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Kinship and Narrative in Old Norse Literature: Parent-Child Relations in Mythic-Heroic Texts

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The thesis explores the imaginative depiction of parent-child relations in the *Poetic Edda*, *Snorra Edda* and the *fornaldarsaga* corpus, with the aim of illuminating both the role of kinship in shaping Old Norse narrative and the complementary role of narrative in aiding the conceptualisation and characterisation of Old Norse kinship. Informed by the work of anthropologists Marilyn Strathern and Marshall Sahlins, I argue that Old Norse kinship is characterised by 'mutuality of being' among kinsmen, whereby kinsmen are co-present in one another and participate intrinsically in each other's existence (chapter I).

The thesis suggests that intergenerational interactions in Old Norse myth and legend are fundamentally characterised by ambivalence, which reveals itself in the hostile encounters frequently depicted between parents and their children. I argue that these creative depictions of kinship allowed authors to explore the different motivations behind this ambivalence, while simultaneously using the ambivalence inherent in parent-child relationships to answer the literary demand for narrative tension. Ambivalence in the father-son relationship is argued to arise from the competitive rivalry between father and son (chapter II), while ambivalence in the father-daughter relationship is motivated by the daughter's desire to escape her father's controlling influence and the father's desire to retain her loyalties even after marriage (chapter III). Maternal ambivalence is closely linked to the mother's own marginal position in the paternally-dominated lineage, which encouraged her to dote upon the son while neglecting the daughter (chapter IV). An examination of relations between uncles or aunts and their nieces and nephews proves that other kinds of intergenerational relationship were similarly characterised by ambivalence (chapter V).

I further argue that the ambivalence which threatens to undermine parent-child relations is balanced by the mutual investment of individual family members in the collective lineage, as expressed in the patronymic naming system, which bound fathers permanently into the identities of their sons and daughters (chapter VI). I suggest that the social recognition of an individual's place within their larger lineage reinforced this collective identity, encouraging solidarity and mutuality between kinsmen, thereby allowing ambivalences to be overcome. In conclusion, I argue that the root of ambivalence in intergenerational relations is revealed to be their inherent mutability, as kinship roles change and develop, children succeed their parents and kinsmen struggle to reconcile competing loyalties and obligations. I suggest narrative was used as a space in which to explore the ambivalent realities of kinship and I argue for an understanding of kinship as constructed in part through narrative, being made in the telling (chapter VII).

DECLARATION

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

The thesis does not exceed the regulation length, including footnotes, references and appendices but excluding the bibliography.

Signed:

Katherine Marie Olley

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

All abbreviations for eddic poems are as set out in Neckel, Gustav, ed., *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius*, rev. by Hans Kuhn, 4th edn (Heidelberg: Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1962).

Alv.	*Alvíssmál*
Akv.	*Atlakviða*
Am.	*Atlamál in grœnlenzku*
Br.	*Brot af Sigurðarkviðu*
CMCS	*Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*
Fm.	*Fáfnismál*
Grm.	*Grímnismál*
Grp.	*Grípisspá*
Gðr. I	*Guðrúnarkviða I*
Gðr. II	*Guðrúnarkviða II*
Hdl.	*Hyndluljóð*
Hm.	*Hamðismál*
Hrbl.	*Hárbarðsljóð*
Háv.	*Hávamál*
HHv.	*Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar*
HH. II	*Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
Ls.	*Lokasenna*
Od.	*Oddrúnargrátr*
PFS	*Poetry in* Fornaldarsögur (ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross)
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*
Sg.	*Sigurðarkviða in skamma*
Skm.	*Skírnismál*
Vkv.	*Vǫlundarkviða*
Vsp.	*Vǫluspá*
ZfdA	*Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum and deutsche Literatur*
Þrk.	*Þrymskviða*

CONVENTIONS

This thesis conforms to the MHRA Styleguide: A Handbook for Authors and Editors, 3rd edn (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2013).

However, for clarity and legibility, some quotations shorter than the recommended forty words have been indented rather than embedded in the text, while words or short phrases in passages of analysis have been put in *italic* rather than enclosed in single quotation marks.

The titles of eddic poems have been normalised, as have eddic names outside quotations. For consistency and clarity *fornaldarsaga* titles follow the orthography of Guðni Jónsson's edition, which is quoted throughout. Thus, for example, *Völsunga saga* is preferred to *Vǫlsunga saga*. The names of saga characters likewise follow the orthography of Guðni Jónsson's edition.

Signed:

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INTRODUCTION

1. Aims and Methodology

This thesis presents a new understanding of the nature of kinship and its function in Old Norse narrative by exploring the imaginative depiction of parent-child relations in the mythic-heroic literature of medieval Iceland. I analyse the literary interactions between fathers and their sons and daughters and mothers and their sons and daughters to determine what expectations, desires and anxieties beset these relationships in Old Norse myth and legend and how the complexities and conflicts of intergenerational kinship were explicated in a narrative setting. I identify the various themes which coalesce around the different kinds of parent-child relationships and their purpose in a narrative context. I endeavour to prove that parent-child relations were both inherently ambivalent and also inherently solidary, that is, characterised by a sense of solidarity, since Old Norse kinship, in spite of its tensions, is founded on a well-developed sense of collective familial identity. Ultimately, the thesis aims to illuminate both the role of kinship in shaping and structuring Old Norse narrative and the complementary role of narrative in aiding the conceptualisation and characterisation of Old Norse kinship, arguing that kinship and narrative are interdependent entities, with kinship being made in the telling.

I take a comparative literary approach to mythic-heroic texts, analysing parent-child relationships within their specific narrative contexts as well as comparing relationships across texts to draw out the principal themes which govern the depiction of father-son, father-daughter, mother-son and mother-daughter relations. This is accompanied by an anthropological perspective on the nature of kinship, informed by the work of anthropologists such as Marilyn Strathern and Marshall Sahlins, which complements the close textual analysis. The characterisation of kinship as a tension between ambivalence and solidarity is interpreted in the light of their anthropological investigations into the nature of kinship.

An anthropological approach to Old Norse myth and legend was pioneered by Margaret Clunies Ross in her seminal work *Prolonged Echoes*, which explored the social and political dimensions of Old Norse myth through the anthropological lens of structural functionalism.[1] The clarity her approach brings to the subject matter, however, is also the work's greatest weakness, as her schema becomes at times too rigid, leaving the reader with an impression of order which does not accurately reflect the corpus of texts (in the sense of

[1] Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society,* vol. I: *The Myths,* The Viking Collection, 7 ([Odense]: Odense University Press, 1994).

both oral and literary productions) she surveys. Kirsten Hastrup has also taken an explicitly anthropological perspective in a number of her works which examine Icelandic society, both medieval and modern.[2] Her sources are more usually historical or linguistic but she combines her anthropological approach with a literary focus in her treatment of *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, though she focuses more on the text's reception in Icelandic society than on the narrative itself.[3]

My approach to Old Norse kinship is grounded in the conceptual analyses of kinship performed by Sahlins and Strathern, among others, which lend themselves to literary interpretations, rather than the systematic kinship analyses preferred by Clunies Ross and Hastrup.[4] Such an approach breaks out of the static confines of stereotypical kinship roles and structures to embrace the transience and ambiguity at the heart of kinship which motivates so much of the ambivalence between kinsmen. The limits of genealogy and descent as an analytical framework have long been recognised by scholars studying them for evidence of the medieval family and its relationships. Medieval genealogy is weighted to value the masculine over the feminine and the linear over the lateral, thereby severely limiting its capacity for insight into the family as a whole. It was this shortcoming which prompted Finn E. Sinclair to propose that readers of such texts should employ an alternate model, the extended genealogical matrix, which is not simply masculine and patrilineal but sees masculine and feminine elements interact together.[5]

I propose an even more radical departure from structural depictions of genealogy as either a matrix or a lineal descent. A focus on kinship as narrative, arising in the telling of the story and sustained by tension while also striving for closure, allows an inclusive approach to parent-child relations which does not force intergenerational relationships to conform to the confines of a single structure or system of kinship organisation but recognises their variability and transience.

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[2] See Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: An Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) and Kirsten Hastrup, *Island of Anthropology: Studies in Past and Present Iceland*, The Viking Collection, 5 ([Odense]: Odense University Press, 1990).

[3] Kirsten Hastrup, 'Tracing Tradition: An Anthropological Perspective on *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*', in *Island of Anthropology*, pp. 154–83.

[4] See also Rasmus Tranum Kristensen's structural approach in 'Why Was Óðinn Killed by Fenrir? A Structural Analysis of Kinship Structures in Old Norse Myths of Creation and Eschatology', in *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, ed. by Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjødt and Rasmus Tranum Kristensen, Studies in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia, 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 149–69.

[5] Finn E. Sinclair, *Milk and Blood: Gender and Genealogy in the 'Chanson de Geste'* (Oxford: Lang, 2003), p. 275.

2. Scope and Source Base

The corpus of mythic-heroic literature in medieval Iceland offers a particularly rich seam of evidence for parent-child relations. The boundaries of the mythic-heroic corpus, however, are flexible and, to some extent, subjective. My source base comprises the *fornaldarsögur*, the poems of the *Poetic Edda* and the short mythic narratives of *Snorra Edda*.

What constitutes a *fornaldarsaga* or an eddic poem has been subject to much debate. The Danish philologist Carl C. Rafn first brought together a total of thirty-one sagas for which he coined the term 'Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda' as the title of his three-volume edition, published 1829–30. The chief distinguishing features of these sagas were their geographical settings in mainland Scandinavia and their temporal settings in Scandinavian pre-history. Guðni Jónsson expanded the corpus in his four-volume edition of thirty-four *fornaldarsögur* published in 1954. Most recently, the corpus has been expanded again by the 'Stories For All Time' project at the University of Copenhagen's Department of Nordic Research (Nordisk Forskningsinstitut).[6] The project included all thirty-one sagas printed in Rafn's original edition, *Fornaldar Sögur Nordrlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, as well as five additional sagas which also met his requirements of setting, both temporal and geographical, for legendary narratives. There remain numerous sagas and *þættir* which arguably fit the parameters of the *fornaldarsögur* but which have not traditionally been included because they also fall within the category of *riddarasögur.* The reverse is equally true and certain sagas within the mythic-heroic corpus could arguably be included within alternative saga categories, such as the *riddarasögur*, on the basis of thematic or structural similarities to other sagas in that category.

Eddic poetry has been similarly hard to define. Most eddic poetry is preserved in one of two eddic anthologies, the thirteenth-century Codex Regius of the *Poetic Edda* (GKS 2365 4to) and AM 748 I a 4to, dated to *c*. 1300, or incorporated within the prosimetric narratives of the *fornaldarsögur*. There are rare exceptions preserved outside these contexts, such as *Hyndluljóð*, attested only in Flateyjarbók.[7] With both the *fornaldarsögur* and eddic poetry, I

[6] See http://nfiapps2.ad.sc.ku.dk [Accessed 7th September 2018].

[7] For further discussion of the parameters of the eddic corpus see Carolyne Larrington, 'Introduction', in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. by Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 1–11. For a complete survey of the preservation of eddic poetry see Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Transmission and Preservation of Eddic Poetry', in *Handbook to Eddic Poetry*, ed. by Larrington, Quinn and Schorn, pp. 12–32.

have taken a maximal approach, including in my analysis those narratives or episodes which best represent the variety and complexity of parent-child relations. As such, no texts or poems have been consciously excluded from the corpus, although not all contain enough significant parent-child interaction to be included in my analysis. Similarly, though the *fornaldarsögur* quoted throughout are mostly taken from Guðni Jónsson's four-volume edition, *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda*, where a particularly interesting reading can be found in an alternative redaction of a saga it has been included in my analysis.

My final major source is Snorri Sturluson's thirteenth-century compendium of poetic myths and techniques, called the *Prose Edda* or *Snorra Edda* in reference to its author. While Snorri was principally concerned with rehabilitating skaldic poetry for his contemporary audience, that poetry's frequent allusion to mythic events and characters obliged him to include a vast amount of mythic-heroic material in his work, not only in the skaldic verses he frequently quotes but also in the form of short prose narratives, such as his account of Baldr's death,[8] or the Hjaðningavíg.[9] Like the eddic poetry on which he sometimes directly draws to validate his account of events, these narratives are remote in time and place, yet their themes are universal: the irreversibility of death; the problems of female exchange; and the construction of society, its allies and its enemies. As these myths are framed within a thirteenth-century Christian worldview, according to which the gods were euhemerised and any sacred function these myths may once have had depleted, they have more in common with fictional narratives than with other myths and, consequently, are analysed alongside the *fornaldarsögur* and eddic poetry.

All these texts share a non-realistic mode, setting their narratives in the distant past, at a deliberate remove from the historical time periods in which they were variously produced and received and embracing elements of the fantastic, such as giants, elves, shape-shifting and dragons. Stephen Mitchell specifically defined *fornaldarsögur* with reference to the 'atmosphere of unreality' created by their 'fabulous episodes and motifs'.[10] The transparently non-realistic nature of many of these narratives' figures and events does not mean they are impervious to the historical and social conditions that attended their composition, rather that they were designed consciously not to reflect those conditions directly but to conjure up a

[8] *Gylfaginning* ch. 49, in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes, 2nd edn (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2005), p. 48. Henceforth *Gylfaginning*.

[9] Snorri Sturluson, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, ed. by Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 1998), ch. 50 (pp. 72–74). Henceforth *Skáldskaparmál.*

[10] Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 27.

nebulous cultural past in which the identities of contemporary medieval Icelandic authors and audiences were rooted. Their imaginative foundation provides scope for a huge variety of parent-child relationships, from the incestuous to the interspecies, and the freedom to depict them in an exaggerated and creative manner. A famous passage from *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, describing the telling of legendary tales at a wedding at Reykjahólar in Iceland in 1119, demonstrates that these stories were told to entertain and that their reliability as accounts of historical events was a matter of opinion:

> Hrólfr af Skálmarnesi sagði sǫgu frá Hrǫ[n]g[v]iði víkingi ok frá Óláfi liðmannakonungi ok haugbroti Þráins berserks ok Hrómundi Gripssyni, ok margar vísur með. En þessarri sǫgu var skemt Sverri konungi, ok kallaði hann slíkar lygisǫgur skemtiligastar. Ok þó kunnu menn at telja ættir sínar til Hrómundar Gripssonar. Þessa sǫgu hafði Hrólfr sjálfr samansetta. […] ok hafa þó margir fróðir menn þessa sǫgu fyrir satt.[11]
>
> (Hrólfr from Skálmarnes told a saga about Hrǫngviðr the viking and about Óláfr, king of warriors, and the mound breaking of Þráinn the berserkr and Hrómundr Gripsson, and many verses with it. And these sagas were amusing to King Sverrir and he called such lying-sagas most entertaining. And still men can reckon their lineage back to Hrómundr Gripsson. Hrólfr had put this saga together himself. […] And yet many wise men held that these sagas were true.)[12]

Despite their description as *lygisǫgur*, it is notable that kinship provides the link between legendary past and contemporary present as men trace their lineage back to the legendary Hrómundr Gripsson, indicating that aspects of the story were considered reliable. Yet the constructed nature of these sagas is also made clear, as Hrólfr is credited with putting the saga together in its narrated form.

Several scholars have recognised that projecting so far back into the past made these narratives the ideal space in which to explore the myriad tensions and anxieties which attended everyday life in medieval Iceland. Clunies Ross describes it as 'inherently plausible that subconscious or indeed unconscious areas of medieval Icelandic socio-cultural concern,

[11] *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða*, ch. 10, ed. by Ursula Brown (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 18.

[12] All translations are my own, except where noted.

areas of tension and problem, could be "outed", as it were, in genres like the *fornaldarsaga* that allowed difficult even tabu areas of human experience to be treated in a non-realistic mode'.[13] She builds on the work of Torfi Tulinius in this regard, whose extended study of the *fornaldarsögur* in *The Matter of the North* rested on the understanding that:

> Not only was the *fornaldarsaga* the one literary genre in which Icelanders' wish-fulfilment fantasies were played out, it was also the one tailored precisely for the handling of vexed and hidden problems, by virtue of its long-ago, far-away, and pagan setting. If the *fornaldarsaga* was the literary arena in which the ideals that inspired social change were expressed, it was also that in which the ills that plagued Icelandic society were displayed most openly.[14]

Brittany Schorn describes eddic poetry similarly as a 'particularly compelling blend of the familiar and the remote'.[15] Much like the worlds of the *fornaldarsögur*, she argues, eddic poetry 'presents a strange world, distanced physically and chronologically from that of its audience; a world populated by larger-than-life characters drawn from myth and legend who experience a correspondingly heightened form of reality. The anxieties of the real-world societies of medieval Scandinavia are played out in the grandest possible terms on the eddic stage'.[16]

The role of kinship in this literary displacement of social anxieties is of particular significance. As the quotation from *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* demonstrates, it is kinship which provides the bridge in these sagas and poems between the distant past in which the narratives are set and thirteenth-, fourteenth-, and fifteenth-century present in which the narratives were written down. Clunies Ross identifies a 'family based nexus between the past and the present' in the *fornaldarsögur*.[17] Kinship structures and relations provide a recognisable

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[13] Margaret Clunies Ross, '*Fornaldarsögur* as Fantastic Ethnographies', in *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed*, ed. by Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson and Anette Larsson (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, Københavns Universitet, 2009), pp. 317–30 (p. 318).

[14] Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, trans. by Randi C. Eldevik, The Viking Collection, 13 ([Odense]: Odense University Press, 2002), p. 186.

[15] Brittany Schorn, 'Eddic Modes and Genres', in *Handbook to Eddic Poetry*, ed. by Larrington, Quinn and Schorn, pp. 231–51 (p. 231).

[16] Schorn, p. 231.

[17] Clunies Ross, 'Fantastic Ethnographies', p. 320.

feature for audiences in narratives otherwise 'remote in time and place', rendering these imagined and sometimes alien literary worlds 'recognisable to medieval Icelanders as similar to their own, socially elevated but still understandable in terms of family structures and kinship relations'.[18] Her analysis of Old Norse cosmology, for which Snorri is a source, has also unpicked many of the kinship relations which both shore up and undermine the Norse world order. This order, she suggests, is vulnerable to both the enemy without, that is the *jǫtnar* (giants), and the enemy within, whom she identifies as the ambivalent god Loki, kin to both the Æsir and the *jǫtnar*. Kinship is the means by which this threat is articulated to an audience as 'Norse myth expresses the connection between the two kinds of threat to divine society in terms of the kinship of one to the other'.[19]

Kinship structures, particularly between parents and children, do not function solely as a means of making these narratives intelligible to an audience. While their familiarity helps in the transmission of meaning by drawing on recognisable patterns, family and genealogy are also crucial to how these stories and poems *create* meaning for their audience, frequently explicating the narrative's themes by means of repetition across multiple generations.[20] The use of genealogy as a structuring principle in the *fornaldarsögur* has been explored by Clunies Ross.[21] Studies of eddic kinship have demonstrated the extent to which the *Poetic Edda* is more concerned with horizontal ties of relation, between siblings, between affines and between spouses, displaying a preference for exploring the lateral dimension over lineal descent.[22] Parent-child relations in eddic poetry are therefore the more remarkable because of their apparent rarity. Lacking the same structural function as in the longer saga narratives,

[18] Clunies Ross, 'Fantastic Ethnographies', p. 320.

[19] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 264–65.

[20] Torfi Tulinius, p. 182.

[21] Margaret Clunies Ross, 'The Development of Old Norse Textual Worlds: Genealogical Structure as a Principle of Literary Organisation in Early Iceland', *JEGP*, 92 (1993), 372–85.

[22] Carolyne Larrington has written extensively on sibling relations in the *Poetic Edda*; see Carolyne Larrington, 'Sibling Drama: Laterality in the Heroic Poems of the *Edda*', in *Myths, Legends, and Heroes: Studies in Old Norse and Old English Literature in Honour of John McKinnell*, ed. by Daniel Anlezark, Toronto Old Norse-Icelandic Series, 5 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), pp. 167–87; Carolyne Larrington, '"I Have Long Desired to Cure You of Old Age": Sibling Drama in the Later Heroic Poems of the Edda', in *Revisiting the* Poetic Edda*: Essays on Old Norse Heroic Legend*, ed. by Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 140–56; Carolyne Larrington, *Brothers and Sisters in Medieval European Literature* (York: York Medieval Press, 2015). David Clark has also written on the significance of fratricide in *Gender, Violence, and the Past in Edda and Saga* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

genealogy and descent nevertheless remain a key means of creating and communicating meaning in these poems, as, for example, in the use of patronymics to reinforce the identities and loyalties of key characters. In *Snorra Edda*, both Clunies Ross and John Lindow interpret the seminal myth of Baldr's death, one of Snorri's longest mythic narratives, as an exploration of kin-slaying within the family which becomes synonymous with the downfall of society as a whole.[23] Since the slaying cannot be avenged without committing another transgression, the myth exposes the limitations of the cultural imperative to preserve the family's honour by revenge killing. The family thereby functions as a microcosm for society.

Bringing together the *fornaldarsögur* with the *Poetic Edda* and *Snorra Edda* yields a source base that encompasses almost every kind of text, from poetry to prosimetrum to prose, and ranging widely in composition date. *Snorra Edda* can be most securely dated, being a single work rather than a body of texts, and its date of composition is generally accepted as around the 1220s.[24] Eddic poetry was likely being produced before the conversion, drawing on material that was already old, although the compilation of the Codex Regius, in which most of the poems discussed here are preserved, did not occur until the latter half of the thirteenth century in the decades around 1270.[25] As for the *fornaldarsögur*, while set in a distant legendary past, their composition and production has been dated to the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Torfi Tulinius has argued that their appearance should be dated 'to the second half of the thirteenth century', but characterised it as a 'slow emergence […] as they evolved contemporaneously with other aspects of medieval Icelandic culture'.[26] This was only the beginning of the corpus, however, and the extended popularity of the *fornaldarsögur* means others were being composed in the very late medieval period and copied well into the modern age.[27] Complete consistency and coherence from textual narratives produced over such an extended period cannot be expected. Different texts may speak to different periods in Icelandic history and reflect different influences, both literary and social. The native core of material on which these narratives draw was supplemented

[23] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 271; John Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance among the Gods: Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology*, FF Communications, 262 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1997), pp. 23, 178.

[24] *Skáldskaparmál*, p. xi.

[25] Bernt Ø. Thorvaldsen, 'The Dating of Eddic Poetry', in *Handbook to Eddic Poetry*, ed. by Larrington, Quinn and Schorn, pp. 72–91 (p. 71).

[26] Torfi Tulinius, p. 55.

[27] Matthew James Driscoll, *The Unwashed Children of Eve: The Production, Dissemination and Reception of Popular Literature in Post-Reformation Iceland* (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1997), pp. 5–6.

over time by borrowings from the Continent, both of content and narrative style. At the same time, however, the continued salience of these indigenous mythic-heroic stories for Icelandic society testifies to the importance of their themes and the continued valence of the portrait of family relations that they projected.

The *fornaldarsögur*, the *Poetic Edda* and *Snorra Edda* all share a loose generic similarity in that they employ a non-realistic or fantastic mode to deliver stories whose settings are temporally and geographically (sometimes even metaphysically) distant from the conditions in Iceland, in the thirteenth century and later. This distance made these texts ideal for the articulation of those tensions which typically remained unspoken in society and even in other forms of literature. These are literary evocations of a legendary past in which, as Torfi Tulinius has described, 'the conflicts and contradictions of medieval Icelandic society can be played out in a veiled and covert fashion'.[28] This catharsis opens these narratives up to reflect both the positives and the negatives of kinship relations, allowing a better understanding of the complexities of parent-child relations, while their status as literary productions allows insight into the vital relationship between kinship and narrative.

3. Structure

Chapter I begins by defining the key terms 'kinship' and 'family' in the context of both Old Norse mythic-heroic literature and recent anthropological works. I propose that Old Norse legendary kinship was conceived as transpersonal, involving the mutual identification of kinsmen with other members of the family as part of a larger unified whole, frequently conveyed by the image of the tree or body. The chapter goes on to discuss the inclusion of non-human members within the family and the interpretation of the various non-human actors in Old Norse myth and legend.

Chapters II–V focus on outlining parent-child relations and establishing ambivalence as a keynote of intergenerational interactions, beginning in chapter II with an analysis of father-son relations. In that chapter, I contrast narratives which disclose conflict between the father and the son, with those which foreclose that narrative possibility, arguing that disclosing paternal and filial tensions sapped them of their fatal potential and actually resulted in more positive father-son relationships. I argue that ambivalence in these relationships was motivated by competitive rivalry: the father threatened by his successor; the son eager to establish his independence.

[28] Torfi Tulinius, p. 68.

My investigation of literary paternity is completed in chapter III with an analysis of father-daughter relations. Since most father-daughter interactions are concerned with the daughter's marriage, I examine how mythic-heroic narratives handle this rite of passage and the pervasive frustration of female choice in these texts. I then consider some less conventional father-daughter relationships, which see the daughter attempt to fill the role of the son, with varying degrees of success, before concluding with an analysis of ambivalence within father-daughter relations. I suggest that such ambivalence is motivated by the daughter's ability to shift loyalties upon her marriage and the father's attempts to control her choice of spouse to prevent this.

Chapter IV explores maternity, examining both mother-son and mother-daughter relations. I contrast the mother's protective tendencies prevalent in mother-son relationships with the more bitter portrait of mother-daughter relations. I argue for the hitherto unrecognised prevalence of maternal ambivalence as a less overt but no less dangerous partner to paternal ambivalence in these texts, stemming largely from the mother's own marginal position within the literary family which threatened to make her dependent on the son and offered the daughter a glimpse of her own future.

A contrast to parent-child relations is provided in chapter V, which spotlights relationships between uncles and aunts and their nieces and nephews, demonstrating that intergenerational ambivalence is not confined to parent-child relations. I deconstruct the assumption of a privileged relationship between a man and his sister's son inherited from prehistoric Germanic society, arguing that it sets up false expectations in Old Norse mythic-heroic literature, since a special relationship is only demonstrable when maternal uncle-nephew relations incestuously coincide with father-son relations.

Chapters VI–VII return to the theme of mutuality of being among kinsmen and examine the relationship between kinship and narrative. In chapter VI, I expand upon the discussion of the transpersonal nature of Old Norse kinship begun in chapter I, examining the role of the patronymic system of nomenclature in Old Norse as a means of performing and declaring the co-presence of kinsmen in one another and the family as a whole, thereby enabling the ambivalences which beset parent-child relationships to be overcome.

Chapter VII concludes the thesis by returning to the central questions of kinship's role in shaping narrative and narrative's role in shaping and conceptualising kinship. I argue that the transient nature of kinship roles is at the heart of the ambivalence evident in parent-child relations. I further argue that kinship relations are depicted as less transient and more structured within narrative, where continual generational change can be framed from a narrative perspective as dynastic stability, resolving much of the tension it engenders between

family members. I suggest kinship relies upon being read in much the same way as narrative, being made in the telling.

I. KINSHIP AND FAMILY

The historical Old Norse kinship system in medieval Iceland has been well documented by scholars of the period, with the consensus that kinship relations were bilateral and cognatic, generally privileging the paternal over the maternal, as can be seen by the prevalence of patronymics as opposed to matronymics, but still attributing importance to maternal relations.[29] Mythic-heroic texts, however, report a much stronger patrilineal bias. This can be attributed to their evocation of a distant past on the Scandinavian mainland, without the social pressures of a migration society. The circumstances of settlement, which forced the disintegration of extended kin-groups or *ættir* (families, lineages), have been seen as contributing factors to the development of a bilateral kinship system in Iceland, supplemented by pseudo-kinship relations such as fosterage, in contrast to the patrilineal system which persisted in Norway. As Clunies Ross has pointed out, '[b]ecause it is unlikely that intact *ættir* migrated to Iceland, compensatory links based on cognation and such fictive kinship relations as blood-brotherhood, fosterage and formalised friendships and trading partnerships (*vinfengi*, *vinátta*, *félag*) were at a premium'.[30] Kinship in mythic-heroic literature, however, is still strongly centred around the *ætt*.

This disjunction between literary, mythic-heroic kinship and historical kinship is not that surprising, since the material which underlies some of these legendary narratives was certainly circulating on the Continent before the migrations to Iceland and the *fornaldarsögur* continued to be open to non-native influences. The families and the kinship relations depicted in mythic-heroic narrative were not designed to be representative of the kinship system which existed in medieval Iceland, though they were undoubtedly informed by the experiences and anxieties of those who recorded them. While laws and historical records can provide insight into the systems of kinship set up in medieval Iceland, narrative sources' explorations of kinship provided a space for Old Norse authors and audiences to reflect in an imaginative way on the nature of kinship and to articulate their understanding of how kinship functioned in practice. Thus, contemporary attitudes towards kinship are implicitly expressed by the

[29] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 89; Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Saga og samfund: en indføring i oldislandsk litteratur*, Berlingske leksikonbibliotek, 116 (Copenhagen: Berlingske, 1977), pp. 32–33; Hastrup, *Culture and History*, p. 70; Torben A. Vestergaard, 'The System of Kinship in Early Norwegian Law', *Mediaeval Scandinavia*, 12 (1988), 160–93 (pp. 180–82) and William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 142.

[30] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 90.

narrative choices made in these literary productions. Their distant temporal setting only made it more likely, as Clunies Ross and Torfi Tulinius have argued, that subconscious anxieties or proscribed practices, such as incest, would be openly explored in the non-realistic mode of mythic-heroic literature.[31] There has been little discussion of how kinship was conceptualised and characterised in Old Norse literature and society, however, with most scholars working from the model of kinship as an abstract system, extrapolated from other cultures, imposed from outside, rather than a conception arising from within narratives depicting and exploring kinship.

This chapter will define the key terms 'kinship' and 'family' which are fundamental to the thesis. The notion of kinship is examined in particular through the imagery of the family tree, which is employed by multiple characters in Old Norse myth and legend to explicate their feelings regarding family relations. The chapter will then discuss what is meant by the term 'family' and its application, in particular, to both human and non-human social groupings, as preparation for the analysis of parent-child relations in chapter II.

1. What is Kinship?

Kinship is that which binds a social group together, the means by which those who are kin are designated as such. The grounds upon which kinship is asserted, however, vary widely according to time, place and culture. Different cultures have expressed and understood kinship in different ways, making it harder to capture the essence of what kinship is. Marshall Sahlins' 2013 book *What Kinship Is—and Is Not* was devoted entirely to this question, drawing on as wide an array of ethnographic examples as possible. Sahlins radically redefines kinship in terms of 'transpersonal relations of being and experience', placing it 'in the same ontological regime as magic, gift exchange, sorcery and witchcraft'.[32] 'The specific quality of kinship' he argues 'is "mutuality of being": kinfolk are persons who participate intrinsically in each other's existence; they are members of one another'.[33] His definition does away entirely with the dichotomy between the biological and the social, so common in anthropological scholarship on kinship, focusing instead on a mutual recognition of kinship between two parties. Sahlins is explicit that this 'mutuality of being' or 'intersubjective participation', as he also terms it, 'applies as well to the constitution of kinship by social

[31] Clunies Ross, 'Fantastic Ethnographies', p. 318; Torfi Tulinius, p. 186.

[32] Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is—and Is Not* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. ix.

[33] Sahlins, p. ix.

construction as by procreation'.[34] According to Sahlins' analysis, there is little difference *in kinship term*s between the relationship of a father to his biological son and the relationship of a father to his fosterling, between the relationship of one blood brother to another and the relationship of two men who have sworn an oath of blood-brotherhood. While Sahlins denies the primacy of biological kinship, he nevertheless concedes that 'broadly speaking, mutuality of being among kinfolk declines in proportion to spatially and/or genealogically reckoned distance'.[35] In other words, mutuality is not always equal in Sahlins' analysis, leaving room to retain some distinction between biological and social kinsmen.

Sahlins is not alone in his conclusion. Decades earlier, Julian Pitt-Rivers glosses kinship as 'the extension of self', a concept which he suggests has given rise to more debate in western literature than elsewhere since 'the majority of the world's cultures do *not* share the individualism of the modern West and have no need to explain what appears to them evident: that the self is not the individual self alone, but includes, according to circumstances, those with whom the self is conceived as solidary, in the first place, his kin'.[36] Marilyn Strathern put forward a broadly similar notion of transpersonal kinship in *The Gender of the Gift*, an analysis of Melanesian kinship, in which she argued, much like Pitt-Rivers, that Melanesian persons' concept of personhood was completely opposite to modern Western individualistic notions. She used the terms 'dividual' and 'dividuality' as antonyms of 'individual' and 'individuality' to describe the way in which persons were plural entities, incorporating their kin within themselves and argued that the persons in the Melanesian society she was studying were not individual entities, but dividually conceived, that is to say 'they contain a generalized sociality within'.[37] 'The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm', she suggests, since persons are 'constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them'.[38] Sahlins criticised Strathern's analysis, arguing that she remained rooted in the singular person even as she strove to emphasise their dividual nature, leading, as he characterises it, to 'a certain unresolved tension between the marked emphasis on dividual persons and the relatively backgrounded relationships that constitute

[34] Sahlins, p. ix.

[35] Sahlins, p. 53.

[36] Julian Pitt-Rivers, 'The Kith and the Kin', in *The Character of Kinship*, ed. by Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 89–105 (pp. 91, 90).

[37] Marilyn Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988), p. 13.

[38] Strathern, p. 13.

them'.[39] Certainly Strathern does not emphasise the extension of the single person as a constituent part of a great indivisible whole, focusing rather on the inscription of multiple relations within that person, but Strathern's terminology remains useful. 'Dividual' will be used throughout this thesis to denote the plurality of Old Norse kinsmen and their transpersonal participation in one another as persons sharing mutual being. More recently, Janet Carsten has also identified a similar unboundedness of person that echoes Sahlins' 'co-presence', remarking on the continuity displayed when adults 'remark upon a child's resemblance to aspects of a dead relative's appearance or behaviour' or the sense of incompleteness experienced by 'at least some adoptees who grew up with no knowledge of their birth kin'.[40]

While informed, therefore, by the work of several anthropologists, I shall engage most directly with Sahlins' definition of kinship, according to which 'kinsmen are persons who belong to one another, who are parts of one another, who are co-present in each other, whose lives are joined and interdependent'.[41] I suggest that Sahlins' definition resonates with Old Norse depictions of kinship in mythic-heroic literature and that interpreting these depictions in the light of his scholarship illuminates new aspects of Old Norse kinship. Moreover, as I discuss in more detail in chapter VII, Old Norse narratives provided the ideal medium with which to explore and explain the complex nature of co-present, transpersonal kinship in an entertaining and intelligible manner and is thus inextricably bound up with the conceptualisation of kinship as 'mutuality of being' in Old Norse myth and legend.

i. Mutuality of Being: The Family Tree

Descriptions of kinship in Old Norse myth and legend are infrequent and mainly metaphorical in their conceptualisations of kinship. Most popular is the image of the family as a tree whose many branches reflect the family's many kinsmen. This imagery likely owes something to the ubiquity of tree-kennings used to refer to both men and women in skaldic poetry, as Snorri records in *Skáldskaparmál*.[42] Thomas D. Hill has also noted the existence of several Old Norse idioms that are comparable to the English 'family tree', including *ættkvísl*

[39] Sahlins, p. 26.

[40] Janet Carsten, *After Kinship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 102–04.

[41] Sahlins, p. 21.

[42] *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 31 (p. 40).

(family branch) and *kynkvísl* (kin-branch) as well as the less common phrases *ættar-askar* (ash [>MAN] of my family) and *kynvior* (family tree) from *Sonatorrek* stanza 21.[43]

In her lament in *Hamðismál*, Guðrún describes herself after her brothers' deaths in more expansive but similar terms. As David Clark has noted in his excellent discussion of the tree imagery in *Hamðismál*, '[t]rees and branches are seen to be consistently employed as a metaphor for human interrelation and interdependence', beginning in stanza 5:[44]

> "Einstœð em ec orðin sem ǫsp í holti,
> fallin at frœndom sem fura at qvisti,
> vaðin at vilia sem viðr at laufi,
> þá er in qvistscœða kømr um dag varman."[45]
>
> ('I have come to stand alone like an aspen in the wood
> bereft of kinsmen like a fir of its branches,
> destitute of joy, as a tree of its leaves,
> when the branch-damager comes on a warm day'.)[46]

John Hines suggests that here Guðrún 'monumentalizes herself into a timeless, static image' which contrasts with the prosaic 'pastoral vignette of a rustic *qvistscœða* going about her business on a warm summer's day'.[47] Ursula Dronke argues that the great height attained by aspens in Norway means 'Guðrún's image expresses not only her loneliness, but her sense that she, the last of her heroic line, towers above other breeds of men—the *holt*—with a

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[43] Thomas D. Hill, 'The Confession of Beowulf and the Structure of *Volsunga saga'*, in *The Vikings*, ed. by Robert T. Farrell (London: Phillimore, 1982), pp. 165–79 (p. 179 n. 12).

[44] Clark, p. 67.

[45] *Hm.* 5, in *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius*, ed. by Gustav Neckel, rev. by Hans Kuhn, 4th edn (Heidelberg: Winter, Universitätsverlag, 1962), p. 269. All eddic quotations, references and abbreviations refer to this edition. Although the Íslenzk Fornrit edition offers some advantages as to normalisation and orthography I have preferred the readings in Neckel and Kuhn for their greater fidelity to the manuscript and fuller textual apparatus.

[46] All eddic translations are informed by Carolyne Larrington, trans., *The Poetic Edda*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[47] John Hines, 'Famous Last Words: Monologue and Dialogue in *Hamðismál* and the Realisation of the Heroic Tale', in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. by Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop and Tarrin Wills, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe, 18 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 177–97 (p. 180).

greatness that no cruelty of circumstance can humble'.[48] Strictly speaking, she is not the last of her line while her sons remain alive. Whether this is prolepsis, as Hines proposes, or just a measure of Guðrún's indifference to Hamðir and Sǫrli remains debatable.[49] Both Hines and Dronke, however, imply that Guðrún is exaggerating, almost aggrandising her tragic situation with her lyrical imagery. In Hines' opinion, 'the rhetorical rather than the strictly factual character of these conceits is clear enough'.[50] Tom Shippey even more ungenerously characterises the stanza as 'self-pitying, a play for sympathy', without considering that there could be a more literal significance to her lament.[51]

With literary metaphors as with ethnographic accounts, there is what Robert Parkin called a double danger in interpreting such statements: namely, 'of assuming that the [speaker] takes them literally, and of assuming that he or she does not'.[52] While such imagery is obviously metaphorical on some level it also speaks to a deeper truth about Old Norse kinship. Guðrún imagines herself as a tree shorn of branches or lacking its leaves now that she has lost her brothers to Atli's massacre. As Clark has articulated, '[j]ust as a tree is bereft without its branches and vulnerably isolated without the other trees of the forest, so is Guðrún without the other members of her family'.[53] Her family, by extension, is conceived as having once been a whole tree, strong and healthy, both a singular entity and yet also partible into trunk, branches, leaves and roots, which are themselves individual pieces yet unable to survive when cut off from the larger structure. Guðrún's imagery exemplifies Sahlins' 'mutuality of being', characterising her and her brothers as members of one another, constituent parts of a greater whole. Her very self is therefore diminished by her brothers' deaths, demonstrating how her identity is dividually conceived, to borrow Strathern's terminology. The image of the tree that she presents combines a sense of the individual as a singular being with the idea of the individual as the site of their relationships with kinsmen, finding wholeness in mutual identity.

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[48] *The Poetic Edda*, ed. by Ursula Dronke, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969–97), I: *Heroic Poems* (1969), p. 227.

[49] Hines, p. 180.

[50] Hines, p. 180.

[51] T. A. Shippey, 'Speech and the Unspoken in *Hamðismál*', in *Prosody and Poetics in the Early Middle Ages: Essays in Honour of C. B. Hieatt*, ed. by M. J. Toswell (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 180–96 (p. 185).

[52] Robert Parkin, review of Marshall Sahlins, *What Kinship Is—and Is Not* (2013), *Anthropological Quarterly*, 86 (2013), 293–302 (p. 295)

[53] Clark, p. 87.

This imagery is not confined to *Hamðismál*. In *Atlamál in grœnlenzku*, Guðrún also compares her situation to that of a tree shorn of branches or stripped of roots:

> "Kostom drepr qvenna karla ofríki,
> í kné gengr hnefi, ef qvistir þverra,
> tré tecr at hníga, ef høggr tág undan."[54]
>
> ('The tyranny of men worsens the position of women,
> The trunk falls to its knees [i.e. loses its strength] if branches dwindle,
> A tree begins to fall if the root is cut from under it.')

The tree can be interpreted as Guðrún herself, left without a foundation at the death of her brothers, who are again presented as integral parts of her dividual identity. The imagery of a tree somehow falling to its knees encourages the elision of the tree and the person it represents, reinforcing the tragedy of the loss by this subtle personification.[55] In Clark's opinion, such a translation 'strengthens the metaphorical link […] between trees and humans, which is after all the point of the strophe'.[56] The trunk can also be read in the context of the preceding statement as a family deprived of the male members that made it strong, not just Guðrún but a plural entity encompassing all the female family members that remain. Once again Guðrún's words reflect on a transpersonal and mutual understanding of kinship that sees kinsmen as inherently solidary with one another and characterises the partition of a family into separate pieces as highly traumatic.

Both tree metaphors of Guðrún's call to mind Óðinn's observation in *Hárbarðsljóð*, where he uses similar language and imagery to expound an opposing ideology. Þórr accuses him of having 'illr hugi' (an evil mind),[57] to which he replies:

> "Þat hefir eic, er af annarri scefr,
> um sic er hverr í slíco."[58]

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[54] *Am.* 73 (p. 258).

[55] For a fuller summary of interpretations of *hnefi* see *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda.* VII: *Heldenlieder*, ed. by Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge, Simone Horst and Katja Schulz (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012), pp. 587–89.

[56] Clark, p. 72.

[57] *Hrbl*. 21 (p. 81).

[58] *Hrbl*. 22:1–3 (p. 82).

('That [i.e. an evil mind] has an oak tree which scrapes from another,
each is for himself in such matters.')

Trees once again become a metaphor for social relations but Óðinn explicitly derides the extension of himself to encompass others with his assertion that 'um sic er hverr í slíco' (each is for himself in such matters). Óðinn uses the guise of Hárbarðr to throw off all his dependents, including his son Þórr, to whom he speaks in this scene. The lengths to which he must go to achieve isolation, however, indirectly implies how interdependent kinsmen are expected to be. The obviously clandestine and unconventional nature of Óðinn's masquerade and the contrast between his own selfish ideology and Þórr's explicit pride in his kin, further discussed in chapter VI section 2.i, clearly designates Óðinn's social attitude as a damaging and an atypical one.

The tree as an emblem of the family and its members also occurs in *Völsunga saga* in the form of the *barnstokkr* (child-trunk) around which Völsungr builds his hall:

> Svá er sagt, at Völsungr konungr lét gera höll eina ágæta ok með þeim hætti, at ein eik mikil stóð í höllinni ok limar trésins með fögrum blómum stóðu út um ræfr hallarinnar, en leggrinn stóð niðr í höllina, ok kölluðu þeir þat barnstokk.[59]
>
> (It is said that King Völsungr had an excellent hall built and in this manner, that a large tree stood in the hall and the branches of the tree, with beautiful blossoms, stretched out above the roof of the hall, and the trunk stretched down into the hall, and they called it *barnstokkr*.)

Catharina Raudvere relates the tree to the world tree Yggdrasil, remarking that 'the hall is the centre of the world', though she also notes its dynastic implications.[60] Literally meaning 'child-trunk' or 'child-stock', the familial symbolism of the tree is hard to miss. Thomas Hill

[59] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 2, in *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson, 4 vols (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954), I, 113. All references to and prose quotations from the *fornaldarsögur* are taken from this edition, except where noted.

[60] Catharina Raudvere, 'Myth, Genealogy, and Narration: Some Motifs in *Vǫlsunga saga* from the Perspective of the History of Religions', in *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, ed. by Hermann, Schjødt and Kristensen, pp. 119–31 (p. 126).

describes it as 'a symbol for the family, specifically King Volsung's descendants'.[61] Judy Quinn concurs, while also noting the heroic connotations of its subsequent description as *inn mikli apaldr* (the large apple tree), suggesting the tree 'encodes notions of both warrior values and dynastic prosperity'.[62] The tree's designation as an apple tree further strengthens its associations with fertility, evoking the magical apple, the consumption of which precipitated Völsungr's conception. R. G. Finch even went so far as to see in both motifs 'traces of a fertility cult in the Volsung-Sigmund material'.[63]

Völsungr goes beyond Guðrún's verbal use of tree imagery, building his family home around this physical emblem of his offspring and his virility. His eight sons and single daughter are evoked by the tree's *fögrum blómum* (beautiful blossoms), the budding health of the tree an indication of the strength of his dynasty: while the tree survives so must Völsungr and his lineage. Consequently, there is cause for concern when Óðinn enters the hall in disguise and thrusts a sword into the *barnstokkr,* which only Sigmundr is strong enough to pull out, earning him the sword as a reward. While the sword is a mark of Óðinn's favour, it is still an ominous image. The sword penetrates the heart of the tree around which Völsungr has built his home, foreshadowing the violence about to swallow Völsungr and his sons. Only Sigmundr, who is strong enough to master the sword, will survive. Hill considers the sword in the tree an 'emblem for violence "within" a given family'.[64] I would argue more explicitly that the *barnstokkr*'s mutilation is a sign to the Völsungs that as kinsmen they have ceased to be co-present in one another as the symbol of their mutuality is literally split apart, though not destroyed beyond hope of recovery, perhaps foreshadowing Sigmundr's survival and the future of the lineage.

The family tree makes another appearance in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, when Ingibjörg, daughter of Þórir, compares her two suitors Gautrekr and Óláfr to apple trees:

> Svá má ek helzt til jafna þessum konungum tveim sem standi tveir apaldar í einum garði, ok er annarr ungr ok alllíkligr til, at þar á vaxi mörg stór epli ok sæt þann tíma, er hann hefir fullan aldr síns tíma, ok merkir sá Óláf konung. Þar í hjá er annarr apaldr, sá er stendr með

[61] Hill, 'Confession of Beowulf', p. 168.

[62] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 2, (I, 114). Judy Quinn, 'The Realisation of Mythological Design: The Early Generations of the Völsung Dynasty', in *Fornaldarsagaerne*, ed. by Ney, Ármann Jakobsson and Lassen, pp. 123–42 (p. 138).

[63] *The Saga of the Volsungs*, ed. by R. G. Finch (London: Nelson, 1965), p. xxxv.

[64] Hill, 'Confession of Beowulf', p. 168.

> margkvísluðum limum á sér, berandi alls konar epli. Sjá apaldr merkir stjórn ok ríki Gautreks konungs, er lengi hefir stjórnat sínu ríki með örleik ok sóma, ok stendr hans ráð allt í fullum tíma.[65]
>
> (Thus may I most readily compare these two kings to two apple trees standing in one enclosure, and one is young and it is very likely that many large and sweet apples may grow on it at that time, when it attains its full age in time, and that one symbolises King Óláfr. There next to it is another apple tree, that one which stands covered with many-branched limbs, bearing all kinds of apples. That apple tree symbolises the authority and power of King Gautrekr, who has ruled his kingdom for a long time with liberality and honour, and his rule endures entirely for the fullness of time.)

The fruitful image of Gautrekr's tree signifies his authority and power but is also linked to his paternity, as Ingibjörg goes on to note:

> 'þó at svá beri til, at hans ríkisstjórn þrjóti fyrr af sökum náttúru aldrs, þá má þó vera, at hann geti þá hrausta sonu, ok er þá gott við þá at una, þótt konungs missi við.'[66]
>
> ('though it might happen that his rule may fail sooner on account of his natural old age, then it may be nevertheless, that he might beget valiant sons, and it would be good to be happy with them, in spite of the loss of the king.')

Gautrekr has already fathered a daughter, evidence of his virility. By contrast, Óláfr, should he attain a great age, is compared in more sterile fashion to a *steinabrú* (stone bridge), solid but not flourishing.[67] Gautrekr's maturity as both a ruler and a father is an integral part of his attraction for Ingibjörg while Óláfr's comparative immaturity diminishes his desirability. She is interested in her suitors not just as individuals but in their wider family context and the

[65] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 1 (IV, 55–56)

[66] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 1 (IV, 56).

[67] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 1 (IV, 56).

kinship opportunities that will afford her. Moreover, as both Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir and Marianne Kalinke emphasise, Ingibjörg's judgement is justified by Gautrekr's subsequent defeat of his rival, bearing out the truth of her metaphor.[68]

Though the most common, the family tree is not the only metaphor for kinship that draws on the idea of mutuality of being and the extension of the self to incorporate kin. *Hamðismál* also contains a second metaphor of mutual kinship expressed in terms of the human body. Just a few stanzas after Guðrún's lament for her kin in stanza 5, Erpr, the half-brother of her sons Hamðir and Sǫrli, also alludes to the mutual nature of kinship, when his half-brothers ask him for assistance in their revenge quest. Erpr's reply shows him more in sympathy with Guðrún's understanding of kinship than her own sons:

> Svaraði inn sundrmœðri, svá qvaz veita mundo
> fulting frœndom, sem fótr qðrom.[69]
>
> (The son of a different mother answered, he said that he would grant
> help to his kinsmen, as one foot [grants help] to another.)

Like the metaphor of a family tree, this image of bodily unity pays, in Sahlins' words, 'at least as much attention to the transpersonal distribution of the self among multiple others as to the inscription of multiple others in the one subject.'[70] In Guðrún's image she is a tree shorn of branches: her kinsmen are thus internalised, imagined as an integral part of her own identity without which she is incomplete. In Erpr's analogy, the emphasis appears reversed; he imagines himself distributed among others as a part of a larger whole, a foot in the body which comes to stand for his entire kindred. At the same time, he implicitly embraces his brothers as co-present in him, part of the same body and thus part of his own dividual identity.

Hines castigates Erpr harshly as 'disastrously pretentious in his physical self-presentation and his sententious way of speaking', suggesting the 'profound failure of

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[68] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, '*Hyggin ok forsjál*. Wisdom and Women's Counsel in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*', in *Making History: Essays on the* Fornaldarsögur, ed. by Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay ([London]: Viking Society for Northern Research, University College London, 2010), pp. 69–84 (p. 75); Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, Islandica, 46 (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 31.

[69] *Hm*. 13:1–4 (p. 271).

[70] Sahlins, p. 13.

communication' which follows is as much his fault as his brothers'.[71] Yet, such a reading disregards the fact that Erpr's analogy is not impossibly oblique but a return to the theme of mutuality among kinsmen that was earlier raised by Guðrún. Nor does it do justice to the generosity of Erpr's character. Erpr embraces his brothers as part of himself and, even though he is not a blood relation of Svanhildr's, offers to help avenge her in what is, as Shippey points out, 'a generous extension of his kinship duties'.[72]

For Shippey, the oblique words are instead a deliberate test, which invites Hamðir and Sǫrli to recognise their kinship with him.[73] While Erpr's words do challenge his brothers, I doubt he intends to confuse them, though that is undoubtedly the words' effect, as they reply:

> "Hvat megi fótr fœti veita,
> né holdgróin hǫnd annarri?"[74]
>
> ('How can a foot help a foot,
> or a hand of the same flesh [help] another?')

Foolishly, Hamðir and Sǫrli kill Erpr, and, in the words of the poet, 'þverðo þeir þrótt sinn at þriðungi' (they diminished their strength by a third).[75] The phrase lays special emphasis on the prospect of the brothers' combined, mutual strength, as did the analogy Erpr employed, and its meaning is reinforced by the emphatic alliteration.

Only as they kill Jǫrmunrekkr do the brothers realise their mistake, since he has time to raise the alarm before they cut off his head, leading Hamðir to remark that:

> "Af væri nú haufuð, ef Erpr lifði,
> bróðir occarr inn bǫðfrœcni, er við á braut vágom."[76]
>
> ('The head would be off now, if Erpr had lived
> Our brother, the one bold in battle, whom we killed on the road.')

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[71] Hines, p. 188.

[72] Shippey, p. 194 n. 11.

[73] Shippey, p. 189.

[74] *Hm.* 13:5–8 (p. 271).

[75] *Hm*. 15:5–6 (p. 271).

[76] *Hm*. 28:1–4 (p. 273).

Erpr's vision of somatic wholeness has been replaced by the image of the dismembered Jǫrmunrekkr, whom the brothers taunt:

> "Fœtr sér þú þína, hǫndum sér þú þínom,
> Iǫrmunreccr, orpit í eld heitan."[77]
>
> ('You see your feet, you see your hands,
> Jǫrmunrekkr, cast into the hot fire.')

Shippey considers these lines redundant since they 'contribute *no information at all* to Iǫrmunrekkr or the conversation', yet they are evidently designed to evoke Erpr's earlier analogy.[78] Though they achieve the fragmentation of their enemy, Hamðir and Sǫrli have fragmented their kin to do so and Jǫrmunrekkr's fate is an uncomfortable reflection of their own shattered unity as a family. The parallel is sharply emphasised by the use of *sammœðri* to describe Hamðir and Sǫrli as they dismember Jǫrmunrekkr, which evokes the *sundrmœðri* used to describe Erpr in stanza 13.[79] Ironically, the *sundrmœðri* brother proposed a vision of bodily and familial wholeness while the *sammœðri* brothers have torn both body and family apart. As Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur and Caroline Brady argue, this contrast is reconciled by Hamðir and Sǫrli's recognition of Erpr as *bróðir okkar* in stanza 28, as they finally accept the kinship he offered before joining him in death, in the logical end to the poem's disintegration of kin.[80]

Numerous Old Norse mythic-heroic narratives thus characterise kinship as a mutual participation and investment by kinsmen in one another's lives such that the death of a kinsman diminishes the self and violence done to a kinsman is violence to the self. This literary conception of kinship is reinforced by more implicit considerations. If kinsmen are conceived of as solidary and co-present in one another, it makes sense to avenge the sins of the father upon his sons, as happens for example at the punishment of Loki,[81] or to shame a man by dishonouring his female kin, as Vǫlundr does to revenge himself on Níðuðr in

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[77] *Hm*. 24:7–10 (p. 272).

[78] Shippey, p. 183 [emphasis in original].

[79] *Hm*. 24:5, 13:1 (pp. 271–72).

[80] Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur and Caroline Brady, 'Sundrmœðri—Sammœðra', *Scandinavian Studies and Notes*, 16 (1940), 133–37 (p. 136).

[81] *Ls*. prose (p. 109); *Gylfaginning*, ch. 50 (p. 49).

Vǫlundarkviða.[82] The deeds of one person have implications for all their kin because they lead interdependent lives.

However, it is interesting to note the liminal position of those who express the mutuality of kinsmen so explicitly. By her own admission, Guðrún is alone, lingering on after the greater part of her kin have been destroyed, a position she particularly laments to Atli in stanza 73 of *Atlamál*. Even when her kindred was at its strongest, it is debatable whether she would have been considered a central part of it. Her curiously egalitarian description of the kinship she shared with her brothers may be an idealistic depiction of how she wishes kinship were understood by other family members. Erpr is similarly liminal, consciously described as *inn sundrmæðri* (the one born of a different mother) and *hornungr* (bastard), descriptions which underline his difference from his brothers, creating a tension between genealogy and kinship, even as he elliptically asserts his unity with his kin: a unity his brothers fail to recognise when they kill him, to their later cost.[83] Even Ingibjörg's position could be considered liminal, poised between her father's family and that of the husband she is about to select.

As Erpr and Guðrún's tragic fates imply, it is those who have the most to lose from the failure of mutuality in kinship that are most vocal about its importance. Erpr's death and Guðrún's isolation, together with Óðinn's self-interest and the sword in the *barnstokkr*'s heart emphasise that mutuality of being is an idealisation of kinship, constantly under threat from those who fail to appreciate the importance of kin and from the arguments and conflict which spring up between kin so easily. As I go on to explore, kinship in mythic-heroic literature is as much about ambivalence as it is about mutuality of being and it is the tension between solidarity and ambivalence that is used to make mythic-heroic family relations so engaging. Before turning to the depiction of ambivalence in parent-child relations I will first clarify what is meant in this thesis by the term 'family'.

2. The Legendary Family

'Family' is used in a limited sense in this thesis to reference a set of biological kinship relations based around the parent-children or traditional 'nuclear family' unit, but also encompassing grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and in-laws. Within this family grouping, differentiation between marital and natal family members can sometimes be observed and

[82] *Vkv*. 28 (p. 121).

[83] *Hm*. 13:1, 14:8 (pp. 270–71).

attention will be drawn on occasion to the treatment of consanguineal as compared to affinal kin. Where more genealogical depth is implied and non-living as well as living ancestors are referenced, the term 'lineage' is preferred. Thus, references to the family do not include any kind of foster or blood-brotherhood relation.

However, the representation of the family in Old Norse mythic-heroic literature is not understood here as a purely human institution. Many of the families in the *fornaldarsögur* are completely human but in a number of *fornaldarsögur*, as well as in the *Poetic Edda* and *Snorra Edda*, more complex categories are introduced. In both Snorri's mythic narratives and the mythological poems of the *Poetic Edda*, the Æsir are the dominant social group. They are allied with the Vanir, whose subordinate position is indicated by the fact that they must seek exogamous brides from a third social group, the *jǫtnar*, who are culturally and socially othered by the Æsir, characterised as monstrous giants from whom it is morally acceptable to steal and who may be killed with impunity.[84] Despite the projection in mythic narrative of distinct, closed groupings, the genealogy of all the Æsir is thoroughly mixed: Óðinn, the apparent head of the Æsir, has significant giant ancestry;[85] both Gerðr, whose mother 'var bergrisa ættar' (was of the lineage of mountain-giants) and Skaði, whose father was a *jǫtunn*, may be counted among the Ásynjur;[86] Þórr, the greatest giant-killer among the Æsir is himself half-giant through his mother Jǫrð, who can herself be reckoned one of the Ásynjur.[87] Evidently, the 'ethnic purity' these narratives project is a cultural expression not a genetic reality.

