

Sexual Violence Against Women
in the
Íslendingasögur and *Fornaldarsögur*



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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a comprehensive study of sexual violence in the *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*. It identifies and analyses the manifold and polymorphous ways in which sexual violence manifests, navigating its narratological purpose and contextualising it within medieval beliefs and anxieties about female bodies.

The use of euphemistic or polysemous language renders sexual violence in Old Norse literature ambiguous, and it is therefore often easily overlooked. The first chapter addresses how, in the *Íslendingasögur*, sexual violence is often latent but not absent. The second chapter examines the role of sexual violence in androcentric feuds, recentring women as victims of sexual violence who can be affected by trauma, shaming, and societal alienation. The third chapter follows Yngvildr *fagrkinn* in *Svarfdæla saga*, whose narrative encompasses marital rape, enslavement, and suicide, revealing the prevalence of these themes throughout the corpus. The fourth chapter is a reassessment of *Bósa saga*, regarded as the most prurient Old Norse saga. It suggests that the text's triptych of sexual conquests is beset by coercive overtones. The fifth chapter explores how women in the *fornaldarsögur* react and respond to their rapists. It argues that rape can be presented, without apparent contradiction, as simultaneously egregious and forgivable. The sixth chapter looks at the *de facto* and *de jure* punishments rapists receive, exploring the ethical quandaries within the *fornaldarsögur* regarding how rape should be prevented or punished. The seventh and final chapter considers the relationship between magic, love, and sex, assessing how enchantment vitiates consent and manipulates its objects into experiencing short-term lust or long-term love.

Both the *Íslendingasögur* and the *fornaldarsögur* contain considerable, and often conflicting, perspectives on female sexual autonomy and unrestrained male violence. Ultimately, this thesis shows that sexual violence is a far more complex, nuanced, and persistent theme throughout both genres than has previously been acknowledged.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR

- Bárðar saga* “Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss.” In *Harðar saga*, edited by Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. Íslenzk Fornrit, 13. 100–72. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1991.
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- Fljótsdæla saga* “Fljótsdæla saga.” In *Austfirðinga sögur*, edited by Jón Jóhannesson. Íslenzk Fornrit, 11. 213–96. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1950.
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- Grettis saga* *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, edited by Gúðni Jónsson. Íslenzk Fornrit, 7. 1–290. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1936.
- Hallfreðar saga* “Hallfreðar saga.” In *Vatnsdæla saga*, edited by Einar Ól. Sveinsson. Íslenzk Fornrit, 8. 133–200. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1939.
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- Reykðæla saga* “Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu.” In *Ljósvefninga saga*, edited by Björn Sigfússon. Íslenzk Fornrit, 10. 149–243. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1940.
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Snorri Sturluson. “Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla.” In *Heimskringla*, edited by Bjarni Aðalbjarnason. 3 vols. Vol. 3, Íslenzk Fornrit, 18. 278–302. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1951.

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- Viktors saga* *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, edited by Jónas Kristjánsson. *Riddarasögur*, 2. Reykjavík: Handritastofnun Íslands, 1964.
- Vilhjálmss saga* “Vilhjálmss saga sjóðs.” In *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, edited by Agnete Loth. 5 vols. Vol. 4, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, 23. 1–136. Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1964.
- Vitæ Patrum* “Vitæ Patrum.” In *Heilagra manna sögur: Fortællinger og Legender om Hellige Mænd og Kvinder*, edited by C. R. Unger. 2 vols. Vol. 2, 1335–488. Christiania: B.M. Bentzen, 1877.

- Ynglinga saga* Snorri Sturluson. “Ynglinga Saga.” In *Heimskringla*, edited by Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson. 3 vols. Vol. 1, Íslenzk Fornrit, 16. 9–83. Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 1941.
- Þiðreks saga* *Þiðreks saga af Bern*. Edited by Guðni Jónsson. 2 vols. Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1951.

DICTIONARIES AND DATABASES

- IEW* Alexander Jóhannesson. *Isländisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Bern: Francke, 1951.
- Blöndal Sigfús Blöndal. *Íslandsk-Dansk Ordbog*. 2 vols. Reykjavík: Prentsmiðjan Gutenberg, 1920–22.
- Cleasby-Vigfússon Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874.
- Fritzner Johan Fritzner. *Ordbog over det Gamle Norske Sprog*. 3 vols. Kristiania: Den norske Forlagsforening, 1886–96.
- ONP University of Copenhagen. “Dictionary of Old Norse Prose.” <https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php>.
- Runor Swedish National Heritage Board: Riksantikvarieämbetet. “Runor.” <https://app.raa.se/open/runor/search>.
- Vries Jan de Vries. *Altnordisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*. Leiden: Brill, 1962.
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A NOTE ON THE APPENDICES

This thesis contains Appendices totalling 23,948 words. *Appendix I* contains translations of indented quotations (except in the case of runic artefacts, which are laid out in their transliterated, standardised, and translated forms in the main body of the thesis). Especially lengthy scenes are quoted in Old Norse together with translations in *Appendix I*. Occasionally, translations may contain a particular crux; these are italicised.

Appendix II contains, in full and with translations taken from editions, all legal codes mentioned in this thesis. Where my analysis necessitates translational changes from the editions quoted in *Appendix II*, I note this.

Appendix III contains a database of rune-sticks.

All translations in this thesis, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

TOTAL WORD COUNT EXCLUDING APPENDICES: 99,912

TOTAL WORD COUNT INCLUDING APPENDICES: 123,860

PREFACE: TALKING ABOUT SEXUAL VIOLENCE

As you prepare to read 100,000 words on the topic of sexual violence, I, as the author of these 100,000 words, wish to acknowledge the due gravity of such an undertaking. Sexual violence is not easy to talk about. It falls into the special category of topics in medieval studies, like mental health, or disability, or critical race theory, that continue to impact the reality of the living. Sexual violence is not a topic cloistered within the safe halls of history. It is a lived reality. Mithu Sanyal reminds us that ‘rape is a veritable hall of mirrors of expectations and discourses, and each sentence is followed by ten unspoken ones’.¹ While I hope to give volume to the voices so often lost to the interstices of these texts, it is never without forgetting the seriousness of this topic, and it is with the knowledge that every fragment of analysis in this thesis could be uncomfortable or triggering for a reader. As a scholar, I strive for sound methodology and forensic attention to detail. Equally, I bring to this project my own subjective relationship to the topic of sexual violence and anyone reading this work will bring their own subjectivity with them, too. There is no single, perfect way to discuss or define rape. Finding a balance between sensitivity and academic rigour can feel like walking a tightrope of gossamer. I have attempted to tread carefully.

I must note too that, while I encountered numerous episodes of sexual violence committed against men in this project, this study focuses on women. This has not been done with the desire or intent to erase the experiences of men, transgender, or non-binary people, and I hope that, in the future, I will be able to devote research to the presentation of sexual violence against a broader range of gender identities. With very few exceptions, the

¹ Mithu M. Sanyal, *Rape: From Lucretia to #MeToo* (London; New York: Verso, 2019), 2.

perpetrators in this study are men. This is not intended to reflect the reality of sexual violence, which — despite legal definitions (which vary enormously geographically as well as temporally) — is not a crime that only men commit against only women. Such an oversimplification is hardly ‘the whole story’.²

I would also like to draw attention to the choice of terminologies throughout this thesis. The vocabulary of sexual violence is a landscape festooned with pitfalls, contradictions, shadows, and tripwires. Seldom does a word entirely capture the desired meaning, so subjective are the terms associated with this topic, and so vulnerable are they to change and misrepresentation according to geography and chronology. When it comes to selecting terminologies, I have attempted to provide my own rationalisation for what I mean by each word, drawing from the work of scholars of rape before me to inform my choices.

Finally, I would like to refer to Sanyal once more, and her acknowledgement that ‘rape is usually discussed as if it is a reality hewn into granite’.³ She and Joanna Bourke remind us that rape is not a fixed reality.⁴ The results of this thesis suggest that sexual violence is more integral to Old Norse literature than has previously been realised. This should not serve to uphold essentialist attitudes towards rape such as the deeply controversial ‘evolutionary perspective’ penned by Randy Thornhill and Craig Palmer which proposes that rape is ingrained into male genes.⁵ I, and many others, find such studies to be potentially harmful and ‘utterly lacking in scientific grounding’.⁶ It is not the purpose of this thesis to suggest that rape is a fixed part of the past, present, and future. Indeed, the Norse portrayals

² Ibid., 8.

³ Ibid., 3.

⁴ Joanna Bourke, *Rape: A History from 1860 to the Present Day* (London: Virago, 2007), 441.

⁵ Randy Thornhill and Craig T. Palmer, *A Natural History of Rape: Biological Bases of Sexual Coercion*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2000), 187.

⁶ Jerry A. Coyne, “Of Vice and Men: A Case Study of Evolutionary Psychology,” in *Evolution, Gender, and Rape*, ed. Cheryl Brown Travis, 1st ed. (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2003), 173.

of rape, particularly in the *fornaldarsögur*, are so very different to modern portrayals of rape (it would be unconscionable now, for instance, to portray *Bósa saga*'s Bósi with the foppishness that he bears in the saga) that it is heartening to see that attitudes have somewhat changed since the Middle Ages. But they have not changed enough. '[Rape] culture is created not just by changes in legal definitions of rape or consent [...], but by the stories told about rape', according to Lenise Prater and Evie Kendal, and it is my hope that by confronting the truisms regarding sexual violence in Old Norse literature, both primary and secondary, we can continue to unpick our inherited literary traditions and look towards a future without the harms of the past.⁷

⁷ Lenise Prater and Evie Kendal, "Rape by Deception in Popular Culture: The Hidden Harm in Body-Swap Narratives," *Australian Feminist Studies* (2024): 14.

en oft verðum vér konurnar ríki bornar af yðru valdi.¹

*yet often we women are forced to bow
to the strength of powerful men like you.*

¹ *Völsunga saga*, 210.

INTRODUCTION

RETICENCE

In Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, Othinus (ON Óðinn) executes a horrific sexual assault of the princess Rinda (ON Rindr), driving her mad before tying her down and raping her, all the while in the guise of her nursemaid. Such *ludibrium* (ludicrous behaviour) begins to alienate worshippers of the pagan gods, who themselves grow anxious about their reputation, so tarnished by one sexually violent god alone.¹ In eddic poetry, Rindr and Óðinn's child, Váli, is a major figure in the unfolding of events at 'ragnarøk' (the doom of the gods).² Sexual violence, then, seems instrumental in the downfall of the pagan gods, and is one of the primary exploits of the 'Alfǫðr' (All-Father) Óðinn.³ The sexually violent reputation of medieval Northmen has endured for a millennium: the phrase 'rape and pillage', comments Erika Sigurdson, 'has become almost synonymous with Vikings'.⁴ Adding 'pillage to rape' might give the latter, according to comedian David Mitchell, 'a certain air of knock-about fun', potentially conjuring a group of horned-helmet-wearing ne'er-do-wells.⁵ The enduring image of Vikings as ancestors of a sexually violent heritage endures to this day, as Tom Wambsgans drily comments in the final season of HBO's hit television series *Succession*: 'Norway, Sweden, what's the difference? They're all descended from the same

¹ Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes*, ed. Karsten Friis-Jensen, trans. Peter Fisher, 1st ed., vol. 1, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), Liber Tertius, 168.

² *Vǫluspá*, 299, st. 32–3.

³ *Gylfaginning*, 21.

⁴ Erika Ruth Sigurdson, "Violence and Historical Authenticity: Rape (and Pillage) in Popular Viking Fiction," *Scandinavian Studies* 86, no. 3 (2014): 249.

⁵ David Mitchell, *The Phrase 'Rape and Pillage'*, *David Mitchell's Soap Box* (2009).

rapists’.⁶ The idea of a somewhat besmirched heritage spans all the way back to one of the earliest Old Norse texts:

En vér þykjumsk heldr svara kunna útlendum mǫnnum, þá er þeir bregða oss því, at vér séim komnir af þrælum eða illmendum, ef vér vitum víst vǫrar kynferðir sannar.⁷
(Appendix I:Introduction:1)

Indeed, sexual violence does not just occupy popular (mis)conceptions about Vikings. It pervades the Old Norse literary corpus, taming the ‘meykongar’ (maiden-kings) of the *ridðarasögur* (chivalric sagas), adorning the skaldic verse of war songs in the *konungasögur* (kings’ sagas), and resonating across the violent civil war landscape of the *samtíðarsögur* (contemporary sagas).

Despite its pervasiveness, shockingly little has been written on the topic of sexual violence in Old Norse literature. The majority of scholarship on the topic is authored by Jenny Jochens and, accordingly, her body of work will be a touchstone for this thesis. Jochens’ work primarily focuses on the ‘illicit love visit’, a *topos* in which, she claims, sexual violence is implied more than it is made concrete.⁸ Overwhelmingly, the word used by other critics to describe Old Norse writers’ attitude to rape is ‘reticent’. In his relatively recent article, Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist professes that ‘A systematic survey of what the Icelandic sagas reveal about sexual assaults against women has not been conducted, owing to the prevailing opinion that the sagas are overly reticent about the matter’.⁹ The sagas are ‘much more reticent about rape than, say, killing or raiding’, suggests William Ian Miller.¹⁰

⁶ *Succession*, season 4, episode 5, “Kill List,” aired 2023, on HBO.

⁷ *Landnámabók*, cii.

⁸ See for instance “The Illicit Love Visit: An Archaeology of Old Norse Sexuality,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1, no. 3 (1991); Jenny Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1998), in particular 33–4.

⁹ 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, no. 4 (2015): 432.

¹⁰ William Ian Miller, “Beating Up On Women and Old Men and Other Enormities: A Social Historical Inquiry into Literary Sources,” *Mercer Law Review* 39, no. 3 (1988): 763.

Indeed, this is difficult to argue with: rape is far less obvious in the sagas than many other forms of violence. Notwithstanding, rape is far more present than has previously been acknowledged in scholarship, which has scarcely advanced beyond Andreas Heusler's suggestion that 'Der Angriff auf die Weibesehre ist überhaupt dem nordischen Altertum, wie es sich in seinen heimischen Schriftwerken spiegelt, kaum bekannt' (Attacks on women's honour were hardly known in northern antiquity, as is reflected in its native writings).¹¹ In sum, the piecemeal scholarship on the topic has largely declared rape to have a minor role, if any at all, in the Old Norse corpus.

Only Jacob Bell's voice stands out against these others, stating that 'the literary corpus is not quite as prudish when it comes to sexual violence as some scholars have argued'.¹² During the progress of this DPhil, which I began in October 2021, Bell's 2023 article, '*Ok lá þar at óvilja hennar: A Reconsideration of Sexual Violence in the Old Norse World*', was published. Bell achieves a great deal in only a short piece, and far more than anyone else writing on the topic. He acknowledges how rape and sexual violence 'have largely escaped scholarly attention and exploration, and no comprehensive study of this topic exists at this time'.¹³ Bell's work — as he himself notes — cannot, as a single article, be comprehensive. The present thesis, however, *is* this comprehensive study for two genres of Old Norse literary texts: the *Íslendingasögur* (family sagas) and the *fornaldarsögur* (legendary sagas). In total, these two genres are comprised of some seventy texts.

¹¹ Andreas Heusler, *Zum isländischen Fehdewesen in der Sturlungenzeit* (Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1912), 41.

¹² Jacob Bell, "*Ok lá þar at óvilja hennar: A Reconsideration of Sexual Violence in the Old Norse World*," *Journal of Family History* 48, no. 1 (2023): 4.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Other areas of scholarship have seen outpourings of material on sexual violence, including within medieval studies.¹⁴ Many have now reached the stage of re-evaluating existing rape criticism in their respective fields.¹⁵ This thesis constitutes the instatement of Old Norse scholarship among the vast swathes of other fields that have considered the presentation and prominence of sexual violence, a topic with enduring import in a global milieu that is still so beset by violence against women. Just as the #MeToo movement encouraged women to revisit and reassess their sexual experience through the diffuse lens of coercion or force, the present study reconsiders the Old Norse corpus as one that is very much afflicted by sexual violence. Much like Carolyne Larrington's article "What Does Woman Want?" *Mær and munr in Skírnismál*, which illuminates Gerðr's response to unwanted sexual advances in the eddic poem *Skírnismál* and in doing so reveals a gender-related 'uneasiness', my reading of Old Norse saga literatures promotes and pursues analyses of female emotion, reaction, and voice (or voicelessness).¹⁶ In 'reading the violence back into' the Old Norse corpus, my thesis aims to capture this elusiveness and draw female experience out from where it has been hidden or overlooked.¹⁷

¹⁴ In other areas of medieval studies, see for instance, Kathryn Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens: Writing Rape in Medieval French Literature and Law*, New Cultural Studies Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991); Elizabeth Ann Robertson and Christine Rose, ed., *Representing Rape in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, New Middle Ages (New York; Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001); Corinne J. Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001); Sarah Baechle, Carissa M. Harris, and Elizaveta Strakhov, ed., *Rape Culture and Female Resistance in Late Medieval Literature*, (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2022); Albrecht Classen, *Sexual Violence and Rape in the Middle Ages: A Critical Discourse in Premodern German and European Literature*, 1st ed., Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

¹⁵ See for instance Garthine Walker, "Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England," *Gender & History* 10, no. 1 (1998); Evelyn Birge Vitz, "Rereading Rape in Medieval Literature: Literary, Historical, and Theoretical Reflections," *Romanic Review* 88, no. 1 (1997); *Revisiting Rape in Antiquity: Sexualised Violence in Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. Susan Deacy, José Malheiro Magalhães, and Jean Zacharski Menzies, 1st ed. (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023); Sarah Baechle, "Speaking Survival: Chaucer Studies and the Discourses of Sexual Assault," *The Chaucer Review* 57, no. 4 (2022).

¹⁶ Carolyne Larrington, "What Does Woman Want? *Mær and Munr in Skírnismál*," *Alvissmál* 1 (1992): 3.

¹⁷ Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver, *Rape and Representation*, Gender and Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 4.

‘ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR’ AND ‘FORNALDARSÖGUR’

This thesis focuses on the presentation of sexual violence in two genres: the *Íslendingasögur*, which depict Iceland’s settlement and history relatively recent to the time of writing, and the *fornaldarsögur*, which look at a more distant, removed past and often contain more fantastic elements. Genre classification in the Old Norse corpus is, as Massimiliano Bampi and Sif Rikhardsdóttir attest, highly contested in scholarship.¹⁸ It is not the aim of this thesis to advocate for or against the standard generic stratifications of the markedly heterogenous Old Norse corpus, nor is it my goal to dichotomise the presentation of sexual violence in the *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*. Within all Old Norse ‘genres’, there is hybridity, transmission, innovation, deconstruction, subversion, and permeability. The increased influence of continental literature during the reign of Hákon IV (r. 1217–63) shortly before Iceland seceded control to Norway in 1262/4, for instance, kickstarted not just the composition of the *riddarasögur*, both indigenous and translated, but the diffusion of romance throughout other genres, notably the *fornaldarsögur* as well as the later *Íslendingasögur*. Indeed, even within these broad generic divisions, sub-genres of further stratifications arise, such as the later, ‘post-classical’, sagas, which ‘came to be regarded as colonial hybrids’ thanks to the filtration of romance to Iceland through Norway which ‘contaminated’ the ‘pure and supposedly realist style of the “classical” sagas’.¹⁹ Certain sagas stand out as particularly genre-defying: *Hrólfs saga kraka*, for instance, is one of the most

¹⁸ Massimiliano Bampi and Sif Rikhardsdóttir, “Introduction,” in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, ed. Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington, and Sif Rikhardsdóttir, Studies in Old Norse Literature (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2020), especially 1–2.

¹⁹ Rebecca Merkelbach, “‘The Coarsest and Worst of the *Íslendinga Sagas*’: Approaching the Alterity of the ‘Post-Classical’ Sagas of Icelanders,” in *Margins, Monsters, Deviants: Alterities in Old Norse Literature and Culture*, ed. Rebecca Merkelbach and Gwendolyne Knight, The North Atlantic World: Land and Sea as Cultural Space, AD 400-1900 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 102. Merkelbach notes that although there is little ‘real difference’ between the post-classical sagas and sagas from the ‘supposedly pure Icelandic storytelling tradition’, she does argue that aspects of them are ‘potentially different, deviant, subversive’, 103.

generically amorphous sagas.²⁰ Despite its inclusion of the *meykongr topos*, usually found in the *riddarasögur*, it is typically classified as a *fornaldarsaga* but, according to Marianne Kalinke, ‘Nowhere is the indebtedness to what is ultimately foreign matter and the conscious reworking of a literary construct more in evidence than in the *Helga þáttir* of *Hrólfs saga kraka*’.²¹ The *fornaldarsögur* in general are ‘difficult to regard as a generic entity’ and they also change across time; as Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson suggest, ‘the literary taste of saga writers shifts at some point during the 14th century and the younger *fornaldarsögur* become more fabulous and fictitious’.²²

Generic definitions are, in sum, far from perfect. For this study, genre is, as Bampi and Sif advise, a ‘hermeneutic instrument for analysing literary works’, and ‘at the very least a useful guide to identifying and discussing texts’ narrative purposes and functionalities’.²³ This thesis takes each text and its treatment of sexual violence heterogeneously, yet overarching these texts is the stratification of genre. The delineations between *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* are enough to notice different generic scripts for sexual violence, to speak very broadly. Examining these genres helps to shed light on the overlapping and contrasting presentations of sexual violence in either one. Possibly due to the

²⁰ See for instance the title of Johanna Denzin’s article, “*Hrólfs saga kraka*: A Tragedy, Comedy, History, Pastoral, Pastoral-Comical, Historical-Pastoral, Tragical-Historical, Tragical-Comical-Historical-Pastoral... Romance,” in *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, ed. Johanna Denzin and Kirsten Wolf, *Islandica* (Ithaca, NY: University of Cornell Press, 2008). Ármann Jakobsson dubs it ‘a *kolbitur*, an ugly duckling, among the mediaeval Icelandic sagas as it does not fit easily into any of the generic definitions of the sagas and is very different from the best known among them’, “Le Roi Chevalier: The Royal Ideology and Genre of *Hrólfs saga kraka*,” *Scandinavian Studies* 71, no. 2 (1999): 139.

²¹ Marianne E. Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*, *Islandica* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 11.

²² Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson, “Prologue,” in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), 12; 10.

²³ See Massimiliano Bampi, “Genre,” in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, ed. Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington, and Sif Rikhardsdóttir, *Studies in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2020); Bampi and Sif Rikhardsdóttir, “Introduction,” 1; Sif Rikhardsdóttir, “Hybridity,” in *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre*, ed. Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington, and Sif Rikhardsdóttir, *Studies in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2020), 33.

incursion of romantic generic repertoires, the *fornaldarsögur* are far less reticent on the topic of sex than the *Íslendingasögur*, a genre wherein rape is, with some choice exceptions, obscured by ambiguities and euphemisms. Indeed, it is amid these ambiguities that my study commences.

In Chapter I: Euphemisms, Mists, Masks, Metaphors and Motifs, I address the polymorphous obscurants that can make sexual violence difficult to detect in the *Íslendingasögur*. The ‘illicit love visit’ *topos* and its accompanying lexical formulae such as *tala við* can, but do not always, denote sexual violence, and the same can be said for words such as *fífla*, *glepja*, and *svikja*, all of which have semantically broad meanings ranging from ‘seduce’ to ‘sexually assault’. The use of such *topoi*, formulae and exempla all euphemise possible scenes of sexual violence. The following advice from Jochens in navigating the nuances of the treatment of the female body is a guiding maxim for my thesis as a whole, especially in the case of the *Íslendingasögur*:

we need to fly like hawks, surveying the entire landscape of some forty-some family sagas and short stories (*þættir*) and diving for details wherever they appear.²⁴

Where sexual violence is not obvious, I unpick the ambiguities shrouding it, interrogating how scenes such as the infamous maidservant episode in *Grettis saga* can, through polysemy and vagueness, be interpreted as sexually violent or merely sexual.

Chapter II: Sexual Violence Against Women, Against Men? challenges the enduring maxim that sexual violence against women in Old Norse primarily affects men. I explore how women’s bodies are often used as objects in male-male feuds, but I also bring in numerous examples in which women do show signs of resistance or trauma, demonstrating how rape and its effect on women are given narrative significance. Lexemes associated with shame

²⁴ Jenny Jochens, “Before the Male Gaze: The Absence of the Female Body in Old Norse,” in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury (New York; London: Garland, 1991), 3.

(e.g. *skemmð*; *skomm*; *svívirðing*) or tarnished purity (*spilla*) increase in prevalence in later sagas, which is in line with scholarly thought that the grip of the Church tightened as the Middle Ages rolled on and women's sexuality became increasingly controlled. I thus resituate rape as an offence in and of itself, rather than just simply as a part of a feud chain.

Chapter III: The Destruction, Degradation, and Desolation of Yngvildr *fagrinn* — the longest chapter in this thesis — is devoted to Yngvildr in *Svarfdæla saga* for reasons that become clear when one familiarises oneself with her story. The excess of brutality aimed at Yngvildr *fagrinn* may be anomalous in the *Íslendingasögur*; however, everything that happens to her can nevertheless be used to magnify other themes and trends that occur elsewhere in the corpus. She is a victim of rape within a marriage to which she does not consent, before being enslaved and committing suicide. Her experiences shed light on the primacy of the consent of men in marriage and marital sex, and on the factor of beauty in the rapability of enslaved women. Her final, ambiguous act of taking her own life after all the traumas that befall her speaks to suicide as a gendered act in the Old Norse corpus at large.

If the *Íslendingasögur* are reticent on the topic of rape, then the *fornaldarsögur* are rowdy. One of the main concerns of this thesis' section on the *Íslendingasögur* is to assess the ambiguities surrounding consent and determine whether an episode is sexually violent or coercive. Many of the rape scenes in the *fornaldarsögur* are much more overt. The extant studies on sexual violence within the Old Norse corpus largely ignore the *fornaldarsögur*, which is perhaps unsurprising considering their status as somewhat overlooked in criticism, compared to the vast swathes of scholarship on, for instance, the *Íslendingasögur*.²⁵

Chapter IV: Bósi and the Three *Bóndadætr* is a reclassification of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* as not just the most 'pornographic' saga in the corpus, but potentially one of the

²⁵ This is due in part, according to Bampi and Sif Rikhardsdottir, to hierarchical perceptions 'of the decline of Old Icelandic saga literature after the golden age', "Introduction," 4.

most sexually violent sagas. It features three sex scenes, each of which has previously been read as mutually sexually enjoyable for Bósi and his sexual partners. However, in this chapter I dismantle this long-held reading of the saga and, by juxtaposing all three scenes, I argue that the text's presentation of sex is, in fact, coercive and deeply troubling.

Chapter V: Resisting Rape and Wreaking Revenge: How Women Punish Their Attackers groups together three sagas which all showcase female resistance to rape or revenge on rapists. Rape in some of these is portrayed as a fitting punishment: for instance, Helgi's rape of Ólöf in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. The eponymous hero of *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, however, is seemingly punished for raping Áslaug by fathering a deformed child. *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* depicts the kidnapped (and presumably raped) Sifka trying to take vengeance on and vanquish her captor. She is eventually murdered, but so is he. This chapter and the next are particularly concerned with the moral ambiguity of rape, examining how rapists are both condemned and exonerated without apparent contradiction.

With this in mind, Chapter VI: Viking Law and Vigilante Vilification: How Men Feel About Rape, explores a triumvirate of sagas which depict men either decrying rape or punishing rapists. *Örvar-Odds saga* is particularly pertinent here: Hjálmar's *vikingalög* condemns rapists to death; meanwhile the eponymous character seems to be at times anti-rape in principle, yet wants to rape an Irish princess. In *Áns saga bogsveigis*, Án takes extra-legal action to castrate someone who tries, while impersonating him, to rape a woman, and in *Hálfðanar saga brönuþóstra* a would-be rapist goes repeatedly unpunished but is eventually castrated. This chapter is therefore concerned with how punishments for rapists are often presented as extra-legal but deserved; yet, there still remains an undercurrent of lenience towards the rapist in certain instances.

Finally, in Chapter VII: 'Turning the Mind of the White-Armed Girl', I discuss the complex relationship between enchantment and rape, and reassess 'aphrodisiacal magic' as inherently coercive. With this theoretical framework, scenes such as the rape of Ingibjörg in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, or Mjöll in *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, become extremely troubling. Even

more troubling is the fact that many methods of enchantment used in these texts were likely practised in medieval Iceland.

MODERN DEFINITIONS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Before I can begin this study, some methodological and terminological concerns must first be outlined and addressed. Foremost is my working definition of sexual violence and its associated vocabulary. Rape is difficult to define. It ‘varies between countries; it changes over time’.²⁶ Trying to distil a word so utterly beleaguered with tangled meanings feels like ‘Hacking through the thorns’.²⁷ Even when one writes about rape nowadays, it is not easily encapsulated by any single, fixed definition: ‘we have to differentiate between interpersonal interpretations (such as legal definitions) and personal ones (“To me it was rape”)’.²⁸ Legal definitions of rape vary not just historically, but geographically; cultural definitions are equally diffuse; personal definitions remain subjective. ‘Politically, I call it rape whenever a woman has sex and feels violated’ offers Catharine MacKinnon, who admits that this claim will attract criticism for being ‘too broad’.²⁹ MacKinnon’s definition is also exclusionary to people other than women who experience rape, so in many senses her definition is far from satisfactory.

Consent is currently ‘the gold standard’ for detecting rape (sex without consent = rape), yet this is also a profoundly flawed metric.³⁰ Giving a verbal ‘yes’ in a sexual situation cannot be deemed consensual when the situation is caused by coercion (emotional or

²⁶ Bourke, *Rape: A History*, 6.

²⁷ Sanyal, *Lucretia to #MeToo*, 4.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁹ Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1987), 82.

³⁰ Sanyal, *Lucretia to #MeToo*, 157.

physical), for instance. Joanna Bourke defines ‘coercion’ as ‘forcing a sexual encounter through the use of violence, manipulation, emotional blackmail or deceit’, adding that ‘The harm of rape can be triggered without the employment of brute force’.³¹ Bourke draws attention to the inherent flaws of ‘any single, static definition’.³² I similarly eschew any static definition, especially any established, current legislation, as these often fail to encompass the full range of sexual acts that have been constituted as abusive (non-consensual or forced) over time and across geographical location, as well as being exclusionary on the basis of gender.³³ However, a working definition is required for any study of sexual violence. Bourke’s is as follows:

The definition of sexual abuse has two central components. First, a person has to identify a particular act as sexual, however the term ‘sexual’ is defined. Second, that person must also claim that the act is non-consensual, unwanted or coerced, however they may wish to define those terms. The person performing the act of classification may designate themselves as the victim, the perpetrator or a third party (the suffering of infants, very young children and the severely mentally impaired can only be described by third parties).³⁴

Both broad and nuanced, the malleability of Bourke’s definition is appealing. As I cannot ask medieval, literary, Icelandic women to define their experiences as a) sexual and b) violent, I am the third party within Bourke’s definition: the party responsible for identifying a sexual act that is ‘non-consensual, unwanted or coerced’. Anything within this category, I shall refer to as ‘sexual violence’. ‘Rape’, in this thesis, I take to mean anything within this category that specifically involves a non-consensual, unwanted or coerced sexual encounter featuring

³¹ Bourke, *Rape: A History*, 12.

³² *Ibid.*, 9.

³³ *Ibid.*, 240. According to the UK Sexual Offences Act 2003, for instance, only penile penetration is considered to be rape.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

penetration. This too, has deliberately broad implications.³⁵ ‘Sexual violence’ often better suits the analysis of saga prose, wherein so many ambiguities lie: the use of this slightly less specific term seems more reasonable than to assume a penetrative act (although, sometimes, rape can be inferred if, for instance, an encounter results in a pregnancy).

This broader term, ‘sexual violence’ encompasses acts that may not have been seen as especially sexually violent by modern standards but are, within Old Norse texts, clearly viewed as egregious and a threat to a woman’s sexual integrity or reputation: for instance, *Þórðar saga hreðu* includes an episode in which a man puts his head into a woman’s lap and has her stroke his hair.³⁶ This might, perhaps, be considered rude and uncomfortable to a modern reader, but it is certainly framed within the saga as a violation with sexual implications. Similarly, reading unwanted love poetry today might be seen as awkward or even concerning, but within an Old Norse context, it is far graver:

A few well-chosen sexual words had the same performative power as the most reprehensible sexual acts, especially when they were fitted into a poetic framework, and the law condoned men’s instinctive reaction to kill for both acts and words.³⁷

The composition of unwanted ‘*mansǫngvar*’ (love-verses), bear the penalty of full outlawry (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§238).³⁸ Although not necessarily denoting physical sexual violence,

³⁵ Note that my definition does not require the rapist to be the *penetrator*, and therefore does not discriminate against gendered experiences; this definition allows for victims *being forced to penetrate*, and not just *being penetrated*.

³⁶ *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 188.

³⁷ Jenny Jochens, “From Libel to Lament: Male Manifestations of Love in Old Norse,” in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1992), 252.

³⁸ Edith Marold has proposed that there are numerous types of *mansǫngvar*: a religious verse that denotes the relationship between man and Christ; a ‘neutral’ type which is love poetry in its traditional, inoffensive form as well as a third type — the type of interest to the present study and the type referred to in *Grágás* — which is an obscene verse that puts a woman’s honour at risk, often resulting in feud between men, “*Mansǫngr — a Phantom Genre?*,” in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 250–7. Note that the first element of this word, *man*, also occurs in *manvelar* and *manrúnar*, which are both associated with love-magic, which I discuss in Chapter VII. Margaret Clunies Ross, for instance, has argued for associations of sorcery with this particular branch of verse, ‘thought capable of turning a woman’s affection to a particular man, without her knowledge and often against her will’, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 41. Lars Lönnroth has likewise pointed it to its perceived magical abilities and suggests its function as ‘förtängda, oppositionella “anti-norm”’ (repressed, oppositional “anti-norm”) from traditional love

the substantial penalty indicates that it was regarded as equally severe, suggesting either an accompanying physical attack unsolicited by the woman — or her family — or that the damage to her honour was tantamount to physical attack.³⁹ *Mansongvar* and the placement of one's head on someone else's lap, then, would be deemed sexually violent by my definition within Old Norse contexts. My heuristic definition of 'rape', however, includes physical penetration, and is therefore more specific than 'sexual violence'.

It is unclear if modern concepts such as marital rape would be applicable to an Old Norse setting. Despite the twelfth-century introduction of verbal consent to marriage in Canon Law, throughout the *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* women are married off against their will. Indeed, previous scholarship has generally found that women were often pressured by family members into marriages, whether or not they themselves approved of the match; this raises serious doubts about the level of consent to intercourse a woman can give in a marriage to which she did not genuinely want to commit.⁴⁰

James Brundage's research is relevant here, as it considers to what extent matrimony is a signifier of sexual consent within medieval marriages. The 'conjugal debt doctrine', Brundage explains, 'was theologically based on St. Paul's injunction to husbands and wives that each must pay the other what was owed to them, and the Apostle's further observation

poetry and courtship "Skírnismál och den fornisländska äktenskapsnormen," in *Opuscula Septentrionalia: Festskrift til Ole Widding, 10.10.1977*, ed. Bent Chr. Jacobsen et al. (København: Reitzel, 1977), 165. There is the potential, therefore, for this particular word to connote manipulation, coercion, or violence.

³⁹ See also Roberta Frank, "Why Skalds Address Women," in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Atti del 120 Congresso Internazionale di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo*, ed. Teresa Pàroli (Spoleto: Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1990), for Frank's insight into a woman's power as the audience of a man's poetry.

⁴⁰ Jochens emphasises the coercive environment in which marriage arrangements are made in the sagas: 'even the cases of purported female consent look suspicious [...] whether the women showed anger, set conditions, or refused the proposal outright, eventually they all married the men chosen for them', "'Með Jákvæði Hennar Sjálfrar': Consent as Signifier in the Old Norse World," in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), 273.

that each partner had power over the other's body'.⁴¹ Brundage's research suggests that, guided by adherence to such patristic doctrines, within European medieval societies 'Once the marriage had been consummated, then (but not before) each party acquired virtually unlimited rights to demand and receive the sexual services of the other'.⁴² Failure to acquiesce could result in the case being deferred to ecclesiastical courts. It is difficult to gauge, without direct sources on the subject, what medieval Icelandic society would have made of conjugal sexual debt, and there remains the enduring problem of the disconnect between Saga Age Iceland and the period in which sagas were written. Unnr's divorce from Hrútr in *Njáls saga* does, however, seem to indicate a belief that sex was owed to a spouse, as does *Grágás*, which accounts for a man who does not sleep with his wife 'fyrir öröctar sacir' (on account of negligence) (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§158).⁴³ Brundage asks, 'If marital consent necessarily implies consent to intercourse, then is that consent unconditional?'⁴⁴ Even in the modern day, the answer is not straightforward: Brundage points to the large proportion of the USA in which 'marriage between the parties provides defendants with an affirmative defense against charges of rape and most other kinds of sexual abuse'.⁴⁵ Today, only four jurisdictions in the USA account for no marital exemptions to rape.⁴⁶ In the UK, marital rape only became a criminal offense in 1992.

While marital rape was certainly not a criminal offence in medieval Icelandic legal codes, the sagas do gesture towards the potential unhappiness that could stem from unwanted marriages. *Reykðæla saga* — a saga populated by unwilling brides — addresses the problem

⁴¹ James A. Brundage, "Implied Consent to Intercourse," in *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), 249. Brundage refers here to 1 Cor. 7:3–4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 251.

⁴³ *Njáls saga*, 24.

⁴⁴ Brundage, "Implied Consent to Intercourse," 245.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 255.

⁴⁶ Teresa M. Garvey, Holly M. Fuhrman, and Jennifer Long, "Charging Considerations in the Prosecution of Marital Rape," *Æquitas*, no. 34 (2019): 2.

of mismatched mindsets in marriage.⁴⁷ Háls asks for Helga's hand and her father agrees, but Helga herself is clearly unhappy: 'Tókusk nú ástir með þeim, ok váru þau þó eigi samlík í lundarfari' (Love grew between them, but their states of mind were mismatched).⁴⁸ As I explore in Chapter V, the formulaic phrase 'taka ástir með þeim' does not necessarily indicate love or passion. Háls is guilty of mistreating Helga in some way, as is made clear by Áskell, the mediator, as he attempts to reunite the separated husband and wife: he and Helga both stress that a reunion can only occur 'ef Háls vill því heita í móti, at láta batna samfararnar við hana' (if in return Háls promised to improve their relations).⁴⁹ Háls is threatened with returning Helga's dowry if he does not comply. When deciding whether husband and wife ought to be reunited, Helga is again not directly consulted but must do as is decided between her father and husband. Her return to her husband is void of emotion; it is unclear if she does so kicking and screaming, happily, passively, or otherwise: 'ok var Helga í þeira ferð' (and Helga went with them).⁵⁰ The dichotomising of the spouses' mindsets from the outset suggests an aspect of coercion within the relationship, as does Helga's attempt at escape.

In both the *Íslendingasögur* and the *fornaldarsögur*, there are examples of women who appear to experience coercive sex within marriage, such as *Svarfdæla saga*'s Yngvildr *fagrinn* and *Ragnars saga*'s Áslaug. Such examples perhaps indicate that — although it is not accounted for in legislation — there is a degree of sympathy towards women forced to have sex because their marriage itself was non-consensual (as is the case with Yngvildr) or within a consensual marriage (in the case of Áslaug). Seemingly anachronistic terms such as

⁴⁷ Besides Helga, Þóra is kidnapped on the way to her own wedding in an attempt to force her to marry someone else. There is also an incident in which the *berserkr* Þorsteinn challenges Hall to a duel over the right to decide who will arrange Hall's daughter's marriage.

⁴⁸ *Reykðæla saga*, 176.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 199.

‘marital rape’, therefore, are not so very alien to the medieval North as they might initially seem.

TWO SIDES OF A COIN: THE RAPIST AND THE VICTIM-SURVIVOR

The Victim and The Survivor

Another issue to contend with is how to refer to the women who potentially experience sexual violence in these texts. Typical words would be ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’, both of which are flawed to some degree. Many people who have experienced sexual violence may choose to define themselves with one, both, or neither of these words. Others might eschew the notion of self-definition resulting from sexual violence in the first place. Bourke uses ‘the word “victim” in order to draw attention to the hurt of abuse; it is not a moral judgement, nor an identity. Many “victims” are survivors’.⁵¹ However, not all victims survive, and it would seem strange to refer to, for instance, Yngvildr *fagrkinn* as a survivor since she (likely) does not survive her ordeal. I have largely opted for ‘victim’ in this thesis although, as a flawed term, I avoid it where possible.

The Rapist

There is another important figure to this thesis: the rapist. In a study that claims to give voices back to women, it seems perhaps contradictory to have a strong focus on rapists, all of whom, in this study, are men. Like Bourke, I believe that ‘studying rape exclusively through an analysis of rape victims is wrong: it lets men off the hook’.⁵² Many modern works of fiction would characterise a rapist as truly villainous, with rape an irredeemable act — we might

⁵¹ Bourke, *Rape: A History*, 7.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 116.

think of Alec in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, or Frolo in *Notre Dame de Paris*. Indeed, the later of the two legal texts pertinent to this study, *Jónsbók*, classes rape as ‘vbota mál’ (a deed without remedy) (Appendix II: *Jónsbók* IV.2). Hans Jacob Orning describes ‘óþótamál as a category of unatonable offences [...] distinguished from the less severe *bótamál*, which could be paid for with fines’.⁵³ Medieval narratives, however, are not so straightforward. Despite Ljungqvist’s claim that in Old Norse literary sources ‘a rapist was despised regardless of his social standing’, my findings indicate that — while rape is often depicted as despicable — it does not define the perpetrator as appositely despicable.⁵⁴ Grettir is at once an apparent rapist and someone who saves women from rape without any apparent contradiction to his moral outlook; Örvar-Oddr is struck by the desire to rape an Irish princess despite having sworn never to rape women earlier in the narrative. The *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* both contain such ambiguously heroic rapists, a collocation that seems anathema to modern sensibilities. Part of the issue here could be the fact that ‘rapist’ as a designated identity is a modern concept, the term only having been coined in 1883; following this coinage, ‘a rapist wasn’t someone who had committed a crime but someone who *became* his crime’.⁵⁵ This may help to understand why we now view the act of rape as an unforgivable part of a person: they become a ‘rapist’. In Old Norse texts, however, characters are rarely defined by committing such an act. Discussing a rapist in terms of anything other than essential villainy is understandably fraught and requires a great deal more, careful, thought. Feminist thinkers are now grappling with how to navigate the uncomfortable truth that ‘rape is an awful crime,

⁵³ Hans Jacob Orning, “Anger in Court: A Multifaceted Ritual Display,” *The Mediaeval Journal* 11, no. 2 (2021): 128.

⁵⁴ Ljungqvist, “Rape in the Icelandic Sagas,” 440.

⁵⁵ Bourke, *Rape: A History*, 11; Sanyal, *Lucretia to #MeToo*, 57.

but rapists are still human beings'.⁵⁶ The presentation of men who rape in the Old Norse sagas is, however, at times, deeply ambiguous, and it is often unclear whether sexual violence is presented as deplorable or somewhat forgivable, or even as a valid act of vengeance. This will be one of the major strands, in particular, of my analysis of rape in the *fornaldarsögur*.

MEDIEVAL DEFINITIONS: THE MIDDLE AGES POST-#METOO

Henric Bagerius said it best when he declared that 'Att studera medeltida sexualitet är en utmaning' (Studying medieval sexuality is a challenge).⁵⁷ If trying to define rape feels like hacking through thorns, then trying to grasp what rape might have meant to Old Norse saga writers feels like walking a path wholly wreathed in briars, ready to coil and ensnare at the slightest movement. Medieval concepts of rape differ so vastly to our own; consent and coercion, which remain such tricky concepts today, are even more elusive when applied to texts written hundreds of years ago. Compounding this problem is the 'impassive and laconic emotional landscape' of, in particular, family saga prose, which serves to obscure emotional reactions that might be helpful in determining consent, coercion or trauma.⁵⁸

There are tools, however, for pruning back these briars. When consent goes unuttered, we can read around its absence, into the actions and reactions of both aggressor and aggressee. Context is enough to give a strong indicator about the potential sexual violence in the power dynamics between a master and an enslaved woman, and the literary evidence is enough to 'reread rape' into texts. Just because a medieval Icelandic woman may not have used the term 'sexual violence' does not mean that it cannot be used on her behalf.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 155. For instance, the autobiographical work *South of Forgiveness*, co-authored by Þórdís Elva Þorvaldsdóttir and her rapist, Tom Stranger, attracted a great deal of controversy and even inspired protests, *South of Forgiveness* (Melbourne: Scribe, 2017).

⁵⁷ Henric Bagerius, *Mandom och mödom: Sexualitet, homosocialitet och aristokratisk identitet på det senmedeltida Island* (Gothenburg: Göteborgs universitet, 2009), 155.

⁵⁸ Sif Rikhardsdóttir, *Emotion in Old Norse Literature: Translations, Voices, Contexts*, Studies in Old Norse Literature (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), 15.

I agree wholeheartedly with Corinne Saunders, who advises that ‘Intrinsic to any consideration of literary attitudes to rape is the delineation of the contemporaneous legal treatment of rape’.⁵⁹ Of course, as I have discussed in relation to modern legislation, legal definitions of sexual violence are mercurial, imperfect, and exclusionary. Medieval Icelandic law codes are no different in this regard. Furthermore, legal codes by no means reflect an individual writer’s moral or ethical code, nor the codes of the world they are depicting, nor any exhortative purpose behind the behaviours of the characters within that world. Legal codes can, however, give us some clues as to generally accepted cultural definitions, especially since — in the case of so many of the *Íslendingasögur* — characters themselves have such profound familiarity with the law that the same might be assumed for a saga writer. It must also be remembered that neither the *Íslendingasögur* nor the *fornaldarsögur* are set contemporaneously with their time of composition; the *Íslendingasögur* are largely written ca. 1200–1400 and take place ca. 800–1100, whereas the *fornaldarsögur* are written later, ca. 1200–1500, and reflect a more distant past, ca. 700–1000.⁶⁰ *Grágás* represents approximately the law of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁶¹ Following this, Icelandic law was substantially based on Norwegian law, first adopting *Járnsíða* from 1271 and then *Jónsbók* in 1281. While law codes may help to develop an understanding of the broad cultural construction of rape, and its penalties give an indication of how severely it was regarded, the disjunct between law, saga writer and setting remain intractable to an unknowable degree.⁶²

⁵⁹ Corinne J. Saunders, “Classical Paradigms of Rape in the Middle Ages: Chaucer’s Lucretia and Philomela,” in *Rape in Antiquity: Sexual Violence in Greek and Roman Worlds*, ed. Susan Deacy and Karen F. Pierce (London: Duckworth, 2002), 243.

⁶⁰ Annette Lassen, “*Fornaldarsögur*,” in *The Cambridge History of Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, ed. Heather O’Donoghue and Eleanor Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 185.

⁶¹ William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 43.

⁶² As surviving court records are meagre, it is necessary to rely ‘on laws themselves for evidence about attitudes toward non-marital sex in medieval Iceland, Norway, Denmark, and Sweden’, as noted by Grethe Jacobsen, “Sexual Irregularities in Medieval Scandinavia,” in *Sexual Practices & the Medieval Church*, ed. Vern L.

Capturing the essence of sexual violence in Old Norse literature, not the realities of medieval Iceland, is the goal of this thesis.

Laws have only recently begun to reconceive rape ‘as an injury to the bodily integrity, sexual autonomy, and personal dignity of women’ and, as Jane Larson rightly points out, have ‘patriarchal, property-based origins’ in terms of a woman’s bodily worth.⁶³ Indeed, law codes from medieval Iceland repeatedly emphasise a woman’s rights in relation to the men in her family; her body is largely commodified. Agnes Arnórsdóttir writes that ‘Rape had become a matter of the woman’s own honour, not only a matter of the honour of her kin-group as had previously been the case under the law of *Grágás*’, referring to a case in 1543 — well after the time of saga writing.⁶⁴ Legal frameworks strongly suggest that rape was a matter for the woman’s family rather than herself. This fact itself is telling in terms of how rape may have been culturally perceived. Legal codes also give clues as to the perception of what rape itself was.

TALKING ABOUT SEX

Before we can attempt to define Old Norse ‘rape’, however, we must try and establish how saga writers talk about sex since, as Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir notes, ‘the Icelandic language did not only have limited vocabulary when it came to emotions and love, but also when it came to sexual relations’.⁶⁵ Often evasive about prurient matter, saga writers tend to mask sexual intercourse with euphemism. The codes relating to penalties for sexual

Bullough and James A. Brundage, 2nd ed. (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1994), 72. As *Járnsíða* was displaced by *Jónsbók* so quickly, I will be focusing on the latter as well as *Grágás*.’

⁶³ Jane E. Larson, “‘Women Understand So Little, They Call My Good Nature ‘Deceit’’: A Feminist Rethinking of Seduction,” *Columbia Law Review* 93, no. 2 (1993): 382.

⁶⁴ Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Property and Virginity: The Christianization of Marriage in Medieval Iceland, 1200-1600* (Århus: Aarhus University Press, 2010), 284.

