Co-Presence and Consumption: Eating Kin(ship) In Old Norse Myth And Legend[1]

I. CANNIBALISM IN MEDIEVAL LITERATURE

Geraldine Heng has suggested that "[t]he great texts of medieval literature, into which are encoded the responses of culture to a range of imagined conduct, confirm an overwhelming cultural revulsion to cannibalism."[2] From *Beowulf* to Dante's *Commedia*, its perpetrators are predominantly the "subhuman" and the "grotesque," whose terrifying appetites are used to anatomize and address issues which would otherwise be unutterable.[3] Cannibalism in the Middle Ages, she argues, was "one of those instrumentally useful technologies of definition by which the malignant otherness of cultural enemies and outcasts can be established and periodically renewed."[4] Such an approach mines instances of cannibalism in literature for their religious and political valence, revealing how cannibalism was used to construct and demarcate communities of cultural identity. In this respect, Heng closely echoes Peggy Reeves Sanday's observation that "[c]annibalism is never just about eating but is primarily a medium for nongustatory messages – messages having to do with the maintenance, regeneration, and, in some cases, the foundation of the cultural order."[5] In spite of its shock value, cannibalism is actually used to reassure and reaffirm established cultural and social norms.

Recent approaches to cannibalism in Old Norse literature have not strayed far from Heng's methodological paradigm. Ármann Jakobsson and Andrea Maraschi both identify cannibalism, or more accurately anthropophagy,[6] as a marker of trollish or giantish identity which Others those who practice it.[7] However, as Maraschi goes on to discuss, Old Norse literature does not always confirm the "cultural revulsion" to cannibalism of which Heng speaks. Under the right conditions, in fact, Old Norse narratives present cannibalism as "not repugnant in the slightest, but even advisable."[8] Maraschi attributes the difference in attitudes to the identity of the eater: cannibalism in giants and trolls only confirms their brutal nature

(natural cannibalism), but in humans, where it is carried out not to satisfy hunger but to gain power and knowledge from the body of the slain, it reinforces their cultured and civilized status (cultural cannibalism).[9] Maraschi's work is an important step in recognizing the multivalent potential of cannibalism in Old Norse literature: the act of one person eating another can have many and varied meanings, dependent not just on the eater, as Maraschi proposes, but also on who is eaten, how and why.

With this in mind, this article focuses particularly on acts of kin-consumption in Old Norse myth and legend, where the consumer is related in some way to the victim being consumed. In such instances, rather than distinguishing and separating between two cultural or taxonomic groupings, cannibalism disturbingly redoubles the propinquity of two persons who are already related. It is the social and the interpersonal impacts of kin-cannibalism which register most strongly, rather than the religious or the political aspects. Indeed, despite the modern tendency to interpret cannibalism primarily as a political metaphor,[10] it can be argued that cannibalism is at its heart a social phenomenon. Anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro observed that "[w]hat one eats of man is always a relationship," even when it is a stranger being consumed.[11] He was writing specifically about the cannibalistic practices of the sixteenth-century Tupinamba of East Amazonia, present-day Brazil, which, he suggested, were concerned with incorporating not the substance of the victim being consumed, but rather their condition or position in relation to the consumer: "not extended matter, but intellectual relation."[12] "Cannibalism is inevitably a semiophagy," Viveiros de Castro concludes, a symbolic as well as a physical act of consumption.[13] His work offers a helpful perspective through which to view episodes of kin-cannibalism in Old Norse myth and legend which neither fall neatly within the parameters of Heng's "technology of definition," nor conform to the criteria of Maraschi's "cultural cannibalism," which must reinforce a civilized human identity.[14] These are acts of social communion, and social commentary, anatomized into

gustatory encounters, with complex and ambivalent outcomes. Viveiros de Castro's focus upon cannibalism as semiophagy demands closer scrutiny be paid to the meaning under consumption as well as under construction. Rather than focusing, like so much previous scholarship, on the eater and on the identities created out of cannibalism, attention will be paid instead to that which is both physically and symbolically destroyed. In eating kin what else is being eaten?

II. KINSHIP AND CONSUMPTION

The physical act of eating is an action at once extremely prosaic and highly significant. Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois suggest that "[n]ext to breathing, eating is perhaps the most essential of all human activities, and one with which much of social life is entwined."[15] It is hardly surprising, then, that kinship and consumption are closely related in many human societies, where rituals of eating may reinforce or even create kinship relations. The shared consumption of the Eucharistic bread and wine, body and blood, in Christian ritual, for example, unites believers as brothers and sisters in Christ: to be a full member of the body of Christ is to be one who consumes that same body. Janet Carsten in her cross-cultural study of relatedness After Kinship sees a strong parallel between kinship and consumption, arguing that for several cultures "the link between what is social and what is biological in kinship is provided by the consumption of food and its transformation in the body."[16] As a specific example, in her ethnographic analysis of relatedness among Malays on the island of Langkawi, Malaysia, she noted that "[t]here exists a continuum between rice (food), milk, and blood. The sharing of any or all of these connotes having substance in common, hence being related."[17] Marshall Sahlins likewise highlights in more general terms "the capacity of shared food to generate kinship" in his 2013 monograph What Kinship Is—and Is Not.[18] By his definition, "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."[19] For Sahlins, kinship erases the limits between the individual and those to whom they are related, an action which finds obvious echoes in the consumption of a shared food substance. Forty years earlier Julian Pitt-Rivers anticipated Sahlins' conclusions somewhat when he glossed kinship as the "extension of self," although his ego-centric perspective minimizes the reciprocal "mutuality of being," whereby the self is invested in others and others are invested in the self, which Sahlins emphasizes.[20]

Compare this expansive definition of kinship to Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the act of eating: "the body transgresses here its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world's expense. […] The limits between man and the world are erased, to man's advantage."[21] Like Sahlins, Bakhtin emphasizes the erasure of the limits of the individual. Eating and kinship can be considered inherently related concepts: in eating the physical body extends itself, just as the metaphysical self is extended in kinship. Both involve the integration of multiple substances or entities, either by the process of ingestion or by the process of relation so that what seems like a discrete entity, the person or the body, becomes, at least for a moment, a plural site where multiple things or people combine.

There is a fine line between Sahlins' "co-presence" or Carsten's "shared substance" and the literal cannibalistic consumption of kinsmen. When the bodies of human kinspeople are consumed, the metaphorical or intellectual understanding of kin as co-present in one another becomes a literal, biological reality of shared physical matter. In the cannibalism of related persons, the elision between kinship and consumption reaches its height. The Tupinamba of Viveiros de Castro's analysis ate only their enemies and thus what was eaten, he surmises, was Enmity, the condition of being enemies.[22] It follows that when what is eaten is instead a kinsman (or -woman), it is the condition of being related which is consumed: eating kin means eating kinship.

Cannibalism is usually defined as the consumption of flesh from a member of the same species, a definition which is complicated in Old Norse myth and legend by the presence of shape-shifters and fantastical genealogies, which allow humanoid parents to give birth to more animalistic offspring.[23] Given that taxonomization and classification of species into discrete categories is a relatively modern impulse, scarcely reflective of the highly interrelated societies of Æsir, Vanir, giants, men, shape-shifters and other beings found in Old Norse literature, any definition which relies on a rigid conception of species distinctions seems too narrow to be usefully applicable.[24] For the purposes of this discussion, therefore, I favour David W. Pfennig's definition of cannibalism as "the ingestion of all or part of a conspecific," which allows for a broader understanding of the phenomenon.[25] All the victims of cannibalistic consumption discussed below are evidently the conspecifics of their consumer, articulating similar social and cultural perspectives and demonstrating a similar capacity for reasoned thought, sometimes in spite of outwardly different physical appearances; in short, they are all persons, if not always fully human. The fact that instances of eating persons in Old Norse myth and legend so frequently involved the consumption of kinsmen, whether in human form or not, only strengthens the impression that such acts are cannibalistic in nature, since cannibalism is predicated on a recognition of sameness between consumer and victim, which is only intensified by kinship.