Mixed lineages are also found in the *fornaldarsögur*. The *Hrafnistumannasögur* in particular are replete with human-giantess couplings and half-human, half-giant offspring.[88] The Völsung lineage in *Völsunga saga* has mythic origins, being founded by Óðinn himself and maintained at one point by marriage to a supernatural valkyrie, while *Hrólfs saga kraka*

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[84] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 99–101, 131.

[85] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 6 (p. 11).

[86] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 37 (pp. 30–31); *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 55, 33 (pp. 1, 40).

[87] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 36 (p. 30). Jǫrð is the granddaughter of the *jǫtunn* Nǫrfi, the offspring of his daughter Nótt and her second husband, Annarr. *Gylfaginning*, ch. 10 (p. 13).

[88] The terms 'giant' and 'giantess' are used throughout the thesis to refer to a range of non-human taxonomies including *jǫtnar*, *rísi*, and *tröll*. It is likely that the many varied Old Norse words now all translated as 'giant' once carried specific connotations, which are hinted at in their medieval usage, although the terms were already seen as members of the same 'family of giants' by the time the *fornaldarsögur* and other mythic-heroic texts were preserved. See Lotte Motz, 'The Families of Giants', *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*, 102 (1987), 216–36; Ármann Jakobsson, 'Identifying the Ogre: The Legendary Saga Giants', in *Fornaldarsagaerne*, ed. by Ney, Ármann Jakobsson and Lassen, pp. 181–200.

and *Vǫlundarkviða* both contain instances of human-elf liaisons resulting in children of mixed heritage. The purpose of these various couplings is usually to mark the lineage in question as particularly notable, admirable or interesting in this way and thus to set them apart on a narrative level from those who have a more conventional, exclusively human genealogy. It has long been understood that these different 'species' designations are merely codings for a variety of social groups or tribes, perceived as familiar or alien by the perspective which dictates the narrative. As Sandra Ballif Straubhaar has analysed, certain legendary sagas are 'rich in anthropological data on social inclusion or exclusion, formulated in rules for the taxonomy of kinship'.[89] By this logic, non-human characters in *fornaldarsögur* represent members of 'other tribes, clans and ethnicities' as filtered through the prism of the narrator's cultural perspective. The interactions of gods, humans, giants and elves or whatever mixture thereof will be compared throughout, on the understanding that 'species' in Old Norse cosmology are merely classifications or taxonomies of different social groups. The patterns of relation among all these groups remain fundamentally human and therefore relevant to this inquiry into Old Norse parent-child relations.

This variety is not only relevant but vital. These taxonomies add a further layer of distance to parent-child relations in these narratives; in stories which are already temporally and geographically remote a further layer of ethnic distance is added. *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* includes a note to its audience should they be sceptical of the outstanding stature of the characters it describes, suggesting that:

> Undrist menn eigi, þó at menn hafi verit fyrr ágætari at vexti ok afli en nú. Hefir þat satt verit, at þeir hafa skammt átt at telja til risanna sinnar ættar. Nú jafnast mannfólkit, er blandast ættirnar. [90]
>
> (Men shouldn't wonder at it, even though men in time gone by may have been more excellent in size and strength than [men are] now. It was true, that they could trace their lineage back a short way to their giant heritage. Now mankind is all alike, now the lineages are intermingled.)

[89] Sandra Ballif Straubhaar, 'Iarpskammr: Tribal Taxonomy and Transgressive Exogamy in the *Fornaldarsögur*', in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. by Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), pp. 102–19 (p. 103).

[90] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 37 (IV, 176).

This demonstrates how the outstanding nature of these men is explicitly related to their long-ago setting, before the human race became homogenised and in which the mingling of human and non-human lineages is taken for granted. With this extra veil in place, these narratives about mixed heritage can grapple with the deepest and darkest intergenerational kinship anxieties, protected by their apparent immersion in an ancient, legendary past. These special conditions, occurring when literary imagination strays beyond the human, allow patricide to be lauded, as when the half-giantess Brana kills her full-giant father with impunity,[91] permit incest to be entertained, as between Signý and Sigmundr in *Völsunga saga*,[92] and constrain for an audience the threat of rape and the horror of Vǫlundr's grisly revenge by setting its perpetrator at an ethnic distance as an elf.[93] The stories suggest that these transgressions of kinship belong in the legendary past rather than real life. Although patricide, incest, rape and child-murder are timeless social evils, these narratives confront them only indirectly, using characters whose very humanity is in doubt, to alienate these disturbing threats from the contemporary audience.

There have been attempts historically to identify the social groups here encoded, based on the premise that the central human perspective is representative of the medieval inhabitants of both Iceland and Norway. Efforts have focused in particular on identifying the giants in an historical context as a stereotyped and perverted reflection of the indigenous Sámi people who live in the far north of Norway, Sweden and Finland.[94] There is a touch of the absurd to these inquiries. Few would now suggest that it would be plausible to seek the historical identifications for the Æsir and the Vanir, or that it would be possible to map the valkyrie or elvish women with whom Völsungr and Helgi have children, in *Völsunga saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka* respectively, onto any specific inspiration.[95] Any identifying features which

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[91] *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, ch. 7 (IV, 304). For further discussion see chapter III section 4.

[92] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 7 (I, 121–22). For further discussion see chapter V section 1.i.

[93] *Vǫlundarkviða*, 20–29 (pp. 120–22). For further discussion see chapter III section 2.iii.

[94] See Ballif Straubhaar, 'Iarpskammr'; Sandra Ballif Straubhaar, 'Nasty, Brutish and Large: Cultural Difference and Otherness in the Figuration of the Trollwomen of the *Fornaldar sögur*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 73 (2001), 105–24; Else Mundal, 'The Relationship between Sami and Nordic Peoples Expressed in Terms of Family Associations', *Journal of Northern Studies*, 2009 (2), 25–37.

[95] Thor Heyerdahl's attempt to trace the historical origins of Óðinn and the Æsir was subject to intense academic criticism. See Thor Heyerdahl and Per Lilliesträm, *Jakten på Odin. På sporet av vår fortid* (Oslo: Stenersens forlag, 2001). See also its critique, Even Hovdhaugen, Christian Keller, Else Mundal, Anne Stalsberg and Gro Steinsland, Review of Thor Heyerdahl and Per Lilliesträm, *Jakten på Odin. På sporet av vår fortid* (2001), *Maal og Minne*, 2002, 98–109.

might have given a hint of the social group on which the author was unconsciously drawing have been buried beneath the weight of fantastical window dressing.

In several narratives containing giants, however, some distinctive features remain. Else Mundal has identified the mythic giantess Skaði, who marries Njǫrðr, a member of the Vanir, as representative of the Sámi, on account of her hunting and skiing which echo their cultural practices.[96] In addition, the location of the mountainous Jǫtunheimar in Norse cosmology, in the far east, on the periphery of the civilised centre that is Ásgarðr and Miðgarðr, could be seen to reflect the Sámi's position on the periphery of Norwegian society in the period when these stories were beginning to coalesce and emerge in narrative form. Straubhaar focuses instead on the trollish women encountered in the *Hrafnistumannasögur.* The saga protagonists, Ketill and Oddr, both encounter troll-women to the far north of their home in Hrafnista, a location geographically consistent with Norse-Sámi patterns of settlement in the medieval period. As with Skaði, it is the actions and even the appearances of the women themselves which she finds most indicative of Sámi identification, arguing that the sagas' depiction of the troll-women as women who are able to perform traditionally masculine activities like fishing and the repeated descriptions of their 'anomalous ("breiðleitr" [broad-faced]) features' may have been deliberate evocations 'meant to mark them to the saga audience as of Sámi origin as much as they mark them as trolls or giants'.[97]

These studies by no means suggest that all giants found in these narratives should be taken as reflections of the same social group. In such a varied corpus, there is no overarching taxonomic consistency and giants, elves or valkyries all function differently within the particular narratives in which they appear.[98] Even within a single text, non-human characters may be multivalent, a locus for more than one meaning, and analysis on a taxonomic level must proceed on a narrative-by-narrative basis.

More broadly, however, it *is* possible to discern meaning behind this narrative preoccupation with mixed lineages. Families function in many ways as a microcosm of societal relations, especially in their continual oscillation between inclusion and exclusion.[99] Families remain dynamic by welcoming new members, either through birth or by naturalising

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[96] Mundal, p. 27.

[97] Ballif Straubhaar, 'Iarpskammr', pp. 118, 107.

[98] Ármann Jakobsson argues especially for a clear distinction between the giants of *Snorra Edda*, whom he describes as 'dethroned ancestors', and the less dignified, more monstrous giants of the *fornaldarsögur*, in 'Identifying the Ogre', pp. 182, 193.

[99] Kári Gíslason has explored how this oscillation is used to construct meaning in the narratives of some *Íslendingasögur* in 'Within and Without Family in the Icelandic Sagas', *Parergon*, 26 (2009), 13–33.

those born outside of the family group, and by losing others, to death and marriage. Since radical endogamy within the family is not a viable social principle,[100] all families are by necessity of mixed heritage. There are certainly degrees of familiarity which can be used to mute the effects of exogamy, by marrying within the same social group, for example, whether that be the extended family, the same class or the same society, but difference within the family, as opposed to constructed in relation to the family, is an ever-present cause of anxiety which must be continually negotiated. These explorations of maximal exogamy, in which the differences between two partners are as extreme as possible, typified by a human procreating with or marrying into another 'species' entirely, represent an exploration of these anxieties. To quote Straubhaar again, 'exogamous pair-bonding, whether with out-tribe humans or with alien beings (of many taxonomical varieties) standing in for out-tribe humans, is a ubiquitous literary trope throughout the *fornaldarsögur* corpus, even though such pairings are presented nearly always as risky, if not outright problematic'.[101] Perhaps the dangers and frequent failure of maximal exogamy may have made more minimal, less exaggerated exogamy look more attractive by comparison, the exaggeration of difference serving to reinforce similarities between a wide range of peoples as their smaller differences are reduced by their common humanity.

Despite the highly anthropomorphised nature of these different taxonomies and their ultimate reflection of different human social groups, it is important to understand the differences in their narrative usage and the possible reasons why. Divine genealogy, for example, has an entirely different function to human genealogy since, as Quinn notes:

> Unlike the mythological family, which is essentially only two generations deep and operates in an expansive time-zone that nonetheless rarely extends beyond these two generations, human society is bound to a faster-paced time-frame and the crucial gears that shift a dynasty upwards or downwards operate between generations, through marriage and offspring.[102]

Such a distinction is of particular importance when it comes to examining the trajectories of mythic-heroic dynasties, since only human dynasties really have the genealogical depth to

[100] Marianne Kalinke has explored the absurdities of endogamy as expressed in *Dalafífla þáttr* in *Gautreks saga* in 'Endogamy as the Crux of the "Dalafífla þáttr"', in *Fornaldarsagaerne*, ed. by Ney, Ármann Jakobsson and Lassen, pp. 107–21.

[101] Ballif Straubhaar, 'Iarpskammr', p. 115.

[102] Quinn, 'Realisation of Mythological Design', p. 130.

develop a complex literary shape, meaning they function differently within a textual structure to the divine lineages with which they occasionally intermingle. While all these relationships will form part of the analysis, the question of species, as it were, will only be raised in connection with individual texts where different taxonomies and their interactions are being used to serve a narrative function. Human and non-human interactions will be considered on a case-by-case basis, without seeking an overarching pattern across the corpus, since to do so would mistakenly imply a consistent approach to non-human but anthropomorphic beings in these texts.

The legendary family, then, is an institution of social grouping in both human and non-human societies, based around the nucleus of parent-child relations but also in an extended sense, capable of encompassing other blood relatives such as grandparents, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews and affinal relations, such as sons- and daughters-in-law. It is important to recognise that the families described are explicit literary constructions, mediated through narrative and should be treated as such, a topic I return to in more detail in chapter VII once the various parent-child relationships within the family have been examined in more detail, beginning in the next chapter with the competitive relationship between fathers and sons.

II. FATHERS AND SONS

The father-son relationship was arguably the most highly prized of all familial relationships in Old Norse society. The father was the head of the family, the son his closest heir. According to Cathy Jorgensen Itnyre, the literary depiction of this relationship in the *Íslendingasögur* reflected and reinforced the qualities which Icelandic society found desirable in its male members. She concludes: '[t]he qualities that are admired and abhorred in the father-son relationship reveal a central underlying principle: the bond between fathers and sons was the main one for preserving the values that created Icelandic society'.[103] Although kinship in Old Norse society was essentially bilateral or cognatic, traced not only through the paternal but also the maternal line,[104] patriliny seems to have been accorded a privileged position in legendary literature, which valorises it above all other kinship relations. Far more literary attention is paid to this relationship than to any other intergenerational interaction in the Old Norse mythic-heroic corpus. The practice of patronymic as opposed to matronymic naming further demonstrates the greater significance afforded to paternal relations and unites fathers and sons on a nominal level, so that to name a character is frequently to name his father also: father and son becoming a single lexical unit. Old Norse even had a single word for this unit, *feðgar*, springing from the same root as *faðir*. Father and son are thus characterised linguistically as an indivisible partnership or an unbreakable link in a genealogical chain.

There is a strong element of paternal possessiveness about such language, which is also revealed in the attitudes of saga characters toward paternity. When Jórunn is first introduced to Án's son, Þorír, in *Áns saga bogsveigis*, she responds with the aphorism:

> "Kemr at því, sem mælt er, at hverr er auðgari en þykkist. Ekki sagðir þú mér, at þú ættir þenna son, en þó hygg ek ekki aukasmíði vera munu at honum."[105]
>
> ('It comes to this, as it is said, that "everyone is wealthier than he thinks". You didn't tell me that you had this son, but still I think that he will not be of no account.')

[103] Cathy Jorgensen Itnyre, 'The Emotional Universe of Medieval Icelandic Fathers and Sons', in *Medieval Family Roles: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Cathy Jorgensen Itnyre, Garland Medieval Casebooks, 15, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1727 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 173–96 (p. 191).

[104] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 89.

[105] *Áns saga bogsveigis*, ch. 7 (II, 401).

Þorír is considered an asset to his father despite the lack of a personal relationship between them, raised as he was by his maternal relatives. Once his identity as his father's son is proven, by means of a golden ring, Þorír *belongs* to his father, compared in Jórunn's implicit analysis to any other precious possession and valued as a productive addition to Þórir's household. Jórunn describes him as *ekki aukasmíði* (not of no account, not a superfluous thing) and the *smíð* element of the compound conveys expectations of tangible contributions to his father's wealth. The verb *eiga* (to have) which she uses to denote the relation is also used to denote marriage in Old Norse sagas and affirms the objectification of the bride by both her husband and her father. Here, instead the son is objectified. The episode draws on the same understanding of paternity that informs the patronymic system, that the son is in some ways an extension of his father and belongs to him. Solidarity between father and son is assumed not on the basis of any emotional relationship but because the father-son relationship is conceived of as inherently solidary, while the balance of power is weighted firmly in the father's favour.

The constant reinforcement of paternal and filial solidarity, as expressed in the patronymic system and the patrilineal bent of the *fornaldarsögur*, may in part be attributed to what some see as the inherent uncertainty of paternity, when compared to the maternal experience. Tom MacFaul even goes so far as to suggest that the Roman proverb *pater semper incertus est* is the closest we may come to 'a cross-cultural human "universal"', arguing that '[u]ncertainty […] permeates virtually every style of thinking about paternity'.[106] Anxiety about paternal uncertainty is certainly rife in Old Norse myth and legend, which provide numerous examples of encounters between fathers and sons in which their relationship must be proven by a token or discerned by another member of the family (frequently the mother) before the father will accept it.[107] Itnyre identifies in the *Íslendingasögur* a 'paternal tendency to favor offspring who resemble themselves,' since such a resemblance 'was one of the few indicators available to "prove" paternity.'[108] A similar tendency is at play within the *fornaldarsögur* corpus. In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, Angantýr is said to resemble his father Höfundr in *skaplyndi* (disposition), hence 'Höfundr unni honum mikit ok þar með öll alþýða' (Höfundr loved him greatly and all the people along with him) while his brother, Heiðrekr, who has an evil temperament, is instead their mother's

[106] Tom MacFaul, *Poetry and Paternity in Renaissance England: Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne and Jonson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 2, 61.

[107] For further discussion of paternal recognition see chapter VI section 2.i.

[108] Itnyre, p. 181.

favourite.[109] In *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, Gautrek's eldest son Ketill is 'ekki mjök við lyndi Gautreks konungs sakir hávaða ok kappgirni' (not much like King Gautrekr in disposition on account of his boisterousness and energy)[110] and it is no coincidence that Gautrekr passes over him when he dies in favour of his second son Hrólfr, specifically citing his younger son's disposition when he suggests that '"at sá taki ríki eftir mik, sem mér þykkir betr til fallinn"' ('that one should take the kingdom after me, who seems to me better suited to it').[111] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, however, provides perhaps the most chilling example of the suspicion that may result from the lack of such similarity, when Auðr's father, Ívarr, suggests to her husband, Hrærekr, that she has been having an affair with Helgi, as evidenced by the striking resemblance between him and her son, Haraldr, tricking Hrærekr into committing fratricide.[112]

While paternal uncertainty is certainly a characteristic theme of father-son relations, it does not necessarily follow that the biological uncertainty of paternity must define the concept of paternity itself. Carol Delaney argues that paternity in the West:

> […] has not meant merely the idea of a physiological relationship between a specific man and specific child, as so many people assume, nor the social role built on that recognition. Paternity has meant the *primary*, *creative*, *engendering* role. The uncertainty about or difficulty of proving paternity in any particular case does nothing to undermine the concept.[113]

In this way she rejects the suggestions that uncertainty must colour all our efforts to discuss paternity. The erasure of the mother's creative role performed by the patronymic system confirms the primacy of the father and his engendering role in Old Norse myth and legend. Clunies Ross has also discussed the male appropriation of the female experience of birth in the Old Norse creation myth, which sees life emerge from the armpit of the male giant Ymir and the world created from his flesh, which further reinforces the father's creative function.[114]

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[109] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 5 (II, 24).

[110] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 3 (IV, 62).

[111] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 5 (IV, 65).

[112] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 2 (I, 343).

[113] Carol Delaney, 'Cutting the Ties that Bind: The Sacrifice of Abraham and Patriarchal Kinship', in *Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies*, ed. by Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), pp. 445–67 (p. 456) [emphasis in original].

[114] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 144–86.

In this chapter, I argue that it is not uncertainty that defines paternity but ambivalence, though paternal uncertainty may well contribute to such ambivalence. Though the father-son relationship was of enormous ideological value in the abstract, this did not mean it had to be consistently positively portrayed. Indeed, father-son relationships are some of the most violent and fraught in Old Norse myth and legend. Paternal attention and affection in the *Poetic Edda*, *Snorra Edda* and the *fornaldarsögur* are never equally or consistently bestowed. *Sörla saga sterka* tells of Sörli and Sigvaldr, the two sons of Erlingr and Dagný, noting that:

> helt konungr meir til Sörla en Sigvalda, því at hann var maðr fríðari sýnum, en svá rammr at afli, at honum komst engi til jafns um allan Noreg ok þótt enn lengra væri leitat.[115]
>
> (The king was fonder of Sörli than Sigvaldr, because he was a more handsome man in appearance, and so physically strong, that no-one could be sought who was equal to him throughout all Norway or even further afield.)

Björn's unequal division of his inheritance between his three sons in *Hrólfs saga kraka* is deliberate and deeply resented by his eldest son who received the smallest share and complains that '"[ó]jafngjarn hefir sá verit, er þessum gripum hefir átt at skipta"' ('that one has been unfair, who had these treasures to divide').[116] Herrauðr in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* is popular with everyone:

> en ekki hafði hann mikit ástríki af feðr sínum, ok olli þat því, at konungr átti annan son frilluborinn, ok unni hann honum meira.[117]
>
> (But he did not have much love from his father and this was the cause that the king had another son, bastard born, and he loved him more.)

His father is the marked exception to Herrauðr's popularity, preferring his illegitimate son, Sjóðr. These brief examples make it clear that amity between father and son could not be

[115] *Sörla saga sterka*, ch. 1 (III, 369).

[116] *Hrólfs saga kraka ok kappa hans*, ch. 28 (I, 52). Henceforth *Hrólfs saga kraka*.

[117] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, ch. 1 (III, 283).

taken for granted. The closer analysis of father-son interactions within the *fornaldarsögur*, the *Poetic Edda* and *Snorra Edda* which follows reveals that competition between fathers and sons was more typical than co-operation.

This chapter explores the tensions which frequently destabilise father-son relations in the mythic-heroic corpus. I examine how saga authors and poets struggled to reconcile these tensions with the patrilineal solidarity between father and son so highly prized by their society. I suggest this was achieved by means of two symmetrical strategies: of foreclosure and disclosure. First, I discuss strategies of foreclosure, which seek to remove the opportunity for antagonism between father and son in order to preserve the unity of the patriline. Then I discuss corresponding strategies of disclosure, which confront and explore the ambivalence at the heart of father-son relations, and in so doing avert its more destructive effects. The chapter concludes by summarising the nature of ambivalence in the father-son relationship, arguing that it was motivated, on the father's side, by fear of usurpation by the son, though tempered by the desire for a successor and, on the son's, by a desire to surpass his father's achievements and outgrow his authority, but tempered by filial respect and affection.

1. Strategies of Foreclosure: The Absent Father

A simple yet effective means of avoiding negative kinship relations was to minimise the interactions between fathers and sons: it is surprisingly rare for the father and son to inhabit the same narrative space in the *Poetic Edda*, *Snorra Edda* and the *fornaldarsögur*. A number of narrative devices explain this, such as Oddr's fosterage away from home in *Örvar-Odds saga*, or Brynjólfr's decision to buy his son, Þorsteinn, a ship in *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns* in a successful effort to be rid of him, since he was *óþýðr* (so unfriendly).[118] The word *óþýðr* emphasises Þorsteinn's incompatibility with society; he is literally unsociable. It subtly hints that there may already be tension between father and son thanks to Þorsteinn's disposition and Brynjólfr's actions foreclose any further potential conflict. In Old Norse myth, Þórr is consistently described as being away from home and therefore away from his father Óðinn's authority: he is absent when the giant builder appears at Ásgarðr;[119] he is absent when his daughter is promised to the dwarf Alvíss;[120] he is absent when Loki appears at Ægir's feast.[121] When he encounters his father in *Hárbarðsljóð*, Þórr is on his way to Ásgarðr from the east,

[118] *Þorsteins þáttr bæjarmagns*, ch. 1 (IV, 321).

[119] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 42 (p. 35).

[120] *Alv*. 4:4–6 (p. 124).

[121] *Ls*. prose (p. 96).

returning from another absence, and his father does his best to delay his journey.[122] For Óðinn's son Baldr, absence is even more of a defining feature, since the principal myth associated with him is about his death and the complete preclusion of his return to Ásgarðr before the end of the world.

By far the most common device, however, is the death of the father, sometimes even before the birth of his son. Sons born posthumously seem marked out for especial distinction, not least Sigurðr, the most famous of all Norse heroes, whose birth is predicted by his father, Sigmundr. While he lies dying on a battlefield, he tells his wife Hjǫrdís that '"[þ]ú ferr með sveinbarn ok fæð þat vel ok vandliga, ok mun sá sveinn ágætr ok fremstr af várri ætt"' ('you are carrying a son and raise him well and carefully and that boy will be famous and the foremost of our lineage').[123] Sigurðr's posthumous birth evokes the even more portentous birth of his ancestor Völsungr earlier in *Völsunga saga*, whose delivery into the world, by Caesarean section no less, is enveloped in the narrative by the death of his father, Rerir, on campaign, and the death of his mother in childbirth.[124] The child's association with death is thus twofold but Völsungr is made all the more heroic because of it. Treated from the moment of birth as a man rather than a child, the death of both parents allows Völsungr to be born into authority, thereby sidestepping any potential conflict with his father.

Posthumous birth is not exclusive to *Völsunga saga*. King Hróarr's wife, Ögn, is pregnant with a son when he dies in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. The boy, Agnarr, becomes a very promising young man, 'ágætliga frægr ok fægri en hans faðir' (excellently famous and more renowned than his father).[125] Later in the saga, the ill-fated Björn tells his sweetheart Bera that she will *fæða sveina þrjá* (bear three sons) the very night before he is killed by his own father's hunting party.[126] Björn and Sigmundr's dying predictions are clearly provoked by their proximity to death rather than any innate paternal knowledge but they nevertheless speak to the anxiety of paternal uncertainty in the Middle Ages. In this fantasy it is the father who is certain of his progeny, even before the mother. The wife's lack of agency over her own body is emphasised by her husband's knowledge of a pregnancy before she herself is even aware of it, thereby diminishing the mother's role in the reproductive process. The word of the father in these examples literally calls forth offspring in a pseudo-creation reminiscent of Trinitarian doctrine, while the mother becomes little more than a vessel, and in Bera's case a corruptible

[122] *Hrbl*. prose (p. 78).

[123] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 12 (I, 137).

[124] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 2 (I, 112).

[125] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 12 (I, 25).

[126] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 26 (I, 49).

and dangerous one capable of damaging as well as nurturing the children inside her, as discussed in chapter IV.

Paternal death need not always precede the son's birth though. In *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* Hjörleifr dies shortly after his son Hálfr is born, while out raiding. His death and Hálfr's birth are immediately juxtaposed in the narrative:

> Hjörleifr konungr ok Hildr in mjóva áttu tvá sonu. Hét in ellri Hjörólfr, en inn yngri Hálfr. Hjörleifr konungr fell í víkingu.[127]
>
> (King Hjörleifr and Hildr the Slender had two sons. The elder was called Hjörólfr and the younger Hálfr. King Hjörleifr fell on a viking raid.)

No exact causality is established but the immediacy is stark. A similar scenario occurs in *Gautreks saga* in which Gautrekr is raised far away from his father, King Gauti, by his mother, Snotra. When he is a little older they travel to his father's court where he is well received and raised but the saga moves swiftly on:

> líða nú svá fram nokkurir vetr, þar til er Gautrekr var mjök fullkominn at þroska. Þá bar svá til, at Gauti konungr tók sótt ok kallaði til sín vini sína.[128]
>
> (Now several years pass by, until Gautrekr had fully come to maturity. Then it happened that King Gauti took sick and called his friends to him.)

With his dying words to his friends Gauti commends the kingdom to his son before passing away. No narrative attention is given to interaction between Gauti and his son or the development of a relationship between them. The timing of King Gauti's demise is significant (and rather ominous). His son's attainment of maturity seems to act as the cue for Gauti's retirement from the saga, much as the birth of Hálfr prompted a similar reaction in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*. It is hard to escape the impression that Gautrekr's absence from his father's court while growing up granted his father a temporary stay of execution. Once

[127] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 9 (II, 106).

[128] *Gautreks saga*, ch. 2 (IV, 10–11).

father and son inhabit the same space in the narrative, one must give way to the other and, most frequently, it is the father who succumbs.

The death or absence of the father in these narratives does not mean that father-son relationships lack significance; indeed, it is quite the opposite. The father's death transforms him into a symbolic presence, that may be ever-present in the text despite his narrative demise. To borrow from Sinclair's discussion of paternal death in medieval French *chansons de geste,* 'the dead father becomes more powerful than was the living'.[129] The otherwise unexplained absence of Gjúki and Buðli in the heroic poems of the *Poetic Edda* leads one to suppose that these are also dead fathers by the time the action takes place but it is noticeable how their presence broods over the poems, defining the two lineages whose mutual destruction shall spell the end of their own legacies, the last truly successful progenitors on either side. In the case of the Gjúkungs, Gjúki has become the definitive ancestor, his name demarcating a genealogical cluster from which Sigurðr is always neatly excluded, in spite of his marriage, and Guðrún is never relinquished. If we agree with Ármann Jakobsson that '[e]very father figure is also a symbol of the past and of death', an inevitable 'terrifying signal to oneself that as one generation passes away, so must the next' then Gjúki exemplifies the father's potential to stand simultaneously as both a past reminder and a future warning.[130] Gjúki functions as a signifier of his children's shared past even as the lack of genealogical depth which he represents, penetrating only one generation back, hints also at the future sterility of his dynasty. Gjúki is not a symbol for the age and antiquity of their lineage but the foundation on which the horizontal kinship relations with which the poems are so concerned are founded. Buðli is less frequently evoked but functions in a similar fashion to tie his disparate children, Atli, Brynhildr and Oddrún together, as discussed further in chapter VI section 2.ii.

Dead fathers are able to become eternally present in their sons' lives without engaging in the personal interactions with their offspring which are so frequently marred in the sagas and poems by altercations both verbal and physical. Dead fathers are aspirational figures, whose legacies are to be honoured without impinging on the sons' own independence. Such a strategy is familiar from elsewhere in medieval literature. Gary Lim's analysis of a number of Middle English romances argues that:

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[129] Sinclair, p. 206.

[130] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Enter the Dragon. Legendary Saga Courage and the Birth of the Hero', in *Making History*, ed. by Arnold and Finlay, pp. 33–52 (p. 49).

> By idealizing dead fathers, the romances eliminate, in advance, the possibility of an antagonistic relationship between fathers and sons, installing the transition of patriarchal principles of succession and lineage as an ideal to be sought after. Without assuming that all father-son relationships are inevitably antagonistic at some level, the ideological underpinnings of these romances may be discerned in how every option other than a positive relationship between the son and the dead father is foreclosed.[131]

Because the father is dead, the father-son relationship thus becomes 'static', immune to both 'ambiguity or the effects of change', which elsewhere are characteristic of kinship relations among the living.[132] The foreclosure Lim identifies leaves no room for the exploration of personal interactions between father and son. The father's death precludes further development, for good or bad, in their relationship. Since the father has already died he becomes indistinguishable from the remainder of the patriline, a positive role model, rather than a rival for, or obstacle to, the son's own pursuit of power and authority.

2. The Word of the Father: Reactions to Paternal Death

Both the application and the limitations of this strategy of foreclosure are most clearly emphasised in those narratives which depict the death of the father. Once dead the father can be reconstructed by his son to suit his own purposes and those of the ongoing lineage, a transformation of the father which is reflected in the son's altered attitude toward him before and after death. Though paternal death is frequent, the circumstances are rarely dwelt upon but there are a few notable exceptions in the *fornaldarsögur*.

i. Hrólfr and Sturlaugr: An Honourable Death

In *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* Hrólfr leaves his father's house after a quarrel, vowing, rather petulantly and extremely competitively, '"eigi aftr koma, fyrr en ek hefi fengit jafnmikit ríki ok þú átt nú, eða liggja dauðr ella"' ('not to come back before I have won a kingdom just as large as the one you have now, or to lie dead otherwise') and refusing any assistance from his

[131] Gary Lim, 'In the Name of the (Dead) Father: Reading Fathers and Sons in *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, and *Bevis of Hampton*', *JEGP*, 110 (2011), 22–52 (p. 33).

[132] Lim, p. 33.

father.[133] The saga emphasises his sudden isolation from his kin in its description of his solitary leave-taking:

> Hvárki bað hann vel lifa föður sinn né móður ok enga sína frændr. Vissu menn ok eigi, hvat um hann leið. Ekki er þess getit, at Sturlaugr gæfi sér um burtferð Hrólfs.[134]
>
> (Neither his father nor his mother nor any of his relatives wished him well. Men did not know where he went. It is not mentioned that Sturlaugr took any interest in Hrólfr's departure.)

It seems the bonds of kinship are not so easily broken when his father reappears on the eve of a great battle. Absence seems to have made the heart grow fond:

> kennir Hrólfr, at þar er kominn faðir hans, Sturlaugr, ok Eirekr, bróðir hans. Verðr þar mikill fagnafundr með þeim öllum saman. Spurði Hrólfr föður sinn tíðenda og af ferðum sínum. Sturlaugr var þá gamall mjök ok hafði lengi af lagt herferðir. Sagðist hann hafa spurt til ferða Hrólfs, ok hann hefði því farit af Noregi til Garðaríkis at veita Hrólfi lið.[135]
>
> (Hrólfr realised that his father Sturlaugr and Eirekr, his brother had arrived. There was a very joyful meeting with them all together. Hrólfr asked his father for tidings and about his journey. Sturlaugr was then very old and had long given up warfare. He said that he had found out about Hrólfr's journey and for this reason he had travelled from Norway to Russia to give Hrólfr assistance.)

In the ensuing battle both Sturlaugr and Eirekr are killed, the latter trying to avenge the former. It is left to Hrólfr to avenge them both. Sturlaugr's death has the obvious effect of resolving the lingering plot threads around Hrólfr's damaged relationship with his family; the saga's note of Sturlaugr's advanced age alters the power dynamic between father and son in

[133] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 4 (III, 174).

[134] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 4 (III, 175).

[135] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 30 (III, 246).

Hrólfr's favour and when Hrólfr lays his father to rest in the burial mound alongside the greatest champions any former rivalry with his father is forgotten in favour of honouring his death. But Sturlaugr's demise also has further narrative consequences, gaining his son the hand of the princess Ingigerðr, who selects Hrólfr as a husband 'því at hann hefði mestu um kostat föður síns at hefna' ('because it had cost him the most to avenge her father'), a cost which included the loss of '"föður sinn ok bróður ok aðra vini ok frændr"' ('his father and brother and other friends and kinsmen').[136] Although the relationship between Hrólfr and Sturlaugr is restored while both are alive, it is Sturlaugr's death which cements their positive relations, making them immune to further change, and, crucially, allows the lineage to move forward and prosper as Hrólfr prepares to start a family of his own. Indeed, he and Ingigerðr go on to have 'mörg börn' (many children).[137] Sturlaugr is transformed in death from an ambivalent rival to his son's ambitions to an idealised progenitor for whom his son has nothing but respect.

ii. Hálfdan and Eysteinn: Abandoning Vengeance

In *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, the titular Hálfdan sleeps through his father Eysteinn's murder. Too late to save his father, he is confronted only with the scene of the crime:

> Hálfdan vitjar skemmubúrsins, ok var konungr þar dauðr ok laginn sverði í gegnum ok þrír smásveinarnir, en inn fjórði komst upp á þvertréit ok sagði, at Grímr inn meiri hefði þar komit ok drepit konunginn ok þá alla, sem dauðir váru, ok kallaði síðan: "Segið svá Hálfdani, at Vígfúss ok Ófeigr hafi hefnt Hergeirs konungs,"—ok gekk út síðan.[138]
>
> (Hálfdan visited the chamber, and the king was dead there and lay with a sword through him, along with three small boys, but the fourth had managed to get up on the crossbeam and said that Grímr the Larger had come there and killed the king and all those who were dead, and afterwards called: 'Say thus to Hálfdan, that Vígfúss and Ófeigr have avenged King Hergeirr,'—and then went outside.)

[136] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 34 (III, 267).

[137] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 38 (III, 279).

[138] *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, ch. 9 (IV, 259).

The larger Grímr, identified by the boy as responsible for the deed, refers to one of the two mysterious strangers, both called Grímr, who had been visiting the court. The killer's bold proclamation of their successful vengeance, which captions the visual scene of the murder, contrasts strongly with Hálfdan's ultimately unsuccessful quest for vengeance on his father's behalf. As if his lack of watchfulness on the night of the crime were not reproach enough, Hálfdan is further compromised by the strange lovesickness which strikes him upon catching sight of the surprisingly delicate hand of the smaller Grímr, actually the lady Ingigerðr in disguise. While he vows not to take up the crown until he has avenged Eysteinn's murder, the restlessness which follows his father's death seems more a cover for his lovesickness which urges him to find the owner of the delicate hand and marry her. His response to his father's death is thus highly ambivalent as he must confront not only his desire for one of the conspirators but also the fact that the killer himself turns out to have saved his own life.

After having been wounded, Hálfdan is spared death when an unknown man has him carried to a doctor named Hriflingr. Once recovered he asks his host to tell him who killed his father and he replies:

> "sá maðr heitir Skúli, ok ef ek skal þér satt segja ok eigi ljúga at þér, þá er þetta sá inn sami Grímr, sem þér hefir líf gefit, ok er nú mikit undir drengskap þínum, er þit finnizt."[139]
>
> ('That man is called Skúli, and if I shall tell the truth and not lie to you, that one is the same Grímr, who has given you life, and now much will depend on your noble disposition when you two meet one another.')

Ultimately, vengeance is laid aside in return for an oath of blood-brotherhood with his father's killer and the hand of Ingigerðr, Skúli's foster-daughter. Hálfdan's acceptance of Skúli's offer suggests that Skúli's actions in saving his life outweigh the crime of taking his father's. Although Hálfdan has it in his power to avenge his father, since even Skúli acknowledges that he will not survive many meetings with Hálfdan if they should fight, Hálfdan's response to Skúli's offer is welcoming:

[139] *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, ch. 16 (IV, 269).

> "Ekki mun þat duga," sagði Hálfdan, "renna ok aftr at sjá. Munda ek ekki frá mörgum tíðendum sagt hafa, þá vér Úlfkell snillingr áttumst við, ef þú hefðir þá eigi sýnt mér drengskap."[140]
>
> ('It will not do,' said Hálfdan, 'to run and to look back. I would not have spoken about many tidings, when we fought Úlfkell the Heroic, if you had not shown me courage then.')

That Hálfdan made the right choice, affirming his heroic character even as he contravenes the usual dictates of honour, is clear from the author's commentary that 'þótti flestum mönnum þar hvárumtveggja fara drengiliga, ok urðu menn fegnir sætt þeira' (most men thought that both of them did nobly and men were glad at their reconciliation).[141]

While at first glance it may appear that Hálfdan abandons his dead father's memory, it is only once dead that Eysteinn solidifies his influence over his son, directing his actions for the remainder of the narrative. Hálfdan's interactions with his father before his death were limited and he is depicted as an obedient but independent son. Raised by his father until he was fifteen, when the death of his mother prompts his father largely to abandon his kingdom for frequent raiding trips, Hálfdan's first direct address from Eysteinn comes in chapter four, when Eysteinn orders him to march against Skúli along with Úlfkell and decrees that '"Hálfdan skal eiga Ingigerði, ef honum hugnast þat ráð"' ('Hálfdan shall marry Ingigerðr if that match pleases him').[142] Hálfdan, it turns out, is not so inclined, declaring that '"Eigi hefi ek mjök huglagt at kvænast svá búit"' ('I have not thought much about taking a wife as matters stand') with the result that Ingigerðr, who is secretly an imposter, is married instead to Úlfkell.[143] It is not until after Eysteinn's death that Hálfdan acquiesces to his father's suggestion by marrying the true Ingigerðr, in spite of her role in his father's murder. Accepting reconciliation with his father's killers may thus be read as obedience to the words and wishes of his father so that even in renouncing vengeance Eysteinn's legacy is still felt; by the same action Hálfdan both confirms and denies his duties to his father underlining the ambivalence which has been so characteristic of their relationship throughout.

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[140] *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, ch. 21 (IV, 278).

[141] *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, ch. 21 (IV, 278).

[142] *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, ch. 4 (IV, 251).

[143] *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, ch. 6 (IV, 255).

iii. Ragnarr and his Sons: The Father's Last Word

Ambivalence is likewise the overwhelming impression left by Ragnarr's death in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar.* News of his death on the orders of King Ella while campaigning in England is brought to all his four surviving sons at once and the tableaux of their reaction is painted in exquisite detail unmatched by the *þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, which condenses the narrative considerably. The moment is especially fraught given Ragnarr's problematic relationship with his sons in the saga, a relationship dominated by explicit competition not between brothers but between the sons as a united group and their father. Torfi Tulinius expresses surprise that Ragnarr 'never fights alongside his sons' and that instead there is what he understatedly describes as 'a hint of competitiveness between Áslaug's sons and Ragnarr'.[144] For him, '[t]hese elements are not very prominent in the saga, and perhaps not very meaningful either', but it seems to me the rivalry is both extremely prominent and significant.[145] To dismiss Ragnarr's rivalry with his sons so lightly is fundamentally to misunderstand their relationship and its significance within a saga which Torfi Tulinius himself admits deliberately focuses on intergenerational relationships, possibly with the aim of encouraging an audience to draw parallels between the saga's depiction of such relationships and their own experience.[146]

For their first voyage Ívarr, Hvítserkr and Björn choose to try and conquer Hvítabær purely because 'hafði Ragnarr komit þar ok varð frá at hverfa ok fekk ekki at gert' (Ragnarr had come there and been turned away and achieved nothing).[147] The success of their various exploits leads to fame that far outstrips their father's; the saga author tells us that 'nú eru þeir svá frægir of allan heim, at ekki var svá lítit barn, at eigi kynni nafn þeira' (now they were so famous in every home that there was no child so little that it did not know their names).[148] Nor is Ragnarr himself unaware of the disparity in their reputations. His expedition to invade England with only two ships is undertaken in indirect dialogue with his sons' actions and with the express purpose of equalling their fame:

> Nú er þar til máls at taka, er Ragnarr sitr heima í ríki sínu ok hann veit eigi, hvar synir hans eru né Randalín, kona hans. Ok þat heyrði hann

[144] Torfi Tulinius, p. 135.

[145] Torfi Tulinius, p. 135.

[146] Torfi Tulinius, p. 129.

[147] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 7 (I, 240).

[148] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 14 (I, 263).

> hvern tala af sínum mönnum, at engir mætti jafnast við sonu hans, ok hugðist honum svá at, at engir væri jafnfrægir þeim. Nú hyggr hann at því, hverrar frægðar hann mætti þess leita, er eigi væri skemmr uppi.[149]
>
> (Now the tale is taken up when Ragnarr remained at home in his kingdom, and he did not know where his sons were, nor Randalín, his wife. And he heard each one of his men say that no one could match his sons, and he thought to himself that no one was as famous as they were. Now he thought about this, how he could seek renown which would be remembered no less time.)

Like Torfi Tulinius, Elizabeth Rowe is surprised by the extent to which Ragnarr feels threatened by his sons, calling the episode 'an odd one, for one would expect that Ragnarr would be proud rather than envious of his sons' and ascribing its 'peculiarity' to the episode's source.[150] There is no need to do so, however. Ragnarr's competitive drive is entirely characteristic of father-son relations in the *fornaldarsögur*. In the passage, Ragnarr's isolation is made starkly obvious. So great is his estrangement from his sons that he does not even know where they are when he decides to travel to England, a rash decision which leads directly to his death. Rory McTurk describes his subsequent, ill-conceived campaign as 'more what would be expected of a rash, youthful hero than of an experienced warrior'.[151] One could view it as an attempt to regain his lost youth by a feat of heroism. He consults only his wife before departing and the first his sons hear of his campaign is when they receive word of his death. It is worth quoting their reactions in full:

> Hvítserkr ok Sigurðr láta þegar falla niðr taflit ok hyggja at vandliga þessi tíðenda sögu. Björn stendr á hallargólfinu ok studdist við spjótskefti sitt. En Ívarr spurði þá vandliga, með hverjum atburð líflát hans hafði verit. […]

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[149] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 15 (I, 264).

[150] Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, *Vikings in the West: The Legend of Ragnarr Loðbrók and His Sons*, Studia Medievalia Septentrionalia, 18 (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2012), p. 210.

[151] Rory McTurk, *Studies in* Ragnars saga loðbrókar *and its Major Scandinavian Analogues*, Medium Ævum Monographs, New Series, 15 (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1991), p. 88.

Ok nú er þessi sögu var þar komit, er hann hafði þetta mælt: "Gnyðja mundu grísir,"—þokar Björn höndum sínum á spjótskaftinu, ok svá hafði hann tekit fast, at handastaðinn sá á eftir. Þá er sendimenn luku frásögn þessi, hristir Björn spjótit í sundr, svá at stökk í tvá hluti. En Hvítserkr helt töfl einni, er hann hafði drepit, ok hann kreisti hana svá fast, at blóð stökk undan hverjum nagli. En Sigurðr ormr í auga hafði haldit á knífi einum ok skóf nagl sinn, er þessi tíðendi váru sögð, ok hugði svá vandliga at þessum tíðendum, at hann kenndi eigi fyrr en knífrinn stóð í beini, ok brást hann ekki við. En Ívarr spyrr at öllu sem gerst, en litr hans var stundum rauðr, en stundum blár, en lotum var hann bleikr, ok hann var svá þrútinn, at hans hörund var allt blásit af þeim grimmleik, er í brjósti hans var.[152]

(At once Hvítserkr and Sigurðr let their game pieces fall, and carefully attended to these tidings being told. Björn stood up on the hall floor and leant upon his spear-shaft. But Ívarr asked them carefully what had been the manner of his death. […]

And now when the tale came to the point where he had said this: 'The piglets would grunt,' Björn moved his hand on the spear-shaft, and he gripped it so tightly that his handprint could be seen on it afterwards. When the messengers ended their tale, Björn shook the spearpoint apart, so that it split into two pieces. And Hvítserkr held a game piece which he had captured, and he squeezed it so tightly that blood sprang up from under each nail. And Sigurðr Snake-in-the-Eye had been holding a knife and was paring his nails, when these tidings were told, and he thought so carefully about these tidings, that he didn't feel it until the knife was stuck in the bone—and he didn't flinch at that. But Ívarr asked about all that had happened, and his colour was sometimes red, sometimes black, and from time to time he went pale. He was so inflamed that his skin was all swollen from the savageness which was in his breast.)

Immediately noticeable is the explicitly non-verbal nature of their responses. Ívarr's fluctuating colour is indicative of his powerful emotional reaction and the contrast with his

[152] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 16 (I, 271–72).

brothers, who respond in more martial fashion either by using and abusing weapons and/or by drawing blood, foreshadows the indirect role Ívarr will play in gaining vengeance for their father. Ívarr's response is also exceptional in that he asks for information although his words are always couched in indirect speech in contrast to the direct voice of their father, Ragnarr, which thus comes to dominate the passage. Although he is neither present nor alive, Ragnarr is the only character to speak directly to his sons in the account of his death as his dying words, already spoken in chapter fifteen, are here repeated verbatim. Aside from a brief episode in chapter seven, in which his sons are reported to have asked their father for ships, Ragnarr and his sons are never depicted interacting directly with one another, much less speaking directly. Ragnarr's dying words are thus the first directed by him to his sons in the saga and they are not delivered until *after* his death.

The words' impact is only increased by the fact that this is their third repetition in the saga, each time in direct rather than indirect speech. Initially Ragnarr's observation is recorded in prose '"Gnyðja mundu nú grísir, ef þeir vissi, hvat inn gamli þyldi"' ('the piglets would now grunt if they knew what the older one suffered').[153] A similar line is then incorporated into Ragnarr's two-stanza lament concerning his situation:

> "Gnyðja mundu grísir,
> ef galtar hag vissi,
> —mér er gnótt at grandi—."[154]
>
> ('The piglets would grunt
> if they knew the boar's condition;
> I have been harmed enough.')

Finally, they are repeated for the third and final time to provoke a reaction from his sons. In death, Ragnarr at last resolves his rivalry with his sons, for not only does his passing remove the competition which characterised their relationship but it provokes the first real failure from his offspring. Ragnarr's final mission succeeds in puncturing his sons' hitherto unbeaten reputations since, perhaps fittingly given their estrangement, his sons' revenge

[153] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 15 (I, 268).

[154] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 27:1–3, ed. by Rory McTurk, in *Poetry in* Fornaldarsögur (*PFS*), ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, 8 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), p. 678. All poetic quotations from the *fornaldarsögur* are taken from this edition. Editors of individual sagas will be listed only in the first reference to each saga.

mission is initially unsuccessful and they are forced to flee from King Ella's forces. Their failure can be attributed to Ívarr's refusal to accompany them and not until his machinations grant them the perfect opportunity for revenge do the brothers succeed. The retrospective construction of the father becomes apparent, as only after Ragnarr's death do we learn that Ívarr claimed to have had doubts over his father's handling of the English expedition. His brisk dismissal of his father's failure cements his own tactical superiority. As Rowe describes it, Ívarr is 'the handsome, wise, and sympathetic character who serves as the author's mouthpiece', explicitly laying out his father's failings, as both conqueror and king.[155] One might add Ragnarr's failings as a father to this list; Ívarr's bonelessness is a direct consequence of his father's impatience in refusing to wait to sleep with his wife, Áslaug. As Rowe summarises, the saga 'shows that despite his fame, Ragnarr is not an ideal king', nor an ideal father.[156]

Yet Ívarr's boneless condition, though not his fault, compromises his heroic stature and prevents him from ever really stepping into his father's shoes. None of Ragnarr's sons immediately emerge as a true rival to his reputation, perfected now in the heroic death which echoes that of Gunnarr in the snake-pit.[157] Rowe sees Ragnarr's death as an unmitigated disaster, 'explicitly described as the result of his own stupidity' and comparing unfavourably with the exploits of his surviving sons who are 'greater than he, wide-ranging conquerors and forebears of Norwegian kings and Icelandic chieftains alike'.[158] It is his sons who present his death as a failure, however, disregarding how subsequently it negatively impacts their own heroic reputations. The effect of Ragnarr's death only gradually becomes apparent but it precipitates the end of unity for his sons. In its wake Ívarr settles in England, Hvítserkr travels to the east where he dies and Björn and Sigurðr father great lineages. Having been continually threatened by his sons' exploits, Ragnarr's death restores the power balance in his favour, for with him ends the saga, rehabilitating his heroic reputation somewhat and leaving a lasting impression of a legacy which far outstrips the briefer epilogues accorded to his sons. In his thrice repeated declaration that '"Gnyðja mundu grísir"' ('the piglets would grunt'), Ragnarr belittles his sons as *grísir* (piglets) in comparison to him, the mighty *gǫltr* (boar), even as he expresses confidence in their vengeance, something they ironically fail to achieve, at least initially. His dying speech perfectly expresses his ambivalent feelings toward his

[155] Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, pp. 213, 212.

[156] Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, p. 214.

[157] McTurk, p. 90.

[158] Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, p. 214.

successors. Simultaneously praising and disparaging them, he both demands and elicits a response from his sons; Ragnarr quite literally has the final word on their relationship.

The significance of Ragnarr's death in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* becomes even clearer when compared to the account in the *þáttr af Ragnars sonum* which provides an alternate retelling of the same events. As in the saga, the relationship between Ragnarr and his sons in the *þáttr* is dominated by their competition for heroic renown but the *þáttr* takes it one step further from rivalry to outright betrayal:

> Fóru synir hans með hernaði allir, því at þeir vildu eigi ófrægri vera en Ragnarr konungr, faðir þeira.
>
> Þat líkaði Ragnari konungi illa, er synir hans heldu móti honum ok tóku skattlönd hans móti hans vilja.[159]

> (All his sons went raiding, because they did not want to be less famous than King Ragnarr, their father.
>
> King Ragnarr did not like it when his sons turned against him and took his tributary lands against his wishes.)

Fearing that he will be usurped by his sons, Ragnarr is forced to set a king, Eysteinn Beli, over Upper Sweden in his absence 'halda því ríki sér til handa, en verja fyrir sonum sínum' (to hold the kingdom for him and to defend it against his sons).[160] McTurk takes this as evidence the *þáttr* preserves an older version of the saga's narrative since it provides 'a more logical explanation of the hostilities' between father and sons.[161] Rowe concurs that the explanation is more logical but see this rather as evidence that the *þáttr* is an attempt to improve upon the extant *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and is therefore the younger of the two.[162] I dispute that there is anything illogical about the rivalry between Ragnarr and his sons in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, since it is characteristic of legendary father-son relations and would refrain therefore from dating either text on the grounds of narrative logic. Whatever their relative dating, the *þáttr* confirms that competition defines Ragnarr's relationship with his sons in multiple retellings of the legend.

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[159] *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, ch. 2 (I, 291).

[160] *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, ch. 2 (I, 291).

[161] McTurk, p. 118.

[162] Rowe, *Vikings in the West*, p. 229.

In the *þáttr*, Ragnarr's sons Agnarr and Eirekr attempt to take the kingdom, as Ragnarr anticipates, but are unsuccessful, dying at the hands of Eysteinn Beli. Thus, where in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* their death is entirely attributable to external forces, in the *þáttr* both Eirekr and Agnarr die while in conflict with their father's ally, if not with their father outright. Ragnarr still seeks vengeance for them, or would have, it is implied, if his remaining sons had not beaten him to it, an intervention he resents. Indeed, this expedition spurs him on to greater competition with his sons:

> Ok er hann kom heim í ríki sitt, þá segir hann Áslaugu, at hann skal gera eigi minna frægðarverk en synir hans höfðu þá gert.[163]
>
> (And when he came home into his kingdom, then he said to Áslaug that he would do feats no less famous than those his sons had done.)

Lacking the extended exploration of Ragnarr's death and his sons' reactions the *þáttr* gives a more open-ended final impression of their relationship, lacking the closure the extended focus on Ragnarr's death scene provides. Without any dying words to speak, Ragnarr's narrative impact is significantly diminished, a silence which contrasts with the dying verses spoken by his son Eirekr. The competition between father and sons is ended by Ragnarr's death but the *þáttr* looks forward, tracing Ragnarr's line all the way to Haraldr hárfagri, the first ruler of a unified Norway, rather than lingering over Ragnarr's passing.

The death of the father, then, forecloses the possibility of sustained negative interactions, stabilising the father-son relationship against the prospect of further change. Nevertheless, the voice of the father speaks loudest from beyond the grave, continuing what Lim has termed a 'spectral father-son relationship' and giving voice to the ambivalence which underpins such relations in both life and literature.[164] Ragnarr's dying words are easily the most significant spoken anywhere in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. Eysteinn's casual marital advice becomes a magical imperative the very same night of his murder, which dogs his son's attempts to avenge him. The dying predictions of Sigmundr and Björn signify the moment of their sons' narrative conceptions, not in the body of the mother but in the words of the father, which govern their prospects for years to come. Yet the cost of this resolution is high, nothing less than the death of the father. Writing on the French *chansons de geste*, Sinclair

[163] *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, ch. 2 (I, 295).

[164] Lim, p. 25.

argues that '[t]he fact the father must *be* dead in order to have narrative resonance and impetus indicates the essential instability of the text's construction of the paternal'.[165] The fact that the father must be dead in Old Norse myth and legend to foreclose the possibility of conflict between father and son likewise has troubling implications for these narratives' constructions of paternity. Such drastic means of foreclosure ultimately serves only to strengthen the notion that the father-son relationship is inherently fragile, even as the care taken to preserve it speaks to its ideological value.

3. Strategies of Disclosure: The Outspoken Son

If strategies of foreclosure afford the voice of the father greater significance in his absence, strategies of disclosure allow the son's voice to emerge and overwrite paternal agency in the narrative. Nowhere is the emergent voice of the son afforded greater significance than in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar*. The poem's hero, Helgi, has an unusual childhood: 'hann var þǫgull; ecci nafn festiz við hann' (he was silent and no name would stick to him).[166] Only when he receives a name from the valkyrie Sváva does he begin to speak, demanding her hand in marriage as a naming-gift, and only after his exchange with Sváva does he first speak to his father. His words are heavily critical:

> "Ertattu, Hiǫrvarðr, heilráðr konungr,
> fólcs oddviti, þóttu frægr sér;
> léztu eld eta iǫfra bygðir,
> enn þeir angr við þic ecci gorðo.
>
> "Enn Hróðmarr scal hringom ráða,
> þeim er átto órir niðiar;
> sá séz fylkir fæst at lífi,
> hyggz aldauðra arfi at ráða."[167]
>
> ('You are not, Hjǫrvarðr, a wisely-counselled king,
> Leader of the host, though you are famous;
> You let fire consume the princes' settlements,

[165] Sinclair, p. 226.

[166] *HHv*. prose (p. 142).

Though they have done you no harm.

'But Hróðmarr will have rings at his disposal,
Those which our kinsmen used to own;
That prince is little anxious about his life,
He thinks to dispose of the inheritance of a family all dead.')

Helgi's criticism is not personal but political, hailing his father by name and making no reference to the kinship between them. His references to kinship are instead reserved for those kinsmen killed by Hróðmarr, namely his maternal grandfather and Helgi thus presents himself in this instance as his mother's, not his father's son. The patrilineal solidarity which we are led to expect from Old Norse social mores is denied by Helgi's forthright criticism. Hjǫrvarðr makes no direct reply, indeed he speaks only indirectly in the prose passage following Helgi's outburst. His response comes across as brief and impersonal, in contrast to his son's impassioned complaints. Recognising the force of his son's criticism, 'Hiǫrvarðr svaraði, at hann myndi fá lið Helga, ef hann vill hefna móðurfǫður síns' (Hjǫrvarðr answered that he would provide Helgi with a troop if he wanted to avenge his mother's father).[168]

The exchange bears comparison to a similar episode in *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis* in which Hjálmþér confronts his father, King Ingi, over his excessive reaction to his wife's death. Like Helgi's confrontation with Hjǫrvarðr, this is not presented as a personal exchange. Hjálmþér deliberately brings with him a band of courtiers, almost in the manner of witnesses to their discussion. He greets his father *blíðliga* (kindly) but his words are harsher:

"Skulu þér hér lengi sitja eða þreyja eftir yðra drottningu? Er slíkt ókonungliga gert. Vil ek heldr halda í burt af ríkinu með yðrum styrk ok fá yðr drottningarefni ok sækja með oddi ok eggju, ef eigi vill öðruvísi fást."[169]

('Must you sit here for such a long time and yearn for your queen? Such [behaviour] is done in an un-kingly manner. I would rather go away from the kingdom, with your assistance, and get your future queen and seek

[167] *HHv*. 10–11 (p. 143).

[168] *HHv*. prose (p. 143).

[169] *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, ch. 2 (IV, 182).

her with spear-point and sword-edge if she cannot be obtained otherwise.')