⁶⁵ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, “‘How Do You Know If It Is Love or Lust?’: On Gender, Status, and Violence in Old Norse Literature,” *Interfaces (Milano)* 2, no. 2 (2016): 192.

intercourse consistently use phrases such as ‘Ef maðr ligr með ...’ (If a man lies with...) (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§155; K§156; K§157; §158). Numerous instances in the literature use being in the same bed as a euphemism; for instance Möndull’s rape of Ingibjörg in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*: ‘Hann tók Ingibjörgu ok lagði í sæng hjá sér hverja nótt’ (He took Ingibjörg and lay in bed beside her every night).⁶⁶ Likewise, Nollar’s description of Helgi’s potential seduction of Helga in *Fljótsdæla saga* clearly has sexual meaning: ‘„ætlar hann at fifla Helgu Þorbjarnardóttur út til Eyvindarár og leggja hana í sæng hjá sér”’ (“he intends to *seduce* Helga Þorbjarnardóttir [and take her] out to Eyvindará and put her in bed beside him”).⁶⁷ In *Bárðar saga*, Hrafn’s intent to rape Helga is framed thus: ‘Vildi hann upp í sængina ok undir klæðin hjá henni’ (He wanted to go up onto the bed and under *the/her* clothes beside her).⁶⁸ We will encounter numerous other euphemisms for sexual encounters throughout this thesis.

TERMINOLOGIES FOR RAPE

The obfuscation of meaning via euphemism also applies to references to sexual violence in the Old Norse corpus. Aðalheiður posits that

despite some clear instances of rape in the Icelandic sagas, [...] the texts seem to lack a specific term for the act (the rape), which makes it in some cases difficult to pin down sexual violence against women in Old Norse texts.⁶⁹

While I agree with Aðalheiður that it is difficult to identify sexual violence in Old Norse texts because of terminological issues, my research has uncovered a plethora of euphemistic or ambiguous terms, as well as several recurring words, by which sexual violence is either

⁶⁶ *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 224.

⁶⁷ *Fljótsdæla saga*, 250. Note that italics within my translations indicate words or phrases that might be translated in a number of ways. Here the italicisation of ‘*seducing*’ refers to the polysemy of *fifla*, which I explore in full in Chapter I.

⁶⁸ *Bárðar saga*, 124.

⁶⁹ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, “Love or Lust?,” 192.

referred or inferred.⁷⁰ Certain phrases recur that indicate a lack of consent; Bell, for instance, points out that in numerous incidents ‘að óvilja’ (against her will) is specifically said.⁷¹ *Fífla*, *svikja* and *glepja* all refer to some sort of seduction that is considered either dishonourable or which may encompass rape. The law codes, however, seem to have quite specific ideas about the kinds of situations in which rape might occur.

Grágás

Grágás sets out provisions for what appears to be violent, forceful rape: ‘[...] *maðr* brytr kono þa til svefnis [...] *oc* hafe *hann* fellda *hana* *oc* látet *afallaz*’ ([a] man [who] forces a woman to sleep with him [...] and he has felled her and lowered himself onto her) (Appendix II: *Grágás* K‡90).⁷² *Brjóta*, a very common verb, can mean break, but also ‘force’; ‘compel’; ‘violate’; combined with ‘svefni’, a word relating to ‘sleep’, the phrase — which only appears in legal texts — seems to mean ‘force to sleep with’; *svefni* is glossed by Cleasby and Vigfússon as ‘to ravish’.⁷³ In this instance, a man who possesses the right to kill for the woman in question can kill the rapist on the spot. Another code outlines the penalty for ‘Ef *maðr* biðr kono *suefnis*’ (If a man asks a woman to sleep with him) as lesser outlawry (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§155). *Biðja*, also an extremely common verb, generally means either ‘to ask’ or ‘to order’, leaving some room for doubt as to whether this code refers to solicitation or coercion. In any case, the higher penalty is attributed to K‡90, which specifies a situational physicality, with a man who is physically on top of a woman.

⁷⁰ I might also point out that the use of the phrase ‘pin down’ here seems ill-advised.

⁷¹ Bell, “Reconsideration,” 24.

⁷² Note this is my translation.

⁷³ Cleasby-Vigfússon, s.v. ‘brjóta’; ‘svefni’.

The same penalty — of sanctioning on-the-spot killings — goes for a man lying side-by-side with a woman with the intent to have ‘misræða’. In every instance in which ‘misræða’ is used — there are five in *Grágás* — the word could be referring to rape: it is used four times within Kþ90, and once more in K§155 to establish lesser outlawry as the punishment for a man who ‘*gengr til sæingar kono oc drygia misræða við hana*’ (goes to a woman’s bed and commits *misræða* with her).⁷⁴ Literally meaning ‘ill-advised act’, it must also be noted that ‘ráð’ is a common term in Old Norse lawcodes to refer to consent or agreement, and is used repeatedly in matters of marriage, as well as in *Grágás* K§155, which delineates between the penalty for a wanted kiss — ‘*at raðe henna*’ (with her consent) and an unwanted one at which ‘*hon reiðiz*’ (she is enraged). It is possible, therefore, that the legal definition of ‘misræða’ is ‘without consent’. However, a complication arises in K§155. While the penalty for ‘*Ef maðr gengr til sæingar kono oc drygia misræða við hana*’ is lesser outlawry, the next but one clause states that ‘*Ef maðr fellir ser kono eða fer isæing hia henne. til þess at hann vill coma legorðe fram við hana*’ (If a man lowers himself onto a woman or gets into bed beside her with the intent of getting intercourse from her), the penalty is full outlawry.⁷⁵ These instances appear to attest to instances in which there is no one there to kill for the woman on the spot for what seem to be the same two acts of ‘misræða’ in Kþ90: use of physical force and spatial presence in a bed for fornication.

In this second clause in K§155, physical force is present and intercourse is referred to as ‘legorð’, carrying the higher penalty of full outlawry. Although one instance of ‘misræða’ from Kþ90 is rather ‘legorð’ in *Staðarhólsbók* (See Appendix II: *Grágás* Kþ90), the words do

⁷⁴ My translation.

⁷⁵ My translation.

therefore seem to carry different meanings.⁷⁶ *Legorð* is a much more common legal word and can refer to any kind of fornication, whether this be in cases of uncertain paternity (K§156; K§157; K§158); incest (K§156; K§158), or indeed rape (K§155). Rather than the higher penalty stemming from the use of *legorð* here, the increased penalty seems to be delineated by the use of force alongside the physical act of getting into bed with a woman, whereas the earlier clause in K§155 lacks this element of specified physical force.

When addressing the lack of a terminology in Old Norse for ‘rape’, scholars have generally drawn from *Grágás*. Ljungqvist who, like Aðalheiður, suggests that ‘the Old Norse language lacked a specific term for “rape”’, draws from Lizzie Carlsson’s work which attests that ‘sexual assault and abduction were perceived as two variants of the same crime’.⁷⁷ In this regard, Bell defers to these preceding studies.⁷⁸ Abduction, however, is in fact differentiated from rape in law in both *Grágás* and *Jónsbók*. *Grágás* K§159, gives the penalty (full outlawry) for ‘Ef maðr tekr kono navðga abrott’ (if a man takes a woman abroad against her will), with K§160, St§159 and St§160 giving further details on penalties for abduction and marriage within abduction.⁷⁹ This is clearly a different act to rape as described in K§90 and K§155 —although, as I will explore in Chapter III, rape is often strongly implied as a part of abduction.

Grágás’ provisions for rape are, in summary:

Euphemisms

⁷⁶ The *Konungsbók* manuscript dates to roughly 1260; *Staðarhólsbók* dates roughly to 1280, Miller, *Bloodtaking*, 43.

⁷⁷ Ljungqvist, “Rape in the Icelandic Sagas,” 433–4. It should be noted that Carlsson delineates between ‘kvinnorov’ (rape of women) and ‘raptus’ here, discussing the fact that *raptus* (in the sense of being kidnapped) could be viewed as such whether or not the woman consents to being taken, “*Jag giver dig min dotter*”: *Trolovning och äktenskap i den svenska kvinnans äldre historia* (Stockholm: Institutet för rättshistorisk forskning, 1965), 32–3.

⁷⁸ Bell, “Reconsideration,” 10.

⁷⁹ My translation.

1. Physical force with optional sleep euphemism: (*Grágás* Kþ90; §155)
2. Getting into bed with a woman (*Grágás* Kþ90; §155)

Terminologies

3. *Misræða* consistently refers to rape in its five attestations (*Grágás* Kþ90; §155)
4. *Legorð* refers to all acts of fornication, which can include rape (*Grágás* K§155; K§156; K§157; K§158)
5. ‘Taka kona nauðga abraut’ refers to abduction, often with the implication of rape (*Grágás* K§159)

Penalties

6. On-the-spot killing is permitted for rape, otherwise the penalty is full outlawry. (*Grágás* Kþ90; K§155)
7. Lesser outlawry is the penalty for what could either be solicitation, or rape that does not appear to involve force (K§155)
8. A woman’s (lack of) consent affects the penalty for a kiss. If her family does not consent, this overrides whether she does or does not herself consent (*Grágás* K§155)
9. The same penalty befits intent to rape as befits rape. (*Grágás* Kþ90)
10. The penalty for abduction is full outlawry (*Grágás* K§159)

Jónsbók

Jónsbók, too, has provisions for abducted women and especially women taken in war: ‘Suo ok þeir menn er konur taka með ræni eða herfangi motí guðs rettí ok mann/a’ (so too [is death the penalty] for those men who take women away with as unlawfully seized goods or as

spoils of war against the laws of God and man) (Appendix II: *Jónsbók* IV.2).⁸⁰ In this instance, the code specifically outlines that no matter the opinions of the man and woman involved in the abduction, what matters is the opinion of the *giptingarmaðr* (lit. giving man): the person with the right to give a woman away in marriage. Both *Grágás* and *Jónsbók* list in detail the hierarchy of *giptingarmenn* and outline a penalty of disinheritance for women who get married without obtaining consent from their kinsmen.⁸¹ One clause that has been repeatedly overlooked in Old Norse scholarship is the *níðingsverk* which states ‘Þat er enn vbota mál ef maðr tekr konu nóðga (It is a deed without remedy if a man takes a woman against her will) (Appendix II: *Jónsbók* IV.2).⁸² ‘Nauðga’ does not always specifically refer to rape, literally meaning ‘against one’s will’, but here it certainly seems to refer to rape. It pits the word of the rapist against the word of the woman and, moreover, suggests that a woman might ‘getí wart lík fyrir goðkuenfku sinnar fakir’ (be able to protect herself for the sake of her feminine virtue). It should also be noted that the ‘níðingsverk’ legal category represents ‘the most serious transgression in the laws’.⁸³

These post-commonwealth laws, therefore, differ considerably from *Grágás* when it comes to sexual violence:

Terminologies

1. ‘taka með ráni eða herfangi’ refers to abduction in war, does not preclude rape and the *giptingarmenn* are given primacy of consent (*Jónsbók*, IV.2)
2. ‘taka kona nauðga’ refers to rape (*Jónsbók*, IV.2)

⁸⁰ My translation.

⁸¹ See Appendix II: *Grágás* K§144, K§253 and St§125, which detail that a son has the right to give his mother in marriage and that a widow can decide for herself but must defer to her male relatives. One exception where a woman has say over her father in marriage is if she would rather become a nun, *Grágás* St§119. *Jónsbók* has an even more comprehensive list of who can act as ‘Giptingar maðr’, *Jónsbók*, V.1.

⁸² My translation.

⁸³ Orning, “Anger in Court,” 128.

Penalties

3. Abducting a woman warrants death, whether or not she consents (*Jónsbók*, IV.2)
4. Raping a woman warrants death (*Jónsbók*, IV.2)
5. She must report the rape on the day or there must be two witnesses (*Jónsbók*, IV.2)
6. If a woman can fight the man off, he will receive an appropriate judgement but not death. (*Jónsbók*, IV.2). A man who does not succeed in his attempt to have intercourse with a woman must pay compensation (*Jónsbók*, V.5)

In *Jónsbók*, we see a shift towards less euphemistic terms for rape, greater specifications about the rape must be proved, and the suggestion that women concerned for their chastity may be able to fend an attacker off. This implicitly suggests that rape was thought to have inherently involved force.

EMOTION AND TRAUMA

Rape, then, seems to have had a much narrower meaning in Old Norse legal terms than most modern definitions, including my own. However, this does not negate the existence within the corpus of both sexual violence and rape according to my definition. When applying more modern concepts and definitions (which account for a far broader and more nuanced understanding of what ‘sexual violence’ could mean), Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver propose the following methodology:

the act of rereading rape involves more than listening to silences; it requires restoring rape to the literal, to the body: restoring, that is, the violence — the physical, sexual violation. The insistence on taking rape literally often necessitates a conscious critical act of reading the violence and the sexuality back into texts where it has been detected, either by the text itself or by the critics: where it has been turned into a

metaphor or a symbol or represented rhetorically as titillation, persuasion, ravishment, seduction, or desire (poetic, narrative, courtly, military).⁸⁴

Evidence of sexual violence and ensuing trauma lie within the text itself, and they can be drawn out by interrogating not just the finer details of the narrative, but also textual interstices. Sif Rikhardsdottir has argued that in Old Norse literature, emotional silences can ‘manipulate the reader (or audience) into an empathetic stance’.⁸⁵ She proposes that

The lack of emotive description induces the reader to visualise the scene on the basis of his or her own internal emotional experience as well as on presumptions about the characters’ emotional impulses or capacity. These presumptions are based on the empathetic capacity of the audience to commiserate with the protagonist, to project themselves into the fictive circumstances and to navigate the signifiers that make up the narrative framework.⁸⁶

Sif draws on the example of Egill’s reticence after his son Bǫðvarr’s death in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, suggesting that ‘The silence again invokes the imaginative involvement of the reader in conjuring the presumed emotions felt by Egill’.⁸⁷ Similarly, the emotional silences that often accompany sexual violence can be interpreted as leading audiences to draw their own conclusions based on the presumption of emotion, which is often potent in and of itself.

Detecting unwillingness in a sexual encounter can be difficult given the emotive landscape of the sagas, but just as Sif finds emotion in the semantic scripts and somatic reactions of the characters in the Old Norse corpus, so too can sexual violence, at times in traces and at times in great swathes, be detected within the nuances of the *Íslendingasögur*. There is no rigid script for sexual violence in Old Norse literature. There is no single framework for a sexually violent character. There is not one victim whose experience follows

⁸⁴ Higgins and Silver, *Rape and Representation*, 4.

⁸⁵ Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Emotion*, 58.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

a by-the-book sexually violent encounter and ensuing emotional upheaval; indeed, the range of actions and reactions we observe throughout both the *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur* reminds us that reactions to sexual violence are far from homogenous. Emma Miller points out that ‘Writing about the trauma of sexual violence is particularly challenging because it remains a topic that seems to elude the easy grasp of language’.⁸⁸ Victims of sexual violence may be traumatised, and this trauma can manifest in a panoply of ways. The ‘collapsible woman’ is not the benchmark for rape victims.⁸⁹ There can be no ‘one model of mental health for an unaccountable number of individuals’.⁹⁰ Indeed, Bourke eschews the idea of a ‘trauma aesthetic’ for rape victims.⁹¹ There are repeated instances of women in these sagas resisting rape, women taking vengeance for their rapes, and women being utterly worn down by their sexual violations. These episodes sometimes contain language that evokes the legal terms for rape within *Grágás* and *Jónsbók*, which both seem to foreground physical force. However, sex that is ‘non-consensual, unwanted or coerced’ is conveyed as such in an array of ways, with an array of reactions from the women involved.

Here I pay close attention to emotive and somatic reactions to possible instances of sexual violence against women in order to delineate coercion from compliance, and mutual affection from physical force. Margaret Clunies Ross describes how the ‘male perspective on human sexual behaviour is revealed throughout Old Icelandic literature to have been the

⁸⁸ Emma V. Miller, “Trauma and Sexual Violence,” in *Trauma and Literature*, ed. J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 226.

⁸⁹ The ‘collapsible woman’, a term coined by Vanessa Veselka to describes a woman who, in response to sexual violence or abuse, ‘fall[s] apart’ both privately and publicly: ‘If we don’t see her fragment, we say that she’s not “dealing with it”’, “The Collapsible Woman: Cultural Response to Rape and Sexual Abuse,” in *BITCHfest: Ten Years of Cultural Criticism from the Pages of Bitch Magazine*, ed. Lisa Jarvis and Andi Zeisler (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2006), 57.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 56.

⁹¹ Bourke, *Rape: A History*, 48.

norm in early Scandinavian society'.⁹² It is my task in this thesis then, to shine a light on female perspectives on sexual behaviour and aggression.

⁹² Clunies Ross, *Poetry and Poetics*, 41.

SECTION 1:
THE
ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR

CHAPTER I: EUPHEMISMS, MISTS, MASKS, METAPHORS AND MOTIFS

„*Hvat skaltu, sveinn, í sess minn?
þvítt þú sjaldan hefr gefnar
vargi varmar bráðir,
vera vilk ein of mína*”

UNRIDDLING AMBIGUITIES

Sexual violence in the *Íslendingasögur* rarely lies in plain sight. Jenny Jochens postulates that ‘The sources are reticent about female penetration’ and, as such, one of the primary obstacles in identifying episodes of rape is the veil over sexual activity altogether.¹ Given this reticence in describing sexual acts, instances of rape are difficult to identify. The picture is further obscured by a long-standing perception that there is a general absence or underplaying of emotion in the sagas, especially the *Íslendingasögur*. Such underplaying problematises the identification of emotion and emotionality, which help to indicate evidence of consent or coercion. This perception of the sagas as largely unemotive has, however, been increasingly challenged: studies of emotions within the broader landscape of literary studies have surged in recent years, with scholars closely examining the psychology of literary figures, drawing out personal and interpersonal understanding, and plucking emotion from subtext.² Sif

¹ Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 76. Cathy Jorgensen Itnyre has argued that medieval Icelanders display a ‘frankness’ when it comes to sexual acts and that such practices are ‘freely mentioned’, but this is largely within the context of sex humour and innuendo, “A Smorgasbord of Sexual Practices,” in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury (New York; London: Garland Publishing, 1991), 145.

² The following are just a few examples of recent emotion studies in language and literature: *Love, History and Emotion in Chaucer and Shakespeare: Troilus and Criseyde and Troilus and Cressida*, ed. Andrew James Johnston, Russell West-Pavlov, and Elisabeth Kempf, Manchester Medieval Literature and Culture (Manchester; Michigan: Manchester University Press, 2016); *Anglo-Saxon Emotions: Reading the Heart in Old English Language, Literature and Culture*, ed. Alice Jorgensen, Frances McCormack, and Jonathan Wilcox,

Rikhardsdottir prefaces her study of emotion in the Icelandic sagas with an acknowledgement of their reputation as ‘coldly unemotional’:³

It is a truism that the medieval Icelandic saga avoids emotive or subjective positioning, preferring an objective narrative style that favours subtle situational behavioural hints over explicit verbalisation or gestural behaviour when it comes to emotions.⁴

This truism — Sif suggests — ought to be re-evaluated: ‘beneath the apparently calm surface of many saga characters there is an abundance of passion and emotional turbulence’.⁵ Daniel Sävborg adopts a similar stance, stating ‘that absence of characters’ open expression of thought and emotion in the *Íslendingasögur* is [...] partly a myth based on a superficial reading’.⁶ Such superficial readings overlook an interiority that is very much interwoven into the text; this interiority may be subtle, but the subtlety encourages closer reading: emotions are there, if the reader is willing to hunt for them.

The combination of subtle emotivity and sexual restraint greatly inhibits the ability to identify scenes of rape in the *Íslendingasögur*, and it is thus somewhat understandable why sexual violence ‘remains a relatively uncharted territory’ in Old Norse literary studies in sharp contrast to other literary fields wherein such studies have sprung up in abundance over recent decades.⁷ Rape is not, however, as absent from the corpus as the deficiency of scholarship on the subject suggests. Just as the emotional complexities of saga literature are slowly being revealed, so too can hitherto glossed-over scenes of sexual violence be lifted out

Studies in Early Medieval Britain and Ireland (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); *Emotional Lexicons: Continuity and Change in the Vocabulary of Feeling 1700-2000*, ed. Ute Frevert (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³ Miller decries how ‘People’s initial impression of sagas is that the saga world is coldly unemotional’, “Emotions and the Sagas,” in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gisli Pálsson (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1992), 90.

⁴ Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Emotion*, 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Daniel Sävborg, “Style,” in *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson (London: Routledge, 2017), 118.

⁷ Ljungqvist, “Rape in the Icelandic Sagas,” 432.

from ‘Under the seemingly placid surface of sexual calm’.⁸ In this chapter, I delve beneath this deceptive placidity. By tethering my study to a scene from *Grettis saga*, I demonstrate the ambiguities, engendered by emotional silence and polysemous words, which shroud sexual violence in the *Íslendingasögur*.

Before turning to *Grettis saga*, however, it is pertinent to highlight other metaphorical and figurative techniques used within the sagas to mask or allude to sexual violence. According to Bell, ‘Old Norse literary artifacts tend to take a much more description-adjacent position to most actions, sexual violence included’.⁹ In *Flóamanna saga*, for instance, Þorgils makes Helga watch a violent attack of a rooster upon a hen to remind her of the gendered hierarchy: ‘hreinn hænna við hana, en hann leggur at henni ok berr hana, þar til er hon mæðist’ (the hen scolded the rooster, so the rooster went at her and attacks her until she was exhausted).¹⁰ Henric Bagerius writes that, in using this visual metaphor for their marriage, Þorgils represses Helga’s rebellion with ‘ett av mannens vassaste vapen: hotet om sexuellt våld’ (one of man’s sharpest weapons: the threat of sexual violence).¹¹ Þorgils does not verbalise the sexual violence of his threat and leaves it implicit in this exemplum. Helga’s reaction is unexpressed but she soon falls in line and so it can be assumed that the threat served its purpose. Such exempla may be evidence that ‘sexual reality is hidden under a veneer of Christian respectability’.¹² This avian warning exemplifies the widespread reluctance to verbalise issues of sex and sexual violence, confining such matters to the animal kingdom.

⁸ Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 33.

⁹ Bell, “Reconsideration,” 7.

¹⁰ *Flóamanna saga*, 317.

¹¹ Henric Bagerius, “I genusstrukturens spänningsfält: Om kön, genus och sexualitet i saga och samhälle,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 116 (2001): 22.

¹² Jochens, “Illicit Love Visit,” 370.

Although the exemplum ‘makes only a sporadic appearance in indigenous Old Norse literature’, a myriad of metaphorical, euphemistic techniques are fashioned within the *Íslendingasögur* which mask but do not completely obfuscate sexual violence.¹³ In peeling back these masks, we can begin to see the layers of sexual violence that pervade the corpus. Drawing on the work of Kathryn Gravidal, Evelyn Vitz has assessed rape as being frequently ‘troped’ in medieval literature, and this ‘troping’ is something that can be observed in a variety of different ways across the *Íslendingasögur*, from the recurrent motif of the ‘illicit love visit’ to formulaic indicators that alert saga-savvy readers to generic conventions.¹⁴

MOTIFS AND MASKS

THE ‘ILLICIT LOVE VISIT’

Rolf Heller’s ‘mißbilligten Liebesbesuchen’ (frowned-upon love visits) have, as a result of Jenny Jochens’ extensive scholarship on the topic, become generally known as the ‘illicit love visit’.¹⁵ She defines it thusly:

In the interstices before marriage young men occasionally acted forcibly either against the girl whom they wanted to visit or against her family who attempted to prevent such visits. In the course of events these men often resorted to physical aggression, probably including rape.¹⁶

¹³ Marlene Ciklamini, “Exempla in an Old Norse Historiographic Mold,” *Neophilologus* 81, no. 1 (1997), 71. Waugh, too, notes that ‘This episode, which has continental origins, is uncharacteristic of the sagas of Icelanders’, Robin Waugh, “Misogyny, Women’s Language, and Love-Language: Yngvildr fagrkinn in *Svarfdæla saga*,” *Scandinavian Studies* 70, no. 2 (1998): 180.

¹⁴ Vitz, “Rereading Rape,” 2; Gravidal, *Ravishing Maidens*; Gravidal, “Chrétien de Troyes, Gratian, and the Medieval Romance of Sexual Violence,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 17, no. 3 (1992). See also Daniel Sävborg, *Sagan om kärleken: erotik, känslor och berättarkonst i norrön litteratur*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis. Historia litterarum (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2007), 111–4, for a comprehensive list and brief summary of ‘illicit love visit’ occurrences in the *Íslendingasögur*.

¹⁵ Rolf Heller, *Die literarische Darstellung der Frau in den Isländersagas*, Saga: Untersuchungen zur nordischen Literatur- und Sprachgeschichte, 2 (Halle an der Saale: M. Niemeyer, 1958), 42.

¹⁶ Jochens, “Illicit Love Visit,” 364.

Given the general reluctance of *Íslendingasögur* writers to delve into overtly sexual detail, this motif remains the most prominent vehicle for sexual violence in the genre; however, it is not always indicative of physical force or even lack of consent on the part of the woman. In some instances, the woman clearly welcomes these visits. In others, she clearly does not. Euphemistic terms veil the precise sexual nature of the visits, although Jochens proposes that the purpose of the visit ‘was obvious to everyone’, and thus her study is strongly in favour of finding in the ‘illicit love visit’ evidence of physical sexual violence and coercion.¹⁷

Such a stance has in recent years come under scrutiny from critics, with Ljungqvist in particular suggesting that Jochens gives undue emphasis to the potentiality of the ‘illicit love visit’ to connote violence.¹⁸ When discussing the ‘illicit love visit’, critics — with the exception of Jochens — have broadly focused on the men involved and the impetus behind the visits on the part of the ‘visitor’ as well as its consequences for the aggrieved household, usually the father, foster-father, or a brother. Sävborg and Bjørn Bandlien favour an interpretation of the motif which emphasises the angering of the male relatives only, and largely disregards the women.¹⁹ Jochens does underplay the aspect of weaponising a woman’s sexual vulnerability in male feuding, instead placing more emphasis on male sexual desire, and sexual violence itself. But as I shall discuss, both are factors in this motif, and neither precludes the other: riling male opponents in feud can be a convenient way for the ‘visiting’ men to satiate sexual desires. To simply state that such visits have the sole purpose of igniting male feuds would be reductive. According to Andreas Heusler, sexual violence is very rare in the *Íslendingasögur*, and even in cases of kidnappings and the ‘illicit love visit’, consent is possible:

¹⁷ Ibid., 370.

¹⁸ Ljungqvist, “Rape in the Icelandic Sagas,” 432.

¹⁹ Sävborg, *Sagan om kärleken*, 114; Bjørn Bandlien, *Å finne den rette: kjærlighet, individ og samfunn in norrøn middelalder*, HIFOs skriftserie (Oslo: Norske Historiske Forening, 2001), 61–4.

der gewaltsame Angriff auf die weibliche Ehre ist verschwindende Ausnahme, wenn man, wie billig, absieht von Entführungen und Liebeleien, die in dubio ein Einverständnis des weiblichen Teils vor aussetzen.²⁰ (Appendix I:1:1)

Heusler is right to be dubious about the level of consent involved in any ‘illicit love visit’. My study examines to what extent consent is dubious or ambiguous, identifying any narrative, emotive, somatic or behavioural indicators that the woman does or does not consent, while acknowledging the caveat, as my Introduction outlines, that consent itself is an imperfect model for detecting sexual violence. Miller expresses his frustration with identifying rape in the sagas and alludes to the practice of identifying the consent of the woman. He draws on the example of *Ljósvetninga saga*, which ‘gives us the example of three brothers who seem to make a practice of rape, but in that case it is not quite clear that what is going on is always without the woman’s consent’.²¹ In this particular episode, the brothers are described as ‘óeirðarmenn miklir um kvennafar ok málaferli’ (most unruly men in the business of women and lawsuits).²² Their history of legal entanglements with women is foregrounded, with one brother engendering ‘fiflingar ok ósæmð’ (disgraces and dishonour).²³ It does not specify to whom the dishonour is brought but, given the indignance of the girl’s brothers, it can be assumed that it is either to her or to the family at large. The bequeathing of criminal qualities to visitors such as these marks these men out as general aggressors of women.

The above example aside, such outright descriptors of men as aggressors of women are rare, and we must instead look for signs of consent from the reactions of the women themselves. Writing on the ‘illicit love visit’ *topos*, Heller states that

²⁰ Heusler, *Zum isländischen Fehdewesen*, 41.

²¹ Miller, “Beating Up On Women,” 763.

²² *Ljósvetninga saga*, 4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

In allen Fällen geht die Rolle der Frau nicht über die Szene hinaus; sie bleibt völlig im Hintergrund.²⁴ (Appendix I:1:I:2)

He goes on to identify an incident in *Sqrla þáttr* following an ‘illicit love visit’ in which the ‘visited’ woman is ostensibly pleased to see Sqrli when he finds her again after having been forbidden to see her. Her pleasure in seeing him is expressed in her ‘lyrical’ phrase: ‘„Nú er mikit um sólskin ok sunnanvind, ok riðr Sqrli í garð“’ (“There is plenty of sun and southerly winds, and Sqrli is riding into the courtyard”).²⁵ Heller notes that this attention to a woman’s opinion is atypical; Jochens also marks it out as an exceptional case.²⁶ However, other behavioural clues indicate mutual affection between the man and the woman. Simple actions can denote affection or attraction: in *Vatnsdæla saga*, when Ingólfr’s ball rolls towards Valgerðr Óttarsdóttir during a ballgame, ‘hon svipti at mottli sínum, ok tóluðusk þau við um hrið’ (she swept her cloak over it, and they talked for a while).²⁷ Other apparently ‘neutral’ actions weighted with sexual symbolism are a woman’s making clothes for a man’, as suggested by Alison Finlay.²⁸ Ingólfr continues to meet Valgerðr even after marrying another woman.²⁹

Ingólfr kom at finna Valgerði jafnan, er hann fór til þings eða frá. Þat líkaði Óttari illa; hon gerði honum ok klæði ǫll, þau er mest skyldi vanda.³⁰ (Appendix I:1:I:3)

Óttarr’s view on the matter is directly contrasted with his daughter’s, as he suggests that ‘hann fíflði hana með vanvirðu’ ([Ingólfr] *seduced* her dishonourably). Valgerðr’s opinion is

²⁴ Heller, *Literarische Darstellung*, 42.

²⁵ *Sqrla þáttr*, in *Ljósvetninga saga*, 110. Jochens also highlights this as an exception, see Jochens, “Illicit Love Visit,” 379.

²⁶ Heller even proposes that this is such an exception that it points to a younger influence upon the saga, but this point is invalidated by the plethora of other instances of women expressing emotion, as I discuss, *Literarische Darstellung*, 42.

²⁷ *Vatnsdæla saga*, 98.

²⁸ Alison Finlay, “Skald Sagas in their Literary Context 2: Possible European Contexts,” in *Skaldsagas: Text, Vocation, and Desire in the Icelandic Sagas of Poets*, ed. Russell Poole (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2001), 236. Sävborg has similarly outlined this as ‘a literary motif charged with emotional attraction’, “Style,” 117.

²⁹ *Vatnsdæla saga*, 99.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 101.

not explicitly expressed, as her father's is, but it can be gauged through the account of her actions; that she creates for Ingólfr elaborate clothes is a clear marker of her affection for him and her willingness to see him. This motif also occurs in *Gísla saga*, when Auðr and Asgerðr's conversation about sewing clothes for Þorkell and Vésteinn clearly refers to sexual attraction (or a lack thereof), the sewer's hands apparently imbued with amorous significance.³¹ By contrast, Steingerðr pointedly refuses to make Kormákr a shirt in *Kormáks saga*.³² Bandlien suggests that

the making of shirts for the suitors [...] was typical women's work that should benefit the household which the woman belonged to. In sewing another man's shirt she symbolically chose to belong to another man's household without asking her father.³³

It may therefore represent not just consent and affection, but rebellion: a mark of allegiance not to a blood relative but to a male outsider.

It is incorrect, therefore, to declare that 'The feelings of the young woman while all this was going on are quite ignored by the saga-authors'.³⁴ Saga writers do give clues as to a woman's thoughts, thus giving her — however subtly — a degree of agency or at least subjectivity. It is true, however, that in many instances, the woman's opinion is either never voiced, or she vocally defers to her *giptingarmaðr*, especially in cases of marital consent, as I outlined in the Introduction. Critics have likewise over-simplified the effect an 'illicit love visit' can have on a woman's reputation. According to Bandlien:

The social effects of the love affairs most often struck men hardest. Within certain public expectations of whom women's loyalty should be directed at, daughters' responsibilities in these affairs seem to have been minor. It was the visiting men who

³¹ *Gísla saga*, 30.

³² *Kormáks saga*, 264.

³³ Bjørn Bandlien, "The Church's Teaching on Women's Consent: A Threat to Parents and Society in Medieval Norway and Iceland," in *Family, Marriage and Property: Devolution in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lars Ivar Hansen (Tromsø, Norway: Department of History, University of Tromsø, 2000), 63–4.

³⁴ Roberta Frank, "Marriage in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Iceland," *Viator (Berkeley)* 4 (1973): 476.

risked their lives, while the daughters were still attractive marriage partners after several love affairs.³⁵

Yet numerous sagas also attest to the gross ill-effects of the ‘illicit love visit’ on a woman’s reputation. In *Fóstbræðra saga*, a concerned mother warns Þormóðr, the illicit visitor, about the damage he is doing to her daughter’s marital prospects:

„þeir menn, er til hafa górzk at biðja hennar, ef þeir vissi, at þú ert nokkut riðinn við hennar mál — má vera, at þeim sýnisk troll standa fyrir durum, þar sem þú ert“.³⁶
(Appendix I:1:I:4)

Þormóðr is likened to a monster trespassing on domestic territory: a disturber of potential marital peace. And so while Bandlien does go on to concede that ‘The episodes of the illicit love visits do indeed deal with women’s minds and loyalty and are relevant in the social dynamics of medieval Iceland’, his study ignores crucial evidence that women’s reputations were also at stake, and that whether love visits were consensual or not, both parties stood to lose a great deal from them.³⁷ Because ‘A girl’s honor seems to have been regarded by her family as a (literally) precious commodity’, the feud violence ricocheting from the ‘illicit love visit’ is set off by the potential damage to a woman’s reputation.³⁸ However, damage to a woman’s reputation is not the only potentially damaging aspect of the ‘illicit love visit’: Jochens tempers this apparent act of affection by reminding us that this *topos* may still be an indicator of situational coercion rather than genuine desire:

If the woman did not initially entice her visitor and most likely had been exposed to a forced sexual initiation, once the visits had started, however, a woman often sided with her lover against her family. Originally a victim, and now with her sexual and reproductive future at stake, she probably had little choice.³⁹

³⁵ Bandlien, “Church’s Teaching,” 63.

³⁶ *Fóstbræðra saga*, 161.

³⁷ Bandlien, “Church’s Teaching,” 64.

³⁸ Frank, “Marriage in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Iceland,” 476.

³⁹ “Illicit Love Visit,” 378–9. However, this is not always the case given the other evidence I have found which clearly shows willingness and even affection.

Jochens' evaluation is a salient reminder of the complexities surrounding consent and coercion: even if a woman's actions appear to denote affection or acquiescence, these actions may be engendered by social expectation or reputational risk, rather than a wholehearted desire to receive an 'illicit visitor'.

LEXICAL FORMULAE

When a woman's opinion on an 'illicit love visit' or betrothal is ambiguous, certain formulae can reveal her feelings. Sävborg's studies on style and formulae in the *Íslendingasögur* suggest that certain phrases — which are repeated across the corpus, verbatim or in slight lexical or verbal variations — are

constructions loaded with meaning – in [some] cases, emotional meaning – which are necessary for understanding the behaviour and reactions of characters and plot development [...] knowledge of the genre is required to understand them.⁴⁰

According to Sävborg, the formulaic phrase 'venja kvámur sínar' (to make habitual visits) specifically invokes the motif of the 'illicit love visit' and its impending violent outcome for the genre-savvy reader. His reading focuses on the male relatives' unhappiness at the seduction, not that of the woman, suggesting that the formula is 'loaded with a particular meaning which the reader lacking genre knowledge will miss entirely', and that this meaning is impending feud violence.⁴¹ Sävborg gives the example of *Droplaugarsonar saga*, in which Helgi, on behalf of Þórdís' husband, says to Björn, 'þat vilda ek, Björn, at þú létir af kvámum til Þórdísar' (Björn, I want you to stop visiting Þórdís).⁴² When Björn does not stop his visits and 'Þat fylgði því máli, at Þórdís fór kona eigi ein saman' (It followed this matter that Þórdís was pregnant), Helgi kills him and it is said that legally, 'hann var um sanna sök veginn' (he

⁴⁰ Sävborg, "Style," 116.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁴² *Ibid.*, quoting *Droplaugarsona saga*, 151.

was killed with just cause).⁴³ It is somewhat implied that Þórdís welcomes Björn's visits, as the saga writer points out that her husband Þorsteinn 'var þá hrymðr mjök, ok var hon til fjár gefin' (was very old, and she was given to him for money's sake).⁴⁴ This is the only indicator the saga writer gives as to what might motivate Þórdís to have an affair.

The 'tala við' (talking to) formula is common, with around ninety instances, and numerous critics, have noted its erotic connotations. Finlay, for instance, notes that 'visits' and 'conversation' are 'enough to bring about pregnancy', and Sävborg suggests that 'In many cases, it has to do with a strong mutual love'.⁴⁵ Bandlien proposes that 'It is a convenient way to refer to sex without being prurient: 'the writers, presumably clerics, drew a veil over their forefathers' aggressive sexuality for the sake of morality, referring to "conversation" when they meant "sex"'.⁴⁶ We might think, for instance, of examples in *Kórmaks saga*: 'ok sat hjá henni ok talaði við hana ok kyssti hana fjóra kossa' 'and sat by her and talked with her and kissed her four times);⁴⁷ and in *Laxdæla saga*: 'Hon fagnaði honum vel ok gefr rúm at sitja hjá sér, ok taka þau tal saman' (She received him well and made room for him to sit by her, and they had a conversation).⁴⁸ I propose that this formula certainly has erotic connotations, but that it does not necessarily indicate a mutual attraction or consensual situation: this aspect can only become clear with additional information.

FÍFLA

⁴³ Ibid., 152.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 151.

⁴⁵ Finlay, "Skald Sagas," 236; Daniel Sävborg, "The Formula in Icelandic Saga Prose," *Saga-Book* 42 (2018): 65.

⁴⁶ Björn Bandlien, *Strategies of Passion: Love and Marriage in Medieval Iceland and Norway*, Medieval Texts and Cultures of Northern Europe (Turnhout: Brepols, 2005), 76–7.

⁴⁷ *Kórmaks saga*, 293.

⁴⁸ *Laxdæla saga*, 131.

Certain words recur within these euphemistically sexual, formulaic ‘conversations’. There seems to be a progression from ‘talking to’ euphemisms, to ‘visiting’ euphemisms, to ‘seduction’ euphemisms; for instance, regarding the relationship between Ingólfr and Valgerðr in *Vatnsdæla saga*, there is a progression from ‘kom han til tals við hana (he came to talk to her), to ‘Eptir þat gerir hann þangat kvámur sínar jafnan’ (afterwards he often made visits to her), to Óttarr’s reported speech that he does not like that Ingólfr ‘fifldi hana’ (seduced her).⁴⁹

Fifla is a word riddled with ambiguities. It indicates an extramarital or premarital seduction beleaguered by dishonour or shame, but it does not always suggest mutual affection. *Glepja* and *svikja* function similarly. *Glepja* seems to have been interchangeable with *fifla* in some instances, meaning ‘verlocken, verführen’ (lure, seduce).⁵⁰ It is used notably in *Egils saga* before the *bóndason* attempts to seduce Helga with runes and thus precipitates violence: ‘þá vildi bóndason glepja hana, en hon vildi eigi’ (the farmer’s son wanted to seduce her, but she did not want that).⁵¹ *Svikja* means ‘betrügen, verraten’ (cheat, betray).⁵² However, *fifla* is easily the most recurrent of this triptych of ‘trickery’ words. Related to the neuter noun *fifli* ‘fool, dolt’ and the feminine noun *fifla* ‘fool’, Jan De Vries interprets the verb as ‘sich närrisch benehmen, verführen’ (to behave foolishly, seduce); as well as having a second meaning ‘mit den finger berühren’ (to touch with fingers), and Cleasby and Vigfússon likewise gloss *fifla* as ‘to beguile a woman’ or ‘to fall into illicit love’, with *fifla* glossed as ‘touch; finger’.⁵³ Alexander Jóhannesson ascribes a gendered usage of ‘eine frau verführen’ (touch a woman), suggesting that the verb ‘scheint zu *fifl* zu

⁴⁹ *Vatnsdæla saga*, 99.

⁵⁰ Vries, s.v. ‘glepja’. John McKinnell notes that, ‘in verse, *glepja* nearly always has sexual connotations; it is only in prose that it refers to people confusing others in legal matters’, *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 150.

⁵¹ *Egils saga*, 238. I discuss this episode in greater depth in Chapter VII.

⁵² Vries, s.v. ‘svik’.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, ‘fifla’, 119; Cleasby-Vigfússon, s.v. ‘fifla’; ‘fifla’.

gehören' (is derived from *fifl*).⁵⁴ Alexander further raises the possibility that the meaning of 'seduce' and 'touch with fingers' may have amalgamated into the single word *fifla*.⁵⁵

Bandlien proposes that 'the term was associated with a man's desire for power over a woman's will', and Jochens has suggested that the word indicates a degree of persuasion at the very least, and physical force at the very worst.⁵⁶ The connotations of *fifla* are, to my findings, wide-ranging, from mutual affection to situational disgrace due to pre-marital seduction. It may refer to a man seducing, persuading, coercing, or forcing. In *Fljótsdæla saga*, Helgi's visits are said to be welcomed by Helga:

En á þeim misserum var þat mælt, at Helgi Droplaugarson legði þangat kvómur sínar til Helgu Þorbjarnardóttur, ok ekki var þat kallat henni um þveran hug, sem raun bar nökkut á.⁵⁷ (Appendix I:1:I:5)

Nollar, however, later uses the word *fifla* to describe the relationship, but given the strong affection Helga has for Helgi, a word denoting coercion does not seem suited to this couple; in this instance it can at worst denote disgrace, or Nollar's own subjective view that Helgi might implement violence in order to sleep with her.⁵⁸ Since Nollar is trying, at this point, to incite Helga's other suitor, Bersi, to go after Helgi, this reading is certainly compelling. This episode demonstrates the complexity of the word *fifla* and its subjective usage depending on the potential bias of the speaker.

Determining whether an episode that features the word *fifla* is one of consent or force or something in between thus depends on contextual cues. Far from always indicating

⁵⁴ *IEW*, 540.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, "'närrisches weib" [verquickung mit *fifla* vb. "mit den finger berühren" kann stattgefunden haben' ("foolish woman" [amalgamation with *fifla* vb. "to touch with the finger" may have taken place), 584.

⁵⁶ Bandlien, *Strategies of Passion*, 76; Jochens, "Illicit Love Visit," 378. Jochens does note however, that in *Flóamanna saga* there is some suggestion that Helgi disapproves of his mother's *fiflingar*, thus shifting some blame onto her, and Jochens suggests that this is due to the lateness of the saga in conjunction with the changing attitudes to women's consent, 266.

⁵⁷ *Fljótsdæla saga*, 249.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, '„ætlar hann at fifla Helgu Þorbjarnardóttur út til Eyvindarár ok leggja hana í sæng hjá sér"' (he intends to *fifla* Helga Þorbjarnardóttir out to Eyvindará and put her in bed beside him), 250.

physical or emotional coercion, some attestations of *fifla* denote definite desire on the part of the woman. Sävborg suggests that *fifla* and *glepja* may sometimes denote ‘ömsesidig kärlek’ (mutual love).⁵⁹ In *Vatnsdæla saga*, Óttarr uses the word to accuse Ingólfr of seducing his daughter, but as previously noted, she creates elaborate clothes for Ingólfr: a potential marker of her affection for him and her willingness to see him.⁶⁰ Most telling of all is the relationship between Þórdís and Þormóðr in *Fóstbræðra saga*. Þórdís’s mother, Gríma, expresses antipathy towards Þormóðr, who is ‘talking to’ her daughter. A clear distinction is made between *tala við* and *fifla*; the latter is clearly delineated as a progression from the former:

Þormóðr lagði mjök kvámur sínar í Qgur ok sat lǫngum á tali við Þórdísi, dóttur Grímu, ok af hans kvámu ok tali var kastat orði til, at hann myndi fifla Þórdísi.⁶¹ (Appendix I:1:I:6)

Fifla is thus often used in the context of rumour and gossip, denoting a negative perception that ‘talking’ has grown into ‘more than talking’, evidenced by Gríma’s use of the word as she addresses Þormóðr directly on the subject:

„Þat er orðtak mjök margra manna, Þormóðr, at þú fiflir Þórdísi, ok er mér þat lítt at skapi, at hon hljóti orð af þér.“⁶² (Appendix I:1:I:7)

It is later revealed, in a bout of imagery-rich romantic expression seldom found in the *Íslendingasögur* outside of prosimetrum, that Þórdís has very deep and tender feelings for Þormóðr:

Ok svá sem myrkva dregr upp ór hafi ok leiðir af með litlu myrkri, ok kœmr eptir bjart sólskin með blíðu veðri, svá dró kvæðit allan órækðar þokka ok myrkva af hug Þórdísar, ok renndi hugarljós hennar heitu ástar gørvalla til Þormóðar með varmri blíðu. Þormóðr kœmr þá jafnan í Qgur ok hefir góðar viðtøkur.⁶³ (Appendix I:1:I:8)

⁵⁹ Sävborg, *Sagan om kärleken*, 119.

⁶⁰ *Vatnsdæla saga*, 101.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Fóstbræðra saga*, 173–4.

Indeed, from this relationship in *Fóstbræðra saga*, it is clear that the usage of *fifla* is not limited to being against the will of the woman concerned, but may express the negative views of the speaker instead. *Fifla* seems to denote a kind of seduction which would specifically bring dishonour, as expressed by the two-fold use of the word in the context of public opinion and maternal concern. It is not always indicative of a lack of consent, as Þórdís' romantic feelings for Þormóðr demonstrate. One particularly ambiguous instance is in *Njáls saga*: the constant source of trouble, Hrappr, wants to 'fifla' Guðrún.⁶⁴ He pays repeated visits to her and she is warned by her father to stop seeing him. Initially she 'hét góðu' (promised to make amends), but then begins to see him again. She goes 'á hnotskóg at skemmta sér' (to a nut-grove to entertain herself), accompanied by Ásvarðr, but Hrappr appears and 'tók í hönd henni ok leiddi hana eina saman' (took her in his hand and led her away alone).⁶⁵ Following them, Ásvarðr finds the two entwined in the bushes: 'í runni einum liggja bæði' (in a single bush they both lay).⁶⁶ After the blood-spattered exchange that ensues between the two men, Guðrún tells Hrappr that she is pregnant. This episode could be a pre-organised rendezvous between Guðrún and Hrappr; however, the phrasing of him taking her by the hand may be evidence of some coercion. Hrappr wreaks general havoc with women: he is said to *fifla* Hallgerðr, and he also steals a ring and a headdress from Þórgerðr. It is unclear if he is a lothario or a sexual predator.⁶⁷ In a total of 11 incidences across the *Íslendingasögur*, the word is generally weighted towards consent but certainly does not preclude coercion or unwanted physical assault, as Fig. 1 illustrates:⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *Njáls saga*, 211.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ *Njáls saga*, 220; 214.

⁶⁸ Likely consent (as indicated by actions that denote affection such as making clothes): Þórdís is explicitly said to love Þormóðr in *Fóstbræðra saga*, 173–4; in *Víga-Glúms saga*, Steinólfr is said to have 'seduced [Arngrím's] wife': 'hefir hann eigi fiflt konu hans?' (has he not *seduced* his wife?), and the wife's reaction to

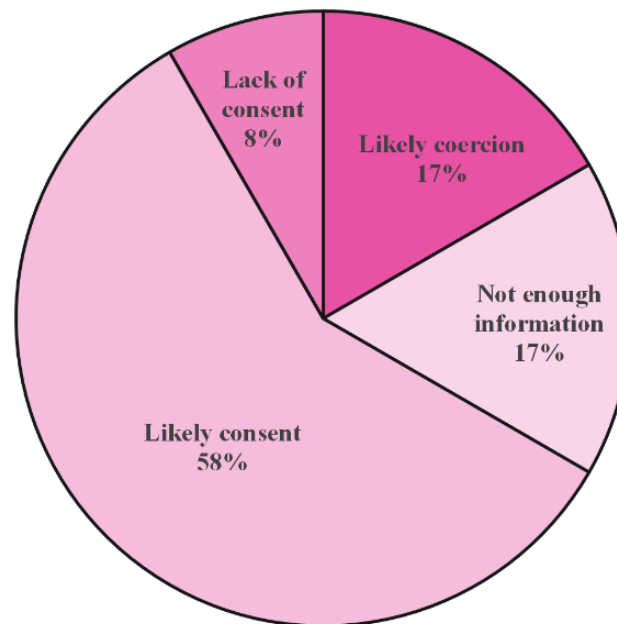


Fig 1: Instances of *fifla*

Despite being vastly weighted towards consensual — albeit dishonourable — dalliances, in *Þórðar saga hréðu*, *fifla* is nevertheless used in a startlingly aggressive situation, as I shall discuss in greater depth in Chapter II. Furthermore, In *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, it is used in a scene I discuss at length in Chapter VII concerning a clearly non-consensual scene.⁶⁹

GRETTIR AND THE *GRÍÐKONA*

The ambiguities surrounding the ‘illicit love visit’ and its associated terminologies reinforce the necessity for a nuanced examination of potentially sexually violent incidents in the

Steinólfr’s murder by her husband is to divorce him, 73; *Víglundar saga*, Ketilríðr and Víglundur have an established relationship but he does not want to bring dishonour on her, 114; in *Fljótsdæla saga*, Helga is said to love Helgi, 250; in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*, Óláfr and Sigríðr are said to get along well, 296; in *Vatndsæla saga*, Valgerðr makes clothes for Ingólfr, 101. Likely coercion: in *Njáls saga* Mqrðr advises Þorgeirr to *fifla* Ormhildr in order to rile Gunnarr, 174; similarly, in *Reykðæla saga*, Þóroddr tells Þorgrímr to *fifla* Sigríðr to rile Skútu, 241. These two instances showcase the women as entirely transactional within male-male feuds — whether or not they consent, it seems they have no choice. Lack of consent: in *Þórðar saga hréðu*, Sigríðr says that Ormr’s visits er á móti mínum vilja’ ([are] against my will), 188. Not enough information: the two incidents in *Njáls saga*: 211; 220.