This article explores four acts of cannibalistic kin-consumption from across the Old Norse mythic-heroic corpus. Atli is fed the hearts of his sons by his vengeful wife, Guðrún, in the eddic poems Atlakviða and Atlamál in grœnlenzku.[26] Sigurðr eats the heart of the dragon Fáfnir, his foster-father's brother, in the eddic poem Fáfnismál.[27] Both incidents are also recorded in Vǫlsunga saga, which draws on the same legendary material.[28] In Hrólfs saga kraka, a young girl called Bera is twice forced by the evil Queen Hvít into eating what is ostensibly bear-meat but which she knows to be the transformed body of her dead husband,

Bjǫrn, in spite of his dire warnings not to be coerced into swallowing any of his flesh.[29] In Snorra Edda, the Fenrisúlfr (the wolf Fenrir), the offspring of Loki and thus a potential member of the Æsir like his father, bites off the hand of the Áss Týr, as revenge for being bound by the gods.[30] In so doing, he takes Týr's flesh inside him, at least temporarily, and although it remains unclear whether he swallows the hand completely, it seems probable that he does so for reasons to which I shall return in section VII.

In societies where cannibalism is an accepted social practice, endocannibalism, that is consumption of those within the social group, usually occurs in the context of mortuary rituals as an "act of affection," in contrast to exocannibalism, that is consumption of those outside the social group, which usually involves eating the flesh of enemies in an "act of aggression."[31] In Norse myth and legend, however, where cannibalism is depicted as an exceptional and/or taboo practice, the consumption of kin is usually depicted as an "act of aggression," sometimes on the part of the consumer (Fenrir and Sigurðr) and sometimes on the part of the one tricking or coercing the consumer into eating (Guðrún and Hvít).

As is to be expected of cannibalistic acts, these episodes are all multivalent and it is not within the scope of this article to explore every possible interpretation. Rather, I endeavour to demonstrate how a comparative study of these episodes, which takes into account the kinship relations and ensuing implications of such consumption, can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of cannibalism and its uses in Old Norse literature and offer a new perspective on the myth of the binding of Fenrir, in particular. In the following analysis, I interrogate these examples using Sahlins' transpersonal understanding of kinsmen as those "who are parts of one another" as a way to understand the interrelation between kinship and ingestion in these narratives, where kinsmen really do become present in one another. A close reading of the episodes reveals that these acts of consumption are devasting not simply because it is kin being consumed but because it is kinship itself. Ultimately, it seems that Old Norse authors and

audiences would have recognized the truth of Viveiros de Castro's maxim that "[w]hat one eats of man is always a relationship."[32]

III. CONSUMPTION AS COMMENTARY

Given the deeply ingrained taboo against cannibalism to which so much medieval literature attests, it would be easy to assume that all the aforementioned instances of cannibalism are transgressions of the norms of kinship. Certainly, the consequences of these acts of consumption are uniformly severe but not always overtly negative or dangerous. Atli's unwitting ingestion of his sons is the first step in his wife's revenge against him for the deaths of her brothers, which will culminate in his demise.[33] On tasting the heart of Fáfnir, Sigurðr immediately understands the speech of birds and kills his foster-father Reginn in consequence, having learned of his intended treachery through the birds' chatter.[34] Having been forced to eat part of her dead husband's body, Bera gives birth to three children, the first two of whom are clearly contaminated by her acts of consumption: her eldest boy has the legs of an elk and his younger brother has the feet of a dog. Only her youngest son is unscathed because she managed refuse the meat when it was offered for a third time.[35] Finally, after biting off Týr's hand, the wolf Fenrir becomes a slavering monster, forever excluded from the Æsir and destined to swallow Óðinn, their foremost member, at ragnarǫk, the apocalyptic downfall of the gods.[36]

These narratives pervert the idealization of mutual kinship, in which kinsmen support one another as integral parts of a wider, unified kin group, found elsewhere in Old Norse legend.[37] In Hamðismál, for example, Guðrún laments the decimation of her family in the following terms:

"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."[38]

('I have come to stand alone like an aspen in the wood

my kinsmen felled like a fir's branches,

bereft of joy, as a tree of its leaves,

when the branch-breaker comes on a warm day.')[39]

As David Clark has highlighted, trees and branches are here "employed as a metaphor for human interrelation and interdependence."[40] Like a tree shorn of branches, Guðrún is made less than whole by her brothers' deaths, demonstrating how her sense of self has been expanded to encompass her kinsmen. Her imagery closely recalls Sahlins' definition of kinsmen as those who "are parts of one another, who are co-present in each other."[41] The bare tree that she laments is at once singular and plural, combining an understanding of the individual as an apparently bounded physical person with an understanding of the individual as the site of their relationships, an unbounded, transpersonal self which can only find completeness in mutual being. The violent and traumatic nature of the tree's division into isolated pieces in her analogy is a testament to the desirability and necessity of this transpersonal identity.

Later in the poem Erpr will appeal to a similarly transpersonal image, this time that of the body and the multiple limbs from which it is constructed, when he offers to help his half-brothers Hamðir and Sǫrli to avenge their half-sister Svanhildr sem fótr ǫðrom (as one foot [helps] another).[42] Unable to fathom Erpr's oblique offer, Hamðir and Sǫrli kill him, only realizing their mistake when they are dismembering Jǫrmunrekkr, whose mutilated body could equally represent their own destroyed family. The imagery used by Erpr and that used by

Guðrún both have parallels elsewhere in Old Norse legendary literature: numerous scholars have pointed out the family or dynastic symbolism of the tree barnstokkr (child-trunk) around which Vǫlsungr builds his hall in Vǫlsunga saga (chap. 2),[43] while Carolyne Larrington compares Erpr's analogy to the boneless Ívarr's wordplay in Ragnars saga loðbrókar, when he agrees to accompany his brothers on a family revenge mission with the announcement: "þó gatk hönd til hefnda, | at hváriga nýtak" ('still I may have a hand in the revenge, though I have the use of neither').[44]

Eating kin thus represents a macabre inversion of the principles of solidarity and interdependence which elsewhere underlie kinship relations in Old Norse myth and legend. It distorts the promise of strength in mutuality, transforming it instead into a double act of violence against both consumer and consumed.

However, upon closer inspection, it is not really the act of cannibalism itself which constitutes the moment of transgression and precipitates the breakdown in family relations, even though the consequences of consumption may be severe, transformative and even dehumanizing. Recent scholarship on the nature of monstrosity in medieval literature has emphasized the extent to which it is as much socially as physically construed.[45] In a similar fashion, cannibalism is as much social as it is physical: it is not the literal act of eating kin which is the real catalyst for kinship breakdown but the anti-social behaviour which precedes it in every case. These scenes respond to and comment on kinship relations which have already been transgressed and are already broken: they anatomize and make explicit a pre-existing crisis of social relations so that in each instance the semiophagy of cannibalism encodes a commentary on kinship and a warning about the perils of its exploitation.

IV. ATLI AND HIS SONS

Guðrún's murder of her two sons, Eitill and Erpr, and her serving of them to her husband Atli as part of his victory feast after the defeat of her brothers is perhaps one of the best known revenge scenes in Old Norse literature. Guðrún's actions are a deliberate perversion of the feast's social purpose in which a lord shares food and drink with his retainers, reinforcing the social ties that bind them together.[46] By serving up the flesh of Atli's dead sons, Guðrún transforms this occasion of social cohesion into one of social and specifically familial destruction. In forcing Atli to cannibalize his own lineage Guðrún tricks him into taking the mutuality which should sustain kinship to a destructive extreme.

The account in Vǫlsunga saga is fairly brief and matter of fact. Guðrún informs her husband that he has drunk his sons' blood and eaten their roasted hearts to which Atli responds by reproving what seems to him the senseless nature of her excessive violence: "er mikil óvizka í slíkum harðræðum" ('there is a great foolishness in such ruthlessness').[47] By contrast, the poet of Atlamál dwells upon the relish with which Atli eats the hearts of his two sons, leaving no scraps, and has Guðrún mock Atli for his hearty appetite:

"Tóc ec þeira hiǫrto oc á teini steictac,
selda ec þér síðan, sagðag, at kálfs væri;
einn þú því ollir, ecci réttu leifa,
tǫggtu tíðliga, trúðir vel iǫxlom."[48]

('I took their hearts and roasted them on a spit,
I delivered them to you, I said that they were calf-meat;
You were able to finish it alone, you had no leavings,
You chewed it greedily, fully trusting your back teeth.')