As in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar*, these are the first words from son to father and Hjálmþér's antagonistic tone challenges his father's authority. Like Helgi's complaint, this is a matter of royal responsibility. Although the queen was presumably his mother he displays no grief, even encouraging his father to remarry against his own best interests. Indeed, when his father does remarry, Hjálmþér's step-mother turns out to be an evil sorceress. It cannot be called an exchange, however, since: 'Konungr svaraði engu. Hjálmþér stóð lengi fyrir föður sínum ok gekk í burt síðan mjök reiðr' (The king did not reply. Hjálmþér stood before his father for a long time and went away afterwards, very angry).[170] Hjálmþér's father has no words for him, an unspoken abdication of authority and responsibility which disgusts his son. The scene does not, however, preclude father and son from later having an extremely positive relationship. Their final interaction sees Hjálmþér return home where 'faðir hans varð honum alls hugar feginn' (his father wholeheartedly rejoiced to see him).[171] The sharp contrast to their opening confrontation proves that father-son relationships in the *fornaldarsögur* are not necessarily defined by initial interactions.

When father and son disagree in *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, it is not so much that King Hringr cannot reply but that the words he uses have no effect upon his son. When the titular Illugi is slandered to King Hringr, the king's son and Illugi's friend Sigurðr does not believe it and refuses to bow to his father's decree that Illugi be denied a place on Sigurðr's upcoming expedition in favour of the king's adviser, Björn. Sigurðr is intransigent, insisting upon Illugi as a companion and when no resolution is forthcoming, the narrator baldly records that 'skilja þeir nú tal sitt' (now they ended their conversation).[172] The proof of Hringr's impotence is found in Illugi's presence on the expedition anyway, although Sigurðr is equally unable to leave Björn behind, tempering his victory somewhat. King Hringr dies shortly after his son's return, neatly preventing any further disagreement, and Sigurðr holds a great funeral feast to honour his father, restoring his image as a dutiful son.

In a particularly acrimonious exchange between Herrauðr and his father in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, Herrauðr likewise robs his father's commands of agency, changing their effect from one of dire threat to the powerless ravings of an old man. When Herrauðr's friend Bósi

[170] *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, ch. 2 (IV, 182).

[171] *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, ch. 22 (IV, 242).

[172] *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, ch. 2 (III, 414).

kills Sjóðr, Herrauðr's half-brother, Herrauðr intervenes to try to reconcile Bósi and his father but only succeeds in making the situation worse as his father accuses him of disloyalty:

> "Mikit kapp leggr þú á, Herrauðr, at fylgja illmenni þessu, ok mundi mörgum þykkja þér betr standa at hefna bróður þíns ok várrar svívirðu."[173]
>
> ('You take great pains, Herrauðr, to help that wicked man and many would think it better for you to stand to avenge your brother and our disgrace.')

Herrauðr stands by his friend, however, refusing to abandon him even after defeat in battle by his father's forces. His loyalty is so absolute that 'Herrauðr sagðist þess manns bani skyldu verða, sem réði lífláti Bósa, ok eigi konungi hlífa heldr en öðrum' (Herrauðr said that he would become that man's slayer, who caused Bósi's death, and deal with the king no more gently than with any others).[174] His father responds to his threat in kind and the saga tells how:

> Var konungr þá svá reiðr, at eigi mátti orðum við hann koma, ok bað leiða Herrauð aftr í myrkvastofuna ok skyldi þá báða drepa um morguninn, því at konungr vildi eigi annat, ok þótti nú flestum óvænliga horfa.[175]
>
> (The king was then so angry that he could hardly say a word and he ordered Herrauðr to be led back into the dungeon, and that they [Herrauðr and Bósi] should both be killed in the morning, because the king wanted no different, and now it seemed to look hopeless to most.)

The visual image of the king almost choking on his anger such that he can hardly speak ('eigi mátti orðum við hann koma') is compounded by Herrauðr and Bósi's evasion of execution, further robbing the king's words of their intended effect.

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[173] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, ch. 4 (III, 289).

[174] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, ch. 5 (III, 290).

[175] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, ch. 5 (III, 290–91).

The king is prevailed upon to spare his son and send Bósi on a quest for a vulture's egg, making it plain that Herrauðr is free to accompany his friend in his exile. Only after their return and the egg's delivery are father and son finally reconciled. Yet King Hringr's request that his son take his place at the battle of Brávellir, while he himself stays at home looking after his son's future wife, suggests his desire for his son's death has not fully abated and the preservation of his own authority and position is still the evident priority.[176] Their fragile reconciliation is only sealed by the death of the father, who falls defending Herrauðr's bride, Hleiðr, when her brother's men arrive to take her away.[177] Hringr's repeated attempts to arrange his son's death contrast sharply with Bósi's dramatic rescue of his own father during the saga's climactic battle:

> Hann sá, hvar faðir sinn flaut með borðinu mjök máttdreginn. Stökk hann nú fyrir borð ok hjálpaði honum ok kom honum upp í skip sitt.[178]
>
> (He saw where his father floated on a plank, completely exhausted. He now leapt overboard and helped him and got him up onto his ship.)

The effect is surely deliberate, emphasising the conflicted nature of Herrauðr and Hringr's relationship. Though they are ostensibly reconciled, it seems the violent feelings disclosed, which gave voice to the idea of destroying the lineage, cannot be fully contained. The ultimate failure of the patriline in Herrauðr's inability to produce a son with his wife suggests that once violence has been directly expressed, its destructive effects are harder to remove completely from the narrative.

In *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar*, *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra* and *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, the sons' challenging of their fathers' authority is vocally expressed, revealing the sons' frustrations at what they perceive to be unacceptable paternal behaviour. The expression of filial and paternal ambivalence is not always confined to verbal interaction, however, but can also manifest in physical confrontation, as demonstrated by a particular cluster of *fornaldarsögur*.

[176] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, ch. 9 (III, 304).

[177] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, ch. 10 (III, 306).

[178] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, ch. 15 (III, 320).

i. The Hrafnistumannasögur*: Physical Difference and Physical Confrontation*

When fathers and sons come into contact with each other in the *Hrafnistumannasögur* familiar rivalries emerge. '"Ætlar þú, at þú munir miklu fleiri eða meiri afreksverk vinna en ek hefi unnit?"' ('Do you think you will achieve more numerous or greater valiant deeds than I have achieved?') Oddr asks his ten-year old son Vignir when they first meet in *Örvar-Odds saga*,[179] to which his son frankly replies: '"enda þykkir mér alllíkligt, at ek muna vinna meiri þrekvirki en þú, ef ek lifi lengi"' ('indeed it seems to me very likely that I will achieve greater valiant deeds than you, if I live for a long time').[180] Sadly he does not. Oddr's goading drives him to challenge the dangerous troll Ögmundr to a duel in which Vignir is killed showing just how toxic these father-son rivalries can be. When Þórir meets his father Án for the first time in *Áns saga bogsveigis*, his father, not recognising him, shoots three arrows at him, which he promptly fires back, only narrowly avoiding killing Án.[181] They then come to physical blows 'ok tóku til at glíma, ok var þeira atgangr mjök sterkligr' (and they started to wrestle and their fighting was very fierce), until Án, feeling his age, tires and asks for respite.[182] Only after they have competed in this way does Þórir reveal his name and the *mark um faðerni hans* (token of his paternity) which proves he is Án's son.[183]

In *Ketils saga hængs*, Hallbjörn likewise has a competitive, at times even violent, relationship with his son Ketill, who is much closer to his nameless mother.[184] It is Ketill's maturation at around eleven which brings his issues with his father to a head. Hallbjörn suggests that Ketill take over the farm, stressing his own physical infirmity—'"ek gerumst gamall ok stirðr ok til einkis meir"' ('I'm becoming old and stiff and increasingly useless')[185]—but Ketill is not interested. Later, however, he wishes to join his father on a fishing expedition. Hallbjörn refuses somewhat bitingly, telling his son it will be more fitting for him to remain at home by the fire, but Ketill takes no notice and his father finds him

[179] *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 21 (II, 287).

[180] *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 21 (II, 287).

[181] *Áns saga bogsveigis*, ch. 7 (II, 399).

[182] *Áns saga bogsveigis*, ch. 7 (II, 400).

[183] *Áns saga bogsveigis*, ch. 7 (II, 400).

[184] He demonstrates his affection by giving her a chair: 'Hann gaf hann móður sinni ok kveðst henni meiri ást eiga at launa en föður sínum' (he gave it to his mother and said that he had rewarded her for her greater love rather than his father). *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 1 (II, 151). For further discussion see chapter IV section 1.

[185] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 1 (II, 152).

waiting at the boat. When Ketill initially fails to push the boat out, Hallbjörn takes the opportunity to taunt him again, claiming:

> "Ólíkr ertu frændum þínum, ok seint ætla ek, at afl verði í þér. En ek var vanr, áðr en ek eltumst, at setja einn ferjuna."[186]
>
> ('You are unlike your kinsmen, and I think that you are slow to become strong. But I was accustomed, before I grew old, to push the boat out alone.')

His accusations hit home, producing a violent physical reaction in his son:

> Ketill reiddist þá ok hratt fram ferjunni svá hart, at Hallbjörn hraut fallinn út á fjörugrjótit, en ferjan stöðvaðist ekki fyrr en út á sjó.
>
> Hallbjörn mælti þá: "Lítt lætr þú mik njóta frændsemi frá þér, er þú vilt brjóta bein í mér, en þat vil ek nú tala, at ek ætla, at þú sért nógu sterkr, því at ek vilda nú reyna afl þitt, ok stóð ek við sem ek gat fastast, en þú settir fram sem áðr. Þykki mér góð sonareign í þér."
>
> Fara þeir nú í veiðstöð.[187]
>
> (Then Ketill grew angry and launched the boat so hard that Hallbjörn was flung, fallen, out onto the shingle, but the boat did not stop before it was out on the sea.
>
> Then Hallbjörn said: 'Little do you allow me to benefit from kinship with you, when you want to break the bones in me, but this I will now say, that I think that you may be strong enough, because I wanted now to try your strength, and I withstood you as firmly as I could, but you launched the boat all the same. It seems to me I have a good son in you.'
>
> Now they went to the fishing-place.)

Particularly telling is Hallbjörn's line '"Lítt lætr þú mik njóta frændsemi frá þér, er þú vilt brjóta bein í mér"' ('Little do you allow me to benefit from kinship with you, when you want

[186] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 1 (II, 154).

[187] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 1 (II, 154).

to break the bones in me'), the inference being that kinship relation ought to constitute a protection against a man's more violent urges. At the same time, the direct comparison fostered here between father and son demonstrates the paradoxical fact that this intimate family relation, which ought to protect Hallbjörn from his son, is at the root of his son's antagonism towards him. The desire, even the necessity, to measure up to the paternal example drives Ketill's outburst, making the conflict between father and son indistinguishable from the *frændsemi* (kinship) of which Hallbjörn speaks.

Hallbjörn's admission of his son's prowess is insufficient to diffuse the tension, which continues even after their fishing trip, though the saga says of Ketill and his father that 'batnaði nú frændsemi þeira' (their kinship was now improving).[188] This interesting phrase implies kinship is not inherent, but something that can be developed and by implication destroyed. Ketill subsequently professes an interest in going to Vitaðsgjafi, even though (or perhaps because) his father has expressly forbidden it. Reluctantly, Hallbjörn advises his son that:

> "Reimt mun þér þar þykkja, […] en auðsýnt er þat, at þú vilt mínar eldstóar kanna ok við mik jafnast í hvívetna." Ketill kvað hann rétt geta.[189]
>
> ('It will seem haunted to you there, […] but it is clear that you want to explore my estates and deem yourself my equal in anything.' Ketill said he was right.)

Once again, even as their kinship is improving, Ketill still shows a desire to compete with his father by revisiting Hallbjörn's *eldstóar*, literally his 'fireplaces'.

Competition between Ketill's son Grímr and his son Oddr in *Örvar-Odds saga* is more muted. Oddr is born in the house of Ingjaldr in Berurjóðr while his parents are travelling to Vík and fostered there immediately after birth. Any rivalry is thus pre-emptively foreclosed, which may partially explain why Oddr and Grímr enjoy one of the better father-son relationships in the *Hrafnistumannasögur*. Nevertheless, there is an element of power-play to their first meeting as adults, with Oddr dominating the encounter. Upon arriving at his father's farm, Oddr demands that Grímr be called to come outside. Grímr in return asks why

[188] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 1 (II, 155).

[189] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 2 (II, 156–57).

they cannot come inside but Oddr is adamant, demanding a second time that his father come out and meet him, which his father duly does.[190] Oddr is similarly determined to have his own way in other things too. When Grímr tells him of his kinsmen Guðmundr and Sigurðr, his response is instantaneous and, on one level, gratifying:

> "Þá vil ek finna," sagði Oddr.
> "Hitt vil ek," sagði Grímr, "at þú sért hér í vetr."
> "Fara verðr nú fyrst," sagði Oddr, "ok hitta þá."[191]
>
> ('I want to meet them,' said Oddr.
> 'I want this,' said Grímr 'that you should stay here over the winter.'
> 'First I must go now,' said Oddr, 'and meet them.')

Oddr's desire to meet his relations testifies to his care for his family. Yet he still disregards his father's wishes, considering his own desire to meet his kinsmen more important than Grímr's wish to have him stay over the winter.

The competitive drive which results from the expectation that one ought to measure up to one's kinsmen destabilises the father-son relationship. At the same time, the father-son relationship is bolstered by the conflicting expectation that kin ought to be united. Hence the wording of Oddr's acceptance of his son Vignir, '"við mun ek ganga frændsemi við þik, ok ver velkominn með mér"' ('but I avow kinship with you, and be welcome with me'),[192] an offer Vignir accepts with extremely bad grace. The same expectation of unity drives Ketill's compromise with his father when Hallbjörn fiercely objects to a visit from Ketill's lover, Hrafnhildr. '"Hví býðr þú trölli þessu hér at vera?"' ('Why do you invite this troll to be here?') he asks his son and the saga goes on to describe how 'var hann mjök byrstr ok styggr við hennar kvámu' (he was very exasperated [lit. set with bristles] and angry at her arrival).[193] Hrafnhildr insists she is no threat to them but nevertheless offers: '"mun ek burt heðan fara, en Grímr, sonr okkarr, loðinkinni skal eftir vera"' ('I will go away from here, but Grímr shaggy-cheek, our son, shall stay behind').[194] Ketill, torn between his lover and his father, chooses not to push his father further for her acceptance, asking Hrafnhildr instead 'eigi

[190] *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 3 (II, 210–11).

[191] *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 3 (II, 211).

[192] *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 21 (II, 287).

[193] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 3 (II, 165).

[194] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 3 (II, 165).

reiðast fyrir þessa sök' (not to be angry on account of this).[195] Even as father and son quarrel, the solidarity between them is ultimately confirmed by Ketill's choice of his father over his lover and by Hallbjörn's acceptance of his half-troll grandson Grímr, who continues to grow up in his father's household rather than his mother's.

What emerges from these conflicting impulses toward rivalry and unity are narratives of ambivalence, familiar from across the legendary sagas. In the *Hrafnistumannasögur*, however, this competition is compounded by significant differences in the ancestry of fathers as compared to their sons. The frequent intermarriage between the men of Hrafnista and giantesses or troll women from Finnmark to the north adds a further complication to the sagas' father-son relationships. Alternating generations in the sagas—Úlfr, Ketill and Oddr—choose to reproduce with giantesses or trolls, while their sons do not, resulting in a pattern where the paternal example is always denied and never emulated. Consequently, fathers and sons never have the same degree of giantish or trollish ancestry. This ancestry is physically expressed in the sagas by characters' excessive size and strength, which feeds into narratives of specifically physical competition. Interactions between father and son are often accompanied not just by vocal disagreement, familiar from other *fornaldarsögur,* but also physical conflict.

Ketill and Hallbjörn's rivalry is the most prolonged and the most pronounced in the *Hrafnistumannasögur*. It is also one of the most explicitly physical, demonstrated by Ketill deliberately knocking his father to the shingle while launching the boat. Given Hallbjörn's half-troll ancestry, his taunt toward Ketill that he used to push the boat out with ease at his age, takes on new implications. Hallbjörn's non-human mother may have meant Hallbjörn was simply stronger than Ketill at the same age and Hallbjörn's accusation that Ketill is unlike his kinsmen ('"[ó]líkr ertu frændum þínum"') is to a certain extent a reflection of his own marital choices.[196] There is a strong physical component to Oddr and Vignir's antagonism as well, even an element of physical comedy to their relationship. Vignir is the son of the giantess Hildigunnr and his initial surprise upon meeting his father is founded upon the physical differences between them. He is incredulous that his father could be '"svá lítill ok smáskítligr sem mér sýnist þú vera"' ('such a little and insignificant man as you seem to me to be').[197] In a similar vein, he later taunts his father, '"Rétt þykkir mér þér fara vit eftir vexti"' ('It seems true to me that your wits are in accordance with your size').[198] By contrast

[195] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 3 (II, 165).

[196] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 1 (II, 154).

[197] *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 21 (II, 287).

[198] *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 21 (II, 289).

Oddr, who had a human mother, Lopthæna, has no kind of physical altercation with his father. The physical differences between fathers and sons which result from paternal exogamy with non-human women reshape the rivalry between father and son in a physical way, providing a new source of tension in their relationship.

Giantish or trollish ancestry is a source of great strength to some of these sagas' heroes and consequently a source of anxiety for those family members who cannot claim immediate trollish descent. Yet there remains a consistent hesitation at the prospect of giantish or trollish ancestry expressed by the fact that neither Hrafnhildr, Ketill's lover, nor Hildigunnr, Oddr's paramour, are deemed suitable marital prospects and only Lopthæna, whose brief trollish transformation is reversed, actually marries into the lineage. In contrast, Hallbjörn strenuously disputes his son Ketill's choice of Hrafnhildr as a sexual partner, as noted above, even going so far as to say '"er þat illt, at þú vilt elska tröll þat"' ('it is evil that you want to love that troll').[199] The resolution this time comes in the form of Hrafnhildr's departure and Ketill's reluctant marriage to the human Sigríðr, daughter of the farmer Barðr, at his father's urging. In spite of Ketill's acquiescence, the marriage only produces a daughter, Hrafnhildr, and it is consequently Grímr, Ketill's half-troll offspring, who succeeds his father. The lineage flourishes as a result of these illicit exogamous liaisons and the genetic contribution of troll women and giantesses to the lineage is thus presented as extremely positive and productive. As Martin Arnold has expressed it:

> Hallbjǫrn tries to breed out this abnormality but fails when the errant Ketill succeeds in exaggerating it in Hallbjǫrn's grandson, Grímr. This comingling of normal and abnormal blood is what Oddr inherits in almost exactly the same measure as his grandfather Ketill.[200]

The degree of non-human heritage in the lineage remains surprisingly stable, because generations alternate between human and non-human partners when it comes to reproduction.

When this mingling of blood ceases and human ancestry becomes dominant, the patriline founders. Although Oddr ultimately has two sons by Silkisif, who outlive him and continue his dynasty, neither of them is named for their patrilineal ancestors. Instead, Ásmundr is named for his father's foster-brother, highlighting the importance of such fictive

[199] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 4 (II, 165).

[200] Martin Arnold, '*Við þik sættumsk ek aldri*. *Qrvar-Odds saga* and the meanings of Qgmundr Eyþjófsbani', in *Making History*, ed. by Arnold and Finlay, pp. 85–104 (p. 99).

kinship-ties and Herrauðr is named after his maternal grandfather, privileging the maternal over the paternal. There is no literary interest in their exploits and instead, the final saga in the Hrafnista sequence follows the adventures of Án bogsveigir, Ketill's great-grandson via his daughter's daughter, and thus explores the lineage's continuation in the female rather than the male line. In spite of the tension it helps to motivate between fathers and sons, these trollish encounters actually prove the lifeblood of Hallbjörn's lineage.

The *Hrafnistumannasögur* are open about the prospect of conflict as well as cooperation between fathers and sons and consistently suggest the relationship was characterised by ambivalent emotions on both sides. Like almost all the *fornaldarsögur* they depict father-son relations as highly competitive, even violent at times. Despite this, the sagas also depict a flourishing lineage over several generations. Indeed, some of the issues which cause conflict simultaneously strengthen the father-son relationship. The same violence with which Ketill threatens his father is also a source of pride to Hallbjörn. The exogamous liaisons which set father against son are also productive of heroic offspring who continue the lineage. These sagas demonstrate that disclosing the conflicts between fathers and sons allows the complexities of their relationships to be explored. While this means hostile interactions cannot be avoided, as they are with strategies of foreclosure, it also means that more positive relations have a chance to thrive, albeit often at the expense of other familial relations. There is an especial irony to the episode in *Ketils saga hæng*s only shortly after Grímr's mother, Hrafnhildr, derided by Hallbjörn as a *tröll* (troll),[201] visits him and Ketill for the last time. While travelling in Finnmark in the north, the country of his mother's family, Grímr is sent for water:

> Hann fór ok sá tröll við ana. Þat bannaði honum ok vildi taka hann. Grímr hræddist ok hljóp heim ok sagði föður sínum.[202]
>
> (He went and saw a troll by the river. It barred his way and wanted to capture him. Grímr was frightened and ran home and told his father).

Ketill goes to meet the intruder, speaks a verse and the troll disappears while the united *feðgar* (father and son) return home having triumphed over this incursion by a member of the

[201] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 4 (II, 165).

[202] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 4 (II, 166).

maternal race.[203] The scene is a reminder of the solidarity and affection in the father-son pair which balances their rivalry as a young Grímr seeks reassurance and protection from his father who willingly provides it. Ambivalence in the *Hrafnistumannasögur* is physically as well as verbally expressed, as is fitting in sagas where physical difference adds a further dimension to father-son relations. Expressing ambivalence, however, ultimately does little to detract from the sagas' presentation of a strong, dynamic lineage.

ii. Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*: A Reminder of Paternal Affection*

The clear affection evinced between Víkingr and sons in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* might be considered the exception to otherwise antagonistic father-son relations. Affection is not sufficient to avert conflict, however, as the violent actions of Víkingr's son Þórir challenge his father's oath of foster-brotherhood with his friend Njörfi. Víkingr is unwilling to break his oath of foster-brotherhood to Njörfi to help his son Þórir, who has killed Njörfi's son, Óláfr. Returning to his father after the deed, Þórir's brother Þorsteinn declares '"Þat er nú ráð, faðir, at hjálpa syni þínum, þótt hann hafi hrapat í ógiftu"' ('Now it is advisable, father, to help your son, although he has fallen into ill luck').[204] Embroiled in conflict by his sons instead of with them, Víkingr chooses to send Þórir away, even in the knowledge that the remainder of his sons will follow. Njörfi is equally reluctant to press the feud professing that '"Þykki mér Óláfr ekki at bættari, þótt Þórir sé drepinn ok aukinn svá harmr Víkingi"' ('it seems to me that Óláfr will not be atoned for, even if Þórir were dead and Víkingr's grief increased in this way').[205] When Njörfi's son Jökull determines to avenge his brother, the saga records that '[f]ekk Jökull nú engan styrk af föður sínum til þessa' (Jökull got no help from his father in this).[206] The words of neither father are sufficient to prevent violence from erupting between their offspring, however, demonstrating the limits of paternal agency once sons find voices of their own.

In the aftermath of the great battle between Jökull and Víkingr's sons, Víkingr comes to the battlefield to find his sons:

> Spurði hann þá, hvárt þeir mætti nokkut mæla. Þórir kvað þat satt vera.
> Þó sá Víkingr, at hann flakti sundr at sárum. Þorsteinn kvaðst ekki sárr

[203] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 4 (II, 167).

[204] *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, ch. 10 (III, 24).

[205] *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, ch. 11 (III, 26).

[206] *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, ch. 11 (III, 26).

> vera, en móðr mjök. Víkingr tók Þóri í fang sér. Þótti Þorsteini hann þá enn sterkliga til taka, þótt hann væri gamall.[207]
>
> (Then he asked whether they could say anything. Þórir said that he could. Nevertheless, Víkingr saw that his wounds gaped open. Þorsteinn said that he was not wounded, but very tired. Víkingr took Þórir in his lap and then it seemed to Þorsteinn that he [his father] was still extremely strong even though he was old.)

Þorsteinn's admission of his father's strength in the moment of his own greatest weakness seems significant and it restores his father's agency. Weeping at their final parting so that 'vatnit fór niðr eftir kjálkunum á honum' (the tears fell down his cheeks),[208] the voice of the father is laden with power once again as Víkingr predicts, with perfect accuracy:

> "Ekki mun ek sjá ykkr á ævi minni. Þó muntu verða gamall maðr, Þorsteinn frændi, ok inn mesti frægðarmaðr."[209]
>
> ('I will not see you again in my lifetime. Nevertheless, you will become an old man, Þorsteinn, my kinsman, and the most famous man.')

Like the *Hrafnistumannasögur*, the saga serves as a reminder that strategies of disclosure, unlike foreclosure, leave more room for the development of father-son relations, since they are never rendered static but remain open to change. Though it takes great violence to precipitate this resolution, bringing Þorsteinn and Þórir close to death, Víkingr's sons achieve independence and not at the cost of their father's life, as is so often the pattern in other *fornaldarsögur*. It is significant that in all these sagas and poems which confront and explore the ambivalent nature of father-son relationships, the antagonism or even violence between father and sons almost always stops short of paternal or filial death, Vignir being an obvious exception. By this token, strategies of disclosure may actually be more successful than strategies of foreclosure at preserving the solidarity between father and son, which Icelandic society so clearly sought to encourage.

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[207] *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, ch. 13 (III, 31).

[208] *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, ch. 15 (III, 38).

[209] *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, ch. 15 (III, 38–39).

Itnyre is right, if frustratingly vague, when she concludes that 'the emotional universe of medieval Icelandic fathers and sons was complex and multifaceted' and 'that the relationship could be nurturing as well as problematic', though she stops short of explicitly identifying the ambivalence which is the keynote of such 'complex and multifaceted' encounters.[210] That ambivalence was characteristic of father-son relationships is demonstrated by the mixed emotions fathers and sons demonstrate towards one another in their narrative encounters: pride vying with frustration; rivalry with solidarity. Competition is a recurring theme in father-son relations, whether between Ragnarr and his sons or between the different generations of Hrafnista-men. These legendary sagas and poems consistently suggest that paternal ambivalence toward the son arises from the father's desire for a worthy successor conflicting with his fear that his son's achievements may eclipse his own. Meanwhile, the son is eager to surpass his father and assert his own independence in the face of paternal authority. Delaney is right, therefore, to reject the suggestion that paternity must be defined by uncertainty. Paternal ambivalence toward the son does not stem from the anxiety that he is not truly the father's heir but from the certainty that he is the heir and will one day outlive and succeed his father. As such, the critical moment in father-son relations emerges as the death of the father, the event which precipitates this transition. As strategies of foreclosure demonstrate, the death of the father could resolve former conflicts with his son(s) and could therefore be used to suppress the tensions inherent in the father-son relationship. Strategies of disclosure explored the ramifications of sons attaining maturity before their father's deaths, leaving more room for ambivalence to be openly expressed, both vocally and physically. In actively confronting the rivalry between father and son, the sagas and poems which explore ambivalence rob it of its destructive potential, demonstrating that in spite of their ambivalent feelings fathers and sons were still capable of resolving their differences. Efforts to foreclose conflict are actually more violent in their effects, frequently resulting in the narrative death of the father, while often the frank disclosure of tension actually leads to more positive and productive father-son relations.

As the *Hrafnistumannasögur* demonstrate, the son's maternal parentage could compound competitive anxieties. In choosing a non-human partner, Ketill and Oddr are forced to confront the prospect of being surpassed by a son whose heritage makes him bigger and perhaps stronger than them. The heightened competitiveness in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*

[210] Itnyre, p. 191.

between Ragnarr and the sons from his second marriage, who have the heroic legacy of Sigurðr in their blood courtesy of their mother Áslaug, suggests a similar anxiety. These patterns are mirrored to some extent in mythic examples: Þórr undoubtedly derives some of his strength from his giantess mother, Jǫrð, and perhaps some Odinic insecurity on this front is implied by Óðinn's strange taunt in *Hárbarðsljóð* that Þórr's mother is dead.[211] Sváva's vital role in helping Helgi mature and confront his father in *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* and Hallbjörn's objections to Ketill's lover Hrafnhildr in *Ketils saga hængs* suggest that the son's choice of partner could also contribute to paternal anxiety. Marriage and children were signs of maturity, hinting that the son was ready to take on the paternal role and succeed his father by becoming a father himself. However, maternal and spousal identity was only a contributing factor to paternal ambivalence in so far as it enhanced the son's ability to outmatch his father. The wellspring of paternal ambivalence was still the son himself.

Whatever their parentage and whoever their partner, sons were a reminder of the looming spectre of old age, which inevitably brings out the worst in saga characters. As Ármann Jakobsson writes: 'Old men are nasty because old age is nasty'.[212] He proposes the myth of Kronos, in which Kronos devours his own children who are reborn in his vomit, as a fruitful paradigm for father-son relations in the *Íslendingasögur*, 'with the old aggressively trying to devour the new to prolong its own life'.[213] Yoav Tirosh follows his lead by analysing *Njáls saga* in the light of the Kronos myth. Tirosh identifies much the same kind of paternal ambivalence on Njáll's part as can be observed in the *fornaldarsögur*, arguing that Njáll's fear of usurpation by his sons leads him to act against them and suppress their attempts to challenge his authority.[214] Njáll, in his estimation, is a more tyrannical father than has previously been appreciated, determined to devour his sons' agency. Ármann Jakobsson finds a more direct parallel to the Kronos pattern in *Ynglinga saga*, in which King Aun sacrifices his sons to Óðinn to prolong his own life, an episode he identifies as '[a]n indigenous version of the [Kronos] myth'.[215] Though at first glance this paradigm might seem to accord well with the competitive nature of father-son interactions in Old Norse myth and legend, another

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[211] *Hrbl*. 4:5 (p. 78).

[212] Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Specter of Old Age: Nasty Old Men in the Sagas of Icelanders', *JEGP*, 104 (2005), 297–325 (p. 305).

[213] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Specter of Old Age', p. 315.

[214] Yoav Tirosh, 'Víga-Njáll: A New Approach Toward *Njáls saga*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 86 (2014), 208–26 (p. 224).

[215] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Specter of Old Age', p. 313.

narrative of sacrifice in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* demonstrates the limitations of the myth as an archetype for father-son relations.

Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks recounts how, in the midst of a terrible famine, the protagonist Heiðrekr learns that the boy with the highest rank in the land must be sacrificed to ensure the return of prosperity to the region. Heiðrekr immediately suggests that the boy referred to is the king's son, while the king in the land, King Haraldr, insists that Heiðrekr's son be considered the highest. In order to settle the dispute Heiðrekr is dispatched to lay the dilemma before his own father, King Höfundr, whose renowned judgement will be accepted by both parties. Earlier in the saga, Heiðrekr parted from his father on very bad terms, after killing his brother, Angantýr, and was told 'koma aldri honum í augsýn' (never to come into his sight again).[216] In spite of this, Heiðrekr is well received by his father but grows angry when he seems to judge in King Haraldr's favour, exclaiming:

> "Svá lízt mér sem þú dæmir minn son til dráps, eða hvat dæmir þú mér þá fyrir sonarskaða minn?"[217]
>
> ('It seems to me that you sentence my son to death, or what do you award me as compensation for the death of my son?')

His father's reply is that he should demand the service of every fourth man at the assembly in recompense for the life of his son, concluding that '"[m]un þá eigi þurfa at kenna þér ráð síðan, hvat þú skalt at hafast"' ('then there will be no need to advise you afterwards, what you shall have to do').[218] So it proves, as Heiðrekr takes the opportunity to seize power from the ailing King Haraldr. This moment of unspoken understanding between the estranged father and son restores their damaged relationship by their shared investment in the younger generation, Heiðrekr's son, Angantýr, symbolically named after the very brother Heiðrekr once killed. The women upon whom the lineage depends, even Heiðrekr's mother, Hervör, who played such a vital role earlier in the saga, as discussed further in chapter III section 3, are nowhere to be found. Indeed, Heiðrekr's wife, the mother of Angantýr and the daughter of King Haraldr, is so utterly excluded from any solidarity with her husband's lineage that she hangs herself on hearing of her father's death. The complete exclusion of the feminine

[216] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 5 (II, 25).

[217] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 7 (II, 29).

[218] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 7 (II, 29).

accompanies the restoration of the paternal-filial relationship. Paradoxically, it is at the moment when the father-son relationship appears in danger of being betrayed twice over, by Heiðrekr's pretence of being willing to sacrifice his son and Höfundr's initial apparent judgement at his son's expense, that its unity and its exclusively masculine solidarity is most strongly asserted.

In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, co-operation between father and son is most apparent when the lineage is under consideration. This observation is born out time and again in the *fornaldarsögur*: Ketill sends his giantess lover Hrafnhildr away at the behest of his father and marries the human, Sigríðr to oblige him;[219] Ragnarr relies on his sons to avenge his killing and restore the family's honour after his death;[220] Sturlaugr sacrifices his life for his son Hrólfr and in so doing wins him the hand of the princess Ingigerðr so that their line may continue;[221] Hálfdan marries a princess also called Ingigerðr according to the wishes of his dead father Eysteinn;[222] Hjálmþér offers to go on a quest to find his father another wife;[223] Herrauðr's father ultimately dies keeping his word to look after his son's bride.[224] The Kronos myth grounds father-son relations solely in paternal fear, untempered by more positive emotions. It should not be forgotten though that however much fathers feared being usurped or surpassed by their sons, they still desired a successor. Simply devouring the son would not suit their purposes. Though father-son rivalry might threaten to descend into conflict, this was by no means inevitable. In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, Höfundr is clearly wary of his son's demonstrably violent tendencies and banishes him from his kingdom. Heiðrekr equally expects his father to use his power to crush his hard-won independence by robbing him of his son. Ultimately, however, these fears are overcome by the mutual investment of father and son in their shared family's welfare, a theme which I explore further in chapter VI.

Ambivalence, which holds the competing fears and desires of the father and son in balance, best explains the variety and complexity found in father-son relations in Old Norse myth and legend. The son was naturally eager to succeed to the father's position of authority and the father was reluctant to relinquish it though the transition was ultimately inevitable. While father-son relations are frequently marred by altercations both verbal and physical the

[219] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 4 (II, 166).

[220] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 15 (I, 269).

[221] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 34 (III, 267).

[222] *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, ch. 21 (IV, 278).

[223] *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, ch. 2 (IV, 182).

[224] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, ch. 10 (III, 306).

value placed upon the son, as the father's heir and future head of the family, is never in doubt. The very fact which motivates paternal ambivalence, that the son will one day become the father, also reaffirms the son's significance and desirability. While the son may supersede his father in the short term, his success in doing so also confirms that one day he too will be replaced or else his line will disappear. Given the fundamental similarity in their positions, it is not so surprising that father and son could find common ground, when not blinded by personal competition. While Old Norse myth and legend may explore paternal and filial ambivalence, these portrayals of father-son relations ultimately confirm to their audiences that father and son were best united and expose the dangers of succumbing to competitive temptation. The unity of father and son contrasts with the separation which defines father-daughter relations, in which the father must relinquish his daughter to her husband in marriage, as will be explored in the next chapter.

III. FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS

In a rather extreme analysis, Lynda E. Boose has argued that the entire Western family unit has been constructed deliberately to exclude the daughter and hide her from view, absence becoming her defining feature, an erasure even more complete than that which frequently threatens the mother in medieval texts, as will be discussed in the next chapter. If '[t]he daughter's presence is normal to the biological realities of family,' she suggests, then 'her absence is therefore loaded with significance', an absence she ascribes to 'a cultural metrics that assigns value almost by literal poundage'.[225] She elaborates thus:

> In the four-cornered nuclear enclosure that is at once the source for and product of Western ideologies about the family, the father weighs most and the daughter least. To consider the daughter and father in relationship means juxtaposing the two figures most asymmetrically proportioned in terms of gender, age, authority, and cultural privilege. Each of these asymmetries is controlled by the idiom of presence, which defines the father, or absence which identifies the daughter.[226]

Boose makes a valid point about the imbalance of power between father and daughter which must inform their interactions but there has been some dissent over such a bleak portrait of father-daughter relations and several studies have modified Boose's analysis with a more positive appraisal.

Judith P. Hallett has studied fathers and daughters in Roman society and argues that, for all their legal disenfranchisement, daughters were nevertheless at the heart of the Roman family, an effect she dubs 'filiafocality'.[227] In her study of fathers and daughters in the Hebrew Bible, Johanna Stiebert concluded that 'things are not as grim as is so widely claimed in feminist examinations of biblical fathers in relation to daughters'.[228] All agree that the

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[225] Lynda E. Boose, 'The Father's House and the Daughter in It: The Structures of Western Culture's Daughter-Father Relationship', in *Daughters and Fathers*, ed. by Lynda E. Boose and Betty S. Flowers (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), pp. 19–74 (pp. 44, 20).

[226] Boose, p. 20.

[227] Judith P. Hallett, *Fathers and Daughters in Roman Society: Women and the Elite Family* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 66.

[228] Johanna Stiebert, *Fathers and Daughters in the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 214.

difficulty in understanding the relationship lies in the contrast between the daughter's legal and social disenfranchisement, which diminished her impact in the historical and literary record, and the emotional intimacy which likely mitigated the harsh effects the daughter's powerlessness would otherwise have had on the father-daughter bond. Even Boose admits that:

> By giving too little weight to what we might call an 'emotional economics', the anthropological construction of family ends up producing a narrative of disinterested fathers that is quite at odds with the picture drawn by most Western myth and literature, where the father most frequently appears as a blocking figure bent on retaining, not exchanging, his daughter.[229]

One thinks of Þórr seeing off the dwarf, Alvíss, who comes seeking his daughter in marriage, or of the fathers of Þóra and Ingibjörg in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Sörla saga sterka* respectively, whose daughters are enclosed behind impenetrable barriers, where suitors cannot reach them.[230] As she goes on to elaborate, '[b]ecause a daughter was the least economically useful member of a patrilineal and primogenitural institution, social historians tracing evidence such as this have perhaps been overhasty to infer that she was likewise the least cherished'.[231]

Any effort to uncover the emotional nuances of father-daughter relations is, however, severely restricted by the limited contexts in which fathers and daughters are depicted together. While Boose overstates the case for filial absence, daughters undoubtedly receive less literary attention than sons and when they do appear in the literature it is overwhelmingly in a marital context. To discuss father-daughter relations in Old Norse myth and legend is inevitably to discuss the question of marriage in Old Norse literature and society. When fathers and daughters interact in the *fornaldarsögur*, the *Poetic Edda* and *Snorra Edda*, it is usually the daughter's marital prospects that are under discussion. This means that father-daughter relationships tend to be depicted at the very moment when the daughter is on the verge of transformation regarding her kinship role. In marriage the daughter is handed over to be another's bride and eventually another's mother, leaving her birth family and allying with

[229] Boose, p. 30.

[230] *Alv*. 35 (p. 129); *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 2 (I, 226); *Sörla saga sterka*, ch. 1 (III, 369).

[231] Boose, p. 45.

her new marital kin. Father-daughter interactions are thus continually haunted by the spectre of a third party, the unknown husband. If the death of the father can usually be pinpointed as the critical narrative turning point which defines father-son relations, the marriage of the daughter performs this function in father-daughter relations and underlines most explicitly the power imbalance between father and daughter.

That a father's authority over his daughter in the medieval period was almost absolute can hardly be doubted given the legal and historical evidence and this authority was translated into the literary sphere. To continue with the example of Þórr in *Alvíssmál*, Þórr is explicit about his control over his daughter's marriage in spite of the apparent pledges of others:

> "Ec mun bregða, þvíat ec brúðar á
> flest um ráð sem faðir;
> varca ec heima, þá er þér heitið var,
> at sá einn er giǫf er með goðom."[232]
>
> ('I shall break them, because I have most authority
> Over the bride as her father;
> I was not at home when she was promised to you,
> The only one among the gods who can give this gift.')

The necessity of paternal consent for a daughter's marriage is raised numerous times in Old Norse mythic-heroic literature and the flouting of it provokes conflict. Oddrún in *Oddrúnargrátr* laments the terrible consequences which ensued when Brynhildr ignored their father's command, according to which Gunnarr was to be her husband and not her sister's.[233] It is exemplary filial behaviour in the *fornaldarsögur* for a daughter, when being abducted, to remind her suitor of the importance of paternal consent. In *Sörla þáttr*, Hildr tells Heðinn even as he abducts her that '"faðir minn mun gifta mik þér, ef þú vilt biðja mín"' ('my father will marry me to you if you wish to ask for me') and it is his scornful rejection—'"Eigi vil ek þat gera"' ('I will not do that')—which leads to an eternal battle between father and suitor.[234] In *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, Hervör likewise informs her abductor Hörðr that:

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[232] *Alv*. 4 (p. 124).

[233] *Od*. 15–16, 19 (pp. 236–37).

[234] *Sǫrla þáttr*, ch. 7 (I, 376).

> "mikinn skaða hafi þér gert föður mínum, at þit takið mik í burt utan hans vilja, en þó vil ek heldr með yðr fara en vera eftir."[235]
>
> ('you have done my father great harm by taking me away against his wishes, though I would rather go with you than remain behind.')

A magical battle with her father Hundingi ensues which she helps Hörðr to win. In both instances, the daughters are vocal about the duty owed to their fathers, though ambivalent if not enthusiastic about the prospect of disregarding it.

Yet despite Boose's dichotomy of paternal presence and filial absence and the father's almost limitless rights and legal control over his daughter, I will begin with the myth of Skaði, which turns these assumptions on their head. In the narrative, Skaði's father Þjazi is dead, thus Skaði is the one present to consent to her own marriage, demonstrating the inadequacy of Boose's paradigm of presence and absence with regard to father-daughter relations. Filled with what seem at first to be atypical features, the myth actually provides a neat résumé of the themes which dominate father-daughter relationships in Old Norse myth and legend: the frustration of female agency in choosing a husband; the refusal of the daughter to conform to traditional gender stereotypes; and the threat of interfamilial violence.

This chapter will explore all three themes in more detail, examining first the frequency with which the daughter's choice of spouse is deliberately frustrated in Old Norse myth and legend. I argue that fathers attempt to use their control of their daughter's marriage to maintain primacy in her affections and loyalties, fearing the consequences should her loyalties be directed to an unapproved lover. I will then discuss the motif of the female-son or maiden warrior, exemplified by the twin examples of Hervör and Þornbjörg. I conclude by returning to the theme of paternal ambivalence already discussed in a father-son context, probing the violence which, while less overt than that between fathers and sons, nevertheless haunts father-daughter relations.

1. Skaði's Choice: The Marriage Myth in Old Norse

There are few father-daughter pairings among the Norse pantheon. Þórr is recorded by Snorri as having a daughter, Þrúðr, whom we may surmise is the same daughter desired by Alvíss in *Alvíssmál*. Njǫrðr is the father of Freyja but the two have no attested emotional connection or

[235] *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, ch. 19 (IV, 231).

narrative interaction. Njǫrðr's wife, however, only becomes his wife because of her relationship with her father, as *Snorra Edda* records:

> En Skaði, dóttir Þjaza jǫtuns, tók hjálm ok brynju ok ǫll hervápn ok ferr til Ásgarðs at hefna fǫður síns. En Æsir buðu henni sætt ok yfirbœtr, ok hit fyrsta at hon skal kjósa sér mann af Ásum ok kjósa at fótum ok sjá ekki fleira af. Þá sá hon eins manns fœtr forkunnar fagra ok mælir:
>
> "Þenna kýs ek, fátt mun ljótt á Baldri."
>
> En þat var Njǫrðr ór Nóatúnum.[236]

> (But Skaði, daughter of the giant Þjazi, took her helmet and mail-coat and all her weapons and went to Ásgarðr to avenge her father. But the Æsir offered her reconciliation and atonement, first of all, that she should choose for herself a husband from the Æsir and choose by his feet and see no more of him than that. Then she saw one man's feet that were exceedingly beautiful and said:
>
> 'I choose that one, little can be ugly about Baldr.'
>
> But it was Njǫrðr from Nóatún.)

As a daughter and apparently only child, she sets out intending to avenge her father in the manner of a son but ends up following the more conventional path of a daughter by intermarrying with her father's enemies. The bargain is sealed by the Æsir's success in making Skaði laugh, the second term of their settlement, appropriately achieved by Loki, who ties his testicles to the beard of a nanny goat and fools around, eventually falling onto Skaði's knee, which prompts her laughter. Nevertheless, Skaði's continual identification with her father, even after her marriage, is expressed by her wish to continue living in the home she inherits from him on his death.

> Skaði vill hafa bústað þann er átt hafði faðir hennar—þat er á fjǫllum nokkvorum þar sem heitir Þrymheimr—en Njǫrðr vill vera nær sæ. Þau settusk á þat at þau skyldu vera níu nætr í Þrymheimi, en þá aðrar níu at Nóatúnum.[237]

[236] *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 56 (p. 2).

[237] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 23 (pp. 23–24).

> (Skaði wished to have that dwelling place which her father had had—that is in some mountains, the place which is called Þrymheimr—but Njǫrðr wished to be near the sea. They settled it between them that they should be in Þrymheimr for nine nights, and then in Nóatún for the following nine.)

Such a compromise proves ineffective, however, and complaining of the noise of the sea birds she abandons her husband's house and returns to the mountains 'ok bygði í Þrymheimi ok ferr hon mjǫk á skíðum ok með boga ok skýtr dýr' (and dwelt in Þrymheimr and she travels about a great deal on skis and with a bow and shoots wild beasts).[238] Similarly, *Grímnismál*, a poem which was certainly known to Snorri, describes Skaði as living in her 'fornar tóptir fǫður' (father's ancient abode).[239] Her mountainous dwelling along with her skiing and hunting have led multiple scholars to suggest that Skaði is a reflection of indigenous Sámi women filtered through the prism of Old Norse myth.[240] Her failed marriage to Njǫrðr, which is followed in the account in *Ynglinga saga* by a more successful liaison with Óðinn, can be read as a mythic symbol, epitomising the fraught but vital relationship between the two differing cultural groups. What the myth confirms in Mundal's view is a 'predominantly positive' attitude toward the Sámi, revealed by the use of family relations as the preferred analogy for Norse-Sámi interactions.[241]

According to such an analysis, Skaði's choice of husband is immaterial as any member of the Æsir would do as a representative of the Norse, as is demonstrated when Óðinn replaces Njǫrðr. By contrast, Clunies Ross considers that if Skaði 'had her wits about her, she could not have chosen anyone other than Baldr'.[242] As she sees it, Skaði's motives are entirely dynastic, her intention 'to take a sexual partner for herself who would be the counterpart for her to Iðunn of the apples of immortality in her father's desire'.[243] Baldr is

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[238] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 23 (p. 24).

[239] *Grm*. 11:6 (p. 59).

[240] See Mundal, p. 27; Karl Müllenhoff, *Deutsche Altertumskunde*, 5 vols (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1870–1908), II (1906), pp. 55–56; Jurij Kusmenko, 'Jätten Thjazi och det samiske elementet i nordisk mytologi', in *Sápmi YıK. Livet i samernas bosättningsområde för ett tusen år sedan*, ed. by Andrea Amft and Mikael Svonni (Umeå: Umeå universitet Sámi dutkan, 2006), pp. 11–28.

[241] Mundal, p. 35.

[242] Margaret Clunies Ross, 'Why Skadi laughed. Comic seriousness in an Old Norse mythic narrative ', *Maal og Minne*, 1989, 1–14 (p. 7).

[243] Clunies Ross, 'Why Skadi laughed', p. 6.

thus the natural choice of spouse because he is the son of Óðinn and Frigg and can therefore assure her of a powerful position in Æsir society. Looked at in this light, Þjazi's death is of benefit to Skaði herself and provides her with the opportunity to seek the husband she truly desires, whether for himself or his social rank. Her father's abduction of Iðunn threatened her with the prospect of new heirs, possibly male ones, who might contest her right to her father's inheritance and her marriage would have remained in her father's hands. With her father's death, however, Skaði emerges as heir to all her father's property and is empowered to choose her own husband.

Yet her choice is more circumscribed than first appears. Scholars agree that the stipulation she must choose by the feet or legs only is a trick on the part of the Æsir. Clunies Ross notes that 'when feet or legs are marked in Indo-European myth, they usually stress the sexual nature of the hero'.[244] In her view, the Æsir see through Skaði's attempt to take Baldr for herself and foil her by proposing such a contest, which flaunts the sexual desirability she seeks in a partner but turns it to their own advantage. John Lindow argues that Skaði's incursion marks 'the only successful invasion by any of the *jǫtnar*', but he considers her achievement 'hollow, and not because she has chosen a mythologically inappropriate spouse, because the marriage fails, or because she is also numbered among Óðinn's or even Loki's conquests, but rather because she is witless enough to accept choosing a spouse on the basis of the folktale suitor's test by legs or feet'.[245] In other words, Skaði does not choose wrong, she is wrong in attempting to choose at all because her desire will inevitably be frustrated.

Skaði's choice is not simply a choice of spouse, however, but precipitates a further choice, which Skaði does not anticipate. Skaði desires both her paternal inheritance and an advantageous marriage but she finds herself thwarted when she attempts to realise both her ambitions and is ultimately forced to choose between them. She can only retain her inheritance if she abandons her marriage: Þrymheimr represents everything she gained by her father's death but it is explicitly mentioned as the bone of contention between her and Njǫrðr. It proves impossible for her to have both; the apparently free choice of husband offered to her by the Æsir actually demands all that she has gained from her father's death in exchange. Unable to bring herself to abandon the mountains, Skaði remains the eternal daughter, for whom even marriage is not enough to wrench her from the paternal home.

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[244] Clunies Ross, 'Why Skadi laughed', p. 6.

[245] John Lindow, 'Loki and Skaði', *Snorrastefna 25.–27. júlí 1990*, ed. by Úlfar Bragason, Rit Stofunar Sigurðr Nordals, 1 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Sigurðr Nordals, 1992), pp. 130–42 (pp. 131–32).

On multiple levels then, Skaði's choice is an illusion. It does not much matter who Skaði does choose in the end only that it should not be Baldr, the one god Skaði particularly desired to have. It is the frustration of her desire, whether it be personal or dynastically motivated, which is marked by Snorri's narration. Skaði is a powerful goddess with a wealthy inheritance, active pursuits and the rare opportunity to choose where to bestow herself in marriage, yet still the choice of husband is denied to her. Instead, the narrative emphasises that she cannot marry the one god she desires, so that any agency she gains in brokering her own marriage is swept away by the conditions which deprive her of genuine freedom of choice. All her marriage does is place her in an ambiguous position, caught between her father's home and her husband's and ultimately reverting to the former. Her marriage itself has no substance, being, like the apparent choice she was offered, nothing more than a myth.

The Skaði myth speaks to the significance of female choice and agency in choosing a spouse. Lip-service is paid to the idea of a daughter actively and freely choosing her husband, but the choice is ultimately a farce, expressly designed to frustrate her desires, a pattern that is repeated elsewhere in Old Norse mythic-heroic literature. At the same time, Skaði emerges only in the wake of her father's death, hinting at the hidden violence which haunts father-daughter interactions. Boose has suggested that violence perpetrated upon the daughter by the father in both social history as well as myth and legend is 'routine enough to be unspectacular' while 'as a mythic motif, daughters killing fathers is comparatively rare'.[246] While Skaði is not implicated in her father's death, she does stand at the crossroads of violence between two social groups, the *Æ*sir and the *jǫtnar*. The threat of violence and its effects overshadows the episode, a reminder that violence has its place in father-daughter relations as well as those between father and son.

Finally, Skaði's active pursuit of vengeance for her father has called into question her gender role. The weak masculine declension of the name Skaði, the existence of a male character named Skaði in the first chapter of *Völsunga saga*, combined with Skaði's active quest for vengeance and the sexual overtones to her encounter with the sexually ambivalent Loki have all led Clunies Ross and Lindow to speak of the 'sex role reversal' and the 'thoroughly confused' sex roles respectively.[247] In this way, the myth also speaks to those less conventional father-daughter relationships between daughters such as Þornbjörg in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* or Hervör in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, both of whom take up

[246] Boose, p. 39.

[247] Clunies Ross, 'Why Skadi laughed', p. 12; Lindow, 'Loki and Skaði', p. 133.

masculine roles and pseudonyms which disrupt the conventional pattern of father-daughter relations.

2. The Frustration of Female Choice

While it might initially appear that daughters' wishes are given unexpected weight in the *fornaldarsögur*, it is noticeable how rarely their wishes are actually followed. In *Ketils saga hængs*, Ketill swears not to give his daughter in marriage without her consent.[248] When Áli Uppdalakappi pursues Ketill's daughter, Hrafnhildr, Ketill follows through on his promise, asking his daughter her thoughts on the match. When she replies that she 'eigi vilja leggja ástarhug við Ála eða binda forlög sín við hann' (did not want to give Áli her affection, or enter into a marriage settlement with him), Ketill fights Áli and kills him when he refuses to accept Hrafnhildr's rejection.[249] Another suitor, King Framarr, is dealt with in the same way. Following the example of his father, Grímr loðinkinni also fights a duel with the berserkr Sörkvir who wishes to marry his twelve-year-old daughter, Brynhildr. Brynhildr, understandably, 'vildi ekki ganga með honum, ok fyrir þat skorar Sörkvir Grím á hólm. Grímr játar því' (did not want to marry him, and because of that Sörkvir challenged Grímr to a duel. Grímr agreed to this).[250] Grímr kills Sörkvir and reiterates his attitude to paternity in a verse:

> "Fyrst mun ek líkja eptir feðr mínum;
> skal eigi mín dóttir, nema skör höggviz,
> nauðig gefin neinum manni
> guðvefs þella, meðan Grímr lifir."[251]
>
> ('First I will imitate my father:
> My daughter, the velvet-pine, shall not be given
> Against her will to any man
> While Grímr lives, unless my head is cut off.')

[248] *Ketils saga hængs,* ch. 4 (II, 167).

[249] *Ketils saga hængs,* ch. 4 (II, 167).

[250] *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, ch. 3 (II, 194).

[251] *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, 7, ed. by Beatrice La Farge, in *PFS*, p. 297.

Brynhildr goes on to accept Veðromr, son of Vémundr, so Grímr, at least, keeps his word but Ketill's oath strikes one more as an excuse to reject those suitors of whom he does not approve since he ultimately betroths his daughter to Boðmarr Framarsson without consulting her at all. In *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, when the terrifying Hárekr jarnhauss seeks the hand of Hunvör, daughter of the King of Svíaveldi, Hunvör's preference likewise is elicited only to help her father reject a suitor of whom he is afraid.[252] Simple statistics reveal that female consent in marriage was the exception not the rule. In her study of female consent in marriage in medieval Iceland, Jenny Jochens surveys the *fornaldarsögur* and concludes that:

> In approximately two dozen sagas in this category, it is possible to identify almost one hundred marriage arrangements. Of those, two-thirds were negotiated by male relatives, without their paying any attention to the women's wishes. In the remaining some familiarity with the idea of consent is shown.[253]

She notes, however, that such 'familiarity' may be nothing more than a woman's immediate acquiescence in her male relative's choice of spouse.

i. Ása and Auðr: The Value of the Daughter's Opinion

Such is the case in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. When King Haraldr decides to marry the beautiful Ása, daughter of jarl Hringr, he gives her father an ultimatum, 'at festa honum dóttur sína elligar mundi hann þar drepinn í stað' (to betroth his daughter to him otherwise he would be killed on the spot).[254] Like Hunvör's father, Ása's father attempts to use his daughter's consent as a shield, suggesting they talk with Ása 'svá at vér vitum, hver svör hennar eru' (so that we know what her answers are).[255] His ploy fails when the king insists on an instant decision and the betrothal is fixed to last three years. The jarl goes to tell his daughter the unhappy news, that he has had to betroth her against his will but Ása is not dismayed and instead counsels Hringr: '"ver kátr, faðir"' ('Be cheerful, father').[256] When the jarl expresses a preference for Sturlaugr as a bridegroom, Ása's only answer is '"Eigi veit ek, hvat fyrir

[252] *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, ch. 2 (III, 4).

[253] Jenny M. Jochens, 'Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law, Life, and Literature', *Scandinavian Studies*, 58 (1986), 142–76 (p. 165).

[254] *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, ch. 5 (III, 111).

[255] *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, ch. 5 (III, 111).

[256] *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, ch. 5 (III, 112).

beztu má verða"' ('I don't know what would be for the best').[257] When the powerful Kolr krappi arrives seeking Ása's hand in marriage at the point of a spear, Hringr promptly breaks the engagement to King Haraldr and goes again to tell his daughter about her new betrothed. The same pattern is repeated, Ása comforts her father, who is principally concerned with the shame of his own situation rather than with the consequences for his daughter, bemoaning: '"Betr væri sótt ok bráðr dauði en fá slíka skömm, at gefa nauðigr dóttur sína"' ('it would be better to be sick and die quickly, than to suffer such shame at giving one's own daughter in marriage unwillingly').[258] Undaunted, Ása repeats her mantra '"ver kátr, faðir"' ('Be cheerful, father').[259] In the end, Sturlaugr forces King Haraldr to give up the betrothal and takes his place in the duel with Kolr krappi. Arriving to claim his bride Hringr shows him to Ása's bower to gain her consent but Sturlaugr promptly makes clear his frustration with the need for her approval, declaring: '"Svá hefir nú verit til ætlat, at ek mundi eigi vera vánbiðill þinn lengr"' ('It has now been decided that I will not be a suitor waiting for your answer any longer').[260] After the lengths to which Sturlaugr has gone to win her hand in marriage, her consent is a mere formality.

Ása demonstrates the furthest extreme in filial compliance. She is the idealised daughter, in whose eyes the father can do no wrong, no matter the poor choices he makes for her future, and she is rewarded for her endless optimism by the best bridegroom the saga can offer, Sturlaugr himself, who has the added recommendation of being the father's first choice. The perfect daughter becomes at once the perfect bride, responding to Sturlaugr's impatience for her consent with the same easy compliance that characterises her throughout: 'Ása segir svá vera skyldu sem þeir vildu' (Ása said it should be as they wanted).[261] Her opinions on her suitors align almost perfectly with her father's and the triadic structure of the episodes reinforces Sturlaugr's presentation as the last and best marital prospect.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are the bitter father-daughter discussions between Ívarr viðfaðmi and Auðr in djúpúðga in *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*. The fragmentary saga opens in the middle of their conversation as Ívarr pretends to consult his daughter on her marital preferences but her answer suggests she knows his true intentions:

[257] *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, ch. 5 (III, 112).