⁶⁹ Note this is only in the AM 591 g 4to redaction; in AM 123 8vo the verb used is ‘blygða’ (put to shame), *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, 419.

Íslendingasögur. Closely analysing consequences and women’s actions following possible instances of sexual violence help to gauge the level of consent in each instance. With this in mind, the episode in *Grettis saga* (presented in full at Appendix I:1:I:9) is particularly helpful in understanding the multiple ways in which Old Norse ‘rape’ scenes may be read given its ambiguous nature.

This episode constitutes probably the most-discussed instance of sexual violence within Old Norse literary scholarship to date, and recent criticism has typically read the incident as ‘rape’ with little equivocation.⁷⁰ To Ljungqvist, for instance, such a reading is blatant:

We can easily infer what happens next. The episode cannot really be understood as anything other than Grettir —the size of whose member has been mocked by the servant girl — manifesting his questioned “manhood” in a most extreme fashion.⁷¹

Jacob Bell calls it ‘Perhaps the most explicit and most detailed scene of sexual violence’.⁷² Conversely, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir suggests that the reading of the scene as rape is ‘debatable’, and Ruth Mazo Karras likewise adopts a slightly more nuanced stance, reading into the ambiguities of the scenario:

The text implies that it was not an actual rape, or if it was (in the sense of being initiated without her consent) she has enjoyed it: “the servant cried out, but when it was over and they separated she did not taunt Grettir”.⁷³

Karras — albeit in a flippant manner — interprets the maid’s cries as those of pleasure rather than pain. Such an interpretation raises questions about the degree of consent involved in

⁷⁰ See for instance Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power*, 1st ed., New Middle Ages (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 125; Gareth Lloyd Evans, *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders*, Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 123; Kate Heslop, “*Grettisfærsla*: The Handing on of Grettir,” *Saga-Book* 30 (2006): 65.

⁷¹ Ljungqvist, “Rape in the Icelandic Sagas,” 436.

⁷² Bell, “Reconsideration,” 4.

⁷³ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, “Love or Lust?,” 192, n. 9. Ruth Mazo Karras, “Servitude and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland,” in *From Sagas to Society: Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland*, ed. Gísli Pálsson (Enfield Lock: Hisarlik Press, 1992), 297.

what appears to be a sexual encounter; to clarify, we must examine some of the other key details of the passage, with which critics have failed to engage in depth.

THE ‘PHALLIC SWORD’

Grettir’s ‘characteristic tendency to speak in verse or proverbs’ comes into play here and we can obtain a clearer picture of how he views the situation by examining his soliloquising.⁷⁴ Evidently feeling emasculated by the housemaid’s appraisal of the size of his member, Grettir metaphorically weaponises his penis (‘Sverðlittinn’) and, in doing so, figuratively resituates the physical representation of his masculinity onto the battlefield. Henric Bagerius has noted a trend in Old Norse literature of ‘då det sexuella spelet skapar en strid mellan män och kvinnor’ (when the sexual game creates a battle between men and women).⁷⁵ Helga Kress has similarly observed how Grettir unites rape and murder by extending this violent metaphor towards his own member:

Også her forenes voldtekt og drap. I Grettes metafor er fallos et sverd som gjennoborer kvinnens kropp. Kvinnens språk og latter forstummer, idet mannen rekonstruerer seg som “real man”.⁷⁶ (Appendix I:1:I:10)

He thereby physically and verbally reasserts himself as a masculine figure and seizes back the power in the interplay between himself and the maidservant. Such implicitly-Lacanian readings are far from misplaced in the Old Norse corpus, and evoke Susan Brownmiller’s famous statement that

⁷⁴ Heather O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 192.

⁷⁵ Bagerius, “I genusstrukturens spenningsfält,” 45.

⁷⁶ Helga Kress, “Kastrasjon eller halshogging – sagalitteraturens drivkraft,” in *Litteratur og kjønn i Norden. Foredrag på den XX. studiekonferanse i International Association for Scandinavian Studies (IASS), arrangert av Institutt for litteraturvitenskap, Íslands universitet, i Reykjavík 7.–12. August 1994*, ed. Helga Kress (Reykjavík: Háskolaútgáfan, 1996), 76.

Man's discovery that his genitalia could serve as a weapon to generate fear must rank as one of the most important discoveries of prehistoric times along with the use of fire and the first crude stone axe.⁷⁷

In *Egils saga*, for instance, sexual dominance is dressed in battle garb and female genitalia becomes carrion for beasts of battle. When Egill steals a seat from the jarl's daughter, she insists that she wishes to be alone:

Hvat skaltu, sveinn, í sess minn?
þvít þú sjaldan hefr gefnar
vargi varmar bráðir,
vera vilk ein of mína;
sáttaðu hrafn í hausti
of hræsolli gjalla,
vastaðu, at, þars eggjar
á skelþunnar runnusk.⁷⁸ (Appendix I:1:I:11)

She accuses Egill of seldom having given 'vargi varmar bráðir' (warm flesh to a wolf), a taunt that invokes the war-hungry canine and 'repurposes the trope of feeding wolves as a descriptor of battle to suggest that, in addition to not being battle-hardened, Egill has little experience of penetrative sex'.⁷⁹ In response to this jibe, Egill reasserts his physical prowess:

Egill tók til hennar ok setti hana niðr hjá sér; hann kvað:

Farit hefk blóðgum brandi,
svát mér benþiðurr fylgði,
ok gjallanda geiri;
gangr vas harðr af víkingum;
gerðum reiðir róstu,
ran eldr of sjot manna,
létum blóðga búka,
í boghlíðum sæfask.

Þá drukku þau saman um kveldit ok váru alkát.⁸⁰ (Appendix I:1:I:12)

It is important to note, as Bell does, that

⁷⁷ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (Middlesex; New York: Penguin, 1976), 15.

⁷⁸ *Egils saga*, 120.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 121. Matthew Roby, "The Licit Love Visit: Masculine Sexual Maturation and the 'Temporary Troll Lover' Trope," in *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature*, ed. Gareth Lloyd Evans and Jessica Clare Hancock, *Studies in Old Norse Literature* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2020), 45.

⁸⁰ *Egils saga*, 121.

the saga writer does want us to know that the Jarl's daughter is not interested in having sex with Egill and would rather spend the night by herself; yet, he forces her to sit on his lap and, the saga implies, have sex with him.⁸¹

Egill reasserts his sexual dominance by euphemistically referring to his 'blóðgum brandi'. Meulengracht Sørensen has proposed that 'The similarity between the sexual act and the sword-point was patent in a warlike masculine culture', although he primarily highlights the 'phallic sword' metaphor for its occurrence in an episode of male-male combat between Skeggi and Gísli in *Gísla saga Súrssonar*: '„Gall Gunnlogi, / gaman vas Söxu“' ("Gunnlogi rang out, there was pleasure for Saxa").⁸² This wordplay enables Skeggi to 'make a connection between battle and sex-play'.⁸³ Locating other instances of the 'phallic sword' motif across the wider corpus of Old Norse literature can help us to comprehend its implications in the *Grettis saga* episode; it does not, as I shall discuss, exist simply as a sexual metaphor but is almost always associated with violence as well.

Kress proposes that the sword is a physical representation of manhood not only in incidents of violence against women but also in incidents where women threaten violence. For instance, women stealing and wielding swords can be read as an attempt to seize power and transgress gender boundaries, and thus, Kress evinces, 'the sword has a double and clearly phallic meaning as a metaphor for male power'.⁸⁴ In *Laxdæla saga* 'Þuríðr setr nú meyna Gró í húðfatit, en greip upp Fótbit' (Þuríðr now sets down the child Gró and takes up Fótbitr).⁸⁵ Þuríðr steals her husband's sword and leaves him with their child and 'With this', Kress argues, 'she not only castrates him, but also feminizes him, making him into a mother

⁸¹ Bell, "Reconsideration," 9.

⁸² Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, Viking Collection (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983), 60; *Gísla saga*, 11.

⁸³ Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 60.

⁸⁴ Helga Kress, "Taming the Shrew: The Rise of Patriarchy and the Subordination of the Feminine in Old Norse Literature," in *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology*, ed. Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 83.

⁸⁵ *Laxdæla saga*, 82.

with a baby in his arms’.⁸⁶ When wielded by a man, the phallic sword is a violent threat to women and Kress catalogues its occurrence in *Landnámabók*, *Skírnismál*, and *Svarfdæla saga*.⁸⁷ In *Landnámabók*, Hallbjörn cuts off his wife’s head for her disobedience ‘brá hann sverði ok hjó af henni hofuðit’ (he took his sword and cut her head off).⁸⁸ In *Skírnismál*, ‘Skírnir’s threat to decapitate Gerd with a sword clearly evokes images of the forcible taking of the maidenhead with the penis’:⁸⁹

„Sér þú þenna mæki, mær
— mióvan, málfán —
er ek hefi í hendi hér?
Hofuð hoggva
ek mun þér hálsi af,
nema þú mér sætt segir.“⁹⁰ (Appendix I:1:I:13)

Skírnir also threatens to touch her with a ‘tamsvendi’ (taming-wand), adding a second layer of phallic imagery to augment the threat of the sword.⁹¹

Finally, in *Svarfdæla saga*, Karl threatens Yngvildr with the sword numerous times, including one notable occasion where she is undressed and ‘vildi klæðast’ (wanted to get dressed); meanwhile, ‘Karl brá þá sverði’ (Karl drew his sword).⁹² Kress also draws attention to an illumination in *Flateyjarbók* which illustrates the violence and heightened sexualisation of Saint Óláfr killing an ugly but feminised sea creature:



⁸⁶ Kress, “Taming th

⁸⁷ Ibid., 90.

⁸⁸ *Landnámabók*, 19.

⁸⁹ Christopher R. Fe

Oxford University Press, 2004), 51.

⁹⁰ *Skírnismál*, 384, st. 23.

⁹¹ Ibid., 384, st. 26.

⁹² *Svarfdæla saga*, 197.

Fig. 2. Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar í íslenskum fræðum, GKS 1005 fol., 79r.

c Britain (Oxford:

Kress notes the femininity of the creature, ‘with naked breasts and long hair [...] The sword, the hero’s phallic attribute, dominates the picture’.⁹³ The image is a visual innuendo: a coalescence of sex and violence.

I would like to make some additions to Kress’s list of instances of the ‘phallic sword’ in saga literature. Especially recurrent in the *Íslendingasögur*, it also occurs in *Króka-Refs saga*. ‘Skálp-Grani’ (Sheath-Grani) or ‘Sverðhúss-Grani’ (Sword-House Grani) is described as ‘vífinn ok kvensamr; gerði hann mörgum í því mikla skapraun’ (very interested in women and womanising; he was a source of affliction to many in such matters).⁹⁴ He attempts to rape Helga, and it is noted that ‘því at skálprinn er hús sverðsins. Mun hann hafa farit um herbergi at leita sér kvenna’ (because a sheath is the house of a sword, he must have gone to the dwelling to amuse himself with women).⁹⁵ An established rapist, then, is given an epithet that links him to rape with this crude, violent, phallic euphemism.

Both *Þorsteins þátr uxafóts* and *Fljótsdæla saga* contain the motif of a sword hanging over a bed in which a literal or metaphorical rape takes place. In *Þorsteins þátr uxafóts* a sword dangles over the bed of a troll-woman before a man strips her and penetrates her through to the feather coverlet with the sword:

Skjöldr ok sverð hekk uppi yfir henni. Þorsteinn steig upp á rekkjustokkinn ok tók ofan sverðit ok brá. Hann fletti þá klæðum af flagðinu [...] Hann leggr sverðinu á þessum sama flekk ok fellr á hjöltin. Sverðit bítr svá, at oddrinn stóð í dýnunni.⁹⁶
(Appendix I:1:I:14)

⁹³ Kress, “Taming the Shrew,” 87.

⁹⁴ *Króka-Refs saga*, 151; 153.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

⁹⁶ *Þorsteins þátr uxafóts*, 360.

Similarly, in *Fljótsdæla saga* ‘Yfir hvílunni sá hann hanga eitt sverð mikit’ (Over the bed [Þorvaldr] saw a great sword hanging), and it is on this bed that Droplaug says that the giant Geitir toys with her: ‘„En um daga er hann í rekkju sinni ok leikr þá at mér, kastar mér hönd af hendi ok hendir mik”’ (“And in the day he stays in his bed and plays with me, throws me from hand to hand and grabs me”).⁹⁷ Droplaug’s disdain for this act is clear, surely implying that she does not consent, especially as she has been kidnapped and is at the whim of her captor: she declares that ‘„ek mega eigi vel neyta, ok öngu hóti þykist hann of vel við mik gjört geta, þat er hann má”’ (“I cannot well enjoy anything, and nothing he does pleases me one bit, that he might do”).⁹⁸ The dangling sword over the bed is a visual threat to the captured Droplaug — a reminder of the sexual violence hanging over her. To the troll-woman in *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts* it foreshadows her own murder, during which she is unnecessarily stripped and thus confronted with a parody of sexual intercourse, much like the maid in the *Grettis saga* episode. Phallic imagery is, accordingly, reasonably common in Old Norse portrayals of aggression between a man and woman in both literary and visual depictions.

Viewing the ‘phallic sword’ motif as an acknowledgement of aggression in Grettir’s *vísa*, then, renders the scene inherently more violent. The euphemism draws a direct link between the maidservant’s mockery of him and the violence with which he is now confronting her: his ‘sverð’ may be ‘lítinn’, but it is a weapon nonetheless, now wielded to punish the housemaid’s insolence. This short passage suggests ‘that sexual violence against women was generally regarded as a powerful weapon to keep them in their place’.⁹⁹ The attack does not simply serve to punish the girl but further serves as a salve for Grettir’s ego: Carl Phelpstead proposes that ‘the sword metaphor is particularly fitting as expressing the sadistic element in [Grettir’s] male sexuality and the use of the penis as an instrument of

⁹⁷ *Fljótsdæla saga*, 226; 227.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁹⁹ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Bodies, Words, and Power*, 125.

phallic aggression'.¹⁰⁰ This assessment seems reasonable: Grettir is reacting to a personal slight of the gravest kind in the Old Norse masculine hegemony in which sexual insults were among the most severe.¹⁰¹ As noted by Gareth Lloyd Evans,

It is only in this scene from *Grettis saga* that the reader may at first have cause to question Grettir's ability to live up to the medieval Icelandic masculine ideal as a result of his sexual status or physicality. But such doubts are quickly banished by Grettir's actions.¹⁰²

The scene serves the narrative purpose of reaffirming Grettir as embodying a masculine ideal, empowered by violent actions that reinforce the gendered hierarchy. Phelpstead has proposed that 'although the penis of Grettir Ásmundarson is central to the episode, in a sense it is never actually quite present'.¹⁰³ The kennings and the designation of the phallus as a weapon thus prevent any explicit sexual detail, casting Grettir's penis to the realms of the implied or the innuendo. Skaldic poetry is by its very nature full of kennings and euphemisms which prevent easy understanding. John Lindow has even suggested that 'the extreme, riddle-like complexity of skaldic *dróttkvætt*' may have functioned 'as a kind of secret language in which the members of the *drótt* could maintain their collective traditions in a special way and also communicate without being wholly understood by others'.¹⁰⁴ Grettir's use of skaldic verse is far from uncharacteristic, and it is therefore not surprising to find his speech here is in poetry rather than prose, but the euphemistic nature of the verse does facilitate the euphemising of

¹⁰⁰ Carl Phelpstead, "Size Matters: Penile Problems in Sagas of Icelanders," *Exemplaria* 19, no. 3 (2007): 429–30.

¹⁰¹ According to Meulengracht Sørensen's study of unmanliness, for instance, 'In ancient Icelandic consciousness cowardice and effeminacy were two aspects of the same thing, and in the world of the sagas nothing hits a man harder than the allegation that he is no man,' *The Unmanly Man*, 11.

¹⁰² Evans, *Men and Masculinities*, 123.

¹⁰³ Phelpstead, "Size Matters," 340.

¹⁰⁴ John Lindow, "Riddles, Kennings, and the Complexity of Skaldic Poetry," *Scandinavian Studies* 47, no. 3 (1975), 324; 323.

its sexual themes, and the rape ‘falls into the silent interstices of the text’, allowing both a sexually violent and a benign reading.¹⁰⁵

THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

There is yet more to unpick in Grettir’s verse when considering his motivation for pouncing on the maid: does he simply want to cause her pain and sexual humiliation with the very ‘weapon’ that she mocked, or does he want to assert his masculinity by proving that the member which she finds so lacking is capable of pleasuring her? Michel Foucault’s proposal that sex be separated from rape in a legal framework provoked an enduring debate within feminist critical movements about the extent to which rape is about sex or violence. Foucault’s stance — that there is no difference, in principle, between sticking one’s fist into someone’s face or one’s penis into their genitalia — has met a great deal of resistance, with Catharine MacKinnon’s famous rebuttal succinctly put as follows: ‘if it’s violence not sex why didn’t he just hit her’.¹⁰⁶ While the relationship between sex and power in inciting a rapist to rape remains a thorny issue, I concur with more recent stances that encourage nuance and refrain from imposing a ‘rigid, monolithic framework on an exceptionally diverse set of acts and actors’.¹⁰⁷ According to sociologist Kathleen Barry, ‘in committing a crime against women, sexual satisfaction, usually in the form of orgasm, is one of the intended outcomes of

¹⁰⁵ Phelpstead, “Size Matters,” 340.

¹⁰⁶ Michel Foucault and Lawrence D. Kritzman, *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 200; Catharine A. MacKinnon, “Sexuality, Pornography, and Method: ‘Pleasure under Patriarchy’,” *Ethics* 99, no. 2 (1989): 323.

¹⁰⁷ Bourke, *Rape: A History*, 408. Holly Henderson notes how rape is often ‘a sexualized and gendered attack which imposes sexual difference along the lines of violence’, “Feminism, Foucault, and Rape: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention,” *Berkeley Journal of Gender, Law & Justice* 22 (2007): 232. Vikki Bell, meanwhile, calls for a non-binariad stance, proposing instead a ‘triangle of terms: sex, power and violence’, thus calling for a nuanced perspective that does not desexualise rape but acknowledges non-sexual motivators, “Beyond the ‘Thorny Question’: Feminism, Foucault and the Desexualisation of Rape,” *International Journal of the Sociology of Law* 19, no. 1 (1991): 96.

sexual violence for the aggressor’, which may be an applicable maxim to Grettir’s intent.¹⁰⁸ O’Donoghue proposes that he takes pleasure ‘in impressing women’.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, when, earlier in the saga, Grettir is criticised for slacking in his work on the ship in order to spend more time with the Bárðr’s wife, his reply suggests that he priorities sexually pleasing women: ‘„veitk, at víf mun láta / verr, ef ek ligg á knerri”’ (“I know that the woman will like it ill if I lie on my bones”).¹¹⁰

Bolstering this argument is Margaret Clunies Ross’ assertion that ‘Male sexual performance was intimately bound up in Icelandic consciousness with notions of bravery and masculinity generally’.¹¹¹ Elsewhere in the sagas, it is suggested that the ability to sexually please a woman champions a man’s masculine capabilities: for example, in *Njáls saga*, Unnr divorces Hrútr for being unable to have penetrative sex with her, adding that he is masculine in every other way, emphasising the masculine value of being able to sexually please a woman:

„Hann má ekki hjúskaparfar eiga við mik, svá at ek mega njóta hans, en hann er at allri náttúru sinni annarri sem inir vöskustu menn.”¹¹² (Appendix I:1:I:15)

This scene constitutes, according to Carolyne Larrington, explicit ‘recognition that women are themselves capable of sexual desire’, and she further suggests that in Old Norse society ‘Women’s sexual response is highly valued’.¹¹³ This seems a fair assumption when we consider the fact that Hrútr’s inability to have penetrative sex leads to the ‘humiliating collapse of his marriage’, and there is also provision in law for a woman whose husband

¹⁰⁸ Kathleen Barry, “Social Etiology of Crimes Against Women,” *Victimology* 10, no. 1–4 (1985): 164.

¹⁰⁹ O’Donoghue, *Skaldic Verse*, 202.

¹¹⁰ *Grettis saga*, 54.

¹¹¹ Margaret Clunies Ross, “Women and Power in the Scandinavian Sagas,” in *Stereotypes of Women in Power*, ed. Barbara Garlick, Suzanne Dixon, and Pauline Allen (New York; Westport; London: Greenwood Press, 1992), 113.

¹¹² *Njáls saga*, 24.

¹¹³ Larrington, “Mær and Munr,” 12.

‘neglects her bed’.¹¹⁴ Thus, emasculation via sexual defamation is one of the greatest personal slights a medieval Icelandic man could endure and, ‘as even the most casual reader of the sagas knows, avenging sexual insults trumped almost all competing norms’.¹¹⁵ We may interpret Grettir, then, as taking the maid’s slight as a challenge to prove his sexual prowess; he casts her as the valkyrie Hrist, a powerful supernatural figure and a worthy opponent on the battlefield.¹¹⁶ Alignment with Freyja likewise evokes the clash of battle, but the *ásynja* is strongly linked to romance, sex, and love in skaldic and eddic texts. The convergence of sex and violence established by the ‘phallic sword’ motif is intensified by Freyja’s associations with love and battle.¹¹⁷

It is, however, with the maid pinned against a bench that Grettir recites the verse, and consequently it seems far more likely that this is a crude subversion of love poetry. Grettir does little else to suggest romance, and aggression is, meanwhile, in abundance: ‘greip hann til hennar [...] Síðan svipti hann henni upp í pallinn’ (he grabbed her [...] Then he flung her on the bench). Casting her as Hrist and Freyja thus parodies romance: if he does want to prove his sexual prowess, it is without her consent; if his goal is to pleasure her, then this does not preclude rape, but rather ‘he violently demonstrates his sexual prowess by raping the woman’.¹¹⁸ If she has ultimately ‘enjoyed’ the encounter, as Karras suggests, it is still for the sake of pacifying Grettir’s ego rather than with the goal of depicting genuine romance, as exhibited by the force and crude imagery punctuating his actions. Any physical pleasure the

¹¹⁴ Ursula Dronke, *The Role of Sexual Themes in Njáls saga* (London: Viking Society of Northern Research, 1980), 8. See above, Introduction, n. 43.

¹¹⁵ Miller, “Beating Up On Women,” 757.

¹¹⁶ Hrist is associated specifically with battle elsewhere in skaldic verse, for instance ‘Hristar [...] hrið’ (Hrist’s storm) is a kenning for battle in *Sigurðardrápa I*, 541, st. 5.

¹¹⁷ Snorri, for instance, ties her to the realm of love poetry: ‘Henni líkaði vel mansöngur. Á hana er gott at heita til ásta’ (She very much likes *mansöngur*. It is good to invoke her when it comes to matters of love). *Gylfaginning*, 25. There are also numerous instances within skaldic poetry where, in the context of romantic love, a woman is designated ‘Freyja’ or a *heiti* for Freyja, such as *hodd-Gefn* ‘hoard-Gefn’ in *Plácitusdrápa*, 192, st. 17; elsewhere she is associated with battle: ‘Valgrindar Gefnar veðrheyjandi’ (the performer of the storm of Gefn, of the victory gates) in *Lausavísur*, 219, st. 4.

¹¹⁸ Evans, *Men and Masculinities*, 123.

maid might derive from the experience, as I shall discuss later, is by no means an indicator of consent. There is a second layer to the malevolence of his love poetry here if we think about the connotations of *mansǫngr*, into which category Grettir's lyrics could be said to fall or at least to mimic, given their obscenities: a violent verbal performance to compound the physical one.

UNCOMFORTABLE POLYSEMY

Indeed, there is nothing to imply that the maid wants to have sexual relations with Grettir, whether or not he believes himself to be pleasuring her. The forceful movement of 'svipti hann henni upp' does little to convey anything about the servant girl's emotional reaction, and until the end of the episode the saga writer says nothing else about her thoughts on the matter: we are only told that she screams and ceases mocking him. Based on the violence of the movement and her subsequent silencing, we can assume she is scared throughout the episode, but there remains a palpable narrative silence, and we are forced to fill in the emotive blanks ourselves based on somatic actions. Some of the aggressor's thoughts can be gauged thanks to his verses, but the aggressee's opinions are comparatively absent, and we must turn, therefore, to 'somatic indices' which might encourage readers to 'infer the presence of an emotion on the basis of our own experience of similar bodily changes'.¹¹⁹ Whether the girl screams from pain or pleasure is unclear: it may be that the writer is deliberately allowing these conflicted interpretations to intermingle. To untangle this ambiguity we must base our interpretation of the emotions in this scene on just a few key words that describe the staging of the action.

¹¹⁹ Carolyne Larrington, "The Psychology of Emotion and Study of the Medieval Period," *Early Medieval Europe* 10, no. 2 (2001): 254.

Sif Rikhardsdottir offers the following guidance in navigating emotive silence: ‘The avoidance of emotional vocabulary enhances the emotive content of non-emotive words whose semantic fields have emotive connotations’.¹²⁰ By this sound logic, in the absence of emoting from the maid, we have a heightened reaction to *æpa*, the word used for her scream. Mikołaj Rychło helpfully provides insight into the lexical signification of the word and its cognates; he tracks the semantic shifts from their root, the PGmc **wōpjan*, meaning simply ‘call out’, without a particular emotional slant before its semantic narrowing into an emotional signifier in its descendant languages:

in the descending line from Proto-Germanic (PGmc) **wōpjan* ‘call’ to OE *wēpan* ‘shed tears’ [...] Go. *wopjan* ‘call out’, Old Norse *æpa* ‘cry, scream, shout’, Old High German *wuofan* ‘bewail’; *wuoffen* ‘whine’, Old Saxon *wōpian* ‘to bewail’, Old Frisian *wēpa* ‘to shout, to cry aloud’.¹²¹

ON *æpa* does seem less overtly negative than some of its cognates, as shown by its glosses as ‘cry out, scream, shout, call’, as opposed to ‘shed tears’ and ‘whine’, but there is a general consensus towards negative associations of the word.¹²² It also forms a collocation in ‘*œpa sigróp*’ (raise a victory cry) clearly denoting positive emotion, and therefore its meaning does not seem limited to crying out of distress or misery.¹²³ However, it is worth noting that *gráta hástofum* is a recurring collocation in the corpus that always denotes violent weeping, even occurring in *Grettis saga* itself.¹²⁴ *Æpa hástofum* can be considered an apposite phrase; however, the dearth of words denoting vocalised sexual pleasure in Old Norse makes it rather impossible to be certain that *æpa hástofunum* does not suggest pleasure. Whether her

¹²⁰ Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Emotion*, 68.

¹²¹ Mikołaj Rychło, “Can Weep Lure? An Analysis of a Controversial Slavico-Germanic Pair of Cognates,” *Beyond Philology* 13 (2016): 113–4.

¹²² ONP, s.v. ‘*œpa*’.

¹²³ For instance in *Egils saga*: ‘*Æpðu Skotar þá sigróp, er þeir høfðu felldan høfðingjann*’ (The Scots let out a victory cry, when they had felled the leader), 140.

¹²⁴ ‘*grét hann hástofum*’, *Grettis saga*, 264.

mocking ceases out of fear, having just been sexually assaulted, or because she has now been robbed of her need to mock him because he has satisfied her sexually, is also uncertain.

When considering this possible factor of enjoyment on the behalf of the woman during unsolicited penetration, it is necessary to consider Vitz' study of rape in medieval literature. Writing primarily on French sources, Vitz has proposed that

during much of the medieval period, the will was by no means reliably conceived of as the primary faculty [...] people — poets in particular — may have had a hard time knowing what to make of a woman's (potential) sensual enjoyment, *malgré elle*, of non-consensual sex.¹²⁵

Vitz suggests a more complex understanding of medieval conceptions of rape than a simple binary of unwanted and wanted sex, instead proposing that given the dangers of extramarital sex, for the medieval woman 'The advantage of rape as a fantasy — of imagining being "forced" by an attractive man — is that it eliminated the problematic act of assent and anxiety about long-term consequences'.¹²⁶ Vitz' assessment is, therefore, that medieval audiences may have had a conception of unsolicited penetration as something that could still be enjoyed, even if it was unwanted. This could explain, for instance, the rather implausible transition on the part of the jarl's daughter in *Egils saga* from active avoidance — '„vilk ein of mína“' (I wish to keep to myself) — to pleasure: 'Þá drukku þau saman um kveldit ok váru alkát' (They then drank together throughout the evening and were very pleased).¹²⁷

This line of thought seems grossly insensitive to the modern reader, and Vitz does admit that female fantasy of rape is a 'thorny and disturbing' subject.¹²⁸ However, to the medieval writer, especially an educated writer with a knowledge of or influence from

¹²⁵ Vitz, "Rereading Rape," 24

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁷ *Egils saga*, 121.

¹²⁸ Vitz, "Rereading Rape," 23. Consideration of female fantasy of rape is certainly not limited to medieval studies. See for instance the following sociological and psychological papers: David J. Johnson, Christian M. Stewart, and Brittany Farrow, "Female Rape Fantasy: Conceptualizing Theoretical and Clinical Perspectives to Inform Practice," *Journal of Couple & Relationship Therapy* 19, no. 2 (2020); Susan B. Bond and Donald L. Mosher, "Guided Imagery of Rape: Fantasy, Reality, and the Willing Victim Myth," *The Journal of Sex Research* 22, no. 2 (1986).

liturgical scholarship and exegesis, pain and pleasure were thought to coalesce. Guillaume de Conches declares that the inherent weakness of female bodies leads them to find pleasure in rape:

Videmus enim raptas reclamantes & plorantes uiolentiam passas, concepisse, unde apparet et illas nullam in opere illo habuisse delectationem, sed sine delectatione non potest sperma emitti. Etsi raptis, in principio opus displiceat, in fine tamen, ex carnis fragilitate, placet [...] Et si in rapta non est uoluntas rationis, est tamen uoluntas quae delectatio est carnis.¹²⁹ (Appendix 1:1:I:16)

What we may now think of as a Cartesian duality seems to have existed for thinkers like Conches, with body independent from mind: rape was enjoyable for the body, even if the mind rejected it. Augustine, meanwhile, opines that both lust and shame of lust are quite literally thrust in during the act of rape:

Sed quia non solum quod ad dolorem, verum etiam quod ad libidinem pertinet, in corpore alieno perpetrari potest, quidquid tale factum fuerit, etsi retentam constantissimo animo pudicitiam non excutit, tamen pudorem incutit, ne credatur factum cum mentis etiam voluntate, quod fieri fortasse sine carnis aliqua voluptate non potuit.¹³⁰ (Appendix 1:1:I:17)

Medieval writers depicted such raped and ravished women with such profusion that Christine de Pisan rebuked these men with ink and vitriol:

je suis navrée et outrée d'entendre des hommes répéter que les femmes veulent être violées et qu'il ne leur déplaît point d'être forcées, même si elles s'en défendent tout

¹²⁹ Guillaume de Conches, *Dialogus de substantiis physicis* (Strasbourg: J. Rihelius, 1567), Liber Sextus, 241–2. De Conches, writing in twelfth-century France, wielded considerable influence among his European contemporaries, and his thoughts also held sway for centuries after. For more on this, see Saunders, “Classical Paradigms of Rape,” 246–7, and Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, “Universal History in Fourteenth-Century Iceland: Studies in AM 764 4to” (PhD thesis, University College London, 2000), 75.

¹³⁰ Augustine, *City of God*, ed. and trans. William Chase Greene et al. (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1957), Liber I, 76–7. Translation here taken from edition. Augustine, though writing in the fifth century CE, was a leading biblical scholar and he continued to wield considerable influence throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. Although it is impossible to be certain that Norse writers were familiar with or directly influenced by specific patristic scholars there is evidence, in the form of quotations and translations in Scandinavian material, that Augustine’s thought, as well as those of other medieval Biblical scholars, were circulating. For more on this, see Anthony Faulkes, “Pagan Sympathy: Attitudes to Heathendom in the Prologue to Snorra Edda,” in *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Haraldur Bessason and Robert James Glendinning, University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1983), 305; as well as Siân E. Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero: Hagiography and Early Icelandic Literature*, Studies in Old Norse Literature (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2017), 17.

haut. Car je ne saurais croire qu'elles prennent plaisir à une telle abomination.¹³¹
(Appendix I:1:I:18)

Pisan levelled these rebuttals against the likes of Lydgate and De Meun, who drew heavily on Ovid's immensely influential treatise on love and how to pursue it, the *Ars Amatoria*.¹³² Ovid's treatise interprets a woman's rejection as desire, and accordingly advises the (presumably male) reader to proceed in the seduction of an unwilling woman:

Quaeque roget, ne se sollicitare velis
Quod rogat illa, timet; quod non rogat, optat, ut instes;
Insequere, et voti postmodo compos eris.¹³³ (Appendix I:1:I:19)

The cries of the maid servant in *Grettis saga* could be a form of *double entendre*, the saga writer weaving her screams of either pleasure or pain around the 'powerful strand of patriarchal thought' that would culminate in Christine's exasperated diatribe.¹³⁴

Whether intended as a scene for female titillation or to pander to male fantasies of rape, the primary purpose of the rape scene in *Grettis saga* is surely for Grettir to assert his masculinity, and the instance is, accordingly, a wholly androcentric one. It has often been claimed that violence against women occurs primarily to initiate or exacerbate androcentric relations within feud chains, and I will discuss this in my next section. This incident in *Grettis saga*, however, serves no such function: it is not referred to again and it appears to have no impact on Grettir or the farmer, the servant girl's employer. The girl herself appears only in this scene. So, we must ask ourselves then, if this scene does not further the plot, what

¹³¹ Christine de Pisan, *Le livre de la cité des dames*, ed. Thérèse Moreau (Paris: Stock, 2000), 186.

¹³² Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le roman de la rose*, ed. Felix Lecoy, vol. 1 (Paris: Champion, 1965), Jean de Meun depicts how, 'riens ne leur porroit tant plere / con tel force' (nothing could please [women] so much as such force), 235; Lydgate's defamatory depiction of Lucretia laments how she is overcome by lust: 'Al-be I was ageyn my will oppressid, / Ther was a maner constreyned lust in deede', John Lydgate, *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, vol. 1 (Washington (State): Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1924), Book II, 235, ll. 1282–83.

¹³³ Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, ed. G. P. Goold, Classical Latin Texts (Los Altos, California: Packard Humanities Institute, 1991), Liber Primus, ll. 484–86.

¹³⁴ Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, 30.

purpose does it serve? If read as a rape scene, does it increase our perception of Grettir as an anti-hero, a flawed protagonist who commits unspeakable deeds alongside the good? Or, if the servant girl is interpreted as enjoying the sexual encounter, is its purpose to highlight his masculinity, his sexual prowess? Is the jab at his masculinity made into an opportunity to diegetically demonstrate his status as a virile hero? Interpreted, as I have argued, as both, the ambiguity of the scene is emblematic of the reluctance in the *Íslendingasögur* to present rape as rape: it is obfuscated by euphemism and inattention to the sentiments of the victim. It can be read either way and this, in and of itself, is a deeply uncomfortable maxim. Miller's laconic appraisal of rape in the Old Norse corpus is that 'This subject is pretty hard to get at' and, indeed, the *Grettis saga* example shows that the difficulties in identifying rape may be due to the saga writer's deliberate veiling of certain sexual violence: this scene, to a modern reader so temptingly an undisputable incidence of rape, remains riddled with ambiguities.¹³⁵ The versatile connotations of words such as *fifla*, as well as the ambiguities surrounding so many 'illicit love visits', exemplify the wide range of tools utilised by saga writers to obfuscate both sex and sexual violence. However, my nuanced appraisal of these tools can help us to understand and address the discomfort surrounding the uncertainties often created by these obfuscations.

¹³⁵ Miller, "Beating Up On Women," 763.

CHAPTER II: SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, AGAINST MEN?

„hann hefir öngri eigu þinni spillt“

A LINK IN A CHAIN

An enduring maxim on the narrative purpose of the rape of women in the *Íslendingasögur* is that it functions primarily in androcentric spheres, with the woman's experience secondary, if present at all. Writing on Malory's *Morte Darthur*, Catherine Batt adduces that

rape's significance may be "displaced" from the female subject, to be subsumed into the issue of masculine chivalric identity and integrity (just as in law one might see women's desires subordinated to the demands of male social control).¹

Batt's appraisal can easily be mapped onto the *Íslendingasögur*, wherein women's bodies are often collateral damage in feuds, caught in the crossfire of male-male aggression. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen has suggested that while phallic aggression can be aimed directly at a woman (for instance, in the case of Grettir and the maidservant), it can also use her

as a medium — against the man who is responsible for her and is her guardian. Here it is a secondary matter whether the aggression — against the man — occurs with the woman's approval or not.²

Rape's significance is hereby displaced, functioning as a link in a feud chain, a motivator to spur male family members into acts of revenge and hence as a forceful narrative catalyst. Theodore Andersson has noted that 'Though we think of the sagas as being the least romantic

¹ Catherine Batt, "Malory and Rape," *Arthuriana* 7, no. 3 (1997): 84.

² Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 28.

literature imaginable, it remains a fact that love is the most frequent cause for conflict'.³

Finlay similarly suggests that

The implication that “love” as a sexual or psychological relationship is subordinated to conflict between male rivals holds good for the skald sagas, whether this is explained by the centrality of feud to the sagas’ structure or by a cultural preoccupation with male relationships.⁴

Indeed, scholarly preoccupation with women’s raped bodies as mere links in feud chains has led to an inattention to these bodies themselves. Two of the most recent articles focusing on violence against women in Old Norse literature concur that the experience of the raped woman is peripheral:

Because of the violent Old Norse honor ideology, it is the humiliation of men that fuels the feuds which are central to the narrative, and consequently also this aspect of sexual assaults against women which attracts the most attention.⁵

Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir similarly states that ‘when rape is addressed, it is not the women’s will that is of primary interest’.⁶ Such views echo Jochens, whose earlier work purports that saga writers have no interest in ‘injury done to the woman, but on the unfolding conflict between two men — the visitor and the girl’s protector, each with reinforcements — which had been prompted by the brutality of the former as he damaged the property of the latter’.⁷ A woman’s body, then, is important for its economic function, separable from female experience:

³ Theodore M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading*, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), 12–3.

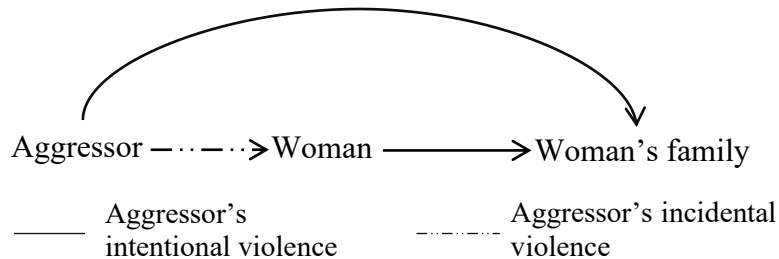
⁴ Finlay, “Skald Sagas,” 235. Finlay categorises *Kormaks saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Bjarnar saga Hitdælakappa* and *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu* as *skáldasögur*, which centre on the lives of poets and a narrative ‘of love-rivalry’, Finlay, “Poets’ Sagas,” in *The Cambridge History of Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*, ed. Heather O’Donoghue and Eleanor Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 240.

⁵ Ljungqvist, “Rape in the Icelandic Sagas,” 437.

⁶ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, “Love or Lust?,” 192.

⁷ Jochens, “Illicit Love Visit,” 368.

Fig. 3. Diagram to represent how critics have previously viewed women as incidental to sexually violent acts committed against them



Although these views are perhaps overly simplistic in their elision of narratological interest in female experience, it would be an over-correction to state that the woman's reaction to rape is more important to narratives than the reactions of her male family members. Across the *Íslendingasögur*, women's bodies are battlefields for feuding, warfare, and male in-fighting. There are numerous episodes wherein the violation of a woman is a means of antagonising or shaming her male relative, as I shall explore, and such episodes have led Ljungqvist, Aðalheiður and Jochens to formulate their analyses.

Turning to recent studies on rape more generally, Joanna Bourke alerts us to the dangers of misleading dichotomies of 'male-active' and 'female-passive'. She inquires, 'Might the focus on male agents of suffering reduce women to mere spectacles of victimization, thus contributing to cultural fantasies of female passivity?'⁸ Separating women's experiences from their objectified bodies is an important step in feminist studies in any field. We might think of the vast tranches of studies that try to displace the classical, raped Lucretia from her overwhelmingly politicised status and redeem her from depersonalisation.⁹ I resituate these Norse women's bodies as loci of the assaults (or

⁸ Bourke, *Rape: A History*, 7.

⁹ Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 9.

attempted assaults) on their bodies, as I believe they are less peripheral than has hitherto been acknowledged in scholarship. But before turning to the women's experiences, it is important to address the androcentricity of so many of these women's raped bodies and diversify our understanding of men's use of sexual violence against women. Broadly speaking, there are two primary ways in which rape is narratologically weaponised: feud is either ignited as a by-product of male lust, or a man deliberately commits rape with the intention of inflaming a male adversary.

THE ACCIDENTAL FEUD

Rape frequently ignites vengeance, but it is not always done with the intent of riling a relative of the woman. Rather, a man rapes a woman because he desires her sexually or romantically, irrespective of her male relatives' disapproval. As I explored in the previous chapter, it can be unclear to what extent the woman does or does not wish to be seduced in the *Íslendingasögur*. This is especially true in cases with accidental feuds. What is clear, however, is that the male relatives' opinions are given more value than that of the woman. This is most evident in *Þórðar saga hreðu*. Ormr expresses open disdain for Þórðr's opinions on his continued visits to Sigríðr, his sister: 'hvárt Þórði líkaði vel eðr illa, — „skal hon þá vera friðla mín.'" (whether Þórðr likes it or not, "she shall be my mistress").¹⁰ The shame caused by Ormr's visits to Sigríðr are enough to incite Þórðr to murder him, even though Þórðr is well aware that Ormr has many powerful kinsmen and allies who would surely want to avenge him. It is made clear by all three characters involved that Þórðr's opinion on the 'seduction', rather than that of Sigríðr, is to be considered; all three voice concerns over his lack of consent before considering hers:

¹⁰ *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 187.

<p><u>Ormr (Aggressor)</u> hvárt Þórði líkaði vel eðr illa.¹¹</p> <p>Hann segir: „Ekki hirði ek um grýlur yðrar.“¹²</p>	<p><u>Sigríðr (Woman)</u> Hon bað hann eigi þat gera, kvað Þórði mundu þykkja verr.¹³</p> <p>Hon spurði, hví hann gerði slíkt, — „því at þetta er á móti mínum vilja, eða mantu eigi ályktarorð bróður míns?“¹⁴</p>	<p><u>Þórðr (Woman’s family)</u> Ok þá talaði Þórðr við Orm: „Þat vil ek Ormr, at þú hafir eigi hingat kvámur þínar til óþykktar við mik, en ósæmdar við systur mína.“¹⁵</p> <p style="text-align: right;">(Appendix I:1:II:1)</p>
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Þórðr’s opinion is of greater import than that of Sigríðr, according to all three parties. Sigríðr even attempts to use Þórðr’s unhappiness as a deterrent to Ormr’s advances before expressing her own unhappiness. The nature of the visits themselves is uncertain: in the first bout of visits the ambiguous but suggestive ‘talking with’ phrase is employed — ‘[hann] settist á tal með Sigríði’ ([he] got to talking with Sigríðr).¹⁶ In the final instance of Ormr’s visitations there is an ostensible escalation to blatantly sexual advances as he ‘gengr til hennar Sigríðar ok setr hana niðr ok leggr höfuð í kné henni ok leggr hennar hendr í höfuð sér’ (goes over to her, Sigríðr, and sets her down and lay his head on her knees and lay her hands on his head).¹⁷ Jochens has suggested that ‘a woman’s attention to a man’s hair was a token of love’, and ‘Intimacy is signalled when a man places his head in a woman’s lap and her hands frame his face’.¹⁸ Hence, in forcing his head onto Sigríðr’s knees, Ormr is committing a violent act against her: physically, emotionally, socially, and sexually. Given the placement of his head in her lap, the sexual implications are also salient. The breach of physical distance is

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 188.

¹³ Ibid., 187.

¹⁴ Ibid., 188.

¹⁵ Ibid., 187.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 188.

¹⁸ Jochens, *Women in Old Norse Society*, 71; 70.

euphemistically sexual and the saga writer's attention to bodily proximity is apparent as 'Ormr lá í knjám Sigríði' (Ormr lay on Sigríðr's knees).¹⁹

In trying to seduce Sigríðr against her will and the will of her brother, Ormr is characterised as both the deserving recipient of violence and as the incendiary device that sets ablaze the fire of feud. Jana Schulman adds that 'Þórðr, in killing Ormr, responds appropriately', and the role of these men in the seduction and protection of Sigríðr reveals 'what constitutes appropriate behavior in male-female relations'.²⁰ For Ormr's villainy to be apparent, his lack of regard for her and her brother's consent is key. He is driven by sexual desire; this is his undoing.

Grettir, too, is driven by his emotions in his attack, but unlike Sigríðr, the maidservant in *Grettis saga* lacks the powerful connections or family members to defend her, and if there are any vengeful repercussions to the attack, they are not relevant to the narrative. Ruth Mazo Karras' study, while flawed in some respects, as I have previously discussed, does draw attention to class divisions when it comes to rape: only women with powerful families spark feuds with their rapes or unsolicited 'visits'. Karras assesses the incident in *Grettis saga* as

One example of a man assuming sexual access to servant women [...] it is significant that the author has made it the servant (*griðkona*) whom Grettir pulls down to him rather than the daughter of the *bóndi*.²¹

Karras' point here is somewhat hampered by the fact that it is the *griðkona* who emasculates Grettir and not the farmer's daughter, thus making the former the focal point of his vengeance. Whether Grettir takes this into consideration when he decides to rape her is unclear; he is, after all, a character who takes risks and who does not necessarily conform to societal rules and expectations. However, unlike the incidents in *Þórðar saga hreðu*, where

¹⁹ *Þórðar saga hreðu*, 188.

²⁰ Jana K. Schulman, "Make Me a Match: Motifs of Betrothal in the Sagas of the Icelanders," *Scandinavian Studies* 69, no. 3 (1997): 310.

²¹ Karras, "Servitude and Sexuality," 297.

the lustful visits reap violent rewards, Grettir's rape of the servant has no repercussions for him, and it provokes no male relatives to take revenge, presumably because the servant lacks the rank for him to have caused her family dishonour. Sexual assault then, only rebounds on the aggressor if the victim is of high enough social status. The diminished value of a lower status woman when it comes to sexual violence is apparent throughout the corpus, from Yngvildr *fagrinn* to the *bondadætr* in *Bósa saga*.

Another iteration of the accidental feud is the general chaotic violence caused by *berserkir*. Although rapists are not limited to the socially marginal, as Ljungqvist has pointed out, some agents of sexual assault in the *Íslendingasögur* do exist beyond societal norms, and I will be discussing this in greater depth in Chapter III.²² William Ian Miller observes that 'Rapists, according to the Icelandic sources, lived mostly in Norway and Sweden and were berserks besides'.²³ Gareth Lloyd Evans dubs *berserkir* 'both hypermasculine and socially disruptive'.²⁴ They are men who are somewhat outside of the law and thus do not conform to the typical constraints of society observed in other men, and their tyranny is 'primarily of a sexual kind'.²⁵ *Berserkir* lack the same regard for rules and regulations which constrains and informs the behaviour of other men. They thus form their own hegemony, causing general chaos by raping women and committing violence against men, too. At times, they rape to take revenge on men, at others, they seem unmotivated by vengeance cycles and seem to rape out of lust. At the beginning of *Gísla saga*, the roaming *berserkr* Björn *inn blakki* wants 'at Ingibjörg hafi samrekkjur við hann slíka hrið sem honum sýndisk' (Ingibjörg to be in the same bed as him for as long as he liked).²⁶ This lexically echoes his introduction, which established his history of raping women: he 'lagði í rekkju hjá sér konur þeira ok dætr ok

²² Ljungqvist, "Rape in the Icelandic Sagas," 440.

²³ Miller, "Beating Up On Women," 763.

²⁴ Evans, *Men and Masculinities*, 135, n. 141.

²⁵ Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 46.

²⁶ *Gísla saga*, 6.

hafði við hönd sér slíka stund sem honum sýndisk’ (put into bed beside him their wives and daughters and kept them in his hands for as long as he liked).²⁷ When Ari (Ingibjörg’s husband) resists, Björn challenges him to a duel, which Ari loses. Inability to protect a female family member, Meulengracht Sørensen suggests, can even be interpreted as akin to an accusation of *ergi* ‘because the threat to a man’s wife is a threat to the very cement of the social structure: marriage and affinity, which are signs of peace and unity between men and families’.²⁸ Björn *inn blakki* seems to represent lust and thirst for male-male violence in interchangeable measure, and the *berserkr* figure thus cycles between centralising and destabilising the woman’s body as the focal point of sexual violence, seemingly not prioritising lust over bloodlust.