In Atlakviða 36, Guðrún similarly taunts her husband that:

> "Sona hefir þinna, sverða deilir,
> hiǫrto hrædreyrug við hunang of tuggin;
> melta knáttu, móðugr, manna valbráðir,
> eta at ǫlkrásom, oc í ǫndugi at senda."[49]
>
> ('Your sons' hearts—sharer-out of swords—
> Corpse-bloody, you have chewed up with honey;
> You were able to digest, proud lord, human flesh as food,
> Eat it as ale-dainties and send it to the high seat'.)

Clark considers that in Atlakviða 36–38 "the horror of the child-murder is foregrounded by the explicit physical detail of the unsuspecting cannibalism" while "the way the boys' humanity is stressed in strophe 37 […] prevents us from seeing them as mere elements of the plot, so that we appreciate the full enormity of the deed."[50] While the poet of Atlamál chooses to emphasize the horror of Atli's gluttony and greed, the poet of Atlakviða deliberately humanizes the victims of Guðrún's savagery, while simultaneously dehumanizing both Guðrún and Atli. Guðrún, who is described as "er hon æva grét" (she who never wept), is portrayed, according to Clark, as "unnatural in her inability to weep," while James V. McMahon argues that Atli is depicted with lupine and canine characteristics by the poet of Atlakviða, the dehumanizing implications of which will be further discussed in section VI.[51]

Every detail of the meal is loaded with significance. In both poems and in Vǫlsunga saga, the fact that Guðrún roasted her sons' hearts specifically recalls the fate of her brother

Hǫgni, whose heart was cut from his chest while he was still alive and presented to Gunnarr in an effort to coerce him into revealing the location of the cursed gold hoard.[52] Moreover, the narrative of Hǫgni's death, in which Gunnarr rejects the heart of the thrall Hjalti because it miǫc bifaz (trembles greatly) but is instantly able to recognize the heart of the brave Hǫgni from the way it lítt bifaz (trembles little), reveals how closely the heart reflects the man in Old Norse legend.[53] The tenderness of Erpr and Eitill's hearts, convincingly passed off as kálfs (from a calf, calf-meat) and ǫlkrásir (ale-dainties, delicacies),[54] evokes the tender nature of Guðrún's victims, who go passively to their deaths in Atlamál, only warning their mother that "scǫmm mun ró reiði, ef þú reynir gorva" ('fury's rest will be short, if you try to do this').[55] A similar scene is depicted in Vǫlsunga saga, where the children go so far as to tell their mother that "[r]áða muntu börnum þínum sem þú vilt" ('you must deal with your children as you wish'), only warning her of the shame she shall incur by the act.[56] The hearts function as a reminder of why Guðrún is seeking revenge, with the murder of two sons in exchange for the death of two brothers further extending the symmetry. At the same time they contribute to the horror of events by bearing witness to the innocence and youth of the sons whom she slaughters. While Gunnarr was instantly able to recognize the heart of his brother, Atli is utterly ignorant until his wife enlightens him. The act of eating in both eddic poems and Vǫlsunga saga thus draws attention to Atli's failure as both a husband to Guðrún and a father to his sons, in contrast to Gunnarr and Hǫgni's familial solidarity, which secures their sister's loyalty even after their deaths.

V. SIGURÐR AND FÁFNIR

In Fáfnismál and Vǫlsunga saga, Sigurðr likewise eats the heart of his foster-father's brother, Fáfnir, who transformed into a dragon after killing his father, Hreiðmarr. Unlike Atli this is

not an instance of unwitting consumption, although it is initially accidental. Sigurðr is instructed to prepare the heart of Fáfnir not for himself to eat but for his foster-father Reginn:

> "Sigurðr tóc Fáfnis hiarta oc steicþi á teini. Er hann hugði, at fullsteict væri, oc freyddi sveitinn ór hiartano, þá tóc hann á fingri sínom oc scyniaði, hvárt fullsteict væri. Hann brann oc brá fingrinom í munn sér."[57]
>
> (Sigurðr took Fáfnir's heart and roasted it on a spit. And when he thought that it was well roasted, and the blood foamed out of the heart, then he touched it with his finger and tested whether it was well roasted. He burnt himself and quickly put his finger in his mouth.)

Sigurðr immediately gains the ability to understand the speech of birds. Eavesdropping on a nearby avian conversation, he is indirectly advised to eat the fiǫrsegi fránn (glistening life-muscle) himself.[58] Continuing to listen in, he then learns of the forthcoming treachery of his foster-father Reginn, who, according to the birds, "vill tæla mǫg, þann er trúir hánom" ('wants to deceive the boy who trusts him').[59] The initial effects of this consumption are clearly positive for the young hero but they lead indirectly to more violence and bloodshed as Sigurðr takes action to forestall Reginn's betrayal:

> "Sigurðr hió hǫfuð af Regin, oc þá át hann Fáfnis hiarta oc dracc blóð þeira beggia, Regins oc Fáfnis."[60]

(Sigurðr hewed the head off Reginn and then he ate Fáfnir's heart and drank the blood of them both, Reginn and Fáfnir.)

It is only after Sigurðr has killed his foster-father that he properly consumes Fáfnir's heart and drinks not only Fáfnir's blood but also that of his brother. As in the Atli poems, this act of consumption underlines kinship bonds already broken. While Guðrún's serving up of her sons punished her husband for the murder of her brothers and made her loyalties in their marriage unmistakeably clear, Sigurðr's action draws a line under Reginn's betrayal of both his foster-son and his brother Fáfnir. The consumption again enacts a perversion of mutuality. As foster-father and foster-son, Sigurðr and Reginn were in a position to strengthen and support one another. Reginn reforged Sigurðr's sword, Gramr, for example, to equip him to fight the dragon.[61] After Reginn's betrayal this support continues but it is no longer a mutual affair, instead Sigurðr forcibly takes Reginn's strength for himself in the form of his lifeblood and the heart of the dragon which Reginn had intended for himself. Yet while the link to violence is clear, Sigurðr profits by his consumption, which is not characterized as horrific in the way that Atli's is.

The consequences are likely mitigated for several reasons. First, the kinship tie between Sigurðr and Fáfnir is much looser than that between Atli and his sons. Although there is a foster-relationship, Fáfnir was designated Sigurðr's opponent and enemy, so this can also be understood as an example of exocannibalism. Secondly, Fáfnir is not in human form when he is killed but dragon form, which distances the hero from the cannibalistic nature of the experience, making it more akin to regular acts of animal consumption. Sigurðr's consumption of Fáfnir's heart can also be read as an expression of the 'consuming the monster's heart' motif, which appears elsewhere in Old Norse literature, usually with positive effects for the consumer.[62] Finally, Sigurðr's consumption forestalls the act of fraternal cannibalism intended

by Reginn, against which Sigurðr's actions are clearly judged to be more fitting, especially since he personally slew the dragon and may therefore be better entitled to the spoils of victory.

Like other instances in which the heart of a monster is consumed, such as when the coward Hǫttr is forced to consume the heart of a marauding dýr (beast) in Hrólfs saga kraka (chap. 35), Jens Peter Schjødt reads Sigurðr's actions as initiatory in character.[63] The blood and heart of Fáfnir and the blood of Reginn bestow additional power and wisdom on the young hero, part of a long series of acquisitions by Sigurðr of numinous knowledge and resources, which for Schjødt, following Van Gennep's tripartite sequence of initiation, characterize the liminal phase of the paradigm.[64] Given that Sigurðr drinks the blood of both Fáfnir and Reginn but only eats Fáfnir's heart, Schjødt speculates that "the heart primarily transfers strength, whereas the blood primarily transfers numinous qualities" whilst not excluding the probability that "ideas about the specific abilities that were transferred with the heart and the blood were quite vague and inconsistent."[65]

As demonstrated by Hǫgni's heart in Atlakviða, the heart in Old Norse myth and legend is representative of its owner. Investing the clay giant Mǫkkurkálfi with a mare's heart in Skáldskaparmál makes him cowardly in spite of his huge size.[66] In contrast, the more intimidating Hrungnir is said to have had a heart "þat er frægt er, af hǫrðum steini ok tindótt með þrim hornum" (which is renowned, of hard stone and spiky with three points).[67] The specific qualities associated with the heart vary according to whose heart it is rather than the heart having any direct association with strength. The heart imbues Sigurðr with some of the qualities of his dead enemy and since Fáfnir is wise as well as strong, it seems just as plausible that the heart transfers knowledge as well as strength.