[258] *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, ch. 6 (III, 113).

[259] *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, ch. 6 (III, 114).

[260] *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, ch. 8 (III, 118).

[261] *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, ch. 8 (III, 118).

> Auðr svarar: "Því skiptir litlu, hvárt þú spyrr mik at þessu eða eigi, því at ek veit, at áðr muntu fastráðit hafa, at öðru víss mun fara en at mínum vilja, ok eigi líkligt, at þú mundir mér svá góðs gjaforðs unna, ok annat muntu mér ætla."[262]
>
> (Auðr answered: 'It is of little importance whether you ask me about this or not, because I know that you will have already decided that it will certainly go otherwise than according to my wishes and it is not likely that you would allow me such a good match and you will intend something else for me.')

The king replies '"Rétt getr þú þar. Aldri skaltu fá Helga konung ok því síðr sem þú girnist meir"' ('You have the right of it. You will never marry King Helgi and all the less the more you desire it').[263] Ívarr freely admits that it is his intention to choose a husband for his daughter whom she does not want to marry. Like Ása, Auðr studiously avoids expressing any opinion on the suitors she is offered but in this case her indifference arises from the knowledge of how her father would use such preferences against her. Yet, like many other fathers, Ívarr hides behind his daughter's supposed *ofsi* (pride, overbearingness) when reporting back to King Helgi, passing off his rejection of the marriage offer as her own.[264] Crucially, the offer he ultimately agrees to is made by an inferior suitor, namely Helgi's brother, Hrærekr, who himself concedes that Helgi 'miklu var framar í hvern stað' (was superior in every respect).[265] Though Ívarr derides his daughter's responses as *ómerkiligr* (foolish) and ironically calls *her* an *ofstýri* (unmanageable thing), Auðr is correct when she tells him '"þú munt áðr fastráðit hafa, hvert gjaforð ek skal hafa"' ('you must have already decided which match I shall have').[266] Ívarr accepts the lesser offer made by Hrærekr on her behalf but even this much is denied her when he schemes to ruin her marriage, using the seeds of rivalry planted by the brothers' competition for Auðr's hand. Ívarr convinces Hrærekr that his son, Haraldr, is actually the product of an affair between Auðr and Helgi. Hrærekr takes the bait and kills his brother only to have Ívarr avenge Helgi's death and take over the land the brothers once ruled. Auðr leads an army against him but is ultimately forced to flee with her

[262] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 1 (I, 339).

[263] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 1 (I, 339).

[264] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 1 (I, 339).

[265] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 1 (I, 339–40).

[266] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 1 (I, 341).

son to Garðaríki where she quickly remarries the ruling King Raðbarðr, without her father's consent but with her son's.

There is real bitterness in the way Ívarr belittles his daughter and an enduring possessiveness as well, familiar from father-son relations. Ívarr thinks 'Raðbarðr konungr firna djarfr, er hann fekk hennar án hans leyfi' (King Raðbarðr very daring, when he married her [Auðr] without his permission) and it is obvious he intended to profit by arranging a further match for his daughter once he had made her a widow.[267] Initially helpless in the face of her father's schemes, Auðr is nevertheless wise to her father's ways and her transformation into a mother gives her the independence to frustrate his designs. The narrative is clearly sympathetic towards Auðr and Rowe has discussed the flattering parallels the author evokes between Auðr and Ástríðr, the mother of Óláfr Tryggvason, and between Auðr and the prominent female Icelandic settler of the same name.[268] Such parallels make it clear that Auðr is celebrated as a maternal figure, the mother of a powerful king, Haraldr hilditönn. It is her maternity which empowers her to flee her father's emotional manipulation, a sharp contrast to her resigned impotence as a daughter.

Although the emotional overtones to these two encounters are very different, the actual value and consequence afforded to the daughter's choice of suitor is much the same. In both episodes the daughter is depicted as an insightful character: everything Ása hopes for, and counsels her father to hope for as well, ultimately comes to pass, while Auðr clearly has the measure of her father, more so than either Helgi or Hrærekr, and is able to take steps to shield her son from his influence. In both cases, however, insight is balanced by obedience and although both daughters initially suffer from their father's actions, ultimately all ends well.

ii. Signý and Völsungr: The Cost of Obedience

An episode from *Völsunga saga* demonstrates that a daughter's obedience was valued more highly than her insight, even when the outcome was fatal. Like Ása and Auðr, Signý is blessed with considerable insight, in this instance into the character of her suitor, Siggeirr. She is the only member of her family who does not welcome his proposal:

[267] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 3 (I, 346).

[268] Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, '*Sǫgubrot af Fornkonungum*: Mythologised History for late thirteenth-century Iceland', in *Making History*, ed. by Arnold and Finlay, pp. 1–16 (pp. 7, 15).

> Þessu tali tekr konungr vel ok svá synir hans, en hún sjálf var þess ófús, biðr þó föður sinn ráða sem öðru því, sem til hennar tæki.[269]
>
> (The king welcomed this conversation and his sons likewise, but she herself was unwilling. Nevertheless, she asked her father to decide, as he did in other matters which might concern her.)

Signý's obedience is clearly to be praised. It is not her place to counter her father's wishes. She does not voice her full objections until after the wedding night, when it is already too late. The timing brings a dramatic tragic irony to her foresight that her union with Siggeirr will mean nothing but misery for her family:

> Nú mælti Signý við föður sinn: "Eigi vilda ek á brott fara með Siggeiri, ok eigi gerir hugr min hlæja við honum, ok veit ek af framvísi minni ok af kynfylgju várri, at af þessu ráði stendr oss mikill ófagnaðr, ef eigi er skjótt brugðit þessum ráðahag."[270]
>
> (Now Signý spoke with her father: 'I don't want to go away with Siggeirr, and my mind does not laugh with him, and I know from my foresight and from our family's particular ability that this match will bring us great sorrow, if this marriage is not quickly broken off.')

Paradoxically, the completion of the union and Signý's emergence into full womanhood empowers her to speak out against both the marriage and her own husband, when before the wedding night she was locked in silent obedience.

Her objections prove to have a logical foundation and graduate from the merely personal to embrace the wellbeing of her entire family. As Quinn notes 'she reveals a better assessment of dynastic risk than Völsungr'.[271] They are not to be heeded, however, and her father rebukes her for speaking such things since it would be *skömm mikil* (a great dishonour) for them to renege on the alliance now.[272] He does not respond at all to her personal objections to the match but only to the familial concern: Signý's qualms as to her own

[269] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 3 (I, 113).

[270] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 4 (I, 115).

[271] Quinn, 'Realisation of Mythological Design', p. 140.

[272] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 4 (I, 115).

happiness are not worthy of his attention. Even on the eve of Siggeirr's treachery, when Signý has warned her father and brothers of the slaughter planned by her husband, her father is unmoved. When she 'grætr […] sárliga' (weeps sorely) and begs not to have to return to Siggeirr, her father reprimands her yet again:

> "Þú skalt at vísu fara heim til bónda þíns ok vera samt með honum, hversu sem með oss ferr."[273]
>
> ('You must certainly go home to your husband and be together with him, however it goes with us.')

No matter her husband's crimes, Völsungr makes it clear that obedience to *him* is obedience to her husband, standing in masculine solidarity with the man who betrays him. Obedience to death is Völsungr's demand and his stranglehold on Signý's loyalty is what ensures her demise, even though she survives her brother's slaughter of her husband and their sons. Signý's final action of walking back into a fire to die with her husband enacts a final obedience to her dead father's wishes. As Quinn puts it, '[h]er duty of bringing death to her husband done, she chose death for herself and resumed the role of wife that her father had urged her to accept despite her better judgement'.[274] The narrative finds resolution in an act which entwines both her natal and marital loyalties and her betrayals. The daughter, who has problematically served the needs of two lineages, is erased.

These narratives reveal the frequent and deliberate frustration of the daughter's desires: Ívarr chooses Hrærekr for Auðr because she would have preferred Helgi; Völsungr cares not at all for his daughter's objections. It is Ása, who explicitly has no desires, and Auðr, who admits to none, who fare better, being spared the forced demonstration of filial obedience which Signý must undergo after her repeated and vocal objections to her father's choice of husband. The result is that the daughter's loyalty to her birth family is not placed in true jeopardy and the father is not forced to compete with the son-in-law for the daughter's attention, quite literally in the case of *Hrólfs saga kraka*. In an overt exploration of father-daughter incest, King Helgi unwittingly marries his own daughter, Yrsa, a marriage he attempts to maintain even after their true relationship is revealed, forcing him into competition with her second husband Aðils, who brings about his death. Choosing a

[273] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 5 (I, 117).

[274] Quinn, 'Realisation of Mythological Design', p. 127.

bridegroom whom the daughter does not favour allows the father to maintain his place in her affections. From the father's perspective, allowing the daughter her choice of bridegroom risks splitting her attachment and can only be dangerous.

iii. Bǫðvildr and Níðuðr: The Daughter's Betrayal

In *Vǫlundarkviða* the daughter's choice is portrayed as disastrous. Bǫðvildr is the one to approach Vǫlundr, seeking him out on his isolated island and asking him to repair her broken ring, which once belonged to his wife. While I would not go as far as John McKinnell in suggesting that Bǫðvildr 'is asking to be seduced when she demands [the ring's] repair', there are hints that she welcomes her liaison with Vǫlundr. Her confession to him that she has broken the ring is accompanied by an avowal of trust—'"Þoriga ec at segia, nema þér einom"' ('I dare not say it except to you alone')—suggesting a certain intimacy between them.[275] Her visit immediately follows his gift to her of brooches made from her brother's teeth, perhaps an overture she has misconstrued.[276] While her impregnation cannot be called anything other than rape, she nevertheless weeps in grief at *for friðils* (her lover's departure) as much as for her father's fury in stanza 29.[277] In seeking out the smith, whose isolation is motivated in part by the threatening way he looks at Bǫðvildr,[278] it is clear that Bǫðvildr is rebelling against her parents whose actions were designed to prevent just such an outcome. The ramifications of her disobedience are explored in the brief father-daughter confrontation which ends the poem.

The exchange is the only direct speech between father and daughter anywhere in the *Poetic Edda*, and its position at the very end of the poem gives it a remarkable significance as the narrative's ultimate climax, however unsatisfactory some have found it.[279] The choice of father and daughter as the interlocutors is additionally worthy of comment given the range of narrative options open to the poet. While many father-daughter pairings in Old Norse mythic-

[275] *Vkv*. 26:7–8 (p. 121).

[276] John McKinnell and Leif Einarson have both explicated the ironic undertones of Vǫlundr's choice of gifts to the king and queen. The choice of brooches as Bǫðvildr's gift has proven less easily intelligible, however. Leif Einarson admits it needs more thought. See John McKinnell, 'The Context of *Vǫlundarkviða*', *Saga-Book*, 23 (1990–93), 1–27 (p. 20) and Leif Einarson, 'Artisanal Revenge in *Völundarkviða*: Völundr's Creations in the Spatial Relations of the Poems', *JEGP*, 114 (2015), 1–31 (p. 29).

[277] *Vkv*. 29:9 (p. 122).

[278] *Vkv*. 17:1–6 (p. 119).

[279] *Poetic Edda*, ed. by Dronke, II: *Mythological Poems* (1997), p. 258. Ármann Jakobsson, 'The Extreme Emotional Life of Vǫlundr the Elf', *Scandinavian Studies*, 78 (2006), 227–54 (pp. 248–49).

heroic literature feature no mother at all (as with Skaði and Þjazi)[280] or else one that is quickly disposed of (as with Hildr and Hǫgni),[281] both parents are present in *Vǫlundarkviða*. Indeed, Bǫðvildr's mother the queen is a powerful figure in the narrative, playing a vital speaking role with profound consequences for the action of the poem; it is she who orders the maiming of Vǫlundr: '"sníðit ér hann sina magni"' ('cut from him his strength').[282] However, she speaks only to her husband and never to her daughter. She is not indifferent, for she draws Níðuðr's attention to the baleful way Vǫlundr looks at Bǫðvildr in stanza 17, but the poet decided to have Níðuðr and not his wife confront their pregnant daughter. Bǫðvildr's marriage is her father's affair more than her mother's:[283] it is his wrath she fears and it is the father-daughter relationship, not Níðuðr's non-existent relationship with his sons, that emerges as the most complex intergenerational relationship in the poem.

The scene takes place after Vǫlundr has revealed his revenge to King Níðuðr, that he has murdered his two sons and impregnated his daughter, and vanished. Níðuðr then orders his slave Þakkráðr to bring his daughter to him:

> "Up rístu, Þacráðr, þræll minn inn bezti,
> bið þú Bǫðvildi, meyna bráhvíto,
> ganga fagrvarið við fǫður rœða."[284]
>
> ('Get up, Þakkráðr, my best thrall:
> Ask Bǫðvildr, the white-eyelashed girl,
> To come, beautifully dressed, to speak with her father.')

The inclusion of the thrall, Þakkráðr, as a go-between at once emphasises the formality of this interview between father and daughter. Ármann Jakobsson considers there is no apparent reason to introduce Þakkráðr at such a late stage in the narrative but Þakkráðr ensures the triangulation between father, daughter and another male continues even in this most intimate conversation. Þakkráðr provides an uneasy third in the scene, representing the symbolic 'other man' who always haunts the father-daughter relationship even when the actual father of

[280] *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 56 (p. 2).

[281] *Sörla þáttr*, ch. 7 (I, 377).

[282] *Vkv*. 17:7–8 (p. 119).

[283] Scheming dynastic mothers like Ólöf and Grímhildr are the monstrous exception rather than the rule. For further discussion see chapter IV section 2.

[284] *Vkv*. 39 (p. 123).

Bǫðvildr's child, Vǫlundr, has disappeared. The stipulation that she is to come *fagrvarið* (beautifully dressed, adorned with fair ornaments) compounds the formality.[285] The detail calls to mind Heðinn's abduction of Hildr in *Sörla þáttr,* where it is explicitly stated how Heðinn takes not only Hildr but also 'klæði ok gripi Hildar' (Hildr's clothes and jewels), the trappings embodying her status and wealth, which he is seizing for himself.[286] Bǫðvildr is to appear before her father not as a daughter but as a bridal object whose worth is contingent upon such an appearance. Where the detail in *Sörla þáttr* underlined the success of Heðinn's bridal capture, it now works to reassure Bǫðvildr's father that he has *not* lost the valuable asset that Bǫðvildr and her finery represents.

Níðuðr calls his daughter to him in denial, insisting on testing the truth of Vǫlundr's claim he has a child in Níðuðr's hall, even though he surely knows it to be true since Vǫlundr has lied about nothing else, his murder of the king's sons proven by the items fashioned from their body parts. Níðuðr nevertheless asks his daughter for confirmation:

> "Er þatt satt, Bǫðvildr, er sǫgðo mér:
> sátoð iþ Vǫlundr saman í hólmi?"[287]
>
> ('Is that true, Bǫðvildr, what they told me:
> Did you and Vǫlundr sit together on the island?')

Her reply leaves her father literally speechless since the poem ends on her confession. Powerless as her final words show her to be, their finality is still significant. It is Bǫðvildr with whom the poem ends not Níðuðr, because she embodies, quite literally in the form of her pregnancy, the future of the dynasty, however distastefully engendered. In this Bǫðvildr has at least some measure of power even if it confirms her disgrace in her father's eyes. Awkwardly stuck between the roles of daughter and mother, Bǫðvildr is caught between her father's authority and her own emergent dynastic significance. Níðuðr has exhausted his social function as both king and father, ending the poem in silent confusion and sorrow. Bǫðvildr announces her own helplessness, but at least she speaks:

> "Satt er þat, Níðaðr, er sagði þér:

[285] *Vkv*. 39:5 (p. 123).

[286] *Sörla þáttr*, ch. 7 (I, 376).

[287] *Vkv*. 40 (p. 123).

sáto við Vǫlundr saman í hólmi,
eina ǫgurstund, æva scyldi!
Ec vætr hánom vinna kunnac,
ec vætr hánom vinna máttac."[288]

('It is true, Níðaðr, what he told you:
Vǫlundr and I sat together on the island,
Alone for just the space of a tide; it should never have happened!
I did not know how to resist him,
I was not able to resist him!')

At first, she merely parrots back her father's own words with minimal alterations, but then she comes into her own and gives voice to a full lament. The slow emergence of her voice from within the confines of her father's language presents a neat verbal parallel to her emergence as a wife and mother from the family over which he presides.

Scholars have put forward myriad interpretations for these anti-climactic final three stanzas and the significance of Bǫðvildr's final words in particular. For Paul Beekman Taylor, they are a reminder of '[t]he violence done to Bödvild's body', a detail unique to the version of the story in *Vǫlundarkviða* but evidently 'important enough for the poet to devote the last two lines of the poem to her helplessness'.[289] In contrast, John McKinnell describes her words as 'uneasy excuses', seeing in them the ultimate indictment of Bǫðvildr's character.[290] Doubting her claim that she would have resisted Vǫlundr if she were able to, given that it conflicts with her explicit grief upon his departure, her plea for leniency rings hollow to his ears: instead of cementing her helplessness, McKinnell harshly suggests her words confirm her as 'insincere, morally as well as physically compromised'.[291] For Kaaren Grimstad, Bǫðvildr is not at all to blame, instead her words speak to a larger theme, aptly

[288] *Vkv*. 41 (p. 123).

[289] Paul Beekman Taylor, '*Vǫlundarkviða*, *Þrymskviða* and the Function of Myth', *Neophilologus*, 78 (1994), 263–81 (pp. 275–76).

[290] McKinnell, 'Context of *Vǫlundarkviða*', p. 22.

[291] McKinnell, 'Context of *Vǫlundarkviða*', p. 22.

summing up 'the impotence of the humans in this conflict against the prince of elves' and reaffirming the poem's implicit message: 'let sleeping elves lie'.[292]

Dronke comments that a happy marriage 'was clearly not [the poet's] choice of epilogue', subtly implying that the true climax lies in Vǫlundr's disappearance, not in the last stanzas which show 'Níðuðr and Bǫðvildr seared by his vengeance and dazed by their own impotence'.[293] Ármann Jakobsson follows her interpretation, characterizing the three-stanza exchange as 'a gentle elegy […]. Vǫlundr may have the last laugh but not the last word'.[294] Yet he denies the stanzas narrative significance by identifying the 'true' ending of the poem at stanza 38: 'The end is not the end; the poem does not conclude with the aftermath of the revenge, but the moment before when the young and innocent Bǫðvildr still believes that this is a story of love, not of revenge'.[295] Bǫðvildr's confrontation with Níðuðr is to him but a 'coda, which undermines the revenge narrative' rather than completing it.[296] This opinion seems nothing less than a denial of the poem's extant structure and one which denies Bǫðvildr the brutal disillusionment her character undergoes in the poem's final three stanzas.

Vǫlundarkviða's final focus on the complexities attending the daughter's sexual maturity is extremely fitting, however, when one considers the manuscript context in Codex Regius. Taylor notes a number of close textual parallels between *Vǫlundarkviða* and *Þrymskviða*, which precedes it in the manuscript and which also grapples with the issue of female exchange, as Freyja is bartered to the giant Þrymr in exchange for Þórr's hammer. At the same time, the poem is succeeded by *Alvíssmál*, in which Alvíss the dwarf strives to win the hand of Þórr's daughter, 'she whose value is signalled by her name *þrúðr* [strength], and whose possession for [Alvíss] would be tantamount to having something of the father's powers'.[297] There appears to be a thematic unity here concerning the possible dangers when women marry outside their communities but *Vǫlundarkviða* remains the only poem which explores how such a fate affects the women themselves. For my part, the close repetition of the last line gives her final words an air of true desperation; helpless twice over, lacking both the knowledge (*kunnac*) and strength (*máttac*) to resist Vǫlundr, she is also abandoned twice

[292] Kaaren Grimstad, 'The Revenge of Vǫlundr', in *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, ed. by Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies, 4 ([Manitoba]: University of Manitoba Press, 1983), pp. 187–209 (pp. 199, 201).

[293] *Poetic Edda*, ed. by Dronke, II (1997), 258.

[294] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Extreme Emotional Life', p. 248.

[295] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Extreme Emotional Life', pp. 248–49.

[296] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Extreme Emotional Life', p. 248.

[297] Taylor, p. 269.

over, by lover and father. Bǫðvildr is undoubtedly more sinned against than sinning but if her protestations seem insincere it is hardly unexpected that she should stress her loyalty to her father in her father's presence and her loyalty to her lover in her lover's, given the difficult position in which her pregnancy has placed her.

Bǫðvildr's relationship to Vǫlundr after his sudden departure remains ambiguous as Níðuðr's silence in the face of her confession leaves her position as his daughter in similar doubt. Both Lotte Motz and John McKinnell suggest Vǫlundr's words in stanza 19—'"Nú berr Bǫðvildr brúðar minnar […] bauga rauða"' ('Now Bǫðvildr wears the red rings of my bride')—may be less a lamentation on Vǫlundr's part and more a recognition that such rings mark her as his bride.[298] Even if his words are interpreted in the usual way, as an indignant response to Bǫðvildr's appropriation of a treasure meant for his lost wife, some concern for Bǫðvildr's welfare in his absence, or at least that of his unborn child, is demonstrated by his departing request that Níðuðr swear an oath:

> "at þú qveliat qván Vǫlundar
> né brúði minni at bana verðir,
> þótt vér qván eigim, þá er þér kunnið,
> eða ióð eigim innan hallar."[299]
>
> ('That you will not torment Vǫlundr's wife,
> Nor become the slayer of my bride,
> Though I may have a wife whom you know
> And we may have a child inside your hall.')

Though he may not unambiguously name Bǫðvildr as his wife, his description of his bride as *þá er þér kunnið* (that one whom you know) together with his affirmation that their child is *innan hallar* (inside the hall) seem like details intended to confirm to Níðuðr that his daughter is indeed the one to whom Vǫlundr refers.

In Motz's opinion, Vǫlundr's vengeance 'consisted, not in bringing the shame of unwed motherhood (a Victorian notion) to the royal household, but in wresting a woman from her family of birth'.[300] By such a reckoning, it is not the shameful circumstances of the

[298] *Vkv*. 19: 1–2, 4 (p. 120); Lotte Motz, 'New Thoughts on *Vǫlundarkviða*', *Saga-Book*, 22 (1986–89), 50–68 (p. 60); McKinnell, 'Context of *Vǫlundarkviða*', p. 19.

[299] *Vkv*. 33:7–14 (p. 122).

[300] Motz, 'New Thoughts', p. 55.

pregnancy which provokes the conflict but the loss of a daughter which wounds Níðuðr. The loss may have been exacerbated by the circumstances of the union, but would have been a blow to the father even without them. The problem is that Vǫlundr does not wrest Bǫðvildr away, as Heðinn does Hildr in *Sörla þáttr* or Hörðr does Hervör in *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*. On the contrary he leaves her behind, pregnant and alone. While other sources, like *Þiðreks saga*, depict Bǫðvildr as the mother of a great hero, in the poem Bǫðvildr's future is very much in doubt. Leif Einarson notes that the cups made by Vǫlundr out of the skulls of Níðuðr's sons 'subversively embody the terms of the negative reciprocity to which he has been subjected', the cup that is so symbolic of a king's power and social position in the hall has been rendered 'useless, and poignantly so'.[301] His focus on artisanal revenge means he does not extend his argument to the rape of Bǫðvildr which could be read as a similar expression of negative reciprocity of the kind which Clunies Ross has demonstrated characterised the majority of marital narratives in the schemae of Old Norse myth.[302] In this way Vǫlundr has asserted his superiority over Níðuðr but his doing so has not lent Bǫðvildr his status.

The ambiguity as to Bǫðvildr's position and the uncertainty over where she now belongs, whether with her husband or her father, is indicative of the ambivalence underlying this system of female exchange. One is forcefully reminded of Hildr of the *Hjaðningavíg* whose position is similarly liminal, poised between two kinship groups but fully belonging to neither, trapped in an endless quasi-marital limbo from which there is no escape. Bǫðvildr's actions and disobedience, whether intentional or not, lead her into a disastrous union. Nor is she the only example of the tragic consequences of filial agency. Sigrún prefers Helgi to her father's choice of suitor, Hǫðbroddr, in the Helgi poems of the *Poetic Edda*, and while *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* ends happily enough, in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* her choice leaves her widowed and alone with the majority of her family dead. Even when the daughter's choice is right it is wrong. Sigrún's judgement that Helgi is a better warrior than Hǫðbroddr is essentially correct but still her choice of him as a spouse cannot and will not be positively embraced by the text because it involves disobedience to a paternal figure; tragedy becomes the only possible outcome.

What is so threatening, then, about the daughter's free choice of a spouse? As Diane Elizabeth Dreher has discussed in a Shakespearean context, the kind of romantic attachment which might result on the daughter's part were she free to choose a husband would reduce her

[301] Leif Einarson, pp. 29, 26.

[302] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 103–43.

emotional dependence on her father. Fearing that they will be displaced, fathers are inclined to shackle their daughters deliberately to men who cannot compete with them for their daughter's affections.[303] Shakespeare's fathers and daughters, in her analysis, 'are caught in a generational struggle' that she characterises as both personal and political.[304] She continues:

> The clash reverberates on many levels: youth and age, female and male, oppressed and oppressor, progressive and traditional. At the heart of it all are two individuals caught in a life transition that threatens their security but offers immeasurable opportunities for personal growth.[305]

The observation is equally applicable to father-daughter relations in Old Norse myth and legend, which explore the same generational struggle.

This frustration of the daughter's desires could, of course, also be taken as indicative of incest, which has cast a long shadow over discussions of the father-daughter bond.[306] Without wading too far into the incest debate, I do not think all father-daughter interaction can be reduced to a paradigm of frustrated desire on the part of the father which he then revenges on the daughter. Father-daughter incest is rare in Old Norse literature.[307] There is an instance in the *fornaldarsögur*, however: Yrsa and Hringr's relationship in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, an episode discussed further in chapter IV section 2.ii. In this case it is ignorance of their relation to one another which leads them into incest, rather than paternal possessiveness. There are many real social and economic advantages to retaining a daughter's loyalties that seem to me ample motivation for the father's repeated attempts in literature to control their daughter's marriage, without introducing incestuous desire as a further motiving factor. Though incest undoubtedly occurred in Old Norse society and was explored in its literature, it is not a defining feature of father-daughter relations.

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[303] Diane Elizabeth Dreher, *Domination and Defiance: Fathers and Daughters in Shakespeare* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1986), p. 43.

[304] Dreher, p. 5.

[305] Dreher, p. 5.

[306] See David Willbern, '*Filia Oedipi*: Father and Daughter in Freudian Theory', in *Daughters and Fathers*, ed. by Boose and Flowers, pp. 75–96; Erin Irene Mann, 'Relative Identities: Father-Daughter Incest in Medieval English Religious Literature' (unpubl. dissertation, University of Iowa, 2011); and Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

[307] Clunies Ross notes that Snorri presents Óðinn's relationship with Jǫrð as incestuous, making Þórr the product of incest. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 58.

iv. Experience before Youth: Choosing Right

The daughter's choice of suitor is only depicted as positive when freely offered by the father, not taken by the daughter, and arranged so that the choice is a limited one between two acceptable men, as in *Völsunga saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*. In these instances, there is no wrong choice to be made and so the decision (and the responsibility for rejecting a powerful suitor) can be passed to the daughter without issue. It is striking, too, that both of these choices end in victory for the older generation, minimising the intergenerational conflict which a daughter's marriage inevitably seems to stir up. While these fathers may be losing their daughters in matrimony, anxieties around ageing and a loss of prowess are allayed by the daughters' explicit preference for the older generation over the younger. In *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, Ingibjörg Þórisdóttir informs her suitors, King Gautrekr and his younger rival Óláfr, that:

> "Nú þótt Óláfr sé maðr yngri ok sé líkligr til höfðingja, þá er illt vísu ván at kaupa, […] ok kýs ek mér til yndis ok samlaga Gautrek konung, þótt ek vissi þat fyrir, at hann lifði fá ár, en Óláfr yrði gamall sem steinabrú."[308]
>
> ('Now though Óláfr may be a younger man and may be an eligible chieftain, it's certainly a bad thing to pay for hope […] and I choose King Gautrekr for myself for delight and companionship, though I know already that he may only live a few years, while Óláfr may become as old as a stone bridge.')

Hjördís Eylimadóttir's reasoning in *Völsunga saga*, when confronted by the two suitors Sigmundr and Lyngvi, is based more on fame than on family but it leads her to the same conclusion:

> "Vant sýnist mér þetta mál, en þó kýs ek þann konung, er frægstr er, en þat er Sigmundr konungr, þótt hann sé mjök aldri orpinn."[309]

[308] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 1 (IV, 56).

[309] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 11 (I, 135).

('This matter seems difficult to me, but nevertheless I choose that king, who is most famous, and that is King Sigmundr, although he may be very bent with age.')

Both Gautrekr and Sigmundr must fight off their rejected rivals and both succeed in defending their wives; although Sigmundr gives up his life to do so, his line at least has been secured by this marriage, which has already resulted in Sigurðr's conception.

These men are themselves fathers and therefore their success in obtaining a wife even in their old age casts both episodes as paternal triumphs even though they necessitate a father giving up his daughter to the spouse of her choice. Additionally, the presence of children from former marriages or liaisons potentially reduces these women's influence in their husbands' kingdoms, where they will not necessarily be the mother to his heirs. In such circumstances, women were likely to return to their father's house as a widow, free to be exchanged again for paternal and familial advantage, hence Ívarr's displeasure in *Sögubrot af fornkonungum* that King Raðbarðr had married his widowed daughter Auðr without his explicit consent. An older spouse could well serve the father's interests. It is difficult, therefore, to know how sincerely to take these supposed declarations of a daughter's desires when they mirror the father's own interests so exactly. They certainly do not dispel the wider impression that the daughter's free choice of a spouse could only bring danger and destruction to her father and her family.

3. The Female Son: Hervör and Þornbjörg

Not all daughters in Old Norse myth and legend wish to marry. Two prominent daughters among the *fornaldarsögur* scorn the traditional female role and seek to break free of its confines: Hervör, in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* and Þornbjörg in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar.* Both women dress, fight and, in Þornbjörg's case, rule as men, both take masculine names and both have extended interactions with their fathers on the subject of their masculine behaviour. These episodes give a glimpse into father-daughter relations that are not completely focused on the marriage of the daughter, although, as for Skaði, pursuing vengeance for her father's death, marriage is inevitably where these episodes end up.

There is a long tradition of lone daughters, who lack siblings, being allowed to take on the mantle of sons, foregoing marriage and childbearing for traditionally masculine roles and responsibilities. Carol Clover has discussed the surprisingly close parallels between maiden warriors like Hervör and Þornbjörg in Old Norse literature and the Albanian practice of

allowing daughters to act and be treated like sons under certain circumstances.[310] These daughters must swear celibacy but they are free to dress as men, inherit property if their fathers have no sons and pursue vengeance for their families in the absence of brothers to undertake such a duty. Clover draws attention to the way in which this behaviour, which would otherwise be considered transgressive by a woman, is used to shore up a failing patriline. The phenomenon is, therefore, less about female emancipation than it is about male continuity. Tales of female warriors like Skaði, Hervör or Þornbjörg, she concludes, 'tell us less about daughters than they do about sons, and less about female volition than about the power, in Norse society, of the patrilineal principle to bend legend and life to its intention'.[311] This may very well be true and Clover's reading fits with her suggestion that we abandon the sex/gender-binary when approaching Old Norse texts and replace it with a power dichotomy of the powerful versus the powerless.[312] If a woman can become an important link in a patrilineal chain, her power may transcend the usual boundaries attendant on her sex. Lena Norrman goes one step further, abandoning binaries altogether as 'inadequate' and preferring to focus 'on the intermediary sphere of transgender'.[313]

Whether such women are seen as appropriating the male or empowered role for themselves or inhabiting a transgendered space *heima í millim* (between worlds), in Hervör's words,[314] when they assume a masculine identity, it is the fluidity with which they change roles that has been seen as most noteworthy. As Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir remarks, '[t]he ease with which Þornbjörg moves between masculine and feminine roles is remarkable'.[315] Even more fascinating is that their kinship roles, especially with regard to their fathers,

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[310] Carol J. Clover, 'Maiden Warriors and Other Sons', *JEGP,* 85 (1986), 35–49 (pp. 44–45).

[311] Clover, 'Maiden Warriors', p. 49.

[312] Carol J. Clover, 'Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe', *Speculum*, 68 (1993), 363–87 (p. 380).

[313] Lena Norrman, 'Woman or Warrior? The Construction of Gender in Old Norse Myth', in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: The Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference 2nd–7th July 2000, University of Sydney*, ed. by Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Sydney, 2000), pp. 375–85 (p. 379).

[314] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 47:6, ed. by Hannah Burrows, in *PFS*, p. 406. For a more detailed discussion of the import of Hervör's words see Clover, 'Maiden Warriors' and William Layher, 'Caught Between Worlds: Gendering the Maiden Warrior in Old Norse', in *Woman and Medieval Epic: Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity*, ed. by Sara S. Poor and Jana K. Schulman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 183–208. Both scholars consider the implications of Hervör's reflection on her complex gender identity.

[315] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 115.

remain surprisingly static even as their genders shift. Hervör and Þornbjörg always remain daughters in their father's eyes, so much so that William Layher suggests that 'the fathers wield a special power to "flip" their daughters back toward the feminine norm'.[316] Layher's argument rests on the inclusion of any male representative of patriarchal authority under the banner of 'father', however. While, broadly speaking, the patriarchal retains power over the filial, individually both daughters fare very well in the battles of wills in which they engage with their fathers.

In *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, Þornbjörg is introduced with a traditional opening. It is only when she confronts her father, King Eirekr, that we get a true sense of her striking personality in one of the longest speeches made by any woman in the *fornaldarsögur*:

> "Nú með því," segir hún, "at þú hefir eigi meir en eins manns líf til ríkisstjórnar ok ek er nú þitt einberni ok á ek allan arf eftir þik, má vera, at ek þurfi þetta ríki at verja fyrir konungum eða konungssonum, ef ek missi þín við. Er eigi ólíkligt, at mér þykki illt at vera þeira nauðkván, ef svá berr til, ok því vil ek kunna nokkurn hátt á riddaraskap. Þykki mér þá líkara, at ek fái haldit ríki þessu með styrk ok trausti góðrar fylgdar, ok því bið ek þik, faðir, at þú fáir mér nokkut af ríki þínu til forráða, meðan þú ert á lífi, ok reyna ek svá stjórn ok umsjá þeira manna, sem í mitt vald eru fengnir. Er þat enn í þessu máli, ef nokkurir menn biðja mín, sem ek vil ekki játa, þá er líkara, at ríki yðvart sé í náðum af þeim ofsa, ef ek held andsvör í móti þeim."[317]
>
> ('Now because of this,' she said, 'that you have no more than one man's life to rule the kingdom, and I am now your only child and will have the whole inheritance after you, it may be, that I might need to defend this kingdom from kings or king's sons, if I lose you. It is not unlikely that I would dislike being their unwilling wife, if that were to happen, and so I want to learn some knightly ways. Then it seems to me more likely that I would be able to hold this kingdom with the strength and support of good followers. And so, I ask you, father, that you give some of your kingdom into my guardianship while you are alive and I will try ruling and

[316] Layher, p. 202.

[317] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 4 (IV, 63).

overseeing those people who are given into my power. There is also this to say: if any men ask for my hand, since I do not want to accept them, it is more likely that your kingdom might be protected from their tyranny if I answer them.')

For a daughter to speak to her father in such a way is astonishing; many sons never make speeches as long or as eloquent. As Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir points out, Þornbjörg's reasons are 'seemingly rational' but her father consents to her demands not because of any agreement but because he foresees trouble for his kingdom from her *ofsi ok kappgirndi* (tyranny and eagerness).[318] Her father concedes to her demands, giving her a third of the kingdom and loyal men to hold it. To complete her transformation, the once feminine Þornbjörg, who was introduced as 'hverri konu vænni ok vitrari, þeira er menn vissu' (more beautiful and wiser than any woman known to man) takes for herself the name Þórbergr.[319] Yet despite this change her parents, Layher notes, 'continue to regard Þornbjörg as their daughter' and arrange a marriage for her with Hrólfr Gautreksson in her absence. As Skaði discovers when she attempts to choose a husband from among the Æsir, Þornbjörg's belief that she can claim the power to bestow or withhold herself in marriage, encapsulated in her desire to respond to her suitors herself, proves a fiction.

King Eirekr's concession to his daughter's demands in the short term, while remaining convinced of her long-term feminine identity, is a strategy echoed by Hervör's father, Angantýr. To complicate matters, Angantýr is already dead when he interacts with his daughter, who was raised in the household of her maternal grandfather, jarl Bjarmarr. A slave's taunting drives her to inquire with the jarl as to her father's real identity and upon discovering he was a great warrior she determines to visit his burial mound and demand her inheritance from him. Although Hervör's unconventional talents of shooting and sword fighting have already been introduced (she has previously run away to live as a highwayman in the woods), only after she decides to seek out her father does she begin to dress as a man, binding her hair in linen and cutting a cloak and kirtle for herself. It is specifically under her mother's aegis that she completes the transformation, explicated in kinship terms this time, from daughter to son. She goes to speak *við móður sína* (with her mother) and requests:[320]

[318] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 4 (IV, 63); Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, p. 113.

[319] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 4 (IV, 62).

[320] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 4 (II, 12).

"Bú þú mik at öllu, sem þú hraðast kunnir,
sannfróð kona, sem þú son myndir."[321]

('Prepare me in all ways as quickly as you can,
Truly wise-woman, as you would a son.')

Her mother is a silent character but her acquiescence to her daughter's demands can be assumed and finally, after Hervör's departure the saga records how she *nefndist Hervarðr* (called herself Hervarðr), sealing her masculine identity.[322] From this point in the saga she is referred to using the masculine pronoun 'hann' but it should be recognised that her transformation has been an entirely female affair, enacted by herself and assisted by her mother.

In contrast to this maternal cooperation with her transformation from daughter to son, Hervör's meeting with her father is the catalyst for her transformation back into a daughter. Layher has taken careful note of the pronouns used leading up to and throughout Hervör's encounter with Angantýr and demonstrates that the feminine pronoun 'hún' begins to replace 'hann' in reference to Hervör from the moment she lands on Sámsey, where her father's burial mound lies, until she returns and settles at King Guðmundr's court for the winter. Layher subtly implies that this is an involuntary change on Hervör's part. 'Hervör's male persona is interrupted', he writes, casting the father as an unwelcome disruption to Hervör's self-constructed identity. However, Hervör does not attempt to dissemble at all but boldly approaches her father as *eingadóttir ykkr Sváfu* ('your only daughter with Sváva').[323] Her entire argument for claiming her inheritance rests on her born identity as his daughter and her female identity here seems a choice not a capitulation on her part. While Angantýr eventually relents and gives her the sword, like Eirekr, he is more concerned with the future, repeatedly evoking the male descendants Hervör will have, who will wield the sword after her:

"Muntu son geta, þann er síðan mun
Tyrfing hafa ok trúa magni."[324]

('You will beget a son, that one who afterwards will

[321] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 17:1–4, in *PFS*, p. 375.

[322] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 4 (II, 13).

[323] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 25:3–4, in *PFS*, p. 386.

[324] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 35:1–4, in *PFS*, p. 395.

Have Tyrfingr and trust in its strength.')

And again:

"Sjá mun Tyrfingr, ef þú trúa mættir,
ætt þinni, mær, allri spilla."[325]

("That sword Tyrfingr will, if you can believe it,
Destroy your entire family, girl.')

It is a vision of the future in which Hervör has returned to the traditionally feminine role of bearing sons and one which she tacitly accepts when she confesses herself unconcerned over 'hvé synir mínir síðan deila' (how my sons contend against one another hereafter).[326] At no point does Angantýr address his daughter in anything other than feminine terms. Even when he applauds her daring, he does so in contrast to the cowardice of most men, but still addresses her as *mær ung* (young girl), using her gender as well as her bravery to distinguish her from those with whom he compares her:

"Kveðkat ek þik, mær ung, mönnum líka,
er þú um hauga hvarfar á nóttum."[327]

('Young girl, I declare you are not like men,
When you wander around the mounds at night.')

Hervör's reply shows how she is still negotiating her gender identity:

[325] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 34:5–8 and 43:5–8, in *PFS*, pp. 395, 402.

[326] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 44:7–8, in *PFS*, p. 403.

[327] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 37, in *PFS*, p. 397. A variant reading in the U manuscript reads *kveð* for *kveðkat*, so that Angantýr declares his daughter *is* like men or humans. This could be taken as an affirmation of her masculine bravery and prowess. Layher believes both readings 'can be seen as equally valid reflections of Norse social attitudes' toward the question of Hervör's gender and that of other warrior women (Layher, p. 197). However, since the episode emphasises how men are too frightened to hang around the burial mounds, the H reading makes more sense in context as, unlike most men, Hervör is brave enough to approach the mound. The stanza is entirely missing from the R manuscript of the text followed in Guðni Jónsson's edition.

“Maðr þóttumz ek mennskr til þessa,
áðr ek sali yrða sækja réðak.”[328]

(‘I thought myself man enough for this,
Before I decided to visit your hall.’)

There is a clear double meaning to Hervör’s words which assert both her humanity as a *mennskr maðr* (human being), surrounded as she is by ghosts of the dead, but also reflect upon her masculinity. The implication of her words is that now she has indeed visited Sámsey she is not so sure of her manliness; a seed of doubt seems to have crept into her mind over the course of her interactions with her father. In Layher’s opinion ‘Hervör’s statement is an unambiguous declaration of her own subjectivity as a male hero’.[329] Her male identity must certainly be reaffirmed once she has left with the detail that *nefndist enn Hervarðr* (she still called herself Hervarðr).[330]

Again, the father succumbs to his daughter’s demands, but in the long term his vision for her future wins out over her own. Ultimately, Hervör goes home and takes up sewing and embroidery before marrying King Höfundr and bearing the sons her father spoke of. It would be possible to leave the argument here and agree with Layher’s summation that such stories ‘serve not to highlight the autonomous authority of the woman but, ultimately, to reinforce the traditional authority that the father has (or should have) over his daughter’.[331] The extent to which Hervör’s return is her own idea, however, should not be forgotten. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir has asked whether it is possible to read a subversive subtext into these episodes, which at least articulate female desires no matter that they are inevitably frustrated.[332] It is the way in which these daughters dictate the terms on which they shall return to femininity that offers a glimpse of resistance to societal and patriarchal norms.

Layher suggests that ‘[w]hen Hervör and Þornbjörg return to their fathers’ homes, no remnant of their masculinity survives’.[333] The flaw in this argument is that Hervör returns to her mother’s father’s house, the maternal home, and entirely of her own volition. She simply gets tired of raiding and transitions smoothly into the next phase of her life. Þornbjörg

[328] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 38:1–4, in *PFS*, p. 398.

[329] Layher, p. 198.

[330] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 4 (II, 23).

[331] Layher, p. 191.

[332] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, p. 132.

[333] Layher, p. 200.

meanwhile returns to her father only at the behest of Hrólfr Gautreksson who bests her in the masculine arena of battle. Rather than competing with her father for her loyalties and affection as so many suitors are forced to do, Hrólfr is instrumental in re-establishing traditional father-daughter relations between them, forcing her to resubmit herself to paternal authority as a condition of her surrender: '"Vil ek gefa þér grið ok öllum þínum mönnum, ef þér vilið játa forráði föður þíns"' ('I will give you and all your men quarter, if you will consent to the management of your father').[334] Yet her consent is still important to him. When Þórbergr warns Hrólfr that it will do him no honour to force her into marriage with him, Hrólfr reassures her that he does not wish to humiliate her into submission; rather, he says, if she allows her father to settle the engagement it will be said '"at þér haldið fullum veg yðrum með sóma"' ('that you maintain all your glory with honour').[335] It is by appealing to the masculine rather than the feminine side of her nature that Hrólfr succeeds in gaining her surrender and even in defeat she remains attached to her masculine identity, voicing the desire to '"svá gera sem kurteisir menn eru vanir, ef þeir verða sigraðir ok yfirkomnir"' ('do as courteous men are accustomed to, if they are vanquished and overcome') by feasting the victors in her hall.[336] She lays aside her masculine identity under duress but ultimately, like Hervör, of her own volition and remains free to take it up again, which she duly does when her husband is later kidnapped in Ireland.

There are, of course, overtones of male collusion in the efforts of her father and suitor to return her to her feminine identity. Where female activity has threatened the established hierarchies and social norms, male competition is abandoned in favour of co-operation which succeeds in bringing this transgressive female threat to heel, but Þornbjörg retains a will of her own, as Hervör does. Moreover, while patriarchal authority wins out against female rebellion, the authority of individual fathers is surprisingly ineffective. They never waver in their identification of their daughters as daughters (though it may be that Hervör cannot lie to Angantýr about her gender more because he is dead than because he is her father) but, while they remain assured of their daughters' return to the feminine role in the long term, in the short term these fathers can do very little to check their daughters' conduct.

Perhaps fathers are ineffective in preventing their daughter's masculine transformations because they are themselves the cause of this transgressive behaviour. 'Gender studies,' Norrman argues 'suggest that we examine carefully the information the

[334] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 13 (IV, 95).

[335] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 13 (IV, 96).

[336] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 13 (IV, 96).

narrative gives us about the circumstances under which the females who act like men are born', generalising that 'with respect to women warriors, their relationship with their parents does not seem to be very close', although Þornbjörg is an immediate exception to this supposed rule.[337] The argument is stronger for Hervör, whose conception shortly before her warlike father's death is taken in the Hauksbók manuscript of the saga to have an adverse effect on her femininity: it is recommended that she be exposed at birth because she 'eigi mundi konuskap hafa, ef fǫðurfrændum yrði líkt' (would not have a woman's disposition, if she were like her kinsmen on her father's side).[338] With only two examples it is difficult to do other than speculate but the notion is an intriguing one. Certainly, in their failure to produce other heirs (for both Hervör and Þornbjörg are only children), Angantýr and Eirekr could be implicated in the choices their daughters make to become sons. Tacit admiration for his daughter's conduct may even be detected in Angantýr, who sends his daughter on her way with a fulsome blessing:

> "Far vel, dóttir, fljótt gæfa ek þér
> tólf manna fjör, ef þú trúa mættir,
> afl ok eljun, alt it góða,
> þat er synir Arngríms at sik leifðu."[339]
>
> ('Farewell daughter, swiftly I'd give you
> Twelve men's lives, if you can believe it,
> Strength and endurance, all the good things
> That Arngrímr's sons left behind them.')

Better after all, as Clover remarked, to have 'a son who is your daughter, than no son at all'.[340]

4. The Nature of Paternal Ambivalence II: The Daughter

Boose's suggestion that the daughter is defined by absence seems insufficient to contain the vibrancy and variety of characters depicted as daughters in Old Norse myth and legend. I

[337] Norrman, pp. 378–79.

[338] *Heiðreks saga: Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, ch. 4, ed. by Jón Helgason, Samfund til Udgivelse af gammel Nordisk Litteratur, 48 (Copenhagen: Jørgensen, 1924), p. 14.

[339] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 46, in *PFS*, p. 405.

[340] Clover, 'Maiden Warriors', p. 45.

propose that mutability rather than absence defines the daughter's familial and literary function. This is not to downplay the daughter's frequent insignificance in a literary setting. Fathers like Oddr, Án and Gauti tell their pregnant giantess lovers to keep the child if it is a girl, only instructing them to send the child to their father if it is a boy. Some daughters, like the one which results from Hálfdan's affair with Brana in *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, go unnamed and narratively ignored. Even where daughters are named, such names may speak more of the father than of the daughter herself. The impersonally named Skuld in *Hrólfs saga kraka* is a living reminder of her father's debt to the elf woman that bore her and her name reflects this. There is some confusion in the same saga as to the exact number of Hrólfr's daughters; in chapter twenty-two two are mentioned, Skúr and Drífa.[341] Drífa is subsequently given in marriage to the king's champion, Böðvarr, but Skúr is never mentioned by name again and the author appears to forget about her until the narrative's end when 'kómu svá ríkjunum aftr undir dætr Hrólfs konungs' (the kingdom came back under the rule of King Hrólfr's daughters).[342] Such narrative indifference is not an isolated phenomenon. In *Yngvars saga víðförla*, King Eiríkr has a son called Óláfr svenski and a daughter *er eigi er nefnd* (who is not named).[343] King Hertryggr in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* has two daughters, both called Hildr (a very common element in women's names), who seem largely interchangeable.[344]

Much is often made in feminist critique of the nameless or impersonally named daughter. Stiebert neatly sums up the trend, remarking that '[t]he dominant current […] is that the namelessness of the daughter results from an ideology toxic to women and is an injustice that marginalizes and trivializes her role, marking her a victim, more expendable, and less consequential'.[345] Yet she argues that such an interpretation often ignores the fact that sons may as frequently be impersonally mentioned without it being taken as an adverse reflection on their importance. There are sons in the *fornaldarsögur* who are not named, the twelve sons of Arngrímr in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, for example, only the first six of whom are named.[346] *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* ends with the note that Hrómundr and his

[341] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 22 (I, 41).

[342] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 52 (I, 105).

[343] *Yngvars saga víðförla*, ch. 1 (II, 425).

[344] *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, ch. 1 (III, 325). Henceforth *Egils saga einhenda*.

[345] Stiebert, p. 83.

[346] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 1 (II, 2). Though a verse in *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 14 (II, 252) provides a complete tally of all twelve names, suggesting there were multiple traditions.

wife had sons and daughters together, providing names for neither gender.[347] For the most part however, if a child is important enough to be mentioned in saga narrative, it is important enough to be named, whether that child is a son or a daughter. Many daughters are only mentioned in sagas in passing but they are not left nameless: Gautrekr's daughter Helga in *Gautreks saga*;[348] Dagný and Dagbjört the daughters of Hrólfr in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*;[349] Herrauðr's daughter Þóra in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*;[350] and Geirmundr's daughter Ýri in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*.[351] Namelessness versus being named is an unreliable measure by which to gauge narrative consequence. There are many daughters who appear in sagas in name only and there are many named daughters, discussed above, who are characterised with care and provide a counterpoint to the daughter's frequent insignificance in literature. These examples demonstrate that daughters were often of great narrative and, by extension, social value and significance.

The historical absence of daughters from many medieval Icelandic families may in fact have increased the daughter's social and emotional value within the family unit. Numerous scholars have suggested that selective female infanticide may have been practised in Iceland. Nancy Wicker has argued that 'Old Norse literary sources also mention fewer females than should be the case according to natural sex ratios. […] While the scarcity of women and girls in written sources is not conclusive proof of infanticide, this testimony supports the proposition of female infanticide when considered alongside other evidence' such as the dearth of women's remains.[352] Such a dearth is considered especially noteworthy given the nature of Viking society 'in which heavy male outward migration and warfare might have led to an overabundance of women if not for the levelling effect of female infanticide at home'.[353] Clover agrees, suggesting Icelandic society may have been trapped in a vicious circle since 'when male attrition rates are high, female infanticide is used *not just to correct but to overcorrect* for that attrition, with the result that males are driven in even greater

[347] *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*, ch. 10 (II, 422).

[348] *Gautreks saga*, ch. 8 (IV, 35).

[349] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 38 (III, 279).

[350] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs,* ch. 16 (III, 322).

[351] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 17 (II, 134).

[352] Nancy L. Wicker, 'Selective Female Infanticide as Partial Explanation for the Dearth of Women in Viking Age Scandinavia', in *Violence and Society in the Early Medieval West*, ed. by Guy Halsall (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), pp. 205–21 (p. 209).

[353] Wicker, p. 213.

numbers into the activities that bring about their attrition to begin with'.[354] She proposes that Iceland's status as a frontier society likely contributed further to an imbalanced sex ratio and that the scarcity of women in Iceland may have increased their informal power, even while such empowerment resulted in a corresponding contraction in their legal rights and freedoms in an effort to reinforce a woman's traditional role.[355]

If such analyses are true, violence is inaugurated from the very first moment of father-daughter relations, when the father is free and indeed more likely to discard a female child at birth. At the same time, however, the practice would testify to a positive desire for those daughters who did survive. Selective female infanticide would make it more not less likely that daughters surviving to adulthood would have been cherished by their parents, though the practice implies systemic indifference and ambivalence toward daughters in general.

However, it is worth sounding a note of caution. Infanticide, especially female infanticide, is rarely touched on in the legendary sagas, the *Poetic Edda* or the *Prose Edda*. This could be attributed to shame surrounding the practice, but it would be wrong to allow it to colour an analysis of father-daughter narrative relations, which erupt in violence not at birth but at a daughter's maturation. For those who define the daughter by her absence, female infanticide might appear a crucial foundation to the father-daughter dynamic, but the actual narratives focus instead on the ambiguity of the daughter's role and her shifting identifications and loyalties. The anxiety this provokes is best exemplified by Brana, who is daughter, mother, lover, every female role imaginable and yet ends up alone and outside of normative kinship structures.

Brana is introduced in *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra* as the daughter of the giant Járnhauss and a kidnapped Norman princess. Her mother is already dead but she turns on the remainder of her family to help her lover Hálfdan, whom she encourages to kill her father. Although she admits that she does not want to have to see the deed, when Hálfdan proves unequal to the task, Brana takes over and is surprisingly philosophical about her kin-slaying:

> Þá kom Brana at ok mælti: "Ek mun sjálf verða at drepa föður minn, því at ek sé, at þér getið eigi banat honum, ok mun þat illa fyrir mælast, ef ek verð honum at bana, en þó skal þat nú vera."

[354] Carol J. Clover, 'The Politics of Scarcity: Notes on the Sex Ratio in Early Scandinavia', *Scandinavian Studies*, 60 (1988), 147–88 (p. 172) [emphasis in original].

[355] Clover, 'Politics of Scarcity', p. 179.

> Brana hleypr nú at ok höggr á háls honum með saxinu, ok lét hann svá sitt líf.[356]
>
> (Then Brana arrived and said, 'I must kill my father myself, because I see that you are unable to kill him and it will be badly spoken of, if I become his slayer, nevertheless it shall now be so.'
>
> Brana now sprang forward and struck at his neck with the short sword, and so he lost his life.)

Brana's actions are extraordinary. In the context of Western myth and legend, Boose comments that 'as a mythic motif, daughters killing fathers is comparatively rare. The daughter's need for paternal approval and her residual awe of the godlike father seem to override the violent impulses of revenge or competition'.[357] In the rare occurrences of the motif the daughter, like Brana, is usually motivated by desire for the hero and is always punished for her transgression. True to this pattern Brana is not to become Hálfdan's wife, in spite of her efforts on his behalf, but his foster-mother instead, facilitating his ultimate marriage to the Princess of England, Marsibil.

Little attention has been paid to Brana's patricide. McKinnell draws out the ambivalence inherent in the act, when he notes that '[t]he feeling is clearly expressed here that killing the father figure is a morally dubious act, however much of a monster he may be'.[358] He does not talk at all about the implications of Brana killing her father, however, since he considers the entire motif expressive of displaced father-son tension. He interprets Járnhauss not as Brana's father but as 'a transferred representative of the protagonist's own father', therefore Hálfdan has to be absolved of responsibility for killing him, 'even if it means that Brana must do it herself'.[359] Brana is characterised, therefore, as 'a fantasy of male irresponsibility'.[360]

I would argue instead that Brana is rather a representation of filial mutability. She suffers few consequences for the murder of her father and his giantish ancestry is undoubtedly a factor which allows her patricide to be presented in a positive light. Yet the new identities

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[356] *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, ch. 7 (IV, 304).

[357] Boose, p. 39.

[358] John McKinnell, 'The Fantasy Giantess: Brana in *Hálfdanar saga Brǫnufóstra*', in *Fornaldarsagaerne*, ed. by Ney, Ármann Jakobsson and Lassen, pp. 201–22 (p. 210)

[359] McKinnell, 'Fantasy Giantess', p. 210.

[360] McKinnell, 'Fantasy Giantess', p. 209.

formed by Brana as lover to Hálfdan and mother to his child are also important in counterbalancing any ignominy she might have suffered for her actions in the role of daughter to Járnhauss. While she transgresses one kinship relationship, she ultimately confirms another and so the positive effects of her action are stressed in place of her betrayal. It is Brana's ability to inhabit such an array of kinship roles which protects and preserves her from disgrace and means she may pose a valid threat to her father. The narrative thus confirms it is not the daughter's absence but her changing role which defines her and provokes paternal anxiety if such a change cannot be controlled to his own advantage.

Boose argues that '[t]yrannical paternity seems to mar the father-daughter text even more conspicuously than that of father and son' but this is not the case in Old Norse myth and legend.[361] Like father-son relationships, father-daughter relationships are underpinned by deep-rooted ambivalence, but it is not the competitive antagonism of father-son relations. Violence is much less conspicuous in father-daughter interaction but that does not make daughters meek or compliant with their father's authority. Daughters find myriad ways in these Old Norse narratives to circumvent the limitations placed upon them by their fathers, whether it be killing them, as Brana does, slipping away to see lovers, like Bǫðvildr, or taking on a masculine identity like Þornbjörg. Their challenges to paternal authority are founded on the ease and fluidity with which daughters may shed their filial identities and emphasise instead their roles as wives, sisters, mothers or even sons.

Paternal ambivalence toward the son arises because of what the father knows the son will one day become, because the son is the father's natural successor and competitor. By contrast, paternal ambivalence toward the daughter arises because the daughter is an unknown quantity who may take many forms and adopt many different loyalties. It is because the father does not know what his daughter will become that he is often wary of her and her marriage, seeking to manipulate this critical transition for his own ends to preserve his place in her affections. In doing so, he frequently frustrates her desires, reconfirming the ambivalence she feels towards him as both protector and imprisoner.