THE INCIDENTAL FEMALE BODY

However, *berserkir* who rape are not just agents of general chaos: an episode in *Grettis saga* shows their clear intent to rape women as an act of revenge against their household at large. In this incident, the saga writer makes it obvious that the *berserkir* intend to rape the women of Þorfinnr’s house, as he immediately sets up the kidnap and detainment of women as their primary misdemeanours:

Tveir bræðr eru nefndir til, at verstir váru; hét annarr Þórir þomb, en annarr Ögmundur illi; þeir váru háleyskir at ætt, meiri ok sterkari en aðrir menn. Þeir gengu berserksgang ok eirðu engu, þegar þeir reiddusk. Þeir tóku á brott konur manna ok dætr ok hǫfðu við hönd sér viku eða hálfan mánuð ok færðu síðan aptr þeim, sem áttu; þeir ræntu, hvar sem þeir kómu, eða gerðu aðrar óspekðir.²⁹ (Appendix I:1:II:2)

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 77.

²⁹ *Grettis saga*, 62.

The men have a blatant disregard for the women's consent in the farmhouse and 'Þórir kvazk eigi hirða, hvat konur nōgguðu' (Þórir said he did not care about the women's maundering).³⁰ There is a continued sense in this episode that the rape of women is the by-product of the affairs of men: the women are specifically designated in the above passage as 'konur manna ok dōtr'. The *berserkir* focus their subsequent crime against Þorfinnr, who had been the most vehement proponent of their outlawry and 'þóttusk þeir honum eiga fullan fjándskað at gjalda' (they felt that he should be repaid with great enmity).³¹ They are portrayed as lacking restraint. At the whim of their base urges, they release unbridled rage and pursue sexual desire. This episode helps to delineate the line between socially-acceptable violence and socially-reprehensible violence; Grettir emerges as the hero. An outcast himself, it is by overcoming these outcasts — and protecting women from rape, instead of being the rapist himself — that he briefly earns himself societal acceptance again.

This episode falls into the category of instances in the *Íslendingasögur* wherein a man specifically weaponises 'seduction' — whether that might mean persuasion, coercion, or outright force — in order to rile a woman's male relatives. Two examples in the *Íslendingasögur* fit into this category. In *Njáls saga*, Mōrðr advises that Þorgeirr 'seduces' Ormhildr with the specific goal of riling Gunnarr: '„er þat nú ráð mitt, at Þorgeirr Otkelsson fifli Ormhildi, frændkonu Gunnars, en Gunnarr mun af því láta vaxa óþokka við þik.“' ("I now advise that you *seduce* Ormhildr, Gunnarr's kinswoman, but Gunnarr will as a result of this let his animosity grow towards you").³² Similarly, in *Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu*, as part of a plot against Skúta, Þóroddr tells Þorgrímr to seduce his foster-daughter: '„skaltu fiflask á Sigríði fōstru hans ok gefa henni mart“' ("you should *seduce* Sigríðr, his foster-

³⁰ Ibid., 65.

³¹ Ibid., 62.

³² *Njáls saga*, 174.

daughter and give her many things”).³³ As I have already established, *fifla* does not always denote consent on the woman’s part; however, *Njáls saga* and *Reykðæla saga* demonstrate the intentional weaponisation of the woman’s body: Ormhildr and Sigríðr are constructed as convenient means of upsetting Gunnarr and Skúta respectively, as opportune as a horse to steal or some land upon which to encroach. The women’s emotions are considered irrelevant to the male aggressors, their bodies merely political ground on which to wage feuds.

Consent is therefore dubious at best in these two instances. Meanwhile in *Víglundar saga* it is apparent that Einarr wants to rape Ólof to provoke Þorgrímr, her husband, into losing face:

„Illa þykir mér, at Þorgrímr inn þrúði hefir svá mikil metorð hér í heraðinu; ætla ek at vita, ef ek komumst á muni við Ólofu, konu hans; mundi þá vera annathvært, at hann mundi leita at hefna eða metnaðr hans mundi lægjast“.³⁴ (Appendix I:1:II:3)

This episode is a clear attempt at rape and demonstrates the vulnerability of a household without a man present:

Ólof húsfreyja hafði þat boðit einni heimakonu sinni, at hvern morgin skyldi hon læsa karldyrum, er karlmenn færi til verks síns.³⁵ (Appendix I:1:II:4)

Ólof’s anxieties about a female-targeted attack are realised when Einarr does enter the household. His intent to rape her is thwarted in a humorous way when Ólof cleverly dresses up as a man named Óttarr and chases him out of the house. A presumably comedic image is evoked by the tiny but incandescent ‘man’: ‘Maðrinn var ekki stórr vexti, en allreiðuligr var hann’ (The person was not particularly large, but he was extremely angry).³⁶ This episode may be a subversion of a real threat that never appears in the sagas but was enough of a reality to engender a particularly esoteric law prohibiting a man from donning a woman’s

³³ *Reykðæla saga ok Víga-Skútu*, 241.

³⁴ *Víglundar saga*, 77.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 78.

headdress with an aim ‘til velar við kono’ (to beguile a woman) (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§155). It was therefore, to some extent, an established practice — albeit a condemnable one — for men to use female attire to gain access to female spaces to rape them; here Ólof assumes the guise of a man — an act likewise condemned within this lawcode — to avoid her own rape.³⁷

Ólof knows the dangers of being in an undefended household (i.e. without men), and she knows that men only respond to other men. She assures her handmaiden that no danger will befall her, showing an empathetic awareness of the impact of a potential rape. If there are any instances of men reassuring women that no sexual violence will befall them in the Old Norse corpus, I have not been able to find them. Sexual violence here in *Víglundar saga* is coded as a man’s business: to be committed by a man (Einarr), prevented by a ‘man’ (‘Óttarr’) and avenged by a man (Þorgrímr). Evans suggests that Ólof’s turn as ‘Óttarr’ ‘must not be regarded merely as masculinity — but rather as *female* masculinity’ and in using such a ‘masculinity to defend herself — while also reassuring her maid that she will let no harm come to her either — Þorgrímr’s lack of reaction could be read as impotent’.³⁸ While this episode is initially constructed as a triumvirate of male agency and impact, Ólof’s emotional and social understanding of male violence enables her to thwart it.

A MATTER OF HONOUR

Before disguising her handmaid as herself to protect herself from rape, Ólof promises ‘„ek skal svá til sjá, at þú fáir öngva skömm af honum”’ (“I’ll see to it that you get no shame from

³⁷ The act of men wearing women’s clothes or vice versa is also condemned in *Grágás* K§254.

³⁸ Gareth Lloyd Evans, “Female Masculinity and the Sagas of Icelanders,” in *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature*, ed. Gareth Lloyd Evans and Jessica Clare Hancock, Studies in Old Norse Literature (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2020), 68.

him”).³⁹ So, although *Víglundar saga* certainly casts men — or masculine performances — as a triumvirate of aggressor, aggressee, and rescuer when it comes to sexual violence, this does not elide the potential experience of the woman herself, should she be raped. Likewise in *Grettis saga*, Þorfinnr’s wife thanks Grettir for rescuing her and her household from ‘skemmd’ (shame).⁴⁰ She repeats an almost identical sentiment to her husband later: ‘„en lá oss við svá mikilli svívirðingu, at vér hefðim aldri bót fengit, ef eigi hefði vetraksmaðr þinn hjálpat oss.”’ (“but we came close to a great disgrace from which we would never have got a remedy, if your winter workman had not helped us”).⁴¹ These ‘shame’ words — *skemmd*, *skömm*, *svívirðing*, as well as *ósæmd* (used to refer to Ormr’s aggression of Ólof in *Þórðar saga hréðu*) — refer to the entire event of the rape and its accompanying attributes of dishonour.⁴² These associated lexemes refer to an act that changes the victim, infecting her with an incurable shame that lasts a lifetime. In *Kjalnesinga saga*, Búi says he cannot be with Ólof after she is kidnapped and impregnated by Kolfiðr because ‘ek vil nú þó ekki elska hana, síðan Kolfiðr hefir spilt henni”’ (“I cannot love her now, since Kolfiðr has spoiled her”).⁴³ Here it is a verb, *spilla*, which is used, putting Kolfiðr in the active voice and describing the action of spoiling Ólof via rape (rather than the overall fallout from the assault, as do the other three sagas). There is a visceral, active sense here of the transformative quality of rape: Ólof has been ‘spoiled’ and therefore cannot be accepted by Búi. Just as *fífla* often seems to connote public disapproval, so too do ‘shame’ words attribute great import to what rape does to the victim’s honour.

Kjalnesinga saga, *Þórðar saga hréðu*, *Grettis saga*, and *Víglundar saga* are all relatively late *Íslendingasögur* (written ca. 1310–1320; ca. 1350; ca. 1320–1400; ca. 1400,

³⁹ *Víglundar saga*, 78.

⁴⁰ *Grettis saga*, 69.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴² *Þórðar saga hréðu*, 187.

⁴³ *Kjalnesinga saga*, 40.

respectively), and contain the only instances of shaming and defilement in relation to sexual violence.⁴⁴ Ljungqvist suggests that this

might well reflect a change in the perception of women's bodily integrity during the fourteenth century. This change reflected stronger continental cultural influences and may be understood in terms of Iceland being more heavily aristocratically dominated, a stronger impact of ecclesiastical views on female chastity and/or a change in the view of women as legal subject.⁴⁵

According to Margaret Clunies Ross, the 'illicit love visit' was of considerable consternation to male family members because 'a violation of a woman's sexual integrity is thought to reflect directly upon the honour of the man who is her guardian', hence why 'women's activities are usually closely invigilated by their male kin'.⁴⁶ Somewhat surprisingly, however, loss of virginity outside marriage does not appear to be a major factor in viewing women as sexually transgressive. Shame and defilement are rarely objects of great concern, and 'There is little to indicate that women's honour in such cases was closely linked to their sexuality'.⁴⁷ Indeed, as Jack Goody notes, 'notions [of honour and shame] appear to be connected more with women in the Mediterranean region and in Southern Europe, and more with property in the North'.⁴⁸ Agnes Arnórsdóttir has found that in wedding speeches dating from the period before 1550, the purity of a bride was of utmost importance, which is at odds with the lack of importance attributed to 'The sexual innocence of a maiden' in the earlier saga literature.⁴⁹ Agnes' findings reflect Ljungqvist's hypothesis about the appearance of 'shame' words in later *Íslendingasögur*, as she suggests that chastity grew in importance as time went on: 'at the same time as stronger control of sexual behavior was emerging, the

⁴⁴ Annette Lassen, *The Sagas of Icelanders: An Introduction to All Forty Sagas with Summaries* (New York: Routledge, 2025), 96; 103; 85; 105.

⁴⁵ Ljungqvist, "Rape in the Icelandic Sagas," 435. Note Ljungqvist does not refer to *Þorðar saga hréðu* here.

⁴⁶ Margaret Clunies Ross, "Þórr's Honour," in *Studien zum Altgermanischen: Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, ed. Heiko Uecker (Berlin; New York: De Gruyter, 1994), 50.

⁴⁷ Bandlien, *Strategies of Passion*, 87.

⁴⁸ Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 212.

⁴⁹ Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Property*, 280.

romantic notion of pure and innocent love between the virgin and her bridegroom was reinforced'.⁵⁰ Most other instances of dishonouring based on sexual activity arise because the woman in question is married: extra-marital, rather than pre-marital, sex is condemned.⁵¹ Often, too, a man who sleeps with a married woman faces more consequences and is seen as insulting her husband. In *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallsonar*, for instance, Þórhaddr tries to slander Þorsteinn by saying that he is sleeping with Haukr's wife and in doing so, Þórhaddr says, '„svivirþing gerir þu Hauki"' ("you are causing shame to Haukr").⁵² Other instances of shaming typically defend against personal slights or concerns about parental obligations such as those eschewed by Ívarr who, in *Þorsteins þátr uxafóts*, calls Þorsteinn 'pútuson' (son of a whore) because he does not want to accept paternal responsibility for him.⁵³

ORDEAL

Alternatively, shame is also levelled at women who have more than one lover. In *Ljósvetninga saga*, Ísolfr, speaking of his pregnant daughter, Friðgerðr, deplors the '„ámæli vándra manna"' ("corruption of wicked men"). He puts the blame on the men who have had sex with his daughter.⁵⁴ Others, meanwhile, clearly view her as promiscuous, suggesting that '„Er dóttir þín kona eigi fálynd ok eigi einn líkligri en annarr til þokka með hennu"' ("Your daughter is not exactly withdrawn, and one person is no more likely than another to have been taken into her graces").⁵⁵ It is not made clear whether the sex which she is purported to have had with multiple partners was against her will, although she is said to get 'mikla ógleði' (great melancholy) when accused of being so promiscuous that she does not know

⁵⁰ Ibid., 285.

⁵¹ See for instance *Droplaugarsona saga*, in which Droplaug is accused of adultery, a slanderous remark, *illmælit*, 147.

⁵² *Þorsteins saga Síðu-Hallsonar*, 305.

⁵³ *Þorsteins þátr uxafóts*, 357.

⁵⁴ *Ljósvetninga saga*, 66.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

who the father is.⁵⁶ This is not an unreasonable emotional reaction and therefore cannot be said to refer with any certainty to unwillingness in any of her sexual liaisons. Overall, the episode could give the impression of a wayward daughter beyond the control of either her father or guardian, who ends up pregnant with no man willing to claim paternity. Indicators of this scenario are the fact that her father sends her away because she has started to ‘tala við’ a young man, and that she chooses to go to Veisa to stay with the foster-brothers Brandr and Høskuldr. The shame Ísolfr speaks of stems from the illegitimate pregnancy rather than suggesting that there was any sexual force involved.

On the other hand, Ísolfr — whose perspective may admittedly be biased — claims that the foster-brothers ‘„heptu ferð hennar [...] ok dvöðu hana til svívirðingar”’ (“restrained her and detained her into shame”), which perhaps implies that Friðgerðr was physically restrained.⁵⁷ *Hefta* means ‘bind’ or ‘restrain’ and often refers to the tethering of horses, while *dvelja* can also possess similar connotations of ‘delay[ing]’ or ‘keep[ing] back’.⁵⁸ Furthermore, it is reported that ‘kvað hon sína ferð óþekkiliga orðit hafa’ (she said her journey had been most unpleasant), with *óþekkiligr* being a word often used to describe malevolent presences, including a woman who Án, in *Laxdæla saga*, dreams pins him to a bed and rips open his belly ‘ok tók á brott innnyflin ok lét koma í staðinn hrís’ (and took out my innards and in their place put brushwood).⁵⁹ The word therefore seems a strong one, denoting terror and the potential for violence. Friðgerðr is also repeatedly said to be ‘sæmilig’ (honourable), which seems an unlikely word to use of a woman with such a reputation for promiscuity. In this scenario, rather than a promiscuous woman, it would be an episode containing some degree of sexual violence for which the woman concerned is then

⁵⁶ Ibid., 65.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁸ Cleasby-Vigfússon, s.v. ‘hepta’; ‘dvelja’.

⁵⁹ *Ljósvetninga saga*, 65; *Laxdæla saga*, 149.

blamed. In line with my evaluation in Chapter I, this is another episode which could be read as either consensual or non-consensual.

The ensuing cloud of distrust that enshrouds the identity of the child's father exhibits a form of violence against women barely mentioned in the sagas but which is a culturally recurring phenomenon across much of medieval Europe: ordeal.⁶⁰ Friðgerðr must prove her trustworthiness in identifying the father of her unborn child by 'ordeal of iron', in a case which, according to Miller, 'might be seen as coercive, not of subject by lord or thingman by *goði*, but of women by men'.⁶¹ Miller does note that some of the men are reluctant to see Friðgerðr undergo such an unnecessarily painful retrial. *Grágás*, however, speaks to the especially harsh treatment of women who attempt to conceal the paternity of their child, where physical force is permissible to uncover the truth: 'Sva *scal hann* pina hana at hvarki verðe at orkumbl ne ilit' (He is to use force in such a way that neither lasting injury nor visible mark remains) (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§161). Friðgerðr is resolutely shamed for having sex with multiple men, but it is hard to detect whether or not this sex is consensual.

The very fact that she is with child may be a nod to the 'very old argument' that pregnancy was believed only to be possible when sex was, in some part, desired.⁶² According to Thomas Laqueur, the physiological basis for this judgement was not questioned until the nineteenth century, and he cites Soranus of Ephesus, writing in the second century AD, as one of the earliest proponents of this myth:

⁶⁰ See for instance Hans Jacob Orning, "Making King Hákon Great Again: Law, God, Morality and Power in Björgvin, 1223," in *Narrating Law and Laws of Narration in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. Roland Scheel (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 64–6.

⁶¹ Miller, "Beating Up On Women," 199.

⁶² Thomas Walter Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge, Mass; London: Harvard University Press, 1990), 161.

καὶ γὰρ εἴ τις βιαθεῖται συνέλαβον, ἔστι καὶ ἐπὶ τούτων εἰπεῖν, ὅτι τὸ μὲν τῆς ὀρέξεως πάντως πάθος καὶ ταύταις παρήν, ἐπεσκοτεῖτο δὲ ὑπὸ ψυχικῆς κρίσεως.⁶³
(Appendix I:1:II:5)

This line of argumentation is an extension of the concept I discussed in Chapter I relating to women’s capacity to orgasm during rape, which dictates a difference between bodily lust and appetite and ‘mental resolve’, since thinkers such as Soranus believe both women and men must have *ὄρεξις* (appetite) in order to conceive.⁶⁴ It is difficult to know precisely whether such thoughts were subscribed to in Iceland. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir has suggested that Sedentiana’s enjoyment of her rape and subsequent pregnancy in *Sigurðar saga þogla* may reflect these concepts.⁶⁵ However, as I shall discuss in Chapter III, Þórnara of *Svarfdæla saga* falls pregnant after being *hertekin* by the *berserkr* Snækollr, which is strongly implied to have been against her will. The children in *Helga þáttr*, which I discuss in Chapter V, are also demonstrably conceived from rape. If the truism that pregnancy negated rape had permeated Iceland then it was not a view held homogenously among all saga writers. If we are to assume, however, that the writer of *Ljósvetninga saga* subscribed to such a truism, this could explain why male fears around Friðgerðr’s promiscuity and her possible mendacity fuel a ritualistic shaming, which takes narrative priority above whether or not her pregnancy was begotten of rape. If such a truism was not a factor for the writer, then we can only infer from the other evidence — such as her father likening her to a tethered horse — whether or not she was complicit in the conception of her child. In either case, she is resolutely shamed.

⁶³ Soranus, *Sorani Gynaeciorum libri iv. De signis fracturarum. De fasciis. Vita Hippocratis secundum Soranum*, ed. Johannes Ilberg, Corpus Medicorum Graecorum (Lipsiae; Berolini: Teubner, 1927), 26. Translation taken from Soranus, *Soranus’ Gynecology*, trans. Owsei Temkin, Gynecology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 36.

⁶⁴ Soranus, *Gynaeciorum*, 26.

⁶⁵ ‘tók hann hana með afli, og undrast hún það mjög, hversu hans líkami var gleðilegur viðkomu, og það, hversu sterklega að hún var nú höndluð’ (he took her with force, and she was surprised by how delightful his body was against hers, and moreover how strongly he handled her), *Sigurðar saga þogla*, 208; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Bodies, Words, and Power*, 122.

THE EXPERIENT FEMALE BODY

Beyond shame and damage to social standing — or physical torture for women viewed as promiscuous for having had intercourse with many men, against their will or otherwise — the *Íslendingasögur* are not silent about the impact of rape on a surviving woman. While, as I have previously discussed, male consent is often given primacy in visitations of a sexual nature with women, I turn my focus now to the women themselves. Contrary to previous scholarship, Bell has asserted that

the impact of sexual violence on women is highlighted by the saga authors. We see women shrieking, fighting back, weeping, taking revenge, and more often than not, the saga authors make sure we know that these acts are done “*að óvilja hennar*”.⁶⁶

Prior to Bell, female reaction to sexual violence had largely been overlooked, due to both the ambiguity and reticence I have already identified, alongside scholarly prioritisation of male attitudes. ‘In patriarchal culture’, says Carolyne Larrington, ‘it is precisely the feminine which is silenced’, and, writing on the male gaze in the eddic poem *Skírnismál*, she has further suggested a gender-based ‘uneasiness in reading [...] especially where the text deals specifically with a woman’s sexual response’.⁶⁷ My aim, then, is to expose and examine this gendered unease in the *Íslendingasögur*, as Larrington does with *Skírnismál*. To this end, I analyse several examples of sexual violence perpetrated against women that do not victimise male relatives at all, and thus seem solely designed to impact female experience. The most concrete example is part of the ‘tragedy of Helga Bárðardóttir’ in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*.⁶⁸ Separated from her family and her lover, Helga retreats into solitude and, due to her enigmatic harp-playing, becomes a figure of interest to a man named Hrafn:

⁶⁶ Bell, “Reconsideration,” 13.

⁶⁷ Larrington, “Mær and Munr,” 5; 3. Larrington suggests that in *Skírnismál*, it is straightforward for male readers to be aligned with Freyr and Skírnir, and male scholars have typically elided the more ‘unsettling implications of the reading position which *Skírnismál* demands’, 3. A female-gendered reading position is less straightforward, and more unsettling.

⁶⁸ Ármann Jakobsson, “History of the Trolls? *Bárðar Saga* as an Historical Narrative,” *Saga-Book* 25 (1998): 63.

Austmaðr var með þeim feðgum, er Hrafn hét. Opt töluðu menn um þat, at eigi þóttust vita, hver þessi kona var. Hrafn leiddi þar einhverr mestan grun á, ok eina nótt forvitnaðist hann undir tjaldit; sá hann, at Helga sat upp í einum serk. Honum sýndist konan fríð mjök. Vildi hann upp í sængina ok undir klæðin hjá henni, en hon vildi þat eigi. Tókust þau þá til ok skildu með því, at sundr gekk í Hrafn Austmanni inn hægri handleggr ok inn vinstri fótleggr.⁶⁹ (Appendix I:1:II:6)

Hilda Ellis Davidson sums this scene up as follows: ‘Once a man tried to discover who she was, and had an arm and a leg broken for his interference’.⁷⁰ This is a marked oversimplification. Despite being subdued significantly by euphemism, the scene is ostensibly one of attempted rape, with the saga writer deploying chiasmus to diametrically present the two participants at opposite ends of the spectrum of desire: ‘Vildi hann [...] hon vildi þat eigi’. The encounter is made all the more unsettling by its voyeuristic nature and the stress on Hrafn’s desire to disturb the private serenity of a woman’s bedchamber. There is a hint of paronomasia with the word *klæðin*, here meaning ‘bedclothes’, but with the double meaning of ‘garments’, thus implying his desire to be under her clothes, not just the bedclothes. The polysemy of the word renders its precise meaning unclear, although the omission of a possessive adjective may relegate the meaning to ‘bed-clothes’, thus keeping the violation of intimacy at bay.⁷¹ Euphemisms for sex are frequent throughout the *Íslendingasögur*, with semantic scripts often established via the focus on body parts other than genitalia (the belly, for instance, is a popular euphemism) or with objects associated with sexual intercourse, as with *klæðin* here.⁷² ‘The male gaze did not yet dominate the general optic’, Jochens proposes, and this is substantially true, likely as a result of the general

⁶⁹ *Bárðar saga*, 123–4.

⁷⁰ H. R. Ellis Davidson, “Fostering by Giants in Old Norse Saga Literature,” *Medium Ævum* 10, no. 2 (1941): 76.

⁷¹ ONP, s.v. ‘klæði’.

⁷² See for instance: *Eyrbyggja saga* ‘„ok klappa um kerlingar nárann”’ (“and pat the woman’s groin”), 28; in *Njáls saga*, Glúmr is accused of having ‘engis afla nema bröta a maga Hallgerði’ (having no strength except to tumble about on Hallgerðr’s belly), 49; *Grettis saga* ‘„klappa um kviðinn á konu Bárðar”’ (“to pat the belly of Bárðr’s wife”), 51–2.

aversion to overt sexual detail.⁷³ The phrasing ‘í sængina [...] hjá henni’ echoes the aforementioned lawcode: ‘Ef maðr fellir *ser* kono eða fer isæing hia henne. til þess at hann vill coma legorðe fram við hana’ (If a man lowers himself onto a woman or gets into bed beside her with the intent of getting intercourse from her) (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§155). The evasive positional language here is thus perhaps not stylistic but rather representative of the phrasing for sexual intercourse (perhaps specifically sexual violence) that was acceptable in legal texts.

In *Bárðar saga*, however, the reluctance to describe the violence of the attempted rape creates further distance from the episode than just the typical sexual reticence observed throughout the *Íslendingasögur*. Indeed, the absence of the struggle’s inherent violence is notable because explicit, detailed violence between men is so abundant in the corpus. The use of the euphemistic *klæðin* here maintains the detachment from sexual violence similar to that observed in the scene between Grettir and the maidservant; the basic information provided — that Hrafn wants to be in Helga’s bed and that she does not want this — is a sparse emotional sketch of what is surely quite a violent and unpleasant scene. This violence is encapsulated in the laconic phrasing ‘Tókust þau þá til’. Compounding this is the fact that the struggle does not play out in ‘real time’, but is rather communicated after the fact through details of Hrafn’s injuries. This means that while the scene is in some ways intimate and invasive due to the bedchamber setting and Helga’s state of undress, there yet remains a sense of detachment: whatever harm he does or attempts to do to her is left unsaid. ‘Skildu með því’ parallels the *Grettis saga* incident’s ‘en svá skilðu þau’, but the silence regarding the incident itself creates a dramatic tension as it forces the reader to imagine the details, recalling Larrington’s gendered ‘uneasiness’.

⁷³ Jochens, “Male Gaze,” 3.

The *Íslendingasögur* contain only one other portrayal of rape that is physically fought off by a woman in a physical tussle. It concerns another Helga. In *Króka-Refs saga*, Helga's husband Narfi 'bauð þeim á varygð mikla, at þeir gengi aldri svá frá skemmuni, at Helga væri þar ein eptir' (asked [his men] to take great care that they never went so far from the hut that Helga was left alone).⁷⁴ Inevitably, the men are remiss in obeying Narfi's command and Skálp-Grani (Sheath-Grani) enters the house where Helga sits alone, explaining that he has arrived there '„at ek vil mér konu kaupa“' ("because I want to buy myself a woman").⁷⁵ When she tells him to go elsewhere, he declines to do so:

Hon bað hann ganga til þess í annan stað. Grani kvað þat ósæmiligt, at gamall maðr ætti unga konu, svá fríða ok fagra. Hon kveðst mundu vera fyrir honum sjálfráða. Grani kveðst mundu vera ekki færavandr ok tók til Helgu. Hon sprettr upp ok verst: slær þar í glímu, ok í því kemr Narfi til gluggans ok sér inn. En er Grani sér skuggann bera fyrir gluggann, þá slízt hann ór höndum Helgu ok leitar til dyranna. Narfi vildi ok komast fyrir dyrrnar. Grani komst þá út fyrr ok hefir þegar á rás. Helga hljóp ok til dyranna ok vill þrífa til Narfa, — „ok láttu Grana fara,“ segir hon, „því at hann hefir öngri eigu þinni spillt.“ Narfi sleit Helgu af sér ok hljóp eptir Grana ok eggjar hann at bíða.⁷⁶ (Appendix I:1:II:7)

Helga manages to wrestle with Grani, but he runs away as soon as Narfi appears. Following her brush with sexual assault, Helga's main concern is to stop her husband from killing her would-be rapist, presumably because he will face legal penalties if he does so. She tells Narfi that she has not been 'spilt', constructing herself as one of his belongings and implying that Grani's attempted assault has primarily affected her husband. *Spilla*, as I discussed above, is a particularly shame-coded way of referring to rape, and so despite Helga's depersonalisation of herself, with this verb she implicitly refers to her own potential, personal consequences.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Króka-Refs saga*, 151.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Króka-Refs saga* is, much like the other sagas which use 'shame' words for rape, a late saga, written ca. 1325-75, Lassen, *All Forty Sagas*, 91.

Her primary reaction to the assault is to attempt to arrest the inevitable ensuing feud chain but as Narfi catches and kills Grani, she is unsuccessful. The rape attempt serves no other purpose and we do not hear from Helga on the topic again. It is tempting to read this episode in *Króka-Refs saga* as somewhat humorous, given the comedic nomenclature of ‘Skálp-Grani’ and ‘Sverðhúss Grani’, as well as the numerous jokes and puns that ensue as Narfi defends himself regarding the killing. Furthermore, there is a peculiar musicality to the rape scene and the rhyming of ‘skuggann’ with ‘gluggann’, as well as the ambivalent likening of the violent tussle to a ‘glíma’ (a wrestling match). The scene could almost be played off as slapstick: while more of the physical fight is described here than is in the attempted rape scene in *Bárðar saga*, the narrative silences of the latter are given weight by the narrative attention to Helga Bárðardóttir’s heightened reaction to the attempted rape.

The palpable personal aftermath of the incident in *Bárðar saga* speaks to Helga’s emotionality. It is assumed, given the fact that Hrafn’s injuries seem to be extensive whereas Helga’s are not mentioned, that he was unsuccessful in his attempt to assault her. However, the trauma of the experience lingers on in what remains of her narrative. We are told numerous times that she is beautiful, engendering a distinct sense that the male gaze which repeatedly falls upon her is a blight to her existence and a continued source of her increasing victimisation.⁷⁸ This abject voyeurism evokes Larrington’s analysis of the *jǫtunn* Gerðr’s eventual submission to Freyr’s voyeuristic desires, having to ‘answer Freyr’s embassy by saying “the female word yes”’.⁷⁹ This submission, Larrington argues, is an inevitable capitulation to the patriarchal world in which Gerðr finds herself: in order to remain in it, she must submit to it. Helga, however, says “no” through her responsive violence towards her

⁷⁸ In *Bárðar saga*, all of Bárðr’s daughters are described as ‘miklar ok ásjáligar’ (tall and beautiful), 114; Helga is described as ‘kvenna vænst’ (the most beautiful of women), 115.

⁷⁹ Larrington, “Mær and Munr,” 14. Here Larrington quotes James Joyce, *Selected Letters*, ed. Richard Ellman (New York: Viking Press, 1975), 285.

attacker, but this “no” casts her ever further from society, away from the watchful male gaze and into solitude.

Both Helgas defy Rolf Heller’s rule that ‘Die Frau greift nie aktiv ein; sie ist der Punkt, um den sich die Handlung dreht’ (The woman never actively intervenes; she is the point around which the plot revolves).⁸⁰ While *Króka-Refs saga*’s Helga is primarily concerned with male-male violence and androcentric repercussions of the attempted rape, her physical resistance poses an uncomfortable and unanswered question as the audience is left wondering whether or not she would have been able to fend her attacker off single-handedly if Narfi had not appeared at exactly the right moment. Her self-depersonalisation functions to try and prevent more violence while also speaking to women’s positionality and awareness of their own position in feuds. Such an awareness both reinforces and deconstructs the truism that the rape of women is a mere link in a feud chain, as it highlights not just the situation but also Helga’s awareness of this situation. Furthermore, Helga’s vulnerability in being left alone at home, and similarly that of Ólof and her housemaid in *Víglundar saga*, speak to an anxiety concerning the rapability of women in a house without a physical male presence.

The attack in *Bárðar saga* also speaks to such anxieties, but goes much further in depicting Helga’s emotional reaction to the attempted rape. She falls prey to several men over the course of her life, and the tragic series of violent acts propel her into a life of increasing nomadism. Her plight begins when, during play, she is pushed by the young Rauðfeldr onto an ice-floe which floats for seven days until it comes to Greenland. Displaced from her family and the protection of her father, she soon becomes prone to poetic lamentations, longing for her home. Eventually, she is taken in by a man named Skeggi, who ‘tók Helgu at sér ok hafði við hana fylgjuag’ (took Helga to himself and had her as a concubine).⁸¹ Despite

⁸⁰ Heller, *Literarische Darstellung*, 54, n. 6.

⁸¹ *Bárðar saga*, 116.

the interiority accessed through her lyrical lamentation, when it comes to the sexual relationship between Skeggi and Helga, she remains defined by what she is to him (i.e. his concubine), but it is difficult to gain a sense of who he is to her. We are told, in brief, that Helga helps him in his combative exploits even to the point of nearly giving her life for him: ‘Helga hjálpaði honum til ok gaf honum nálíga líf’ (Helga helped him with this and nearly gave up her life for him).⁸² Little information is provided about the relationship, then, but given Helga’s vulnerability and presumed youth, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir’s assessment of it as ‘grooming’ does seem likely, especially as she suggests that this is what causes ‘the young Helga to become emotionally dependent on him’ hence ‘why she unravels after he casts her off’.⁸³ Indeed, Helga’s plight does become increasingly pronounced, and she is a rare example — outside of eddic texts — of a woman allowed to lament because of the violence done to her.

Helga seems to find solace in music and lyricism: ‘Hon sló hörpu nær allar nætr, því at henni varð þá enn sem optar ekki mjök svefnsamt’ (She played the harp nearly every night, because she was even then, as before, not prone to sleeping).⁸⁴ Insomnia is, of course, a classic symptom of melancholia. Here we see Helga perhaps finding comfort in her music, recovering from the trauma of being groomed by a man, growing dependent on him and being separated from him. Music has long been identified as a ‘traditional remedy soothing the effects of melancholy’.⁸⁵ The idea that music was supposed to heal and uplift one’s spirit was, according to Yonatan Bar-Yoshafat, especially prevalent in the Middle Ages: ‘During the Middle Ages, not only sacred music but secular music too seemed to display eschewal of

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Valkyrie: The Women of the Viking World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 46. Bárðr separates Helga from Skeggi, upon learning that he has a wife (*Bárðar saga*, 122.)

⁸⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁸⁵ Dominic E. Delarue and John Raimo, “Melancholy and Its Sisters: Transformations of a Concept from Homer to Lars von Trier,” *History of European Ideas* 47, no. 6 (2021): 830.

excessive sadness’.⁸⁶ Applying this maxim to Helga — a victim of separated love — suggests that perhaps Helga’s harp-playing is an act of self-soothing rather than ‘self-indulgence in sadness’.⁸⁷ Skeggi, Helga’s lover, is said to be attracted to her after hearing her speak in verse. After being separated from him, she utters the following ornate lament:

Braut vil ek bráðla leita;
 brestr eigi stríð í flestu
 mér fyrir menja rýri,
 mun ek dáliga kálast,
 því at ek auðspenni unnak
 alteitum sefa heitum;
 sorg má ek sízt því byrgja,
 sit ek ein; trega greinum.⁸⁸ (Appendix I:1:II:8)

We can thus see this as a tragic, romantic, and wistful elegising. In her misery she creates poetry and plays music: hers is a kind of generative melancholy. According to Victoria Smith, ‘Performing loss/acting out provides a route to a partial working out/recovery and to overcoming trauma’.⁸⁹ Regardless of whether Helga’s harp playing is a rumination on sadness or a self-soothing lament, it is potentially because she plays the harp that she is nearly raped. Just as the sound of her verse attracted Skeggi to her, Hrafn hears about this mysterious harp-playing woman and goes and peers into her bedroom and, when Helga retreats from society this second time following Hrafn’s attack, her harp playing is not mentioned again. The harp is absent after Helga’s escaped rape; she embraces solitude and nothing makes her happy:

Litlu síðar hvarf Helga þaðan í burt ok fór víða um Ísland ok festi hvergi yndi; var hon alls staðar með dul, en optast fjarri mönnum.⁹⁰ (Appendix I:1:II:9)

⁸⁶ Yonatan Bar-Yoshafat, “On the Musically Melancholic: Temporality and Affects in Western Music History,” *History of European Ideas* 47, no. 6 (2021): 923.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Bárðar saga*, 122.

⁸⁹ Victoria L. Smith, “Generative Melancholy: Women’s Loss and Literary Representation,” *Mosaic* 41, no. 4 (2008): 108.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

The harp's music is perhaps no longer available to her because it may prompt other men to seek her out and assault her, or perhaps because this melancholy is no longer generative. Now existing not just in solitude but silence too, it seems that Helga has moved from one type of trauma to another.

Her almost complete withdrawal from society is thus a cumulative result of the attempted rape and her doomed relationship with Skeggi, and she evolves into a figure of pathos. Notably, the emotional toll of these encounters on Helga serves no purpose for any male feuding plots, and Hrafn's attempt to rape her is unique in that it follows on from her emotional and societal withdrawal. However, *Bárðar saga* is an atypical member of the *Íslendingasögur* and is less driven by feud narratives; it is rather a saga concerned with descendants and Bárðr's vain attempts to establish a lineage.⁹¹ Helga's 'tragedy' may not be woven into feud narratives, as so many 'illicit love visits' are, but rather serves a different narrative function. The digressions within the saga may reflect the saga at large, and Helga's tragedy therein helps to illustrate the wider tragedy of the titular character: inability to produce a family line. Her tragedy can thus be seen as supporting male narratives, but in a markedly different manner from the usual way in which rape functions as a chain in a feud narrative. Indeed, Helga's tragedy is just that: a tragedy, and while it may serve to support a wider narrative of loss, this sense of loss is created because of the attention the narrative pays to her plight and her shifting modes of melancholy.

WOMEN *EN MASSE*

Grettis saga and *Hallfreðar saga*, meanwhile, offer different representations of a woman's reaction to the threat of rape. Both depict large groups of men assailing an entire household,

⁹¹ See, for instance, Ármann Jakobsson, "History of the Trolls?," 64.

and both depict very different levels of emotive response. First, I return to the aforementioned scene in *Grettis saga*, which features *berserkir* intending to rape a full household of women. Despite the focus on male interactions here, the saga writer provides insight into the plight of the women of Þorfinnr's household. There is a clear progression in their emotional reaction, lurching from fear and misery to anger. Upon hearing Grettir's dry quip that '„megu þær þá eigi yfir sinn hlut sjá"' ("they won't go wanting"), the women are visibly and audibly upset: 'Nú stukku fram konur allar, ok sló á þær óhug miklum ok gráti' (now all the women fled from the room, and were struck with bouts of great despair and weeping).⁹² This swells into rage as the evening draws on, their fates seem increasingly inevitable, and Grettir's façade as the enabler of the assailants has gone uncracked: 'Þær báðu honum ills á móti; var inn mesti úlfabytr til þeira at heyra' (they cursed him; the greatest wolf-cry could be heard from them).⁹³ This canid cry, remarkably, is later echoed by the *berserkir*, who fly into a *berserk*-rage when they suspect Grettir of treachery and 'grenja sem hundar' (howl like dogs).⁹⁴ These dog- and wolf- sounds link the groups of women and men in their feelings of rage and betrayal: the women, like the men, are overcome by raw, animal emotion denoted by this rare compound word *úlfabytr*. The word is an unerringly negative one, its only other appearance in the Old Norse corpus is in *Matheuss saga postula* among a list of things that do not exist in heaven.⁹⁵ The female victims are thus aligned with fierce animals and with the *berserkir*; both groups emote *en masse* and not as individuals, thereby becoming a pack. There is an aspect of othering to their emotive scenes and, despite accessing their emotional interiority, the saga writer still depersonalises them by presenting them as a group. Unlike the pathos-

⁹² *Grettis saga*, 65.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 67–8.

⁹⁵ *Isländska handskriften No. 645, 4to i den Arnemagnæanska samlingen på Universitetsbiblioteket i København i diplomatiskt aftryck utgifven*, ed. Ludvig Larsson, vol. 1 (Denmark: Malmström & komp:s boktr, 1885), 'v1 | fa þytr', 113.

rich treatment of Helga, then, this rare example of enraged female reaction to the threat of sexual violation is held at arm's length by the writer.

The episode in *Hallfreðar saga* is far more evasive about female interiority, showing barely any discernible concern for the targeted servants. In the episode, the titular character rapes his former mistress and offers — or even promises, given the semantic range of 'lofa' — the rest of the women of the household to his fellow raiders:

sagði Hallfreðr: „Þat ætla ek mér, at liggja hjá Kolfinnu, en ek lofa félofum mínum at breyta sem þeir vilja.“ Þar váru fleiri sel, ok er svá sagt, at hvern þeira fengi sér konu um nóttina.⁹⁶ (Appendix I:1:II:10)

As in *Grettis saga*, the servants are not given individual identities and, according to Karras, the lack of attention given to the servants' rape is because of their social status, implying that 'women servants would be considered legitimate prey sexually, and that no one would object to it very much (as they certainly would in the case of the rape of the wife of the house)'.⁹⁷ This episode in *Hallfreðar saga*, indeed, does not explore the emotions of any woman besides Kolfinna, the mistress of the house. However, even her unwillingness and unhappiness in this scenario are merely implied rather than expressed, gaugeable only from her muted attempts to convince Hallfreðr to leave — '„Þat vilda ek, at þú riðir til vetrhúsa“' ("I want you to ride to the winter house"), and from her designation as 'skapþungt' (low in spirits) some time after the event.⁹⁸ Kolfinna's unwillingness is thus severely underplayed, and this is doubly true of the women of her house; the writer simply does not attach a great deal of importance to the emotions of any female character. Meanwhile, in *Grettis saga* it is clear that the entire household of women is emotionally distraught, and that there would be shame brought upon them as well as upon the mistress of the house. This is entirely at odds with Karras'

⁹⁶ *Hallfreðar saga*, 180–; ONP s.v. 'lofa'.

⁹⁷ Karras, "Servitude and Sexuality," 297.

⁹⁸ *Hallfreðar saga*, 180; 186.

designation of female servants as ‘legitimate prey sexually’; moreover, in both *Grettis saga* and *Víglundar saga*, the ladies of the house show great concern for the safety of their servants and, contrary to Karras’ view, would very much object to their rape. *Hallfreðar saga*’s Kolfinnr is not granted the same opportunity to express her concerns, but it can easily be imagined that she wants Hallfreðr and his men to leave for the safety of her household, not just herself. Emotivity does not reflect class; rather, saga writers often underplay the emotions of all women. Perhaps the servants’ class discourages any presentation of them as individuals, but Karras’ argument that there was no concern for them at all lacks nuance.

Karras’ reasoning likely stems from the fact that class and status were determining factors in intercourse proceedings. According to *Grágás*, the severity of the penalty for illegal sexual intercourse directly corresponds to the status of the woman, with higher penalties applied for crimes committed against higher status women and lower penalties in the case of enslaved women.⁹⁹ However, legal stipulations are not always reflected in saga narrative, as shown by the personal sense of threat felt by the women in *Grettis saga*. Just as servants can be considered valid victims of rape despite having lower status in the law codes, the emotive reactions of women in the *Íslendingasögur* display a personal concern for the women themselves which is not reflected in the law codes.

In the *Grettis saga* scene, for instance, we do gain a sense of the great personal cost the women would have suffered had Grettir not killed the *berserkir*, as Þorfinnr’s wife mentions first to Grettir himself and then again when recounting the tale to her husband:

„ok hefir þú,“ segir hon, „mikla frægð unnit ok leyst mik ok hjú mín frá þeiri skemmð, er vér hefðim aldri bót fengit, nema þú hefðir borgit oss.“¹⁰⁰ (Appendix I:1:II:11)

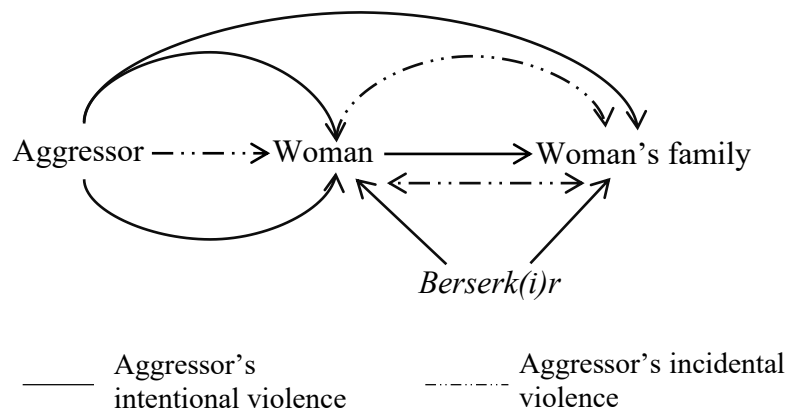
⁹⁹ See Appendix II: *Grágás* K§155, which has the penalty for intercourse with a free woman as full outlawry. K§156 lists the penalty for intercourse with a woman in debt as lesser outlawry, three marks for an enslaved woman, lesser outlawry for a freedman’s wife and no penalty for a vagrant woman.

¹⁰⁰ *Grettis saga*, 69.

Note that the word used here, *hjú*, denoting the household as a whole, implies that the shame would have been attributed not just to the women immediately threatened by the *berserkir*, but to the family unit as whole, thus showing concern for the male relatives in tandem with personal concern.¹⁰¹

However, my analysis of this episode in *Grettis saga* has revealed the complex role played by women in male feuds: they are not merely collateral damage, but victims in and of themselves. Fig 4., below, serves to contrast with Fig. 3 and demonstrate the complexity of intentional and incidental sexual violence. Here women are often central, rather than merely peripheral, to cycles of violence:

Fig. 4. Diagram to represent the ways in which sexual violence can be used against women themselves, or their family.



Especially important to note is that within each arrowhead resides the potential for emotionality and trauma. Damage dealt to women may ricochet onto their male relatives, but their own experience is not always ignored or cast aside. Ljungqvist argues that

The difficulty in determining whether force has been used against the women in the saga incidents shows, in some cases, that the author of the saga has given this only secondary importance. What takes center stage is the illegitimate intercourse.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ ONP, s.v. 'hjú'.

¹⁰² Ljungqvist, "Rape in the Icelandic Sagas," 434.

This is not, however, the case from my findings, for although instances of definitive rape are hard to identify, there is clear evidence of distress present in many of the cases of sexual violence and attempted sexual violence that I have identified. Women's concerns are often raised verbally, somatically or in their consequent behaviour within the subsequently unfolding feuds. Ljungqvist supports his argument by suggesting that the ambivalent attitude of the saga writers likely reflects a reality shown by the 'legal stipulations in *Grágás*, which [...] shows that the woman's attitude to illegitimate intercourse is not accorded any legal significance'.¹⁰³ I would argue, however, that it remains a dangerous exercise to attempt to gauge to what extent the world of the sagas reflects reality, and the examples from *Grettis saga*, *Bárðar saga*, *Víglundar saga*, and *Króka-Refs saga* are all affecting representations of female concern for their own sexual security, with the latter two both suggesting that women left alone in a house were inherently vulnerable to sexual assault. While it cannot be denied that male-male feud is of immense import to many narratives featuring sexual violence against women, the women themselves are given voices to cry with, or fists to fights with, or fears to contend with.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

CHAPTER III: THE DESTRUCTION, DEGRADATION, AND DESOLATION OF YNGVILDR *FAGRKINN*

„*Opt stendr illt af tali kvenna*“

Across all the *Íslendingasögur*, the treatment of one woman in particular stands out as excessively brutal. *Svarfdæla saga*'s Yngvildr *fagrinn* experiences ‘the most severe case of violence against women depicted in the *Íslendingasögur*’.¹ *Svarfdæla*, a post-classical saga, is relatively understudied due, in part, to the large lacunae which obfuscate the narrative. It stands out for ‘both the gratuitous torturing of Skidi and the brutal treatment of Yngvildr *fagrinn*’ which ‘are uncharacteristic of a *Saga of Icelanders*’.² The saga particularly demands attention for its saturation of violence against women, sexual and non-sexual alike: the kidnapping and rape of Þórarina; the way Þorsteinn ‘gerði hann meyjunni þann þykk, at hon grét þegar’ (gave the girl [Sigríðr] such a thwack that she cried); the throwaway mention of the starvation of Katla at the hands of Helgi, a murder by which ‘kól hana í hel, svá at hann sat henni þar mat, þar til er hon dó’ (she froze to death, because he provided no food until she died).³ These piecemeal instances of violence against women, although fleeting, precipitate and culminate in Yngvildr’s fate.

In brief, Yngvildr’s narrative is as follows: entering the saga as Ljótólfr’s concubine, Yngvildr is praised for her beauty, which attracts the interest of the *berserkr* Klaufi. He

¹ Rebecca Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society: Alterity, Transgression, and the Use of the Past in Medieval Iceland*, Northern Medieval World (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 114.

² *The Complete Sagas of Icelanders, Including 49 Tales*, ed. Viðar Hreinsson, vol. 4, Viking Age Classics (Reykjavík: Leifur Eiríksson, 1997), 149. Note that Merkelbach has suggested the problems of trying to date post-classical sagas, especially *Svarfdæla saga*, which is mentioned in thirteenth-century sources, suggesting that the saga was circulating in some form before the fourteenth century, “Coarsest and Worst,” 108–9. Lassen suggests a composition timeframe of 1350–1400, Lassen, *All Forty Sagas*, 98.

³ *Svarfdæla saga*, 155; 158.

makes it his mission to sleep with her. Klaufi and Karl *inn rauði* then trick Yngvildr's father into agreeing to marry his daughter to Klaufi. It is unclear whether this is a legalised, traditional marriage, but he and Yngvildr do have sex at least once. Yngvildr eventually has her brothers murder him. She is then married, with Ljótólfr's consent this time, to the enslaved Skíði as his reward for enduring torture. Yngvildr consents to this marriage so long as a) Skíði is freed and b) '„Hann skal hafa fyllt skarðið í vör sinni á fimm vetra fresti, svá at mér þykki vel fullt vera“' ("The gap on his lips must be so well healed in five years' time that I think it is fully healed").⁴ The gap takes on an allegorical importance for the overarching saga feud. Yngvildr and Skíði have three sons together. Yngvildr later attends the proceedings to forge a settlement between Skíði, Ljótólfr, and Karl *inn rauði* and, because she speaks up, no settlement is reached and she is blamed. Skíði then kills Karl *inn rauði* and the latter's son Karl Karlsson kills Yngvildr's sons and kidnaps her because she insists that Skíði's gap is healed. Karl Karlsson keeps her in his cabin as he sails around Europe while selling her to various slavers who frequently reappear and sell her back to Karl until finally her resolve is so withered that she admits Skíði's scar is not healed and Karl returns her to Iceland, where Ljótólfr and Skíði reject her. Her ultimate fate is that she, 'sumir segja' (some say), commits suicide.⁵

Yngvildr's active role within the saga's feud is more pronounced than any other woman within the *Íslendingasögur*. According to Bergljót Kristjánsdóttir:

Ljóst er að það er ekki venjan í Íslendingasögum að menn snúi hefndum að konu sem með einum eða öðrum hætti hefur orðið völd að erjum manna og vígum nema þá að um galdrakvendi sé að ræða.⁶ (Appendix I:1:III:1)

⁴ Ibid., 186.