Ármann Jakobsson posits the dragon as a pseudo father-figure "in the sense that the dragon (and his death) is the making of the hero," redoubling the familial overtones of the consumption.[68] As he points out, "[t]he conversation between Sigurðr and the dragon revolves

around fathers, mothers, sons and midwifes," so that considerations of kinship saturate the entire dragon-slaying episode.[69] Joyce Tally Lionarons likewise posits Fáfnir as a symbolic father-figure, proposing that Sigurðr's defeat of Fáfnir is a parallel of Fáfnir's own patricide since "Fáfnir kills his father Hreiðmarr in an unprovoked attack to gain his gold; Sigurðr kills Fáfnir in a similarly unprovoked attack for the same reason."[70] She takes the parallel further by suggesting that "Fáfnir symbolically devours Sigurðr as he crawls over the pit in which the hero is hiding," mirroring Sigurðr's own act of ingestion so that "each 'internalizes' the other."[71] Fáfnir is perceived not just as a symbolic father but a double of the hero himself, which is conquered by reincorporation into the hero's body, so that the monstrous mirror image is absorbed and the threat nullified.

Such interpretations emphasize how Fáfnir's original humanity, of which his capacity for human speech is a continual reminder, and his relationship to Sigurðr, whether by fosterage or in more symbolic terms, confirm the cannibalistic nature of Sigurðr's consumption. This is not a simple initiation, hence why the consequences are more complex than just the acquisition of knowledge and power. Ármann Jakobsson observes that the dragon-slaying is "the climax of the hero's life," after which his stature begins inevitably to decline, but the tragic fate of Sigurðr is set in motion not specifically by his dragon-slaying but by the meal which follows, which makes him receptive to the advice of the birds to seek out Brynhildr, beginning the entanglements which will cause his death.[72] A better parallel for his ingestion than Fáfnir's supposed symbolic devouring would seem to me to be Sigurðr's future absorption into his wife's family. Eating the heart marks not merely a triumph but a devastating betrayal, which will set the tone for Sigurðr's kinship relations for the remainder of his life; Sigurðr's story, and that of his death in particular, is one overshadowed by questions of honor and integrity, deception and betrayal.[73]

VI. BERA AND BJǪRN

Both Atli and Sigurðr's cannibalistic consumptions form part of the same sprawling Vǫlsung legend. It should not be forgotten that, according to Brot af Sigurðarkviðu and Vǫlsunga saga, Sigurðr shares Fáfnir's heart with his wife Guðrún, making her, according to the saga author, "miklu grimmari en áðr ok vitrari" (much grimmer than before and wiser).[74] Guðrún's revenge is doubtless meant to evoke the great triumph achieved by her first husband, the more so since his defeat of Fáfnir was a catalyst for the events which followed. Bera's forced cannibalism in Hrólfs saga kraka should likewise be contextualized by the numerous other episodes of blood-drinking and heart-eating in the saga. These include the transformation of the cowardly Hǫttr into the brave champion Hjalti after eating the heart of a beast, as well as the sharing of blood between two of Bera's sons. Bera's consumption of her husband's flesh is the first of these to occur in the saga, however, making it a key point of reference for the events which follow.

Trapped in bear form by his evil stepmother after he rejects her advances, Prince Bjǫrn is hunted and killed by his father, King Hringr, and his men. In celebration after the successful hunt, his body is then cooked and served up to the court, including his wife, who is forced to eat his flesh not once but twice:

> "Hún bitar fyrir hana, ok þat verðr af leiknum, at hún etr þann bita. Drottning skerr þá annan ok lætr í munn henni, ok þar kemr lítit korn niðr af þeim bita, ok sló þá úr munni sér ok kveðst eigi meir mundu eta, þó at hún píndi hana eða deyddi."[75]
>
> (She [the queen] cut a piece for her [Bera], and it happened in the end that she ate that mouthful. The queen then cut another piece and placed it into her [Bera's] mouth and a little bit of that mouthful went down,

and then she spat the rest out of her mouth and said that she would not eat any more, even if she were tortured or killed.)

The result is that when Bera gives birth to the sons conceived before her husband's death her eldest boy has the legs of an elk from the waist down and her second eldest has the feet of a dog. They are accordingly named Elk-Fróði and Þórir hundsfótr (hound's-foot) respectively. Only their youngest brother, Bǫðvarr, is unscathed.

There are moral overtones to these bestial features, which affect not just form but also character. Elk-Fróði grows up to become a bandit who "drepr menn til fjár" (kills men for money), a profession to which his youngest brother Bǫðvarr objects, but which he cannot be persuaded to change.[76] Bǫðvarr can at least take comfort in his brother's confession "at hann hafi mörgum manni grið gefit, þeim er litlir váru fyrir sér" (that he had given quarter to many men, those who were weak and vulnerable).[77] Þórir hundsfótr has a more respectable career, becoming King of Gautland. His animalistic feet glide into the background, so much so that the saga claims that Bǫðvarr and Þórir "váru menn svá líkir, at hvárigan mátti þekkja frá öðrum" (were men so alike, that neither could be told apart from the other), which strains credulity a little.[78] Bǫðvarr is clearly depicted as the best of the brothers, however, both physically and morally, and only he is destined to serve the saga's greatest leader, King Hrólfr kraki.

Yet there is a downside to Bǫðvarr's escape from foetal contamination. A wrestling match between him and Elk-Fróði reveals that he is unequivocally the weaker of the two.[79] This concerns his brother, who offers him blood drawn from his calf, the very area made bestial by his mother's act of forbidden ingestion. Mediated by his brother, Bǫðvarr is only improved by this fraternal blood which makes him "fyrirmaðr flestra um afl ok hreysti ok um alla harðfengi ok drengskap" (the superior of most men in power and prowess and in all valor and

nobility).[80] Both the generosity of Elk-Fróði's offer and the fact that Bǫðvarr accepts it freely contrast with the coercion experienced by Bera. While Bǫðvarr absorbs second-hand some part of the flesh which transformed his brothers, there are no adverse effects. Bǫðvarr is not forcibly taking something from his brother, rather he is partaking in his brother, and therefore this shared blood and strength exactly corresponds to the kind of positive, transpersonal kinship found elsewhere Old Norse myth and legend. That their interaction is as much about mutual solidarity as improving individual strength is confirmed when Elk-Fróði combines his offer of blood with a promise to avenge Bǫðvarr should he die, taking Bǫðvarr's enemies for his own in a further display of familial loyalty.

In contrast, the scene of Bera's cannibalism, as we have come to expect, twists the promise of strength offered by co-presence between kinsmen into a horrific ordeal, which highlights to what dire straits the evil queen has brought her husband's family, turning father and son against each other and now using Bjǫrn's body to effectively poison his sons. While she is an antagonist instead of a heroine, Queen Hvít's betrayals, like those of Guðrún, destroy the royal family from within and the cannibalism is the result not the cause of these broken relationships.

While Bera does not eat her husband's heart specifically, there are other similarities with the instances of cannibalism previously discussed in the Poetic Edda and Vǫlsunga saga. In all the narratives, the human flesh must be altered for consumption by cooking and in Fáfnir's and Bjǫrn's cases by transmutation to an animal form as well. Both of these processes normalize the act of consumption by comparing it to the consumption of other, animal meat. In effect these bodies go by these processes from flesh to food.

Yet the human origin of this meat cannot be fully erased as is evident from the consequences of consuming it: all the consumers are dehumanized, not necessarily in a pejorative way but drawn into closer relation with the natural world rather than human society.