Given that all kinship relations are founded on transience and in a state of continual development, the mutability of the daughter in literature perhaps comes closest to kinship in life. The daughter's ability to transform with ease, into a wife, a mother, even a son at times, is not a bold threat like that posed by the often-violent son but rather an insidious threat which may manifest in a variety of ways. Although yet lacking any chance to attain security and influence through their children, in their mutability daughters are in some ways more

[361] Boose, p. 37.

powerful than their mothers. Theirs is the strength of opportunity and flexibility and to them more narrative options may be open, while mothers are no longer able to bend in such a way but break instead, sometimes brutally, as the following chapter explores.

IV. MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN

Just as the daughter has been characterised in some critical discourse by absence, so too has the mother, who is, after all, only a daughter at a later stage in life. Julia Kristeva linked the mother to her understanding of the Abject, 'the "object" of primal repression' which we are compelled to cast away from ourselves to preserve our own sense of identity.[362] Paul Acker points out that 'patriarchal culture will have a stake in this form of abjection in its attempt to control the means of reproduction. The mother line may be effaced in the system of patronymics'.[363] His observation, made with reference to the abjection of the maternal in *Beowulf*, chimes with Sinclair's identification of an 'ideological "writing out" of the feminine in the medieval articulation of its own social ideal' in the French *chansons de geste* and with Jochens' remarks on the absence of the *kvennkné* (female link) in medieval Norwegian conceptions of royal genealogy.[364] Nikki Stiller talks even more dramatically of the 'total obliteration of the mother's role found in medieval works' since 'in medieval times, all children were their father's children'.[365] The vast majority of mothers in Old Norse legendary literature are peripheral figures who do not intrude on the all-male genealogy, but sit invisibly in what Sinclair calls the 'white space' of the text and function as an empty conduit for the male dynastic line, filling in 'the interstices of a tale told between men'.[366] This position, she suggests, allows apparently marginalised mothers to 'undercut the very system they apparently seek to maintain', which has relegated them and their contributions to absent status.[367]

Mothers are certainly not as frequently depicted in Old Norse literature as fathers, sons or even daughters. As Jochens has explored, 'motherhood and mothers' relations with their children are subjects that receive scant attention in the sagas'.[368] She continues, '[w]hen

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[362] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. by Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 12.

[363] Paul Acker, 'Horror and the Maternal in "Beowulf"', *PMLA*, 121 (2006), 702–16 (p. 709).

[364] Sinclair, p. 55; Jenny Jochens, 'The Politics of Reproduction: Medieval Norwegian Kingship', *The American Historical Review*, 92 (1987), 327–49 (p. 335).

[365] Nikki Stiller, *Eve's Orphans: Mothers and Daughters in Medieval English Literature*, Contributions in Women's Studies, 16 (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), pp. 4, 15.

[366] Sinclair, p. 160.

[367] Sinclair, p. 163.

[368] Jenny Jochens, 'Old Norse Motherhood', in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. by John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler, The New Middle Ages, 3, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities, 1979 (London: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 201–22 (p. 202).

mothers are included in the narratives they are more likely to be callous or indifferent', than devoted and affectionate.[369] For Jochens, the depiction of motherhood in Old Norse literature concurs 'with the conclusion reached by recent scholarship, that love and self-service (beyond the demands imposed by biology) are not universal and "essential" features of maternal behaviour'.[370] As early as 1980, Elisabeth Badinter presented evidence, culled mainly from examples of maternal indifference in eighteenth-century France, to support her 'conviction that maternal instinct is a myth'.[371] More recently, Sarah LaChance Adams has argued that 'maternal ambivalence results from mothers' efforts to achieve both intimacy and separation in relation to their children and that this is likely to be an aspect of all mother-child relationships'.[372] She suggests the image of the Janus Head as a figure for the inherently ambivalent nature of maternity.[373] In this respect, maternity is very much like paternity, which is likewise inherently ambivalent, as explored in chapters II and III. In most other respects, however, maternity is set up as paternity's foil. If maternity is defined by absence it is because of paternity's overwhelming presence in both narratives of families and their genealogies, which leaves little space for maternal contributions. For some critics, maternity can be defined by certainty, an assurance that the child produced is without question her own flesh and blood, in contrast to the inherent uncertainty of paternity before the advent of genetic testing.[374] This certainty is grounded in the physicality of maternity, in its inextricable association with the body, encouraged no doubt by the biological facts of gestation, birth and nursing. The inescapably physical nature of maternity again contrasts with the father's verbal declaration of paternity and thus recognition and acceptance of his children after birth and his bestowal of his name upon them via the patronymic.

The literary fixation on the spectacle of the maternal body is a reminder of maternal presence which belies the supposed absence of the mother. The same maternal body, which in its ability to produce sons offered women a means of attaining power and influence in the medieval world, is subjected to extreme trauma in the poems of the *Poetic Edda* and the

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[369] Jochens, 'Old Norse Motherhood', p. 202.

[370] Jochens, 'Old Norse Motherhood', p. 203.

[371] Elisabeth Badinter, *The Myth of Motherhood: An Historical View of the Maternal Instinct*, trans. by Roger DeGaris (London: Souvenir Press, 1981), p. 327.

[372] Sarah LaChance Adams, *Mad Mothers, Bad Mothers and What a "Good" Mother Would Do: The Ethics of Ambivalence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. 32.

[373] LaChance Adams, p. 71.

[374] See Stephanie Chamberlain, 'Fantasizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England', *College Literature*, 32.3 (2005), 72–91 (p. 73) and MacFaul, p. 2.

fornaldarsögur. Svanhildr, step-mother to her husband Jǫrmunrekkr's son, is brutally trampled to death by horses.[375] The unnamed mother of Hildr in *Sörla þáttr* is bodily crushed under the prow of a ship in the course of her daughter's abduction.[376] Sifka in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* is deliberately pushed from her lover's shoulder as he carries her across a river, so that her back is broken and her body is left to float unceremoniously downstream.[377] In these examples the damage is violent and fatal, but the disintegration of the maternal body can be expressed in more fantastical ways as well. In *Völsunga saga* Siggeirr's mother is a shape-shifter who takes the form of a monstrous she-wolf and goes out each night to devour Völsungr's sons.[378] *Oddrúnargrátr* implies that Atli's mother can also change shape, becoming a snake in the snake-pit, where Gunnarr meets his end.[379] In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, the maternal body simply disappears when the elfin woman, who gives birth to Hrólfr's daughter Skuld, deposits the child with her father and is never seen again.[380] Her body is neither destroyed nor changed but is suddenly not present. These sagas continually depict the maternal body as fragile and vulnerable to violence and, in their fragmentation of the maternal body, they conform to the pattern found in other medieval literature. Sinclair talks, for example, of the 'conflict and fragmentation […] in the figuring of the mother and the maternal body' found in the French *chansons de geste*.[381]

If the body is not shown being broken, it can instead be violated and pass the corruptive consequences on to any subsequent children. Áslaug, in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar,* gives birth to a boneless son because her husband lies with her immediately after their wedding instead of waiting three nights to do so.[382] Bera, in *Hrólfs saga kraka,* twice swallows portions of her dead husband's bear-transformed flesh with the result that her first

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[375] *Am.* prose (p. 263). I treat Svanhildr as a maternal figure here since it is her failure as a step-mother—exemplified by the accusation of adultery with her husband's son—which causes her death and seals her dynastic sterility. This contrasts with the maternal success of her half-sister Áslaug, as discussed in section 1.i below. See Carolyne Larrington, '*Stjúpmæðrasögur* and Sigurðr's Daughters', in *Á Austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint Papers of the 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala 9th—15th August 2009*, ed. by Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), pp. 568–75.

[376] *Sörla þáttr*, ch. 7 (I, 377).

[377] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 9 (II, 35–36).

[378] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 5 (I, 118–19).

[379] *Od*. 32 (p. 239).

[380] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 15 (I, 28–29).

[381] Sinclair, p. 19.

[382] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 6 (I, 239).

two sons are born with elk's legs and hound's feet respectively.[383] Likewise, Loki in *Hyndluljoð* brings forth an entire evil race of ogresses when he eats the heart of a witch and becomes impregnated:

> Loki át af hiarta lindi brendo,
> fann hann hálfsviðinn hugstein kono;
> varð Loptr qviðugr af kono illri,
> þaðan er á foldo flagð hvert komit.[384]
>
> (Loki ate from a linden-wood roasted heart,
> He found, half-charred, a woman's stone of courage [>HEART]
> Lopt became pregnant by an evil woman,
> From whom every ogress on earth is descended.)

Although Loki is known for fathering monstrous children, he appears elsewhere as the mother of the eight-legged Sleipnir, which is positively described in *Gylfaginning* as the best of horses.[385] His maternity appears to have been corrupted in this instance by his act of ingestion. With Loki in the maternal role and the heart which impregnates him also belonging to a woman, this conception becomes an act of purely maternal parthenogenesis, with predictably terrible results. These mothers, both male and female, prove the truth of Peggy McCracken's assertion that 'the power to corrupt lineage is located in the maternal body'.[386] This was a view expressed not only in narrative but also in scientific works. Medieval medical writings were explicitly concerned with the harmful effects maternal fluids could have on foetuses and nursing infants, particularly the dangers posed by menstrual blood, which had a 'propensity toward "corruption"'.[387]

In its vulnerability to both violence and corruption, the maternal body appears simultaneously weak and threatening. The sorcerous and often deadly power of mothers like Grímhildr, Atli's mother and Siggeirr's mother are evidence of the danger and fear associated

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[383] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 27 (I, 51).

[384] *Hdl*. 41 (p. 294).

[385] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 15 (p. 17).

[386] Peggy McCracken, *The Romance of Adultery: Queenship and Sexual Transgression in Old French Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), p. 134.

[387] William F. MacLehose, 'Nurturing Danger: High Medieval Medicine and the Problem(s) of the Child', in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. by Parsons and Wheeler, pp. 3–24 (p. 9).

with maternity. This fear motivates the violence often meted out to the maternal body, which confirms that body's reassuring conquerability, even as the continued assaults reinforce anxieties around its ultimate indefensibility and potential to admit corruption. It is the idealisation of maternal absence which necessitates that the actual intrusion of the maternal body into a narrative be rendered violent and traumatic. Thus, when maternity makes its presence known, it is often with devastating effects, whether it is Guðrún's murder of her sons by Atli,[388] the death of Völsungr's sons one by one in the merciless jaws of the maternal she-wolf[389] or even Frigg's efforts to protect her son Baldr, which ultimately bring about the circumstances leading to his death.[390]

This chapter explores the depiction of mother-child relations in Old Norse mythic-heroic literature, arguing that just like father-son and father-daughter interactions, they are characterised by ambivalence, arising from a mother's precarious position in society, at the mercy of her gender and often dependent on her male children for support. Children could be a source of support and security for their mothers and a route to power and influence, but they could also be reminders of rape or a distasteful marriage, while childbirth could threaten the mother's very life. To their children, mothers could be a source of protection and affection or alternatively the perpetrator of the child's abuse or even death. I first examine mother-son relationships where a mother's protective instincts are most in evidence, focusing especially on Áslaug and Frigg in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Snorra Edda*, respectively. These idealised mothers are spared the horrific fragmentation of the maternal body, managing to rise above the confines of maternal physicality, but only at the cost of their sons' lives, hinting at ambivalent feelings toward their sons despite their protective intentions. I then explore mother-daughter relations, which are so ambivalent as to approach bitterness and which only flourish in the non-human world of troll women and giantesses, where the physical body of the mother can be embraced without violence. I conclude by returning to the theme of maternal ambivalence and its foundation in the physical and social vulnerability of the mother.

1. Mothers and Sons: The Protective Mother

Stephan Grundy commented of the *Íslendingasögur* that:

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[388] *Akv*. 36–37 (p. 246); *Am*. 77–79 (pp. 258–59).

[389] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 5 (I, 118–19).

> […] the relationship between mother or adoptive maternal figure and grown son stands out as one of unusual closeness, in which the mother's ability to affect the world for her son's benefit, and dedication to doing so, is remarkable for its power in both the supernatural and social spheres.[391]

The closeness Grundy identifies may well reflect historical realties: Jochens is adamant that medieval Icelandic mothers '[u]ndoubtedly […] maintained close—if not loving—relations with their sons', who were legally responsible 'for maintaining her if she needed it, even by going into debt if necessary'.[392]

The image of the protective mother is well-documented in the *fornaldarsögur* too, where mothers display great dedication to their sons. Gunnlöð in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* single-handedly saves more than just her son's life when, after the great battle in which King Hálfr dies, she:

> fór til valsins um nóttina at leita sona sinna. Hún fann Innstein dauðan, en Útstein særðan ólífis ok Bárð ok Björn. Hún ók þeim til bæjar ok græddi þá á laun.[393]
>
> (went among the slain during the night to search for her sons. She found Innstein dead, and Útstein mortally wounded, and also Bárðr and Björn. She drove them to her farmstead and healed them secretly.)

Hildr in *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra* is initially reluctant to allow her young son Illugi to join Prince Sigurðr on his first voyage, claiming 'son sinn ungan vera ok eigi í hernað fara mega' (her son was young and could not go raiding).[394] Anxiously Hildr protests that '"Er hann ok ekki reyndr,"' ('He is also not experienced') and only after he is tested, by fighting and killing his mother's magical slave-woman, Sunnlöð, when she tries to ride him and beat him, does his mother relent and allow him to accompany the prince.[395] In *Af Upplendinga konungum*,

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[390] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 49 (p. 45).

[391] Stephan Grundy, 'The Viking's Mother: Relations between Mothers and their Grown Sons in Icelandic Sagas', in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. by Parsons and Wheeler, pp. 223–37 (p. 223).

[392] Jochens, 'Old Norse Motherhood', p. 216.

[393] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 14 (II, 118).

[394] *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, ch. 2 (III, 414)

[395] *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, ch. 2 (III, 414)

after the death of her husband, Ása 'fór norðr á Agðir með Hálfdan, son sinn, hann var þá vetrgamall' (went north to Agðir with Hálfdan, her son, he was then a winter old) and raises him there, out of reach of his half-brother, Óláfr, who is already full-grown, and might wish to rid himself of his infant rival for the kingdom.[396] In a similar fashion Auðr in *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*:

> býr hún ferð sína ok hefir með sér Harald, son sinn, ok margt stórmenni fór með henni ór landi.[397]
>
> (prepared for her journey and had with her Haraldr, her son, and many men of rank went with her out of the land.)

The move is clearly intended to protect her young son from her father's plotting.[398] Yrsa is among those who avenge the death of her son (and brother) Hrólfr in *Hrólfs saga kraka* and her second husband, Aðils, professes his dissatisfaction that her loyalties lie with her son by her first marriage and not with him when he picks up a ring Yrsa had earlier given Hrólfr from where Hrólfr has thrown it to the ground.[399] The same saga also depicts a closeness between Böðvarr, the youngest son of Björn, and his mother Bera, who *unni honum mikit* (loved him very much).[400] Böðvarr is the last of his brothers to leave his mother's home and is also blessed to be the only son not to suffer any ill effects from his mother's forced ingestion of his father's dead flesh. *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* mentions how Bósi, not his handsomer elder brother, is beloved of his mother, Brynhildr.[401] In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, Hervör shows clear favouritism for her son Heiðrekr, even after he kills his brother Angantýr, whom their father favoured; she gives Heiðrekr the sword Tyrfingr and at her urging his father is convinced to offer him some good advice as he departs into exile.[402] Again and again

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[396] *Af Upplendinga konungum*, ch. 2 (II, 147)

[397] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 2 (I, 345).

[398] For further discussion of Auðr's relationship with her father see chapter III section 2.i.

[399] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 45 (I, 89–90): '"Hollari hefir sá verit Hrólfi konungi en mér, sem honum hefir fengit þessa gersemi"' ('That one has been more loyal to King Hrólfr than to me, who has given him this treasure').

[400] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 30 (I, 55).

[401] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, ch. 2 (III, 285).

[402] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 5 (II, 24–26)

maternal affection wells up where paternal affection is denied, either deliberately withheld or rendered irrelevant by paternal absence.

Neither is this love one-sided: many *fornaldarsögur* heroes show special affection for their mothers, although admittedly expressed in odd ways. In *Ketils saga hængs*, Ketill disappears for three days only to return with a chair: 'hann gaf hann móður sinni ok kveðst henni meiri ást eiga at launa en föður sínum' (he gave it to his mother and said that he had rewarded her for her greater love rather than his father).[403] In a repetition of the same motif, Án, of *Áns saga bogsveigis*, '[l]ítit ástríki hafði hann af feðr sínum, en móðir hans unni honum mikit' (had little affection from his father but his mother loved him very much) and in recognition of this love he brings her a dwarven chair saying that he 'henni eiga bezt at launa' (had rewarded her the best).[404] She, in turn, gives him a *loðkápa* (fur cloak) which he takes to wearing later in the saga; the cloak is a physical symbol of her maternal protection and is explicitly identified as preserving him when he is thrown bodily into a fire.[405] Ásmundr's mother is the first to recognise him when he returns home in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* and he greets her affectionately, so affectionately, in fact, that his father becomes jealous of the handsome stranger, demanding to know 'er hún léti svá líkliga við' (toward whom she [his wife] was behaving so favourably).[406] Völsungr's mother loses her own life in her efforts to birth her son after six year's gestation and her devotion is rewarded with a kiss from her newborn offspring before she dies.[407] Finally, Hrólfr in *Hrólfs saga kraka* is depicted as extremely fond of his mother, entirely unperturbed by their incestuous relationship. It is described how he 'mælir ástsamliga til móður sinnar, ok skilja þau með blíðu' (spoke affectionately with his mother and they parted from each other with tenderness).[408]

Such strong attachments to sons as opposed to daughters, especially in those sagas where maternity coincides with queenship, is surely a measure of the necessity for male offspring to secure a wife's or queen's position. Snotra in *Gautreks saga* is a textbook example of how a woman might pursue maternity to advance her position, carefully choosing the first exogamous partner available to her in the form of King Gauti, knowing a pregnancy

[403] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 1 (II, 151).

[404] *Áns saga bogsveigis*, ch. 1 (II, 368–69).

[405] *Áns saga bogsveigis*, ch. 4 (II, 375).

[406] *Egils saga einhenda*, ch. 18 (III, 364).

[407] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 2 (I, 112)

[408] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 44 (I, 88).

might enable her to escape the confines of her parents' deliberately sterile existence.[409] Her success may be measured by Gauti's invitation to 'koma á sinn fund, svá sem henni þætti tími til' (come to meet him whenever the time seemed right to her),[410] and find him she does, once she has claimed her inheritance, so her son may be raised at his father's court and in due time claim his.[411] Snotra knows that presence is the most important criterion for ensuring a stake in the patrimony, hence her motivation for refusing King Gauti's initial offer of accompanying him immediately, and she makes sure her son is equally well positioned by the time of his father's death, to his advantage and certainly to her own.

Unlike fathers, for whom, as established in chapter II, the son figured as a rival, mothers were unlikely to be directly threatened by their sons and, as Pauline Stafford has pointed out, if a king had multiple wives, either simultaneously or in succession, a mother and son would be natural allies against rival contenders to the throne.[412] Indeed, as Stafford notes, '[t]he remarkable fact, in view of the known tensions of family life, is that so many [royal mothers] succeeded in wielding so much influence, especially in the early years of a reign'.[413] In a more specifically Scandinavian study, Jochens notes that 'women who consorted with prominent men often suffered considerable hardship in an effort to protect and promote their offspring', citing the examples of Inga Varteig and the mothers of Óláfr Tryggvasonr and St Óláfr, all of whom were forced to move from place to place with their infant sons to keep them safe.[414] There is obviously an element of historical similitude to the characters painted in the *fornaldarsögur*. The actions of mothers like Ása and Auðr chime particularly closely with such historical examples but legend offered greater scope to explore maternal devotion and support, as demonstrated by the depiction of Áslaug, the consummate motherless mother, who forms the pivot around which an entire legendary dynasty turns and who wields considerable maternal influence that is positively rather than threateningly depicted in the text.

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[409] See Kalinke, 'Endogamy as the Crux'.

[410] *Gautreks saga*, ch. 1 (IV, 6)

[411] *Gautreks saga*, ch. 2 (IV, 10)

[412] Pauline Stafford, 'Sons and Mothers: Family Politics in the Early Middle Ages', in *Medieval Women*, ed. by Derek Baker (Oxford: Blackwell for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 1978), pp. 79–100 (p. 81).

[413] Stafford, p. 91.

[414] Jochens, 'Politics of Reproduction', p. 342.

i. Áslaug and Frigg: Transcending the Body

Áslaug in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* is the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, second wife of the famous Ragnarr loðbrók and mother to his sons, Ívarr, Björn, Hvítserkr, Rögnvaldr and Sigurðr, providing the bridge which ties his lineage into the heroic Völsung dynasty. McTurk has pointed out that '[t]he relatively little information about Áslaug was no doubt to the advantage of the Ragnarr loðbrók tradition, which was able to adapt her freely to its needs'.[415] Áslaug was undoubtedly a flexible legendary figure, a testament to a broad and varied tradition. In *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, Áslaug features prominently as an idealised maternal figure. For Áslaug, it is crucially not her body that changes but her name. Rather like Óðinn, for whom Ármann Jakobsson has noted the 'unusual variety' of different names and who is equally able to transcend his body, Áslaug's frequent name changes allow her to escape the bounds of her physicality.[416] With each transformation she reinvents herself and grows in self-importance. Her first name, Kráka, literally meaning 'crow', is given to her by her foster-mother, who declares: '"Hún skal eftir móður minni heita Kráka"' ('she shall be called Kráka, after my mother'), in a transparent attempt to integrate her into their family and claim her as their own.[417] At the same time, the name subtly dehumanises her, marking her out as a cuckoo in the nest of her supposed blood-relations.[418] In reclaiming her true name, bestowed upon her at birth by her parents, Áslaug pronounces her true lineage and confirms it with the birth of her son Sigurðr ormr í auga. Finally, she becomes known as Randalín, a valkyrie kenning meaning 'shield-goddess'.[419] It is unclear exactly who bestows this name upon her and tempting to read her name change as an act of self-expression and even self-construction, projecting a self-image that transcends even humanity. Unlike so many women, her own mother Brynhildr included, for whom marriage and maternity spelled an end to the social and personal freedoms associated with their status as valkyries or maiden-kings, Áslaug effects an unparalleled transformation in the opposite direction, from a lowly peasant girl to an empowered valkyrie-like queen.

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[415] McTurk, p. 178.

[416] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Óðinn as Mother: The Old Norse Deviant Patriarch', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 126 (2011), 5–16 (p. 11).

[417] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 1 (I, 225).

[418] Compare Yrsa, whose rejection by her birth-mother is symbolised by her name, which derives from her mother's dog. See section 2.ii below.

[419] McTurk, p. 178. McTurk cites Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Nafngiftir Oddaverja', in *Bidrag till nordisk filologi tillägnade Emil Olsen den 9. Juni 1936* (Lund: Gleerup, 1936), pp. 190–96 (p. 195).

As her name changes so too does her relationship with her body. Married to Ragnarr in the guise of the lowly Kráka, she is initially concerned by the corruptive dangers of her maternal body. She warns her husband Ragnarr that they must sleep separately for three nights after their marriage:

> "Þrjár nætr skulum þessar,
> ok þó saman, byggja
> †hressvar† nætr í höllu,
> áðr vit heilug goð blótim.
> Þó munu mein á mínum
> megi til löng of verða;
> heldr ertu bráðr at byrja
> þann, er bein hefir engi."[420]
>
> ('For these three nights, †…† nights, we shall dwell in the hall, and together besides, before we two sacrifice to the holy gods. Though the injury to my son will be too long-lasting; you are rather hasty to beget the one who has no bones.')

The reason behind the delay is unclear. Given the corrupting influence of menstrual blood in medieval medical thought, perhaps she is menstruating.[421] Unwilling to deny himself, Ragnarr ignores her advice with the result that their eldest son Ívarr is born 'beinlauss ok sem brjósk væri þar, sem bein skyldu vera' (boneless and as if there were cartilage where his bones should be) and must be carried about his entire life.[422]

In reclaiming her true name, however, Áslaug demonstrates the positive traits that may also be passed through the female bloodline and the importance of maternal heritage in the strengthening of a dynasty. Trapped in just such a situation as Stafford has explored, threatened by the prospect of her husband taking another wife, Áslaug's body transforms from an agent of corruption to a vital link in the dynastic chain and produces the son that will secure her position. Knowing of her pregnancy, she prophesies that '"mun þat vera sveinbarn,

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[420] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, 6, in *PFS*, p. 635. The entry includes full discussion of *hressvar* (l. 3) and the various proposed emendations and interpretations. Following the edition, I have left the word untranslated.

[421] MacLehose, p. 9.

[422] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 7 (I, 239).

er ek geng með, en á þeim sveini mun vera þat mark, at svá mun þykkja sem ormr liggi um auga sveininum"' ('it will be a boy that I am carrying and on that boy there will be that mark, which will seem like a serpent lying in the boy's eye').[423] If she is correct and such a sign appears, she demands that Ragnarr must give up his plans to take another, more nobly born, wife. To compound her claims to noble blood, she desires that her unborn son be named after her father, Sigurðr the famous dragon-slayer, '"ef í hans auga er þetta frægðarmark, sem ek ætla, at vera muni"' ('if that mark of glory is in his eyes, as I believe it will be').[424] Her prophecy proves true and in the time-honoured fashion Áslaug uses her maternal body and function to secure her royal position:

> Ok nú kemr upp ætt Áslaugar, svá at þat veit hverr maðr, at hún er dóttir Sigurðar Fáfnisbana ok Brynhildar Buðladóttur.[425]
>
> (And now the lineage of Áslaug became known, so that every man knew that she was the daughter of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and Brynhildr, daughter of Buðli.)

In her transformation from Kráka to Áslaug, Áslaug has become an exemplary mother, producing a string of sons, culminating in the begetting of a worthy successor to her father's name, with all its heroic connotations. Yet even in the birth of her final son Áslaug begins to rise above the physical, as her prophecy forces the text's gaze to shift away from her own body onto that of her offspring in order to read the sign of her parentage in his flesh.

Her move away from the confines of the maternal body continues in the great love she now demonstrates for her step-sons. In an inversion of the customary wicked step-mother motif, Áslaug is on excellent terms with Eirekr and Agnarr, the offspring of Ragnarr's first wife Þóra, and appears to grieve more at their deaths than at that of her biological son, Rögnvaldr. Her reception of the news of their deaths is bookended by two physical descriptions of her body, demonstrating the ways in which she is capable of using it as a signifier rather than being subject to its vulnerabilities. When the messengers come before her in her high seat, it is described how 'hafði hún einn líndúk fyrir knjám sér ok ætlaði at kemba sér, ok hárit hafði hún leyst' (she had a linen cloth across her knees and intended to

[423] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 9 (I, 245).

[424] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 9 (I, 245).

[425] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 9 (I, 247).

comb her hair and she had unbound her hair).[426] With her loose hair, the messengers clearly catch her in a private moment. The scene evokes Ragnarr's stipulation earlier in the saga that she come to meet him neither naked nor clothed, so that she arrives covered only by her hair and a fishing net.[427]

Torfi Tulinius suggests that Áslaug's hair evokes the story of St Agnes, who miraculously grew hair all over her body when a man attempted to strip her and make her a prostitute.[428] For Torfi Tulinius, Áslaug's hair is a means of hiding her from the male gaze. Her ostentatious combing of it would then serve as a distraction from her body, allowing her to figure as a mother rather than an object of desire. However, I would argue her unbound hair foreshadows the grief to come. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir argues that Guðrún's unbound hair in *Guðrúnarkviða I* symbolises 'a violent loss of emotional control'.[429] Though Áslaug is perfectly controlled, her unbound hair evokes grieving customs and thus helps to convey bodily her inward emotions at the tragic news. The way she drapes a cloth across her lap in preparation, presumably to catch the hairs that fall, could even be read as a somatic metaphor for kinship, similar to that employed by Erpr in *Hamðismál* as discussed in chapter I. Setting her own body up as a metonym for her family, the fallen hairs become her fallen sons, no less a bodily part of her than her biological offspring. Their mutual kinship in life and its severance on their death would thus be written into Áslaug's bodily spectacle.

The news that Eirekr and Agnarr have fallen is immediately followed by another physical description:

> Nú sjá þeir, at hún felldi tár, en þat var sem blóð væri álits, en hart sem haglkorn. Þat hafði engi maðr sét, at hún hefði tár fellt, hvárki áðr né síðan.[430]
>
> (Now they saw that she let fall a tear and that it was like blood in appearance and as hard as a hailstone. No man had ever seen that, that she should let fall a tear, neither before nor since.)

[426] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 10 (I, 251).

[427] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 5 (I, 233–34).

[428] Torfi Tulinius, pp. 133–35.

[429] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, 'Women and Subversion in Eddic Poetry', in *Revisiting the* Poetic Edda, ed. by Acker and Larrington, pp. 117–35 (p. 129).

[430] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 10 (I, 252).

Again, Áslaug's emotions are held in check but her grief is physically expressed. The tear is a further sign that her body is no longer biologically normative, but is capable of circumventing its biological functions and using them as signifiers. Moreover, the hardness of the blood-teardrop suggests an impenetrability at odds with the usually permeable nature of the maternal body and an implacability—for it will not disintegrate like a natural tear but presumably holds it shape even after it has fallen—that hints at Áslaug's third and final, armoured and unyielding persona. The teardrop is the last physical description related to Áslaug and its static nature begins to demonstrate her attainment of a static and unchanging ideal, marking the subtle renunciation of the physical which follows.[431] She is emphatic in her wish that her step-sons be avenged '"jafnt sem þeir væri mínir synir"' ('just as if they were my own sons') and their deaths precipitate her final name change.[432] It is fitting that, at the moment she strives to transcend human form and attain the status of the super-human as Randalín, she should do so for the sake of sons not born of her body but whom she considers no less her own. She confounds the dictates of purely biological kinship by putting her own sons at risk for the sake of avenging her step-sons.

As outlined above, the maternal body seems inherently changeable and vulnerable to transformation, perhaps because of the literal expansion and contraction which it undergoes during gestation and birth. It is significant that even Áslaug cannot escape this change but the transformation of her name instead of her body appears to allow her to control it and work her way toward a degree of freedom from the flesh. Rather than disappearing from the text once her genealogical function has been served, as so many mothers do, Randalín succeeds in making her body disappear instead. Having fulfilled its function by producing a string of sons to continue the lineage, one of whom even has the physical mark of his heritage inscribed upon him, Áslaug's body passes out of the system of exchange, as demonstrated by her decision to pursue revenge for her step-sons not through her husband, who may demand access to her body, but through her sons, for whom her voice is the chief means of influence. Her power is not without its limits; she is reliant upon the support of her youngest son to achieve her aims, she is denied a place on the ships by Ívarr and must content herself with leading the land forces, but she is ultimately successful in seeing revenge carried out.

Áslaug's unprecedented success in transcending the maternal body bears close similarity to the only maternal figure in the Norse pantheon, Frigg, Baldr's mother. Carolyne

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[431] She is later briefly mentioned as a *gömul kona* (old woman) but no physical description is given. *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 18 (I, 279).

[432] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 10 (I, 252).

Larrington has examined the 'implications of protectiveness and maternality' associated with the name Randalín.[433] 'That the base-word of the kenning, Hlín,' she writes 'is considered on the basis of Vsp 53 to be a by-name of Frigg, that famously grieving mother, only amplifies the way in which the Áslaug-tradition probes into motherhood, whether biological or social, and its reaction to the loss of sons'.[434] In Frigg we find another prominent example of the protective mother, yet as with Sigurðr ormr í auga it is the body of Baldr, her son, which is most prominently displayed in the narrative in contrast to the usual emphasis on the maternal body. In an even stronger inversion, it is Baldr's body that is penetrated by the fatal missile, carried out into full view and burned on the pyre, hinting at its vulnerability to corruption, literally the corruption of posthumous decay which will otherwise result. Frigg appears the perfect example of the protective mother and so it seems natural that she should be selected from among the Æsir to collect oaths not to harm Baldr from 'eldr ok vatn, járn ok alls konar málmr, steinar, jǫrðin, viðirnir, sóttirnar, dýrin, fuglarnir, eitr, ormar' (fire and water, iron and all kinds of metal, stones, the earth, the trees, the diseases, the animals, the birds, poison, snakes), in short everything in the Æsir's purview.[435] It is to her that these oaths are sworn on her son's behalf, though Snorri reports that:

> Óðinn bar þeim mun verst þenna skaða sem hann kunni mesta skyn hversu mikil aftaka ok missa Ásunum var í fráfalli Baldrs.[436]
>
> (Óðinn bore that injury the worst as he had the greatest understanding of how great a deprivation and loss to the Æsir the death of Baldr was.)

Only Óðinn understands that the tragedy is irreversible, as John Lindow puts it, he 'most clearly sees the implications' of his son's death.[437] Frigg's apparently lesser grief is chiefly because she is able to hold on to hope and she first recovers the power of speech, using it at the gathering of the Æsir to ask:

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[433] Larrington, '*Stjúpmæðrasögur*', p. 573.

[434] Larrington, '*Stjúpmæðrasögur*', p. 573.

[435] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 49 (p. 45).

[436] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 49 (p. 46).

[437] Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance*, p. 101.

> hverr sá væri með Ásum er eignask vildi allar ástir hennar ok hylli ok vili hann ríða á Helveg ok freista ef hann fái fundit Baldr ok bjóða Helju útlausn ef hon vill láta fara Baldr heim í Ásgarði.[438]
>
> (Who that one might be among the Æsir who wished to earn all her love and goodwill and was willing to ride the Hel-road and see if he could manage to find Baldr, and offer Hel a ransom if she would let Baldr go back to Ásgarðr.)

Lindow considers it 'a bit alarming that Frigg offers *ástir*, since when used in the plural, as here, this noun often refers to love that includes sexual congress'.[439] 'Even if such an offer seems fitting from the point of view of older religious conceptions of Frigg,' he continues, 'it does not seem wholly consistent with her role as concerned mother'.[440] Quinn, however, has pointed out that such an offer is entirely 'in accord with her reputation in *Lokasenna*; and it is effective'.[441] Indeed, using her body to achieve her own aims is entirely in keeping with her maternal role; it is the same strategy pursued by Snotra to escape her family and by Áslaug to prove her lineage. For the release of her son's body, Frigg fittingly offers her own but, in spite of the sexual overtones, her body does not actually appear in the text, being only alluded to very briefly. It cannot win her son back from Hel, only a volunteer to ride and seek him. It is her voice and not her body upon which Snorri focuses.

Frigg's entreaties for her son's life were a defining aspect of her character, as demonstrated by Oddi in litli Glúmsson's kenning for Frigg, 'beiði-Rindi | Baldrs' (begging-Rindr of Baldr).[442] Like Áslaug, she stands out as the protectress of a great lineage yet what is most striking about these consummate protective mothers is that they do not succeed in protecting their sons. Baldr dies and cannot be resurrected, while Áslaug, too, is predeceased by an alarming number of her progeny: Rögnvaldr dies in the battle at Hvítabær, her stepsons

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[438] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 49 (p. 46).

[439] Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance*, p. 101.

[440] Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance*, pp. 101–02.

[441] Judy Quinn, 'What Frigg Knew: The Goddess as Prophetess in Old Norse Mythology', in *Dee, profetesse, regine e altre figure femminili nel Medioevo germanico*, Atti del XL Convegno dell'Associazione Italiana di Filologia Germanica (Cagliari, 29–31 maggio 2013), ed. by Maria Elena Ruggierini and Veronika Szöke (Cagliari: CUEC, 2015), pp. 67–88 (p. 84).

[442] Oddi inn litli Glúmsson, 'Lausavísur' 1:3–4, ed. by Judith Jesch, in *Poetry from the Kings' Sagas 2: From c. 1035 to c. 1300*, ed. by Kari Ellen Gade, Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages, 2 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), p. 614.

Eirekr and Agnarr are defeated by King Eysteinn in Sweden and Hvítserkr falls in the east.[443] In the *þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, Hvítserkr survives but news is brought to Áslaug instead that Sigurðr ormr í auga has been killed in battle with the Emperor Arnulfr.[444] Even in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, although the implication is that Sigurðr outlives his mother the saga nevertheless declares that 'frá Sigurði orm í auga er mikill ættbogi kominn' (a great lineage is descended from Sigurðr snake in eye) not in the male line as is customary, but fittingly, given the status accorded his own maternal ancestry, in the female line since '[h]ans dóttir hét Ragnhildr, móðir Haralds ins hárfagra, er fyrstr réð öllum Noregi einn' (his daughter was called Ragnhildr, the mother of Haraldr Fairhair, who was the first sole ruler of all Norway).[445] Both Áslaug's penchant for non-physical procreation, as demonstrated by her step-mothering, and the emphasis on the female line continues in the *þáttr af Ragnars sonum* as she bestows her previous name, Áslaug, on her grand-daughter. In neither text is the death of Áslaug herself reported; she simply fades out of the stories. In the context of Frigg's maternal tragedy, it is also worth remembering the sad fate of her foster-son Agnarr in *Grímnismál*—'"hann elr born við gýgi í hellinom"' ('he raises children with a giantess in a cave')—in contrast to the royal success of her husband's protégé.[446]

There is an ambivalence expressed toward maternity in these fatal outcomes, the more so in the narrative of Baldr's death where Frigg is implicitly responsible for her son's demise as a result of her loose talk to the woman who is Loki in disguise. Lindow argues Loki 'approaches Frigg in her role as mother', casting Loki as an Odinic seducer, willing to shape-shift to get a son from a forbidden woman, although the getting is not sexual in this case.[447] It is both Loki's feminine guise and Frigg's maternal role that prove her undoing. By presenting their conversation as he does, Snorri attributes fatal consequences to female gossip, as secrets pass freely between the two women about events at the *þing*, which they should perhaps not be discussing at all, given their exclusion, as some have interpreted it, on account of their gender.[448] Not only is Frigg's ill-judged conduct thereby characterised as explicitly feminine but also maternal in nature. Frigg reveals to Loki that the mistletoe did not swear an oath because '"[s]á þótti mér ungr at krefja eiðsins"' ('that one seemed to me too young to demand

[443] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 8, 10, 18 (I, 241, 248, 251, 279).

[444] *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, ch. 5 (I, 301).

[445] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 18 (I, 280).

[446] *Grm*. prose (p. 56).

[447] Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance*, p. 59.

[448] Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance*, p. 59.

the oath from'), a transparent misjudgement for which there is no one to blame but herself.[449] Her description of the mistletoe as *ungr* effectively infantilises the plant and her qualifying *at krefja eiðsins* further designates it beneath the age of legal and social responsibility.[450] Her desire to treat the mistletoe differently due to its child-like age is thus presented as a particularly maternal instinct which paradoxically leads to the death of her own son. Frigg's inability to achieve her protective aims is thus inextricably bound up with her maternal characterisation. The limits of mother-son attachment are further exposed by the evocation of Loki's own mother by the matronymic Laufeyjarson, a bitter reminder that Loki's matrilineal kinship ties to the Æsir were not enough to bind his loyalties to them above the giant-kin of his father, Farbauti.

Despite their outward differences both Áslaug and Frigg have more in common with those Medean-mothers who murder their sons than first appears. Larrington praises Áslaug, describing her as a 'heroine' rather than a 'mere conduit for masculine bloodlines'.[451] She is correct, Áslaug is not a mere conduit, a trait she shares with mothers like Signý and Guðrún and it is exactly this which makes her dangerous, for in rising above the maternal body and with it the 'genealogical imperative […] that opens up this space for the inclusion of the mother', identified by Sinclair, maternal figures erupt into narratives which do not hold the space to accommodate them and so are forced to present them as disruptions, dangerous disturbances to the lineage, whatever their avowed intentions or emotions.[452]

Áslaug and Frigg represent maternal ambivalence from one end of the spectrum where their apparent protectiveness is at odds with the results of their labours. Both succeed in diverting the change and violence which is usually inflicted on the maternal body away from themselves but neither can escape it completely: Áslaug's name absorbs the capacity for change usually found in the maternal body; while for Frigg the damage is displaced onto the body of the very son she was trying to protect. Guðrún and Signý in *Völsunga saga* present a mirror image in which their vocal intent seems clearly aligned with its murderous results but

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[449] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 49 (p. 45).

[450] For discussion on the age of maturity in Iceland see Chris Callow, 'Transitions to Adulthood in Early Icelandic Society', in *Children, Childhood and Society*, ed. by Sally Crawford and Gillian Shepherd, BAR International Series, 1696 (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007), pp. 45–55. See also Carolyne Larrington, 'Awkward Adolescents: Male Maturation in Norse Literature', in *Youth and Age in the Medieval North*, ed. by Shannon Lewis-Simpson, Northern World, 42 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 151–66.

[451] Carolyne Larrington, 'Þóra and Áslaug in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*: Women, Dragons and Destiny', in *Making History*, ed. by Arnold and Finlay, pp. 53–68 (p. 66).

[452] Sinclair, p. 67.

who yet express great ambivalence in their performance of the violent acts. Signý never goes quite so far as to raise a hand to her own children, always working instead through a proxy, and her decision to burn with the family she has helped to destroy physically expresses her conflicting interests and divided loyalties as will be further explored in chapter V section 1.i.[453] Guðrún's ambivalence is even easier to read because more vocally expressed in the adjective *buri* (beloved) she uses to describe her dead offspring in *Atlakviða* and in the desperately positive spin she puts on their deaths in *Atlamál* where she professes the wish *at lyfia ycr elli* (to cure your old age).[454] Even her son Sörli is not blind to her mixed feelings, asserting that she will weep for them, her remaining sons, once they have ridden to their deaths as she urges them, though perhaps this is only wishful thinking on his part.[455]

While mother-son relationships are more frequently presented in a positive light than not, it is noticeable that there remains an unspoken discomfort when such relationships are explored in more depth and the lineage is threatened when the mother advances too far into the foreground, forsaking the white space for the main body of the text. In erasing the physical threat of the maternal and making transcendent figures out of Frigg and Áslaug, authors attempt to present an alternative narrative for maternity, one which shores up rather than corrupts the paternal lineage. In bringing her out of the margins the mother is elevated instead, lifted above the mundane and forged into a lofty, idealised exemplar who is no more integrated into the genealogical progression than the conventionally 'absent presence' of the maternal link. Though these mothers transcend the vulnerability of the maternal body, they do so at the cost of those they were attempting to protect. Their exceptional narratives reinforce a self-sacrificing, self-abnegating image of maternity by making the cost of self-preservation so high.

2. Mothers and Daughters: The Perverse Mother

Compared to mother-son relationships, depictions of mother-daughter interactions are rare in mythic-heroic texts. Like many of the mothers themselves, mother-daughter relations are often invisible, sometimes implied but infrequently depicted. Not only in mythic-heroic texts but in Old Norse literature more widely, '[i]nformation about mothers and daughters—not to speak about a loving relationship—is extremely rare'.[456] There is evidence enough, however,

[453] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 6–8 (I, 119–28).

[454] *Akv*. 38:8 (p. 246); *Am*. 78:4 (p. 259).

[455] *Hm*. 10:5–6 (p. 270).

[456] Jochens, 'Old Norse Motherhood', p. 212.

to demonstrate that closeness between mother and daughter was not encouraged. Guðrún's excessive grief at the death of Svanhildr, leads her to destroy what little is left of her family. Only bitterness results from Ólöf's continual confrontation with her own disgrace in the form of her daughter Yrsa in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. These cautionary exemplars contrast with the highly successful career of Áslaug, who fared much better as a mother herself for being sent away by her own mother, Brynhildr, shortly after she was born. Áslaug's most positive parental figure as a child is her male foster-father, Heimir, since neither her birth-mother nor her foster-mother are depicted as particularly nurturing individuals.

Only two mother-daughter relationships provide enough material for close analysis, Ólöf and Yrsa in *Hrólfs saga kraka* and Grímhildr and Guðrún, in both *Völsunga saga* and the *Poetic Edda*. Both are suggestive of a deep-rooted ambivalence at the heart of mother-daughter relationships, which both recalls that expressed between mothers and sons yet at the same time is distinct from it. It is the coincidence of gender which makes mother-daughter relations so singular, for, as with fathers and sons, mothers and daughters hold up a mirror to one another. Mothers raise daughters who will one day be mothers in their turn and so, like the father-son relationship, mother-daughter relations provide a space for self-reflection, wherein mother and daughter respond to the hints of their past or future which they identify in the experience of the other.

i. Grímhildr and Guðrún: Becoming the Mother

Grímhildr is introduced in *Völsunga saga* as *in fjölkunnga* (the one skilled in magic)[457] and described as a *grimmhuguð kona* (grim-minded woman).[458] She is quickly established as an influential queen, far busier on her dynasty's behalf than her husband, King Gjúki. In the saga, it is Grímhildr who arranges the match between Guðrún and Sigurðr, not Gjúki. Indeed she goes so far as to persuade her husband to offer Sigurðr their daughter as a bride rather than wait for him to make the customary approach in case the opportunity should be lost.[459] Ever eager to expand her influence, which is always anchored in her maternity, she tells Sigurðr she will be like a mother to him, pronouncing: '"Þinn faðir skal vera Gjúki konungr, en ek móðir"' ('Your father shall be King Gjúki, and I your mother')[460]. Similarly, Guðrún tells Brynhildr not to blame Grímhildr for their unhappy situation, '"því at hún er til þín sem

[457] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 25 (I, 169).

[458] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 25 (I, 169).

[459] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 26 (I, 173–74).

[460] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 26 (I, 173).

til dóttur sinnar"' ('because she treats you like her own daughter'), a comment that is darkly ironic in its truthfulness, for Grímhildr's cruel treatment of Brynhildr is no more than she metes out to her own daughter by blood.[461] There is little closeness between mother and daughter, in fact, as Grundy points out, 'Guðrún is specifically sacrificed by her mother for the sake of her brothers'.[462] In a similar vein it could be said that Grímhildr is true to her word in treating Sigurðr like a son as *fortölur Grímhildar* (Grímhildr's persuasions) are implicated in the murder of Sigurðr, and as a result she is indirectly implicated in the death of her own son Guttormr, who dies trying to kill his brother-in-law.[463]

Grímhildr views herself as an integral pivot around which the family turns, and not without cause, as most of her schemes bear fruit. She is not dissimilar to Áslaug in this regard, yet where Áslaug quietly and naturally assumes such a role, with Grímhildr the effect is forced by the way she so stridently insists upon proclaiming herself in such terms. Brynhildr predicts that it is through the counsels of Grímhildr that Gunnarr and Guðrún will be reconciled and so it proves.[464] When Guðrún disappears into the forest, ultimately making her way to Denmark, it is Grímhildr who tracks her down and even joins her sons on the journey to offer their sister compensation for her husband, saying that: 'þeira erendi svá fremi fullgert munu verða, at hún siti eigi heima' (their errand would be completed only if she did not stay at home).[465] It is surely significant that her daughter, Guðrún, is the only one of her children who even attempts to rebel, explicitly rejecting her family in the aftermath of her husband's death, as exemplified by the tapestry she weaves, which depicts the exploits of figures such as Sigmundr, Sigarr and Siggeirr.[466] As Larrington has observed 'if the Sigarr depicted here is the opponent of Hámundr's sons from *Völsunga saga*, she signals her identification with her dead husband's lineage by embroidering their history, not that of her own family'.[467] Her reward is to be brought ruthlessly back into line by her mother and forced to drink a *meinsamligr drykkr* (hurtful drink) to make her forget, mixed, among other things, with *dreyri sonar hennar* (the blood of her son), adding a macabre maternal twist to the whole affair.[468]

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[461] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 28 (I, 181).

[462] Grundy, p. 225.

[463] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 30 (I, 190).

[464] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 31 (I, 193).

[465] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 32 (I, 195).

[466] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 32 (I, 195).

[467] Larrington, 'Sibling Drama', p. 178.

[468] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 32 (I, 196).

It is Grímhildr who arranges Guðrún's second marriage as well. When Guðrún refuses her mother is adamant: '"Þenna konung mun þér skipat at eiga, en engan skaltu elligar eiga"' ('It has been arranged for you to marry that king and you shall not marry anyone else'), even going so far as to dictate the terms of her daughter's future maternity.[469] In a statement loaded with foreshadowing she enjoins her daughter not to plan revenge, telling her: '"lát sem lifi Sigurðr ok Sigmundr, ef þú átt sonu"' ('if you have sons, behave as if Sigurðr and Sigmundr were alive').[470] In other words, she should raise them as if they were the son she wanted, Sigmundr, the three year old son of Sigurðr, burned on his funeral pyre, and not the sons she has. Only at Guðrún's warnings that Atli will treat Grímhildr's own sons *illu* (cruelly) does Grímhildr show the slightest alarm and it is not hard to get a sense of how her children rank in her affections.[471]

The eddic picture of the same encounter in *Guðrúnarkviða II* is very similar but all the more interesting for being filtered through Guðrún's filial perspective. There is no sense of affection on Guðrún's part: she first talks of her mother impersonally as *gotnesc kona* (lady of the Goths)[472] and recalls how she *þrágiarnliga* (insistently, defiantly) asked her sons to compensate their sister after Sigurðr's death.[473] Grímhildr's attitude throughout is entirely practical, but she proves relentless in her pursuit of her aims. First, she tries bribery, offering her daughter *gull* (gold),[474] a share in her paternal inheritance and '"Húnscar meyiar, þær er hlaða spiǫldom"' ('Hunnish girls, those who weave with tablets').[475] When Guðrún stands firm, her mother admonishes her not to think of revenge and declares:

> "svá scaltu láta, sem þeir lifi báðir,
> Sigurðr oc Sigmundr, ef þú sono fœðir."[476]
>
> ('You'll behave as if they were both still alive
> Sigurðr and Sigmundr, if you bear sons.')

[469] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 32 (I, 197).

[470] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 32 (I, 197).

[471] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 32 (I, 197).

[472] *Gðr. II* 17:2 (p. 226).

[473] *Gðr. II* 17:7 (p. 227).

[474] *Gðr. II* 25:2 (p. 228).

[475] *Gðr. II* 26:1–2 (p. 228).

[476] *Gðr. II* 28:5–8 (p. 229).

Much depends here on the interpretation of the verb *láta*. Larrington translates it as 'feel', suggesting Grímhildr is appealing to her daughter, coaxing her to accept the arrangement with the assurance that it will make her *feel* better. The sense is altered if it is translated in the more usual sense as 'behave', as Byock chooses in his translation of *Völsunga saga* where a close parallel to the line appears—'"lát sem lifi Sigurðr ok Sigmundr, ef þú átt sonu"' ('behave as if Sigurðr and Sigmundr are alive, if you have a son')—giving the impression that Grímhildr's announcement is scarcely short of a command to her daughter Guðrún to comply if she knows what is good for her.[477] It seems to me that this latter interpretation is more in keeping with Grímhildr's characterisation in the poem, which otherwise contains no hint of concern on Grímhildr's behalf for her daughter's feelings.

The threatening tone continues as Grímhildr emphasises that this will be Guðrún's only chance at remarriage, else she will be *verlaus* (manless) all her life.[478] Her efforts provoke Guðrún's powerful and emotional exclamation:

> "Hirða þú bióða bǫlvafullar,
> þrágiarnliga, þær kindir mér!"[479]
>
> ('Stop offering me these accursed
> Kin so insistently!')

The recurrence of *þrágiarnliga*, used earlier by Guðrún to describe her mother, is striking here, reinforced as it is by the adjective *bǫlvafullr* (baleful, accursed). From Guðrún's perspective, it is the insistent nature of her mother that is most prominent, something the exchange between them also emphasises in its intensity. The duologue is the dramatic heart of the poem, its longest exchange, and here it builds to an emotional pitch as Guðrún begs for a reprieve and predicts the tragic fate of her brothers at Atli's hands. She moves her mother to tears but Grímhildr is not so easily defeated, merely resorting to bribery again:

> "Lǫnd gef ec enn þér, lýða sinni,
> Vínbiǫrg, Valbiǫrg, ef þu vill þiggja;
> eigðu um aldr þat oc uni, dóttir!"[480]

[477] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 32 (I, 197).

[478] *Gðr*. *II* 30:7 (p. 229).

[479] *Gðr*. *II* 31:1–4 (p. 229).

[480] *Gðr*. *II* 33 (p. 229).

('I'll give you lands as well, a retinue of men,
Vínbjǫrg, Valbjǫrg, if you want to accept;
Possess them your whole life long, and be content, daughter!')

It is the entrance of the word *dóttir* into the exchange here which is most significant, referencing a kinship relation which has been everywhere implicit but nowhere stated. Following this reminder of their relationship, Guðrún admits defeat and cedes to her mother's demands, despite knowing exactly what it will mean for her and her family. Guðrún and Grímhildr appear evenly matched and it is Grímhildr's specifically maternal influence which is shown to tip the scales in her favour. Where earlier Grímhildr asked her sons '"hverr vildi son systor bœta"' ('who wanted to compensate their sister for her son'),[481] relating to her daughter exclusively through their shared male relation, here Grímhildr finally appeals directly to Guðrún with no male intermediaries and it wins her daughter's acquiescence.

Such a capitulation on Guðrún's part is particularly interesting because she is more frequently identified with her mother after her marriage to Atli, so that if one were to look at the *Poetic Edda* as a whole this might mark a turning point in their relations, moving from opposition to emulation. In *Grípisspá*, for example, the change in Guðrún's demeanour is unambiguously attributed to her mother's influence:

"Þá er Guðrúno grimt um hiarta.
er brœðr hennar þér til bana ráða,
oc at ǫngo verðr ynði síðan
vitro vífi; veldr því Grímildr."[482]

('Then Guðrún will be grim in her heart
When her brothers bring about your death,
And no happiness will come afterwards
To the wise woman; Grímhildr is responsible for this.')

One cannot but be struck by the similarity between the way Guðrún is described here as *grimt um hiarta* and the way Grímhildr is first introduced as *grimmhuguð* (grim-minded) in

[481] *Gðr*. *II* 17:9–10 (p. 227).

[482] *Grp*. 51 (p. 172).

Völsunga saga.[483] The effect of Grímhildr's mothering, it appears, is to produce a daughter exactly like herself. It is no coincidence that when Guðrún reveals what she has done to Atli's sons in *Atlamál* she refers to herself as *dóttir Grímildar* (Grímhildr's daughter), drawing on her mother's highly pragmatic and sacrificial model of motherhood.[484] It is noteworthy too that in the same poem Guðrún mixes her sons' blood with ale,[485] echoing the earlier drink of forgetfulness brewed by her mother which was likewise mixed with blood, specifically *sonardreyri* (blood of a sacrificial boar),[486] but explicitly identified as that of her son in *Völsunga saga*.[487] The parallel is too perfect not to be deliberate, especially given the alternative tradition depicted in *Atlakviða* where it is just her sons' hearts she feeds to Atli and no mention is made of their blood being drunk as well.[488] The poet of *Atlamál* is evidently eager to draw on the relationship between Guðrún and Grímhildr and even goes so far as to elaborate on the circumstances around Grímhildr's death as Guðrún accuses Atli: '"móður tóct mína ok myrðir til hnossa"' ('you seized and murdered my mother for treasure'),[489] an accusation not found elsewhere but which is readily intelligible as part of the tapestry of maternal references and allusions being made by the *Atlamál*-poet. Grief for her mother as much as her brothers is thus presented as a motivating factor for her vengeful behaviour in *Atlamál.*

The tragedy of Grímhildr and Guðrún's relationship is how successfully Grímhildr moulds her daughter in her own image with equally dire consequences for Guðrún's children as Grímhildr's actions as a mother had for her own. Guðrún is guilty of arranging a marriage for her own daughter no better than her own with Atli and Svanhildr continues the tradition, becoming a poor step-mother to her step-son and dying before she can have any children of her own.[490] Grímhildr disappears abruptly from *Völsunga saga* once she has arranged her daughter's marriage, rendered irrelevant by the destruction of the sons she was so desperate to advance. Having presented herself as central to the Gjúkung dynasty, Grímhildr is simply unable to exist without it, yet she casts a long shadow, her legacy lingering on in the form of

[483] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 25 (I, 169).

[484] *Am*. 80:4 (p. 259).

[485] *Am*. 82 (p. 259).

[486] *Gðr*. *II* 21:8 (p. 227).

[487] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 32 (I, 196).

[488] *Akv*. 36 (p. 246).

[489] *Am*. 57:3–4 (p. 255).

[490] Larrington, '*Stjúpmæðrasögur*', p. 570.

her daughter Guðrún, who ultimately tries and fails to resist the powerful influence wielded over her by her mother.

ii. Ólöf and Yrsa: The Daughter Left Behind

Born the child of rape, Yrsa in *Hrólfs saga kraka* embodies Queen Ólöf's punishment for her excessive pride in rejecting the advances of King Helgi, who forces himself on Ólöf to avenge his humiliation. As Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist articulates, '[b]y raping the queen repeatedly, Helgi finally breaks her and is able to emerge victorious in his showdown with her. The dishonor of being humiliated by a woman has thus been requited and honor restored through demonstrating male superiority'.[491] Though the Old Norse language did not have a specific term for 'rape', rapists are 'consistently described in a negative and judgemental manner in the sagas'.[492] Helgi's rape is no exception, the more so because of its incestuous repercussions. The consequences of his impulsive revenge are far-reaching and it has been argued that the downfall of his dynasty may be attributed to his treatment of women, but it is surely his daughter who suffers the most.[493] Her mother's rape overshadows every aspect of their relationship, which is one of the cruellest in all Old Norse myth and legend.

Ólöf's profound shame at Helgi's treatment of her is registered immediately in the text and sets the stage for her future treatment of her daughter: 'er henni nú þvílíkt hefnt sem nú var sagt, ok unir hún stórilla við hag sinn' (such vengeance was taken on her as was now told, and she was deeply unhappy with her condition).[494] Ólöf treats her daughter from the very beginning as if she were an animal:

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[491] Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist, 'Rape in the Icelandic Sagas: An Insight in the Perceptions about Sexual Assaults on Women in the Old Norse World', *Journal of Family History*, 40 (2015), 431–47 (p. 436).