⁵ Ibid., 206.

⁶ Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, "Skarðið í vör Skíða: Um hjónabönd og samfarir í Íslendingasögum," *Skáldskaparmál 2* (1996), 143–4.

Yngvildr is a marked exception, and she is a target of extensive vengeance for the egregious transgression of speaking up at the Þing:

þá sagði Yngvildr, at seint mundi verða fyllt skarð í vör Skíða, ef sjá sætt skyldi takast.⁷ (Appendix I:1:III:2)

A settlement had nearly been reached; Yngvildr's interjection derails it. Gunnarr then utters the following portentous statement that seals her fate as the saga's scapegoat:

„Opt stendr illt af tali kvenna, ok kann vera, at af hlótist þessu tali sem þá er verst hefir af hlotizt“⁸ (Appendix I:1:III:3)

Women could attend the Alþing ‘but did not have access to the performance roles in the centre of the socio-legal space’.⁹ Yngvildr's vocalisation undermines the men's ability to settle, and her offhand jibe about the gap on Skíði's mouth becomes the stick with which Karl repeatedly beats her. From this point on, she is the saga's primary revenge victim. Yngvildr's treatment is anomalous and

reveals an extremely gross and elaborate kind of misogyny, where the woman can be said to be the subject of men's attention in their constant conflicts.¹⁰

Yngvildr does not orbit the saga's foreground: she is at its epicentre. Indeed, the narrative structure of the saga's denouement is around Yngvildr and sexual violence is a constant throughout this narrative. She is the victim of at least one episode of rape, and likely a constant victim of it during her entire time in captivity. Tracking her story through marital rape, sexual trauma, kidnapping, enslavement and, ultimately, suicide, is a useful hermeneutic for understanding the overwhelming brutality levelled not just against this character, but also against the panoply of other women in the corpus whose narratives encompass similar themes.

⁷ *Svarfdæla saga*, 188.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Zoe Borovsky, “Never in Public: Women and Performance in Old Norse Literature,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 112, no. 443 (1999): 14.

¹⁰ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, “Love or Lust?,” 192.

SEXUAL TRAUMA

KLAUFI AND MARITAL RAPE

Before her kidnapping, enslavement, and sexual exploitation, Yngvildr is raped by her husband, to whom she is married without her consent. In order to marry her, Klaufi must first gain consent from Ásgeirr, her father; Klaufi and Karl fool Ásgeirr into betrothing Yngvildr to Klaufi, who Ásgeirr believed to be dead. In a manner not dissimilar to Grettir's utterance of verse before he rapes the maidservant, Klaufi then sings of his intentions to trap Yngvildr in his arms so she cannot escape. From this verse it is evident that Klaufi acknowledges, considers and dismisses Yngvildr's lack of consent in the matter:

Mál er í meyjar hvílu,
mjök emk styggliga hnugginn,
flýgr í faðm mér eigi
fögr drós, gala mögrum.
Munat oss um þrá þessa,
þat kváðu hjú, batna,
rétt, þau er reisa áttu
rauð þinn hana inni.¹¹ (Appendix I:1:III:4)

This verse is corrupt, according to Jonas Kristjánsson, who emends it to

Hinum magr hrekkalóm er mál að komast í hvílu meyjarinnar; ég er mjög hnugginn; hin fagra kona flýgur ekki í faðm mér. Mér mun ekki batna þráin til hennar; það kváðu hjúin rétt, þau sem...¹² (Appendix I:1:III:5)

The sense of both iterations is the same: a household (Ásgeirr) removes the beautiful woman's (Yngvildr's) obstinacy so that she is forced to fly into Klaufi's arms against her will. The first version simply imbues Klaufi with anger where the second leaves him downcast.

Klaufi acknowledges how Yngvildr shuns his embrace, solidifying what follows as a rape scene that has been largely overlooked in Yngvildr's narrative:

¹¹ *Svarfdæla saga*, 169.

¹² *Ibid.*

Ásgeirr sagði: „Við því áttu ek ekki gert, at þú færir með þrettum eðr ráðkrókum eða lygi.“ „Eigi laug ek,“ sagði Karl, „þótt ek segða hann veginn, því at þat er sagt vegit, sem reitt er.“ Ok nú fara þeir ofan til Brekku, ok færir Karl þau í eina sæng Klaufa ok Yngvildi fagrinn; en Ásgeirr hafðist við upp í dalnum, á meðan þetta fór fram.¹³ (Appendix I:1:III:6)

I concur with Rebecca Merkelbach that Yngvildr is only ‘in a sense, married to Klaufi’ and that ‘it was done against her will and without the establishment of ties of affinity through property exchange’.¹⁴ Yngvildr does later speak of herself as ‘gefin’ (married) to him but it is worth bearing in mind that this is said during a speech of appeasement to Klaufi himself.¹⁵ The twelfth-century introduction of verbal consent to marriage had been accepted by Iceland in 1275, before *Svarfdæla*’s likely composition.¹⁶ Jochens argues that the logic behind this doctrine was simple: a happier marriage was more likely to occur if it was happy from the outset.¹⁷ She says that ‘marriages contracted against the specific wishes of the women invariably ended in death, injury, or divorce — all disasters for the men’.¹⁸ Given Klaufi’s imminent demise after the marriage, Jochens’ statement here certainly seems to hold true for *Svarfdæla saga*.

Whether a legitimate marriage or not, unusually for a family saga the focus of the union is the bedding that follows: ‘The marriage of the hideous Klaufi to a beautiful woman is meant as a sensational parody of sexual relations, dwelling on bodily contact between two exact antitheses when the marriage is consummated’.¹⁹ The attention is focused on the placement of the two parties in the same bed, evoking the tradition of the bedding ceremony. Scant information exists about nuptial bedding ceremonies in the medieval North, although

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society*, 114.

¹⁵ *Svarfdæla saga*, 173.

¹⁶ Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Property*, 87.

¹⁷ Jenny Jochens, “Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law, Life, and Literature,” *Scandinavian Studies* 58, no. 2 (1986): 167–8.

¹⁸ Jochens, “‘Með Jákvæði Hennar Sjálfrar’: Consent as Signifier in the Old Norse World,” 273–4.

¹⁹ Waugh, “Misogyny,” 185.

they certainly seemed to occur; *Grágás* stipulates that a legal marriage must entail ‘.vi. menn at brullavpi et fæsta oc gangi brvþgumi iliosi i sama sæing kono’ (six people at the wedding and the bridegroom led *in the light* into the same bed as his wife) (Appendix II: *Grágás* St§171). Some have interpreted this law code as meaning that six people had to be present for the bedding of a married couple for the marriage to be legitimate, but Konrad von Maurer interprets this as meaning that six people had to be present just at the wedding itself.²⁰ Other information concerning these bedding ceremonies in Iceland is sparse. A bedding scene does occur in *Örvar-Odds saga*, in which Ketill *hængr* extends an invitation to ‘Finnnum mörgum’ (many Lappish men) to the room where he proceeds to have sex with Hrafnhildr, although he is sure to cover them both with a hide because of the presence of these men.²¹ In Sweden, it was customary for the bride and groom to be put into bed together, ‘while the bride’s parents covered and uncovered them with a blanket’, a custom ‘which probably followed a German practice’.²² It is not unreasonable to suppose, therefore, that parental presence was customary at bedding ceremonies in the medieval North. Bedding ceremonies, common across Europe, were more an aspect of ribald festivities than actual observations of copulation, and Mia Korpiola suggests that ‘consummation of the union was not mentioned in Swedish matrimonial law, while the bedding and the morning gift only implied consummation’.²³ I propose that the scene in *Svarfdæla saga* ought to be read as a rape scene which ostensibly imitates a traditional bedding ceremony; far from a joyous festivity following a conventional

²⁰ Konrad von Maurer has discussed the potential meanings of ‘iliose’ i.e. ‘í ljósi’, suggesting it may be very literal i.e. in light, not darkness, or that the groom is led with torches to the bed, or that it simply means ‘publicly’, *Vorlesungen über altnordische Rechtsgeschichte* (Leipzig: A. Deichert’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung Nachf. (G. Böhme), 1907), 542–3. According to Mia Korpiola, ‘In Sweden, the nuptial chamber was lit up by torches and candles’, and it is possible that Iceland had a shared custom, *Between Betrothal and Bedding: Marriage Formation in Sweden 1200-1600*, *The Northern World*, 43 (Boston: Brill, 2009), 61.

²¹ *Örvar-Odds saga*, 201. Supposedly, Grímr *loðinkinni* ‘hairy-cheek’ is conceived at the precise moment when Hrafnhildr looks out of the hide and sees a particularly hairy Lappish man.

²² Korpiola, *Betrothal and Bedding*, 61.

²³ *Ibid.*, 64.

wedding, Klaufi and Yngvildr enter the same bed without her consent (or her father's, it seems).

Yngvildr's antipathy for her 'husband' is evidenced by her substantial role in his murder:

Hann laut mjök í dyrunum, er hon fagnaði honum, ok renndi sverðit Atlanaut[r] fram ór slíðrunum, ok tók hon þat ok kastaði út í snjóbyrgit ok mælti: „Neyti sá, sem neyta þorir.“ Hon dvaldi fyrir Klaufa, þar til at hann var laginn í gegnum, svá at hann fekk þegar bana. Þessu verki ollu þeir Ásgeirssynir, ok tóku þeir Klaufa ok drógu undir heygarð at húsbaki. Yngvildr fór þá í rekkju sína, en þeir bjuggust brott. Þegar kom Klaufi til sængr Yngvildar, er þeir váru brottu. Hon lét þá kalla á þá bræðr, ok hjuggu þeir þá af honum höfuð ok lögðu neðan við iljarnar.²⁴ (Appendix I:1:III:7)

After conspiring with her brothers to kill Klaufi, Yngvildr goes to bed. One detail, albeit a small one, stands out in the clause sequence 'Yngvildr fór þá í rekkju sína': the word *sína*. This is now Yngvildr's bed; it is no longer the 'eina sæng' into which Karl led Klaufi and Yngvildr, and the security of this solitude and freedom from her husband is immediately interrupted. Klaufi, now some kind of *draugr* (revenant) comes to 'sæng Yngvildar'. Even in death, her husband torments her in the place that symbolises his violent ownership of her.

Marion Poilvez has convincingly linked psychological trauma to paranormal activity in the sagas, suggesting that 'trauma and paranormal are connected to violent, overwhelming events'.²⁵ Other scholars, notable among them John McKinnell, Kirsi Kanerva, and Marie Novotná, also agree that there is a strong argument for viewing revenants as the results of — among other things — psychological trauma.²⁶ Poilvez has labelled Yngvildr's suicide

²⁴ *Svarfdæla saga*, 173–4.

²⁵ Marion Poilvez, "A Troll Did It?: Trauma as a Paranormal State in the *Íslendingasögur*," in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150–1400*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd (Berlin; Boston: Medieval Institute Publications, 2020), 74; 80.

²⁶ McKinnell proposes a psychological element to the 'dead lover' motif, see *Meeting the Other*, 218–31; Kanerva proposes that emotions such as fear and sadness were 'considered particularly dangerous because they affected the mental immunity of the person. These emotions could expose people to the influence of demons or evil spirits', "Disturbances of the Mind and Body: The Effects of the Living Dead in Medieval Iceland," in *Mental (Dis)Order in the Later Middle Ages*, ed. Sari Katajala-Peltomaa and Susanna Niiranen, Later Medieval Europe (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 231–2; Novotná proposes that a cause for revenants are 'Threats and anxieties on

‘striking for its likeness to the description of a PTSD patient who only commits suicide once they have reached safety, proving again the devastating effects of trauma’, yet she tempers this by saying that ‘However, there is no direct involvement of the paranormal’ in Yngvildr’s narrative.²⁷ I believe Poilvez overlooks this scene of the *draugr* Klaufi appearing to Yngvildr; this is a paranormal event which — in line with the work of McKinnell, Kanerva, and Novotná mentioned above — could be a physical manifestation of Yngvildr’s trauma, and which probably traumatises her further. The bed is where the *draugr* Klaufi visits her. His revenance is a reminder of the violence she suffered on that bed. Studies, such as that of Poilvez, propose that the supernatural elements of the *Íslendingasögur* are coping mechanisms, methods for rationalising the more distressing aspects of human psychology. This scene, I argue, is a method of rationalising the psychologically unsettling. Revenants can be, according to Novotná,

a concretization of a negative thought or an emotion, or even expressions of mental disorder as they often occur in situations of emotional confusion associated with social or personal conflicts.²⁸

This can certainly be applied to Klaufi, who reappears so soon after being killed to torment Yngvildr in death just as he tormented her in life. Kanerva puts forward the idea that ‘Fright caused by the dead was connected with social stature; heroes and remarkable women are never mentioned as fearing revenants’.²⁹ Yngvildr displays immense stubbornness in *Svarfdæla saga*, but she is not free of fear in the sense proposed by Kanerva, relying on her brothers to dispatch Klaufi once again. She is not, in this sense, a ‘remarkable woman’. However, she does seem to recover from this marriage, only to be tormented by other men

the psychological level’, “Revenants in Old Norse Literature as Embodied Memory,” *Acta Universitatis Carolinae. Philologica* 2020, no. 1 (2020): 12.

²⁷ Poilvez, “A Troll Did It?,” 74.

²⁸ Novotná, “Revenants,” 14.

²⁹ Kanerva, “Disturbances,” 227.

throughout the remainder of the saga. Novotná expands on her evaluation of revenants as ‘a concretization of a negative thought or an emotion’ by suggesting that ‘On the psychological level, if a woman is able to drive away a revenant i.e. to separate him from her memories, renew her integrity, she survives; otherwise, she is taken with him to death — overwhelmed by her memories’.³⁰ Yngvildr does indeed ‘survive’ the trauma done by both the living Klaufi and the *draugr* Klaufi, but the events that follow are enough to dissolve her mental resolve.

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The sexually violent and psychological torment dealt to Yngvildr only increases after she and her brothers vanquish Klaufi. The saga writer explicitly draws attention to the gender dynamic between Karl and Yngvildr, stating that

Hann lét fara með sér Yngvildi fagrinn, ok gerði hann þat til skapraunar við hana, en eigi fyrir ræktar sakir.³¹ (Appendix I:1:III:8)

The implication is that, as a man and woman, the former should be in charge of the wellbeing of the latter, and so this subversion emphasises the atypical nature of this relationship. Noteworthy, too, is that ‘Karl Karlsson’ literally means ‘Man Man’s son’, and it could be argued that this is a hyperbolic means of highlighting Karl as representing a certain mode of masculinity or manliness, overly eager to prolong the feud while subverting the role of the male protector. In turn, our understanding of the significance of Yngvildr’s epithet can be broadened by turning to *Landnámabók*. In this historical account of the settling of Svarfadalr, Yngvildr’s epithet is not *fagrinn* ‘fair-cheek’ but *rauðkinn* ‘red-cheek’.³² Being red of cheek

³⁰ Novotná, “Revenants,” 17.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

³² See for instance *Landnámabók*, 252. Jónas Kristjánsson highlights the differences between the background of Svarfadalr according to the *Sturlubók*, *Hauksbók* and *Þórðarbók* recensions of *Landnámabók* (*Svarfdæla saga*, lxvii).

bears a range of connotations. We might think of *Laxdæla saga*'s Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir who, upon being slapped by her first husband Þorvaldr, says of her red cheek:

„Nú gaftu mér þat, er oss konum þykkir miklu skipta, at vér eigim vel at gort, en þat er litarapt gott, ok af hefir þú mik ráðit brekvísi við þik.“³³ (Appendix I:1:III:9)

Her red cheek here becomes simultaneously a mark of beauty and of resilience. Similarly, I propose that Yngvildr's alternative epithet does mark her with the blush of beauty associated with the colour but also hints at her victimhood, her cheeks red with the marks of abuse. However, *rauðkinn* could have yet further connotations. Firstly, Edel Porter and Teodoro Antón have found that 'reddening in the face was associated with anger in the minds of the Icelanders'.³⁴ They list forty-seven instances of 'red' words such as *roðna* and *rauði* which denote anger.³⁵ Given Guðrún's vengeful actions following Þorvaldr's slap in *Laxdæla saga*, anger could also explain her somatic reaction. They also note, however, that words such as '*kinnroði* (cheek-blushing; a blush of shame) were 'probably coined to render Latin *rubore* or *verecundia* "modesty, shame"'.³⁶ Yngvildr's 'red cheek' could therefore denote any combination of beauty, violence, anger, or shame. It also, of course, links her nominally to Karl *inn rauði*.

Karl Karlsson's sexual abuse of Yngvildr is foreshadowed at the outset of their relationship. Stood only in her night shirt, she is forced to observe as he beheads her three sons, before wiping his sword, bloodied with the deaths of her boys, on her skirts.³⁷ Robin Waugh has argued that this is a 'phallic parody', echoing Helga Kress, whose discussion of

³³ *Laxdæla saga*, 93–4.

³⁴ Edel Porter and Teodoro Antón, "Flushing in Anger, Blushing in Shame: Somatic Markers in Old Norse Emotional Expressions," *Cognitive Linguistic Studies* 2 (2015): 11. Porter and Antón give numerous examples of reddening as a sign of anger, for instance in *Egils saga*, 'sásk konungr um ok roðnaði ok mælti ekki, ok þóttusk menn finna, at hann var reiðr' (the king looked around and went red and said nothing, and people knew that he was angry), 29.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33. They find twenty-seven instances of *kinnroði* denoting shame, from religious texts such as *Marthe saga og Marie Magdalene* and *Jóns saga Postula*, 31–3.

³⁷ *Svarfdæla saga*, 197–8.

the phallic sword motif I discussed in Chapter I.³⁸ I propose that the symbolism of the blood on Yngvildr's skirts is a crude imitation of violent sex, childbirth, and loss of innocence all at once. This scene associates non-sexual violence with sexual violence. The sword then remains a constant threat to her for the rest of her time in Karl's ownership:

Hann lét Yngvildi fara með sér ok setti hana it næsta sér. Jafnan gekk Karl með bert sverðit, þat sem hann hafði vegit sonu hennar með.³⁹ (Appendix I:1:III:10)

The proximity embedded in the phrase 'it næsta sér' strongly implies a sexual, as well as a coercive, dimension to the master-slave relationship Karl fashions with Yngvildr. This further invites a reading of the sexual connotations of the drawn sword, a weapon used not only to threaten her into submission, but also as a means of constant psychological torture.

That Yngvildr is not merely beaten but sexually abused by Karl Karlsson was first commented on by Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, who says:

Sé tvíræðni í frásögninni er þrælkun Ingvildar tvöföld: hún er ekki aðeins seld mansali heldur er hún rekkjuþræll Karls.⁴⁰ (Appendix I:1:III:11)

Fredrik Heinemann similarly suggests that Karl 'makes Yngvildr his mistress'.⁴¹ That Karl sexually abuses her is not explicit, but given that he not only keeps her as close to him as possible and given her unclothed state and oft-expressed sexual desirability, as well as the overhanging threat of the sword, I would argue that it is strongly implied. It is clear, too, that he views this as a punishment, as the saga writer describes how, when she finally capitulates and his torment of her ends, 'Yngvildi var fengin önnur vist.' (Yngvildr was given another place to stay.⁴² The implication is that he no longer wants to punish her sexually because she

³⁸ Waugh, "Misogyny," 182.

³⁹ *Svarfdæla saga*, 198.

⁴⁰ Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, "Skarðið," 146.

⁴¹ Fredrik J. Heinemann, "'Svarfdæla saga': The Norwegians Versus the Swedes," in *Sagas and the Norwegian Experience: 10th International Saga Conference, Trondheim, 3–9 August 1997*, ed. J. R. Hagland (Trondheim: Senter for Middelalderstudier, 1997), 246.

⁴² *Svarfdæla saga*, 206.

has given in to his demeaning demands and admitted her wrongdoings, and so he finally liberates her from his sleeping quarters.

Karl is likely not Yngvildr's sole aggressor. Yngvildr is hauled about some of the major trade routes of the Viking Age and flung from slaver to slaver and shipped, cargo-like, from port to port. The repetition of these trades and repeated phraseology becomes a familiar sequence of increasingly traumatising events designed to wear down Yngvildr's resolve. The contrived nature of coincidence that reunites Karl and Yngvildr constantly, against all odds, is even noted by the slavers, who presume that ‘„er þat líkara, at vér sjáimst aldri.”’ (“It is more likely that we will never see each other again”).⁴³ Indeed, the narrative demands that belief be somewhat suspended when, in the vast trading world of the North, Yngvildr and Karl cross paths multiple times, facilitating her degradation. There is also a ubiquity to Yngvildr's shame: she is transported from Iceland to Denmark, to Sweden, to Norway, to Ireland, and finally back to Iceland. She is robbed of autonomy and reduced to little more than cargo.

COMMODITY

THE RIGHT TO *GEFA* WOMEN

In *Svarfdæla saga*, women are repeatedly commodified. Moldi wants to marry Ingibjörg, the daughter of the earl Herrǫðr, ‘„elligar býðr hann honum á hólmi”’ (“or he will challenge [the earl] to a duel”).⁴⁴ In response, the earl, who does not wish to seem cowardly, offers the following: ‘„þeim manni munda ek gipta dóttur mína, er þenna mann gæti af ráðit”’ (“I shall

⁴³ Ibid., 201.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 142.

give my daughter to the man who can get rid of [Moldi]).⁴⁵ A maiden to be rescued is, it seems, a valid prize for her rescuer elsewhere in the corpus as well; in *Fljótsdæla saga*, when Droplaug is taken to a cave at Yule by a giant named Geitir, her father declares that ‘„Hefi ek þat mælt, at þeim manni munda ek hana gefa, ef nökkur væri svó frækinn, at henni næði á burt“’ (“I have declared that I will give my daughter to that man who is so brave that he can rescue her”).⁴⁶ This ‘marriageable damsel’ motif is even more recurrent in the *fornaldarsögur*. In *Örvar-Odds saga*, King Herraður offers to ‘gifta þeim dóttur sína, at þeir skyldu heimta skatt af landinu’ (give his daughter to the person who might collect a tribute).⁴⁷ In *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, when King Hertryggr’s daughters go missing, he offers their hands in marriage to whoever finds them, and ‘„ef þær finnast dauðar, skal sá hafa inn bezta jarlsdóm í mínu ríki ok þá gifting, sem hann vill“’ (“if they are found dead, [whoever finds them] shall have the best jarldom in my kingdom, and whatever marital match he desires”).⁴⁸

Like other fathers in the corpus, then, Herraður commodifies his daughter. Even though the reward for vanquishing Moldi had already been set by Herraður as the hand of his daughter, when Þorsteinn is asked what reward he would like, he declares that ‘„ef ek skal ráða, þat er Ingibjörg, dóttir yður“’ (“If I can choose, then I choose your daughter Ingibjörg”), a request that seems somewhat anticlimactic and redundant since this offer had already been extended. It is only at this point that it occurs to both men that they ought to consult Ingibjörg, and they both seem eager to prove that they would not let her be married without her consent:

⁴⁵ Ibid., 143.

⁴⁶ *Fljótsdæla saga*, 226.

⁴⁷ *Örvar-Odds saga*, 322.

⁴⁸ *Egils saga einhenda*, 326.

„mun ek því samþykkr verða, ef Ingibjörg vill sem ek.“ Þorsteinn kvaðst eigi mundu bekkjast til þess, ef henni væri eigi ljúft. Þeir gengu nú til tals með hana ok sögðu henni sína fyrirætlan ok spurðu, hversu henni væri um gefit, en hon sagði, at faðir hennar skyldi fyrir ráða, kvað sér þat vel mundu gegna.⁴⁹ (Appendix I:1:III:12)

She herself defers to her father's better judgement, although it is likely that, in order to lay the foundation for a good marriage (and thus future prosperity), it would be easier for all parties involved if Ingibjörg approved. Indeed, a girl's deference to her father's wishes in marriage is often a convenient, best-case scenario. The princesses in *Egils saga einhenda*, for example, are happy to comply when their rescuers ask for their consent to marry them.⁵⁰ According to Roberta Frank, some marriages with the woman's expressed consent end badly and some well, and some without the woman's expressed consent can equally have either outcome. 'The unavoidable, if unremarkable, conclusion', according to Frank, 'is that while a woman's consent does not count for much, it is unwise to marry her off against her wishes'.⁵¹ However much *giptingarmenn* and suitors claim to value a woman's consent in marriage, this is often an afterthought, however.

Yngvildr is wholly at the whim of her *giptingarmenn*. A victim of violence, she is vulnerable to this victimhood because of her protectors' cowardice and foolishness. The consent of Yngvildr's male guardians is considered and either dismissed or (deceptively) attained. Her own consent is completely disregarded and her father does nothing to stop the rape of his daughter. *Svarfdæla saga* raises further questions about who has the right to 'gefa' (give) women away. In adulthood, Yngvildr is introduced as 'frilla Ljótólfs' (Ljótólfr's concubine).⁵² It seems that Ljótólfr has some say over who Yngvildr can marry or sleep with, as Klaufi specifies that he wants to sleep with her 'án vilja Ljótólfs' (without Ljótólfr's say-

⁴⁹ *Svarfdæla saga*, 148.

⁵⁰ *Egils saga einhenda*, 361.

⁵¹ Frank, "Marriage in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Iceland," 477.

⁵² *Svarfdæla saga*, 165.

so).⁵³ When Ljótólfr refuses to come out when Klaufi and Karl *inn rauði* confront him in his house, Karl charges him with cowardice. Klaufi later taunts Ljótólfr by saying, ‘„Hér er Yngvildr, frilla þín, í fõr með mér”’ (“Here is Yngvildr, your mistress, travelling with me”), and Ljótólfr pretends not to hear, actively shirking any responsibility he had for her.⁵⁴

Skíði also asks for Ljótólfr’s help with marrying Yngvildr as a reward for keeping his silence with Karl. Ljótólfr replies that ‘„ek vil eigi gefa hana nauðga”’ (“I don’t want to give her away against her will”), and thus seeks her opinion on the matter.⁵⁵ This seems, however, to be a mere courtesy and an expression of concern for the longevity of a potential marriage, rather than a legal requirement. Given my previous analysis of *nauðga*, a word that can denote rape, it must also be called into question whether Ljótólfr is referring to Yngvildr’s bodily consent as well as her matrimonial consent, since the latter would necessitate sexual intercourse. He only frees Skíði because Yngvildr is offended at the prospect of marrying a slave. Although it is unclear exactly who had legal rights over a *frilla* — ‘The earliest extant Icelandic law code, the *Grágás*, did not mention the *frilla* at all, indicating that in the twelfth century, this was not a formal legal status’ — Ljótólfr certainly seems to be responsible for who Yngvildr can and cannot marry, but it remains at his own discretion to appease her.⁵⁶ Consent is considered a matter for male guardians, not the woman, in both legal and literary texts, as I outlined in the Introduction.

KIDNAP: ‘(EKKI) AT FRÆNDARÁÐI’

⁵³ Ibid., 166.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 170.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 186.

⁵⁶ Ruth Mazo Karras, *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 107.

This emphasis on male primacy and consent looms within the wider context of kidnapping in the *Íslendingasögur*. One of the most recurrent threats to women in the Old Norse corpus, kidnapping often bears the added dimension of sexual threat. In *Finnboga saga*, believing that the eponymous Finnbogi is following her father's orders, Ragnhildr is permitted to go with him, but when he tells her he has killed her father, she demands to be taken back to her mother. He refuses and 'tók mærin at gráta' (the girl began to cry).⁵⁷ Finnbogi assumes that this is because she fears what he is going to do to her, assuaging these fears: '„Vertu kát, því at ekki skal ek níðast á þér.“' ("Be cheered, because I am not going to behave shamefully towards you").⁵⁸ In *Finnboga saga*, another of the post-classical sagas, shame here is evidently euphemistic for rape.⁵⁹ Finnbogi does then insist that her cousin not betroth her to anyone else and the cousin suspects that this was his true motive for kidnapping Ragnhildr all along: '„má vera, at þú hafir þat hugsat, þá er þú tókt hana brott ór Sandey.“' ("Maybe you had this in mind when you kidnapped her from Sandey").⁶⁰ Nevertheless, he facilitates the marriage of his cousin and her kidnapper and as it transpires, 'Þau unnast mikit, Finnbogi ok Ragnhildr' (they loved each other dearly, Finnbogi and Ragnhildr), and even her mother approves heartily of the match: 'lætr Ingibjörg sér nú þetta vel líka, með því at maðr inn ágætasti' (Ingibjörg said she was well pleased because he was the most excellent of men).⁶¹ Whether or not it is particularly realistic that a girl would fall in love with a man who kidnapped her and killed her father — and moreover that her mother would approve of the match — is another matter. But kidnapping here plays part of the courtship and Finnbogi is

⁵⁷ *Finnboga saga*, 280.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Finnboga saga* is thought to have been composed ca. 1300–1350, Lassen, *All Forty Sagas*, 85.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 287.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

essentially accused of grooming his kidnapped victim, even though he does not bring shame to either himself or her by having sex with her before marriage.

In *Bárðar saga*, the motif of the father offering the daughter to her rescuer is subverted as Kolbjörn offers Sólrún to Þórðr in marriage, but the latter ultimately finds her deep in a cave, tied to a chair by Kolbjörn himself. Kolbjörn turns out to be a man-eating ‘þurs’ (ogre). Sólrún ‘segir hann hafa numit sik í burt af Grænlandi undan Sólarfjöllum, — „frá Bárði’ (says that he had taken her for himself, away from Sóllarfjall in Greenland, “from Bárðr”).⁶² She has not yet been sexually assaulted but the ogre has made his intentions clear, and it appears that she has hitherto resisted. She says that he

„ætlar mik sér til handa ok frillu, en nú hefi ek ekki viljat samþykkjast honum, ok því hefir hann jafnan illa haldit mik, en þó verst, síðan hann játaði mik þér. Fyrirman hann hverjum manni at eiga mik, hverjar glósur sem hann gerir þar á.”⁶³ (Appendix I:1:III:13)

Sólrún’s account details how sexual assault is dangled over her as a permanent threat. Worse still, she says, is the taunting of a marriage to a viable suitor. Kolbjörn threatens her with both physical sexual violence and the psychological torment of never attaining a viable marriage, controlling her sexual autonomy in his subverted role as the father-kidnapper.

In the Introduction, I outlined the key distinction made, in both *Grágás* and *Jónsbók*, between a woman’s consent and her family’s consent when it comes to kidnapping (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§156; K§159; *Jónsbók* IV.2). A woman can be considered ‘kidnapped’, even if she wants to go with her kidnapper, so long as her *giptingarmenn* do not consent. This ethos is very much reflected in the *Íslendingasögur*. In *Víglundar saga*, when Ólof is taken from Ketill, he considers it ‘ina mestu sneypu’ (the greatest dishonour).⁶⁴ Even if the kidnapping was not intended as a crime against a man, it still reflects on him as

⁶² *Bárðar saga*, 152.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Víglundar saga*, 74.

dishonourable and it is for this dishonour against Ketill that Þorgrímr is outlawed by the king. On numerous other occasions, there is a clear prioritisation of the consent of male family members when it comes to kidnapping. In *Kjalnesinga saga*, ‘fór Kolfiðr til Kollafjarðar ok tók þaðan á brutt Ólofu ina vænu nauðga ok at óvilja föður hennar’ (Kolfiðr went to Kollafjarðr and then took Ólof the beautiful away against her will and against the will of her father).⁶⁵ Ólof’s consent is explicitly noted as not being given — she is taken *nauðga* — but the saga writer adds in the detail about her father’s lack of consent to compound the gravity of the crime. There is one occasion when the mother, not the father, must give her consent to her daughter being taken; in *Finnboga saga*, when Finnbogi wants to take Ragnhildr away, her mother asks her if she wants to go but Ragnhildr ‘bað hana ráða’ (told her to decide), deferring to her mother (in the absence of her father) to decide. This aligns with the hierarchy of *giptingarmenn* as outlined in the lawcodes.⁶⁶

Far more often there is evidence of the exclusive consideration of the consent of male kin and not of the woman herself. The weight of paternal consent is such that in *Bárðar saga* Sólrún describes herself as being taken ‘„frá Bárði, föður mínum”’ (“from Bárðr, my father), and thus sees herself as being taken from one man by another; she couches it in terms of her belonging to her father, a stolen object rather than her own person.⁶⁷ At the beginning of *Ljósvetninga saga*, Sölmundr repeatedly visits Ölvir’s daughter ‘ok í mót vilja frænda hennar; ok fekksk þó engi forstaða af lítilmennsku föður hennar’ (against her kinsmen’s wishes, but he met no resistance from the inadequate response of her father).⁶⁸ The fact that her father does not formally object — apparently because he is ‘lítilmennsku’ — facilitates Sölmundr’s kidnapping of her, and incipits an unusually detailed kidnap scene in which, as part of a

⁶⁵ *Kjalnesinga saga*, 38.

⁶⁶ See above, Introduction, n. 81.

⁶⁷ *Bárðar saga*, 152.

⁶⁸ *Ljósvetninga saga*, 4.

comedic push-pull scene over a garden wall, Qlvir employs ‘a famously strong man named Ófeigr’ to act *in loco patris* and physically intervene to stop the kidnapping.⁶⁹

Ok í því er Sólmundr vill taka við henni ok hefja út af garðinum, kom Ófeigr at í því ok grípr til hennar ok kippir henni inn af garðinum.⁷⁰ (Appendix I:1:III:14)

Ófeigr decries Sólmundr, who he claims ‘gerir eptir bóndadóetrum’ (goes after farmers’ daughters), and this speaks to class, status and, most tellingly, frames the women not just as women but as daughters of their fathers.⁷¹ The unnamed daughter, who we observe being shoved backwards and forwards over a garden wall, has — at least as far as the saga writer is concerned — no view or say in the matter. Similarly, in an episode in *Egils saga*, it is very difficult to determine the level of consent of Hildiríðr. Björgólfr, whose descent from a *hálfbergrisi* (mountain giant) indicates a potentially violent otherness, sits beside Hildiríðr at his feast, and ‘töluðu þau mart um kveldit; leizk honum mærin fōgr’ (they spoke at length during the evening, and he thought the girl beautiful).⁷² He later descends upon the farm of her father, Hōgni, with twenty men and says to him, ‘„ørendi er þat hingat, at ek vil, at dóttir þín fari heim með mér, ok mun ek nú gera til hennar lausabrullaup“’ (“the reason which has brought me here coming here is that I want your daughter to come home with me and I want to make her a hasty marriage now”).⁷³ It is then said that

Hōgni sá engan annan sinn kost en láta allt svá vera, sem Björgólfr vildi. Björgólfr keypti hana með eyri gulls, ok gengu þau í eina rekkju bæði; fór Hildiríðr heim með Björgólfi í Torgar.⁷⁴ (Appendix I:1:III:15)

The intimidation at play here is obvious; Björgólfr’s own size and might, as well as his retinue of twenty men, force Hōgni into acquiescing. The overtly sexual motivation behind

⁶⁹ Ben Raffield, Neil Price, and Mark Collard, “Polygyny, Concubinage, and the Social Lives of Women in Viking-Age Scandinavia,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 13 (2017): 183.

⁷⁰ *Ljósvetninga saga*, 4.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁷² *Egils saga*, 16.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

the hasty marriage is made clear by the way he pays Hildiriðr's dowry and immediately goes to bed with her. It certainly seems that Hildiriðr has no choice in the matter; however, whether she is pleased or not is completely unknown. A 'lausabrullup' would certainly not be desirable, as is evident to women's reactions to similar threats in *Bósa saga* and in *Hrólf's saga kraka*.⁷⁵ Certainly, Hildiriðr talks to him during the feast, but this does not necessarily suggest acquiescence to a marriage, especially one with the indignity of haste and a crude payment. It is the anger and annoyance this union engenders in Björgólfr's son and Högni that are mentioned, not the feelings of Hildiriðr.

The *Íslendingasögur* abound in examples of the all-important father in matters of kidnap. In *Víglundar saga*, the jarl Þórir essentially locks his daughter Ólof away because he was 'svá vandláttr um hana' (so protective of her) and does not want to marry her off; rather, 'vísaði hann þeim frá með hæverskligum orðum' (he rejected [any suitors] with polite words).⁷⁶ When Þorgrímr, Ólof's love, finds out she is betrothed to Ketill, he confronts her betrothed by asking, '„Var þat nökkut með hennar ráði gert?“' ("Was that done with her consent?").⁷⁷ Ketill responds, '„Ek ætlaða, at Þórir jarl mundi sjálfr eiga at ráða dóttur sinni“' ("I thought that Þórir jarl himself had say-so over his daughter").⁷⁸ When Þorgrímr makes off with the bride, it might be assumed that Ólof wants to go with him as she loves him — '„ann ek vel björtum manni“' ("I so love that bright man") — and when her father betrothed her to Ketill 'Lagði Ólof ekki jáyrði til né samþykki' (Ólof gave neither her approval nor her

⁷⁵ I discuss both of these texts at length in Chapter IV and V respectively. Princess Edda, the maiden-king Ólöf and the 'álfkona' (elf-woman) are all threatened with 'hasty marriages' in sexually violent situations ('skyndibrúðlaup' in *Bósa saga*, 317; Helgi's proposal that 'vit drekkum brullaup okkart í kveld' (we drink to our wedding this evening) in *Hrólf's saga kraka*, and his proposal of a 'skyndibrullaup' to the *álfkona* before raping her, 15).

⁷⁶ *Víglundar saga*, 64; 65.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

consent) out of duty and deference to her father, rather like *Svarfdæla saga*'s Ingibjörg.⁷⁹ Thus, regardless of whether Ólof is taken with or without her consent, her father and her betrothed are the ones who need redress for Þorgrímr's act of kidnap. Such instances highlight the precarity of consent as a metric in marriage, as daughters so often defer meekly to their *giptingarmenn*.

We might also consider the episode in *Egils saga* relating to the inheritance of Ásgerðr and Gunnhildr; when trying to invalidate the inheritance of the former, Berg-Önundur enforces the fact that ‘„var móðir hennar hernumin, en síðan tekin frillutaki, ok ekki at frændaráði”’ (“her mother was taken as spoils of war, and then taken as a captured concubine, and without her kinsmen's consent”).⁸⁰ As the child born of a pregnancy by a ‘captured concubine’, Ásgerðr finds her claim severely weakened next to Gunnhildr, a legitimate heir. Þóra *hlaðhond*, Ásgerðr's mother, is made pregnant by these men who take her ‘ekki at frændaráði’, and it is this aspect of consent which is of most concern in the matter of inheritance. It is entirely unclear whether Þóra herself consented to going with Björn; this seems not to matter at all, whereas her family's consent is enough for her to be considered *hernumin* and *tekin frillutaki*. Given the context of kidnapping, it seems tempting to suggest that Þóra personally would not have consented to the matter; however, in *Eiríks saga rauða*, there is a clear example of a woman who wants to go with the man who her family views as her captor:

En er Leifr bjósk brott, beiddisk Þórgunna at fara með honum. Leifr spurði, hvárt þat væri nokkut vili frænda hennar. Hon kvezk þat ekki hirða. Leifr kvezk eigi þat kunna at sjá at sínu ráði, at gera hertekna svá stórættaða konu í ókunnu landi, — „en vér liðfáir.”⁸¹ (Appendix I:1:III:16)

⁷⁹ Ibid., 72; 71.

⁸⁰ *Egils saga*, 155.

⁸¹ *Eiríks saga rauða*, 210.

Leifr employs the phrase *gera hertekna* here despite having been asked by Þórgunna herself to go with him, thus aligning the phrase specifically with meaning ‘to make taken in war’ i.e. to take from her kinsmen without their permission, regardless of her own view. Jochens, commenting on this episode, says that ‘Although the relationship between a man and a woman under such circumstances need not be entirely hostile, an element of violence seems unavoidable’.⁸² Þórgunna is likely at least partially motivated by her pregnancy by Leifr here to remain under the protection of her unborn child’s father and therefore she is possibly responding coercively to societal pressures, but that is still not suggestive of physical violence (other than his concerns about enraging her kin and possibly sparking a blood feud). Leifr is the one to refuse Þórgunna; she would be classed as a victim of kidnapping due to her kin’s lack of consent, despite her own desires to accompany him. The saga writer is likely attempting to make Leifr look as noble and as chivalrous as possible and thus imagines him as a figure unwilling to offend other men and nurture feud. Leifr gives her gifts and leaves her, despite the pregnancy, but then does acknowledge the child when he comes to Greenland. He therefore behaves respectably towards her kinsmen and his child, albeit in a manner that disregards Þórgunna’s own wishes. There is some motivation, then, for exonerating Leifr as a potential kidnapper; nonetheless, this episode acutely demonstrates that within the *Íslendingasögur*, kidnap is framed in terms of the *giptingarmaðr*, not the woman.

ENSLAVEMENT

Another dimension to kidnapping is the potential for enslavement which itself often envelops sexual violence. Guðrún Þórhallsdóttir has suggested that the *Grágás* lawcode previously

⁸² Jenny Jochens, “Vikings Westward to Vínland: The Problem of Women,” in *Cold Counsel: Women in Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Sarah M. Anderson and Karen Swenson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 135.

interpreted as legally condoning a man’s right to buy a slave girl for sexual purposes ought to be reconsidered. The code dictates that ‘Rétt er at maðr caúpe til karnaþar sér amböt’ (It is a man’s right to buy a slave girl *til karnaðr*) (Appendix II: *Grágás* K‡112). Guðrún proposes that the similarity of *karnaðr* to ‘carnal’ has led to a mistaken understanding of its semantic meaning, and suggests — based not just on context but on other etymological factors as well, such as the term’s relationship to other words of Germanic origin — that its meaning could well be “‘umönnun’—sakleysislegt orð sem er laust við knýlifsmerkingu’ (“care” —an innocent word that is free of sexual connotations).⁸³ This code may not, therefore, necessarily indicate that enslaved girls were legally seen as sex objects; indeed, *Grágás* outlines a penalty specifically for ‘Ef legit er með ambátt’ (If [a man] lies with a slave woman) (Appendix II *Grágás* K§156).

However, historical accounts of Norse enslavement depict a particularly sexually depraved dynamic between the enslaver and the enslaved. Ibn Faḍlān’s infamous encounter with the Rūs is one of the more detailed accounts; he betrays, it has been argued, ‘a fascination with the sexual availability of slave girls’.⁸⁴ Among the depravities he recounts is a Rūs master raping a slave in front of a merchant:

ولكل واحد سرير يجلس عليه، ومعهم الجوارى الروقة للتجار، فينكح الواحد جاريتة ورفيقه ينظر إليه، وربما اجتمعت الجماعة منهم على هذه الحال بعضهم بحذاء بعض، وربما يدخل التاجر عليهم ليشتري من بعضهم جارية فيصادفه ينكحها فلا يزول عنها حتى يقضي أربه.
(Appendix I:1:III:17)⁸⁵

Ibn Faḍlān’s account, albeit a source riddled with its own problems, is useful in elucidating the presentation of sexual subjugation in the *Íslendingasögur* as his depiction can help to

⁸³ Guðrún Þórhallsdóttir, “Að kaupa til karnaðar sér ambátt,” *Orð og tunga* 13 (2011): 90.

⁸⁴ Marianne Moen, and Matthew J. Walsh, “Agents of Death: Reassessing Social Agency and Gendered Narratives of Human Sacrifice in the Viking Age,” *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 31, no. 4 (2021): 601.

⁸⁵ Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān, *Risālat Ibn Faḍlān*, ed. Ḥaydar Muḥammad Ghaybah (Bayrūt: al-Sharikah al-‘Ālamīyah lil-Kitāb, 1994), 76. Translation taken from Aḥmad Ibn Faḍlān, *Mission to the Volga*, trans. James E. Montgomery, Library of Arabic Literature (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2017), 33.

build an image of various aspects of the practice of slavery in the Norse world.⁸⁶ The fact that the masters have such public sex with the slave girls — at times even observed by potential buyers — suggests either that they do not care if potential buyers observe the intercourse. Perhaps the implication is even that intercourse is one of the reasons for which a buyer may be interested in buying a slave girl. The verb ‘صادف’ (ṣādafa), translated above as ‘stumble upon’, can simply mean ‘to encounter’, or can connote a degree of surprise, thus implying more that the slavers simply do not care who observes the sex.⁸⁷ Either way, they do not seem concerned that this will impact that value of the enslaved girl in sale, and Ibn Faḍlān particularly notes that the advent of the merchant does not deter the Rūs from seeking pleasure. Ibn Faḍlān ‘rarely give[s] women a voice’ and ‘describes the world through male action and speech’.⁸⁸ This episode is no exception: the voice of the slave girl is not invoked at all. Given the circumstances of this sexual encounter, and the inherent problem of power dynamics between the slaver and the enslaved, it is difficult to read this as anything other than rape.

In another Middle Eastern historical source of an encounter with the Rūs, Ibn Rustah writes that in combat,

ولهم رجلة وبسالة فاذا نزلوا بساحة قوم لم ينصرفوا عنهم دون ان يهلكوهم ويستببحوا حرهم ويسترقوهم

⁸⁶ Such problems, for instance, include the ethnic identity of the Rūs as observed by Ibn Faḍlān. Jens Peter Schjødt has made a strong case for exercising extreme caution when aligning Ibn Faḍlān’s account with Old Norse literary sources, stating that ‘we do not know whether the Rus people he encountered were performing Scandinavian practices. It is possible that they had lived in the Volga region for two or more generations, and that they had acquired local Slavonic traditions’, “Ibn Fadlan’s Account of a Rus Funeral: To What Degree Does It Reflect Nordic Myths?,” in *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, ed. Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjødt, and Rasmus Tranum Kristensen, *Studies in Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 133. Even if the Rūs are Scandinavian, therefore, the snapshot of them Ibn Faḍlān observes is not necessarily reflective of the society and its custom in saga-age Iceland. Schjødt also points out that as Ibn Faḍlān did not speak the language of the Rus, his reliability as a source for Viking practices is further cast into doubt. Indeed, his impression of them seems to be that they are generally depraved; he describes them as ‘أقذر خلق الله’ (the filthiest of all God’s creatures), *Risālat Ibn Faḍlān*, 76.

⁸⁷ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, ed. J. Milton Cowan, 4th ed. (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979), 593.

⁸⁸ Moen, “Agents of Death,” 600.

(Appendix I:1:III:18)⁸⁹

Similarly, Ibn al-Athīr observes that

واستعبدوا السبي واختاروا من النساء من استحسوها
(Appendix I:1:III:19)⁹⁰

Men and women are separated, with a decided emphasis on the women's physicality, and women are enslaved specifically for their attractiveness and thus their potential as sexual commodities. Similarly in the *Íslendingasögur*, men are killed whereas women are enslaved during a house burning in *Droplaugarsona saga*, as the slave woman Arneiðr describes:

„þeir komu um nótt til bæjar fǫður míns ok brenndu hann inni ok allt karlafólk, en konur gengu út. ok síðan fluttu þeir okkr móður mína higat, er Sigríðr heitir, en seldu aðrar konur allar mansali.“⁹¹ (Appendix I:1:III:20)

The women are evacuated only to be sold into slavery, implying a gendered, transactional aspect to the customary act of extricating women from fiery deaths.⁹² A passage in *Jökuls þáttur Búasonar* similarly places value on women over men: Jökull finds a man, Hvítserkr, and a woman, Marsibilla, chained to a chair. They have been kidnapped by the giants Skram and his son. Hvítserkr states,

„hefir því valdið Marsibilla, að eg hefí svó lengi lifað, því hun sagði þeim feðgum, að nornir hefði spáð henni, að hun mundi deyja þegar í stað, ef eg væri sleginn, en þeir trúðu því“⁹³ (Appendix I:1:III:21)

⁸⁹ *Bibliotheca geographorum Arabicorum*, ed. M. J. Goeje, vol. 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1892), 146. Translation taken from William E. Watson, “Ibn Rustah’s Book of Precious Things: A Reexamination and Translation of an Early Source on the Rūs,” *CSS* 38, no. 3 (2004): 292.

⁹⁰ Izz al-Dīn Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil fi'l-ta'rikh*, vol. 8 (Cairo: 'ah al-Azharīyah al-Miṣrīyah, 1884), 160. Translation taken from William E. Watson, “Ibn al-Athīr’s Accounts of the Rūs: A Commentary and Translation,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 35, no. 4 (2001): 434.

⁹¹ *Droplaugarsona saga*, 138.

⁹² Gendered evacuations are not uncommon (although subsequently selling evacuees is). In *Njáls saga*, Flósi permits ‘konum ok börnum ok húskǫrlum’ (women and children and house-karls) to leave the house before he sets it ablaze, 329; similarly in *Harðar saga*, Hörðr ‘brenndi bæinn ok allt andvirkir ok tvær kvinnur, er eigi vildu út ganga’ (burned the farmstead and all of its contents and two women, who would not come out), which does imply that they were given the chance to come out, 56.

⁹³ *Jökuls þáttur Búasonar*, 56.

In light of the value given to the sister's life, it can be assumed that she was kidnapped for sexual purposes; there is no other distinction between brother and sister provided, and the former's life is deemed expendable. Both the example in *Droplaugarsona saga* and that of *Jökuls þáttur* suggest that while men are better dead, women may be more valuable in circumstances where their gender makes them sexually useful.