Sigurðr comes to understand the speech of birds, a clear link to the natural world, that is shared in some sources by Guðrún after she also eats some of the heart.[81] Similarly explicit are the animalistic features of Bera's children. Even her youngest son Bǫðvarr possesses the ability to manifest in the form of a bear, a skill he utilizes in the climactic battle against King Hrólfr's enemies.[82] In all these cases cannibalism seems to blur the line between the human and the natural worlds. The flesh that is already transformed would also appear to be the most transformative, even in the tiniest of quantities, whether it be heart's juices on a thumb or mere mouthfuls of bear-meat. The exception would seem to be Atli but, as noted earlier, McMahon has highlighted a number of "indirect, covert and sly canine references" in relation to Atli and the Huns in Atlakviða, beginning with stanza eleven's reference to the wolf ruling the inheritance of the Niflungar, which he takes to refer directly to Atli, who will control the treasure hoard if Gunnarr cannot thwart him.[83] McMahon relates these allusions to French and Italian medieval traditions which claimed Attila the Hun was descended from a dog.[84] However, these oblique allusions could also be related to Guðrún's cannibalistic revenge; wolves in Norse poetry feed upon the bodies of the human slain after all. Larrington has further noted, citing Hamðismál 29, that the idea that "wolves turn even on closely-related kin is part of lupine lore in Old Norse."[85] After Atli has killed Guðrún's brothers, it could be argued that she treats him like the wolf he has figuratively become in her eyes, serving up more human flesh for him to feed upon, literally this time. The language used to describe Atli's consumption in Atlakviða 36 would support this interpretation; La Farge and Tucker note in their glossary that valbráð, meaning "meat of the battle-field" usually refers to food for wolves, which would cast Atli as the wolf here.[86] Once again, the consumption of human flesh is accompanied by the dehumanization of the consumer.

VII. THE BINDING OF FENRIR

With these consequences in mind, then, I would like to offer a reading of the binding of Fenrir, which takes account of Fenrir's biting of Týr's hand as an act of cannibalistic kin-consumption. This narrative is different in several respects to those that have gone before, the flesh the wolf ingests is not transformed in any way, it is neither cooked nor non-human. It is not even certain that the wolf does ingest it by swallowing the hand rather than just biting it off. Swallowing would be fitting, since it would neatly foreshadow his eventual swallowing of Óðinn at ragnarǫk.[87] In Kevin Wanner's opinion, "it is clear that the damage caused by Fenrir and/or his proxies at ragnarök is accomplished by gaping and swallowing rather than biting or tearing."[88] Larrington likewise draws on Mikhail Bakhtin to associate the wolf's gaping mouth with the act of swallowing specifically, that "most ancient symbol of death and destruction."[89] It is an act of wolfish consumption, not merely destruction, that is feared at ragnarǫk and so it is fair to assume that Fenrir's taste for the Æsir may begin here, with Týr's hand.

Even if there is no confirmed consumption, in its essential structure and outcomes the narrative is very similar to those previously discussed. The episode anatomizes the relationship between Fenrir and the Æsir, distilling social relations into the interactions, of various kinds, between hand and mouth: from feeding, to holding, to biting and possibly swallowing. At the very least a proxy ingestion is enacted when Týr's hand is placed inside the wolf's mouth as a gesture of good faith on the part of the Æsir. The hand in the mouth demonstrates literal mutuality of being, the flesh of one group inside the other. Equally importantly, while the physical hand may not be explicitly consumed, the narrative makes it clear that something more intangible is swallowed up by the Æsir's treachery, namely their kinship with the wolf and Týr's hand is an important embodiment of this relationship, swallowed or not.

As a final consideration, Fenrir's copious salivation after the Æsir prop his mouth open with a sword further suggests consumption as a narrative subtext.[90] Salivation is a necessary

precursor to eating. The detail confirms that the wolf is hungry but part of his punishment is presumably not to be satisfied until ragnarǫk. Such a punishment only makes sense as a response to some prior transgressive consumption, such as the eating of Týr's hand.

Taken together, all these considerations seem to me to provide ample support for reading Fenrir's taking of Týr's hand as an act of ingestion which bears comparison with other acts of kin-consumption, for as Margaret Clunies Ross points out, "Fenrir was partly [the Æsir's] own kin, which they acknowledge when they agree to nurture him."[91] In bringing the wolf home to live in Ásgarðr, as Snorri describes, the Æsir essentially foster him:

> "Úlfinn fœddu Æsir heima, ok hafði Týr einn djarfleik til at ganga at úlfnum ok gefa honum mat."[92]
>
> (The Æsir brought up the wolf at home, and only Týr had the boldness to approach the wolf and give him food.)

Significantly, Týr is the one who feeds him. As Sahlins suggests, food here seems to generate kinship. It is a symbol of the wolf's relationship to the gods, and to Týr in particular, and of their undertaking to nurture and raise him. As further proof of their relationship only Týr will later be brave enough to put his hand in the wolf's mouth as a guarantee. In eating that hand the wolf ostensibly breaks down the kinship tie between himself and the Æsir. Once again, however, the cannibalistic event is the result not the cause of kinship breakdown. The Æsir decided to betray and bind Fenrir in response to his increasing size long before he took Týr's hand. Tricking Fenrir into bondage, they corner him into making the final violation of their kinship, thereby justifying his utter exclusion from their group and arguably turning him into the monster they feared he would become.

For this ingestion of kin has inevitable dehumanizing consequences. Fenrir's consistently bestial form makes it easy to conflate his pre- and post-binding characterizations and to paint him as a monster from the moment of birth. For Rasmus Tranum Kristensen, for example, Fenrir is one of the "purely destructive forces of chaos."[93] Wanner, however, rightly warns against this "[d]iabolization of Fenrir."[94] Before he is bound Snorri depicts the wolf as eminently capable of human speech and reasoning. Not only does he speak but he has a very human preoccupation with his heroic fame and reputation that is twice mentioned by Snorri: first, when the wolf agrees to try the chain Drómi since "[k]om þat í hug at hann mundi verða at leggja sik í hættu ef hann skyldi frægr verða" (it came into his mind that he would need to take some risk if he was to become famous);[95] and again in his objection to the delicacy of the subsequent binding chain, Gleipnir:

> "Svá lízk mér á þenna dregil sem ønga frægð munak af hljóta þótt ek slíta í sundr svá mjótt band."[96]
>
> ('It looks thus to me with this ribbon as if I will get no fame from it if I break asunder so slender a band.')

These abilities and concerns have not gone unnoticed in scholarship. Larrington describes him as "an amiable animal, talkative and playful."[97] William Sayers characterizes the wolf as "garrulous", while to Wanner "he comes across as rather urbane and introspective, and with an unmonsterlike fixation on the state of his reputation."[98] Edna Edith Sayers, writing as Lois Bragg, describes the passage as "fascinating for the tension between his stated monstrosity and his patently normative ethical system. That the latter is conveyed in language, the language of the human world, sharpens the point that Fenrir participates in the human ethical system."[99] It

is this shared ethical system which most strikes Bragg, who highlights the Æsir's tacit recognition of the wolf's faculties in the way they are able to converse with him "as conspecifics, that is to say, they articulate common social-class concerns."[100] Fenrir's personhood and indeed personality can hardly be denied.

Only after he eats Týr's hand is the faculty of speech forcibly taken from him by the sword, described as gómsparri hans (his gum-prop), which is placed in his mouth to hold open his slavering jaws, reducing him to the state of ravening beast.[101] Bragg characterizes this as a return to his canine roots, an exposure of the uncivilized creature which he cannot escape, but there is nothing to suggest such a development was an inevitable reversion to his intrinsically bestial nature.[102] Rather, the eating of Týr's hand is the catalyst for this transformation: loss of the power of speech is a very common punishment for cannibalistic consumption in other classical and medieval examples.[103] Eating kin becomes eating kinship as the bond between the wolf and the Æsir dissolves, leaving an alienated monster in its wake.