[492] Ljungqvist, pp. 433, 441.

[493] Ármann Jakobsson notes that 'Helgi's womanising casts a long shadow over his kin'. See 'Queens of Terror: Perilous Women in *Hálfs saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*', in *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen and Agneta Ney, Nordiska texter och undersökningar, 28 (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, Institutionen för nordiska språk, 2003), pp. 173–89 (p. 182). Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir goes further, suggesting that 'Helgi's sexual misbehaviour leads to the ultimate downfall of the line'. See 'A Valiant King or a Coward? The Changing Image of King Hrólfr kraki from the Oldest Sources to *Hrólfs saga kraka*', in *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, Lassen and Ney, pp. 141–56 (p. 154).

[494] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 8 (I, 19).

> Ok er stundir liðu fram, fæðir Ólöf barn. Þat var mær. Hún leggr á barn þat alla óstund. Hún átti hund þann, er Yrsa hét, ok þar eftir kallaði hún meyna, ok skyldi hún heita Yrsa.[495]
>
> (And when some time had passed, Ólöf gave birth to a child. It was a girl. She paid no attention to the child at all. She had a dog, which was called Yrsa and she named the girl after it, and she was called Yrsa.)

Names are powerful indicators of social relations in Old Norse legendary literature as will be demonstrated in chapter VI: naming her daughter after a dog suggests a determination on her mother's part to see Yrsa as almost sub-human.

Ólöf does everything humanly possible to deny the fact of her daughter's existence:

> Ok sem hún var tólf vetra gömul, skyldi hún gæta hjarðar ok aldri annat vitast en hún væri karls dóttir ok kerlingar, því at drottningin hafði svá leynt með þessu farit, at fáir menn vissu, at hún hefði barn átt ok fætt.[496]
>
> (And when she was twelve years old she had to tend the herd and she never knew other than that she was the daughter of a poor old man and an old woman, because the queen had concealed her condition, so that few men knew that she had had a child and given birth.)

Doubtless Ólöf denies the child so that she does not have to be confronted continually with evidence of her shame, yet she does not expose the child, as was surely an option, especially for unwanted female babies.

When Yrsa is thirteen and out tending the herds, her father, disguised as a beggar, comes across her. In blissful ignorance Helgi falls in love with Yrsa and the two are married over Yrsa's protests—'[h]ún bað hann þat eigi gera' (she asked him not to do that)—but she soon becomes accustomed and is said to love her husband in return.[497] Although perfectly aware of what has happened, Ólöf chooses not to intervene:

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[495] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 9 (I, 19).

[496] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 9 (I, 19).

[497] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 9 (I, 20).

> Ólöf drottning varð fláráð við þetta ok eigi heilbrjóstuð, þá er hún vissi. Lét hún sem hún vissi ei, hvat um var, ok gerði þat í hug sér, at þetta mundi Helga konungi vera til harms ok svívirðingar, en til einskis frama né yndis.[498]
>
> (Queen Ólöf was deceitful and not true-hearted about that which she knew. She behaved as if she did not know what had happened and thought in her mind that this would mean sorrow and dishonour for King Helgi and not distinction or delight.)

When Ólöf learns of the happy state of her daughter's marriage, however, she determines to pay her a visit. She meets her daughter outside the limits of the hall, where Yrsa reigns as Queen. Steadfastly refusing to enter, on the grounds that she 'engan sóma eiga at launa Helga konungi' (had no honour to repay to King Helgi),[499] she forces her daughter to come to her as symbol of the power imbalance between them.

In keeping with Ólöf's position of authority, Yrsa speaks first, taking the active part and confronting the queen for treating her so shamefully. Her attitude is blunt and to the point. She is aware of the hold the older woman has over her, asking frankly: '"Eða kanntu nokkut at segja mér frá ætt minni, hver hún er"' ('Or can you tell me anything about my family, who they are?')[500] It is no exaggeration to say that Ólöf toys with her daughter in the moment of her own twisted triumph. Coyly, she replies:

> "Ekki er þess örvænt, at ek kunni at segja þér nokkut þar af. Var þat mitt mesta erendi hingat, at ek vildi kunngera þér þat, eða unir þú vel við ráðahaginn?"[501]
>
> ('It is not unlikely that I may be able to tell you something about that. That was my main purpose in coming here, that I wanted to make it known to you, and are you well content with your marriage?')

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[498] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 9 (I, 20).

[499] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 13 (I, 25).

[500] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 13 (I, 25).

[501] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 13 (I, 25).

As soon as Yrsa happily confirms her contentment, her mother proceeds to shatter it that with the pronouncement that her husband '"er faðir þinn, en þú ert dóttir mín"' ('is your father, and you are my daughter').[502] Yrsa declares with feeling and no little accuracy: '"Mína ætla ek móðurina versta vera ok grimmasta"' ('I think my mother is the worst and cruellest').[503]

Strangely, though, the destruction of her daughter's happiness seems to free Ólöf to offer her first hint of maternal concern, admitting her daughter has suffered from the actions of both her parents and inviting her to accompany her home to Saxland, with the assurance that:

> "nú vil ek bjóða þér til mín með sæmd ok virðingu ok gera til þín í alla staði eftir því, sem ek kann bezt."[504]
>
> ('Now I want to invite you to stay with me with honour and esteem, and I will treat you as best as I can in every respect.')

One cannot help feeling that, given Ólöf's profound lack of affection for her daughter, her best may not amount to much but her acknowledgement that this recognition of their biological kinship must change the relationship between them is at least more realistic than King Helgi's plea that '"þad villda eg ad so buid væri"' ('I want things to be as they are'), as if nothing has altered.[505] His actions, or rather his inaction, effectively debar Yrsa from remaining with him as his daughter and it is no surprise she accepts her mother's offer.

Ólöf's bitterness toward her daughter is evidently the result of the circumstances of her birth. Like several other mothers in Old Norse legendary literature, her child constitutes her best and only means of enacting vengeance on the man who has wronged her. Her motivation is similar to that which drives Guðrún to kill Atli's sons and feed them to him and his household and to that which surely leads the elfin woman to send her ominously named daughter, Skuld (Debt) to her father, Helgi, in the knowledge that she will help bring about the downfall of his son Hrólfr. Yet Ólöf's feelings toward her daughter are not straightforwardly negative; there are moments of compassion once her revenge has been achieved. Once her

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[502] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 13 (I, 25).

[503] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 13 (I, 25–26).

[504] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 13 (I, 26).

[505] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 10, ed. by Desmond Slay, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ Series, B 1 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1960), p. 30. Slay's edition is based upon AM 285 4to. This line does not appear in Guðni Jónsson's edition.

daughter, too, has become a victim of Helgi's sexual advances, Ólöf relents in her cruelty toward her. Carl Phelpstead argues that by inviting Yrsa to stay in Saxland 'the queen demonstrates a solidarity with Yrsa, which perhaps arises from their common position as wronged women'.[506] Though Yrsa is not raped by her father, their marriage is against her express wishes and puts her through a similar anguish. The bitterness in their initial relationship arises mainly from their different experiences at Helgi's hands. Yrsa is not so much the object of her mother's hatred, rather the cause of it and the cruel consequences for Yrsa are nothing more than a by-product, a price Ólöf was perfectly willing to pay but for which she at least acknowledges some responsibility, something Helgi never does.

Indeed, there are few indications that Ólöf's treatment of her daughter is considered unreasonable. Ólöf suffers no ill effects for treating her daughter so harshly and disappears from the saga after seeing her daughter remarried to King Aðils. The saga takes care to present the motivations behind her actions, which softens their impact, and it is not her neglect of her daughter so much as her deceitful concealment of the incestuous nature of Helgi and Yrsa's relationship, even after their marriage, that draws criticism. Once she has 'rescued' her daughter from her unorthodox marital situation she becomes perfectly socially responsible as a mother. Rather like Grímhildr, in brokering this unhappy marriage she is attempting to do what she thinks is best for her daughter, perhaps even compensate her for the wrong she has done her in the past. In the end, Helgi is the architect of both their misfortunes and the episode highlights the devastating consequences of rape. Though Yrsa's gender is undoubtedly a factor in her mother's neglect, since bearing a king's illegitimate daughter offered her mother none of the advantages that an illegitimate royal son might have done, it is the circumstances of Yrsa's conception which really set the tone for their relationship.

Most extramarital affairs in the *fornaldarsögur* produce sons, but comparisons can be made with Brana and her nameless daughter in *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*. Crucially, Brana did consent to her liaison with the saga-hero Hálfdan. Like Ólöf, Brana gives birth to a daughter but there is no bitterness in their relationship. Admittedly, the saga shows more interest in developing Brana's pseudo-maternal relationship with Hálfdan who also happens to be the father of her child. Still, Brana's maternal instinct is evidenced by her irritation at being called away from her newborn to save Hálfdan from being burned to death. Her exasperation is apparent as she tells him: '"Ek varaða þik, at þú skyldir eigi láta Áka svíkja þik"' ('I warned you that you must not let Áki deceive you') and she is in haste to leave since:

[506] Carl Phelpstead, 'The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfs saga kraka*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 75 (2003), 1–24 (p. 7).

> "Hefi ek nú gengit frá meyjunni viku gamalli, ok trúi ek, at hún sé orðin fífl, ok má ek eigi hér vera lengr."[507]
>
> ('Now I have parted with my week-old girl, and I believe she may have become a fool and I cannot be here any longer.')

While Hálfdan's claims have clearly taken precedence over those of her daughter, Brana's concern for the infant hints at a much more positive relationship between them than that which flourishes between Ólöf and Yrsa. The difference can largely be attributed to Brana's more positive feelings toward her child's father but it is also noteworthy that Brana is a giantess.

iii. Beyond the Human: Embracing the Body

Mother-daughter pairings are more common in the *fornaldarsögur* when giantesses or troll-wives are involved and in these non-human relationships mothers exhibit the same maternal protectiveness for their daughters as human mothers do for their sons in the *fornaldarsögur*.

In *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra,* the queen Signý is cursed to become the troll-wife, Gríðr, and to murder every one of her daughter Hildr's lovers until she finds one unafraid of her knife. Even once Illugi frees them both of the curse she still hangs Björn, the evil counsellor of Illugi's father the king, for calling her daughter a troll-woman,[508] proving herself extremely protective of her daughter's honour. In *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, Hrólfr meets an elf-woman and her daughter, who '"[h]efir […] nú legit nítján dægr á gólfi ok má eigi léttari verða"' ('has now lain for nineteen days on the floor and cannot be delivered of her child'), without a husband or a father in sight.[509] The elfin-mother goes to great lengths to see her grandchild safely delivered, luring Hrólfr to their home in the guise of a white stag so he may lay human hands on her daughter and speed the process along and she greatly rewards him for doing so.[510] In *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, the troll-queen Arinnefja is likewise extremely protective of her daughter, Skinnefja. Carolyne Larrington has discussed at length the implications of Arinnefja's concern for her daughter's chastity, given Skinnefja's

[507] *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, ch. 13 (IV, 313).

[508] *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, ch. 6 (III, 423).

[509] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 15 (III, 200).

[510] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 15 (III, 199–201).

refusal of Ásmundr's gold ring on the grounds that '"ek veit, at móðir mín segir, at þat sé hvílutollr minn"' ('I know, that my mother says that that's my bed-money').[511] 'Mother and daughter,' she writes 'aim to maintain a female line of succession; Skinnefja's virtuous resistance of Ásmundr's blandishments points up a concern about lineage'.[512] In this scenario, what Larrington calls Arinnefja's 'loathliness' is key in allowing her to pursue royal authority as the Queen of Jǫtunheimar.[513] It is her loathliness which 'fixes her in a Sovereignty role in which she herself embodies, performs and fulfils kingship; through her suffering and her hard-won wisdom she triumphantly demonstrates that a woman can exercise royal authority in her own right'.[514]

In this context, it is even more interesting that Brana, discussed in chapter III section 4, also begins to establish an all-female dynasty. She explicitly identifies herself as taking more after her mother, the daughter of King William of Normandy, than after her father and having given such weight herself to her matrilineage it is fitting that she gives birth to a daughter to continue it.[515] Such is the threat of exclusively female sovereignty or perhaps more accurately, exclusively female genealogy, it must be explored beneath the veil of the supernatural. Reproduction without a man or with nothing more than an absent paternal contribution is presented as strange and dangerous, while in the human world the maternal contribution can be written out altogether if possible and all-male genealogy is presented as the norm.

The loathly, other-worldliness of mothers like Arinnefja and Gríðr locates their monstrosity firmly in their physical appearance. Far from Randalín's super-human transcendence of the body, their bodies are rendered sub-human, but they nevertheless escape from the system of male exchange which would otherwise seek to exploit them. Their bodies and their actions in promoting their daughters' welfare so strenuously are characterised as perverse, parodic inversions of society's normal structures. As such their efforts cannot be anything but curiosities, episodes whose chief function is to render some advantage to the male hero of the tale, but in such a situation all-female relationships are allowed a rare space to flourish because of a lack of further textual consequences.

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[511] *Egils saga einhenda*, ch. 5 (III, 332).

[512] Carolyne Larrington, 'Kerling/Drottning: Thinking about Medieval Queenship with *Egils saga einhendar ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*', *Saga-Book*, 39 (2015), 61–76 (p. 63).

[513] Larrington, 'Kerling/Drottning', p. 71.

[514] Larrington, 'Kerling/Drottning', p. 71.

[515] *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, ch. 6, 13 (IV, 302, 313).

It is interesting to note that in cases in which the *daughter* rejects the traditional appearance of femininity the positive outcome for mother-daughter relations is similar. Daughters may occasionally take on a masculine role, like Hervör in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, who goes to her mother asking to be treated *sem þú son myndir* (as you would a son), as discussed in chapter III section 3,[516] or Ingigerðr in *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, who reveals herself to her mother, Ísgerðr, while masquerading as a man in order to avenge her father.[517] Her vengeance is contingent on killing her mother's new husband but Ingigerðr is not afraid to whisper a plea to her mother to open the chamber that night and enable the assassination to occur.[518] Nor is her trust misplaced, for her mother does not betray her and the scheme succeeds as planned. Both Hervör and Ingigerðr dress and act as men even as both continue to identify themselves as daughters in encounters with their parents, Ingigerðr with Ísgerðr and Hervör with her dead father Angantýr. The rule seems to be that if it does not *look* like conventional femininity then it need not be confined to the usual narrative conventions which characterise all-female, mother-daughter relations. The key is again the body and it is immediately noticeable that while the body of the unwed daughter may be disguised as that of a man, still retaining its essentially human characteristics, the maternal body must be rendered sub-human to gain the same advantage. Rather than rising above the body such mothers practically luxuriate in their physical otherness and in embracing the body, coming to be defined by it (quite literally in Arinnefja's case, whose name 'Eagle-beak' identifies her by her grotesque facial features), they represent the opposite end of the maternal spectrum to the transcendent mothers like Áslaug and Frigg.

Maternity here has become a subtext, layered within episodes which revolve not around the mother but the saga-hero. These peripheral mother-daughter relationships avoid the disastrous consequences of mother-daughter relations suffered by Grímhildr and Guðrún and Ólöf and Yrsa. It appears that when either the mother or the daughter rejects the customary woman's role and appearance, space is opened for more harmonious mother-daughter relations. Such an outcome is unsurprising; in her study of mother-daughter relations in medieval England, Stiller examines the ways in which 'ambivalence towards herself as a woman and towards a woman's role' might affect and toxify the way a mother treats her own daughter.[519] The shared suffering of mother and daughter in a patriarchal

[516] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 17:4, in *PFS*, p. 375.

[517] *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, ch. 8 (IV, 257).

[518] *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, ch. 20 (IV, 277).

[519] Stiller, p. 50.

society may produce compassion and Ólöf noticeably softens towards her daughter after she has also suffered at Helgi's hands.

Nevertheless, it remains true that patterns of repetition and emulation between Grímhildr and Guðrún and Ólöf and Yrsa do more to poison rather than strengthen their relations. Guðrún gains nothing by following in her mother's footsteps while Helgi remains the chief matter of contention between Ólöf and Yrsa, in spite of their reconciliation. It may even be possible that Ólöf's initial bitterness stems in part from jealousy that Yrsa had been offered the honourable marriage she herself came to regret spurning. Mothers, who have themselves been at the mercy of a patriarchal society, are helpless to avoid reinforcing in their daughters' lives the lessons they themselves learnt as young women. Any who stray outside of such a society are dehumanised in order to nullify the threat offered by exclusively female succession and genealogy. Yet embracing the body forced upon them in their subjection empowers such mothers. Although their physical alterity appears their punishment for freedom from patriarchal control, it spares them from the maternal ambivalence which poisons human mother-daughter relations. Disruption is visited upon their maternal bodies and while the body may suffer it also contains that trauma, which does not spill out into their mother-daughter relationships.

3. The Nature of Maternal Ambivalence

According to Terence Stephenson, '[t]he killing of her own child by a mother is […] an extraordinarily rare event in any culture, at any period in history, indeed in any species.'[520] Certainly, few mothers kill their own children in Old Norse myth and legend, with the notable exceptions of Signý and Guðrún in *Völsunga saga*, which undoubtedly intends parallels to be drawn between the two. Disturbingly, whenever Guðrún interacts with one of her children in the *Poetic Edda*, whether Erpr and Eitill or Hamðir and Sǫrli, it presages their imminent death. Moreover, Guðrún is always aware of the fatal consequences that will result from these encounters, though her children may not be. Both Signý and Guðrún are exceptional cases of maternal violence. There are plenty of other fatal maternal encounters, however, even if the violence is not directed at the mother's own children: Siggeirr's lupine mother devouring the sons of Sigmundr;[521] Atli's serpentine mother killing Gunnarr in the snake-

[520] Terence Stephenson, 'Fatal Outcomes of Fabricated or Induced Illness: A Modern Medea', in *Unbinding Medea: Interdisciplinary Approaches to a Classical Myth from Antiquity to the 21st Century*, ed. by Heike Bartel and Anne Simon (London: Legenda, 2010), pp. 295–98 (p. 295).

[521] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 5 (I, 118–19).

pit;[522] Frigg's fatal revelation of her son's only weakness;[523] Áslaug's bloody vengeance for her step-sons' deaths.[524] Idealised in absence, mothers still cast long and threatening shadows in Old Norse myth and legend.

Maternal violence goes hand in hand with protective aspects of motherhood in the mythic-heroic corpus. This violence symbolises anything but a lack of maternal feeling: indeed, some of it is committed on behalf of their children. Even Guðrún and Signý are not necessarily entirely devoid of maternal sentiment. As Badinter points out, '[o]utright infanticide is generally the result of considerable human distress. Whatever else may be said, the conscious murder of a child is *never* proof of indifference'.[525] The mother's dual nature is revealed most sharply in her relationship with her sons. Understandably, in the patriarchal culture that was Old Norse society, mothers are the most demonstrative with their affection toward their sons, to whom they might one day look for support and protection. The son is the focus of maternal care and protection in the *fornaldarsögur*. However, the son's value as an heir to their father and his potential position of power over his mother also made him a target of maternal aggression. Guðrún kills Atli's sons to get to Atli himself. The fantasy offered by mothers like Frigg and Áslaug, who are emotionally invested in their sons but still capable of being independent agents, expresses an ambivalence toward the prospect of dependence. In the wake of the deaths of their sons or step-sons, these mothers come into their own and take charge. Mother-daughter relations never approach the same emotional extremes. Ambivalence is expressed not in the outcomes of these narratives, as with the death of Áslaug's sons and Baldr, but in the attitudes mothers and daughters express toward one another. Inherent ambivalence toward the female role in society complicates this all-female relationship; the daughter offers no prospect of advancement but there is solidarity in their shared female experience. Grímhildr and Guðrún freely give voice to their frustrations with one another in *Guðrúnarkviða II* and *Völsunga saga*, as Ólöf is free to vent her frustrations on Yrsa in *Hrólfs saga kraka*.

In both mother-son and mother-daughter relations, maternal ambivalence is inextricably tied to the mother's disenfranchisement and vulnerability within the family in spite of her vital reproductive function. Hagný in *Hálfs saga Hálfsrekka* provides the perfect example of how maternal ambivalence arises from the anxiety surrounding her maternal function and the vulnerability of her maternal body. Hagný is introduced as the wife of King

[522] *Od*. 32 (p. 239).

[523] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 49 (p. 45)

[524] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 11 (I, 257).

[525] Badinter, p. 39 [emphasis in original].

Hjörr Hálfsson and she gives birth to twin sons, Hámundr and Geirmundr, described as *svartir ok furðu ljótir* (black and exceedingly ugly).[526] At the same time a servant girl gives birth to a well-favoured child called Leifr. Clearly ashamed of the boys' appearance, '[d]rottning keypti um sonu við ambátt ok færði þann konungi' (the queen exchanged sons with the servant girl and brought that one [Leifr] to the king).[527] On the surface, Hagný appears an extremely detached mother, so lacking in maternal affection that she abandons her sons to serve her own interests. Maternity, for her, is a matter of perception, which she attempts to control to her own advantage. The blood she shares with her true sons and their right to their paternal inheritance is not as important as their ugly appearance. In exchanging them for a fairer but low-born child, Hagný exemplifies medieval anxieties surrounding maternity as the site wherein a lineage could be corrupted in her efforts to disrupt the proper succession. Though superior in appearance, Leifr cannot help but reveal his poor lineage by his timidity just as Hámundr and Geirmundr's noble descent tells in their exceptional development: 'Hámundr ok Geirmundr váru geysimiklir ok orðvísir' (Hámundr and Geirmundr were very large and clever).[528] By exchanging the children, Hagný upends the social order which must be restored by the male agency of the wise skald Bragi, who sees through the lie and commands her to switch them back.

Yet her fears about her sons are not unfounded. When she finally restores her sons to their position after the skald Bragi's admonishment, her husband is disgusted by their appearance, exclaiming: '"Ber í burt! […] eigi sá ek slík heljarskinn"' ('Take them away! […] I've never seen such deathlike skin').[529] Hagný's instinct to hide the truth was not so misguided; she seems rather to have anticipated the king's harsh reaction and taken steps to spare herself any unpleasantness. When Bragi discovers the deception, she is said to be hidden in the hall: 'drottning leyndist þar ok var hulin klæðum' (the queen concealed herself there and was hidden by clothes), which confirms her timidity and vulnerability.[530] It may even be relevant that she gave birth while her husband was away at a meeting of kings, potentially opening her up to accusations of adultery. Her ambivalence toward her own sons is more a reflection of her own anxieties about how they reflect upon her than her emotional feelings toward them. Caught between conflicting impulses she chooses self-preservation and her sons thrive without her affection. Her actions might even be construed as protective of

[526] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 17 (II, 133).

[527] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 17 (II, 133).

[528] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 17 (II, 133).

[529] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 17 (II, 134).

[530] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 17 (II, 133).

her sons, whose unprepossessing appearances could have threatened them with paternal rejection and exposure, given their father's subsequent harsh reaction to their *heljarskinn*. Already three years old and promising in other ways, the boys are protected from such a fate by the time they are presented to King Hjörr as his heirs. The force of his rejection, however, invites speculation as to their fate if their mother had not exchanged them at birth. Anxiety about Hjörr's reaction further explains Hagný's own ambivalence. Jochens speculates that:

> […] the father's preponderant role in the newborn's fate, in particular the distinct possibility that he might order its exposure, may have inhibited women from emotional attachment to their children during pregnancy; furthermore, the experience of having had one infant killed may have rendered bonding with subsequent children more difficult.[531]

Perhaps Hagný fails to bond with her sons because she feels unable to rely on their survival.

Where the father's dominance is threatened in different ways by the son and the daughter, Hagný's example demonstrates how far maternal ambivalence is rooted in the mother's own vulnerability: both physically vulnerable to violence and socially vulnerable to shame and abandonment. Ultimately Hagný is betrayed by her own body, which produced such ugly offspring, after which any course of action becomes problematic. Hagný denies her sons their inheritance and corrupts the proper succession when she exchanges them for another. Their subsequent reception by their father, however, proves that, even had she not done so, their appearance would still have placed them in danger of rejection, leaving her with no heirs to consolidate her position. Her ambivalence toward the children that place her in such an untenable position is hardly surprising.

As the motivation behind paternal and maternal ambivalence is different, so too is its expression. Paternal ambivalence erupts in violent outbursts, both physical and verbal, toward the son and overbearing treatment of the daughter. Maternal ambivalence presents more as manipulative, creeping danger, represented by Grímhildr's scheming, Ólöf's duplicity, Áslaug's goading and even Frigg's indiscretion, though Signý and Guðrún are reminders that mother-child relations can approach the same violent extremes given the right circumstances. Old Norse myth and legend presents narratives of maternity which are at once both vulnerable and threatening. As we might expect from narratives fashioned by those who

[531] Jochens, 'Old Norse Motherhood', p. 206.

are not mothers, maternity is relegated to the sidelines, but it can no more be erased in fiction than it can in biological reality.

While mothers and their children may not be as frequently depicted as fathers, maternity is far from invisible in Old Norse myth and legend. Instead maternal presence is depicted as destabilising and often dangerous, for her children and for others. Like Hagný, Frigg, Áslaug, Grímhildr and Ólöf all jeopardise their children's health and happiness, whether deliberately or unwittingly. Whether they wish to or not, mothers in the mythic-heroic corpus cannot help endangering their children because their maternal function is characterised as inherently compromising. Their body is both their best asset, used by Áslaug to prove her heritage, offered by Frigg to save her son, and their greatest weakness, as emphasised by Ólöf's violation and Hagný's hideous offspring. Though mothers may ostensibly dote upon their sons and neglect their daughters in the *Poetic Edda*, *Snorra Edda* and the *fornaldarsögur*, maternal ambivalence emerges not as a response to the gender of their offspring but to the mother's own position at the mercy of a patriarchal society that turns even her own body against her. Ambivalence has thus been shown to characterise all kinds of parent-child relations, both maternal and paternal, in Old Norse mythic-heroic literature, but intergenerational ambivalence was not confined to these relationships, as the next chapter demonstrates.

V. UNCLES AND AUNTS

Intergenerational family relationships in the mythic-heroic corpus are not confined to parent-child relations. These are supplemented by, or contrasted with, relationships between uncles and aunts and nephews and nieces, which have the same intergenerational dynamic even though the participants are less closely related. Aunts and uncles were important members of the wider kin-group. According to *Grágás*, uncles and nephews were liable to pay or receive a two-mark ring in compensation for the other's killing, more than first cousins but less than fathers, brothers, sons, grandfathers and grandsons.[532] Given the ambivalence which so often characterises parent-child relations, it might be expected that these relationships could prove to be substitutes for dysfunctional or broken parent-child relationships. From the literary evidence of the *Íslendingasögur*, Steven B. Johnson and Ronald C. Johnson suggest that 'uncles and nephews were strong allies', citing the example of Njáll and his nephew Þorgeir skorargeir in *Njáls saga*.[533] Still, they do not discount the evidence of *Orkneyinga saga*, where the joint rule of an uncle and his nephew quickly results in the nephew's murder, suggesting alliance between uncle and nephew was by no means guaranteed in Old Norse literature.

Johnson and Johnson's is one of the few studies to examine uncle-nephew relations in Old Norse literature in any detail. In the *fornaldarsögur*, depictions of interactions between uncles or aunts and nephews or nieces are less common than parent-child interactions and have received minimal critical attention. This chapter will explore relationships between children and their parents' siblings in Old Norse myth and legend, relationships complicated by the fact that, in certain incestuous cases, a child's uncle or aunt can double as their parent. Since it has long been suggested that the relationship between the mother's brother and his nephew was an especially intimate one in Germanic society, I devote particular attention to this bond. The foundation for this intimate assessment of maternal uncle-nephew relations in Germanic culture has rested largely on Tacitus' description in *Germania*:

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[532] *Laws of Early Iceland. Grágás. The Codex Regius of Grágás with Material from Other Manuscripts*, trans. by Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote and Richard Perkins, University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies, 3 (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), p. 178.

[533] Steven B. Johnson and Ronald C. Johnson, 'Support and Conflict of Kinsmen in Norse Earldoms, Icelandic Families, and the English Royalty', *Ethology and Sociobiology*, 12 (1991), 211–20 (p. 216).

> sororum filiis idem apud avunculum qui apud patrem honor. quidam sanctiorem artioremque hunc nexum sanguinis arbitrantur et in accipiendis obsidibus magis exigunt, tamquam et animum firmius et domum latius teneant.[534]
>
> (Sister's children mean as much to their uncle as to their father: some tribes regard this blood-tie as even closer and more sacred than that between son and father, and in taking hostages make it the basis of their demand, as though they thus secure loyalty more surely and have a wider hold on the family.)[535]

The legacy of this short passage has been long-lived.

The idea of a Germanic avunculate was enthusiastically embraced by literary scholars like Francis Gummere, William Farnsworth and Clair Hayden Bell in the early twentieth century, who found further evidence for it in literature produced hundreds of years after Tacitus was writing.[536] Their work highlighted the significance and frequently the intimacy of this bond in their respective sources, which reflected to their minds the 'legendary survival of the notion of nephew-right long after it had disappeared in fact and as an institution or a custom'.[537] These treatises are now long outdated and the uncle-nephew relationship has been largely ignored in more recent scholarship.[538] Yet the legacy of this scholarship remains. McKinnell blithely states that in Old Norse society '[t]he relationship between a man and his sister's son was traditionally a sacred one', citing only Tacitus, the poems of the *Poetic Edda* and Clunies Ross' interpretation of *Hávamál* 140 (discussed in section 1 below) as evidence;

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[534] Tacitus, *Germania*, trans. by M. Hutton, rev. by E. H. Warmington, in Tacitus*, Agricola. Germania. Dialogus*, Loeb Classical Library, 35, rev. edn (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 128–215 (ch. 20, p. 162).

[535] Tacitus, *Germania*, ch. 20 (p. 163).

[536] See Francis B. Gummere, 'The Sister's Son', in *An English Miscellany Presented to Dr. Furnivall in Honour of his Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. by W. P. Ker, Arthur S. Napier, Walter W. Skeat (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901), pp. 133–49; William Oliver Farnsworth, *Uncle and Nephew in the Old French Chansons de Geste: A Study in the Survival of Matriarchy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1913); Clair Hayden Bell, *The Sister's Son in the Medieval German Epic: A Study in the Survival of Matriliny* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1922).

[537] Farnsworth, p. 2.

[538] For a slightly more recent appraisal see Thomas J. Garbáty, 'The Uncle-Nephew Motif: New Light into its Origins and Development', *Folklore*, 88 (1977), 220–35.

none of which can be considered reliable historical sources for the Old Norse period.[539] While there is some minimal evidence for what Larrington calls the 'privileged' relationship between a man and his sister's son,[540] especially in the poems of the *Poetic Edda*, these generalisations set up false expectations for maternal uncle-nephew relations in mythic-heroic literature overall.

Contrary to older scholarship's eulogisation of the bond between the uncle and the sister's son, I suggest that, just as ambivalence was a keynote in parent-child and sibling relations, so too it affected relationships between uncles or aunts and their nieces and nephews. First, I examine the limited evidence for the sister's son bond in Old Norse mythic-heroic literature, highlighting, in contrast, the frequency with which both maternal and paternal uncles turn on their nephews (and vice versa) in the *fornaldarsögur* and eddic poetry. I then explore the more supportive picture that is painted of the aunt in eddic poetry, where relationships between both aunt and nephew and aunt and niece are more positively depicted. As there are no significant relationships between uncles and nieces in the mythic-heroic corpus, I do not discuss this relationship. I conclude with a reassessment of uncle-nephew relations in Old Norse myth and legend and argues that relationships between children and their parents' siblings provide further evidence for the importance of ambivalence as a defining feature of intergenerational kinship relations.

1. Uncles and Nephews: More than Kin or Less than Kind?

As McKinnell, Larrington and Clunies Ross all attest, it has been assumed that Norse society and therefore Norse literature also partook of the special intimacy which Tacitus describes between a man and his sister's son. There are certainly hints in eddic poetry that the relationship between a maternal uncle and nephew was considered a particularly close kinship tie.

Hávamál 140 describes how Óðinn gained knowledge from his mother's brother:

"Fimbullióð nío nam ec af inom frægia syni
Bǫlþors, Bestlo fǫður,
oc ec drycc of gat ins dýra miaðar,

[539] John McKinnell, 'Wisdom from the Dead: The *Ljóðatal* Section of *Hávamál*', *Medium Ævum,* 76 (2007), 85–115 (p. 98).

[540] *Poetic Edda,* trans. by Larrington, p. 301 n. 3.

ausinn Óðreri."[541]

('Nine powerful spells I learnt from the famous son
Of Bǫlþorr, Bestla's father,
And I got a drink of the precious mead,
Ladled from Óðrerir.')

Bǫlþorr, the father of Bestla, was a giant like his daughter, Óðinn's mother, and her unnamed brother. Thus, Óðinn admits to gaining powerful knowledge from his mother's brother, a member of the race he continually stigmatises. As Clunies Ross puts it, 'knowledge passes from the closest maternal kinsman of the senior generation to his sister's son'.[542] She understands this transfer of knowledge as initiatory in character: Bestla gives Óðinn birth but her brother gives him rebirth, 'hence both physical birth and spiritual rebirth are accomplished for Óðinn by his giant relatives'.[543] Jens Peter Schjødt, however, rejects Clunies Ross' initiatory reading of the stanza, arguing that the chronology of events is incompatible with such a reading, since Óðinn likely acquires this knowledge after and not during the hanging episode.[544] McKinnell has suggested, more radically, that the knowledge gained by Óðinn is of the kind more usually bestowed by a female donor and that Bǫlþorr's son is merely an invention of the poet, created to spare Óðinn 'the disgraceful connotations of female magic'.[545] Other scholars have identified Bǫlþorr's son with Mimir, though no other sources corroborate such an assumption.[546] Schjødt is undoubtedly right in saying that '[w]ithout further proof, it is not possible to determine who Óðinn's mother's brother is, and it is hardly of vital importance'.[547] It is enough to know that Bǫlþorr's son is Óðinn's mother's brother and that he is a purveyor of knowledge to his nephew.

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[541] *Háv*. 140 (p. 40).

[542] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 227.

[543] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 227.

[544] Jens Peter Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion,* trans. by Victor Hansen, The Viking Collection, 17 ([Odense]: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2008), p. 183 n. 20.

[545] McKinnell, 'Wisdom from the Dead', p. 100.

[546] Viktor Rydberg, *Undersökningar i germansk mythologi*, 2 vols (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1886–89), I, 259; *Die Lieder der Edda*, ed. by Barent Sijmons and Hugo Gering, 3 vols (Halle: Buchhandlung der Waisenhauses, 1906–31), III, 151.

[547] Schjødt, p. 182.

At first glance, Óðinn's relationship with his maternal uncle seems to embody the special relationship proposed by scholars but when set into the wider context of Óðinn's relations with his giant relatives, gleaned from *Snorra Edda*, the picture becomes more exploitative. There is no reason to assume his uncle is protected from the fate of all the frost-giants when Óðinn and his brothers kill Ymir and drown the race of giants in his blood, in spite of the service he has apparently done his nephew in teaching him *fimbullióð* (powerful spells).[548] No mention of Bǫlþorr's son is made elsewhere in the surviving corpus of mythic-heroic texts so the exact nature of this encounter must remain shadowy at best. If read under the impression that the uncle-sister's son relationship was a privileged one in Old Norse, the passage would seem to depict a special relationship between Óðinn and his mother's brother, but the stanza cannot then be taken as evidence for such a privileged relationship in Norse culture without the argument becoming circular. We would be better served reading their interactions in the context provided by other encounters between uncles and nephews in mythic-heroic literature.

There are a few positive interactions which could indicate a privileged bond. Another eddic poem, *Grípisspá*, depicts the hero Sigurðr seeking out his mother's brother for advice, but the character of Grípir functions mainly as a frame device for the poet and the relationship between them is sparsely drawn. The figure of Reginn, his foster-father is more important to the overarching eddic narrative of Sigurðr's youth. As he is arriving at his uncle's hall, Sigurðr addresses Grípir as *móðurbróðir* (mother's brother),[549] but is evidently not that close to his uncle. He checks he has come to the right place, asking '"Hverr byggir hér borgir þessar"' ('Who lives here in this castle?'),[550] announces himself almost as to a stranger and, in turn, Grípir tells him *væri sæmra fyrr* ('you should have come sooner').[551] There is welcome in his words but they also imply distance, suggesting Sigurðr has not visited recently, if at all. They might easily be meeting for the first time. Grípir tells Sigurðr of his future before disappearing from the eddic scene. The account in *Völsunga saga* is even briefer and the author or scribe was clearly familiar with the eddic poem.[552]

Larrington confidently designates the poem a late production and from the lack of any other mention of Grípir it seems plausible that he was a character invented solely to provide a

[548] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 7 (p. 11).

[549] *Grp*. 6:6 (p. 165).

[550] *Grp*. 1:1–2 (p. 164).

[551] *Grp*. 5:6 (p. 165).

[552] *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda.* V: *Heldenlieder*, ed. by Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge, Wolfgang Gerholt, Eve Picard and Katja Schulz (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2006), p. 148.

fresh take on a well-known legend by enabling a young Sigurðr to comment on his future actions.[553] Significantly, Sigurðr goes to his uncle for advice principally because of Grípir's reputation rather than because of their relationship: Grípir is described as 'allra manna vitrastr oc framvíss' (the wisest of all men and able to see the future).[554] However, the fact that the figure of a mother's brother was chosen in order quickly to sketch an intimate and trusting relationship suggests that an assumption of harmony between maternal uncle and nephew could still be exploited at the time of the poem's composition. Like *Hávamál* 140 though, the poem provides little reason to believe the relationship between maternal uncle and nephew was any more privileged than other kinship relations, if one approaches the text without the pre-formed assumption that such a relationship was especially close.

An episode from *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* reinforces the impression that the sister's son relationship was not especially privileged. After King Hálfr's death a number of his men take refuge with uncles: Björn and Bárðr go to see King Sölvi, *móðurbróðir Hálfs konungs* (King Hálfr's mother's brother), implying he was an ally of his nephew while he lived; while Hrókr inn svarti, is smuggled 'norðr í Sogn til Geirmundar hersis, föðurbróður síns' (north into Sogn to Lord Geirmundr, his father's brother) to recover from his wounds.[555] The protection of his paternal uncle is here taken for granted. Both maternal and paternal uncles in the text are presented as unsurprising allies for the saga's heroes but there is little hint of any sacred or special quality which sets the maternal uncle-nephew relationship apart.

These positive examples of uncle-nephew relations are far outweighed by the instances of violence and betrayal which attend most depictions of uncle-nephew relationships, whether the uncle is maternal or paternal. Very little is made of Gunnarr and Hǫgni's relationship with their sister's sons in any of the eddic poems. By contrast, the continentally influenced *Þiðreks saga* depicts the final battle in Attila's hall being sparked by Hǫgni's brutal beheading of his sister's son, Aldrian, who has just been offered in fosterage to his maternal uncles in an effort to strengthen the kinship between the two peoples.[556] A similar episode is highlighted by Brent Miles in his comparative study of *Branwen* and its Norse and German analogues; Efnisien throws his sister's son Gwern into the fire

[553] *Poetic Edda*, trans. by Larrington, p. 138.

[554] *Grp*. prose (p. 164).

[555] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 14 (II, 118).

[556] *Þiðreks saga af Bern*, ed. by Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1951), ch. 379 (pp. 512–13); It is usually considered that *Þiðreks saga*, although written in Old Norse, has been heavily influenced by the German tradition. See Susanne Kramarz-Bein, *Die Þiðriks saga im Kontext der altnorwegischen Literatur*, Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie, 33 (Tübingen: Francke, 2002).

precipitating the battle between the Irish and the Britons in the *Second Branch of the Mabinogi*.[557] In the Norse, the shocking transgression of kinship ties is instead achieved by Guðrún, who murders her sons herself, not to start the fight but to enact revenge once it is over. The dramatic focus is trained on the mother-son and not the uncle-sister's son bond and the relationship of Erpr and Eitill to their uncles Gunnarr and Hǫgni is given no more than a passing thought in both the *Poetic Edda* and *Völsunga saga*.

When Gunnarr and Hǫgni kill their sister's son in the aftermath of Sigurðr's death, the act is not dwelt upon in either eddic poems or *Völsunga saga* but occurs as a footnote to the murder of his more glorious father. Neither does the killing of the maternal nephew seem to elicit any particular horror: in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma,* Hǫgni objects to the scheme solely on the grounds of the oaths they have sworn and emphasises the advantages of adding Sigurðr's sons to their kindred:

> "Vitoma við á moldo menn in sælli,
> meðan fiórir vér fólki ráðom
> oc sá inn húnsci herbaldr lifir,
> né in mætri mægð á moldo,
> ef vér fimm sono fœðom lengi,
> áttomgóða œxla knættim."[558]
>
> ('We don't know of happier men anywhere on earth
> while we four rule the people
> and the southern warlord is alive,
> nor of a mightier kindred on the earth
> if we should in time bring up five sons
> of good family to increase our kin.')

The most that can be said is that principal blame for killing Sigurðr's son in *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* is shifted onto Brynhildr, who is most insistent on this point, declaring: '"Látom son fara feðr í sinni!"' ('Let the son accompany the father [i.e. in death]!'), lest the boy grow up to

[557] Brent Miles, 'Branwen: A Reconsideration of the German and Norse Analogues', *CMCS*, 52 (2006), 13–48 (pp. 28–34).

[558] *Sg*. 18 (p. 210).

avenge him.[559] It is similarly explicit in *Völsunga saga* that Brynhildr ordered the son to die rather than his uncles.[560]

Clearly the relation of Gunnarr and Hǫgni to Sigurðr and not his son is at the heart of the poetic drama. The violence perpetrated against the nephew by his maternal uncles is incidental. By contrast, the aunt-nephew relationship shared by Guðrún and Hniflungr, son of Hǫgni, in *Atlamál* (discussed in section 2.i below) is both positive and productive, as he helps her to achieve vengeance for her brothers and his father. While Gunnarr is therefore avenged by his brother's son, Hniflungr's aim is clearly to avenge his father and the fact that this entails also avenging his uncle again appears more incidental than anything else.

The attitude of eddic poets to the uncle-nephew relationship seems disinterested then, even the portrayals in *Hávamál* and *Grípisspá* are incidental to the poems' main themes. However, the *fornaldarsögur* furnish a few examples where uncle and nephew interactions are more central to the narrative. *Hrólfs saga kraka* opens with fratricide, when Fróði turns on his brother Hálfdan. He also attempts to kill his nephews, Helgi and Hróarr, but they evade capture and ultimately return to seek vengeance. At this late stage, Fróði tries to plead the sanctity of the kinship they share but it is too late:

> Konungr býðr þeim sætt fyrir sik ok bað þá einu ráða þeira í milli,—"ok ferr þetta óskapliga í millum vár frænda, at hvárr skal vilja vera banamaðr annars."
>
> Helgi segir: "Engi má þér trúa, ok muntu okkr síðr svíkja en Hálfdan, föður minn? Ok nú skaltu þess gjalda."[561]

> (The king offered them a settlement and he asked them alone to decide the terms between themselves,—'and that is unfitting among us kinsmen that each man should want to be the killer of the other.'
>
> Helgi said, 'No one can trust you and will you betray us any less than you betrayed Hálfdan, my father? Now you shall pay for this.')

Helgi and Hróarr remain unmoved though they appear to walk a careful line between respect for their kinship and the demands of revenge in that they raise no hand to their uncle directly

[559] *Sg*. 12:1–2 (p. 208).

[560] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 31 (I, 194).

[561] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 5 (I, 13).

but leave him instead to be burned alive in his hall. Their careful manoeuvrings are not in vain as they avoid the open condemnation of the author although Hróarr's death at the hands of his nephew, Hrókr, son of his sister Signý, could be construed as poetic justice. This seems unlikely, however, since it is Helgi not Hróarr who is presented as the more culpable brother in the saga, both commanding the attack on Fróði and being the one to refuse verbally to make peace with their uncle, and he remains unscathed. Indeed, he perpetuates the cycle of uncle-nephew violence by breaking his nephew Hrókr's arms and legs to avenge his brother Hróarr's death.[562] In doing so, he walks a fine line between kin-slaying and justice by leaving his nephew his life, although, as Ármann Jakobsson notes, this maiming is also intended as a further degradation for Hrókr, since 'a lame king is of no use to his kingdom'.[563]

Condemnation is much more explicit in *Völsunga saga* when Rerir kills his maternal uncles, and, as with Helgi and Hróarr's decision, a full account of his reasoning is given:

> þá minnist hann á þær sakir, er hann átti við móðurbræðr sína, er drepit höfðu föður hans, ok safnar konungr sér nú liði miklu ok ferr nú á hendr frændum sínum með þenna her, ok þykkja þeir fyrr gert hafa sakir við sik, þó at hann mæti lítils frændsemi þeira, ok svá gerir hann, fyrir því at eigi skilst hann fyrri við en hann hafði drepit alla föðurbana sína, þó at óskapliga væri fyrir alls sakir.[564]
>
> (Then he [Rerir] remembered his grievances, which he had against his mother's brothers, who had killed his father, and the king now gathered a large host and now went against his kinsmen with that army. He felt that they had committed offences against him, although he little valued their kinship. And this is what he did, because he did not stop before he had killed all his father's slayers, although it was unfitting by all accounts.)

The careful justification for this kin-slaying implies its transgressive nature but it does not appear to have any adverse effects for Rerir and the narrative moves swiftly on to the problems he and his wife have in conceiving an heir.

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[562] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 12 (I, 24).

[563] Ármann Jakobsson, 'Le Roi Chevalier: The Royal Ideology and Genre of *Hrólfs saga kraka*', *Scandinavian Studies*, 71 (1999), 139–66 (p. 154).

[564] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 2 (I, 111).

Other examples of uncle-nephew interaction in the *fornaldarsögur* are even more briefly recounted. Hróarr's murder of his uncle in *Örvar-Odds saga* is mentioned only in passing as an explanation for why he rules eleven provinces of the kingdom of Gaul and his cousin Hjörólfr only one.[565] Starkaðr's maternal uncles appear briefly in *Gautreks saga* when they kill both his parents.[566] In *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* Árán's paternal uncles, Hrærekr and Siggeirr, are highlighted as being troublesome *berserkrs*, although they die at the hands of one of the saga's heroes, Ásmundr, rather than at their nephew's.[567] In *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, the initially positive relationship between Haraldr hilditönn and his brother's son, Hringr, inevitably turns sour resulting in battle between them at Brávellir, where Haraldr falls.[568] Yet something of their former intimacy re-emerges in Hringr's search for his uncle's body to ensure it receives proper treatment and burial.[569]

While no single narrative formula emerges, the unifying theme is treachery and violence, making small allowance for the bonds of kinship. Uncles and nephews are in competition for the same resources and inheritances, even the same brides, as when Hrókr tries to marry his uncle's widow.[570] Both maternal and paternal uncles appear as murderers but the violence cuts both ways and is instigated by the younger generation in several examples as well. The literary picture of the relationship is overwhelmingly negative, one of broken trust and suspicion. Yet amid these continued narrative betrayals, the assumption that one ought to be able to rely on one's uncle persists in the literature. More positive uncle-nephew relations are to be found in the *riddarasögur* where the uncle and nephew pairings are translated wholesale from their continental exempla and, perhaps more surprisingly, in the *Íslendingasögur*, where Johnson and Johnson claim there is not a single instance of violence between uncle and nephew to be found.[571]

Even in the *fornaldarsögur*, Hringr's respectful treatment of his uncle's body is noteworthy nor should it be overlooked that Haraldr's defeat at the hands of his nephew has as much to do with Óðinn's withdrawal of patronage as with Hringr himself. The fact that the author of *Völsunga saga* explicitly calls Rerir's murder of his maternal uncles *óskapligr*

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[565] *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 30 (II, 336).

[566] *Gautreks saga*, ch. 3 (IV, 12).

[567] *Egils saga einhenda*, ch. 7 (III, 336).

[568] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 6, 9 (I, 351, 361).

[569] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 9 (I, 361).

[570] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 11 (I, 23).

[571] S. B. Johnson and R. C. Johnson, p. 216. However, there are certainly cases when violence threatens in both *Harðar saga ok Hólmverja* and *Fóstbræðra saga*, enough to cast doubt on their sweeping generalization.

(unfitting), the same word used by a pleading Fróði in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, reminds us that legendary literature often focuses on exceptional cases, where there may be unusual forces at play. Quinn comments on the *Völsunga saga* episode that:

> What is 'skapligr' is in the process of being defined through the critical transition from Sigi the mulatto to Rerir the quadroon, the growing admixture of human blood (from the unnamed wives) making necessary an effective, if brutal, antidote to the political problems exogamous marriage brings. The impulse of the dynasty to incorporate and exploit another family's blood-line is accompanied by a reflex to cut down the entire donor family to counter treachery and thereby uphold the dynasty's reputation and safeguard the next generation.[572]

It is a combination of particular circumstances, the vulnerability of the dynasty in its early stages and the importance of privileging its patriline, with its special mythological connections, that makes such behaviour necessary. The legendary sagas suggest that uncle-nephew violence is common and yet at the same time characterise it as atypical within the narratives themselves, even if it does not seriously taint those engaged in it. While there may be hints of a privileged relationship between mother's brother and nephew in *Grípisspá* and *Völsunga saga*, with the designation of Rerir's murder of his maternal uncles as *óskapligr*, there is not enough evidence to justify a blanket assumption that encounters like that between Óðinn and his mother's brother in *Hávamál* 140 should automatically be read as evidence of any special relationship.

i. Sigmundr and Sinfjötli: The Paradox of the Sister's Son

The most complex and developed uncle-sister's son pairing in the Norse legendary canon, that of Sigmundr and Sinfjötli, is the exception which proves such a rule. Initially, the episode detailing their interactions in *Völsunga saga* looks to exhibit a favourable attitude to the uncle-sister's son bond. After the death of her father, Völsungr, and all but one of her brothers at the hands of her husband Siggeirr, Siggeirr's wife and Völsungr's daughter, Signý, sends her sons one by one to her last surviving brother, Sigmundr, for fosterage, in the hopes that they will help him to avenge their father. When they fail to do so, she disguises herself and sleeps with her brother to conceive another son. That she only resorts to conceiving an

[572] Quinn, 'Realisation of Mythological Design', pp. 130–31.

incestuous child, unbeknownst to her brother, after her first two sons by Siggeirr fail to meet with their uncle's approval implies she expects, initially at least, the simple uncle-sister's son relation to be enough for their vengeful purposes.

Sinfjötli, the offspring of this incestuous liaison, proves himself worthy by kneading a poisonous snake into the flour, which his supposed uncle has left him to bake into bread. Yet Sigmundr, though he gladly accepts Sinfjötli's help in seeking vengeance for Völsungr, is somewhat surprised by Sinfjötli's lack of loyalty toward his own father:

> ætlar hann eigi mjök frændrækinn, því at hann minnir oft Sigmund á sína harma ok eggjar mjök at drepa Siggeir konung.[573]
>
> (He [Sigmundr] thought that he [Sinfjötli] was not very attached to his kinsmen, because he often reminded Sigmundr of his sorrows and urged him strongly to kill King Siggeirr.)

Sigmundr senses the contradiction inherent in attempting to avenge his father by encouraging his nephews to turn on theirs: to support their uncle, his nephews would have to act in a way utterly foreign to Sigmundr's nature, with his powerful sense of filial loyalty. To have them prove in sympathy with his aims would be to place them out of sympathy with his fundamental character. There is a gulf here between what Sigmundr professes to expect from his nephew and the surprise he demonstrates when his expectations are actually met, that indicates some scepticism about the maternal uncle-nephew bond and explains the ease with which he killed those sister's sons that failed him earlier. Although he is asking for loyalty on the basis of shared kinship according to matrilineal reckoning, he himself does not actually respect such ties and has no fears about transgressing them.

Sinfjötli confounds his expectations, however. The saga author goes to some lengths to assure the audience that Sigmundr is completely deceived by Sinfjötli's parentage. Having been confronted with his fearless strength and chosen to keep the boy with him, it is underlined that in spite of Sinfjötli's demonstrably strong Völsung heritage Sigmundr nevertheless believes 'at hann sé sonr Siggeirs konungs, ok hyggr hann hafa illsku föður síns, en kapp Völsunga' (him to be the son of King Siggeirr and thought him to have his father's cruelty but the zeal of the Völsungs).[574] Once again his conviction that Sinfjötli will have

[573] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 8 (I, 123).

[574] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 8 (I, 123).

inherited his father's evil nature demonstrates the inherently patrilineal bent of Sigmundr's understanding of kinship, even as he tries to build a relationship with his nephew based on matrilineal ties. The illusion persists right up until the moment of Siggeirr's death, when Sigmundr declares: '"Hér erum vit Sinfjötli, systursonr minn"' ('Here we are, Sinfjötli, my sister's son and I'),[575] which is technically true, but Sigmundr clearly does not know the whole story.

His ignorance is confirmed by his reaction to Signý's command, shortly before Siggeirr's death, to kill her two young sons, when they betray Sigmundr and Sinfjötli's presence to their father in the hall. Hard on the heels of having almost killed Sinfjötli while under the influence of magical wolf-skins, Sigmundr refuses to kill the boys, dramatically declaring: '"Eigi vil ek drepa börn þín, þótt þau hafi sagt til mín"' ('I do not wish to kill your children, although they have betrayed me').[576] This is an about turn for Sigmundr, who earlier murdered his nephews without qualm when they failed to knead a snake into flour, like Sinfjötli. Matthias Teichert interprets Sigmundr's refusal here as a loss of agency, which has passed to Sinfjötli after he underwent the initiation of his near-death experience.[577] There is a simpler, more emotional explanation, however. After having grown close to Sinfjötli, a boy he believes to be his sister's son, Sigmundr cannot bring himself to violate the bond of kinship that underlies their relationship. Were he aware of Sinfjötli's true parentage at this point, he would not have refused in such terms. The scepticism which characterised Sigmundr's earlier attitude to the sister's son bond is finally resolved. Sigmundr is a reluctant convert to the efficacy of matrilineal as well as patrilineal kinship loyalty just as he discovers that his relationship to Sinfjötli rested on patrilineal ties all along, thereby justifying all his previous scepticism.

The revelation of Sinfjötli's parentage makes it plain that Sigmundr's successful fictive relationship with Sinfjötli as the sister's son only flourishes because he is in fact the son as well. His true heritage makes him a suitable companion for his father in their quest for revenge and protects him, via the stoicism he inherits from his Völsung ancestry, from death at the hands of his uncle. Indeed, Sinfjötli's own violent interactions with his uncle by marriage, his step-mother Borghildr's brother, demonstrate the exceptional nature of his

[575] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 8 (I, 127).

[576] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 8 (I, 125).

[577] Matthias Teichert, '*Þeir Sigmundr fóru í hamina*. Die Werwolf-Erzählung in Kap. 8 der *Völsunga saga*', *ZfdA*, 138 (2009), 281–95 (p. 291).

relationship with Sigmundr and it is the murder of his step-uncle, while competing for the hand of the same woman, which ultimately motivates his death.[578]

Paradoxically, it is the mask of the uncle-sister's son relationship that allows him to coexist so peaceably (murderous wolf-skin episodes aside)[579] with his father for so long. As established in chapter II, fathers and sons rarely spend sustained narrative time together in legendary Old Norse literature, yet from the age of nine Sinfjötli is single-handedly raised by his father and the antagonism and ambivalence which customarily mark father-son interactions in mythic-heroic texts is almost entirely absent. Successfully, they both cooperate in a long-term revenge strategy and this cooperation is without parallel elsewhere in the legendary sagas. It appears the fiction of their uncle-nephew relationship allows for camaraderie to emerge where there would otherwise be rivalry.

Even more striking, this co-operation between Sigmundr and Sinfjötli does not outlast the revelation of Sinfjötli's true parentage; Sinfjötli is only granted space in the narrative when he functions as the sister's son. Once he is revealed to be the son and his incestuous heritage is normalised by Signý's withdrawal from the narrative—burning to death with her husband, thereby rendering the circumstances of his incestuous conception invisible—Sinfjötli is quickly squeezed out of the saga. He gives way to his more famous brothers, Helgi and Sigurðr, and dies fairly shortly after vengeance against Siggeirr has been achieved. Moreover, the manner of his murder, being forced to drink from a poisoned horn by his step-mother, makes Sigmundr complicit in the act, since his father could so easily have prevented it had he not been drunk. Sigmundr's apathetic reaction contrasts particularly sharply with his efforts to save Sinfjötli when he attacked him under the influence of the wolf-skins. Likewise, his ineffective drunken advice to '"Lát grön sía, sonr!"' ('Let your moustache strain it, son!'),[580] although he knows Sinfjötli does not share his own immunity to poison, contrasts with his earlier warning to his supposed nephew not to eat the bread he has just made with poisoned flour.[581]

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[578] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 10 (I, 133–34).

[579] The wolf-skin episode in *Völsunga saga*, ch. 8 (I, 123–24) is the only moment when the fictive relationship between Sigmundr and Sinfjötli is seriously threatened. Under the influence of the skins the relationship becomes much more competitive and vicious. This may in part be attributed to the skins themselves, Sigmundr's burning of which suggests they are inherently malign. At the same time the episode invites comparison with other father-son rivalries which spring up when recognition is suspended between father and son (see chapter VI section 2.i) and is a reminder that beneath the fiction the same anxieties lie dormant in Sigmundr and Sinfjötli's relationship, only waiting to be exposed.

[580] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 10 (I, 134).

[581] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 6 (I, 122).