The Price of Beauty

That Yngvildr is desired and purchased for sexual means is clear from the repeated emphasis on her beauty, and from the way her increasingly naked form is highlighted. Yngvildr's beauty is 'evident from her name *fagrinn*'.⁹⁴ The importance of this quality to her character is something that the saga narrator is loath to let us forget, given the number of times she is referred to with her epithet rather than just her forename: while Karl Karlsson's epithet 'ómáli' (speechless) is dropped after the third time he is mentioned, Yngvildr is 'Yngvildr *fagrinn*' almost as often as she is simply 'Yngvildr'.⁹⁵

Indeed, many scholars have noted the constant reassertion of Yngvildr's sexual desirability, with Jónas Kristjánsson suggesting that this is one of the aspects of the saga that detracts from the writer's ability to craft narrative, as Yngvildr continues to be sexually desirable even into her seventies:

En þó er auðséð, að höfundur hugsar sér, að hún sé enn á góðum aldri, og er þetta meðal annars til marks um það, hversu lítt hann hirðir um söguleg sannindi.⁹⁶
(Appendix I:1:III:22)

⁹⁴ Jochens, "Male Gaze," 15.

⁹⁵ Karl is referred to as 'Karl ómáli' twice, as 'Karl Karlsson' once and simply 'Karl' 127 times, thus he is referred to by epithet 1.5% of the time. Yngvildr, meanwhile, is referred to as 'Yngvildr fagrinn' ten times and as 'Yngvildr' fourteen times, thus meaning she is referred to by epithet 41.6% of the time i.e. nearly half the time. She is referred to by her epithet even mere sentences apart from the last time her epithet was used, when it cannot possibly be functioning to identify her. This contrasts markedly with Karl who is referred to simply by his name so much of the time, even though there are two prominent Karls in the story and using their epithets would help to distinguish them.

⁹⁶ *Svarfdæla saga*, xcii. Jónas' calculations are, I can confirm, sound.

Vésteinn Ólason is seemingly in agreement concerning the impact of Yngvildr's age on the quality of the saga prose, arguing,

There are many other incredible and fantastic events and phenomena in this saga, such as the long lasting sex appeal of the much tormented Yngvildr fǫgurkinn.⁹⁷

Vésteinn expresses this sentiment rather offhandedly, the phrase 'sex appeal' too flippant, in my opinion, to describe a woman enslaved and re-enslaved for, as I have argued, sexual purposes, but his point is otherwise valid: Yngvildr's age seems simply not to be detrimental to her value as a slave, even though there is some evidence that age, alongside beauty, was integral to a slave girl's monetary value. Jan Rüdiger has drawn attention to Cnut the Great's sister, who 'made her profit in the luxury slave trade across the North Sea'.⁹⁸ The twelfth-century historian William of Malmesbury alleges that she achieved this 'puellas presertim quas decus et aetas pretiosiores facerent' (especially with girls who were particularly valuable on account of their age and beauty).⁹⁹ Karras elucidates that 'women in their late teens through early thirties commanded the highest prices, presumably because they were the most capable of work'.¹⁰⁰ Yngvildr, by the end of her ordeal, is more than twice this age, but it is neither her age nor any mention of loss of beauty that finally makes her a low-value commodity; according to Karl, it is her loss of pride and her capitulation to his demands. She has diminished from a prize to be won, desired by Ljótólfr, Skíði, and Klaufi, to a commodity so low in value that Karl says, '„máttu nú gipta hana hverjum, er þú vilt, því at engum mun hon nú of stór þykkjast"' ("You can marry her to anyone you want, because no one will think

⁹⁷ Vésteinn Ólason, "The Fantastic Element in Fourteenth Century Íslendingasögur: A Survey," *Gripla*, no. 18 (2007): 14.

⁹⁸ Jan Rüdiger, *All the King's Women: Polygyny and Politics in Europe, 900–1250*, trans. Tim Barnwell, The Northern World (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2020), 176.

⁹⁹ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum* ed. and trans. R. A. B. Mynors, R. M. Thomson, and M. Winterbottom, vol. 1, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 363. Malmesbury notes that she is struck by lightning, a fitting end for her cruel acts.

¹⁰⁰ Karras, *Unmarriages*, 86.

her too proud now.”)¹⁰¹ Bergljót has suggested that Karl aims to punish her for her beauty by disfiguring her with years of torture:

Hann linnir ekki látum fyrr en hann hefur látið afskræma hina fegurstu konu svo að hún er samboðin hvaða karldurgi sem kann að girnast hana.¹⁰² (Appendix I:1:III:23)

This removal of her beauty, regardless of her age, is a possible contributing factor to Yngvildr’s sharp decrease in value, making her undesirable to Ljótólfr and Skíði when she eventually returns home. However, there are numerous other factors contributing to why Ljótólfr and Skíði no longer desire her including her kidnap (making her sexually undesirable except as a slave), as well as her crime of emasculation at the Alþing.

There is nevertheless a strong correlation between beauty and sexual desirability — and therefore value — in kidnapped and enslaved girls. Ibn Faḍlān describes how women are ‘الروقة’ (al-rūqa) ‘beautiful’, before observing how they are subject to intercourse with their masters. This adjective shares a root, ‘ر و ق’ (r w q) with the verb ‘راق’ (rāqa) which has connotations of giving pleasure, and this word suggests an inherent link between beauty and ability to provide sexual pleasure.¹⁰³ In *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, the bright skin and fairness of the war-torn women is emphasised, and the attention to the women’s bodies connotes their value as sexual commodities:

en fengin urðu
fögr sprund, Danir undan
Láss helt líki drósar.
Leið fyr yðr til skeiða,
bitu fíkula fjotrar,
fljóð mart, hqrund bjartir.¹⁰⁴ (Appendix I:1:III:24)

¹⁰¹ *Svarfdæla saga*, 206.

¹⁰² Bergljót Soffía Kristjánsdóttir, “Skarðið,” 147.

¹⁰³ Wehr, *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 427.

¹⁰⁴ *Haralds saga Sigurðarsonar*, 94.

In *Magnúss saga ins góða*, women taken as spoils of war are described as ‘auðtróðu’ (treasure-twigs), which, as Jan Rüdiger comments, ‘makes the prey being hunted here doubly attractive’, and their bodies are also aligned with the violence and blood of war:¹⁰⁵

Menn eigu þess minnask
 manna Svens at kannu,
 víga Freyr, síz vöru,
 vef-Gefn, þrjár stefnur.
 Vöpn es fagr á Fjóni
 fljóðs. Dugir vöpn at rjóða.¹⁰⁶ (Appendix I:1:III:25)

The clause ‘vöpn at rjóða’ evokes Klaufi’s graphic verse, ‘Rauð þinn hana inni’, before he rapes Yngvildr. Here, it is an extremely violent euphemism, it seems, for rape in the context of the battlefield, the act elided with the violence of war. Magnús’ men hope for ‘fagr fljóðs’ — woman with physical beauty — to render more palatable the prospect of raping her. There is a constant trend of the beauty of slave women being highlighted, an aspect that is innately linked to their sexual value.

The many beautiful, kidnapped, and sexually assaulted women of the *Íslendingasögur* seem to have their beauty given as explanation for their kidnap and sexual assault or threat. In *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar*, the kidnapped siblings are picked out because ‘Þau voru bæði mögr og þó fögr að álitu’ (they were both thin but beautiful of face), thus drawing attention to Marsibilla’s desirability.¹⁰⁷ *Droplaugarsona saga*’s Arneiðr, too, attracts Ketill’s attention because her hair was ‘mikit ok fagrt ok fór vel’ (long and beautiful and suited her).¹⁰⁸ Ketill buys and later marries her. In *Flóamanna saga*, Þorgils, the main character, is raiding in Ireland. He pillages some swords and also spots ‘tvær konur; var önnur ung ok fríð, en önnur gömul ok þó fríð’ (two women, one was young and beautiful and the other was old but still

¹⁰⁵ *Magnúss saga ins góða*, 53; Rüdiger, *All the King’s Women*, 176.

¹⁰⁶ *Magnúss saga ins góða*, 55.

¹⁰⁷ *Jökuls þátrr Búasonar*, 56.

¹⁰⁸ *Droplaugarsona saga*, 138.

beautiful).¹⁰⁹ He decides to take them both with him and his motivation is likely sexual since they are both highlighted for their beauty. This contrasts sharply with the *fornaldarsaga Sörla saga sterka*, in which Högni, laying siege to King Erlingr's fortress, sees two women in a bower: 'konu ófríða ok mjök aldraða ásýndum ok hjá henni eina jómfrú svá fagra ok dæilega ásýndum, at Höгна fell vel til geðs hennar prýði' (an unbeautiful woman who looked very old and beside her a young girl so beautiful and fair of face that Högni fell for her beauty).¹¹⁰ He wishes to 'ná þeiri inni fögru mey' (obtain the beautiful maiden) but shows no interest in taking the older woman.¹¹¹ The princess' beauty is his sole motivation for kidnapping her, which strongly indicates a sexual motivation.

Commenting on the steep increase in the price of slave women in fourteenth- and fifteenth- century Italy, Sally McKee suggests that such increases, inherently economically inefficient, could be explained by sexual demands on the slaves: if 'sexual service is factored into explanations for the increased demand, then the rise in the cost for female slaves in this period becomes more understandable'.¹¹² Such logic, applied to Iceland, would account for the higher prices Yngvildr fetches. McKee does note that physical attractiveness is neither the sole nor the primary motivator behind sexual violence in a slave-master dynamic, but it is, as with rape more generally, also a product of a power dynamics and 'the violence inherent, quite literally, in the system'.¹¹³ Considering this context, it seems extremely likely that Yngvildr is purchased for sexual purposes, especially because Karl sells her for a very high

¹⁰⁹ *Flóamanna saga*, 262.

¹¹⁰ *Sörla saga sterka*, 401.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Sally McKee, "The Implications of Slave Women's Sexual Service in Late Medieval Italy," in *Unfreie Arbeit: Ökonomische und kulturgeschichtliche Perspektiven*, ed. M. Erdem Kabadayi and Tobias Reichardt (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2007), 103.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 104.

price even though ‘hon er óvön verknaði’ (she is unaccustomed to work).¹¹⁴ The slavers — after assessing her beauty — are nonetheless keen to buy her. There is an underlying sexual threat within their proviso that ‘„Þess þyrfti,” sǫgðu þeir, „at hon ynni mikit ok vel, svá dýr sem hon er, ok viljum vit sjá hana.”’ (“This will require,” they said, “that she *works/loves* a lot and well, as she is so very expensive, and we want to see her”).¹¹⁵ The verb the slavers use is *ynni*, the subjunctive form of both *vinna* ‘to work’ and *unna* ‘to love’. The effect of this paronomasia suggests that the work she is expected to perform for them is sexual. Indeed, her sale is contingent on her appearance, and appearance is far more likely to affect the sale of a slave intended for sexual rather than simply menial purposes. Stefan Brink, writing on medieval Scandinavia, proposes that ‘the beauty of a female slave may have increased her price’.¹¹⁶ Such is her beauty that Karl is even able to increase the price from ‘þrjú hundruð silfrs’ (three hundred silvers) with the Danish traders to ‘sex hundruð silfrs’ (six hundred silvers) with the Swedish trader.¹¹⁷

While Yngvildr’s beauty is often commented upon — even by the slavers themselves, who ‘kváðust enga ambátt jafnfagra sét hafa’ (said that they had never seen such a beautiful slave girl) — the slavers’ ugliness is emphasised.¹¹⁸ The pair in Denmark are described as ‘miklir ok illiligir’ (big and hideous), and the slaver in Sweden is likewise described as ‘mikill ok illiligir’.¹¹⁹ The saga writer contrasts their ugliness and height with Yngvildr’s beauty and vulnerability. Similarly, Yngvildr’s union with Klaufi was a poignant mismatch of attractiveness, and Waugh comments that

¹¹⁴ *Svarfdæla saga*, 200.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹¹⁶ Stefan Brink, “Slavery in Medieval Scandinavia,” in *Viking-Age Trade: Silver, Slaves and Gotland*, ed. Jacek Gruszczyński, Marek Jankowiak, and Jonathan Shepard (London: Routledge, 2020), 49.

¹¹⁷ *Svarfdæla saga*, 201; 204.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 200.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 204.

This coupling recalls the very familiar theme of beauty and the beast, and perhaps the saga writer wants readers to interpret Yngvildr's outrageous first marriage as a punishment for her illicit sex with Ljótólfr.¹²⁰

Klaufi is described as inhumanly tall and very ugly; the saga writer comments on his immense stature — ‘hann var þverrar handar ok fimm álna hár’ (he was nearly eight feet tall) — before detailing the multitude of ways in which his face was unappealing.¹²¹

DEICTIC RAPABILITY

‘HJEMME’

Klaufi's ugliness and Yngvildr's fairness also serves to highlight the *berserk*-Otherness of the former. Bjørn Bandlien suggests that rape bifurcates in terms of social acceptability: the ‘Othered’ man from outside the community raping women from within the society is not permissible, while conversely, men from within the community raping women from outside is permissible:

Idealene om tvang av kvinner “ute” og et ønske om anerkjennelse av kvinner “hjemme” kunne derfor eksistere samtidig.¹²² (Appendix I:1:III:26)

The relationship between Karl and Yngvildr is too complex to be summarised simply as a cruel Icelandic man mistreating an unfortunate Icelandic woman; indeed, the saga writer does not necessarily depict Karl's actions as particularly heinous, and certainly not misplaced. Bandlien's rule generally runs true in the *Íslendingasögur*: ‘ute’ (from outside the man's own community) women become tenable commodities and valuable pawns to be used tactically in war, whereas ‘hjemme’ (from within the man's own community) women are easily victimised by ‘Other’ men.

¹²⁰ Waugh, “Misogyny,” 185.

¹²¹ *Svarfdæla saga*, 162.

¹²² Bandlien, *Å finne den rette*, 48.

Rape is depicted largely as a threat from the margins, and this is reflected in eddic myth. Three principal Ásynjur all face the threat of kidnap and implied sexual advances, and in each of these instances the would-be abductor is a *jötunn*: Sif by the giant Hrungrnir; Íðunn by the giant Þjazi; and Freyja no less than three times by the giants Hrungrnir, Þrymr, and the Builder.¹²³ The safe enclosure of Ásgarðr is cast into peril by these extra-societal assailants. Similarly, for the most part in the *Íslendingasögur*, kidnapping, enslavement and rape are largely perpetrated by the very much ‘Othered’ identity groups of giants and the *berserkr*. Both these groups tend to exist outside societal norms and reside physically outside of the community, with giants often dwelling in caves and *berserkr* typically hailing from Norway, or more specifically, Hálogaland in northern Norway, an area considered ‘wild and untamed’.¹²⁴ Merkelbach, as part of her study on monstrosity and ‘Otherness’, says that

One of the features of rape culture, it has been argued, is that it tries to distance itself from rapists, excusing them as social anomalies that have no relation to ordinary men. This is essentially what happens in the *Íslendingasögur*: by constructing the monstrous *berserkr* as rapist, non-monstrous men — even if they themselves are sexually violent — have a figure to point to and claim, “This is the monster; I am not like it.”¹²⁵

This ‘Othered’ threat looms large in the *Íslendingasögur*; there is a pervasive fear of women being taken not by members of Icelandic society but by figures representing outside threats. Spatially, kidnapping often occurs on the fringes of society: the perpetrators live extrasocietally, like *Flóamanna saga*’s ‘ránsmenninir’ (robbers), who live offshore and kidnap farmers’ daughters.¹²⁶ Accordingly, the kidnapped women are taken away to extrasocietal locations such as caves, the natural dwellings of ogres and giants, who are often the perpetrators of kidnap. Such dwellings are not governed by the rules of Icelandic law and

¹²³ For Íðunn see *Skáldskaparmál*, 2; for Hrungrnir see *Skáldskaparmál*, 20; for Þrymr see *Þrymskviða*, 423, st. 11; for the Builder see *Gylfaginning*, 34.

¹²⁴ Roderick Dale, *The Myths and Realities of the Viking Berserkr*, Studies in Medieval History and Culture (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2022), 28.

¹²⁵ Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society*, 115.

¹²⁶ *Flóamanna saga*, 306.

protocol; in *Fljótsdæla saga*, Geitir the giant takes Droplaug to a cave, and in *Bárðar saga*, Kolbjörn the ogre kidnaps Sólrún and ties her to a chair in a cave.¹²⁷ The ‘Otherness’ of this latter instance is particularly heightened as Sólrún says she was taken ‘með fjólkynngi’ (with magic).¹²⁸ Likewise in *Reykðæla saga*, Þóra is kidnapped via the machinations of Ísgerðr, who ‘var mikil fyrir sér ok fjólkunnig mjök’ (was powerful and very skilled in magic).¹²⁹ These kidnapped women are thus not only displaced from their homes but from their very society, beyond the easy reach of potential male rescuers and even taken by magical forces, adding another barrier to their possible rescue and increasing the ‘Otherness’ of the circumstances of their kidnappings.

In *Grettis saga* there are numerous examples of *berserkir* abducting and raping women: besides Þórir *þomb* and Qgmundr *illi*, who I mentioned in the previous chapter, Snækollr the *berserkr* also wants to kidnap Einarr’s daughter.¹³⁰ He is one example of the fear of ‘Othered’ kidnapping in the saga’s zeitgeist:

Þat var þá víða í Nóregi, at markamenn ok illvirkjar hljópu ofan af mörkum ok skoruðu á men til kvenna eða tóku á brótt fé manna með ofríki, þar sem eigi var liðsfjöldi fyrir.¹³¹ (Appendix I:1:III:27)

This brief passage depicts a milieu of terror surrounding *berserkir*, who seem to live in the woods and occasionally leap out and threaten men for their wives. Merkelbach views the characteristics of ‘abductor and rapist’ as intrinsic *berserkr* qualities, such that a man abducting or raping can be an indicator of his identity as a *berserkr*, as she argues in the case of another Snækollr, a rapist-*berserkr* in *Svarfdæla saga*.¹³²

¹²⁷ *Fljótsdæla saga*, 226; *Bárðar saga*, 152.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ *Reykðæla saga*, 191.

¹³⁰ *Grettis saga*, 134.

¹³¹ Ibid, 135.

¹³² Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society*, 108.

Snækollr leaves Þorsteinn's sister, Þórarna, in such a wretched state that she is willing to pay a huge fee to send her children home to Iceland. Gríss, the captain, asks: ‘„Hví ertu svá dálig orðin af svá góðum ættum?“’ (“How have you, coming from such a good family, become so wretched?”).¹³³ Þórarna's response offers a brief glimpse into her trauma:

„Ek var hertekin af Snækolli Ljótssyni, ok hann á börn þessi við mér; *síðan rak hann mik frá sér nauðga.*“¹³⁴ (Appendix I:1:III:28)

I have italicised this last clause because it poses a number of problems when translating. There are various ways it could be translated: to translate one way indicates that Þórarna is ‘dáligr’ (wretched) because her lover abandoned her with their children, to translate in another way indicates that she is *dáligr* because a man captured her against her will, raped and impregnated her, and then abandoned her. *Rak* (infinitive: *reka*) means ‘to drive; compel’ or ‘to thrust; push with force’.¹³⁵ The verb therefore either simply denotes that Snækollr drove Þórarna away or, given the semantic variant with more physical connotations, that he physically pushed her away, indicating a degree of violence. But the primary problem when translating this sentence is *nauðga*. *Nauðga* (v.) means ‘to force; compel’ or, as I have argued, ‘to rape’. But in adjectival form, as it is here, *nauðigr* means ‘unwilling’ which could simply mean that Þórarna did not want to be driven away from Snækollr because she had affection or attachment to him. Given the use of the related word *nauðga* in the *Jónsbók níðingsverk* code, the first option seems more likely (Appendix II: *Jónsbók* IV.2). Þórarna declares herself to have been *hertekin* by Snækollr. As the example in *Eiríks saga rauði* shows, a girl or woman could still be considered *hertekin* even if she went with her captor willingly, so long as her family — particularly a male member of her family — did not consent to her departure. Given the context in which *nauðga* occurs here (with Þórarna

¹³³ *Svarfdæla saga*, 154.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ ONP, s.v. ‘reka’.

relating how a man took her away, gave her children and abandoned her), it does seem very likely that the word is supposed to connote her unwillingness to be kidnapped and have sexual intercourse, rather than her unwillingness to be abandoned by him. This is further compounded by the sometimes-violent connotations of *reka*. At its weakest, the clause reads, ‘he drove me, unwilling, away from him’. At its most explicit, it can be translated, ‘he thrust me, ravished, away from him’.

That Snækollr, Þórarinn’s abductor, is a *berserkr*, has been best argued by Merkelbach, who identifies in *Svarfdæla saga* ‘a clear case of a *berserk* descent line’.¹³⁶ Ljótr *inn bleiki*, although not described outright as a *berserkr*, has the characteristic *berserkr* quality that ‘hann bíti eigi vápn’ (weapons do not bite him) and, more concretely, is brother to Moldi, who is ‘víkingr eðr hálfberserkr’ (Viking or half-*berserkr*).¹³⁷ Although the saga’s sizable lacuna ‘makes it difficult to trace the exact genealogies’ it is reasonable to assume that Ljótr *inn bleiki* is father to Snækollr Ljótsson because ‘*Berserkir* are otherwise never introduced with their patronymics’.¹³⁸ Klaufi, as well as being Snækollr’s son, is outright said to have a fit of *berserkrism* in which ‘kominn at honum berserksgangr’ (a *berserkr*-rage had come over him).¹³⁹ Thus, Snækollr is likely to be at least partially *berserkr* and can be associated with the rapist characteristics that emerge in the more explicit translation of Þórarinn’s explanation of her misery.

Merkelbach has further suggested a ‘contaminating effect’ of *berserkir*: through sexual assault, *berserkir* can contaminate women with monstrosity.¹⁴⁰ If this is accurate, Snækollr and Klaufi contaminate their victims by raping them; this renders Þórarinn and

¹³⁶ Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society*, 107.

¹³⁷ *Svarfdæla saga*, 135; 142.

¹³⁸ Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society*, 108.

¹³⁹ *Svarfdæla saga*, 174.

¹⁴⁰ See Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society*, 113–5.

Yngvildr social outcasts, with Þórarna managing to rehabilitate her children by sending them away but being unable to go with them herself. Merkelbach does argue that Yngvildr's contamination prompts the question 'as to why Karl did not rape her himself to reinstate his family's honor and his own control over this deviant woman', going on to reason that 'the issue of monstrous contagion could offer an explanation: if Karl himself had engaged in sexual intercourse with her, he would have risked contamination as well'.¹⁴¹ However, I have shown that Karl does in all likelihood rape her, repeatedly, and I therefore argue not for a monstrously contaminating effect, but for a devaluing effect of rape in general: like *Víglundar saga*, *Kjalnesinga saga*, and *Grettis saga*, all of which construct the raped body as shamed, so too are the raped women in *Svarfdæla saga* socially outcast. As a post-classical saga, this certainly lends credence to Ljungqvist's claim that shame became increasingly important in the fourteenth century.

Yngvildr originally objects to the marriage to Skíði because of his lowly status, and Bandlien has argued for a contaminating effect of slaves, stating that 'If a free woman slept with a slave, she herself chose to define herself as equal to the unfree'.¹⁴² This certainly makes sense in Yngvildr's case as, after marrying Skíði, Karl turns her into an 'ambátt' (slave girl) with ease and no opposition, and this is what she remains until he releases her, degraded, to her former lover, who no longer wants her by this point.

'UTE'

Just as kidnapping was a threat from outside, so too could men from within the bounds of acceptable society target women from without; just as giants attack the Ásynjur, so too do the

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 114–5.

¹⁴² Bandlien, *Strategies of Passion*, 89.

Æsir torment and target giant women.¹⁴³ According to saga literature Icelanders could, apparently with little condemnation, kidnap and enslave Irish women. It may be that such depraved acts of sexual misdemeanour with slave girls were naturally watered down by saga writers; *Landnámabók* demonstrates an explicit desire to distance Icelandic ancestry from slavery.¹⁴⁴

Yet the practice of slavery occurs throughout the corpus of Old Norse literature, even in *Landnámabók* itself: Geirmundr Heljarskin's mother was taken 'at herfangi' (as spoils of war) for sexual purposes during a raid and forcibly married to his father, Hjǫrr.¹⁴⁵ I propose that rather than erasing slavery and sexual subjugation within slavery — as *Landnámabók* would advocate for — the *Íslendingasögur* often attempt to sanitise its slave-based foundations. Karras writes that

While it was generally known and even accepted in western Europe that some men had sexual relations with female slaves, or paid attention to physical attractiveness when they purchased slaves for general domestic work, it was not openly acknowledged in the way it was, for example, in Muslim culture.¹⁴⁶

This chimes with the general inattention to the more unsavoury aspects of enslavement in the literature, which would hardly reflect well on the founding Icelanders. Slavery and sexual subjugation within the corpus are made rather more palatable than historical accounts would suggest.

We might think, for instance, of Þorgils in *Flóamanna saga*, who is deterred from kidnapping the two beautiful Irish women, one old and one young. A man approaches him

¹⁴³ For instance, Freyr and Gerðr in *Skírnismál*; Óðinn and his deception of Gunnlöð in *Skáldskaparmál*, 4; Þórr's many altercations with giant women — see McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, for more on this (109–25) — including an incident in which Þórr throws a stone at the giantess Gjalp's private parts to stop her from filling the river in *Skáldskaparmál*, 25.

¹⁴⁴ See above, Introduction, n. 7.

¹⁴⁵ *Landnámabók*, 150.

¹⁴⁶ Karras, *Unmarriages*, 84.

and begins to speak (presumably in Irish) and the older woman begins to speak in Norse. She says

„Þessi maðr er jarl ok son minn, en ek er víkversk at móðurkyni; munu þér þá ok bezt njóta gripanna, er svá er gert, því at þungi fylgir sverðinu. Son minn heitir Hugi; hann býðr þér, Þorgils, fé, heldr en þér takið mik í burtu. Er yðr ok ekki happ í okkr burt at taka.“¹⁴⁷ (Appendix I:1:III:29)

Her Icelandic provenance — as well as perhaps, the cursed sword — deters Þorgils. He seems to be exonerated by not taking them, even though he is motivated by selfish desires, and perhaps his attitude to kidnapping alters as, later in the saga, he agrees to help a man whose daughter is being threatened by a ‘ránsmaðr’ (robber) Although Þorgils is selfishly motivated here as he owes the farmer a debt, he is nonetheless transformed from a would-be slaver of apparently Irish women to the saviour of Icelandic women from *ránsmenninir*, thus evading condemnation. This change of heart leaves the number of Icelandic slavers in the *Íslendingasögur* very low, and very ‘watered down’.

Melkorka

The most salient example of this ‘watering down’ is the relationship between Melkorka and Hǫskuldr in *Laxdæla saga*, very much a sanitised account of what would likely be the reality of a coerced sexual relationship between a slave woman and her owner. This is probably due to the overall idealising of Óláfr *pái*’s parentage. Óláfr ‘the Peacock’, Karras argues, was known throughout the thirteenth century to have been the child of a slave and so ‘By making Melkorka an enslaved princess [...] the author removed a good deal of the stigma of slavery’.¹⁴⁸ This ‘idealized portrayal’ of Melkorka facilitates the construction of a noble

¹⁴⁷ *Flóamanna saga*, 263.

¹⁴⁸ Karras, *Unmarriages*, 104.

lineage for Óláfr.¹⁴⁹ To make Óláfr *pái*'s mother a slave, but a regal slave in both air and blood, then, seems to be a compromise; Melkorka's palpable graces of elevated rank raise her above a slave of mere commoner's ancestry.

Indeed, the writer's attempts to gentrify Melkorka and thus ennoble the circumstances of Óláfr's birth are the focal point of the intercourse between Hǫskuldr and his new slave, rather than depicting explicit emotion or sexual. Melkorka's re-dressing immediately after the implied copulation gives her the finery that reflects and augments her societal roots as a princess:

Þat sama kveld rekkði Hǫskuldr hjá henni. En um morguninn eptir, er menn fóru í klæði sín, mælti Hǫskuldr: „Lítt sér stórlæti á klæðabúnaði þeim, er Gilli enn auðgi hefir þér fengit; er þat ok satt, at honum var meiri raun at klæða tólf en mér eina“. Síðan lauk Hǫskuldr upp kistu eina ok tók upp góð kvenmannsklæði ok seldi henni; var þat ok allra manna mál, at henni semði góð klæði.¹⁵⁰ (Appendix I:1:III:30)

The very conception of a child may be indicative of the writer's desire to have Melkorka consent to the sex, as I discussed in Chapter II. Subscription to such a view would complement the removal of any violence from Óláfr's conception scene.

Melkorka's attitude to Hǫskuldr is, however, not straightforwardly cordial. Karras, speaking of a wider culture of slave-master co-parentage in medieval Europe, identifies the historical impossibility of gauging consent/coercion in these sexual relationships:

We cannot know what went through the minds of the many slave women who were sexual partners of and had children with their masters. The fact that they were vulnerable to coercion does not mean that they did not exercise agency. No doubt some women fought back against coerced sex either physically or by passive noncooperation; no doubt others acquiesced gladly or even initiated a relationship, in order to avoid punishment or to secure better living conditions for themselves or their children.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁹ William Sayers, "Management of the Celtic Fact in Landnámabók," *Scandinavian Studies* 66, no. 2 (1994), 140.

¹⁵⁰ *Laxdæla saga*, 24–5.

¹⁵¹ Karras, *Unmarriages*, 70.

As his slave, it is certainly tempting to immediately identify coercion in their sexual relationship, as seemed so evident in the case of the slave girl and the master in Ibn Faḍlān's account due to the silence of the girl. In medieval Iceland, these lines may have been somewhat blurred as evidenced by Karras' research, which proposes that 'in the Viking Age concubinage and slavery were intimately and intricately connected'.¹⁵² The status of a 'slave concubine', as Karras terms it, seems to have been largely fluid and without structurally-imposed measures of how it was to be dealt with: 'the bearing of a man's child does not necessarily make a woman part of his household or confer upon her any customary role or special status'.¹⁵³ Bourke reminds us of the historical specificity of concepts of who could or could not consent, suggesting that historically,

Slave women were regarded as the absolute property of another person and were incapable of acting as individual agents. Concepts of consent or resistance were inappropriate. They were inherently rapable.¹⁵⁴

Nonetheless, Melkorka's acts of silence and secretly raising her son to speak Irish, are suggestive of resistance, which is itself suggestive of a reaction to coercion. The saga writer heavily sanitises the master-slave sexual relationship between Hǫskuldr and Melkorka. However, her silence acts as a reminder of their intrinsically unequal relationship dynamic, even if the relationship is otherwise free enough of violence to give Óláfr *pái* a respectable origin tale.

Indeed, Melkorka's regal attire contributes to this overall depiction of respectability. When in the hands of Gilli *enn auðgi*, she is described as 'illa klædd' (ill-clad), possibly meaning poorly dressed in the sense of wearing ugly clothes or possibly in the sense of

¹⁵² Ruth Mazo Karras, "Concubinage and Slavery in the Viking Age," *Scandinavian Studies* 62, no. 2 (1990): 141.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁵⁴ Bourke, *Rape: A History*, 76.

wearing scant clothing.¹⁵⁵ That Hǫskuldr notes this inadequate clothing, proceeds to have sex with her and then redresses her in fine clothes is coercive and has airs of grooming. However, Melkorka's status as a princess adds a layer of care and acknowledgement for her as her true self and thus it barely comes across as a negative encounter, despite the circumstance of slavery and sexual subjugation.

Clothing — or lack of it — is also an important theme in *Svarfdæla saga*. Roused from her bed by Karl Karlsson during her husband's absence, Yngvildr tries to dress herself before being dragged outside, but she manages only to get into her slip. The saga writer draws particular attention to her 'mikit ok fagrt' (long and beautiful) hair, notable not only for its lustre but for its visibility: she has previously been labelled beautiful when her hair is presumably covered by a headdress, but here she is noted for being 'faldlaus' (without a head-dress).¹⁵⁶ *Droplaugarsona saga*'s Arneiðr is identically described as having 'mikit ok fagrt' hair.¹⁵⁷ Commenting on *Svarfdæla saga*, Jochens states, 'This story demonstrates at the time both the sexual connotations of visible hair and the practice of married women covering their heads during the day'.¹⁵⁸ There is thus an edge of the taboo in the display of Yngvildr and Arneiðr's exposed hair, and an inherent sexualisation given the connotations of uncovered female hair. If exposed hair symbolises sexual beauty, then the detail that, as Yngvildr is purchased by slavers, 'tók annarr í hár henni ok leiddi hana, en annar hafði svipu í hendi ok keyrði hana' (one took her by the hair and led her thus, while the other had in his hand a whip and lashed her), can be no coincidence.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ *Laxdæla saga*, 23.

¹⁵⁶ *Svarfdæla saga*, 197.

¹⁵⁷ *Droplaugarsona saga*, 138.

¹⁵⁸ Jochens, "Male Gaze," 15.

¹⁵⁹ *Svarfdæla saga*, 201.

Later, Yngvildr is sold from slaver to slaver, and is increasingly ill-clad each time she re-enters the story, her clothes more ragged and closer to nudity: ‘ok hekk annarr trefill fyrir, en annarr á bak’ (some rags hung from her front, some on her back).¹⁶⁰ At the first instance of her capture she is clad simply in a shirt and wants to get dressed properly: ‘Hon stóð upp ok vildi klæðast ok komst eigi í fleira en í serk sinn’ (She stood up and wanted to get dressed and came out in no more than her shirt).¹⁶¹ Her increasingly ragged state is a mark of degradation that takes the place of the untold tortures that no doubt befall her. To add insult to injury, every time she is re-purchased by Karl Karlsson, he dresses her in finery:

Hann leiddi hana til skips ok lét gera henni laug ok klæddi hana góðum klæðum ok gerði hana svá sæla sem þá, er hon var sælst.¹⁶² (Appendix I:1:III:31)

That Karl ‘restores [Yngvildr] to her accustomed clothing (and status) [...] only underlines her value: a mere exchange piece’, as has been argued by Robin Waugh.¹⁶³ The undoing and redressing cycle to which Karl submits Yngvildr means, as Waugh says, that ‘Her status with Karl and the slave owners remains totally insecure and seems designed to be as psychologically debilitating as possible’.¹⁶⁴ This clothing in finery functions very differently to Høskuldr’s redressing of Melkorka, which seems to visually cement her nobility.

By the end of her period of enslavement Yngvildr is, finally, ‘konu svá nokta, at aldri beið á henni ríðanda ræksn’ (a woman so naked, that fish-gut-like mesh scarcely covered her).¹⁶⁵ It is only then that, nearly naked, she finally capitulates to Karl’s demands, ending her multi-year ordeal. Yngvildr’s re-dressing and undressing is a cyclic form of psychological torture designed to prey on her sense of vanity. It is in her most exposed state, and after three

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 202.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 197.

¹⁶² Ibid., 202.

¹⁶³ Waugh, “Misogyny,” 159.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ *Svarfdæla saga*, 204.

winters and having been trafficked across the North Atlantic, that she finally gives in and admits that Skíði's lip 'aldri fullt mundu verða' (will never be fully healed), giving up everything she was determined to maintain even through her first bout of enslavement and the deaths of her sons.¹⁶⁶

SUICIDE

Yngvildr's possible suicide in *Svarfdæla saga* is integral to understanding the full extent of her trauma. Just like Helga in *Bárðar saga*, Yngvildr's troubled and traumatised state propels her from society. The decline of her mental resolve culminates in her capitulation to Karl's wishes after years of enslavement:

Hon lagði þá hendr um háls Karli ok grét, en þat hafði Karl aldri áðr sét, at henni hefði nokkurs fengit, hvat sem at henni hafði borizt.¹⁶⁷ (Appendix I:1:III:32)

During her period of enslavement she is referred to as *kona* or *ambáttina*.¹⁶⁸ This depersonalising way of referring to her only relents when her mental resolve is thoroughly broken. The narratological neglect of Yngvildr, however, does not end here. When it comes to her suicide, the saga writer does not even dignify her fate with certainty:

Ljótólfr tok við Yngvildr fagrinn, ok kunnu men þat eigi at segja, hvárt hon hefir gipt verit, en sumir segja, at hon hafi tortímt sér af óyndi.¹⁶⁹ (Appendix I:1:III:33)

It is in this frustratingly ambiguous manner that Yngvildr is written out of *Svarfdæla saga*. She is not granted specificity in death, unlike the majority of primary characters in saga literature, who are granted graphic deaths in the crossfire of battle or feud, or else dignified deaths on their sickbeds. Yngvildr is given merely a 'maybe' of a suicide. Much like

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 295.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 204.

¹⁶⁸ This happens when Karl sees her being pulled along by the Danish slavers, and by the slaver in Norway, *Svarfdæla saga*, 202; 204.

¹⁶⁹ *Svarfdæla saga*, 206.

medieval rape, medieval suicide is a slippery topic to define, and Rebecca McNamara and Juanita Ruys question, ‘how can we begin to unearth the emotions that were understood to be related to suicide in the pre-modern world?’¹⁷⁰ To fully understand the implications of Yngvildr’s possible suicide and its ambiguities first necessitates a broader study of suicidal ideation and representation in the Middle Ages and specifically in the Old Norse corpus. I will be drawing here substantially from Alexander Murray’s research on the former, and the work of Terry Gunnell and Kirsi Kanerva on the latter.¹⁷¹

According to *Hávamál*, ‘Betra er lífðum / en sé illlifðum, / ey getr kvikr kú’ (It is better to live than to be without life; ever the living one gets the cow).¹⁷² According to Murray, however, pre-Christian Germanic belief in no way condemned suicide and in fact ‘the early Germanic peoples as a whole tolerated, even respected, suicide, and were accordingly free of any fear or suicide phobia’.¹⁷³ He goes on to argue for a similar lack of suicide phobia in the sagas.¹⁷⁴ There are *Íslendingasögur* episodes in which suicide seems to be a reasonable solution for being shamed, with shame itself a deeply undesirable attribute to be avoided at all costs in medieval Icelandic society, as argued by, for instance, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen.¹⁷⁵ Perhaps the most famous example in the corpus is that of Njáll: ‘,en ek vil eigi lifa við skömm’” (“I do not want to live with shame”), he says, refusing to

¹⁷⁰ Rebecca F. McNamara and Juanita Feros Ruys, “Unlocking the Silences of the Self-Murdered: Textual Approaches to Suicidal Emotions in the Middle Ages,” *Exemplaria* 26, no. 1 (2014): 58.

¹⁷¹ Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998–2000); Kirsi Kanerva, “Female Suicide in Thirteenth-Century Iceland: The Case of Brynhildr in *Völsunga saga*,” *Viator (Berkeley)* 49, no. 3 (2018); Kirsi Kanerva, “Genre Matters? Female Suicide in Mythic, Mytho-Heroic, and Historical Contexts,” in *Folklore and Old Norse Mythology*, ed. M. Frog and J. Ahola, Folklore Fellows’ Communications (Helsinki: Kalevala Society, 2021); Terry Gunnell, “Suicide and the Sagas,” *forthcoming*.

¹⁷² *Hávamál*, 336, st. 70.

¹⁷³ Alexander Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 2:567.

¹⁷⁴ Murray uses Brynhildr as a primary example of the glory of suicide, and the fact that no *draugar* are suicides as convincing evidence of a lack of fear of those who had committed suicide, which is a rather inconsequential piece of evidence, in my opinion, and is not indicative of any fixed views towards suicide, *ibid*.

¹⁷⁵ Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*.

leave his burning house as he is old and cannot avenge his sons.¹⁷⁶ Likewise, in *Vatnsdæla saga* Eyvindr and Gauti stab themselves for their inability to avenge Ingimundr.¹⁷⁷ In *Egils saga*, Gunnell suggests that ‘rather than being viewed as shameful or unmanly, Egill’s impending act of suicide is seen essentially in terms of strength, humanity and passion’.¹⁷⁸ Egill’s desire to starve himself is prompted by his son’s death, and he asks, ‘„Hver ván er, at ek muna lífa vilja við harm þenna?“ (“What hope is there, that I might want to live with this grief?”).¹⁷⁹ Overwhelming sadness appears to be a valid motivator for suicide, at least in this particular episode.

WOMEN AND SUICIDE

Gunnell’s research also highlights the considerable number of female suicides present in the corpus as a whole; indeed, many of the examples he highlights in his comprehensive study are women, even though his is not a gendered study by design. Another study focusing on Old Norse and Finnish myth concludes that, ‘drawing on Northern European material, importantly extends and supports our theory that suicide as an escape from intolerable predicament has existed for at least one millennium’, but the more interesting aspect of this study — which it does not outwardly recognise in itself — is that every single case of suicide it detects within these two traditions is female, and each of these suicides is related to sexual violence.¹⁸⁰ The androcentricity of female suicides cannot be overlooked: women die for a male family member and/or because of male violence. Both Murray and Gunnell note the

¹⁷⁶ *Njáls saga*, 330.

¹⁷⁷ *Vatnsdæla saga*, 63–4.

¹⁷⁸ Gunnell, “Suicide and the Sagas.”

¹⁷⁹ *Egils saga*, 245.

¹⁸⁰ Saxby Pridmore, Jamshid Ahmadi, and Zainab Abd Majeed, “Suicide in Old Norse and Finnish Folk Stories,” *Australas Psychiatry* 19, no. 4 (2011): 323. The study makes reference to Brynhildr, Aino and Kullervo’s sister from the medieval Finnish epic the *Kalevala*.

very public nature of these suicides: they are designed to make a spectacle and, in doing so, prove a moral point.

Numerous Norse women choose death over an unwanted marriage. In *Landnámabók*, two men exchange ‘baeði lǫndum ok konum ok fé ǫllu’ (both land and wives and all their wealth).¹⁸¹ One of these wives, Sigríðr, cannot tolerate being treated as a commodity, as the text explicitly states, ‘en Sigríðr hengði sik í hofinu, því at hon vildi eigi mannakaupit’ (but Sigríðr hanged herself in the temple, because she did not want to be a commodity).¹⁸² This very public suicide indicates not merely an act of despair and desperation, but a desire to publicly decry and denounce the cruelty of her fate. One would almost be tempted to call it a political statement. Gunnell likens the publicity of this act to Helga in the *fornaldarsaga Hervarar saga*, who has been given in marriage to Heiðrekr. Whether or not she consents is unknown. Nothing more is said of Helga (aside from the fact that she gives him a son, Angantýr) other than that she was ‘svá reið eftir fall föður sins, at hún hengdi sik sjálf í dísarsal’ (so angry at her father’s death that she hanged herself in the *dísarsal*).¹⁸³ This is an act of anger, presumably because she cannot bear to be married to the man who brought about the death of her father; so too is it an act then of defiance and of self-preservation. Of these two acts of suicide, Gunnell says, ‘In neither case is the act condemned in the text. Furthermore, in both cases, far from being private (like most medieval suicides), the acts were clearly meant to attract attention (at least afterwards)’.¹⁸⁴ In the *U* redaction of *Hervarar saga*, ‘lagdi Øgn sig med suerdi i giegnum og villdi ei giffast Starkade’ (Øgn ran herself through with a sword and did not want to marry Starkaðr), thus indicating that Øgn opts for

¹⁸¹ *Landnámabók*, 78.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 78–80.

¹⁸³ *Hervarar saga*, 30.

¹⁸⁴ Gunnell, “Suicide and the Sagas.”

death rather than be robbed of consent in a marriage.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, when in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, Ingigerðr's father is killed and his army defeated, she tells the invading King Eirekr:

en fyrr en ek gangi nauðig með nokkurum manni, þá skal ek fyrr heldr veita mér bráðan bana, ok nýtr mín þá engi. ¹⁸⁶ (Appendix I:1:III:34)

Her self-preservational act is so attractive to Eirekr that he falls in love with her immediately. This is potentially parodical, but it also lends credence to the idea that suicide may have been perceived as a virtuous act in the right circumstances.

A similarly laudable act of suicide is the *suttee* motif, prevalent across literary material of the medieval North.¹⁸⁷ In Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, for instance, Gunnilda stabs herself to follow her husband in death 'quam uita deserere preoptauit' (rather than desert him by living), and Saxo appears to laud the choice she makes in following her husband, 'cuius charitatem uite pretulerat' (whose love she preferred to life), as he says that 'itaque Gunnilda aliquanto speciosius uirum busti quam thori societate complexa' (in this way Gunnilda lay, clasping her husband more beautifully than she ever did in the marriage bed), thus wryly implying that the ultimate wifely duty to a husband is to die with him.¹⁸⁸ Perhaps the most famous suicide in the Old Norse corpus is committed by Brynhildr of the *Völsunga* cycle. John McKinnell suggests a *suttee* motivation for this figure, stating that Guðrún lacked the courage to die with Sigurðr and, therefore, that Brynhildr was his 'true wife'.¹⁸⁹ Judy Quinn's appraisal of this episode is not dissimilar; she emphasises Brynhildr's desire for a 'lovers'

¹⁸⁵ *Heiðreks saga: Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, ed. Jón Helgason, S.T.U.A.G.N.L. (København: J. Jørgensen & Co, 1924), 90. In Chapter VI, I discuss the differing redactions of this saga.

¹⁸⁶ *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 171.

¹⁸⁷ 'Suttee' refers to the Hindu practice of a widow burning herself to death on her husband's funeral pyre, but has been adopted to refer to female suicides at the deaths of their husbands in Norse studies, see for instance Haakon Schetelig, "Traces of the Custom of 'Suttee' in Norway During the Viking Age," *Saga-Book* 6 (1908).

¹⁸⁸ Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, 1:Liber Primus, 56.

¹⁸⁹ McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, 229; Kanerva, "The Case of Brynhildr," 133.

union' in the afterlife.¹⁹⁰ Kanerva, influenced by studies on suicide in Anglo-Saxon England, proposes that Brynhildr's suicide is a manifestation of power: she ends her life on her own terms.¹⁹¹ Others have suggested a more holistic desire to end her life and that 'she suffered painful losses and her death ended her distress'.¹⁹² What all of these scholars have failed to account for is the psychological damage dealt to Brynhildr as a result of sexual trauma by deception, as I shall be arguing in Chapter VII. Brynhildr potentially combines these two androcentric motivators for suicide: sexual trauma and *suttee*.

There are also a number of *suttee*-adjacent deaths that circumvent suicide. A great many Old Norse women die from grief, which is potentially a convenient way to have these wives remain dutiful to their husbands by not long outliving them, without stamping them with the potentially shameful act of suicide.¹⁹³ Kristen Mills suggests that 'women who commit suicide, as opposed to those who die from grief, tend to be in some ways aberrant in their gender performance'.¹⁹⁴ Actively suicidal women are therefore transgressive, whereas those who die from grief remain exculpated. Indeed, while Murray suggests that Germanic peoples were not suicide phobic and lauds the Scandinavian literary tradition as 'a precious window onto pre-Christian Germanic belief', he does not account for the influence of Christian doctrine on the Old Norse literary tradition.¹⁹⁵ The Germanic conceptualisation of

¹⁹⁰ Judy Quinn, "Scenes of Vindication: Three Icelandic Heroic Poems in Relation to the Continental Traditions of *Þiðreks saga af Bern* and the *Nibelungenlied*," in *Medieval Nordic Literature in its European Context*, ed. Else Mundal (Oslo: Dreyer, 2015), 91.

¹⁹¹ Kanerva, "The Case of Brynhildr," 134.

¹⁹² Pridmore, Ahmadi, and Majeed, "Suicide in Old Norse and Finnish Folk Stories," 322.

¹⁹³ For instance, Hrefna after Kjartan's death in *Laxdæla saga*: 'ok er þat sagn manna, at hon hafi sprungit af stríði' (and people said that she had burst from grief), 158; and Baldr's wife Nanna in *Gylfaginning*: 'Nanna Nepsdóttir þá sprakk hon af harmi ok dó. Var hon borin á bálit ok slegit í eldi' (Nanna Nepsdóttir then burst from grief and died. She was carried onto the pyre and torched), 46; in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, Queen Þyri wishes to die because of the grief she feels due to her husband's death, but she does not wish to actively take her own life. She consults a 'dýrligr prestr' (glorious priest) who suggests that she live only off a single apple a day so that she might perish but without the sin of taking her own life, 354.

¹⁹⁴ Kristen Mills, "Gender and Death from Grief in Medieval Scandinavian Texts," in *Grief, Gender, and Identity in the Middle Ages*, ed. Lee Templeton (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 139.

¹⁹⁵ Murray, *Suicide in the Middle Ages*, 2:564.

suicide — which is more glorious and glorified, reflecting classical depictions of public and moralistic self-killings, as well as a valid response to unimpeachable shame — is at odds with Christian doctrine on the matter which, by the time the *Íslendingasögur* were written down, was deeply opposed to any form of suicide. With this in mind, we must attempt to contextualise Yngvildr’s suicide in the milieu of late medieval attitudes to the act, rather than solely reconstructing the unadulterated Germanic values of the pre-Christian Saga Age, which cannot be extricated from the Christian society that inked the *Íslendingasögur* upon vellum.

THE BODY POLITIC

Sexual violence as a precipitant for suicide appears to have been a cause for concern in medieval Europe, impacting, for instance, Canon Law: ‘the issue of female suicide precipitated by rape was such a frequent occurrence that it was a major factor in the condemnation of suicide under Canon Law at the Council of Nimes in 1184’.¹⁹⁶ When thinking specifically about suicide committed as a consequence of sexual trauma, alongside the Germanic portrayal of public, moralistic suicides, it is helpful to consider Lucretia, and medieval thought regarding the suicide of victims of sexual violence. According to Murray, ‘after the early fifth century every serious theologian knew that the pagan Lucretia’s suicide, if nothing else, ruled her out as a model’, and Yngvildr therefore would have been unlikely to be seen as making a laudable choice in killing herself, even with the background of Germanic glorification of suicide.¹⁹⁷ This line of patristic thought was substantially inspired by Augustine, who ‘regarded [Lucretia] as an example of pagan pride and excessive concern

¹⁹⁶ Eleanor Glendinning, “Reinventing Lucretia: Rape, Suicide and Redemption from Classical Antiquity to the Medieval Era,” *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 20, no. 1/2 (2013): 78.