This reading would additionally explain why the gods all laugh despite Týr's misfortune in losing his hand. Týr's hand, which fed the wolf, is a symbol of their relationship to him. The hand that fed is thus tainted by association and, if it remained, it would designate the Æsir as violators of their kinship obligations. In order to disavow kinship with the wolf they must also destroy any symbol of that kinship. Týr's actions in feeding the wolf have become a liability, one that must be dealt with. To have the hand removed, and in such a manner, is cause for celebration, for it makes the Æsir truly free of any obligation toward Fenrir.

The use of Týr's hand as a symbol for the Æsir's relationship with the wolf and their responsibilities toward him is reinforced by the exchange between Loki and Týr in Lokasenna 39 where Týr responds to Loki's taunting by reminding him that:

"Handar em ec vanr, enn þú Hróðrsvitnis,

bǫl er beggia þrá."[104]

('I am lacking a hand, and you the infamous wolf.

Misfortune brings privation to us both.')

The loss of a hand and the loss of the wolf are balanced against each other. Sayers has pointed out that "[t]he wrist is called the 'wolf-joint' (úlfliðr) in Old Norse figurative language. In early Europe the joint was widely seen as a symbol of the link between generations (ON liðr 'degree of kinship, generation', Irish glún 'knee, degree of kinship, generation', Latin genus 'descent, origin' < genu 'knee'). Thus, Loki has also lost a link, as Týr notes."[105] Such a double meaning only emphasizes more strongly the vital symbolism of Týr's hand: in biting off the hand the wolf is goaded into biting off the link that bound him to the Æsir and the Æsir to him, retrospectively justifying to his captors the wisdom of their own perfidy.

The binding of Fenrir brings together multiple functions of the cannibalism motif into a single, sophisticated narrative. On one level cannibalism is used by the Æsir as a straightforward technology of definition. By eating the hand that fed him Fenrir is rendered sublinguistic and unfit for divine society. By tricking him into behaving the way they, and by extension the Old Norse audience, would expect a wolf to behave, the Æsir are able to resolve Fenrir's hitherto confusing and contradictory place in the mythological system, placing him firmly outside of civilization with his brother and sister where he 'belongs', according to their cultural logic. However, reading the episode as one of specifically kin-consumption reveals a subversive subtext which casts the actions of the Æsir in a far more ambiguous light, for kin-consumption underlines not the monstrosity of the consumer but the failure of mutual kinship relations, and therefore leaves both sides diminished. Clunies Ross summarizes: "Týr loses his

hand and the wolf loses his liberty. Neither is destroyed, but each has his personal freedom restricted, one by binding, the other by maiming. The most obvious message of this myth is that the two worlds of gods and giants are interrelated."[106] Though the Æsir may laugh and count the binding of Fenrir a victory, they are the architects of their own destruction and in isolating Fenrir only succeed in creating their most implacable and destructive enemy at ragnarǫk. When Fenrir next swallows something it will be much more than just a hand and far less amusing for the Æsir, a dangerous reminder that an appetite once whetted will stop at nothing to be satisfied and that kinship bonds devoured cannot be remade.

VIII. EATING KIN, EATING KINSHIP

As Maggie Kilgour has observed, "[t]he idea of incorporation […] depends upon and enforces an absolute division between inside and outside; but in the act itself that opposition disappears, dissolving the structure it appears to produce."[107] Eating kin derives its symbolic resonance (and particular irony) from the relationship between consumer and consumed which is perverted by the cannibalistic consumption, yet in the eating that relationship disappears. Ultimately the instances of kin-consumption in Old Norse myth and legend seem to demonstrate the truth of Viveiros de Castro's assertion: "What one eats of man is always a relationship."[108] This is true of Atli, eating his own paternity and swallowing his dynasty's future, of Sigurðr, eating his foster-kin and striking out alone, of Bera forced to eat and destroy her relation to the king's son which so threatened the queen, and Fenrir, eating his relationship to the Æsir. By utilizing Sahlins' understanding of kinship and the co-presence of kinsmen, we are able to see how these narratives use the motif of cannibalistic ingestion to gloss rather than to motivate the broken kinship relations in these narratives, underlining the dissolution of relationship between consumer and consumed.

It is not the fact of kin-consumption that is necessarily transgressive in these episodes, the consumption may even be recommended, as in Sigurðr's case. Rather, it accompanies always a violation of kinship, whether the treachery of Atli, of Reginn, of Bjǫrn's step-mother or even of the Æsir. The motif of cannibalism is used to draw attention to those kin relations where betrayal has poisoned the mutuality which should sustain kinship, using the horror of cannibalism to emphasize the perceived unnatural character of kin betrayal. Kin-cannibalism becomes a visual shorthand with which to represent the antithesis of positive kinship: exploitative where it should be symbiotic. The use of the cannibalism motif for such a purpose is reminiscent of the way in which cannibalism has more recently been used as a methodological framework with which to critique Western consumerism and capitalism, perhaps a modern expression of a similar kind of cultural criticism.[109]

As consumption is used in these narratives to comment on transgressed kinship relations, it is worth remembering that Old Norse cosmology has as a central image the exploitative consumption of a less sensational kind suffered by the world-tree Yggdrasill:

"Ascr Yggdrasils drýgir erfiði,
meira, enn menn viti;
hiǫrtr bítr ofan, enn á hliðo fúnar,
scerðir Níðhǫggr neðan."[110]

(The ash of Yggdrasill suffers hardship,
More than men may know:
A stag bites it from above, and it rots at its side,
Níðhǫggr gnaws away at it from below.)

Clunies Ross muses on the imbalance in these animals' relationships to the source which sustains them: "Why the animals cannot live symbiotically with Yggdrasill is never explained […]. It is in their nature to exceed control and moderation, and that is surely one of the messages that their animal form conveys."[111] The animals which populate Yggdrasill are a perfect symbol of worldly disfunction and discord, further emphasized by the squirrel Ratatoskr, who runs between the eagle perched in the branches and Níðhǫggr down below carrying envious and malicious words between the two.[112] Their thoughtless consumption appears less an expression of their animal forms to a modern audience than peculiarly human in its short-sighted and selfish character. While not strictly cannibalistic, their consumption again demonstrates a recognition of how fragile and vulnerable to abuse were the structures (quite literally in the case of Yggdrasill) which underpinned the Old Norse legendary world.

It was Bakhtin's opinion that in the act of eating the body "triumphs over the world, over its enemy, celebrates its victory."[113] Hence, to his mind, "[n]o meal can be sad. Sadness and food are incompatible (while death and food are perfectly compatible)."[114] Consumption is essentially conquest, and a conquest more complete than any other. At the same time, as Kilgour reminds us, "bodily needs also indicate that the appearance of autonomy is an illusion, for the body must incorporate elements from outside itself in order to survive. The need for food exposes the vulnerability of individual identity, enacted at a wider social level in the need for exchanges, communion, and commerce with others, through which the individual is absorbed into a larger corporate body."[115] Kin-cannibalism in Old Norse myth and legend represents an isolated (and isolating), individualistic form of eating, which rejects the social communion offered by living kinsmen for the literal consumption of the dead. The corporate body, an image famously articulated and fatally misinterpreted in Hamðismál, is sacrificed to the appetite of the individual. The graphicness of these episodes of literal consumption was used, however, to reinforce more subtle instances of familial betrayal, where kinship had been

eaten, even if kinsmen remained physically unconsumed. The horror of cannibalism forces the audience to confront the reality of what has been lost by these earlier, figurative, but no less destructive, acts of consumption, retrospectively framing them as a kind of social cannibalism which could only have devasting consequences. These episodes all function as warnings against abandoning the reciprocity inherent in kinship, for, in the interdependent world of Old Norse myth and legend, it is exploitative consumption which appears most threatening: the ability to eat the relationships which bound both the social and the physical world together.

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[2] Geraldine Heng, Empire of Magic: Medieval Romance and the Politics of Cultural Fantasy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 28.

[3] Heng, Empire of Magic, pp. 28 and 9.

[4] Heng, Empire of Magic, pp. 28–29.

[5] Peggy Reeves Sanday, Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 3.