While the relationship between Sigmundr and Sinfjötli appears at first to glorify uncle-sister's son relations, the revelation of Sinfjötli's true parentage ultimately devalues the foundation of their earlier relationship. Sinfjötli is kin twice over, both son and nephew to Sigmundr and it is this combination that preserves him from the harmful effects of uncle-nephew relations seen elsewhere in the mythic-heroic corpus. The uncle and sister's son relationship between Sigmundr and Sinfjötli that flourishes is really the exception that proves the rule: the uncle-nephew relation tends to be incidental in mythic-heroic narrative and is frequently marred by violence and competition. Only as a cover for father-son relations does it truly flourish. The same can be observed in the Norse pantheon with Njǫrðr and his son Freyr. Snorri records in *Ynglinga saga* that:

> Þá er Njǫrðr var með Vǫnum, þá hafði hann átta systur sína, því at þat váru þar lǫg.[582]
>
> (When Njǫrðr was with the Vanir people he had married his sister, according to their law.)

Freyja and Freyr are the offspring of this incest, making Freyr Njǫrðr's sister's son as well as his son. This dual relation should be problematic, since 'þat var bannat með Ásum at byggva svá náit at frændsemi' (intermarriage between so near relations was forbidden among the Æsir),[583] but the invisibility of Njǫrðr's sister-wife largely removes the spectre of incest from their relationship, just as Signý's death normalised the relationship between Sigmundr and Sinfjötli. *Skírnismál* even has Skaði referring to Freyr as 'occarn […] mǫg' (our boy, our son), as if she were his mother, which suggests another effort to erase any incestuous origins.[584] Freyr's position as the sister's son is something better forgotten, which is, of course, why Loki cannot resist taunting Njǫrðr in *Lokasenna* that 'við systor þinni gaztu slícan mǫg' (with your sister you begot such a son).[585] Njǫrðr and Freyr's father-son relationship confirms that when the father-son and the uncle-sister's son relationship coincide, the father-son relationship will ultimately win out.

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[582] *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 4, in *Heimskringla I*, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, Íslenzk fornrit, 26 (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 2002), p. 13.

[583] *Ynglinga saga*, ch. 4, ed. by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, p. 13.

[584] *Skm*. 1:3 (p. 69).

[585] *Ls*. 36:4–5 (p. 103).

2. Guðrún and Gjaflaug: The Aunt

While the uncle is clearly not as prominent as the father, he does have an undeniable presence in the mythic-heroic corpus. The same can hardly be said of the aunt, who features only incidentally in the *fornaldarsögur*. The *Poetic Edda*, however, depicts both Guðrún's relationship with her nephew Hniflungr, who helps his aunt avenge her brothers in *Atlamál*, and Guðrún's relationship with her paternal aunt, Gjaflaug, the sister of Gjúki, in *Guðrúnarkviða I*. Both relationships, between aunt and nephew and niece and aunt, are depicted as supportive, if not particularly intimate, but the evidence is too meagre to draw any wider conclusions.

i. Guðrún and Hniflungr: In Pursuit of Revenge

Guðrún and Hniflungr successfully co-operate to exact revenge on Atli for the murders of Gunnarr and Hǫgni. After Guðrún's dramatic slaughter of her two sons, the poet rather anticlimactically describes how:

> Sáto samtýnis, senduz fárhugi,
> henduz heiptyrði, hvártki sér unði. [586]
>
> (They [Guðrún and Atli] sat in the same farmstead, sent each other hostile thoughts,
> Hurled hateful words back and forth, neither was content.)

The image of Guðrún and Atli at this point is static, sitting in the hall and taking no active steps against one another. As Clark says, '[t]hey are portrayed equally fairly, and equally unattractively'.[587] After the dramatic massacre of the Gjúkungs, an impasse seems to have been reached. In the knowledge that Guðrún will murder Atli eventually, Dronke finds this pause in proceedings illogical and Hniflungr's presence 'ill-motivated' on the grounds that Guðrún 'needs no one else to spur her on', but the poem suggests rather the opposite by choosing to introduce Hniflungr, son of Hǫgni, to break the apparent deadlock.[588] Earlier in the poem, Hǫgni's sons, who accompany him on his doomed expedition, are named Snaevar

[586] *Am*. 88:1–4 (p. 260).

[587] Clark, p. 34.

[588] *Poetic Edda*, ed. by Dronke, I (1969), 105.

and Solar. The existence of a third son is not hinted at in *Atlamál*, though *Atlakviða* mentions 'inn œri erfivorðr Hǫgna' (the younger inheritance-guardian of Hǫgni),[589] who sees his father off in stanza 12:5–6 and certainly, other sources, including *Þiðreks saga* and the Faroese ballad *Høgna táttur*, the Danish ballad *Grimilds Hævn* and the *Hvenske Krønike*, preserve the tradition of Hǫgni's surviving son reappearing to claim vengeance for his father.[590] Given the name Hniflungr is a variation of Niflungr, used elsewhere to describe all the sons of Gjúki,[591] there has been some debate as to whether it constitutes a proper name or a genealogical identifier, but his name is less important than his role as avenger.[592]

Hniflungr is introduced abruptly as the poet cuts away from Guðrún and Atli to show him planning his revenge:

> Heipt óx Hniflungi, hugði á stórræði,
> gat fyr Guðrúno, at hann væri grimmr Atla.[593]
>
> (Hatred grew in Hniflungr, he had a great deed in mind,
> He mentioned to Guðrún that he was full of hate for Atli.)

A linguistic and thematic connection is immediately established between Hniflungr and his aunt by the repetition of *heipt* to describe Hniflungr's emotional state, evoking Guðrún's *heiptyrði* (hateful words) in the line before. Their shared hatred makes them ideal allies and so it proves, for once Hǫgni's son has made himself known to Guðrún their vengeance is speedily accomplished: 'veginn var þá Atli, var þess scamt bíða' (then Atli was slain, it was a short time to wait).[594]

The joint nature of the enterprise between aunt and nephew is stressed several times, as when both participants physically attack Atli during the assault:

> sonr vá Hǫgna oc siálf Guðrún.[595]

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[589] *Akv*. 12:5–6 (p. 242).

[590] *Kommentar*, ed. by von See, and others, VII: *Heldenlieder* (2012), p. 628.

[591] *Br*. 16:10 (p. 200); *Akv*. 11:2 (p. 242); *Am*. 47:5 (p. 254).

[592] *Kommentar*, ed. by von See, and others, VII: *Heldenlieder* (2012), pp. 627–28.

[593] *Am*. 88:5–8 (p. 260).

[594] *Am*. 89:5–6 (p. 260).

[595] *Am*. 89:7–8 (p. 260).

(Hǫgni's son struck a blow and Guðrún herself.)

Guðrún also admits to the shared character of her revenge in her confession to Atli:

"látomc því valda, er líðr þína ævi,
enn sumo sonr Hǫgna, er þic sár mœða."[596]

('I declare that I brought it about that your life is passing away,
And Hǫgni's son, in part—that your wounds exhaust you.')

Her declaration reveals a slightly uneasy negotiation of responsibility. While Guðrún is proud, even anxious perhaps, to take the bulk of the credit for Atli's death, her acknowledgement that Hniflungr too had some part in it seems a little disingenuous after the narrative painted by the previous stanzas. Until Hniflungr's appearance and his *storrœði* (great deed) there is little to suggest that Guðrún intended to take further action against her husband after killing his sons. It is only when Hniflungr lets her know of his hatred for Atli that '[k]ómo í hug henni Hǫgna viðfarar' (his treatment of Hǫgni came into her mind),[597] as if she had begun to forget her brother's fate. The verses strongly imply that Hniflungr's appearance is the catalyst for the revenge which follows and, despite Guðrún's pride in her actions, Hniflungr can be seen to take the more active part in initiating their alliance: the stratagem is his, the impetus behind the alliance is his and the way the poet tells it, the first blow is his as well.

Guðrún and Hniflungr's relationship is more inferred than depicted and all speech between them is indirectly told. Direct interaction between them is confined to the moment of Atli's murder, when they stab him together, whereupon poetic focus shifts back to Guðrún alone and her conversation with her dying husband. Unlike in *Þiðreks saga*, where Hǫgni's son obtains vengeance on Atli entirely on his own, the narrative account in *Atlamál* is centred on Guðrún's experience. Hniflungr's disappearance is as abrupt as his arrival. Having served the purpose of helping Guðrún achieve vengeance, Hniflungr's ultimate fate is not revealed, much like those of the other additional characters in *Atlamál*, including his presumed mother, Kostbera. However, the successful collaboration between Hniflungr and his aunt stands as a rare example of a relationship between a woman and her brother's son that is both narratively

[596] *Am*. 91:3–6 (p. 261).

[597] *Am*. 89:1–2 (p. 260).

significant and productive, from the perspective of Guðrún and Hniflungr, if not their victim, Atli. In this way, it contrasts sharply with the failed revenge mission in *Hamðismál*, where fraternal squabbling ultimately undermines the brothers' attempt to avenge their sister. Guðrún and Hniflungr have no such difficulties in an alliance that cannot be faulted.

ii. Gjaflaug and Guðrún: A Community of Kinswomen

Gjaflaug is introduced in *Guðrúnarkviða I* as one of a number of women who attempt to offer Guðrún comfort in the wake of her husband Sigurðr's murder. These women form a community within the text that is defined by kinship. All of them are relatives of Guðrún: Gjaflaug is her aunt; Herborg, while a hostage, is called *fóstra* (foster-mother) by Gullrǫnd;[598] and Gullrǫnd is herself Guðrún's sister. Finally, Brynhildr, who makes an appearance at the poem's conclusion is Guðrún's sister-in-law. These are, in fact, Guðrún's closest female kinsmen, her sister, her sister-in-law, her aunt and her foster-mother. Only her mother is conspicuous by her absence. Given the bitter relationship between Grímhildr and Guðrún in other eddic poems, as discussed further in chapter IV section 2.i, her exclusion here, in a poem exploring female solidarity, is fitting. Instead, Herborg represents the maternal role filled elsewhere by Grímhildr. Each relationship within the poem is thus made distinct; no kinship role is duplicated. The inclusion of Gjaflaug seems to be a deliberate choice which completes the picture of support from her female kin. Against this backdrop of female solidarity both Brynhildr's venom and the betrayal by Guðrún's brothers are cast into sharp relief. The aunt-niece relationship between Gjaflaug and Guðrún must be read in dialogue with the other relationships within the text. Throughout the poem Guðrún is consciously contrasted with the other women in her family and they with each other.

Sat over Sigurðr's body, Guðrún is unable to express her grief at the start of the poem. Her inability to weep is clearly problematic: without giving vent to her emotions she is 'búin til at springa af harmi' (ready to burst from grief).[599] Not only is Guðrún unable to grieve in the expected manner but her emotional reticence appears to be linked to a more drastic response to her husband's death: the very first line of the poem notes that she *gorðiz at deyja* (prepared herself to die).[600] Getting Guðrún to grieve is presented as a matter of life and death; a collective effort is made, therefore, to direct her *harðr hugar* (rigidity, fierceness of

[598] *Gðr. I* 12:3 (p. 203).

[599] *Br*. prose (p. 201).

[600] *Gðr. I* 1:2 (p. 202).

mind) into the more conventional channels of weeping and lamenting.[601] Two of the women, Gjaflaug and Herborg, lead by example, recounting their own *oftregi* (deep sorrow).[602] While these laments are clearly meant to support Guðrún, encouraging her to make a lament of her own as an alternative to suicide, there is still a competitive edge to them, leading McKinnell to describe their contributions as a 'rather crude misery contest'.[603]

Gjaflaug is the first of the women introduced in the poem and it is she who institutes this initial show of female support, immediately after *iarlar alsnotrir* (very clever noblemen) have tried and failed to offer Guðrún comfort.[604] The character does not appear elsewhere, not even in *Völsunga saga* which drew so heavily on the eddic poems, but any confusion is dispelled by the instant identification of her as Gjúki's sister:

> Þá qvað Giaflaug, Giúca systir:
> "Mic veit ec á moldo munar lausasta;
> hefi ec fimm vera forspell beðit,
> þriggia dœtra, þriggia systra,
> átta brœðra, þó ec ein lifi."[605]
>
> (Then said Gjaflaug, Gjúki's sister:
> 'I know that on the earth I am most deprived of joy,
> I have suffered the loss of five husbands,
> Of three daughters, three sisters,
> Of eight brothers, yet I alone am living.)

This positive downpour of bereavements is clearly meant to abash Guðrún but it has no discernible effect as: 'Þeygi Guðrún gráta mátti' (yet Guðrún could not weep).[606]

Herborg is the next to try and her five-stanza lament quite dwarfs Gjaflaug's brief attempt but it is her sister, Gullrǫnd, who ultimately succeeds in making Guðrún cry. Only

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[601] *Gðr. I* 2:3 (p. 202).

[602] *Gðr. I* 3:6 (p. 202).

[603] John McKinnell, 'Female Reactions to the Death of Sigurðr', in *Essays on Eddic Poetry*, ed. by Donata Kick and John D. Shafer, Toronto Old Norse-Icelandic Series, 7 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), pp. 249–67 (p. 259).

[604] *Gðr. I* 2:1–2 (p. 202).

[605] *Gðr. I* 4 (p. 202).

[606] *Gðr. I* 5:1–2 (p. 202).

Gullrǫnd understands that something more drastic than a demonstration of lament is needed. She uncovers Sigurðr's body and encourages Guðrún to kiss and embrace it, thereby coming face to face with the reality of her loss. She even rebukes Herborg for her ineffective approach:

> "Fá kanntu, fóstra, þótt þú fróð sér,
> ungo vífi annspiǫll bera."[607]
>
> ('You little know, foster-mother, though you may be wise,
> how to give comforting words to a young wife.')

There are subtle hints at generational contrast here in Gullrǫnd's characterisation of Guðrún as an *ungt víf*. Both Gjaflaug and Herborg, as representatives of the older generation, are implied by Gullrǫnd to be out of touch with the sisters' youth. Gjaflaug and Herborg focus more on themselves than on Guðrún, sympathising with her in so far as they themselves have experienced her griefs. The outpouring of their losses, which are so much heavier than Guðrún's own, seem intended to trivialise her own sorrow. If they can survive such heavy grief, their laments seem to imply, Guðrún can certainly survive the loss of only her husband. Her catatonic response to his death is painted as disproportionate. Their support is tainted by a self-centredness which makes it less effective. By contrast, Gullrǫnd empathises with Guðrún's situation directly, lamenting with her for what she has lost:

> "Ycrar vissa ec ástir mestar
> manna allra fyr mold ofan;
> unðir þú hvárki úti né inni,
> systir mín, nema hiá Sigurði."[608]
>
> ('Yours, I know, was the greatest love
> Of all men across the earth;
> You were content neither outside nor inside
> My sister, unless you were near Sigurðr.')

[607] *Gðr. I* 12:3–6 (p. 203).

[608] *Gðr. I* 17:3–10 (p. 204).

Gullrǫnd's approach is rewarded with success, privileging the sister relationship above that of aunt and niece or daughter and foster-mother.

Guðrún's newfound ability to grieve is usually taken as a positive development. Hill is of the opinion that *Guðrúnarkviða I* 'is a humane poem about grief and the beginning of recovery, about dealing with sorrow and its consequences, and about the necessity of expressing grief, both in tears and speech in order to be able to move on in one's life'.[609] Robert J. Glendinning agrees that the poem's theme 'is patently Guðrún's grief', a theme he suggests is shared with *Guðrúnarkviða II*.[610] Nevertheless, the support offered by her kinswomen is tempered by their determination to channel Guðrún's exceptionalism into more usual forms of behaviour. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir suggests that in finally being brought to lament, Guðrún has 'perhaps lost control over herself: she has been forced to adhere to society's norms, to conform to her gender role, by enacting the lament'.[611] Her analysis calls attention to the ambivalences both in how support is offered and how it is received by Guðrún. The attempt at comfort made by her aunt Gjaflaug, among those of her other kinswomen, is not untainted by competition and judgement. This is by no means an idealised relationship between aunt and niece but it is mostly a positive and supportive one.

3. Reassessing Uncle-Nephew Relations

At no point in mythic-heroic literature do relationships between uncles and aunts and their nieces and nephews supplant or compensate for ambivalent parent-child relationships; the only instance where this appears to be the case, Sigmundr's raising of Sinfjötli, proves to be a father-son relationship in truth and the two figures ultimately struggle with the resulting ambivalence. Instead, these interactions are plagued by many of the same competitive and even violent instincts which attend parent-child relations in the same narratives, whether that be Gjaflaug's competitive grief in *Guðrúnarkviða I* or Fróði's struggle with his nephews for power in *Hrólfs saga kraka*.[612] It is no surprise, given that most mythic-heroic texts are primarily occupied with male characters and concerns, that uncles appear far more frequently than aunts. Uncles may support or thwart their nephews and contribute to the narrative in a

[609] Thomas D. Hill, '*Guðrúnarkviða in fyrsta:* Guðrún's Healing Tears', in *Revisiting the* Poetic Edda, ed. by Acker and Larrington, pp. 107–16 (p. 107).

[610] Robert J. Glendinning, '*Guðrúnarqviða Forna*: A Reconstruction and Interpretation', in *Edda*, ed. by Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason, pp. 258–82 (p. 279 n. 14).

[611] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, 'Women and Subversion', p. 129.

[612] *Gðr. I* 4 (p. 202); *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 3–5 (I, 5–13).

variety of ways. Being neither bride nor mother, there is little space for the role of aunt in the genealogically orientated *fornaldarsögur*. The *Poetic Edda* appears to be a special case but the disproportionate representation of both uncles and aunts in the compilation is easily explained by the focus on lateral sibling relations in so many of its poems rather than on parent-child interactions. The dramatic preoccupation with siblings encouraged lateral expansion in the preceding generation as well, resulting in a greater number of scenes between uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews.

A thorough survey of uncle-nephew interactions in the mythic-heroic corpus has revealed two things: depictions of uncle-nephew relations in Old Norse legendary literature hardly differentiate between the maternal and the paternal uncles; and depictions of uncle-nephew relations in Old Norse legendary literature overall are as likely to be marred by violence and betrayal as any other kin-relation. The most prominent uncle and nephew pairings in Old Norse mythic-heroic literature are those that are also fathers and sons and as the namelessness of Njǫrðr's sister-wife suggests, it is paternity that is the important factor in such relationships. It is supremely fitting that the only lament for a sister's son in the *Poetic Edda* comes not from the mouth of an uncle but from the mouth of the father, when the dying Sigurðr grieves his son's inevitable murder. He reminds Guðrún that:

> "Riðra þeim síðan, þótt siau alir,
> systor sonr slícr at þingi."[613]
>
> ('No such sister's son will ride with them
> To the *þing*, even if you bear seven.')

Sigurðr idealises the sister's son relationship but the timing of his lament underscores how little it has been regarded by the actual uncles of his son. The uncle-nephew bond, whether paternal or maternal, in no way rivals the father-son relationship, although it does occasionally provide a cover for it. In the light of this firmly patrilineal literary context, it seems advisable to be more cautious in assuming that the authors and audiences of these texts understood the relationship between a man and his sister's son to be in any way special or sacred, even if only historically or anciently so. Instances of positive, nurturing interactions between maternal uncles and their nephews, which could be taken as an echo of a long-

[613] *Sg*. 27:1–4 (p. 211).

abandoned custom, must be set against the broader backdrop of more ambivalent or outright violent relationships which suggest the relationship had lost any sacred connotations.

Undoubtedly there is some evidence for the privileging of maternal over paternal uncles in older Germanic culture, not least in the way uncle < OFr. *oncle* < Lat. *avunculus* originally referred only to the maternal uncle but ultimately became the preferred term for both maternal and paternal uncles in English, French and German. However, the relevance of this purported Germanic custom to Old Norse texts preserved from the thirteenth century onwards seems minimal. While it is tempting to take the description of Rerir's murder of his maternal uncles as *óskapligr* as evidence that he was transgressing a special bond, the case for any memory of a privileged relationship between uncle and sister's son in Old Norse mythic-heroic literature is ultimately inconclusive. The texts themselves paint a mixed picture of uncle-nephew relations, but one that strays more often toward strife than familial amity.

If uncles often appear to be a threat, aunts are more usually (in so far as one can generalise from so few examples) in need of support themselves: Gjaflaug's list of woes paint her as a victim, while Guðrún requires assistance to achieve her vengeance on Atli. In both cases they are also sterile characters. Gjaflaug is a mother no longer, having lost all five of her husbands and never having borne any children. Guðrún, in *Atlamál* at least, ends the poem childless and alone. Although she goes on to mother Hamðir and Sǫrli in subsequent poems, *Atlamál* does not allude to this future fecundity but ends on the poignant note of her failed suicide, presenting her as someone who has given up on life. It is Hniflungr who represents the hope of a new generation, not any children of hers.

Most importantly, all these relationships conform to the broader pattern of intergenerational interactions set by parent-child relations. They are highly ambivalent; violence is undercut by censure, while support is tempered with self-interest. The critical difference between these and parent-child relations is in their narrative role. Parent-child relations are embedded in the literary structure of their narratives while uncle-nephew, aunt-nephew and aunt-niece relations are more tangential unless, as in Sigmundr and Sinfjötli's case, they are directly entangled in parent-child relations. These are relationships often defined by a single interaction, with little narrative room to grow and develop, and thus rarely approach the narrative significance of parent-child relations, which were further reinforced by the patronymic naming system in Old Norse society, as the next chapter explores.

VI. THE PATRONYMIC SYSTEM

In any society names are important indicators of character, status and affiliation. Names are heavily implicated in kinship relations because their choosing, bestowal and usage (or indeed non-usage) are all frequently the province of kin. Along with kin-terms, names provide a means by which to address or refer to an individual and the names themselves frequently declare the bearer's position or their role in a kinship system. In Old Norse society, family affiliation was nominally declared by a patronymic naming system, in which sons and daughters were identified by their filial relationship to their father. The result was that systems of kinship were embedded in forms of address and reference and were thus continually reinforced by social usage. Moreover, the patronymic system specified a certain type of relation, namely the relation of descent between a father and their son or daughter, rather than just common membership of a family group. Identity was thus founded both on who a person was individually and on whom they were related to. The use of patronymics, which embed the name bearer in a larger lineage, openly declares, and sometimes, I would argue, performs the relationship between father and son or father and daughter. Conversely, such a relationship could also be denied by the rejection of such a name and the assumption of a matronymic in its stead, as when Loki is called Laufeyjarson to reinforce his kinship with his mother's family, the Æsir, rather than his kinship with the giants from whom his father, Farbauti, is descended. The preference for a patronymic rather than a matronymic name indicates the higher value placed on the patriline as compared to the matriline. Any preference for a matronymic tended to indicate something undesirable about the father, such as Farbauti's giantish blood.

Because patronymics depended on filiation, not marriage, they were constant from birth. Even after a woman married she would still be known as the daughter of her father. Similarly, even after a man became a father to his own sons, he would still be known as the son of his own father, his paternity reflected in his son's names rather than his own. Other names might change, as when Áslaug becomes Randalín in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* or Höttr becomes Hjalti in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, but while a patronymic might be displaced by a character's more common nickname, once bestowed, it could not be altered.[614]

In addition to the patronymic, of course, people also bore personal names and as the patronymic described a person's descent, personal names in Old Norse could likewise be descriptive. Björn (Bear), who is turned into a bear in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, is so-named long

[614] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 11 (I, 257); *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 36 (I, 69).

before his transformation but the narrative logic behind his name is clear. Hildr (Battle), who is the cause of conflict in *Sörla þáttr,* is aptly named after 'battle' and the same word recurs in the compound names of other women, like Brynhildr, who also cause narrative strife. Descriptive nicknames could supplement personal names too, serving both to differentiate between commonly named characters and to inform the audience about the character themselves. Hallbjörn hálftröll in *Ketils saga hængs*, is introduced bearing a nickname that is a constant reminder of his mother's trollish blood, even as he is identified in the next sentence as *sonr Úlfs ins óarga* (the son of Úlfr the fearless).[615] The nickname of Illugi Gríðarfóstri (foster-son of Gríðr) similarly informs an audience of his kin relations beyond his relationship to his father. Örvar-Oddr (Arrow-Oddr) is so named for his possession of three magical arrows, but nicknames could equally commemorate great deeds of the hero, as when Sigurðr is called *Fáfnisbani* (slayer of Fáfnir) in *Völsunga saga* or Ásmundr is called *berserkjabani* (slayer of *berserkrs*) in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*.

If not directly descriptive, the frequency with which certain common names appear in the literature meant names could instead be allusive. In eddic poetry and the *fornaldarsögur*, legendary names recur across lineages and across legendary traditions: Hǫgni is the name of both Gunnarr's brother in the Gjúkung legend and Hildr's father in the Hildr legend; there are a number of different retellings concerning a hero named Helgi and his valkyrie lover in the *Poetic Edda*. Richard Alford argues that, unlike unique names, '[h]igh reoccurrence names […] do not emphasize a person's individuality and uniqueness. In fact, they do just the opposite. They call attention to similarities between namesakes',[616] and thus encourage behaviour consistent with their social role. In many cultures, '[n]amesakes often share a special relationship, sometimes involving special, reciprocal obligations'.[617] Sons are rarely called directly after their fathers in Old Norse legendary literature, perhaps because of an awareness that the patronymic system would make such a name repetitive and unwieldy, but it is not unheard of and great-grandfathers, grandfathers and fathers all appear as namesakes in the legendary material. In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, the second Angantýr is named after his

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[615] *Ketils saga hængs*, ch. 1 (II, 151).

[616] Richard D. Alford, *Naming and Identity: A Cross-Cultural Study of Personal Naming Practices* (New Haven: HRAF Press, 1988), p. 73.

[617] Alford, p. 74. Old Norse society was no exception. In *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 30 (IV, 159), King Hrólfr shares a namesake relation with his adversary, the King of Ireland. In *Áns saga bogsveigis*, ch. 7 (II, 401), Án tells his son Þórir '"sýnist mér sem þú værir skyldr til at hefna nafns þíns á Ingjaldi konungi"' (it seems to me that you might be obliged to avenge your namesake on King Ingjaldr).

maternal great-grandfather.[618] In *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, Hjálmþér names one of his sons after his father, King Ingi.[619] Similarly, Hálfdan Eysteinnson of *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar* names one of his sons Eysteinn and Sigurðr's young son by Guðrún in *Völsunga saga* is called Sigmundr, after his grandfather.[620] In *Af Upplendinga konungum*, there is an Eysteinn, son of Högni Eysteinsson, and *Tóka þáttr Tókasonar* tells of a Tóki, son of Tóki, son of Tóki in gamli (the elder).[621] Sharing a personal name could therefore indicate shared membership of a lineage or a family just like the patronym, further promoting social and familial cohesion. The repetition of a name within a single saga, tale or tradition is not common though. Presumably, narrative clarity demanded names be distinct, even if they were not unique and appeared elsewhere in the legendary corpus.

The descriptive, informative and cohesive function of Norse names is clear. At every level, whether the personal name, the nickname or the patronymic, names provided information about a character's nature, exploits or descent. The understanding of kinship as mutuality of being, which is implicitly expressed by the metaphors for kinship used by characters in mythic-heroic literature, as discussed in chapter I, has so far been contrasted with the ambivalence which characterises most intergenerational relationships in Old Norse myth and legend. While such direct reflections on the nature of kinship are rare, I suggest that the patronymic system further reinforces the same mutual and transpersonal understanding of kinship expressed by the image of the family tree but in a much more pervasive manner. The ambivalent feelings which attend most parent-child interactions are balanced by the strength of the collective family and an individual's obligations toward it, which is asserted by the patronymic system. From the moment of naming, a sense of kinship founded on 'mutuality of being' and the extension of the self to include other family members was being forged which might counteract the ambivalence threatening to tear parents and children apart as their relationships developed.

1. Giving Names and Receiving Names

In Old Norse society names were customarily given by the father. Children were brought before their fathers immediately after birth to be sprinkled with water and receive a name.[622]

[618] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 6 (II, 28).

[619] *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, ch. 22 (IV, 242).

[620] *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, ch. 25 (IV, 282); *Völsunga saga*, ch. 26 (I, 174).

[621] *Af Upplendinga konungum*, ch. 2 (II, 147); *Tóka þáttr Tókasonar*, ch. 1 (II, 137).

[622] Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 81.

The child received two names from its father, first a forename and secondly a patronym. While kinship in Iceland was reckoned bilaterally, including both maternal and paternal relatives, linguistically and legally the patriline was clearly dominant.[623] Alternatively, it was within the father's power to refuse to name the child and instead order it to be exposed. If the mother was the agent of biological birth, the father could be said to be the agent of social birth, endowing the child with a sense of personhood by naming it and assuring it a chance of life not guaranteed by a successful delivery. Even in the pre-Christian period, it seems not to have been considered murder to expose a child until it had undergone the ceremonial sprinkling of water and received a name, and the rite of baptism seems to have fulfilled the same function after conversion.[624] Thus, in Old Norse society the individual, with its rights and responsibilities, only came into being by being recognised as part of a larger *dividual* whole, as expressed by the common image of kinship as a tree discussed in chapter I, and the father was the key actor in this drama of recognition, as I shall refer to it.

Without this paternal recognition and the name it bestowed, a child's welcome into the family was doubtful. True namelessness, which is not the result of a temporary disguise, is a rare occurrence in Old Norse myth and legend, best exemplified by Helgi Hjǫrvarðsson. In his case, naming is delayed because 'ecci nafn festiz við hann' (no name would stick to him), the implication being that only the right name, one that suits his character and temperament, will become permanent.[625] Given that the prospect of reincarnation is raised with regard to the name Helgi, it could even be the case that his naming is delayed by the challenge of finding not just a suitable name but of finding the *exact* name which already belongs to him from a past life. *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* concludes with the statement 'Helgi oc Sváva er sagt at væri endrborin' (Helgi and Sváva are said to have been reborn),[626] while *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* ends on the comment that:

> Helgi oc Sigrún er kallat at væri endrborin. Hét hann þá Helgi Haddingiascaði, enn hon Kára, Hálfdanar dóttir, svá sem qveðit er í Károlióðom, oc var hon valkyria. [627]

[623] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 89.

[624] Clover, 'Politics of Scarcity', p. 154. See also Juha Pentikäinen, *The Nordic Dead-Child Tradition: Nordic Dead-Child Beings. A Study in Comparative Religion*, trans. by Antony Landon, FF Communications, 202 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1968), pp. 59–62, 74.

[625] *HHv*. prose (p. 142).

[626] *HHv*. prose (p. 149).

[627] *HH. II* prose (p. 161).

(It is said that Helgi and Sigrún were reborn. He was then called Helgi Haddingja-damager, and she was Kára, Hálfdan's daughter, as is told in *Károljóð*, and she was a valkyrie.)

The position of the poem *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar* between two accounts of the life of Helgi Hundingsbani further encourages the view that Helgi Hjǫrvarðsson is the reincarnation of the aforementioned hero, or at the very least his literary double. The ordering of the poems suggests that Sváva may have named Helgi Hjǫrvarðsson because in character or temperament Helgi Hjǫrvarðsson resembled Helgi Hundingsbani, although an explicit namesake connection is never established. The similarity of their stories, both men falling in love with a valkyrie leading to conflict within the family, reinforces their connection.

Name and narrative are shown to be interconnected by the first words Helgi Hjǫrvarðsson speaks, addressed to the valkyrie Sváva:

"Hvat lætr þú fylgia Helga nafni,
brúðr biartlituð, allz þú bióða ræðr?
hygg þú fyr ǫllom atqvæðom vel!
Þigg ec eigi þat, nema ec þic hafa."[628]

('What will you give me with the name Helgi,
Bright-faced bride, since you decided to give it?
Think well before all decisions!
I won't accept it unless I have you also.')

The way Helgi tells it, the name Helgi and a valkyrie bride or lover go hand in hand: he will not accept one without the other. In taking the name, Helgi also takes a bride and all the trouble that comes with her. Rather than promoting cohesion within his family, Helgi's name connects him to a hero he is not related to and confirms him in a marital not a consanguineal relationship. The power of naming is diverted and instead of strengthening his relationship with his father it forges an alternative relationship with a wife.

The exchange also highlights how a name is like a gift and it is accompanied by gifts: Sváva offers Helgi a sword from Sigarshólm in response to his request. As a gift, the name

[628] *HHv*. 7 (p. 142).

sets up an expectation of reciprocity, an obligation on the part of the recipient. The effect on Helgi of receiving a name is immediate. While he is still nameless Helgi is shown sitting passively on a burial mound, a clearly liminal space between the living and the dead, that could even be compared to the womb. No sooner does he receive a name from Sváva than he begins to take on a more traditionally heroic role, voicing a desire to avenge his maternal grandfather. His warlike pursuits seem likely to suit Sváva's valkyrie nature and he follows her urgings even more explicitly in seeking the sword which she had mentioned on Sigarshólm. In exchange for his name, Helgi proves himself loyal to her interests and advice.

In contrast, the bestowal of a name by Sváva seems to be a trigger which draws him into conflict with his father, who earlier failed to give him a name that would stick. Helgi's first words to his father after receiving his name from his lover are critical of his father's leadership:

> "Ertattu, Hiǫrvarðr, heilráðr konungr,
> fólcs oddviti, þóttu frægr sér."[629]
>
> ('You are not, Hjǫrvarðr, a wisely-counselled king,
> Leader of the host, though you are famous.')

In particular, it seems to be his father's neglect of his kinship obligations, by failing to kill Hróðmarr, the slayer of his wife's father, to which Helgi specifically objects:

> "Enn Hróðmarr scal hringom ráða,
> þeim er átto órir niðiar."[630]
>
> ('But Hróðmarr will have rings at his disposal,
> Those which our kinsmen used to own.')

It is fitting that Helgi complains about a failure of kinship obligations, given that his father's failure to give him a name could be construed as a further failure by Hjǫrvarðr to carry out his kinship duties. Hjǫrvarðr's inability to name his son has consequences for their relationship which never positively develops, as discussed in chapter II section 3. Instead, Helgi spends

[629] *HHv*. 10:1–4 (p. 143).

[630] *HHv*. 11:1–4 (p. 143).

his time either criticising his father or away from home, raiding, and his brother Heðinn is ultimately the one to succeed their father when Helgi dies young. It is also worth remembering that the title *Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar*, which stresses Helgi's descent, is an editorial creation. The manuscript rubric entitles the section 'Frá Hiǫrvarði oc Sigrlinn' (About Hjǫrvarðr and Sigrlinn), which makes no reference to the father-son relationship between Helgi and Hjǫrvarðr.[631] Contrary to the editorial title's assertion of a united lineage, Hjǫrvarðr's failings as a father and king find a response in Helgi's failings as a son. It was from Sváva he received a name and it is for her he sends as he lies dying. It is left to her and to his brother to remind him of his paternity, calling him *Hiǫrvarðz sonr* (Hjǫrvarðr's son).[632] Helgi ends where he began, caught on a threshold between life and death, as he lies dying on the battlefield. The consequences of his early namelessness and alienation from his parents are long-lasting and he dies without issue, leaving his wife to remarry his brother and continue the patriline.

What the poem consistently makes plain is the importance of *reciprocal* family responsibilities in the strengthening of a lineage and the dangerous consequences when such responsibilities are shirked. The drama of recognition is a drama precisely because it has consequences. Reciprocity is a theme which resonates in other encounters where the drama of recognition is placed in doubt by the actions of either the father or his child, as becomes apparent when these encounters are examined in more detail.

2. The Drama of Recognition: The Intersection of Language and Lineage

The drama of recognition is so central to dynastic relations that in many texts it is simply taken for granted or glossed over in a few short sentences wherein a child is named and sprinkled with water. It is only when familial recognition is threatened or withheld that the drama is played out in full and it is the failure of the father and not of the son which stands out in such cases.

[631] *HHv*. prose (p. 140). Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í islenskum fræðum, GKS 2365 4to, fol. 22r. https://handrit.is/en/manuscript/imaging/is/GKS04-2365#page/21v++(52+of+145)/mode/2up [Accessed 28th September 2018].

[632] Sváva uses this address in *HHv*. 38:2 (p. 148) and Heðinn in 43:6 (p. 149).

i. Paternal Recognition of the Son

In *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, both Egill and Ásmundr wish to return to their respective fathers after they have married. The saga first describes how: 'En er Egill kom til Gautlands, fór hann á fund föður síns, ok brást hann ókunnigr við, því at hann hugði hann löngu dauðan' (When Egill came to Gautland, he went to see his father, and he [his father] did not recognise him, because he thought him long dead).[633] The episode is then mirrored by Ásmundr's reception by his own father, King Óttarr:

> Ásmundr gekk á fund föður síns við tólfta mann. Hann kvaddi konung virðuliga. Konungr þekkti hann eigi, en móðir hans þekkti hann, þegar hún sá hann, ok hvarf til hans. Óttarr spurði, hverr sá maðr væri, er hún léti svá líkliga við, en Ásmundr sagði til it sanna. [634]
>
> (Ásmundr went with eleven men [lit. being twelve altogether] to see his father. He greeted the king respectfully. The king did not recognise him, but his mother recognised him as soon as she saw him and went to him. Óttarr asked who that man might be, towards whom she behaved so favourably and Ásmundr told him the truth.)

Both Egill's and Ásmundr's fathers initially fail to recognise their offspring, a failure which stands in stark contrast to Ásmundr's mother's immediate recognition of her son.

There is disbelief on both sides at the first meeting of Vignir and his father Oddr in *Örvar-Odds saga*: Vignir, Oddr's son by the giantess Hildigunnr, declares himself sceptical that '"þú sért faðir at mér, svá lítill ok smáskítligr sem mér sýnist þú vera"' ('you could be my father, such a little and insignificant man as you seem to me to be').[635] Oddr is also determined to hear all the facts before deciding whether to believe the claims of his son, asking immediately who his mother is and his age before condescending, with the air of bestowing a great favour, to acknowledge their kinship. Án is likewise taken by surprise by the arrival of his son Þórir in *Áns saga bogsveigis*. Þórir is searching for his father but comes close to killing him before realising who he is, shooting three arrows at Án which would have

[633] *Egils saga einhenda*, ch. 17 (III, 362).

[634] *Egils saga einhenda*, ch. 18 (III, 363–64).

[635] *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 21 (II, 287).

hit him in the stomach, the ribs and the eye if he had not hidden behind a tree.[636] Þórir goes on to exhaust his father in a wrestling match and taunts him with *heiftarmál* (hateful speech).[637] Þórir learns Án's name first and is consequently the first to suspect their kinship, since he knows his father is called Án. However, it is with some reluctance that he produces a ring as a token of his parentage, upon which Án recognises him as his son and takes him home.[638]

In *Völsunga saga*, Sigmundr is initially ignorant as to the true nature of Sinfjötli's relation to him, as was explored in detail in chapter V section 1.i. Sinfjötli, meanwhile, seems to have an instinctive knowledge of the truth despite his youth, revealing his heritage at every turn. When his mother rips away the shirt she has sewn to his skin he comments that '"Lítit mundi slíkt sárt þykkja Völsungi"' ('such a wound would seem small to Völsungr'),[639] showing by his instant identification with his grandfather, by the zeal with which he encourages Sigmundr to seek vengeance for him and by the lack of compunction with which he later kills his half-brothers, the purity of his Völsung bloodline. Sinfjötli never refers to King Siggeirr as his father nor to Sigmundr as his uncle. In contrast, it is explicitly affirmed that whilst Sigmundr recognises Sinfjötli's resemblance to the Völsung lineage he firmly believes 'at hann sé sonr Siggeirs konungrs, ok hyggr hann hafa illsku föður síns' (that he is the son of King Siggeirr and he thinks he has his father's cruelty),[640] an illusion which endures right up until Siggeirr's death, when he confidently asserts: 'Hér erum vit Sinfjötli, systursonr minn' ('Here we are, Sinfjötli, my sister's son and I').[641]

Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka includes an episode in which neither father nor sons are aware of their true relationship to one another. Toward the saga's end, Queen Hagný, wife of King Hjörr Hálfsson, gives birth to two sons, Hámundr and Geirmundr, both *svartir ok furðu ljótir* (black and exceedingly ugly), for which she substitutes the better-looking child of a servant.[642] She presents this boy, Leifr, to the king in his true sons' place and he has not the slightest suspicion. It is left to the skald Bragi to see through the deception and force the Queen to set it right. Accordingly, when Hjörr returns from campaign, the saga describes how 'bar hún sveinana til hans ok sagði, at þeir váru hans synir' (she took the boys to him and said

[636] *Áns saga bogsveigis*, ch. 7 (II, 399).

[637] *Áns saga bogsveigis*, ch. 7 (II, 400).

[638] For further discussion of father-son relations in the *Hrafnistumannasögur* see chapter II section 3.i.

[639] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 7 (I, 122).

[640] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 8 (I, 123).

[641] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 8 (I, 127).

[642] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 17 (II, 133).

that they were his sons),[643] with no further explanation. The king is horrified by his new offspring, exclaiming: '"Ber í burt!" sagði hann, "eigi sá ek slík heljarskinn"' ('Take them away!' he said, 'I've never seen such deathlike skin').[644] Such a strongly-worded rejection of his own flesh and blood, and in a way that expresses his evident preference for the handsome appearance of the low-born boy he thought to be his son, suggests that the rift formed by the queen's actions cannot simply be reversed without ill effects. Instead of welcoming them into the lineage, the king's hasty words bestow upon the boys the moniker *heljarskinn* (Deathskin), which supplants the more customary patronymic, severing any nominal connection with their father. Ultimately, it is the father who thus denies his sons the recognition they deserve, even once their mother has repented of her deception. Indeed, the king's response to her confession almost provides a reverse motivation for her actions in the first place, justifying her implicit anxiety at having given birth to such ugly children, as discussed in chapter IV section 3.

To these unwitting failures, can be added several examples where fathers deliberately refuse to recognise their offspring. In the eddic poem *Hárbarðsljóð*, Óðinn masquerades as a ferryman and persistently refuses to recognise Þórr when he asks to be rowed across the sound. Óðinn taunts his son by feigning ignorance of his identity, informing him that:

> "baðat hann hlennimenn flytia eða hrossa þiófa,
> góða eina, oc þá er ec gerva kunna;
> segðu til nafns þíns, ef þú vill um sundit fara!"[645]
>
> ('He [Hildólfr] asked me not to carry robbers or horse-thieves
> but only good men, and those whom I recognised clearly;
> tell me your name if you want to cross the sound.')

By pretending not to recognise his son, even taking the opportunity to cast sly aspersions on his character, Óðinn is rejecting, or at the very least suspending, his paternal relationship with Þórr. The rejection is reinforced by the fact that Þórr *fór ór austrvegi* (came from the east),[646] that is, he is coming home, presumably from *jǫtunheimar* in the east. In denying him passage across the inlet, Óðinn is denying him access to the land of the gods and by extension

[643] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 17 (II, 134).

[644] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 17 (II, 134).

[645] *Hrbl.* 8:5–10 (p. 79).

[646] *Hrbl.* prose (p. 78).

entrance into Óðinn's family. Indeed, the subsequent description of his destination as *Óðins lǫnd* (Óðinn's land),[647] which he shall only reach by *áttunga brautir* (the roads of the kinsmen) shown him by his mother,[648] stresses the central familial aspect of his journey. In contrast to Þórr's proud assertion of his kinship relations as: 'Óðins sonr, | Meila bróðir, enn Magna faðir' (Óðinn's son, Meili's brother and Magni's father),[649] Óðinn promotes a more selfish, egocentric attitude. His self-serving attitude is revealed in his response to Þórr's remark: 'Illom huga launaðir þú þá góðar giafar' (you paid them back with an evil mind for their good gifts).[650] Óðinn replies:

> "Þat hefir eic, er af annarri scefr,
> um sic er hverr í slíco."[651]
>
> ('That [i.e. an evil mind] has an oak tree which scrapes from another,
> each is for himself in such matters.')

Óðinn's treatment of his son in the poem is a manifestation of the fundamental self-interest he espouses, which conflicts with his obligations toward the son he is so eager to insult. Where Þórr embraces his kinship entanglements, Óðinn seeks to shake them off, to his own advantage.

Paternal rejection is more ambiguous in *Hrólfs saga kraka* where Björn, son of King Hringr, is cursed by his wicked stepmother Queen Hvít to become a bear, in revenge for having refused her advances. His sweetheart Bera recognises him instantly when she looks into his eyes, which have remained unchanged. Whether his father does is a more open question. Given his son's disappearance is followed immediately by the mysterious arrival of a large grey bear that begins to decimate the king's cattle, the inference seems obvious, even ignoring the significance of Björn's name, which his father must have chosen for him. The only comment in the text is that '[l]ætr konungr sér fátt um þetta finnast ok þykkir með undarligu móti vera' (the king paid little heed to this and it seemed to be a strange matter),

[647] *Hrbl.* 56:10 (p. 87).

[648] *Hrbl.* 56:9 (p. 87).

[649] *Hrbl*. 9:4–6 (p. 79).

[650] *Hrbl*. 21 (p. 81).

[651] *Hrbl*. 22:1–3 (p. 82).

which suggests he may have had his suspicions although he does nothing to stop the bear being hunted and killed.[652]

The frequent failure of the father to recognise the son in these examples, whether deliberate or not, sheds light on the nature of their kinship. Bell characterised medieval German epic as 'the epic of the kin, the large, closely adhering group of blood relatives' and commented on how such epics turned 'repeatedly to the theme of the inherent and instinctive attraction of kin for kin'.[653] The concept of kinship in medieval German epic, as Bell would have it, is fundamentally a matter of shared substance; the possession of a blood tie is enough to bind father and son together, whether or not they know it and whether or not they wish to know it. The Old Norse examples reflect something of this attitude: there is a clear affinity between blood kin, demonstrated by the immediacy with which Ásmundr's mother recognises her son or the instant recognition of Helgi and Hróarr by their sister Signý in *Hrólfs saga kraka*.[654] Yet in spite of, or perhaps because of, the father's importance to the ritual of recognition—his being the recognition that has the most social sway—the father is frequently excluded from any instinctive knowledge of kinship. The failure of the fathers of Egill, Ásmundr, Vignir, Þórir, Sinfjötli, Geirmundr and Hámundr to recognise their sons indicates that shared substance is not enough, there must be shared experience too, an open declaration or social acknowledgement that cements the blood tie. Indeed, the declaration is itself performative; in recognising the son the father makes him the son or, in the negative sense, by refusing to recognise him the father prevents his biological offspring from entering into his full social inheritance as part of the dividual kin-group and not just an individual. There is an initiatory aspect to the drama; it changes the participant, bringing him by means of the ritual recognition question into a complete sense of himself. His successful navigation of the question, 'Who are you?', relies upon both substance and language, blood and recognition; to borrow R. Howard Bloch's description of the Incarnation, which involves a similar ritual recognition when Christ is baptised in the Jordan and explicitly called 'my son' by the Spirit of God that descends, it is 'a drama of language and lineage'.[655]

To a degree these encounters are literary devices, delivering narrative suspense or humour by contrasting a character's ignorance with the audience's awareness of the kinship relations at play, but the persistent narrative fascination with this moment of recognition

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[652] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 26 (I, 48).

[653] Bell, pp. 69, 77.

[654] *Egils saga einhenda*, ch. 18 (III, 364); *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 3 (I, 6).

[655] R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 60.

suggests the motif was informed by anxieties about recognising kin in everyday life. On one level these encounters reflect the simple, biological truth that shared substance alone cannot ensure kin recognition. Kin may be genetically predisposed to look alike but there is no guarantee. Certain historical precedents may also shine a light on this anxiety of ignorance that colours certain father-son interactions. Jochens has remarked on the problems that occurred for the Norwegian succession when 'unknown young men came from abroad, claiming to have been conceived by Norwegian kings on their frequent journeys'.[656] The issue of how to recognise the truthful claimants among the frauds was an ongoing problem for the Norwegian aristocracy. Some cases were settled by ordeal but even ordeals were eventually prohibited by the church in 1247 having facilitated too many deceptions.[657] Given the frequency with which royal considerations are intermingled with familial interactions in the *fornaldarsögur*, such incidents may provide a context for this popular literary motif. Such encounters in the legendary sagas and poetry could bespeak a very real concern about unknown and unrecognised offspring that might one day return to make claims on their family. Narrative interest in the drama of recognition indicates its social relevance to Old Norse authors and audiences.

ii. Paternal Recognition of the Daughter

The drama of recognition was not confined to the father-son relationship; women could also play a role in both giving and receiving social recognition. Hervör's confrontation with her dead father, Angantýr, in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* is a rare example of the same drama played out between father and daughter, albeit an extremely masculine daughter, but one who nevertheless approaches her father as a woman and not in her masculine guise. Hervör goes to her father's burial mound, demanding her father's recognition by claiming her inheritance. Her acquisition of the sword Týrfingr is contingent upon her father recognising her right to it, a right which derives from her position by biological birth and social recognition as his daughter and only child. Thus, she greets him with the command:

> "Vaki þú, Angantýr; vekr þik Hervör,
> eingadóttir ykkr Sváfu."[658]

[656] Jochens, 'Politics of Reproduction', p. 340.

[657] Jochens, 'Politics of Reproduction', p. 341.

[658] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 25:1–4, in *PFS*, p. 386.

('Wake up, Angantýr, Hervör wakes you,
your only daughter by Sváfa.')

Further, she calls herself *arfi þinn* (your heir) when chiding him for his reluctance to accede to her request for the sword.[659] That her request succeeds implies that Angantýr recognises the force of these assertions, even from beyond the grave.

The importance of the drama for her sense of self is also made clear in the saga. Her decision to claim the sword comes hard on the heels of a slave's taunt that her father is not who she thought he was. Evidently horrified and bewildered, Hervör exclaims:

"Föður hugðumz ek fraeknan eiga;
nú er sagðr fyrir mér: svína hirðir."[660]

('I thought I had a valiant father,
now it is said in front of me: [he was] a herdsman of pigs.')

This emotional outburst, coupled with the immediacy with which she seeks out the jarl, her grandfather, to ask him the truth about her father, reveals how vital her perception of her parentage is to her sense of self. The circumstances of the drama in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* may be rare, but the function and effect remain the same: Hervör claims her place in her father's lineage and fosters its continuation in her turn, going on to have two sons of her own, Angantýr and Heiðrekr.

The *Poetic Edda* further demonstrates that patronymics were just as important for daughters as for sons. The poems may not show the drama of recognition enacted, as it is in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, but it is evoked by the continual use of patronymics for some of the poems' most prominent female characters. Both Brynhildr and Guðrún are regularly referred to as *Buðla dóttir* (Buðli's daughter) and *Giúka dóttir* (Gjúki's daughter) respectively in a variety of eddic poems. These kinship kennings are not used in isolation but in addition to their personal names. As Quinn has noted, 'poets in the eddic mode often (through not invariably) deployed kennings in apposition to a noun rather than as a substitute for one'.[661] This apposition locates these independent women within a wider kin-group that is paternally

[659] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 31:7, in *PFS*, p. 392.

[660] *Hervarar Saga ok Heiðreks*, 13:5–8, in *PFS*, p. 372.

[661] Judy Quinn, 'Kennings and Other Forms of Figurative Language in Eddic Poetry', in *Handbook to Eddic Poetry*, ed. by Larrington, Quinn and Schorn, pp. 288–309 (p. 289).

oriented; their strong narrative voices may contrast with their fathers' narrative silence, but their speech is authorised and empowered by the reminder of their paternal heritage. The use of patronymics is particularly striking in the female-dominated *Guðrúnarkviða I* where both Guðrún and her sister Gullrǫnd are frequently referred to by the shared patronymic *Giúka dóttir* (Gjúki's daughter),[662] binding them together, against the malice exhibited by Brynhildr, whose contrasting patronymic *Buðla dóttir* (Buðli's daughter) sets her up as their adversary.[663] Even though Brynhildr is Gunnarr's wife, she is still identified by the patronymic which emphasises the difference between her and the rest of Gunnarr's kin rather than by reference to the husband who binds them all together. Similarly, Guðrún is not referred to as *Gjúka dóttir* until she has begun to weep and thereby begun to accept the death of her husband Sigurðr: 'Þá grét Guðrún, Giúca dóttir' (Then Guðrún, daughter of Gjúki, wept).[664] Guðrún's intention in stanza 1 had been to demonstrate her enduring faithfulness to her husband by joining him in death. As she begins to weep, she is drawn from death back into the arms of her birth family, as is signified by the use of the patronymic with reference to her for the first time.

There is undoubtedly a metrical component to these references. In *Guðrúnarkviða I* as in other eddic poems like *Brot af Sigurðarkviðu* and *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*, the four-syllable patronymic is ideally placed to fill a half line and many of the patronymics appear in introductory lines, identifying the speaker of the remaining stanza. However, it does not follow that these kinship tags were not used to deliberate effect. Their addition to Brynhildr and Guðrún's personal names is a constant reminder of the descent of these two women, whose narrative drama is mainly marital. Brynhildr is torn between Gunnarr and Sigurðr and Guðrún has three husbands in the course of the *Poetic Edda*. Amidst these shifting marital loyalties, the patronymics provide a stable handle on their characters, a reminder of the enduring constancy of parent-child relations when compared to the transience of other kinship ties.

iii. Matronymics and Maternal Recognition

Only in *Atlamál* is a matronymic used with reference to Guðrún instead of a patronymic, as Guðrún twice refers to herself as *dóttír Grímildar* (Grímhildr's daughter) in

[662] *Gðr. I* 12:2, 16:2, 17:2, 24:2 (pp. 203–05).

[663] *Gðr. I* 23:2, 25:2, 27:4 (pp. 205–06).

[664] *Gðr. I* 16:1–2 (p. 204).

her confession to the dying Atli.[665] The invocation of her mother, with whom she remonstrates so strongly in *Guðrúnarkviða II*, rather than her father, about whom very little is known, invites a parallel between them, discussed at greater length in chapter IV section 2.i. Grímhildr is more fully characterised in *Völsunga saga*, but *Grípisspá* paints her as deceitful and *Guðrúnarkviða II* depicts her schemes to force Guðrún to remarry Atli. At the moment when Guðrún's own deception is revealed to the husband her mother forced upon her, Guðrún's proud self-identification with her scheming mother reveals the change in her own attitude. Earlier in the poem Guðrún picks up a sword to defend her brothers and the poem tells how: 'Dóttir lét Giúca drengi tvá hníga' (Gjúki's daughter made two warriors fall).[666] In battle, the poem goes on to say 'þat brá um alt annat, er unno born Giúca' (that which the children of Gjúki accomplished surpassed every other feat), but their martial prowess cannot save Gjúki's children.[667] Now Guðrún takes a different approach, more in line with her mother's tactics, and by freshly identifying herself as *dóttir Grímildar* rather than the *dóttir Gjúka* she was when she fought with her brothers, she indicates a refusal to share their fate.

As *Atlamál* demonstrates, in certain circumstances a matronymic could be preferable to a patronymic, Loki Laufeyjarson being a well-known example. As Clunies Ross summarises '[t]he fact that he is always referred to as Loki Laufeyjarson (and not as son of Fárbauti) indicates the precedence of his divine kinship through his mother's family, according to the socially defined hierarchy of Old Norse myth'.[668] The erasure of Loki's giant ancestry attempts to resolve the issue of his ambiguous loyalties. In the *Poetic Edda*, Loki's mother is always mentioned in close proximity to the *jǫtnar* or *jǫtunheimar*, as if his divine loyalties must be reinforced in the face of this implicit reminder of his paternity. In *Lokasenna*, Loki responds to Skaði's accusations that he was foremost at the killing of her father Þjazi with the counter allegation:

> "Léttari í málom vartu við Laufeyiar son,
> þá er þú léz mér á beð þinn boðit."[669]
>
> ('You were milder in your words to Laufey's son
> When you had me invited to your bed.')

[665] *Am*. 80:4, 91:2 (pp. 259, 261).

[666] *Am*. 50:1–2 (p. 254).

[667] *Am*. 52:3–4 (p. 254).

[668] Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, I, 101 n. 11.

[669] *Ls*. 52:1–3 (p. 106).

It is surely ironic that he chooses this moment, while addressing a giantess, to remind his audience of his maternal parentage, which he has not otherwise raised in his attempt to gain access to the Æsir's feast. He seems to be reminding Skaði that, though he may be an unwanted guest, he at least had a mother among the Æsir. Meanwhile, Skaði is only included among the gods by virtue of her marriage and the bitterness she displays with regard to her father's death demonstrates her own divided loyalties. Her accusations against Loki actually serve as a reminder of his services to the Æsir before Baldr's death, since Þjazi's death was desirable in their eyes and Loki's response reinforces his claim to be a member of the Æsir.

A similar pattern is found in *Þrymskviða*, where Loki is twice called *Laufeyiar sonr*. The matronymic is used first in stanza 18 as Loki rebukes Þórr for his unwillingness to dress as a woman to reclaim his hammer:

> Þá qvað þat Loki, Laufeyiar sonr:
> "Þegi þú, Þórr, þeira orða!
> þegar muno iǫtnar ásgarð búa,
> nema þú þinn hamar þér um heimtir."[670]
>
> (Then said Loki, Laufey's son:
> 'Do not say such things, Þórr!
> The giants will inhabit Ásgarðr straight away
> Unless you retrieve your hammer.')

Once again, the reminder of Loki's maternity contrasts sharply with the threat of the giants settling in Ásgarðr, clearly demonstrating his loyalties in this instance. There is no hint of his ultimate betrayal of the gods here; he is instead Þórr's stalwart ally against a common enemy. In stanza 20, the matronymic is used again as Loki proposes to accompany Þórr:

> Þá kvað Loki, Laufeyiar sonr:
> "Mun ec oc með þér ambót vera,
> við scolom aca tvau í iǫtunheima."[671]

[670] *Þrk*. 18 (p. 113).

[671] *Þrk*. 20 (p. 114).

(Then said Loki, Laufey's son:
'I'll also be with you as your handmaid,
We two shall drive to *jǫtunheimar.*')

Even as they are heading into giant territory there is no danger of Loki's loyalties turning, so the matronymic reassures. The linguistic reinforcement of Loki's familial connection to the Æsir encapsulates his incorporation within their kin-group and wherever Loki's more equivocal actions are referred to, as in *Vǫluspá* and *Hyndluljóð*, no reference is made to his mother.