¹⁹⁷ Murray, *Suicide*, 1:287.

with personal fame and honor'.¹⁹⁸ To other early patristic scholars such as Tertullian and Jerome, however, Lucretia was a figure to be admired for her suicide, given her tarnished purity, and so was she too for much later writers, such as Chaucer, Christine de Pisan, and even Dante.¹⁹⁹

Yngvildr's suicide arguably presents the Augustinian view from a Christian perspective: the sin of suicide. In natural opposition to the public, Germanic heroic suicides, the Christian attitude condemns the act. This is reflected in the privacy of the act identified by Murray in the context of a Christianised Europe:

when suicide does get into records there are usually signs that, in some way, it is trying to escape them. [The elusiveness of suicide] will be shown in this case to have had three elements, related but distinct. These were the essential privacy of the suicidal act, as sought by those who did it; the obstacles put in the path of its general discovery by the few who knew of it; and the blanket of reticence with which tradition, as a whole, sought to cover the entire subject in both the abstract and the concrete.²⁰⁰

Yngvildr's suicide corresponds to all three of Murray's elements here: she appears to withdraw from society to the extent that it is not diegetically, publicly certain whether or not she kills herself, and this uncertainty extends to the reader; we are given no more clarity. This

¹⁹⁸ Cristina Calhoun, "Lucretia, Savior, and Scapegoat: The Dynamics of Sacrifice in Livy 1.57–59," *Helios* 24, no. 2 (1997): 151.

¹⁹⁹ According to Tertullian in the second century CE, 'De feminis ad manum est. Lucretia, quae vim stupri passa est, cultrum sibi adegit in conspectu propinquorum, ut gloriam castitati suae pareret' (Of women there is to hand Lucretia, who having suffered the force of base need stabbed herself upon seeing her closest kin so that she might honour the glory of chastity), *Ad martyres*, ed. F. Oehler, vol. 1, *Tertulliani Opera Quae Supersunt* (Leipzig: Bibliotheca Augustana, 1851), 11–2. Jerome, writing in the fifth century CE, lauds Lucretia who, according to him, 'violatae pudicitiae nolens supervivere, maculam corporis cruore delevit' (did not want to survive her violated purity, but rid her body of stain with blood), *Patrologiae Cursus Completus*, vol. 23, *Series Graeca* (France: Migne, 1857), 287. Lucretia had 'no guilt' and was a 'seynt' and moreover 'Wel wot men that a woman hath no myght', writes Chaucer, apparently echoing his primary source for his version of Lucretia i.e. Ovid, who writes: 'quid faciat? pugnet? vincetur femina pugnans' (What could she do? Fight back? A woman will always lose, fighting), *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Dean Benson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 620, 619; *Fasti*, ed. James George Frazer, new ed., vol. 2, *Loeb Classical Library* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1931), 114. Christine de Pisan uses Lucrece as the primary example 'pour réfuter ceux qui disent que les femmes aiment à être violées' 'to refute those who say that women like to be raped', Pisan refers to her as an 'excellente et vertueuse femme' 'excellent and virtuous woman', *Le livre de la cité des dames*, 186; 230. For Dante, Lucretia spends her afterlife in Limbo as a virtuous pagan, one of 'li spiriti magni, che del vedere in me stesso m'essalto' (the great spirits which, by being in my own sight, exalt me), *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*, ed. Robert M. Durling, vol. 1. *Inferno* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 76.

²⁰⁰ Murray, *Suicide*, 1:21–2.

fits with another recurrent aspect of a suicidal individual as identified by Murray, namely ‘social dislocation’.²⁰¹ Yngvildr is in the same state of desolation as the manifold examples Murray provides i.e. sufferers and perpetrators of ‘crime, disgrace, or financial ruin’ who become ‘enemies of society’.²⁰² Pushed to the most desperate extreme caused by being deemed a societal enemy, Yngvildr’s suicide is a final recourse. There is nothing glorious about her death and she stands in stark contrast with the suicidal women of the mytho-heroic past. According to Kanerva:

In thirteenth-century Icelandic thought, however, strong-willed, violent women such as Brynhildr were presumably expected to belong mostly to the mytho-heroic past, whereas in the medieval Icelandic context even the strong-willed women would eventually be “domesticated” by Christian moral values, which steered their behavior to other, more Christian possibilities.²⁰³

Yngvildr thus remains neither a mytho-heroic figure nor a ‘domesticated’ Christian woman. Prideful and at times conniving, her stubbornness is her undoing, and presumably plays a role in her withdrawal from society and perhaps life itself. She cannot bear the shame brought upon her and, having finally capitulated to Karl, she cannot re-enter society; on a personal level, she cannot tolerate the shame. Sara M. Butler, drawing attention to imposing patriarchal systems, with particular regards to disadvantaged women, suggests suicide as a way for women to take ‘control of their lives’.²⁰⁴ However, any agency Yngvildr could be said to assume from her suicide is utterly undone by its ambiguity. The privacy and reclusive nature of her suicide implies an exclusion, a transgression that reflects the Christian-

²⁰¹ Ibid., 317.

²⁰² Ibid., 317; 295.

²⁰³ Kanerva, “The Case of Brynhildr,” 154.

²⁰⁴ Sara M. Butler, “Women, Suicide, and the Jury in Later Medieval England,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 32, no. 1 (2006): 161.

influenced law codes of the era, in which ‘suicides were not allowed burial in consecrated soil unless they had shown in some way that they repented of their deed’.²⁰⁵

Unlike Yngvildr, Lucretia’s suicide invariably takes place after she has called her friends and family to bear witness: she is, according to Ian Donaldson, ‘a moral example to an oppressed people, inciting them to revolt’.²⁰⁶ Possessing ‘not merely a public but a histrionic quality’, Lucretia’s is a highly politicised rape in its classical context — ‘Lucretia is not simply Lucretia, but the figure of violated Rome’ — and a moral, religious crux for patristic and medieval writers.²⁰⁷ Is Yngvildr simply Yngvildr, then, or is she something more — or less? Murray argues that given the Christian loss of Lucretia as a model, ‘there are no Lucretia-like suicides after rape’, and although the pair are united by sexual trauma and suicide, the circumstances of their suicide could hardly be more different.²⁰⁸ Yngvildr is hardly Lucretia-like; hers is not a ‘body politic’, mapping social change. The privacy and uncertainty of her suicide rob her death of any meaning. She has no loved ones remaining to care about her death: her sons are dead, and her lovers have turned their backs on her, repulsed. The uncertainty of her suicide might fall into the phenomenon referred to by Daniel Sävborg as ‘factual gaps’, a stylistic device that Sävborg argues is used by saga writers for deliberate, artistic reasons — that is to say, the uncertainty of her death is no oversight, but rather it is a deliberate narrative choice.²⁰⁹ Assuming the Lucretia myth was known to the *Svarfdæla* writer, Yngvildr could almost be seen as a subversion of the classical, raped and vindicated woman. It is an impossible task, however, to definitively identify a direct

²⁰⁵ Kanerva, “The Case of Brynhildr,” 130. ‘Þa menn er sjalver spilla’ (People who kill themselves) are included in a list of those excluded from holy burials, which also consists of, among others, murderers and traitors, according to the strongly Christian-influenced Norwegian Gulåping law, *Den Eldre Gulatingslova*, ed. Magnus Rindal, Bjørn Eithun, and Ulset Tor, *Norrønne Tekster* (Oslo: Riksarkivet, 1994), 46.

²⁰⁶ Donaldson, *Rapes of Lucretia*, 7.

²⁰⁷ Murray, *Suicide*, 1:22; Donaldson, *Rapes of Lucretia*, 9.

²⁰⁸ Murray, *Suicide*, 1:287.

²⁰⁹ Sävborg, “Style,” 114; 115.

influence as the text contains no direct allusion to the Lucretia myth. Nevertheless, the privacy of Yngvildr's suicide and its implied shame is likely meant to make her more condemnable to a Christian reader, rather than more admirable in the context of Germanic suicide tradition.

Yngvildr's death is so unpublic as to be obfuscated by uncertainty. Hers could not be further from the 'grand public suicides' we have observed of other women in the corpus.²¹⁰ She is far more aligned with Christian values relating to the shame of suicide than to North Germanic ones of glory. The fact that the suicide remains ambiguous is one final act of degradation on the part of the saga writer; Yngvildr has descended into oblivion, outside the realms even of a saga's decisive list of each of its primary characters' deaths. As the saga progresses, Yngvildr becomes a mere commodity, her body a map of misery and torture and her dignity the plaything of her captors. However, her extensive tale of torment and its saturation of sexual violence helps to bring the experiences of other *Íslendingasögur* women out of obscurity. Yngvildr becomes more than just Yngvildr, then: more than an endlessly tormented woman trapped in the eye of a storming feud. Through this anomalously detailed narrative on commodifying women, objectifying them, enslaving them and on inducing them to end their own lives, Yngvildr offers insight into the experiences of Old Norse women that are often shrouded in ambiguity or blighted by the primacy of men.

²¹⁰ Gunnell, "Suicide and the Sagas," 18.

SECTION 2:
THE
FORNALDARSÖGUR

CHAPTER IV: BÓSI AND THE THREE *BÓNDADÆTR*

„eru þeir ok margir hlutir, at oft snúast til gæfu, þó at háskasamliga sé stofnaðir“

Sexual acts in the Old Norse corpus are, as I have often stated thus far within this thesis, rarely portrayed in extensive detail.¹ The *fornaldarsögur* are far less reticent than the *Íslendingasögur* in depicting sex and sexual misdemeanours, but there are still very few detailed ‘sex scenes’. The saga that defies this trend is *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*. Jenny Jochens has commented that ‘the only sexual, almost pornographic, scenes in the Old Norse corpus are found in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*’; Vésteinn Ólason echoes this sentiment, saying ‘nowhere else in saga literature is there a direct description of sexual intercourse’.² Kate Heslop refers to the saga as ‘one of the very few medieval Icelandic texts in which sex plays as central a role as it does in *Grettisfærsla*’, the latter a poem existing only in ‘mangled remnants’.³ The ‘pornographic scenes’ in *Bósa saga* form a triptych of sexual conquests that become almost folkloric in their repetition: three times the eponymous heroes happen upon a farmstead; Bósi has sex with the farmer’s daughter; she provides post-coital information that will aid Bósi and Herrauðr in the next part of their quest. The scenes are prominent in their graphic detail and their repetitive nature and they also help to structure the saga’s greater narrative. My reading of this saga reveals it to be not just the most sexually explicit, but also

¹ Note that a version of this chapter has been published as Grace O’Duffy, “A Triptych of Sexual Violence in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*,” *Saga-Book* 48 (2024).

² Jochens, “Illicit Love Visit,” 380; Vésteinn Ólason, “The Marvellous North and Authorial Presence in the Icelandic Fornaldarsaga,” in *Contexts of Pre-Novel Narrative: The European Tradition*, ed. Roy Eriksen (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1994), 120.

³ Kate Heslop, “Grettir in Ísafjörður: *Grettisfærsla* and *Grettis saga*,” in *Creating the Medieval Saga: Versions, Variability and Editorial Interpretations of Old Norse Literature*, ed. J. Quinn and E. Lethbridge, Viking Collection (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2010), 216; 205.

the most sexually coercive amongst the *fornaldarsögur*, if not the whole Norse corpus. Since this is a novel reading of what has been hitherto regarded as a saga depicting mutually enjoyable sex, it is necessary for a complete analysis of this sole saga to occupy this inaugural chapter in the thesis' study of the legendary sagas.

Bósa saga has often been likened to the French *fabliaux*, which were immensely popular in mainland Europe at the time of the saga's composition, probably in the fourteenth century. Described by Kim Phillips and Barry Reay as 'short comic verses that deploy erotic themes and imagery for satirical and moral ends', around 150 of these Old French poems survive.⁴ Numerous scholars have drawn links between the *fabliaux* and *Bósa saga*: Heslop attests that 'metaphor and euphemism are at the heart of the fabliau's (and *Bósa saga*'s) erotic effect'.⁵ Jean Renaud has proposed similarities between the creative euphemisms in *Bósa saga*, *De l'escuriel* (The Squirrel) and *De Porcelet* (Piglet), in which lovers come up with euphemistic names for each other to evoke humour in a sexual setting.⁶ Vouching for more than mere general similarities between *fabliaux* and the saga, Sverrir Tómasson has argued for direct *fabliau* influence on *Bósa saga* from *De la Damoisele qui ne pooit oïr parler de foutre* (Of the young girl who couldn't stand to hear talk of fucking).⁷ Sverrir also emphasises the parallels between the equine metaphors for male genitalia in *De la Damoisele* and *Bósa saga* and the indigenous *Völsa þátr* of *Flateyjarbók*, in which a woman appears to

⁴ Kim M. Phillips and Barry Reay, *Sex Before Sexuality: A Premodern History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 169.

⁵ Heslop, "Grettir in Ísafjörður," 216.

⁶ Jean Renaud, "Eroticism in the Saga of Bósi and Herrauðr," in *Litteratur og kjönn i Norden: foredrag på den XX. studiekonferanse i International Association for Scandinavian Studies (IASS), arrangert av Institutt for litteraturvitenskap, Íslands universitet, i Reykjavík 7.-12. August 1994*, ed. Helga Kress (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 1996), 70; 71.

⁷ Sverrir Tómasson, "Hugleiðingar um horfna bókmenntagrein," *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 50, no. 2 (1989): 217; 218.

worship a horse phallus.⁸ Hákon IV's large-scale translation programme of French texts into Old Norse oversaw the transmission of a multitude of continental material into the Norwegian courts and, among the thirty-eight surviving Old Norse translations, one *fabliau* exists: *Möttuls saga*, a translation of the Old French *Lai du cort mantel*. The adaptor announces that the translation was commissioned by King Hákon 'til gamans ok skemtanar' (for amusement and entertainment), and the misogynistic threads of the *fabliau*'s plot, which oversees a series of chastity tests upon courtly women, have led Liliane Irlenbusch-Reynard to comment that this amusement 'is at the expense of the ladies of Arthur's court, and of women in general'.⁹ This theme of amusement at the expense of women certainly chimes with *Bósa saga*.

The metaphors in *Bósa saga* add, as they do in the *fabliaux*, to the sexual humour of the scene. Bósi's penis — a jarl, a foal, a stump — is never described literally. But the graphic nature of the euphemisms, which are accompanied by talk of sexual fluids, sexual positions, and even an oblique discussion of Bósi's apparently peculiarly shaped glans, still imbue the scenes with 'grossly physiological detail'.¹⁰ The erotic scenes appear to have been considered so distasteful that each one of them has been very deliberately scratched off the saga's primary manuscript, AM 586 4to (ff. 15r; 16v–17r; 17v–18r), meeting the same fate as the sexual scenes in *Grettisfærsla*.¹¹ Sverrir Tómasson suggests that any stories with sexual themes, particularly those stemming from the *fabliaux*, may have existed orally but were likely considered too distasteful to be committed to vellum, which would explain why there is only one extant saga with such explicit sexual content and why in its principal manuscript the

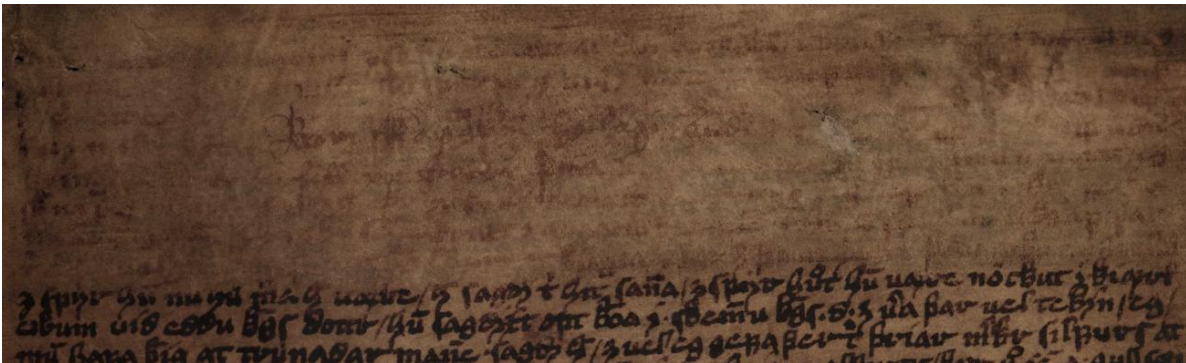
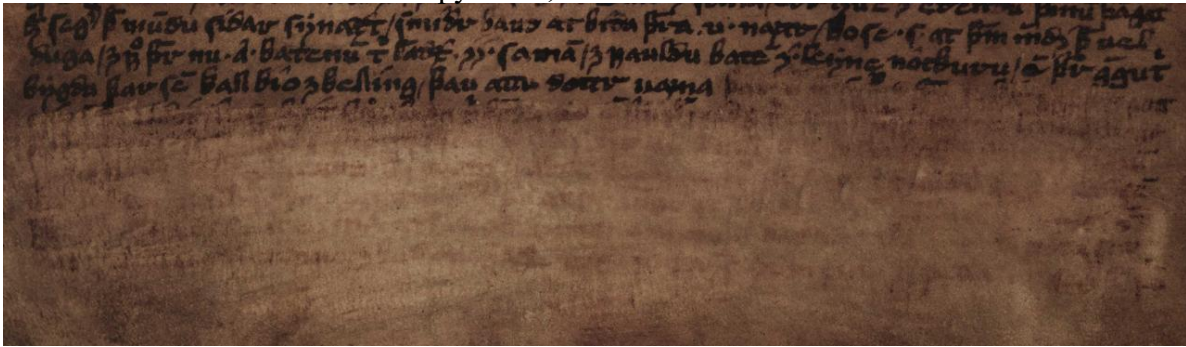
⁸ Ibid., 219.

⁹ *Möttuls saga*, 6; Liliane Irlenbusch-Reynard, "Translations at the Court of Hákon Hákonarson: A Well Planned and Highly Selective Programme," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 36, no. 4 (2011): 391.

¹⁰ Peter Hallberg, "Some Aspects of the *Fornaldarsögur* as a Corpus," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 97, no. 7 (1982): 21.

¹¹ Heslop, "Grettir in Ísafjörður," 207.

Figs. 6–7. 16v is cut off from “ok svá í móti”, resuming
at “spyr hún, hvat manni” on 17r



Figs. 8–9. 17v is cut off from “þau áttu dóttur væna” and
resumes at “ok spyr hún nú” on 18r

These scenes, which I will be discussing in forensic detail, are taken from the standard edition in Guðni Jónsson’s *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, which follows Otto Jiriczek’s edition of the text. Jiriczek uses all the saga’s major manuscripts, drawing primarily from AM 586 4to. Due to the eradication in AM 586 4to however, he uses AM 510 4to for ‘Die drei obscenen Stellen’ (the three obscene episodes), referring to AM 586 4to for comparison where possible given the eradications.¹⁴

A HISTORY OF ‘MUTUAL ENJOYMENT’

Despite the resounding acknowledgement that *Bósa saga* portrays ‘a rollicking sexuality’ and ‘a robust popular pornography’, as well as the recognition of its ‘comic sexual imagery’, no

¹⁴ Otto Luitpold Jiriczek, *Die Bósa-saga in zwei Fassungen* (Strassburg: K.J. Trübner, 1893), xxxv.

study, to my knowledge, has addressed the coercive nature of some of these sex scenes.¹⁵ The only such scholarly allusion to coercion that I have found in relation to Bósi comes from Hans-Peter Naumann, who says that Bósi is ‘willens, sexuellen Zwang auszuüben’ (willing to exercise sexual coercion).¹⁶ This, however, is in reference to the coercion of Princess Edda in the walnut grove and not to the three aforementioned sex scenes, although it certainly speaks to Bósi’s character and the themes of the saga as a whole.

I have found no scholars who have identified any traces of sexual violence in the sex scenes of *Bósa saga*, but several who attest to its positive depiction of sex. Vésteinn Ólason highlights ‘The sheer, and mutual, enjoyment of sexuality described in *Bósa saga*’.¹⁷ Jochens is primarily concerned with the fact that Bósi takes the initiative, thus fuelling her argument for male-led seduction in a study largely focused on the *Íslendingasögur*, and simply says of *Bósa saga* that ‘the women clearly enjoy the activity’.¹⁸ Her justification for this statement is that ‘the second episode even indicates that “the missionary position” was not universal’, in other words, that the *mulier equitans* position is a good indicator of the second farmer’s daughter’s enjoyment and enthusiasm during the sexual encounter with Bósi.¹⁹ This is a reasonable claim, but it does not account for the other two women, neither of whom are said to adopt this position. Renaud, whose study is entitled ‘Eroticism in the Saga of Bósi and Herrauðr’, likewise detects no negativity in any of the three sex scenes. Comparing the eroticism of *Bósa saga* to the scene with the maid in *Grettis saga* which I discussed at length in Chapter I, Renaud states that ‘Both verses are full of double meanings and the whole scene

¹⁵ Jochens, “Illicit Love Visit,” 381; Hallberg, “Aspects of the *Fornaldarsögur*,” 21.

¹⁶ Hans-Peter Naumann, “Die Abenteuersaga. Zu einer Spätform altislandischer Erzählkunst,” *Skandinavistik* 8, no. 1 (1978): 46.

¹⁷ Vésteinn Ólason, “Marvellous North,” 121.

¹⁸ Jochens, “Illicit Love Visit,” 381.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

has the same playful tone as those in *Bósa saga*'.²⁰ Renaud does not appear to pick up on the sexual violence both the *Grettis* scene and the first and third sex scenes in *Bósa saga* share.

Quite a few scholars even draw attention to the lack of negative emotion or implication in the scenes: Alaric Hall, Steven Richardson and Haukur Þorgeirsson seem to pick up on the dubious circumstances of Bósi's seductions but suggest that none of the women are in any way bothered: 'Bósi's sexual exploits comprise Old Icelandic literature's most unabashed account of womanising, and the various women Bósi sleeps with are implausibly untroubled by his advances'.²¹ Peter Hallberg too seems struck by the lack of bad feeling, suggesting that 'There are no traces whatsoever left of dangerous temptation and sense of guilt'.²² In her work on sexual violence, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir expresses a degree of surprise that the most explicit sexual scenes in the corpus are violence-free:

The descriptions are explicit, and in fact unique in Old Icelandic literature, and one thing they have in common is that no force is used on the girls. Even if they do not take the initiative themselves, they are curious about the handsome guest, and share a bed with him of their own free will. All of them have learnt something more about the pleasures of this world by the time he leaves in the morning.²³

These scholars thus seem to have been mindful of the potential for sexual violence, discomfort, shame, or discord, but do not detect any. Lucy Anne Keens, whose study is, much like Aðalheiður's, very perceptive when it comes to the topic of sexual violence, picks up on some of the reticence of the third farmer's daughter, acknowledging that 'this time the girl is not as open to his advances' but also that 'Bósi's metaphors help reassure her and secure his final sexual encounter'.²⁴ Keens accurately determines that there is reticence but in

²⁰ Renaud, "Eroticism," 74.

²¹ Alaric Hall, Steven D. P. Richardson, and Haukur Þorgeirsson, "*Sigrarðs saga frækna*: A Normalised Text, Translation, and Introduction," *Scandinavian-Canadian Studies* 21 (2013): 96.

²² Hallberg, "Aspects of the *Fornaldarsögur*," 22.

²³ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "Love or Lust?," 195.

²⁴ Lucy Anne Keens, "Scenes of a Sexual Nature: Theorising Representations of Sex and the Sexual Body in the Sagas of the Icelanders" (PhD thesis, University College London, 2016), 70.

my view vastly understates it. The third sex scene in particular is a glaring example of non-consensual sex, and the first scene takes place, as I shall discuss, under coercive circumstances.

Although Vésteinn Ólason says that ‘Three times Bósi gets into bed with farmers’ daughters and spends a merry night there’, he does not interrogate the differences between the three scenes. While it is possible to view Bósi as understanding each scene to be a repeated enjoyable experience, the reactions of each girl are very different. The third, in particular, does not seem to have a ‘merry night’.²⁵ Each of the scenes has a folkloric similarity: all three times, the two heroes happen upon a farm with a beautiful farmer’s daughter and Bósi has sex with her. The language used in each instance appears to purposefully establish this similarity: (1) ‘Einn dag kómu þeir at húsabæ einum’ (One day they came to a cottage), (2) ‘Þeir kómu at húsabæ litlum ok kyrfiligum’ (They came to a humble little cottage), (3) ‘þeir gengu til byggða’ (they went to some houses); (1) ‘Dóttur áttu þau væna’ (They had a beautiful daughter), (2) ‘Þau áttu dóttur væna ok vel kunnandi’ (They had a beautiful, well-informed daughter), (3) ‘Þau áttu dóttur væna’ (They had a beautiful daughter); and (1) ‘Um kveldit var þeim fylgt at sofa með góðum umbúningi’ (During the evening, they were led away for some sleep with good bedding), (2) ‘Um kveldit var þeim fylgt at sofa’ (In the evening they were led away to sleep), (3) ‘Litlu síðar fóru menn til svefns’ (A little while later the people went to sleep).²⁶ Likewise, each girl is nameless and referred to with the same word, *bóndadóttir*, yet each has a distinct personality, and their reactions to Bósi’s advances all differ in key ways. The fact that the *bóndadóttir* scene occurs

²⁵ Vésteinn Ólason, “Marvellous North,” 120.

²⁶ Note that I will be referring throughout this chapter to the first, second and third *bóndadóttir* scenes as (1), (2) and (3) respectively. All quotations from *Bósa saga*, unless otherwise stated, are available in Appendix I.

three times is crucial; Naumann in particular has drawn attention to *Bósa saga*'s tripartite structure:

Nach dieser schematischen Triade richtet sich die Gesamtstruktur der *Bósa saga*, dem Gesetz der Dreizahl unterliegt darüber hinaus ihre episodische Gliederung. Dreimal gelangt Bósi zum einsamed Waldgehöft, dreimal hat er dort Liebesnächte mit Bauernmädchen zu bestehen, die ihm dreimal die erforderlichen Informationen zur Bewältigung seiner drei Abenteuer liefern.... und so fort: der Zwang zur formelhaften Wiederholung ist augenfällig.²⁷ (Appendix I:2:IV:1)

This folkloric number has been established as significant to European storytelling by Axel Olrik, who calls it ‘das Gesetz der Dreizahl’ (the rule of three).²⁸ Three sexually violent scenes in apposition are found elsewhere in the corpus: the three-fold rape of Sedentiana by Sigurðr in *Sigurðar saga þögla*, in which he disguises himself variously as a dwarf, a swineherd and an ogre; and in *Helga þáttur* of *Hrólfs saga kraka* with Helgi's three rape victims, Ólöf, Yrsa and the *álfkona* (elf-woman), a triptych of sexual violence that I discuss at length in the next chapter.²⁹ Indeed, that there are such clear similarities between the *bóndadóttir* scenes renders their differences all the more palpable. The enthusiasm of the second girl highlights the reticence of the first and third, and the result is that these two scenes are framed by coercion and discontent.

THE FIRST *BÓNDADÓTTIR*

In the episode with the first girl (presented in full at Appendix I:2:IV:2), it seems that she is initially unwilling, but eventually complies in having sex with Bósi. Hers is a classic example of the ambiguous qualities that often wreath sex in the sagas. In the initial flirtation stage — a staple of each scene — Bósi behaves playfully towards her and she reciprocates. Since, in

²⁷ Naumann, “Die Abenteuersaga,” 46–7.

²⁸ Axel Olrik, “Epische gesetze der volksdichtung,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 51, no. 1 (1909): 3–4.

²⁹ *Sigurðar saga þögla*, 206–15; *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 14–29.

both subsequent sex scenes, flirting appears to be a marker of the girl's sexual attraction to Bósi, this could be interpreted as her being sexually interested in him. However, when Bósi does go to her bed, she seems confused about what he wants from her. As already mentioned, the sex scenes in *Bósa saga* are strongly reminiscent of the *fabliau De la Damoisele qui ne pooit oïr parler de foutre*.³⁰ Renaud has compared the *bóndadætr* and their evasion of referring to genitalia by their proper terms to this *fabliau*.³¹ However, the *damoisele*'s unwillingness to hear sexual language should not be confused with a lack of awareness; rather, it gives the French poet the opportunity to compose a panoply of humorous metaphors: 'the often playful language of the *fabliaux* is not usually coy or euphemistic; rather it testifies to the composer's skill and is central to the works' entertainment value'.³² Indeed, the *damoisele* in *AEC* initiates the sexual touching and in *B* and *D* she devises the metaphors; in each version, the dialogue is a back-and-forth of wit for wit. In *B*, the young man asks the *damoisele* (of her vagina), 'que est ce' ("what is this?") and she responds, 'Ce est» fait elle ma fontaine' ("This," she said "is my fountain"); she then asks (of his testicles), 'Que est ici, / Daviet, si roide et si dur, / Que bien devroit percier .i. mur?' ("What is here

³⁰ This *fabliau* exists in three different versions. *AEC* (*De la Damoisele qui ne pooit oïr parler de foutre* 'Of the young girl who couldn't stand to hear talk of fucking') is a combination of MS A: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr. 837; MS E: Paris, BnF, fr. 1593, and MS C: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Hamilton 257; edition taken from "De la Damoisele qui ne poit oïr parler de foutre," in *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles imprimés ou inédits*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud, vol. 3 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1878). *B* (*De la Damoisele qui n'ot parler de fotre qui n'aüst mal au cuer* 'Of the young girl who didn't hear talk of fucking without heartache') is based on MS B: Bern, Bibliothèque de la Bourgeoisie, 354; edition taken from "De la Damoisele qui n'ot parler de fotre qui n'aüst mal au cuer," in *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles imprimés ou inédits*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud, vol. 5 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1883). *D* (*De la Pucele qui abevra le polain* 'Of the virgin who watered the foal') is based on MS D: Paris, BnF, fr. 19152; edition taken from "De la Pucele qui abevra le polain," in *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles imprimés ou inédits*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud, vol. 4 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1880). For more on these manuscript differences see Sophie Marnette, "Framing Discourse: Three Versions of *De la damoisele qui ne pooit oïr parler de foutre*," in *Si Sai Encor Moul't Bon Estoire, Chançon Moul't Bone et Anciene; Studies in the Text and Context of Old French Narrative in Honour of Joseph J. Duggan*, ed. John F. Levy Sophie Marnette, Leslie Zarker Morgan (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2015), 220.

³¹ Renaud, "Eroticism," 71.

³² Phillips and Reay, *Sex Before Sexuality*, 171.

Daviet, so rigid and hard, which could so easily pierce a wall?”).³³ He responds that they are his ‘polains’ (foals), which he then says ‘muert de soi’ (are dying of thirst), and she replies, ‘Va si l’aboivre à ma fontaine’ (“Come and give them water in my fountain”).³⁴ The couple thus collaborate to initiate sex via metaphor. Similarly in *De l’escuiruel*, the girl responds to Robin’s ‘escuiruel’ (squirrel) — his penis — by telling him to let it go hunting for ‘Bones nois’ (delicious nuts) — to penetrate her.³⁵ In *De Porcelet*, which Renaud also invokes as a point of comparison, the boy encourages the girl to come up with metaphors for both of their genitalia:

Dame,» fait il, «ice est droiz
Que les nons amedeus metoiz,
Teus con vostre plaisir sera.³⁶ (Appendix I:2:IV:3)

She comes up with the metaphor of ‘porcelez’ (piglet) for her own vagina and ‘fromant’ (wheat) for her lover’s penis.³⁷ The first *bóndadóttir* in *Bósa saga*, however, lacks this agency and seems confused by Bósi’s metaphors. Vésteinn Ólason has described the exchanges between Bósi and his lovers as follows:

His conversations with his lovers and the descriptions of their actions sparkle with witty metaphors and much good humour, so that these parts of the saga may be considered pearls of bawdy literature.³⁸

But *Bósa saga*’s metaphors are not a back-and-forth like those of the *fabliaux*; rather, Bósi comes up with metaphors for both sets of genitalia in all three scenes. In each version of *De la Damoisele* the girl names her body parts and the young man comes up with metaphors for

³³ “De la Damoisele qui n’ot parler de fotre qui n’aüst mal au cuer,” 29–30.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ “De l’escuiruel,” in *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles imprimés ou inédits*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud, vol. 5 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1883), 170.

³⁶ Renaud, “Eroticism,” 71; “De Porcelet,” in *Recueil général et complet des fabliaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles imprimés ou inédits*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud, vol. 4 (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1880), 144.

³⁷ “De Porcelet,” 144; 145.

³⁸ Vésteinn Ólason, “Marvellous North,” 120.

his own that complement her metaphors. The French girls do not display the naïveté of the first and third *bóndadætr*.

In *Bósa saga*, the first girl's repeated questions about what Bósi wants to do facilitate the coining and development of the *jarl* metaphor which, if we can assume it draws on the *fabliau* tradition, is likely intended to be humorous and witty. It is possible that she is coyly pretending not to know what he means by his 'jarl' in order to encourage him further, in a *fabliau*-like manner, as in the examples above. However, this apparent naïveté is accompanied by an active desire not to cooperate with Bósi. He tells her where to touch — 'milli fóta sér' (between his legs) — and she immediately pulls her hand back. The word *ófagnaðr* (*joyless; unwelcome*) unambiguously expresses unhappiness. It seems that unlike the *fabliaux*, wherein euphemisms are deployed to add to the sexual play and both parties are fully aware of what the euphemisms stand for, the *bóndadóttir*'s sudden reaction to Bósi's penis indicates that she did not comprehend his euphemism. She therefore appears both reluctant and inexperienced. The *fabliau* women are not asked or forced to touch their lovers, but instead both lovers curiously touch each other. The *bóndadóttir* seems not to know what Bósi's penis is, questioning why it is so 'óvæni' (unfortunate) and 'svá hart sem tré' (as hard as a tree). That the girl uses this tree simile shows that she is not playing along with his *jarl* metaphor and so she seems genuinely clueless. These actions do not 'sparkle with witty metaphors', as Vésteinn suggests; rather they appear as miscommunication built on uncertainty. Bósi is yet undeterred by her lack of comprehension; he persuades her by suggesting that his penis — which has alarmed her with its hardness — will soften in 'myrkholunni' (the dark hole), although he does not say what this is.

It is at this point that the girl appears to consent to sex verbally, although her autonomy in consenting to the act is certainly in doubt at this point given her potential lack of comprehension at the situation she is in, as well as the coercive context in which she finds

herself. Her naïveté could be designed for humour, as is the case with the *fabliaux* and their use of mutual misunderstanding to lead to comedic sexual encounters. However, the discomfort and awkwardness of the scene are consistently underlined: Bósi puts his *jarl* between her legs, and the saga writer makes a point of saying that her ‘gata’ (path) was not particularly spacious. Not only does this suggest any combination of virginity, lack of arousal or lack of care on his part to prepare the girl for penetration, but it also does not align with the *jarl* metaphor or indeed the wood metaphor. Again, the witty back-and-forth of suggestive banter is undermined by an incongruous euphemism. It is only at this point that the narrative shifts into a mutual enjoyment of the sex as the two ‘Lágu þau nú um stund, sem þeim líkar’ (lay now for a time, as pleased them) and the girl suggests that she wants him to harden again so they can have further intercourse. But the lead-up to this depicts not an eager partner but a very naïve, inexperienced one who does not appear to know what is happening, who does not respond to Bósi’s euphemisms and who must be persuaded into having sex with him after initial reluctance and who even recoils when he tells her to touch his member.

There is also the matter of the transactional nature of this interaction. In each of the three sexual encounters Bósi gives the girl a ring: he offers it to the first girl as he enters her bed, and it seems at first to be a token to encourage her to sleep with him, even a payment. However, the girl seems to view both the ring and the ‘góða nætrskemmtan’ (good night’s entertainment) as currency for the information; after she gives her information, Bósi in turn rewards her with more sex ‘í skemmtanarlausn’ (as pleasure-payment). The sex is transactional but not on the part of the girl, as it originally seems: Bósi’s ability to provide good sex is exchangeable for the girl’s information. There is thus a high value placed on Bósi’s sexual ability, implying, perhaps that the girl’s original reticence was transformed into lust and pleasure by his prowess. We might think, here, of the maidservant in *Grettis saga* and the jarl’s daughter in *Egils saga*, and how their reluctance may be turned into pleasure by

the sexual prowess of Grettir and Egill, respectively. The encounter in *Bósa saga* is complex, beginning as coercive but turning into a depiction of mutually enjoyable sex. Bósi's aphorism after the sexual encounter could even be read as his acknowledgement that she was reluctant at first but her fears were transformed into pleasure: '„eru þeir ok margir hlutir, at oft snúast til gæfu, þó at háskasamliga sé stofnaðir“' ("there are many things that often turn into good fortune, even though at first they seem perilous").³⁹ This comment suggests a lack of accountability on Bósi's part and her eventual pleasure could even constitute a wish fulfilment narrative according to which Bósi finds a young girl attractive and decides to seduce her knowing that her parents will likely be able to do nothing about the seduction, and that they — not he — will face the repercussions of the seduction, such as a resultant pregnancy. That the first *bóndadóttir* is, at the end of the saga, said to have had a son seems to have no impact on Bósi one way or the other.⁴⁰ This builds upon my prior discussion of enslavement in the *Íslendingasögur* and how girls of lower social status, such as enslaved girls, were sexually accessible because of their reduced rights and because 'slaves, and their bodies, were often figured as undesirably subhuman, unnatural, and "Other"'.⁴¹

The girl, unwilling at first, has her hesitation converted to pleasure by Bósi's sexual prowess. As I have previously discussed, there exists a clear trend in medieval writing that supports the notion of women being governed by their lust and enjoying rape. Perhaps in *Bósa saga*, Bósi's ability to coerce the *bóndadóttir* into feeling pleasure is a by-product of this widespread medieval male fantasy about women who are unable to resist their lustful

³⁹ *Bósa saga*, 299.

⁴⁰ 'Hann átti son við frillu sinni, þeiri er hann herti jarlinn hjá. Sá hét Sviði inn sókndjarfi; hann var faðir Vilmundar viðutan' (He had a son with the concubine beside whom he had hardened his jarl. He was called Sviði the valiant, he was the father of Vilmundr the Far-Out), *Bósa saga*, 322.

⁴¹ Amy C. Eichhorn-Mulligan, "Contextualizing Old Norse-Icelandic Bodies," in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference Durham and York. 6-12 August, 2006*, ed. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, vol. 1 (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Durham University, 2006), 199.

nature even when forced into participating in sexual acts. Andreas Capellanus' twelfth-century treatise on courtly love, *De Amore*, follows the Ovidian model of pursuing unwilling women;⁴² Capellanus propagates similarly misogynistic advice but adds in an especially class-based framework for rapeable women:

Si vero et illarum te feminarum amor forte attraxerit, eas pluribus laudibus efferre memento, et, si locum inveneris opportunum, non differas assumere quod petebas et violento potiri amplexu.⁴³ (Appendix I:2:IV:4)

Corinne Saunders interprets Andreas' advice on peasant women as implying that they 'cannot understand the polite game of *fin'amors*, and, perhaps, that they do not qualify as "maidens" because of their low status' and, furthermore, that the 'rape of the peasant woman fulfils an accepted and basic, if bestial, male sexual need'.⁴⁴ In line with this, Bósi's repeated actions towards the daughters of a *karl* and a *kerling* — vocabulary which denotes them as of lower social standing — adds a socio-political dimension to the power-interplay of these sexually coercive scenes. Bósi will face no repercussions for seducing their beautiful daughter and, moreover, she will end up enjoying his seduction despite having initial reservations; this plays into a classist fantasy of the availability of lower-status women as well as the deeply misogynistic, widespread patriarchal belief in the inherent lustfulness of women and their ability to be conquered by their own desires.

Kathryn Gravdal's work on French *pastourelle*, a twelfth-century lyric form originating in southern France, is relevant here.⁴⁵ Gravdal explains how lower-class women can be acceptably raped by a knight and that rape itself is depicted as a 'game'. By the end of the game, the woman finds sexual pleasure and this has a voyeuristic effect on the male listener and plays into the male fantasy of rape:

⁴² See above, Chapter I, n. 133.

⁴³ Andreas Capellanus, *On Love*, ed. and trans. P. G. Walsh (London: Duckworth, 1982), 222–3.

⁴⁴ Saunders, *Rape and Ravishment*, 190; 191.

⁴⁵ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, 104–21.

Rape is aestheticized in a way that both manages and encourages the erotic satisfaction of the listener. The *pastourelle* aestheticizes assault as a socio-sexual game and therefore a source of pleasure for the playful, resilient, and plastic female character, thus enabling rape to become a source of pleasure for the male listener and critic as well. The shepherdess bounces back pertly after an attack: unhurt, dry-eyed, cheerful, and refreshed.⁴⁶

Gravdal counts twelve scenes in *pastourelles* in which a ‘scene of forcible rape is interrupted by coos of female pleasure or followed by the victim’s thanks and request for more of the same’.⁴⁷ This chimes remarkably with the encounters in *Bósa saga* as a socially-inferior girl (usually a shepherd-girl in the *pastourelle*, here a farmgirl) is subject to the sexually-violent desires of a higher-class male (the knight in the *pastourelle*, the warrior Bósi here) and is won over after a bout of force. Vésteinn has underscored the European nature of the saga in which ‘a typical *fornaldarsaga* matter, the matter of the North, has been written into the genre of chivalric romance’; given the likely influence from French *fabliaux*, it is perhaps not unreasonable to think that there may also be a connection to this prominent motif in the French *pastourelle*.⁴⁸

THE SECOND *BÓNDADÓTTIR*

That the second *bóndadóttir* fully consents to sex with Bósi is clear for several reasons (episode presented in full at Appendix I:2:IV:5). Firstly, Bósi’s flirting is explicitly reciprocated and, as the night proceeds, Bósi repeats his actions with the first girl by lifting the bed-clothes of the second. However, there is no ring-giving here; this does not occur until the following morning. This is possibly because the girl needs no convincing; after her initial quizzing about what he wants, which echoes the first *bóndadóttir*, this girl responds

⁴⁶ Ibid., 110.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 111.

⁴⁸ Vésteinn Ólason, “Marvellous North,” 122.

immediately to Bósi's metaphor of the foal at the well, even suggesting that her 'brunnhúsum' (well-house) is beyond Bósi's experience. She is the only girl of the three to be introduced not just as *væna* (beautiful) but *vel kunnandi* (well-informed), and this second epithet sets her apart: she seems much more sexually experienced or knowledgeable than the other two. Like the *fabliaux*, this encounter features an equal exchange of wit, and the use of the drinking horse as a euphemism for sex appears not only in *De la Damoisele* but also as a creative euphemism for a sexual act in Heslop's reconstruction of *Grettisfærsla*: '<o>k gefur hestum<;> / drykk at blanda' (and gives horses drink to blend together).⁴⁹ There is also the 'helldr röskligan / vingul' (rather doughty horse member) in *Völsa þátr*.⁵⁰ This second scene thus potentially evokes an established sexual metaphor known not only in mainland Europe but also in the North.

Unlike the other girls, this *bóndadóttir* refers to Bósi with pet names — 'maðr minn' (my man) and 'hjärtavinrinn' (my heart-friend) — and the biggest contrast of all is when she touches his penis. In all three scenes, Bósi encourages the *bóndadóttir* to touch 'á millum fóta mér' (between my legs), but this girl is very different from the other two, who are lexically and semantically mirrored: 'kippti hendinni ok bað ófagnað eiga (1) jarls (3) stúfa hans' (yanked her hand back and told him his [1] jarl / [3] stump was unwelcome). This second girl is more forthcoming and even dominant: 'Hún tók nú um göndulinn á honum ok strauk um ok mælti: „Þetta er fimligr foli ok þó mjök rétt hálsaðr“' (She now seized his penis and stroked it and said: "This is a nimble foal, but very erect at the neck"). She does not at any point recoil and say his penis is unwelcome. However it is implied that she is startled by how quickly he progresses to full penetration: 'Bóndadóttur varð mjök dátt við þetta' (The farmer's daughter was very startled by that). This indicates that Bósi is far from a considerate

⁴⁹ Heslop, "Grettisfærsla," 81. This appears to be a euphemism for the mixing of sexual fluids.

⁵⁰ *Flatayjarbók*, 2:442.

sexual partner, going at his own speed and not his partner's. Bósi is unrepentant about this, extending the foal metaphor further by calling it 'óstýrinn' (unbridled). It appears that Bósi then ejaculates, and his flaccid penis is equated with an 'ölsjúkr' (ale-sick) man, but this is not necessarily a negative euphemism; 'hafi hann ælt upp' (he has vomited up) i.e. ejaculated can be compared to *De l'escuiruel* in which Robin's 'squirrel' 'a vouchié et a vomí' (vomited and threw up).⁵¹ The metaphor thus has precedent in a very consensual, apparently enjoyable instance of intercourse in the *fabliau*.

Bósi and the *bóndadóttir* then continue to have sex for a while longer and, as Jochens suggested, the enjoyment on the part of the girl is indicated by the inclusion of a reference to a female-dominant sexual position. Excepting some discomfort at the beginning of the sexual intercourse, then, in this scene the sexual experience is positive for both partners. Bósi does not give her a ring before the sex but in the morning, supporting the idea that in other scenes it is a coercive bribe to convince the other girls to have sex with him; here it is not necessary as a bribe but functions as a token of gratitude for the girl's information, as she is a willing sexual partner from their first meeting to their parting the following morning.

THE AM 577 4TO VARIANT

There is, however, a complication to this scene: the jarringly different version in AM 577 4to (ca. 1450–1499), which Jiriczek includes in his annotations to the primary version in AM 510 4to (ca. 1540–1560), as well as the legible parts of the censored AM 586 4to (ca. 1450–1499).⁵² In AM 577 4to, the encounter with the second *bóndadóttir* (presented in full at Appendix I:2:IV:6) far more closely resembles the encounter with the first and third.

⁵¹ "De l'escuiruel," 107.

⁵² Jiriczek, *Die Bósa-saga*, 39–40.

This variant depicts a much more violent scene. The wording ‘Hann bað hana taka í millum fóta sér, en hún kipti hendinni ok bað ófagnað eiga hans kylbu’ (He told her to take [what was] between his legs, but she yanked her hand back and said his club was unwelcome) parallels the exact same phrasing in the first and third scene: (1) ‘Hann bað hana taka milli fóta sér, en hún kippti hendinni ok bað ófagnað eiga jarls hans’ and (3) ‘Hann bað hana taka á millum fóta sér. Hún kippti at sér hendinni ok bað ófagnað eiga stúfa hans’. This sentence is the greatest indicator of unwillingness in all three incidents. In AM 577 4to alone, all three express hesitance and the explicit idea that Bósi’s penis is not welcome. In this variant of the second scene, Bósi also tells the *bóndadóttir* to stay as quiet as possible, which could be taken either as him expecting her to be loud in her pleasure as he has sex with her, or as him telling her not to alert her family members, sleeping close by, that an unwanted man is trying to have sex with her. This ties in with the maidservant scene in *Grettis saga* and the possible ambiguity of a woman’s cry during sex as either from fear and pain or from pleasure. This polysemy of sound appears in the *pastourelle* ‘L’autre jour moi chivachai’ (The Other Day I Was Riding). Gravdal notes that

the shepherdess’s ‘recurring line, “ai! ai! ai!,” is at first a cry of sadness, then after another stanza a cry of pain, and finally after the knight has forced himself on her a cry of orgasmic ecstasy: *ai! ai! ai!* Thus the audience is allowed both to laugh and to imagine that rape is a pleasurable game.⁵³

It is therefore possible to interpret the sounds of crying as a product of fear or sexual pleasure and perhaps even both, deliberately. Indeed, in the other versions of this scene, Bósi tells the *bóndadóttir* to ‘haf sem kyrrast’ (be as quiet as possible), but in that context — in which she is very encouraging and positively responsive to his sexual advances — it certainly seems that he is expecting her to express her pleasure loudly. In the AM 577 4to variant, following the context of her calling his penis unwelcome and recoiling, the order to stay quiet seems

⁵³ Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*, 117.

much more threatening. That Bósi's behaviour remains the same in either context suggests that he is proceeding as he wishes, without regard for the girl's reactions, even if she seems to express unwillingness and/or unhappiness.

This manuscript is also the only one to place the ring-giving of the second scene during the encounter, as it is in the first and third scenes, rather than the following morning, as it is in the other manuscripts depicting the second *bóndadóttir*. Rather than a token for the girl after the act, here it becomes much more transactional; indeed, it is only after seeing the ring that the girl seems inclined to sleep with him. The phrase 'kvómu þeim nú allir hlutir vel saman' (now all things between them went well) suggests that up until that point, things between the pair had not been going well. The detailed sex scene that follows in the other versions is absent in this version; there is no description of fluids, no more dialogue and no attempt at depicting sexual positions. It is simply said that they 'skemtu þau sér um nottina' (they entertained themselves throughout the night), which is suggestive of mutual pleasure and indicates that, like the first *bóndadóttir*, this girl is won over by Bósi's sexual prowess. Also noteworthy is that in both AM 510 4to and AM 577 4to, the ring is said to be made of copper on the inside 'wodurch die Gabe zum Betrug gestempelt wird, ein Versuch komischer Wirkung, der [AM 586 4to and AM 343a 4to] fremd ist' (thereby making the gift a fraud, adding a comic element that is alien to [AM 586 4to and AM 343a 4to]).⁵⁴ This trickery adds a distinct malevolence to Bósi's actions; it is difficult to tell whether he recognises the *bóndadóttir*'s unwillingness, but the bribery with the ring suggests that he knows she must be convinced. The fact that the ring — which she presumably believes to be solid gold — is, in fact, merely gold-plated means that the girl appears to be convinced to sleep with him under false pretences. Whether we are supposed to laud Bósi for fraudulently seducing her, or feel

⁵⁴ Jiriczek, *Die Bósa-saga*, 43; LIV.

outraged on her behalf and see him as a swindler, is less clear. If rape in *Bósa saga* is a ‘game’, as it is in the *pastourelle*, then perhaps this is a joke at the girl’s expense.