[6] Whether such instances truly constitute acts of cannibalism is debateable. Andrea Maraschi argues that "if a giant who eats humans is considered a cannibal, then it also means that they are human, to some extent" ("Taboo or Magic Practice? Cannibalism as Identity Marker for

Giants and Human Heroes in Medieval Iceland," Parergon, 37 (2020), 4). However, the reverse may equally be true. If giants and trolls are considered taxonomically distinct from humans then acts of anthropophagy committed by such beings cannot truly be called cannibalism, in the sense of one who eats the flesh of their own species. In this article I define cannibalism as the consumption of all or part of a conspecific, leaving room for interpretation according to the nature of the consumer and victim in each individual case.

[7] Ármann Jakobsson, "Identifying the Ogre: The Legendary Saga Giants," in Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed. Studier i de oldislandske fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda, ed. Agneta Ney, Annette Lassen and Ármann Jakobsson (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2009), pp. 191–92 and 196; Ármann Jakobsson, "Beast and Man: Realism and the Occult in Egils saga," Scandinavian Studies, 83 (2011), 32–33; Maraschi, "Taboo or Magic Practice?" pp. 4–15.

[8] Maraschi, "Taboo or Magic Practice?" p. 19.

[9] Maraschi, "Taboo or Magic Practice?" p. 24.

[10] See Merrall Llewelyn Price Consuming Passions: The Uses of Cannibalism in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, Studies in Medieval History and Culture, 20 (New York: Routledge, 2003), Heather Blurton, Cannibalism in High Medieval English Literature (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Heng, Empire of Magic, all of whom highlight the political, and particularly colonial, dimensions of literary cannibalism.

[11] Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, From the Enemy's Point of View: Humanity and Divinity in an Amazonian Society, trans. Catherine V. Howard (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 286.

[12] Viveiros de Castro, Enemy's Point of View, p. 286.

[13] Viveiros de Castro, Enemy's Point of View, p. 286.

[14] Heng, Empire of Magic, p. 28; Maraschi, "Taboo or Magic Practice?" p. 24. Maraschi actually includes Bǫðvarr's consumption of blood from his brother Elk-Froði's calf as an instance of power absorption and therefore "cultural cannibalism". Since I confine my argument here to examples of eating kin, I do not treat the episode in detail, but do offer some suggestions of my own as to why Bǫðvarr's act of kin-consumption is treated more positively in the saga than that of his mother (see section VI below).

[15] Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois, "The Anthropology of Food and Eating," Annual Review of Anthropology, 31 (2002), 102.

[16] Janet Carsten, After Kinship (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 141.

[17] Janet Carsten, "The Substance of Kinship and the Heat of the Hearth: Feeding, Personhood, and Relatedness among Malays in Pulau Langkawi," American Ethnologist, 22 (1995), 228.

[18] Marshall Sahlins, What Kinship Is—and Is Not (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 6.

[19] Sahlins, What Kinship Is, p. 21.

[20] Julian Pitt-Rivers, "The Kith and the Kin," in The Character of Kinship, ed. Jack Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 91; Sahlins, What Kinship Is, p. ix.

[21] Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), p. 281.

[22] Viveiros de Castro, Enemy's Point of View, p. 286.

[23] The classic examples being the gigantic wolf Fenrir, Jǫrmungandr the Miðgarðsormr or midgard serpent and Hel, who resembles a woman but whose body appears half human flesh and half a livid blueish black, presumably rotted, all of whom were children of the shape-shifting Áss Loki and his giantess lover Angrboða. Gylfaginning, chap. 34, in Snorri

Sturluson, Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2d ed. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005), p. 27.

[24] See Ármann Jakobsson, "The Taxonomy of the Non-Existent: Some Medieval Icelandic Concepts of the Paranormal," Fabula, 54 (2013), 199–213.

[25] David W. Pfennig, "Kinship and Cannibalism," BioScience, 47 (1997), 667.

[26] Atlakviða, stt. 36–38, in Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern, vol. 1: Text, ed. Gustav Neckel, 4th ed., rev. Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1962), p. 246; Atlamál, stt. 77–85, ed. Neckel, pp. 258–60. All references to and quotations from eddic poems will refer to this edition. The titles of eddic poems have been normalized, however.

[27] Fáfnismál, prose, ed. Neckel, pp. 186–87.

[28] Vǫlsunga saga, chaps. 19 and 38, in Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954; repr. 1976), I, 155–56 and 211.

[29] Hrólfs saga kraka, chap. 27, in Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954; repr. 1976), I, 50–51.

[30] Gylfaginning, chap. 34, ed. Faulkes, pp. 28–29.

[31] Shirley Lindenbaum, "Thinking about Cannibalism," Annual Review of Anthropology, 33 (2004), 478. See also Laurence R. Goldman, "From Pot to Polemic: Uses and Abuses of Cannibalism," in The Anthropology of Cannibalism, ed. Laurence R. Goldman (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1999), p. 14.

[32] Viveiros de Castro, Enemy's Point of View, p. 286.

[33] Atlakviða, stt. 36–43, ed. Neckel, pp. 246–47; Atlamál, stt. 77–89, ed. Neckel, pp. 258–60; Vǫlsunga saga, chap. 38, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 211–13.

[34] Fáfnismál, prose and stt. 32–39, ed. Neckel, pp. 186–87; Vǫlsunga saga, chap. 19, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 155–56.

[35] Hrólfs saga kraka, chap. 27, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 51.

[36] Gylfaginning, chap. 51, ed. Faulkes, p. 50; Vafþrúðnismál, st. 53, ed. Neckel, p. 55.

[37] For a full discussion of transpersonal kinship in Old Norse myth and legend, including the imagery in Hamðismál and other examples briefly discussed here, see Katherine Marie Olley, "Kinship and Narrative in Old Norse Literature: Parent-Child Relations in Mythic-Heroic Texts," (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2019), pp. 15–25, where I make this argument in much more detail.

[38] Hamðismál, st. 5, ed. Neckel, p. 269.

[39] All translations are my own. All eddic translations are informed by The Poetic Edda, trans. Carolyne Larrington, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) and by Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker, Glossary to the Poetic Edda: Based on Hans Kuhn's Kurzes Wörterbuch (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1992). All translations from Gylfaginning and Skáldskaparmál are informed by Snorri Sturluson, Edda, ed. and trans. Anthony Faulkes (London: J. M. Dent, 1995) and by the glossaries to Faulkes' editions (see note 23 above and note 66 below).

[40] David Clark, Gender, Violence, and the Past in Edda and Saga (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 67.

[41] Sahlins, What Kinship Is, p. 21.

[42] Hamðismál, st. 13:4, ed. Neckel, p. 271.

[43] Thomas D. Hill, "The Confession of Beowulf and the Structure of Volsunga saga," in The Vikings, ed. Robert T. Farrell (London: Phillimore, 1982), p. 168; Judy Quinn, "The Realisation of Mythological Design: The Early Generations of the Völsung Dynasty," in Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter og virkelighed. Studier i de oldislandske fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda, ed. Agneta Ney, Annette Lassen and Ármann Jakobsson (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 2009), p. 138; 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. Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjødt and Rasmus Tranum Kristensen, Studies in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia, 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 126.

[44] Ragnars saga loðbrókar, chap. 10, in Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1954; repr. 1976), I, 256; Carolyne Larrington, "Stjúpmœðrasögur 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. Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), p. 574.

[45] Robert Olsen and Karin Olsen, "Introduction: On the Embodiment of Monstrosity in Northwest Medieval Europe," in Monsters and the Monstrous in Medieval Northwest Europe, ed. Karin E. Olsen and L. A. J. R. Houwen, Mediaevalia Groningana New Series, 3 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), p. 21. For a thorough discussion of social monstrosity in a medieval Icelandic context see Rebecca Merkelbach, Monsters in Society: Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2019).

[46] Icelandic feasts, according to William Ian Miller, were occasions for "renewing and reaffirming bonds of blood and alliance," though he notes that social tensions were bound to run high at such a public event, with insults and slights also frequent occurrences. William Ian Miller, Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 80.

[47] Vǫlsunga saga, chap. 38, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 211.

[48] Atlamál, st. 83, ed. Neckel, p. 259.

[49] Atlakviða, st. 36, ed. Neckel, p. 246.

[50] Clark, Gender, Violence, and the Past, p. 29.