Interestingly, *Snorra Edda* uses the matronymic quite differently, not as a reassurance about Loki's loyalties but to impress upon the audience the depth of his betrayal. Snorri refers to him as 'sá er flestu illu ræðr, Loki Laufeyjarson' (he who is the cause of most evil, Loki Laufeyjarson)[672] when he is blamed for promising Freyja, the sun and the moon to the giant builder and the matronymic is used again when he is blamed for cutting off Sif's hair *til lævísi* (for love of mischief).[673] He is Loki Laufeyjarson in the moment he conceives of the plan to murder Baldr, displeased by the fact he was *sakaði ekki* (not harmed) by any missile at the assembly, and he is Laufeyjarson again, 'er flest hefir illt gert með Ásum' (who has done most evil among the Æsir), when he refuses to weep Baldr out of Hel.[674] Nowhere in the Utgarða-Loki episode, where Loki appears in a positive light as Þórr's companion and ally, much like in *Þrymskviða*, is Loki ever defined by his parentage, even though the matronymic would surely help to distinguish him from Utgarða-Loki in the narrative. Snorri's constant contextualisation of the matronymic transforms it from a positive reminder of his ties to the Æsir to a destructive reminder that it is only through the lesser valued maternal line that Loki is related to the Æsir, a bond which is devalued and undermined by his actions. Even without recognition from Loki's father or a nominal connection to him, Snorri is convinced that blood will out. Social recognition does not traditionally lie in the hands of the mother and the power of the matronymic cannot compete in Snorri's eyes with paternal influence. If the patronymic is a reminder of kinship bonds sealed in childhood, the matronymic is a reminder that such a ritual failed to take place, hence it lacks the positive cohesive force of its masculine counterpart and serves instead as a reminder of Loki's ambiguous loyalties and position among the Æsir.

[672] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 42 (p. 35).

[673] *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 35 (p. 41).

[674] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 49 (pp. 45, 48).

iv. The Drama in Reverse: Sigurðr Fáfnisbani

A final example worth considering is the exchange between Sigurðr and Fáfnir in the eddic poem *Fáfnismál*, where the typical pattern of the drama is reversed. As already demonstrated, it is the father who usually attempts to withhold recognition from the son in Old Norse literature, but Sigurðr turns the drama on its head and refuses to recognise the father, with devastating consequences. As he lies dying, Fáfnir's first question is to ask the parentage of his killer, to which Sigurðr boldly replies:

"Gǫfuct dýr ec heiti, enn ec gengit hefc
inn móðurlausi mǫgr;
fǫður ec ácca, sem fira synir,
geng ec æ einn saman."[675]

('I am called a noble beast, and I go about
As a motherless boy;
I have no father, as the sons of men do,
I am always alone.')

His claims of isolation do not stand for long and he admits in stanza 4 that Sigmundr was his father but the damage appears to have been done already. As Quinn has noted, Sigurðr stands out in the eddic corpus because of his dynastic isolation, entering the set 'as a kind of lone ranger'.[676] Despite his glorious ancestry, Sigurðr is not deeply embedded in his Völsung heritage; in his father's absence he is raised by his foster-father Reginn and becomes embroiled in his foster-family's disputes over the cursed gold of Otr's ransom.

It is telling that, although Sigurðr avenges his father in *Völsunga saga*, he does not go so far as to reclaim Sigmundr's kingdom as his inheritance and thus take his place in the dynastic chain. Instead he inherits Fáfnir's hoard and the curse along with it, implicitly inserting him as heir to an alternate lineage. The act of killing Fáfnir sees him declare his independence from his blood kin, not only by the inheritance he claims and his reply to the dragon's question but also in the way the epithet *Fáfnisbani* comes to overwrite and silence

[675] *Fm.* 2 (p. 180).

[676] Judy Quinn, 'Betrothal and Betrayal: The Eddic Tradition's Treatment of Sigurðr', in *Preprint Papers of the 14th International Saga Conference*, ed. by Ney, Williams and Ljungqvist, pp. 783–87 (p. 783).

the patronymic *Sigmundarson*, which is used only in the early part of *Völsunga saga*.[677] Sigurðr effectively eclipses his kin-group by the magnitude of his achievement. His answer to Fáfnir is prophetic, anticipating his future isolation, an isolation that makes him vulnerable, so eager for kin, that he allows himself to be assimilated into his wife's family, who then dispose of him when it suits their purpose. Sigurðr ceases to recognise his father and as a consequence he never fully integrates into the Völsung dynasty.

3. Striving for Unity: Resolving the Drama of Recognition

Once the centrality of the drama of recognition is understood, the importance not just of shared blood but of the public declaration of that tie, the patronymic system in Old Norse mythic-heroic literature assumes a new significance. The performative power of a spoken act of recognition, or indeed denunciation, of kinship is evident and in a patronymic the act is condensed but no less meaningful. Every time a patronymic is used this drama of recognition is replayed in an instant; the patronymic recalls and reaffirms the moment a father gave his son or daughter a name and the right to suffix it with his own as acknowledgement of the bond between them. It reinforces the ritual of social acceptance which began at birth.

To understand fully all that is being referenced when the drama of recognition is played out in miniature by the use of a patronymic, however, it is necessary to return to the handful of times the drama is played out in full. These encounters provide a glimpse of the interactions that slip through the cracks, unrestrained by the framework of social obligation which underpins all other encounters, making it more readily apparent what is at stake. The competitive and antipathetic nature of father-son relations that was explored in chapter II is at its most exposed in some of these exchanges. Ásmundr's father in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* initially perceives in his son a rival for his wife's affections when he jealously asks whom she is embracing so warmly. For both Oddr and Vignir and Sigmundr and Sinfjötli the rivalry is not romantic but heroic, the tension erupting over who will perform the greatest deeds. In *Örvar-Odds saga*, Vignir declares to his father, '"þú ert it mesta vesalmenni at sjá, ok svá muntu at reyna"' ('you are the most paltry person to look at, and so you'll prove'), to which Oddr responds '"Ætlar þú, at þú munir miklu fleiri eða meiri afreksverk vinna en ek hefi unnit?"' ('Do you think you will achieve more numerous or

[677] The patronymic *Sigmundarson* is used in ch. 17 (I, 148, 149) and ch. 20 (I, 157). Sigurðr is also called 'sonr Sigmundar konungs' (the son of King Sigmundr) in ch. 25 (I, 171), ch. 26 (I, 173) and ch. 31 (I, 192). The nickname *Fáfnisbani* is used in the titles of ch. 13 (I, 140) and ch. 22 (I, 163) and also in ch. 31 (I, 194), ch. 40 (I, 214) and ch. 41 (I, 216).

greater valiant deeds than I have achieved?').[678] In a similar vein in *Völsunga saga*, Sinfjötli taunts his father that '"Þú þátt lið at drepa sjau menn, en ek em barn at aldri hjá þér, ok kvadda ek eigi liðs at drepa ellefu men"' ('you accepted help to kill seven men but I am a child in age next to you, and I did not summon help to kill eleven men'), enraging him so much that Sigmundr attacks and very nearly kills the boy.[679] Án and Þórir's physical confrontation upon meeting in *Áns saga bogsveigis* shows a similar rivalry and he too taunts his father verbally, playing on his name to declare '"at margs góðs muntu án vera, ok ertu nú án sauðarins þess, er ek tók"' ('that you will be without many goods and you are now without that sheep, which I took').[680] For Óðinn and Þórr, the rivalry is both sexual and martial, as they exchange boasts about everything from witches and women seduced to giants killed and wars waged. Finally, for Geirmundr, Hámundr and Hjörr in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, while there is no hint of an open rivalry between the boys and their father (the episode is so short there would hardly be space), it is striking that literally the last directly spoken words of the saga are words of rejection and the lasting impression is of the rupture not unity of a dynasty. The ambivalent nature of father-daughter relations is likewise on display in Hervör's opening threat to her father and his brothers:

> "svá sé yðr öllum innan rifja,
> sem þér í maura mornið haugi,
> nema sverð selið, þat er sló Dvalinn."[681]
>
> ('May it be to you all in your ribs
> As though you rot in an ant-hill,
> Unless you give me the sword, which Dvalinn forged.')

Hervör is incensed by the initial lack of response to her call and only after this aggressive curse does her father reply.

In the aforementioned examples, the drama is only temporarily delayed. Antagonism is expressed initially, but once the drama has been enacted and the son or daughter has been recognised, more positive interaction can thrive. Although the rivalries do not disappear, they are counterbalanced by mutually profitable actions which foster unity and promote the family

[678] *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 21 (II, 287).

[679] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 8 (I, 124).

[680] *Áns saga bogsveigis*, ch. 7 (II, 400).

[681] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 28:3–8, in *PFS*, p. 389.

as a whole: Ásmundr is accepted as his father's heir and rules Hálogaland after him;[682] Vignir joins his father's band of men and fights alongside him;[683] Þórir follows his father's advice to find a wealthy bride and is ultimately entrusted with his father's estates;[684] Sinfjötli lends his support to his half-brother Helgi;[685] and Óðinn and Þórr put up a united defence of their people at *ragnarǫk*.[686] Hervör, too, continues the lineage and blesses her father and uncles as she departs, in a manner symmetrical to her opening curse: 'Búi þér allir […] | heilir í haugi' ('May you all dwell unharmed in the mound').[687]

In cases where recognition is permanently denied the consequences are deadlier. In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, having parted from his son on bad terms and with a new wife to give him further heirs, Hringr no longer sees his son Björn as indispensable. Whatever he thinks of the strange occurrences, and it seems to me the saga implies Hringr suspects the truth, he still allows the bear to be hunted down and killed. His attitude releases a violent response in his son. When the bear is finally cornered, '[s]nýr hann þá þangat, sem konungr stendr, ok þrífr þann mann, sem næstr stóð honum, ok reif hann kvikan í sundr' (then he turned to where the king stood, and seized that man, who stood nearest him, and tore him apart while still alive), making Björn's final action an attempt to kill his father.[688] Without paternal recognition, even with a matronymic, ambiguity becomes a defining feature of Loki's characterisation, with ultimately destructive consequences both for his own offspring and for the Æsir.[689] As already discussed, Sigurðr's rejection of his father leaves him open to the fatal scheming of his wife's family. For Helgi Hjǫrvarðsson the result is equally tragic: once he receives his name (not from his father but from his valkyrie lover) his first words are ones of conflict with his father, accusing him of not being a well-advised king or war-band leader.[690] Like Sigurðr he develops into an isolated hero, frequently out raiding while his wife makes her home with her father King Eylimi and not Helgi's kin-group.[691] When Helgi meets an early death, it is his brother Heðinn who enjoys the benefits of their father's recognition, who comes into

[682] *Egils saga einhenda*, ch. 18 (III, 364).

[683] *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 21–22 (II, 287–91).

[684] *Áns saga bogsveigis*, ch. 7 (II, 402).

[685] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 8 (I, 128).

[686] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 51 (p. 50).

[687] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 47, in *PFS*, p. 406.

[688] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 26 (I, 50).

[689] *Ls*. prose (pp. 109–10); *Gylfaginning*, ch. 50–51 (pp. 49–51).

[690] *HHv*. 10 (p. 143).

[691] *HHv*. prose (p. 147).

Helgi's inheritance and ultimately claims his wife as well.[692] Here again is the ambivalence that has been shown to characterise parent-child relations; the drama of recognition keeps this ambivalence in check by asserting the unity of the dynasty to which both father and son belong. The drama holds the competing claims of the individual versus the family in balance and in so doing prevents the lineage from turning on itself and descending into violence.

The patronymic system is a manifestation of the 'mutuality of being' that characterises kinship in Old Norse myth and legend, whereby, in Sahlins' words, 'kinsmen are persons who belong to one another, who are parts of one another, who are co-present in each other, whose lives are joined and interdependent'.[693] It is not only the imagery used to conceptualise kinship, as discussed in chapter I, which promotes the idea of mutual and interdependent kinship relations, but the naming system itself. The layering of personal and familial identities in the patronymic system is a reminder that the figures of Old Norse legend are not just individuals but also dividual persons, that they are formed as 'the plural and composite site of [their] relationships'.[694] Full personhood is dependent upon those around them and cannot be achieved outside of participation in the family but more than this the family or kin-group is itself a composite and yet singular entity, like Guðrún's lone aspen in *Hamðismál*, the *barnstokkr* in *Völsunga saga* or Ingibjörg's fruit-laden tree in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, all discussed in more depth in chapter I section 1.i. The family comprises the mutual presence and participation of all members of the lineage and that mutuality is at the same time internalised and inscribed within its members. The unity of kin is asserted largely through naming, not just the use of patronymics but in the repetition of names and parts of names across a lineage, as with the prefix *Sig-* which characterises the Völsung dynasty or even simply the alliteration which unifies the Gjúkungs.

Giving full weight to the composite and dividual and yet singular and indivisible nature of the family or the lineage means a number of actions assume a new gravity. The killing of a man's sons in revenge, for example, is not a simple deprivation of the future of a lineage, it diminishes the actual person upon whom revenge is being taken, by diminishing the dividual family of which they are a part. It is in a paradoxical sense the only mortal wound that leaves the victim alive to appreciate the full realisation of revenge. The difficulty of obtaining 'self-determination among scheming kin-groups' raised by Quinn in her article on Sigurðr's treatment in the eddic tradition can also be seen as part of the wider struggle

[692] *HHv*. 43 (p. 149).

[693] Sahlins, p. 21.

[694] Strathern, p. 13.

between individual and dividual concerns.[695] If we appreciate that the family or kin-group is as much a single entity as each individual within it, we can truly understand the ramifications of what is being attempted when a character tries to pull away from something that is as much a part of them as they are of it. The conflicting desires of individual and dividual may make for drama but when it comes down to it the family is extremely difficult truly to divide or destroy beyond hope of recovery. While the drama of recognition may be frequently challenged or delayed by the ambivalent nature of parent-child relations it very rarely fails to achieve its unifying purpose. Kinship bonds between parents and children are exceedingly hard to break in mythic-heroic texts. What must now be considered is how the relationship between kinship and narrative contributes to this resilience.

[695] Quinn, 'Betrothal and Betrayal', p. 787.

VII. KINSHIP AND NARRATIVE

As the drama of recognition demonstrates, kinship drama makes for good narrative, playing off expectations of familial solidarity against the ambivalences of kinship to structure narrative episodes in an arc that is opened by the introduction of tension between kin and ultimately resolved by the culmination of the drama and the recognition of mutual, interdependent kinship between the parties involved. Relations between parents and their children are stretched almost to breaking point in Old Norse myth and legend in the knowledge that the foundation of solidarity among kinsmen remains secure. These narratives may provide the space in which to probe the frustrations and ambivalences inherent in kinship relations through their depiction of parent-child relations so long as the conception of mutual and transpersonal kinship also mediated through these literary depictions reassures their audience of the fundamental resilience of parent-child relationships in literature and, by extension, in life.

The literary depictions of parent-child relations, therefore, inform us about the anxieties and ambivalences provoked by kinship in the Old Norse society that told and retold these mythic-heroic narratives as well as about their hopes and ideas of what kinship could and should look like in various imagined situations. As Boose has articulated, the family is a public as well as a private institution, the emotional ambivalences of which 'get written not in its official documents but inside the masking devices of what we might call the archetypal histories of family—its literary and mythic texts.'[696] These ambivalences are no less authentic for having been expressed via imaginative literary means and suggest that while kinship was vitally important to Old Norse society it was also deeply problematic.

At the same time, it must be borne in mind that kinship and family relations in a literary setting operate under a different set of rules and strictures to those enacted in the outside world. Within the confines of the literary text, family relations are both less constrained by certain cultural taboos, like incest or kin-slaying, but simultaneously more constrained by considerations of narrative composition, the demand for balance between tension and closure within a literary production. Any successful narrative requires conflict and suspense in order to retain an audience's interest and attention. Moreover, conflict provides the narrative with an impetus to move forward, a drive to resolve whatever has been complicated or restore whatever has been broken. Happy families do not make compelling literature, whereas problematic kinship relations can be endlessly explored. If mythic-heroic

[696] Boose, p. 46.

texts are a place where the ambivalent truth of kinship relations could be fully exposed to an audience, they are also a place where the violent and destructive extremes of that ambivalence were likely to be the most exaggerated for narrative effect. Compelled to serve the needs of the narrative, kinship relations in literary and mythic texts cannot be thought of as anything but artificial, inseparable from the narrative into which they are embedded.

The drama of recognition exemplifies the way in which kinship and narrative may become so closely intertwined. The recognition and the declaration of kinship in the drama of recognition is performative, enacting the relationship between two characters such that telling kinship becomes indistinguishable from the fact of it. It is not enough for characters to be related in mythic-heroic literature: because kinship is social as well as biological, characters must be aware of their relation and declare it openly. What value is there in a kinship relation if no one knows about it and thus no one will act in accordance with it? This chapter examines the symbiotic relationship between kinship and narrative through the mutually compatible questions of how kinship is depicted and functions in mythic-heroic narratives and the role of narrative structure and composition in making complex ideas of kinship intelligible to an audience. I shall explore how the chaos and continual change of real kinship relations becomes structured by a narrative and how those relations themselves impose structure in turn when integrated into a literary framework, arguing that acknowledging the imaginative, literary nature of mythic-heroic parent-child relations is vital to understanding the conception of kinship that they present.

1. Transience: The Foundation of Ambivalence

I have established that parent-child relations in Old Norse mythic heroic literature are characterised on the one hand by ambivalence, which threatens to undermine solidarity between kinsmen, and on the other by a transpersonal understanding of kinship, which extends the limits of the self beyond the individual to include kinsmen as integral parts of personal identity. I have further established that Old Norse mythic-heroic narratives, with their consciously non-realistic style, allowed for imaginary scope in the depiction of interactions between parents and their children. These interactions thus provided an opportunity to explore and confront the causes of contention in parent-child relationships and reveal that the motivations behind ambivalence varied according to the relationship in question.

The depiction of physical as well as verbal altercation between fathers and sons in eddic poetry and the *fornaldarsögur* highlighted the competition for heroic renown and

martial prowess as the principal motivation behind ambivalence in father-son relationships: Ragnarr is threatened in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* by his sons' emergent reputations for valorous deeds, which begin to eclipse his own;[697] Hrólfr in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* is determined to win a larger kingdom for himself than that of his father Sturlaugr;[698] Vignir in *Örvar-Odds saga* taunts his father Oddr for his smaller size and strength and Oddr in turn belittles his son's attempt to compete with his own heroic reputation.[699] In each case, the father's awareness of his age and the prospect of his son(s) succeeding him are a source of both tension and pride, while the son is inspired by his father's achievements and yet eager to surpass them.

Ambivalence between father and daughter has been shown to arise from very different circumstances, not because of the certainty of who she will grow to become but because of the uncertainty surrounding her position after her marriage and the question of where her loyalties may lie. The daughter's mutability in mythic-heroic narrative, able to become wife, mother, even son at times, provokes anxiety on the part of the father, whose tyrannical attempts to control her marriage can only contribute to the daughter's frustration with her parent. Auðr and Ása are at the mercy of their fathers' marital schemes for them in *Sögubrot af fornkonungum* and *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* respectively,[700] but Skaði in *Snorra Edda* and Bǫðvildr in *Vǫlundarkviða* fare little better for attempting to take an active part in shaping their marital fates.[701] These narratives confirm the daughter's marriage, in which she transitions from daughter to wife and mother, as the locus of anxiety and the wellspring of ambivalence on both the father's and the daughter's parts.

Hagný's child-swapping schemes in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* demonstrate that maternal ambivalence has much to do with the mother's own vulnerability, as she is continually stigmatised as a site of corruption for her offspring.[702] Nevertheless, the depictions of mothers' relationships with their children are also coloured by the knowledge of how their children, like themselves, will age and grow. A mother's protectiveness for her son is in part motivated by the knowledge that she may one day be dependent on him for shelter

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[697] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 15 (I, 264). See chapter II section 2.iii.

[698] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 4 (III, 174). See chapter II section 2.i.

[699] *Örvar-Odds sag*a, ch. 21 (II, 287). See chapter II section 3.i.

[700] *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 1 (I, 339–41); *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, ch. 5–8 (III, 111–18). See chapter III section 2.i.

[701] *Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 56 (p. 2); *Gylfaginning*, ch. 23 (pp. 23–24); *Vǫlundarkviða* 26–41 (pp. 121–23). See chapter III section 1 and 2.iii.

[702] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 17 (II, 133). See chapter IV section 3.

and support, while the ambivalence between mother and daughter responds to the daughter's ability to follow in her mother's footsteps and experience the vulnerability of maternity for herself. Grímhildr and Guðrún demonstrate particularly clearly how closely mother and daughter may resemble one another, resulting in a relationship which encompasses both bitter resentment and mutual sympathy.[703] The maternal body's susceptibility to physical change, expanding and contracting in childbirth and breaking under the assault of male violence feeds the vulnerability of the mother's social position and compounds the relationship between change and ambivalence in mother-child relations.

In every parent-child relationship, therefore, ambivalence arises from the awareness of change within the family unit and the non-static nature of kinship relations. Kinship roles are not permanent but in constant flux as family members grow and take on new kinship roles or age and pass their responsibilities to a new generation. Change is foundational to the experience of kinship and yet no less problematic because of that. Julian Pitt-Rivers expresses well the transience of kinship relations and how it contributes to ambivalence within the family, arguing that:

> […] kinsmen quarrel along predictable lines. Amity, the basis of their solidarity in the face of the non-amiable, is laid in abeyance when the non-kin are forgotten and the demands of the social structure reassert themselves. Society imposes its rules, but imposes them, not on individuals as such, but on relationships. The individual is the same person throughout his life but in the course of the developmental cycle his status changes. Rites of passage mark these changes and set the seal of recognition on his changed relationship to others. But individuals are finite in contrast to the continuity of the social unit within which they live and which requires them to replace each other as they grow up, grow old and vanish. Hence one can distinguish between the person in himself, the self as individual, the seat of the sentiments, and the person in society, the 'right- and duty-bearing person', the *social* self.[704]

Maurice Godelier also takes pains to emphasise that 'individuals pass in the course of their lifetime from one kin position to others, occupying simultaneously with regard to several

[703] See chapter IV section 2.i.

[704] Pitt-Rivers, pp. 101–02 [emphasis in original].

other relatives several positions at once'.[705] In a like manner, Marshall Sahlins warns against taking 'the parents of the child out of their social contexts and [presuming] they are abstract beings' since '[a]s parents, they already have kinship identities and relationships'.[706] Parents are also the sons and daughters of their parents. The family exists always in a constant state of flux, being added to through birth and marriage and diminished by death or divorce. That this change was productive of great anxiety and no little conflict amongst kinsmen is evident from the preoccupation with exploring these critical kinship transitions through the medium of narrative.

Narrative is the ideal medium for such an enterprise because, like kinship, it is a non-static entity. Though it might appear that the literary family is static, frozen in whatever form the narrative is fixed when it is textualised, modern textual criticism has revealed the extent to which the 'text' as a single entity is an illusion, especially in a medieval context, before the advent of the printing press.[707] The Old Norse *fornaldarsögur*, eddic poetry or *Snorra Edda*, are no exception. These texts exist in variation and multiplicity, reworked and recopied, extended and abbreviated. Since the text is never truly static, neither are the kinship relations within it. In their continual openness to development, continuation and change, kinship and narrative have much in common. The literary family combines kinship and narrative in the same entity, making it necessary to study them side by side and interdependently in order to understand fully either subject.

The retrospective construction or narration of a lineage in the context of a legendary saga or poem is founded upon genealogical instability and mutability, which can be manipulated by the creative process to serve the interests of the author and his audience. Caroline D. Eckhardt and Bryan A. Meer discuss 'the enormous appeal, when rewriting the past, of choosing which paternities to display'.[708] Drawing on what Georges Duby called 'évasion dans l'imaginaire' (escape into the imaginary), by which he referred to the opportunity literary fiction offers to articulate a fantasy of lineage, their work recognised that the stability projected by the lineage in these texts is as much a fiction as the narrative itself.

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[705] Maurice Godelier, *The Metamorphoses of Kinship*, trans. by Nora Scott (London: Verso, 2011), p. 480.

[706] Sahlins, p. 74.

[707] See Bernard Cerquiglini, *In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology*, trans. by Betsy Wing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Saga Literature*, ed. by Judy Quinn and Emily Lethbridge. The Viking Collection, 18 ([Odense]: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2010).

[708] Caroline D. Eckehardt and Bryan A. Meer, 'Constructing a Medieval Genealogy: Roland the Father of Tristan in "Castleford's Chronicle"', *Modern Language Notes*, 115 (2000), 1085–111 (p. 1095).

Within and without the text, kinship is mutable. Though the narrative may present the development of a lineage as inevitable, even divinely sanctioned, lineages of the same kin-group may vary considerably from one text to another, include or exclude different members, alter names or be grafted onto different lineages entirely. This instability between different texts which refer to the same lineages can be seen repeated within the texts themselves as ambivalences and anxieties from within the family threaten to break it apart. Like narrative, kinship has the continual capacity to be retold, by different authors in different texts and by different characters within the same text, and to be changed in the retelling.

Sahlins' definition of kinship as 'mutuality of being' emphasises the extent to which kinship can be an autonomous choice, a process of identification with others which must be consciously embraced and which may be very differently perceived by different individuals. Such autonomy represents a key similarity between kinship and narrative; both kinship and narrative are not pre-determined entities but a *conscious production* on the part of the author or the individual. What is told depends completely on who is telling it and why, resulting in inevitable variation, of which Old Norse saga scribes were well aware. *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* contains a disclaimer to the effect that 'þessi saga þykki eigi samhljóða verða öðrum sögum, þeim er at ganga þessu máli, um manna nöfn ok atburði' (this saga may not seem to accord with other sagas, those which are about this matter, with regard to men's names and events) and the writer begs people to remember that:

> Munu þær ok fár eða engar fornra manna sögur, at menn vili með eiðum sanna, at svá hafi verit sem sagðar eru, því at flestar verða orðum auknar, verða ok eigi öll orð ok atvik greind í sumum stöðum, því at flest er seinna en segir.[709]
>
> (There are also few or no sagas of ancient men that men wish to affirm with oaths, that thus it may have been as is told, because most [sagas] become increased with words, and not all words and details come to be told in some places, because most things are slower [to happen] than they are to tell.)

Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar concludes with a similar reflection that:

[709] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 38 (III, 279).

> Mun svá um þessa sögu sem um margar aðrar, at eigi segja allir einn veg, en margr er maðrinn ok ferr víða, ok heyrir þat annarr, sem annarr heyrir ekki, ok má þó hvárttveggia satt vera, ef hvárrgi hefir gerla at komizt.[710]
>
> (It will be so regarding this saga, as about many others, that everyone does not tell it in one way, but there are many men and they travel widely and one man hears that which another does not hear, and nevertheless both things may be true, if neither has quite managed to come to [the truth].)

Both saga scribes recognise the importance of the telling to the content of the narrative being told, even in matters as fundamental as people's names, and neither seeks to denigrate this narrative multiplicity nor claim especial authority for their own telling above another. It is enough that the story has and can be told in the manner they have chosen. Other versions may be longer or shorter and vary regarding details but this variation is an inevitable product of telling a story as different people will make different choices about what to tell.

Kinship and narrative are not only subject to similar variation in what content may be told but both also thrive on variation in how this information may be told. Just as individual characters fit into a larger overarching narrative, so individual kinsmen fit into larger kinship groups as constituent members. As the exploits of a number of characters combined to create a narrative, so these lineages, bound together by kinship, have shape and literary form. There is a trajectory to all literary lineages, frequently either dying away from former glory or building to a glorious pitch that nevertheless precludes the possibility of continuation. It is possible to detect in some lineages a high point, often an individual, who constitutes a turning point in the narrative of the kin-group, for better or worse. Just as a narrative thrives on tension and conflict so too does the kin-group, which is often riven with internal strife as well as beset by external enemies. Such a comparison is another reminder that negative relations within a literary family should not be considered surprising, nor representative of historical kinship relations, for ambivalences are revealed in fiction that may be concealed in life. Literary fiction is, as Torfi Tulinius discusses, a method of catharsis for a society, which works to prevent the expression in real life of the anxieties and ambivalences explored in the text.[711] The various shapes of lineages which emerge from narratives document the cycle of

[710] *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 37 (IV, 176).

[711] Torfi Tulinius, p. 68.

change which is a necessary aspect of kinship, while also presenting an impression of stability through the imposition of form on what is, in life, an essentially random process.

2. Shaping Kinship: The Trajectory of Lineage

While not static, narrative does have form and structure and is constructed in a deliberate fashion. Kinship relations can contribute to this structure, as the genealogically orientated *fornaldarsögur* demonstrate, in which following the activities of a lineage provides a logical template for narrative progression. The same principle holds true for poetic productions, like *Guðrúnarkviða I*, which is structured as a catalogue of exchanges between Guðrún and her various female relations or *Vǫlundarkviða*, which structures its finale around a father-daughter confrontation. At the same time, the construction of narrative imposes a structure on the continual change and development which characterises kinship relations. The transience of kinship is tempered in narrative, since change on a generational level signifies stability for the lineage as a whole, which can only be maintained by the transitions between parents and their children. To return to Pitt-Rivers, quoted in section 1 above, the finite individual contrasts with the continuity of the social unit, in this case the family.[712] Narrative kinship, which lacks a central ego from whose perspective all kinship relations are perceived, is capable of charting both these experiences simultaneously, allowing for a multiplicity of perspectives, both individual and communal. As this thesis has demonstrated, the tension between these two perspectives is indispensable to these narratives' conceptualisation of kinship, expressed explicitly in reflections placed in the mouths of literary characters and more implicitly in the patronymic system, which emphasises the immersion of the individual within a larger collective whole and the complementary inscription of that familial whole within the individual. Combining both perspectives means that narrative can explore kinship through its tensions between parent and child, individual and family, while simultaneously offering a sense of closure and resolution to its depiction of kinship, for which there is no parallel in life.

Narrative necessarily condenses kinship from the experiences of a lifetime or indeed multiple lifetimes to a brief narrative span, this telescoping effect allowing patterns to be shaped over the course of several family generations. Two alternative trajectories tend to dominate narrative depictions of kinship in mythic-heroic literature, the linear and the cyclical, both of which provide a sense of closure, albeit in different ways. The linear

[712] Pitt-Rivers, p. 101.

trajectory is characterised by either the development or the decline of a lineage, the narrative inexorably charting a progression either toward or away from greatness and ultimately reaching a terminal point beyond which the lineage cannot continue. The cyclical trajectory is designed to emphasise the continuity of a lineage and the assurance that it will continue to develop even after the narrative has reached its apparent end. Both trajectories demonstrate the complementary nature of kinship and narrative, showing how narrative brings form and structure to the endless transience of kinship relations even as these changing relationships provide the substance and drama to sustain the narrative.

i. Linear Trajectory: The Rise and Fall of Lineage

A number of *fornaldarsögur* demonstrate linear trajectories which depict lineages building to a climax, beyond which the lineage cannot continue in straightforward, patrilineal fashion. The end of a family line is entwined with the end of a narrative, compounding the finality of both events. Sagas like *Völsunga saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka* chart the rise and fall of families of great men, each son usually surpassing their father in renown until the lineage culminates with an outstanding individual, Sigurðr and Hrólfr kraki respectively, who is nevertheless incapable of continuing the lineage in the male line. Both Sigurðr and Hrólfr leave daughters behind them, although Sigurðr did father a son who predeceased him. Hrólfr's daughters survive to rule their father's kingdom after him but are not recorded as having had any illustrious descendants.[713] Indeed, Drífa is widowed by the same battle which kills her father, closing off the prospect of descendants by her marriage to the champion Böðvarr, whom her father held in high esteem. In Sigurðr's case, Áslaug, his daughter by Brynhildr, produces further heroic offspring who extend the Völsung lineage and, if one believes the claims of the *þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, conquer almost the entire world.[714] Yet, these sons are primarily depicted as competing with their father Ragnarr loðbrók for fame and glory and make no attempt to vie with the reputation of their heroic grandfather. In leaving no living sons, therefore, both Sigurðr and Hrólfr, ensure that they remain unsurpassable in their feats of heroism, immortalised in death as the pinnacle of the lineages from which they sprang. In their treatment of Sigurðr and Hrólfr's deaths, both sagas underline the singularity of their heroes rather than memorialising them as part of larger kinship structures.

Hrólfs saga kraka ends with the raising of Hrólfr's burial mound and those of his champions:

[713] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 52 (I, 105).

[714] *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum*, ch. 3 (I, 298–99).

> Var haugr orpinn eftir Hrólf konung ok lagt hjá honum sverðit Sköfnungr ok sinn haugr handa hverjum kappa ok nokkurt vápn hjá.[715]
>
> (A mound was raised over king Hrólfr and the sword Sköfnungr was placed next to him and for each champion his mound [was raised] and any weapons [placed] beside him.)

The image preserves forever an idealised social unit founded on male camaraderie in place of familial solidarity. Hrólfr is buried with his champions, reaffirming his relationships with his retainers as the defining ones of his life. After two generations building up to Hrólfr kraki, the narrative confirms the lineage's tripartite structure by drawing a clear line under the death of Hrólfr, as the representative of a third and final male generation and showing little inclination to expand upon the fates of his daughters.

Sigurðr's death in *Völsunga saga* comes much earlier in narrative terms, occurring in chapter thirty of forty-two. However, the implications of Sigurðr's death linger for such a long time as to cement his heroic reputation beyond all doubt, aided by Guðrún's repeated laments for his brilliance and pre-eminence. It is by witnessing the slow fallout of his murder that his status as dynastic climax is underlined. The dramatic termination of the Völsung lineage in the death of Sigurðr and his son in one bloody night is contrasted with the slower decline of the Gjúkungs who betrayed him. Their family is whittled away, beginning the same night with the death of Guttormr and culminating in Hamðir and Sǫrli's disastrous revenge mission, with which the saga ends. Óðinn's timely reappearance to advise Jǫrmunrekkr on how to overcome the brothers' protection from iron weapons by stoning them to death, invites further comparison between the Gjúkungs and the Völsungs, evoking his earlier appearance to drive a sword through *barnstokkr*, foreshadowing the massacre of Völsungr and his sons.[716]

Despite a last stand against overwhelming odds, little in the way of eulogy is provided for the two ill-fated sons who were earlier unfavourably compared by their mother to their heroic uncles, Gunnarr and Högni, massacred at Atli's court: '"ekki hafið þit líkt skaplyndi Gunnari eða Högna"' ('you two do not have dispositions like Gunnarr's or Högni's').[717] The

[715] *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ch. 52 (I, 105).

[716] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 42, 3 (I, 218, 114).

[717] *Völsunga saga*, ch. 41 (I, 216).

anti-climax is palpable. Since narrative is rarely, if ever, perfectly closed, there remain narrative threads which can be pulled, such as Hniflungr, Högni's son, who remains alive, as well as Áslaug, who became the focus of much narrative attention in her own right. From Óðinn's son Sigi all the way to Sigurðr, however, the tale of the Völsung lineage has been told. Sigurðr's greatness retrospectively positions the constant transferral of kinship roles from one generation to the next, which provokes such anxiety, as necessary stages of genealogical development toward the terminal figure of Sigurðr, whose tragedy is that he outgrows his lineage, disowns himself and ultimately precludes his family's continuation in the male line, as discussed in chapter VI section 2.iv. As with Hrólfr kraki, heroic excess proves fatal to the lineage as a whole. It is only by telling the narrative from beginning to end that the shape of the lineage can emerge, imbuing the transience at the heart of kinship with a narrative purpose and arc.

Rather than climaxing with a single individual, the lineages in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* climax with a set of siblings, much like the Gjúkungs in *Völsunga saga*. In *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, Ragnarr's many sons spread the lineage across Europe. In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, the narrative climax is undoubtedly the fraternal battle between Angantýr III, son of Heiðrekr and his first wife Helga, and his half-brother, Hlöðr, son of Heiðrekr and his concubine, Sifka. Since the opening engagement results in the death of Angantýr's half-sister, Hervör II, the conflict is a truly family affair and ends when Angantýr personally kills his brother.[718] Angantýr is subsequently commemorated with the conventional formula that:

> Angantýr var lengi konungr í Reiðgotalandi. Hann var ríkr ok hermaðr mikill, ok eru frá honum komnar konunga ættir.[719]
>
> (Angantýr was king for a long time in Reiðgotaland. He was powerful and a great warrior, and lineages of kings are descended from him.)

After his death the narrative condenses considerably, briefly sketching the lineage with minimal narrative detail for a further nine generations, all the way to the sons of Ragnarr loðbrók and on for a further twelve generations, ending anticlimactically with Philippus son

[718] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 14 (II, 66).

[719] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 15 (II, 67).

of Hallsteinn who *var skamma stund konungr* (was king for a short while).[720] The genealogy is not limited to men and several times descends through the female line. This sudden concision after the expansive account of the battle between Angantýr and his half-brother gives the impression of a narrative and a lineage tailing away from a time of heroic grandeur, albeit a lineage still held in high esteem. The manner of telling cannot help but decrease the impact made by these later generations, though the deeds of several characters mentioned are treated more expansively elsewhere in Old Norse mythic-heroic literature.

It is also worth noting that the genealogy is a picture of the lineage's continuation and extermination at the same time, as various branches are cut off by in-fighting among kinsmen. Eysteinn, son of Haraldr hilditönn is killed by the sons of Ragnarr, who was his uncle's grandson and thus Eysteinn's first cousin once removed. Further down the lineage, Styrbjörn fights his father's brother Eiríkr and dies, cutting off another genealogical offshoot. Finally, the opening of chapter sixteen, which begins with the ancestry of Steinkell, who is to be grafted into the larger lineage by his marriage to the daughter of King Eymundr, is a potent structural reminder that the limits of the lineage are blurring as it continues. By making a new beginning at the start of the chapter instead of simply continuing on from Eymundr, the question is raised as to whose lineage is now being recorded: is it that of Steinkell's family or can it still be called Angantýr's, though he is a vanishingly distant ancestor at this point? By the saga's end the lineage has been terminated in the male line several times over, has died out in certain branches and been grafted onto other lineages. The effect is somewhat overwhelming and makes for a strong contrast with the leisurely pace of the saga as it narrated the exploits of Angantýr, Hervör, Heiðrekr and Angantýr II. Their lives and narratives are suddenly at least twenty-one generations distant, over and done with and belonging to a different time. The very density of the genealogical finale implies the finality of the narrative which has gone before. Continuation is precluded because it entails picking up the narrative not from the end but from somewhere in the middle.

The ending of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* likewise situates its heroes in a distant past. Great lineages descend from Sigurðr ormr í auga and his brother Björn járnsíða but the sons of Ragnarr clearly represent the end of an era, as the saga relates that:

> En þá er synir Ragnars váru allir líflátnir, dreifðist lið þeira á ýmsa vega, er þeim hafði fylgt, ok þótti þeim öllum, er verit höfðu með sonum Ragnars, einkis vert um aðra höfðingja. Þeir váru tveir menn, er fóru

[720] *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 16 (II, 71).

> víða um lönd at leita, ef þeir fyndi nokkurn höfðingja þann, er þeim þætti sér eigi svívirðing í þjóna, ok fóru þeir eigi báðir saman.[721]
>
> (And when the sons of Ragnarr were all lifeless, their troop dispersed in various directions, those who had followed them, and it seemed to all of them who had been with Ragnarr's sons, that other chieftains were worth nothing. There were two men, who travelled widely across the lands to see if they could find any chieftain whom they would not think it a disgrace for them to serve, and they did not both travel together.)

The final chapters of the saga are particularly nostalgic, depicting the two mentioned followers of Ragnarr and his son Björn, meeting and recognising one another at a funeral feast. The episode is followed by the discovery of an ancient wooden idol raised by the sons of Ragnarr on Samsø, a marvellous reminder that even after their deaths, their legacies live on. Like the extended genealogy in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, these episodes set distance between the sons of Ragnarr and the present day and underline the finality of their demise. As the saga tells it, the sons of Ragnarr remain a pinnacle of heroism which can never be surpassed, so that it would seem futile to try and continue the narrative any longer.

ii. Cyclical Trajectory: The Assurance of Continuity

The genealogical epilogue is a conventional formula with which to end a saga, being found not just in the *fornaldarsögur* but other saga genres too, and it gives quite a different shape to the lineages narrated. *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* will serve as an example, ending with the note that Bósi had a son with his lover: 'Sá hét Sviði inn sókndjarfi; hann var faðir Vilmundar viðutan' (that one was called Sviði the Valiant; he was the father of Vilmundr the Outsider).[722] Attention then turns to Herrauðr, who had a daughter called Þóra borgarhjörtr, who married Ragnarr loðbrók. In the absence of a son, Herrauðr obtains perhaps the most illustrious son-in-law possible for his daughter and one who promises to keep the lineage strong (though as we know from *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, Þóra's sons by Ragnarr are destined for tragic fates). The saga ends on a hopeful note, however, promising a future for Herrauðr's family through Ragnarr.

[721] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 18 (I, 280).

[722] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, ch. 16 (III, 322).

The pattern in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* is typical and finds many parallels elsewhere. *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra* ends by telling how Hálfdan and his wife Marsibil have a son called Ríkarðr, who *segja sumir menn* (some men say) fathered Áli flekkr, hero of a *riddarasaga*.[723] Sturlaugr at the end of *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* has two promising sons, Heinrekr and Ingólfr and 'eru margar stórar ættir frá þeim komnar' (many great lineages are descended from them).[724] Göngu-Hrólfr in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* has *mörg börn* (many children), whose names and achievements are briefly listed and Hrómundr in *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* is simply said to have had sons and daughters, from whom are descended 'konunga ættir ok kappar miklir' (lineages of kings and great champions).[725] Almost the final words of *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar* are that *margt stórmenni* (many great men) are descended from Hálfdan and his wife Ingigerðr, whose sons are named as Þórir and Eysteinn a few chapters before the saga's end.[726] The final chapter of *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* describes how Ásmundr had a son called Ármóðr, from whom 'er […] mikil ætt komin' (a great lineage is descended), while the final chapter of *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* describes how Hrólfr's son Eirekr took the kingdom after his father.[727] In *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, both Hjálmþér and Ölvir leave sons behind them: Hjálmþér leaves his elder son Ingi his kingdom and his younger son Hlöðvir his sword Snarvendil; from Hlöðvir and from Ölvir's son Rauðr *margt fólk* (many people) are said by the saga to be descended.[728] Even *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, the final chapter of which problematises the easy progression of lineage by the threat of Hagný's child substitution, ends with a brief epilogue about Hámundr's son Þórir á Espihóli, from whom *eru komnir Esphælingar* (the Esphælingar are descended) and Geirmundr's daughter Ýri, 'ok er þaðan mikil ætt komin' (and from her a great lineage is descended).[729]

These sagas all conclude with the promise of a genealogical progression that is not made explicit. Unlike *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*'s lengthy account of subsequent generations, these epilogues are short, covering no more than a generation or two and thereby give a sense of cyclical resolution, confirmation that the natural order of genealogical progression, in which a new generation arises to take over from the old, will continue.

[723] *Hálfdanar saga Brönufóstra*, ch. 17 (IV, 318).

[724] *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, ch. 28 (III, 160).

[725] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 38 (III, 279); *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* ch. 10 (II, 422).

[726] *Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar*, ch. 27, 25 (IV, 285, 282).

[727] *Egils saga einhenda*, ch. 18 (III, 364); *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, ch. 37 (IV, 175).

[728] *Hjálmþés saga ok Ölvis*, ch. 22 (IV, 242–43).

[729] *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 17 (II, 134).

Mention is made of the various children of saga heroes but little detail is provided about their lives. It can only be assumed that the lineage continues to thrive but the implication is plain. Indeed, in cases such as Herrauðr's in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* the brevity of the epilogue may disguise the imminent end of a lineage.

Such endings are a clear example of the way kinship in narrative differs from kinship in life. The transition between generations is at the heart of much of the ambivalence between parents and their children. What is in life an intermediate stage in the inevitable cycle of one generation to the next can be told in narrative as a closing device. The introduction of a new generation, which is a marker of change in the family, becomes an assurance of continuity with which the saga can come to an end, having effectively forestalled the question of what happens next with the simple answer, the lineage goes on. Once placed into a literary framework, the production of children becomes a structuring element which signifies a narrative stopping place.

The shape of lineages, therefore, whether linear or cyclical, is a function of their communication through narrative. Only when retrospectively recounted is it possible to depict a lineage as building toward a pinnacle, declining from greatness or steadily progressing. Narrative can easily encompass more of a lineage than can be actively experienced by any individual and can balance this scope by shedding the trivialities of everyday life. As one scribe of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* put it, 'flest er seinna en segir' (most things are slower [to happen] than they are to tell).[730] Neither the linear nor the cyclical depictions of lineages in narrative shy away from the change and development of lineages but shaping kinship across multiple generations reduces the impact of individual generational shifts, presenting them either as inevitable steps on a dynasty's rise or fall, or as evidence of dynastic stability and continuity. Either way, generational shifts are part of a larger pattern rather than a random progression.

iii. Questioning Kinship: Mythic Lineage and Shorter Narrative

As discussed in chapter I section 2, mythic lineage lacks the genealogical depth of legendary lineages, reaching only a few generations into the past. This is reflected in the shorter, episodic nature of the many mythic narratives in *Snorra Edda*. The shape of lineage which emerges from these narratives is quite different, therefore. There is no terminal point for mythic lineage. Even *ragnarǫk* is succeeded by the promise of rebirth and the return of

[730] *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, ch. 38 (III, 279).

Baldr from the dead.[731] This regeneration could imply that mythic lineage has instead a cyclical trajectory but it is by no means certain that all Old Norse myths should be interpreted in the light of *ragnarǫk*, since Snorri integrated his mythic retellings into a larger structure that was unlikely to have been representative of how individual myths were composed or received by an audience.

The anthropomorphic characterisations of the Æsir mean that their parent-child relations are characterised by much the same ambivalences found in the *fornaldarsögur* or heroic eddic poetry. *Hárbarðsljóð* and the myth of Baldr's death are replete with paternal ambivalence on Óðinn's part towards his sons. The ambivalent overtones to Frigg's unwitting implication in Baldr's death have also been discussed in chapter IV section 1.i. Unencumbered by genealogical depth, however, these shorter mythic narratives and poems do not need a larger trajectory that balances the narrative's interrogation of kinship relations with a framework of stability, since that purpose is arguably already served by their timeless, mythic setting in which the pace of generational change is drastically slowed. Instead, these shorter narratives are well structured to probe the ambiguities of kinship, as do the many episodes within longer mythic-heroic narratives which have been discussed throughout this thesis.

3. Made in the Telling: Kinship as Narrative

Kinship and narrative exist in symbiosis. Kinship is integral to the narratives mythic-heroic sagas and poems are telling and narrative is fundamental to the conception of kinship that emerges from these texts, as a process of social identification as much as biological relation. Mythic-heroic narratives provide a space in which to explore the anxieties and frustrations thrown up by the ever-changing nature of kinship, they reflect a mode of kinship which combats the ambivalences between kin with reminders of their interdependence and their mutuality of being as kinsmen, and they present the inevitable change inherent in intergenerational kinship relations as purposeful and ordered according to a larger overarching trajectory. The interdependence between kinship and narrative in these literary productions is so profound that it is possible to talk not simply of kinship *in* narrative but about kinship *as* narrative, not a structure of relations imposed upon a text from without but an endlessly changing, transient story of relations which arises from within. Another word for lineage in Old Norse is *kynþáttr*, literally 'kin-strand' but equally plausibly 'kin-tale', given *þáttr*'s

[731] *Gylfaginning*, ch. 53 (p. 53); *Vsp*. 62 (p. 14).

alternative meaning as a short story or narrative. Such language reinforces that kinship is made in the telling, as the authors of the sagas and poems themselves are well aware.

The drama of recognition demonstrates that kinship is not necessarily something that *is* but something that must be done. As William Ian Miller points out, in Old Norse society '[k]eeping good kinship did not come naturally. It required work […] to maintain the bonds in working order'.[732] Elision between telling or declaring kinship and doing or enacting kinship is not only found in the drama of recognition but elsewhere in mythic-heroic narratives. The triple repetition of Ragnarr's dying words in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, which reflect on his relationship with his sons, not only stresses the significance of his death as a defining moment for the wife and sons he leaves behind but, more importantly, elides the occurrence of an event with its narration. Ragnarr's death is essentially told twice, first as Ragnarr experiences it and then as his sons do via the news brought by a messenger. For his sons and for the saga audience, Ragnarr dies in the telling as his final words—'Gnyðja mundu grísir' (the piglets would grunt)—resound once more in the messenger's mouth.[733] Only after the tale of his death has been told is he finally lifeless, with no words left to say. Ragnarr's sons are affected more deeply by the tale of their father's death than by any of his actions while alive and, as previously explored in chapter II section 2.iii, their reactions to this narrative within a narrative provide the best insight into their relationships with their father. Ragnarr predicts his sons will avenge his death and their relationship is reaffirmed when his sons do not disappoint his expectations.

The final stanzas of *Vǫlundarkviða* further demonstrate that the opposite is also true: where kinship is not or cannot be told then that relation is in doubt. As discussed in chapter III section 2.iii, Níðuðr is determined to hear from Bǫðvildr's own lips the truth of what happened between her and Vǫlundr. The telling is again fixed upon as a critical moment, both in narrative terms, as the poem's conclusion, and in kinship terms, as a defining interaction in their father-daughter relationship. The lack of any further narrative after Bǫðvildr's admission of her rape and pregnancy is what drives home Bǫðvildr's tangled kinship situation, since it cannot be said definitively where her family loyalties now lie, with her father, her lover, or her child. It is quite literally impossible to *tell* exactly what her current status is and whether her relationship with her father remains intact.

Within these literary productions, attention is often paid not only to the act of telling but to the possibility of multiple tellings and the multiplicity of kinship-narratives which may

[732] Miller, p. 164.

[733] *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 16 (I, 272).

arise within a family. The nature of kinship is then interrogated by contrasting the various different accounts of kinship relations or perspectives on interactions between kin. Queen Hagný's deception in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, discussed in chapter IV section 3, is a troubling episode with which to conclude a saga, laying stress on what is told about kinship as much as what is biologically the case. Hagný tells her husband that the servant girl's son is hers and he believes her. The power of what has been told is implied by the difficulty Hjörr has in accepting the new reality and embracing his two true sons once Hagný reverses her substitution. Hagný's relationship with her sons is explored by means of two different kinship-narratives, one presented as true and one a lie, but Hjörr's easy acceptance of the low-born child Leifr and his rejection of his true sons, Hámundr and Geirmundr, problematises the distinction between the two. As discussed in chapter VI section 2.i, his rejection of his sons bestows on them the name *heljarskinn* (Deathskin) rather than a patronymic and thus he does not verbally accept them as his own. The absence of his declaration of kinship, combined with Hagný's own mendacious declaration that Leifr is her son, means that the telling of the boys' true kinship is left to the saga narrator and to Bragi the skald, ironically the only character in the episode who is not their relation. The boys' estrangement from their parents is reinforced by the manner in which their kinship is narrated and revealed and the episode raises questions about dangers of kinship being so reliant on narrative for its comprehension and dissemination.

In a similar fashion, the relationship between Sigmundr and Sinfjötli is told through two alternative truths, that Sinfjötli is Sigmundr's son and that Sinfjötli is Sigmundr's sister's son, as explored in chapter V section 1.i. Sigmundr believes what his sister tells him about his relation to Sinfjötli, that he is his sister's son. The sister's son relationship is real to him, so much so that he changes his behaviour accordingly, refusing to murder any more of Signý's children after he has become close to Sinfjötli. Signý's telling of the sister's son relation has enacted that relationship and it is when she tells Sigmundr that Sinfjötli is also his son that Sinfjötli suddenly is treated like other sons in mythic-heroic literature, unable to easily co-exist with his father and dying soon after their father-son relationship is revealed. Since the audience is told the facts of Sinfjötli's parentage, Sigmundr's ignorance in the saga plays off their knowledge. The depiction of Sigmundr and Sinfjötli's relationship by means of these dual perspectives illuminates the nature and value placed upon father-son as opposed to maternal uncle-nephew relations and highlights the contradictions in Sigmundr's quest to avenge his father by asking his nephew to commit patricide.

Finally, the complex characterisation of kinship in literature as a struggle between ambivalence and solidarity also emerges only in the telling of kinship-narratives. The notion

of mutuality in kinship can find expression in literary productions, where there is the opportunity to reflect upon kinship and to mediate complex ideas about the nature of the self and the transpersonal identification of kinsmen in an intelligible fashion. The imagery expressing kinship in terms of a family tree or a mutual body discussed in chapter I section 1.i represents some of the most consciously literary and overtly stylised speeches in mythic-heroic literature with their riddling imagery of unity in multiplicity; the ideas that they convey are best expressed in this imaginative fashion rather than in dry theorising. Moreover, they show how mythic-heroic narrative examines kinship from multiple perspectives. As was discussed briefly in chapter I section 1.i, it is curious how many of those characters who reflect upon the nature of kinship are situated on the fringes of the family: Guðrún as the last of her siblings left alive; Erpr as a bastard; Ingibjörg as a daughter on the verge of leaving her father's family for her husband's. Their reflections on kinship show saga authors and poets consciously embracing a wide array of perspectives on kinship that nevertheless accord surprisingly well with the 'mutuality of being' among kinsmen which seems to inform the actions of both father and son, the central links in the patriline, in the drama of recognition. This multiplicity of perspectives confirms that the transpersonal nature of kinship is for all family members, whether male or female, central or peripheral.

Post-modern conceptions of genealogy have argued for genealogy to be treated not as a structure or entity but 'as a mode of inquiry and an epistemological position that questions prevailing assumptions about order and truth'.[734] I suggest that the idea of kinship as a structure or entity ought likewise to be dismissed in favour of an approach which recognises how far kinship and narrative are implicated in one another such that kinship becomes an act of telling. Narrative offers the imaginative scope and the necessary structure to handle the dynamism and change inherent in kinship in life while also raising questions and offering reflections about the nature of kinship through the way in which kinship is narrated and structured within a narrative. Kinship and narrative inform one another and ought to be studied side by side.

[734] Eckehardt and Meer, p. 1098.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has completed a thorough survey of the depiction of parent-child relationships in the narratives of the Old Norse *fornaldarsögur*, *Snorra Edda* and the poems of the *Poetic Edda*. I have argued that narrative and kinship are inextricably intertwined in these myth-heroic texts such that kinship can be read as narrative, arising from within a narrative framework rather than imposed upon it as an external system. Kinship is communicated by narrative means which identify, define and problematise relationships in the process of depicting them.

Parent-child relationships within mythic-heroic literature are characterised by a tension between ambivalence and transpersonal solidarity. Within these narratives, kinsmen are conceived as inherently co-present in one another, sharing mutual being and leading interdependent lives. Concurrently, parent-child relationships are also wracked by ambivalence which is founded on the ever-changing nature of intergenerational relationships, whereby the younger generation matures to accede to the kinship roles of the elder, which inevitably decline and pass away.

I have argued more specifically that fathers and sons struggle with heroic rivalry, striving to outdo one another in proof of strength and valour and sometimes sexual prowess. These conflicts may be foreclosed in narrative by the death of the father, diminishing the need for the son to compete with him, or openly explored until compromises can be reached. At the same time, the patronymic system emphasises father and son as a united entity and encourages shared investment in the welfare of the mutual lineage which tempers the effects of personal competition between father and son. I have further argued that the mutability of the daughter's kinship role, able to become mother, wife, even son, occasioned anxiety on the part of the father so that female choice in marriage is usually depicted as frustrated or results in disastrous consequences. Daughters respond with ambivalence to paternal control and may use their flexibility in kinship relations to subvert or rebel against paternal influence, though only beneath the veil of the non-human is patricide ever countenanced, as the giantess Brana demonstrates.

Maternity has been shown to be no more resistant to ambivalence than paternity, particularly in the context of mother-daughter relations. Mothers in mythic-heroic literature are frequently characterised as sites of corruption for the lineages they bear and the maternal body is threatened with dismemberment and fragmentation as a result. Defined always by their reproductive capabilities, mothers are at the mercy of their physicality, with profound consequences for their relationships with their children. While succeeding in transcending the

body themselves, both Áslaug and Frigg leave their sons exposed, with fatal consequences. Only non-human mothers are empowered to embrace their physicality and circumvent the ambivalence which arises from it.

In the light of the ambivalence which characterises parent-child relations, I have reappraised the maternal uncle-nephew or sister's son bond which could constitute a surrogate parent-child relationship in Old Norse myth and legend and cautioned against the assumption that there was anything privileged about their relationship in mythic-heroic texts. Instead, I suggest that depictions of maternal uncle-nephew relations primarily reinforce the importance of father-son relations and demonstrate that ambivalence was not confined to parent-child relations but characteristic of other intergenerational interactions as well.

The ambivalent nature of parent-child relations does not define them, however, since it is balanced by a strong sense of corporate, collective familial identity, expressed both by individual characters in legendary sagas and poems and more systematically by means of the patronymic system. The importance of recognising kin and thereby establishing a basis for mutuality of being with them is revealed to be vital in counteracting the rivalries and frustrations of kinship. Once kin are revealed to one another more positive interactions can thrive as ambivalences are set aside in pursuit of mutually desirable aims.

The patronymic system affirms that persons in Old Norse mythic-heroic narrative were dividually conceived, internalising their kinship relations within them and extending their selves as part of a larger familial whole. Though such a depiction of kinship is an idealised narrative projection it nevertheless demonstrates that kinship relations were foundational to Old Norse society from its inception all through the medieval period during which these stories were composed, recorded and retold. Parent-child relations in particular were understood to be fractious, ambivalent and even violent as well as supportive, protective and caring. The anxieties exposed in narrative were also resolved by the continual reminder of a family's collective identity in which all members, male and female, participated. The conjunction of ambivalence with this foundation of solidarity means that parent-child relations in mythic-heroic literature were depicted above all as resilient, suggesting that what Old Norse society prized most about kinship relations and what it most enjoyed about them in a literary narrative was their ability to endure.

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