[51] Atlakviða, st. 38:6, ed. Neckel, p. 246; Clark, Gender, Violence, and the Past, p. 29; James V. McMahon, "Atli the Dog in Atlakviða," Scandinavian Studies, 63 (1991), 187–94.

[52] Atlakviða, st. 24, ed. Neckel, p. 244; Atlamál, stt. 59 and 65, ed. Neckel, pp. 256–57.

[53] Atlakviða, stt. 23:7 and 25:7, ed. Neckel, p. 244.

[54] Atlamál, st. 83:4, ed. Neckel, p. 259; Atlakviða, st. 36:7, ed. Neckel, p. 246.

[55] Atlamál, st. 78:7–8, ed. Neckel, p. 259.

[56] Vǫlsunga saga, chap. 38, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 210–11.

[57] Fáfnismál, prose, ed. Neckel, p. 186.

[58] Fáfnismál, st. 32:7–8, ed. Neckel, p. 186.

[59] Fáfnismál, st. 33:3–4, ed. Neckel, p. 186.

[60] Fáfnismál, prose, ed. Neckel, p. 187.

[61] Vǫlsunga saga, chap. 15, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 146.

[62] See D551.3., D1357.1., D1358.1., D1358.1.1. and E714.4.1. in Inger M. Boberg, Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature, Bibliotheca Arnamagnæana, 27 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966), pp. 58, 71 and 100.

[63] Jens Peter Schjødt, Initiation Between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion, trans. Victor Hansen, The Viking Collection, 17 ([Odense]: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2008), pp. 288–89.

[64] Schjødt, Initiation Between Two Worlds, pp. 78–81.

[65] Schjødt, Initiation Between Two Worlds, p. 290 note 31.

[66] Skáldskaparmál, chap. 17, in Snorri Sturluson, Edda: Skáldskaparmál, ed. Anthony Faulkes, 2 vols. (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998; repr. 2007), I, 21.

[67] Skáldskaparmál, chap. 17, ed. Faulkes, I, 21.

[68] Ármann Jakobsson, "Enter the Dragon. Legendary Saga Courage and the Birth of the Hero," in Making History: Essays on the Fornaldarsögur, ed. Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay ([London]: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2010), p. 48.

[69] Ármann Jakobsson, "Enter the Dragon," p. 48.

[70] Joyce Tally Lionarons, The Medieval Dragon: The Nature of the Beast in Germanic Literature (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1998), p. 69.

[71] Lionarons, Medieval Dragon, p. 69.

[72] Ármann Jakobsson, "Enter the Dragon," p. 47.

[73] Judy Quinn, "Betrothal and Betrayal: The Eddic Tradition's Treatment of Sigurðr," in Á Austrvega: Saga and East Scandinavia. Preprint Papers of the 14th International Saga Conference, Uppsala, 9th–15th August 2009, ed. Agneta Ney, Henrik Williams and Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist (Gävle: Gävle University Press, 2009), pp. 783–87.

[74] Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, prose, ed. Neckel, p. 201; Vǫlsunga saga, chap. 26, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 174.

[75] Hrólfs saga kraka, chap. 27, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 51.

[76] Hrólfs saga kraka, chap. 28, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 53.

[77] Hrólfs saga kraka, chap. 31, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 59.

[78] Hrólfs saga kraka, chap. 32, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 60.

[79] Hrólfs saga kraka, chap. 31, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 58.

[80] Hrólfs saga kraka, chap. 31, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 59.

[81] Brot af Sigurðarkviðu, prose, ed. Neckel, p. 201.

[82] Hrólfs saga kraka, chap. 50, ed. Guðni Jónsson, I, 99–101.

[83] McMahon, "Atli the Dog," p. 197.

[84] McMahon, "Atli the Dog," p. 196.

[85] Carolyne Larrington, "Loki's Children," in The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles. Preprint Papers of the 13th International Saga Conference, Durham and York, 6th–12th August 2006, ed. John McKinnell, David Ashurst and Donata Kick (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), p. 545.

[86] La Farge and Tucker, Glossary to the Poetic Edda, p. 275.

[87] Gylfaginning, chap. 51, ed. Faulkes, p. 50; Vafþrúðnismál, st. 53, ed. Neckel, p. 55. Some scholars also mention Fenrir swallowing the sun at ragnarǫk, citing Vafþrúðnismál, stt. 46–47, ed. Neckel, pp. 53–54. However, as with Týr's hand, consumption here is uncertain. The verb used is not gleypa 'to swallow' but fara, in the sense of 'to destroy, kill', one variant (the Codex Trajectinus or Utrecht manuscript of Snorra Edda, in which the stanza is quoted) even has fá 'to get, seize'. I therefore do not include the sun as further evidence of Fenrir's monstrous appetite.

[88] Kevin J. Wanner, "Sewn Lips, Propped Jaws, and a Silent Áss (or Two): Doing Things with Mouths in Norse Myth," JEGP, 111 (2012), 13.

[89] Larrington, "Loki's Children," p. 543; Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, p. 325.

[90] Gylfaginning, chap. 34, ed. Faulkes, p. 29.

[91] Margaret Clunies Ross, Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society, vol. 1: The Myths, The Viking Collection, 7 ([Odense]: Odense University Press, 1994), p. 220.

[92] Gylfaginning, chap. 34, ed. Faulkes, p. 27.

[93] Rasmus Tranum Kristensen, "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. Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjødt and Rasmus Tranum Kristensen, Studies in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia, 1 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), p. 165.

[94] Wanner, "Sewn Lips, Propped Jaws," p. 19.

[95] Gylfaginning, chap. 34, ed. Faulkes, p. 27.

[96] Gylfaginning, chap. 34, ed. Faulkes, p. 28.

[97] Larrington, "Loki's Children," p. 545.

[98] William Sayers, "'ok er hann einhendr': Týr's Enhanced Functionality," Neophilologus, 100 (2016), 247; Wanner, "Sewn Lips, Propped Jaws," p. 19.

[99] Lois Bragg, Oedipus borealis: The Aberrant Body in Old Icelandic Myth and Saga (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004), p. 99.

[100] Bragg, Oedipus borealis, p. 88.

[101] Gylfaginning, chap. 34, ed. Faulkes, p. 29. The dehumanization of the wolf at this point is subtly underlined in Faulkes' translation where he substitutes 'it' and 'its' for 'he' and 'his' in reference to the wolf from the moment he bites off Týr's hand. Snorri Sturluson, Edda, trans. Faulkes, p. 29.

[102] Bragg, Oedipus borealis, p. 99.

[103] Price, Consuming Passions, p. 23.

[104] Lokasenna, st. 39:1–3 , ed. Neckel, p. 104.

[105] Sayers, "Týr's Enhanced Functionality," p. 251.

[106] Clunies Ross, Prolonged Echoes, p. 221.

[107] Maggie Kilgour, From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 4.

[108] Viveiros de Castro, Enemy's Point of View, p. 286.

[109] See Michael M. Ames, Cannibal Tours and Glass Boxes: The Anthropology of Museums, rev. 2d ed. (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1992), p. 3; Crystal Bartolovich, "Consumerism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Cannibalism," in Cannibalism and the Colonial World, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iversen, Cultural Margins, 5 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 204–37; Dean MacCannell, Empty

Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers (London: Routledge, 1992), see especially chapter one "Cannibalism Today," pp. 17–73; Rosalind C. Morris, "Anthropology in the Body Shop: Lords of the Garden, Cannibalism, and the Consuming Desires of Televisual Anthropology", American Anthropologist, 98 (1996), 142; Deborah Root, Cannibal Culture: Art Appropriation, and the Commodification of Difference (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), pp. 15–16 and 30. For a thoughtful criticism of this trend see C. Richard King, "The (Mis)uses of Cannibalism in Contemporary Cultural Critique," Diacritics, 30 (2000), 106–23.

[110] Grímnismál, st. 35, ed. Neckel, p. 64.

[111] Clunies Ross, Prolonged Echoes, p. 64.

[112] Gylfaginning, chap. 16, ed. Faulkes, p. 18.

[113] Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World, pp. 282–83.

[114] Bakhtin, Rabelais and his World, p. 283.

[115] Kilgour, From Communion to Cannibalism, p. 6.