In this variant, she is unwilling, Bósi’s member is the more combative club rather than a foal, she is told to keep quiet, and she is fooled with the ring. This is quite a departure from the second *bóndadóttir* of AM 510 4to and AM 586 4to, who is eager, experienced, and shows every sign of consenting to Bósi’s sexual advances.

THE THIRD *BÓNDADÓTTIR*

Compared to the first and second *bóndadóttir*, the third (presented in full at Appendix I:2:IV:7) has a more lukewarm response to Bósi’s flirting: he smiles at her and she ‘var mjök tileygð til hans á móti’ (was very *tileygð* to him in return). This clause marks the first of many reactions from the third girl that could be interpreted in multiple ways: Cleasby and Vigfússon gloss *til-eygðr* as ‘squint-eyed’, and George Hardman renders the phrase as ‘she was quite reserved toward him’, indicating that she looks at Bósi with some level of suspicion or dubiousness.⁵⁵ The only other attestation of this word according to ONP is in the late romance *Vilhjálmss saga sjóðs*, in which a woman ‘var miog tileyg’ (was very *tileyg*) to Vilhjálmr with the goal of distracting him so that he loses a game, and so here the translation would be something more like she ‘made eyes’ at him.⁵⁶ Hermann Pálsson translates the *Bósa saga* phrase ‘tileygð til hans’ as ‘eyed him’, and this translation perhaps best encapsulates the ambiguity of the word: the girl may be eyeing Bósi with interest or with suspicion.⁵⁷ This ambiguous response, far more muted than those of the first or second girls does not deter

⁵⁵ Cleasby-Vigfússon, s.v. ‘til-eygðr’; George L. Hardman, trans., “The Saga of Bosi and Herraud,” Northvegr Foundation 2011, accessed 10 December 2023, https://jillian.rootaction.net/~jillian/world_faiths/www.northvegr.org/lore/oldheathen/068.html.

⁵⁶ *Vilhjálmss saga*, 22.

⁵⁷ Hermann Pálsson, trans., *Seven Viking Romances*, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985), 222.

Bósi, however, although he possibly gauges that she is less keen than the other two as she is the only one from whom he does not immediately lift the bedclothes, which suggests a slightly less aggressive approach.

As with the first *bóndadóttir*, it is possible to read the third *bóndadóttir*'s dialogue with Bósi as sexually responsive. If she understands what he means by 'hólkr' (sheath) and 'stúfa' (stump), she may be being coy, and intimating that she fears his penis may be too big: 'Hún sagðist engan hafa, þann sem honum væri hæfiligr' (She said that she didn't have one that would fit). When she asks to see his *stúfa* this could be a flirtation. However, like the first girl, and the second girl in the AM 577 4to variant, she recoils and informs him his stump is unwelcome after he tells her to touch it. As I have argued, this is an extremely negative response and does not align with someone who is eager to have sexual intercourse. Her response when asked what his 'stúfa' is like is puzzling: '„Pundaraskafti föður míns ok sé brotin aftan af því kringlan“' ("My father's steel shaft but with the disk broken off"). This could be evidence of a much deeper trauma — comparing Bósi's penis to something of her father's could suggest sexual trauma from her father — or it may be that she is clueless about sex in general, and completely misunderstands Bósi's *doubles entendres* and attempts at seduction, leading her to make this awkward, incongruous comment. If she does understand his euphemisms, she may even be trying to deter Bósi. Keens calls this moment an 'unflattering parallel for Bósi, reaching an anti-climax with mention of her father during this moment of intimacy', adding that 'her continued naivety suggests that the *double entendres* used by Bósi have been lost on her'.⁵⁸ Indeed, Bósi appears offended and calls her 'tilfyndin' (fault-finding) before offering her a gold ring. She certainly views this as something transactional, immediately asking what he wants in return. He responds,

⁵⁸ Keens, "Scenes of a Sexual Nature," 71.

„Ek vil sponsa traus þína,“ sagði hann.
 „Ekki veit ek, hvernig þat er,“ segir hún.

(“I want to stop up your spout,” said he.
 “I don’t know what that is,” says she.)

Again, she expresses a lack of comprehension. At this point, it is very difficult to read this as reciprocally flirtatious: now at the point of the start of intercourse, she is still saying that she does not know what he intends even though he is in her bed and has used some fairly transparent euphemisms, and told her to grab between his legs. He tells her to lie down, which she does, but unlike the first girl, who verbally asked him to proceed, and the second girl, who was verbally and physically responsive to his seduction, this third *bóndadóttir* never gives verbal consent and appears completely clueless. After the penetration, she lets out an exclamation, as it appears that Bósi has been too forceful, and there is some rather bizarre anatomical description: ‘leggr síðan neðan í kviðinn á henni, svá at allt gekk upp undir bringspölu’ ([he] puts himself down into her womb, so that he went all the way up underneath her ribcage), to which she physically jolts and exclaims ‘„Þú hleyptir inn sponsinu um augat, karlmaðr“’ (“You’re bursting the stopper up around the eye, man!”). It is very likely that this sequence is intended to be funny: the hyperbolic language, the misunderstanding of euphemism, and the use of exclamation all follow the *fabliau* tradition, which was certainly a comic one. All three sex scenes in *Bósa saga* have been read as ultimately humorous, ‘a bawdy and playful version of physicality rather than anything sensual and erotically charged’.⁵⁹ But the undertones of this third scene in particular are of coercion, lack of consent and sexual discomfort. After she expresses her discomfort, Bósi, as he previously did in the second *bóndadóttir* scene, chases his own pleasure: ‘„Ek skal ná því ór aftr. “’ (“I’ll get it back out of you after.”)

⁵⁹ Ibid., 73.

The *bóndadóttir* then says that the experience is ‘„Svá dátt sem ek hefði drukkit ferskan mjöð,“ kvað hún, „ok haf þú sem vakrast í auganu þvegilinn,“’ (“As *pleasing/numbing* as if I had drunk fresh mead,” she said, “and keep your eyes alert on the mop!”) This is a particularly important crux in reading this scene as sexually pleasurable or not. It can be translated in two very different ways. Firstly, it could be taken as a request for him to keep having sex with her. Hermann Pálsson, for instance, translates it as ‘Keep the mop stirring in the flue’, seemingly interpreting the *bóndadóttir*’s words as a euphemism.⁶⁰ George L. Hardmann translates it similarly: “Keep the mop lively in the pail”.⁶¹ These translations are likely influenced by the general through-line of *fabliau*-esque euphemisms used by Bósi and the first and second *bóndadóttir*. If the third *bóndadóttir* asks for Bósi to keep going, this does imply some level of encouragement or enjoyment, although this does not negate the cloud of coercion over the whole encounter. After all, the first *bóndadóttir* was similarly reluctant originally, but the saga writer transformed this reluctance into sexual pleasure. Much like the first *bóndadóttir*, there would seem to be a sudden shift from unwillingness to enthusiasm.

The third *bóndadóttir*’s fresh mead analogy could also be an expression of enjoyment; she calls the experience of being penetrated by Bósi *dátt* (undecl. *dár*) which has broad, contrasting semantic meanings of ‘overwhelming’ as something positive such ‘pleasant, familiar’, or something negative, such as ‘numbing, unpleasant’.⁶² If we interpret it as the

⁶⁰ Hermann Pálsson, trans., *Seven Viking Romances*, 223.

⁶¹ Hardman, “The Saga of Bosi and Herraud.”

⁶² Fritzner, s.v. ‘dár’; Cleasby and Vigfússon translate it as ‘numbing’ or ‘in phrases denoting a charm or fascination exercised over another, always of uncertain and fugitive nature’, Cleasby-Vigfússon, s.v. ‘dár’; Blöndal has it as, ‘overvældende, stærk, kraftig’ (fast; overwhelming; strong; powerful), ‘fortrolig, intim, familiær’ (intimate; familiar) or ‘ondt’ (bad, wicked, painful), s.v. ‘dár’; Zoëga sets it in the context of ‘startled at a thing’; ‘pleased with a thing’ s.v. ‘dár’. Attestations in the ONP reflect these ambiguous definitions, for instance, the word clearly denotes an extremely negative emotion when Rimsteinn is killed in *Þiðreks saga* and his men ‘verðr dátt við fall jarlsins’ (become overwhelmed at the death of the jarl), 1:214. Meanwhile, in *Njáls*

more positive meaning than the sentiment is obvious: she is enjoying the sex. Taken to mean ‘numbing’, ‘unpleasant’, or ‘startling’, *dátt* could be read as far more negative, however, and the mead would have connotations of intoxication. This is certainly a possible interpretation since the *bóndadóttir* soon becomes nauseous, a well-established side effect of drinking too much. *Dátt* is also used of the second *bóndadóttir* when Bósi appears to move too quickly for her. In that instance too, it could be read as either positive or negative. The ‘mead’ comparison can thus be interpreted in two ways; in either case, unlike the first *bóndadóttir*, whose switch from reluctance to pleasure does not then revert into any kind of discomfort, the third *bóndadóttir*’s sexual experience with Bósi ends with nausea. This follows the *bóndadóttir*’s request: ‘„haf þú sem vakrast í auganu þvegilinn”’.

As mentioned previously, it is possible to translate this mop phrase very differently from Hermann and Hardman. I have translated it as ““Keep the mop in sight!”” as, rather than an innuendo, it could be an expression of her nausea: she is literally telling Bósi to keep an eye on a nearby mop in case she vomits. Grammatically, it could feasibly mean the more euphemistic ‘keep the mop alert in the eye’, with the mop consisting of a phallic euphemism and the eye a euphemism for the vagina’. This would facilitate a dual interpretation: the girl may be asking Bósi to keep an eye on the literal mop because she is nauseous, whereas Bósi could be misinterpreting her words as a euphemism asking him to speed up, which is in line with the other scholars’ translations, given the context of exchanging euphemisms and the ambiguity of the *fabliau* language being played on here. It is also possible that he does understand her request to keep an eye on the mop but ignores her, instead he ‘sparir nú ekki’ (spares nothing). This makes the girl feel so sick that she asks him to stop, which he does. That Bósi only stops when the *bóndadóttir* asks him to despite her numerous attempts to tell

saga, *dátt* is used to describe the peaceful terms between Hǫskuldr and Njáll’s households: ‘Ok svá var dátt með þeim ǫllum’ (And so everything was well between them all), 247.

him that she is uncomfortable shows a grave lack of concern for his sexual partner. Translating the mop phrase in this way encourages a reading of the mead as unpleasantly intoxicating and the *bóndadóttir* as experiencing great discomfort. There is no evidence of pleasure, and they do not go on to entertain themselves throughout the rest of the night, as happens with the first and second *bóndadótr*.

Bósi's last sexual conquest ends in discomfort and awkwardness. Translating the mop phrase as Pálsson and Hardman do, it is possible that she experiences some pleasure; but even so, her experience is not the repeated sexual pleasure effusively expressed in the encounters with the first and second *bóndadótr*. Translating the mop phrase as a plea for Bósi to keep an eye on the mop which he either ignores or misinterprets, combined with her repeated expressions of discomfort, makes it difficult to read this scene as anything other than completely non-consensual. She still goes on to give Bósi information and even helps him in carrying out his next quest, but this *bóndadóttir* is markedly different from the first and second in that she and Bósi do not have a lengthy, pleasurable sexual encounter. She responds to his flirtations with narrowed eyes, to his euphemisms with cluelessness, and to his sexual advances with nausea. Of the three sex scenes this is the most coercive and the most unpleasant.

INTERWEAVING ADVENTURE-QUESTS

Each of the encounters with the *bóndadótr* is integral to the greater narrative of the saga. We must, therefore, consider these scenes not just in isolation but within the context of the saga as a whole since 'the nightly activities contain metaphorical language which invites us to look for a possible function of the scenes, which contributes to the appreciation of the saga

author's literary skills'.⁶³ The saga writer appears to deliberately depict these scenes with different levels of sexual enjoyment, and each scene prefaces a part of Bósi and Herraúðr's adventure which includes significant violence towards women. Each *bóndadóttir* provides Bósi with information pertaining to his quest and thus the sexual encounters, which as a three abide by the folkloric *Gesetz der Dreizahl*, are part of the very backbone of the saga's structure. Naumann, who seems to take *Bósa saga*'s scenes as depicting mutually enjoyable encounters and refers to Bósi as a 'sexual athlete', notes the misogynistic violence of the interweaving adventure scenes and proposes that this functions to contrast with the *bóndadóttir* scenes: 'The triple kidnaping of the princess contrasts with the sexual scenes with the farmer's daughter'.⁶⁴ However, given my reading of the *bóndadóttir* scenes as sexually violent, the interweaving of further violence against women after each episode suggests that the saga does not alternate sex and violence, but rather intermingles them. This is not a case of violence-free sex scenes interwoven with violence for contrast; rather the three sex scenes and the quests that follow each one form overlapping tales of violence and sexual violence with themes of lust, rescue, and marriage.

The first *bóndadóttir* describes how Hleiðr has been kidnapped by a priestess who wants to groom her into her replacement. Bósi and Herraúðr must defeat this priestess to attain the object of their quest, the 'gammsegg' (vulture's egg), and in doing so they also find and free Hleiðr. This adventure scene details combat between Herraúðr and the priestess, who is clearly monstrous to a degree as 'Tvævetra kvígu þarf hún í mál' (she eats a two-year old cow for every meal) and 'í fjörbrotum hennar varð landskjálfti mikill' (at her death-struggle

⁶³ Lars von Wezel, "Myths to Play with: *Bósa saga ok Herraúðs*," in *The Fantastic in Old Norse/Icelandic Literature: Sagas and the British Isles: Preprint Papers of the Thirteenth International Saga Conference Durham and York. 6-12 August, 2006*, ed. John McKinnell, David Ashurst, and Donata Kick, vol. 2 (Durham: Centre for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006), 1038.

⁶⁴ Hans-Peter Naumann, "Bósa saga (Herraúðs saga ok Bósa)," in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano and Kirsten Wolf (London: Garland, 1993), 54.

there was a great earthquake).⁶⁵ This death-struggle features a tussle described in sexual terms:

Kerlingu varð hált í gammsblóðinu, ok fell hún á bak aftir, ok váru þá sviptingar miklar með þeim, svá at ýmsi váru undir. Bósi raknaði þá við ok greip höfuð griðungsins ok rak á nasir gýginni. Herrauðr sleit þá af henni höndina í axlarliðinum.⁶⁶ (Appendix I:2:IV:8)

This attention to the switching of positions seems to foreshadow the next sex scene in which ‘var bóndadóttir ýmist ofan á eða undir’ (the farmer’s daughter was sometimes above him and sometimes beneath him), and thus the violence of the fight is undercut with sexual connotations. In turn, when this positioning is echoed in the second *bóndadóttir* scene, the saga writer invites us to recall the fight with the *gýgr* and thus the sex scene mimics combat. Bósi and Herrauðr then find the beautiful Hleiðr tied to a chair by her hair, in tears. She has been kidnapped by the now-dead ogress who intended her as her heiress, and Herrauðr immediately says, ‘„Góð mundir þú vera þeim manni [...] er þik frelsaði heðan.”’ (“you would surely be good to the man who released you from here”).⁶⁷ At first, she replies ‘þat mundi engi gert geta’ (that no one could do that), but quickly changes her mind.⁶⁸ She says, ‘„Engan veit ek svá leiðan mennskan mann [...] at ek mundi eigi heldr vilja eiga en at vera blótuð hér í hofinu”’ (“I do not know of such a loathsome man that I would not rather marry than be sacrificed here in the temple”), which is a rather lukewarm response.⁶⁹ Yet Herrauðr quickly insists again that ‘„ek þykkjumst sæmda”’ (“I think myself honoured”), further adding that he does not intend to ask her family for permission, even though she tries to insist on this.⁷⁰ It is only after she gives a firm ‘yes’ to marriage that he and Bósi set her free. She

⁶⁵ *Bósa saga*, 300; 302.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 301–2.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 303.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

sticks to this resolve even after her brother insists that Siggeirr marry her instead, as ‘hún var treg til þess ok kvað þat makligt, at sá nyti sín, er hana frelsaði ór tröllahöndum’ (she was downcast at this and said that it was fitting that the one who had freed her from the hands of the *tröll* should enjoy her).⁷¹ She subsequently appears to feel indebted to Herrauðr. The information from the first *bóndadóttir* thus leads to the sexualised killing of the *gýgr* and the freeing of Hleiðr with the coercive offer of marriage from Herrauðr.

The second *bóndadóttir* tells Bósi how to free Hleiðr, now unwillingly betrothed to Siggeirr, on her wedding day. The *bóndadóttir* makes it clear that Hleiðr is against her marriage to Siggeirr — ‘,ok er þat þó á móti hennar vilja’” (“and it is however against her will”) — and is even concerned about the fact that Hleiðr and Siggeirr’s marital bed will be particularly well-guarded:

Sæng stendr á miðju hallargólfi, ok er þar fimm palla upp at ganga. Þar skal liggja brúðrin ok brúðguminn, en hirðin öll skal vaka um kringum, ok má þeim því ekki á óvart koma.⁷² (Appendix I:2:IV:9)

The precise information she provides enables Bósi to prevent the undesired marriage and implied marital rape of Hleiðr by Siggeirr so that she can marry Herrauðr instead.

Finally, the third *bóndadóttir* agrees to lure the wealthy Princess Edda to the woods so that Bósi can marry her. Bósi gives Edda a choice: ‘,at fara með mér viljug eða geri ek skyndibrúðlaup til þín hér í skóginum’” (“to come with me willingly or I will perform an improvised wedding to you here in the woods”).⁷³ This could certainly be read as an implied threat of a forced informal marriage and marital rape. Saunders has labelled rape as one of the recurrent themes associated with the forest setting in romance; the secluded, dangerous setting of isolation in the woods and the imposed ultimatum upon Edda either to go willingly

⁷¹ Ibid., 306.

⁷² Ibid., 310.

⁷³ Ibid., 317.

or to be forced generate strong undertones of sexual threat here.⁷⁴ After hanging her protector, Skálkr the eunuch, Bósi kidnaps Edda:

Síðan setti Bósi konungsdóttur á handlegg sér ok bar hana til skips, ok létu frá landi ok fóru þar til, er þeir fundu Smið. Konungsdóttir barst lítt ad, en þegar Smiðr hafði orð við hana, tók af henni allan óhug, ok sigldu heim í Gautland.⁷⁵ (Appendix I:2:IV:10)

It is clear that initially Edda does not want to go with Bósi, and it is very likely that Smiðr alters her thoughts on the matter with magic, since it is mentioned at the beginning of the saga that Smiðr had been very amenable to learning the ‘taufr’ (sorcery), ‘galdr’ (magic) and ‘sleita’ (trickery) which Bósi himself had not wanted to learn.⁷⁶ Vésteinn Ólason describes Bósi as ‘a sexual adventurer’ who is ‘endowed with a wild temperament’ and, when discussing the scene in which Bósi kills the princess’s slave and woos her, says that his ‘vulgarity is superficial; he has in him the makings of a nobleman’.⁷⁷ Vésteinn does not mention the princess’s reluctance and it is very difficult to read Bósi’s actions as mere ‘vulgarity’; this is a rather weak word to use of murder and sexual coercion. Rather than a ‘sexual adventurer’, Bósi in this episode might more aptly be called a murderer and a sexual aggressor — hardly the qualities of a nobleman. Since Bósi does go on to marry Edda and in doing so gains all the power of her heritage — becoming not just a nobleman but king of Bjarmaland — Vésteinn’s assessment is perhaps understandable. But the violence used to attain this role is difficult to dismiss as ‘superficial vulgarity’.

The *fabliau*-like sex scenes in this saga are no doubt intended to be humorous, just as the *fabliaux* themselves were designed to be. Given the sexual detail, it is also possible that

⁷⁴ According to Saunders, in the forest ‘the boundary between sexual desire and love is blurred, and irrationality and chivalric behaviour begin to blend into each other’, *The Forest of Medieval Romance: Avernus, Broceliande, Arden* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993), 132–3.

⁷⁵ *Bósa saga*, 317.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 285.

⁷⁷ Vésteinn Ólason, “Marvellous North,” 117; 116.

they were intended to be titillating; Norris Lacy suggests that ‘exciting prurient interest’ is ‘foreign to the purpose of *fabliaux*’ but Phillips and Reay propose that Lacy ‘overdoes caution’.⁷⁸ In *Bósa saga*, the eradication of the sex scenes in the principal manuscript does suggest an aversion to sexual content, possibly out of fear and prurience or out of disdain for the bawdy humour. But underneath these layers of humour and sexual salaciousness is a disturbing depiction of sexual coercion and sexual violence, with two (or three, if reading AM 577 4to) young, naïve girls being forced and possibly bribed into having sex with Bósi, whose main goals are his own sexual satisfaction and to acquire pivotal information so that he can continue on his own quest, which ultimately enables him to marry the Princess Edda against her will and inherit her father’s kingdom.

Given the strong emphasis on *fabliau*-style humour, it is certainly possible to read rape here as a ‘game’, with lower-class women the butt of what we would now consider extremely poor-taste rape jokes. After all, Bósi, who ends up king of Bjarmaland with a coerced queen, has the last laugh. Or perhaps Bósi’s ruthlessness in his sexual escapades highlights an anxiety around high-status men and their perceived right to use lower-status women to satiate their lust, whether the woman was initially unwilling, initially willing, or unwilling throughout. This triptych of seduction and violence in *Bósa saga* certainly showcases a delineation between gradations of consent, coercion and forced pleasure and — whether the audience was supposed to laugh with Bósi or recoil with the farm girls — it is not just the most sexually explicit, but one of the most sexually violent sagas in the Old Norse corpus.

⁷⁸ Norris J. Lacy, *Reading Fabliaux* (New York: Garland, 1993), 14, n. 13; Phillips and Reay, *Sex Before Sexuality*, 170.

CHAPTER V: RESISTING RAPE AND WREAKING REVENGE: HOW WOMEN PUNISH THEIR ATTACKERS

„Nei,“ sagði hann, „eigi skal þér þess kostr.“

My thesis began by piecing together the puzzle of polymorphous ambiguities which surround rape in the *Íslendingasögur*. In the case of the *fornaldarsögur*, with their higher volume of sex scenes, the problem of rape often becomes a question of whether the saga writers condone or condemn the act of rape or the rapist himself. Condoning and condemning sexual violence are rarely mutually exclusive. The *fornaldarsögur* depict a panoply of anti-rape paradigms: women who protect themselves from rape, women who protect other women from rape, and women who take vengeance on their rapists. There are also many other episodes where men express a specific desire to protect women from rape or to punish rapists. However, these acts of rebellion, resistance, retribution, or reprimand do not necessarily vilify a rapist or would be rapist *in toto*, with rapists often presented as somehow exonerated, or even justified.

This chapter and the next are very much siblings, in which I examine female and male reactions to rape, respectively. In this chapter, I discuss how men receive their ‘come-uppance’ for raping women: in two out of three of the narratives discussed a woman attempts to take revenge on her rapist. In *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, a *hertekin* woman betrays her captor and is viciously murdered by him. In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, the ‘meykongr’ (maiden-king) Ólöf humiliates king Helgi and is raped by him before being released to give birth to his daughter, who he then marries. In the third saga, however, the saga writer seems to punish the man for rape, drawing a direct link between the action and its consequence as the eponymous Ragnarr *loðbrók* has a deformed child as a result of raping Áslaug. These three

texts construct narratives that highlight female resistance to rape and the consequences that ought — or ought not — to be faced by a rapist.

VENGING THE OPPRESSOR IN *HERVARAR SAGA OK HEIÐREKS*

Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks bears witness to the particularly brutal treatment of a princess by a man named Heiðrekr. Each of the three extant manuscripts depict this princess slightly differently, with two of three splitting her into two separate entities: the *H* manuscript variant (*Hauksbók*, AM 544 4to, fourteenth century) has two ‘Sifkas’ (one Humladóttir, one from Finland); *R* (GKS 2845 4to, fifteenth century) simply has one Sifka who returns — ‘Sifka Humladóttir var þá í annat sinn með konungi’ (Sifka Humladóttir was for a second time with the king) — in a manner described by Christopher Tolkien as ‘clumsy’.¹ *U* (R:715 of the University Library, Uppsala, mid-seventeenth century) has a ‘Sváfa’ (Humladóttir) and a ‘Sifka’ from Finland. The manuscript variation of this figure is, consequently, quite complex and ‘Something seems to be wrong with all the versions’ in this regard.² Each of the redactions’ different approaches to the character impacts the narrative in distinct ways, as I shall discuss: the *R* variant combining Sifka into one figure rather than two, for instance, means that she is both mother of Heiðrekr’s child and traitor, rather than one or the other, as in *H* and *U*. Kemp Malone suggests that this reappearance interrupts the suspension of disbelief and is ‘obviously not original’ although it should of course be noted that an

¹ *Hervarar saga*, 32; *Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra*, trans. Christopher Tolkien (London: Thomas Nelsons and Sons, 1960), xvi. Note that the *FN* edition follows the *R* redaction. Where redaction variations are relevant, I will elucidate which version I am referring to, otherwise, as with the other *fornaldarsögur*, my primary source is the *FN*. Note that references to *U* and *H* are taken from Jón Helgason’s edition, *Heiðreks saga: Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*.

² A. Le Roy Andrews, “Studies in the Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda: II. The Hervarar Saga-(Continued),” *Modern Philology* 21, no. 2 (1923): 194.

‘original’ is difficult to trace.³ In any case, all of these women are taken as a *frilla* in the context of war; Sifka Humladóttir is taken when Heiðrekr conquers her father’s land in both *R* and *H*; in the *U*, version it is specified that Sváfa and Sifka are both taken ‘ad herfangi’ (as spoils of war) to be the *frillur* of Heiðrekr.⁴ Regardless of this character’s inconsistent bifurcation, it is the same Sifka in all versions who proceeds in the saga to be Heiðrekr’s confidante, although it is specified that ‘honum var þat ráðit, at hann skyldit engan hlut henni segja, þann er leyna skyldi (he had been advised not to tell her anything that should be kept secret).⁵ She is thus immediately highlighted as untrustworthy.

When Heiðrekr gets into bed with Sifka he is ‘ókátr ok sat skamma stund við drykkju’ (unhappy and sat drinking for a time).⁶ Sifka asks, ‘„Hví eru þér ókátr, herra, hvat er yðr, eru þer sjúkir, segið mér”’ (“Why are you unhappy, sir, what ails you, are you sick? Tell me.”).⁷ When he informs her his life would be at stake if his secret were revealed, ‘Hún kveðst leyna mundu ok gerist blíð við hann ok fór eftir ástsamliga’ (She said she would keep it a secret and was tender towards him and sought the answer with affection).⁸ This is very reminiscent of Yngvildr — also a *frilla* — who uses tenderness to coax Klaufi out of his *berserkr*-rage so that her brothers can kill him. Heiðrekr then reveals to Sifka that while he was out hunting he had killed the young prince.⁹ At this point the redactions differ: *U* and *H* have Sifka weep when Heiðrekr tells her of the prince’s murder and it is because she is still crying the following day that the queen asks her why she is sad. At first Sifka says she ‘ei þora ad segia’

³ Kemp Malone, “Widsith and the *Hervararsaga*,” *PMLA* 40, no. 4 (1925): 772.

⁴ *Hervarar saga*, 30 (*R*); *Heiðreks saga: Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, ed. Jón Helgason, 47 (*H*); 124 (*U*).

⁵ *Hervarar saga*, 32.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ ‘Þá kom Yngvildr í mót honum ok var allblíð við hann’ (Then Yngvildr came towards him and was very tender towards him), *Svarfdæla saga*, 173.

(does not dare to say), but when the queen persists, she tells her the truth; the queen, not Sifka, then goes to tell the king.¹⁰

The *R* version, meanwhile, depicts Sifka as very eager to tell the queen; the next morning when the queen asks her why Heiðrekr is so ‘ókátr’, she replies, ‘„Ærit er til, hann hefir drepit son konungs ok þinn.“’ (“There is reason for that, he has killed your and the king’s son”).¹¹ Despite being ordered by the queen to keep this is a secret, Sifka immediately proceeds to tell the king when he asks why the queen is troubled, responding: ‘„mikit er til gert, Heiðrekr hefir drepit son ykkarn, ok meiri ván, at eftir vilja hans færi“’ (“There is much to have caused that; Heiðrekr has killed your son, you and the queen, and what’s worse is that it went according to his will”).¹² Not only is she eager to relay the secret that Heiðrekr told her would be the death of him, she embellishes the incident by telling the king that he had truly wanted to kill the prince when in fact, as Heiðrekr explained to her, he was bound by Tyrfingr’s prophecy which states that the sword, when drawn, ‘„manns bani skyldi verða“’ (“would be the death of someone”).¹³ She even adds that Heiðrekr is ‘„dauða verðr“’ (“worthy of death”).¹⁴

Her intentions in coaxing the truth out of Heiðrekr seem clear: she is searching for something to use against him. He has kidnapped her and taken her as an unwilling concubine, and she seizes upon this opportunity to try and have him killed. Sifka’s episode thus represents a very rare case in the Old Norse corpus of a woman trying to seek vengeance for her kidnap, rape and subjugation into a *frilla*. While the later versions increase sympathy towards Sifka by having her weep, and having the truth coaxed out of her, the *R* version

¹⁰ *Heiðreks saga: Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, ed. Jón Helgason, 127 (*U*); 50 (*H*).

¹¹ *Hervarar saga*, 34.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

makes her out to be much more purposeful and even vindictive. Christopher Tolkien calls her ‘the treacherous mistress’, but — as a displaced victim of war and ongoing sexual violence — reading her as a victim attempting to vanquish her oppressor might be a fairer assessment.¹⁵ In the *R* version — the more vindictive version — she is also Sifka Humladóttir, who was impregnated and returned to her home in disgrace by Heiðrekr. Perhaps it is no coincidence then that this iteration of Sifka is more vindictive: she has more reason than the other Sifkas to be angry with Heiðrekr.

Her plan backfires and Heiðrekr decides to ‘flýta Sifku’ (dispatch Sifka).¹⁶ Carrying her across a stream, he ‘brýtr í sundr hrygg hennar ok skilr svá við hana, at hana rekr dauða eftir ánni’ (broke her back and parted from her so that she drifted dead down the river).¹⁷ Katherine Olley has written of the ‘extreme trauma’ undergone by the maternal body in Old Norse texts, highlighting Sifka’s fate as ‘particularly brutal’.¹⁸ The *U* version does not feature Sifka’s death scene; in the *R* and *H* redactions, however, following this brutal murder, Heiðrekr immediately marries Hervör, and is described as ‘höfðingi mikill ok spekingr at viti’ (a great chief, and very sage).¹⁹ Sifka’s attempt at justice fails utterly and Heiðrekr’s position is improved by her accusations. The horrific murder of Sifka and Heiðrekr’s ensuing wedding to Hervör are acutely dichotomous; the violent murder and disposal of Sifka, who is never mentioned again, is a cacophonous juxtaposition with the ‘veizlu mikillar’ (great feast) that

¹⁵ *Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra*, xvi.

¹⁶ *Hervarar saga*, 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Katherine Marie Olley, *Kinship in Old Norse Myth and Legend*, Studies in Old Norse Literature (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2022), 111; Katherine Marie Olley, “Labour Pains: Scenes of Birth and Becoming in Old Norse Legendary Literature,” *Quaestio Insularis* 18 (2018): 46.

¹⁹ *Hervarar saga*, 36.

accompanies the nuptials.²⁰ The non-vindictive Sifka of *H* seems to get a particularly raw deal, having done nothing to deserve this brutal back-breaking.

Heiðrekr does not seem to be directly punished for his actions; perhaps his is not supposed to be a disproportionate reaction to the betrayal of his concubine. However, for all his wisdom, it is Heiðrekr's slaves, captured during 'vestrvíking' (Viking raids in the west), that are his undoing: there are nine of them, all 'af stórum ættum ok kunnu illa ófrelsi sínu' (from high-class backgrounds and they did not much like their captivity).²¹ They slay him and his household during the night, and there is a strong sense of irony that slaves captured in war seek vengeance on Heiðrekr, just as Sifka did. Perhaps these are his just desserts for failing to anticipating that enslaved people would seek freedom and revenge, despite the prophecy of Óðinn which warned him that 'inir verstu þrælar at bana verða' (the worst of slaves will be your bane).²² Timothy Bourns has read this pronouncement as a signal that 'Óðinn finds Heiðrekr unworthy of the function of kinship'.²³ Contrary to Malone's claims that 'her betrayal has no tragic consequences, and the whole episode in which she figures might be omitted from the story without materially affecting the course of the action', it seems, given the poetic justice of his death, that while Sifka's plan for revenge backfires, it is taken up on her behalf by people who, just like her, were ripped from their high-status backgrounds and thrown into subjugation.²⁴

KING VS MAIDEN-KING: THE PERMISSIBILITY OF RAPE IN *HELGA ÞÁTR*

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 51.

²² Ibid.

²³ Timothy Bourns, "The Language of Birds in Old Norse Tradition," *JEGP* 120, no. 2 (2021): 235.

²⁴ Malone, "Widsith," 808.

Unlike many of the accounts of rape I have discussed throughout this thesis, significant scholarly attention has been directed towards Ólöf, the misogynous ‘meykongr’ (maiden-king) from *Hrólfs saga kraka*. This subsection therefore differs somewhat from the bulk of my work, which has been devoted to identifying and drawing attention to episodes of sexual violence that have been largely overlooked. Less attention, however, has been devoted to the subsequent rapes of Yrsa (the daughter of Helgi and Ólöf) and the ‘álfkona’ (elf woman). I will explore rape as a permissible act in *Helga þátr*, assessing Helgi’s victims as enactors of violence and vengeance.

PRIDE AND PUNISHMENT

Several scholars have evaluated the culpability of Ólöf and Helgi in their cycle of vengeance and largely concur that both are presented as cruel and violent in their own ways:²⁵

While both monarchs are exceptional in many ways (and thus on a basic level function as romance protagonists), they also both exhibit cruel and thoughtless behavior and they both commit acts of violence and betrayal.²⁶

According to my reading of the saga, however, Ólöf cannot simply be constrained by the typology of a cruel, irredeemable villain. To a female audience her resistance to sexual violence may be admirable. Moreover, her character is eventually redeemed. There can be no doubt, however, that the saga writer presents Ólöf at first as behaving most egregiously, prompting Helgi to defend his honour. The cycle of vengeance between her and Helgi is constituted as follows:

²⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, “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. Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, and Agneta Ney (Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 2001); Ármann Jakobsson, “Roi Chevalier”; Carl Phelpstead, “The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfs saga kraka*,” *Scandinavian Studies* 75, no. 1 (2003); Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest*; Marianne E. Kalinke, “Transgression in *Hrólfs saga kraka*,” in *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, and Agneta Ney (Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 2001).

²⁶ Denzin, “Tragical-Comical-Historical-Pastoral... Romance,” 211.

1. Helgi insults Ólöf with the proposal of a dishonourable marriage. It is made clear that he intends to take her whether she is willing or not.
2. Ólöf publicly and violently humiliates Helgi, figuratively penetrating him and emasculating him by shaving and tarring him.
3. Helgi rapes Ólöf repeatedly.
4. Ólöf has a child, Yrsa, who she hates so much that she sends her away to live in poverty. After Helgi unknowingly kidnaps and marries Yrsa, Ólöf finds out and does not speak out about their incest in the hopes that it will harm Helgi.
5. Ólöf tells Yrsa of her parentage and convinces her to come home with her and leave Helgi. This does not seem to be done out of malice but out of a desire to care for Yrsa. The vengeance cycle ends.

Ólöf is somewhat redeemed, displaying a tangible shift from cruelty to kindness, whereas Helgi proceeds to rape two more women. While Ólöf is possibly depicted as deserving her sexual assault according to the moral logic of the saga, her redemption in juxtaposition with Helgi's lustful stagnation encodes his sexually violent nature as contemptible.

'A veritable amazon' in the first movement of *Helga þátr*, Ólöf is an archetypal *meykongr*.²⁷ Shunning marriage, donning male-coded attire, beautiful yet cruel: her introduction marks her as tantalisingly unavailable and immediately flags the impending narrative of a suitor who refuses to respect her misogamy:

Fyrir Saxlandi réð í þann tíma ein drottning, er Ólöf hét. Hún var á þá leið sem herkonungar. Fór hún með skjöld ok brynju ok gyrð sverði ok hjálm á höfði. Þannig var henni háttat: væn at yfirliti, en grimm í skapi ok stórmannlig. Þat var mál manna, at sú vaeri beztr kostur í þann tíma á Norðrlöndum, er menn höfðu spurn af, en hún vildi þó engan mann eiga.²⁸ (Appendix I:2:V:1)

²⁷ Ármann Jakobsson, "Queens of Terror," 178.

²⁸ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 14.

Her attire places her in the category not just of the maiden-king but also of the maiden-warrior. The juxtaposition of her beauty and her cruelty immediately frustrates the male gaze: she would be a valuable match in marriage and with her beauty, she ‘naturally attracts men like honey draws bees’.²⁹ Upon hearing of her pride and eligibility, Helgi decides to marry her ‘hvárt sem henni væri þat viljugt vel eða miðr’ (whether she was very or not very willing).³⁰ At the outset of their story her consent is unimportant to him, and this sets the precedent for the rest of their relationship.

When Helgi surprises Ólöf with his arrival in Saxland, she throws a hasty feast for him during which he proposes a marriage and consummation so hasty that it would, as she says, bring her ‘svívirðingu’ (dishonour).³¹ This word will prove to be key in the cycle of vengeance between Helgi and Ólöf, as each tries to bring the other more *svívirðing*. The term appears in morphological variations five times in the interplay between the monarchs.³² Helgi responds: ‘henni væri þat makligt fyrir dramblæti sitt ok stórlæti, — „at vit búum nú bæði saman slíka stund sem mér líkar.”’ (she would, because of her pride and arrogance, deserve, “that we stick together as long as I like”).³³ He views her pride as something he must punish or perhaps fix. Ólöf smiles through the rest of the feast, plotting her revenge for this insult to her pride and honour. When they meet in the bedroom however, she shaves and tars him:

Konungr hafði drukkit svá fast, at hann fell þegar sofandi niðr í hvíluna. Drottningin neytir nú þessa ok stingr honum svefnþorn.

Ok sem allir menn eru í burtu gengnir, þá stendr drottning upp. Hún rakaði þá af honum hárit allt ok neri í tjöru.³⁴ (Appendix I:2:V:2)

²⁹ Ármann Jakobsson, “Queens of Terror,” 178.

³⁰ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 14.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

³² *Ibid.*, 15; 16; 18; 20.

³³ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁴ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 15–6.

According to Marusca Francini ‘the shaving of the head was a common practice in medieval Scandinavia for the purpose of stigmatizing slaves and criminals’, and M.F. Thomas has likewise associated shaving and tarring with the ‘plunge of the well-born to the lowest depths of social inferiority, the prevention of recognition of their true rank, and the acceptance of the status of slaves’.³⁵ When characters return with their hair restored to its former glory — such as Tristram or Áslaug, as I shall explore — it assures the audience of their nobility and their body’s rejection of this socially stigmatising punishment.³⁶ We might also think of the example of Haraldr *hárfagri*: after his famous haircut, which he had vowed to have only after gaining control of all Norway, his hair was ‘bæði mikit ok fagrt’ (both long and beautiful).³⁷ His luscious locks symbolise his kingship and — as Carl Phelpstead has argued — his ‘new (masculine) identity’.³⁸ Phelpstead draws on Robert Mills’ ‘Lacanian-influenced reading’ of hair as a symbol of virility, and proposes a convincing link ‘between hair and masculinity in the medieval Norse-speaking world’.³⁹ Noting Mills’ alignment of ‘extreme haircuts’ with ‘humiliation’, Phelpstead contrasts the emasculation of Helgi with Haraldr *hárfagri*, whose hair is left long after his haircut, establishing his hair as a symbol of masculine power.⁴⁰ Mills equates hair shaving with ‘a kind of figurative castration’, rendering Ólöf’s act not just an attack on Helgi’s kingship, but also on his sexual potency.⁴¹

³⁵ Marusca Francini, “The Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd: An Icelandic Reworking of *Tristrams saga*,” in *The Garden of Crossing Paths: The Manipulation and Rewriting of Medieval Texts*, ed. Marina Buzzoni and Massimiliano Bampi (Venice: Università Ca’ Foscari Venezia, 2005), 255; M. F. Thomas, *The Briar and the Vine: Tristan Goes North*, Arthurian Literature (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 57.

³⁶ After being shaved and tarred in *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, Tristram’s hair is ‘mikit’ (long) and ‘fagrt sem á gull sæi’ (as beautiful as if it were gold), 264.

³⁷ *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, 122.

³⁸ Phelpstead, “Size Matters,” 6.

³⁹ Carl Phelpstead, “Hair Today, Gone Tomorrow: Hair Loss, the Tonsure, and Masculinity in Medieval Iceland,” *Scandinavian Studies* 85, no. 1 (2013): 3.

⁴⁰ Robert Mills, “The Signification of the Tonsure,” in *Holiness and Masculinity in the Middle Ages*, ed. P. H. Cullum and Katherine J. Lewis (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2004), 4; Phelpstead, “Hair Today,” 5–6.

⁴¹ Mills, “Tonsure,” 116; 115.

Although shaving and tarring was by no means a punishment reserved only for sexual misdemeanours (take the examples of Tristram and Áslaug, or Skarphéðinn in *Njáls saga*, for instance), there is nevertheless a trend of shaving and tarring as punishment for attempted sexual coercion in two other *meykongr* episodes.⁴² In *Sigurðar saga þögla*, Sedentiana shaves and tars Hálfðan and Vilhjálmr before flogging them and cutting owl shapes into their backs and in *Viktors saga*, when Viktor asks to marry Fulgida she leads him to her bed and shaves, tars, and whips him before abandoning him in a forest.⁴³ In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Ólöf shaves and tars Helgi for attempting to sleep with her dishonourably. Phelpstead and Bagerius have also suggested that there is a penetrative aspect to her incapacitation of the king with the ‘svefnþorn’ (sleep-thorn).⁴⁴ Ólöf’s punishment of Helgi is resoundingly emasculating: she figuratively castrates and penetrates him.

This episode could be read as a triumphantly feminist moment, in which a woman seizes control and punishes the unwelcome man for his disregard for her sexual integrity. Ármann quips that ‘From a modern standpoint, the queen may seem quite within her rights [...] An audience brought up on modern films such as *Thelma and Louise* might almost applaud’.⁴⁵ Rather than thinking of a monolithic Norse audience, there is scope for delineating different potential reactions to Ólöf’s abuse of Helgi. Ólöf represents the kind of power that the average Norse woman would not have had, in both her position as a female *herkonungr* (war-king) and through her use of a sleep-thorn to stupefy and so remove the threat of her seducer.⁴⁶ In the absence of a magical giantess ally like Brana, as we shall explore in *Hálfðanar saga Brönufóstra* in Chapters VI and VII, or the supernatural might of

⁴² In *Njáls saga*, Skarphéðinn insults Skapti for his abject behaviour after killing Ketill, which includes shaving and tarring his own head, 298–9.

⁴³ *Sigurðar saga þögla*, 131; *Viktors saga*, 37.

⁴⁴ Phelpstead, “Sexual Ideology,” 6. Bagerius, *Mandom och mödom: Sexualitet, homosocialitet och aristokratisk identitet på det senmedeltida Island*, 170.

⁴⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, “Queens of Terror,” 179.

⁴⁶ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 14.

Bárðar saga's Helga, or the serendipitous arrival of Narfi in *Króka-Refs saga* — or indeed, a gun-wielding Susan Sarandon — Ólöf only succeeds in resisting Helgi's sexually violent intent because of her use of the magic 'sverfnþorn'. This scene could therefore represent an escapist feminine fantasy in which a female audience could envisage a method of defending themselves from rape. However, such a reading relies on a somewhat subversive interpretation of a text which clearly outlines Helgi as already intoxicated and vulnerable; Ólöf does not just want to incapacitate him, she wants to punish him. She is repeatedly characterised as prideful and her violent actions towards Helgi could also be read as a grave crime by an audience uninterested in female fantasy. After using the sleep-thorn, Ólöf stuffs Helgi in a sack and has her men carry him to his ship for his own men to find him in a state of utter dishonour:

En þá þeir hafa lyst, finna þeir þar í konung sinn svívirðliga leikinn. Hrítr þá í burtu svefnþorninn, ok vaknar konungr þá eigi við góðan draum ok er nú í illu skapi til drottningar.⁴⁷ (Appendix I:2:V:3)

The use of the word 'svívirðliga' here is poignant; it immediately evokes the last time it was uttered by Ólöf as she remarked how Helgi's marriage proposal would bring her 'svívirðingu'. She has done to him as he intended to do to her.

Thus far, the tale of Ólöf and Helgi follows the familiar maiden-king narrative trajectory observed in so many of the indigenous *riddarasögur*, as summarised succinctly by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir:

They uniquely focus on a female protagonist and follow a paradigm of a young, noble, unmarried woman, usually depicted as haughty, cruel, and, early in the tradition, armed. She rules her own kingdom, rejects all her suitors and mistreats them physically, verbally, or both. However, ultimately the male hero finds a way to outwit and conquer the maiden-king, sometimes subjecting her to equal violence, and the story concludes with a traditional ending in which the two protagonists (for the main

⁴⁷ Ibid., 16.

female character plays a role equal in importance to the man) marry, though sometimes they do not live so happily-ever-after from the woman's point of view.⁴⁸

Helgi and Ólöf emulate this cat-and-mouse model of cyclic, violent vengeance in which maiden-king and suitor take it in turns to do damage to the other. However, that pattern will be disrupted with Helgi's revenge.

HELGI'S REVENGE

Following Helgi's humiliation, we are told that 'hefir hennar ofsi ok ójafnaðr aldri verit meiri en nú' ([Ólöf's] tyranny and unjustness had never been greater than now).⁴⁹ Moreover, it is said that 'Þykkir öllum in mestu ódæmi, er hún skyldi hafa spottat slíkan konung' (everyone thought it was a monstrous thing to have made sport of the king in such a way).⁵⁰ Phelpstead has pointed out that these phrases in tandem show a condemnation of Ólöf by both the narrator 'and people in general'.⁵¹ Diegetically and extradiegetically, her behaviour towards Helgi is socially unacceptable.

It is repeatedly reinforced that Ólöf's greed is her undoing; Helgi lures her into the forest with treasure and she is repeatedly qualified by her cupidity: the *þræll* Helgi ropes in to help him calls her 'kvenna féágjörnu' (the most treasure-eager woman) and the saga writer notes that she 'sýnir nú þat, at hún sé fégjörn' (shows that she is treasure-eager) by keeping the information about the treasure to herself.⁵² The story of Helgi exists in other texts such as *Ynglinga saga*, *Gesta Danorum*, and *Skjöldunga saga*, and Kalinke has convincingly argued that the author of *Hrólfs saga kraka* 'superimposed the maiden-king paradigm on the matter

⁴⁸ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Bodies, Words, and Power*, 107. Jóhanna provides a helpful, comprehensive list of maiden-king episodes and texts at 164, n. 2.

⁴⁹ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 17.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Phelpstead, "Sexual Ideology," 6.

⁵² *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 17; 18.

transmitted in *Skjöldunga saga*.⁵³ Kalinke likens Ólöf's greed, which is absent from the other versions of the Helgi tale, to the other maiden-kings of Norse romance whose cupidity leads to their downfall.⁵⁴ It is in the forest — which I have already outlined as a venue for rape in medieval literature — that Helgi begins his assault.⁵⁵

Ok er þau koma í skóginn, er Helgi þar fyrir ok grípr hana höndum ok segir þá vera skapligan fund þeira at hefna sinnar svívirðingar.

Drottning sagðist hafa illa breytt við hann, — „ok vil ek þat nú allt bæta við þik, ok gerðu til mín brúðkaup sæmiligt.“⁵⁶ (Appendix I:2:V:4)

According to Kalinke:

Were the *Helga þáttr* a romance, the narrative would conclude in the comic mode with the nuptial festivities. The author of the narrative had to fashion the matter in such a manner, however, to make Helgi's subsequent incest with his daughter credible.⁵⁷

Because of the need to conform to the matter, Helgi steps outside of the romance genre. In the *riddarasögur* narratives, rape prompts the capitulation of the maiden-king, taming her into passivity and monogamy. It restabilises hierarchical gender roles. Jürg Glauser has commented on its ability to reinstate a patriarchal power dynamic:

Erst wenn ihr Stolz mit der Viginität gebrochen, die Prinzessin zur Hure erniedrigt worden ist, erhöht sie der Held allenfalls wieder zu seiner ihm untergebenen Frau.⁵⁸ (Appendix I:2:V:5)

For instance, in the *riddarasaga Dínus saga drambláta*, Dínus tries to sleep with Philotemia twice and is attacked, but on the third attempt he succeeds in taking her 'med afle' (with

⁵³ *Ynglinga saga*, 56–7; Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, 1:Liber Secundus, 106–11. *Skjöldunga saga* exists primarily in Arngrímur Jónsson's 1596 Latin retelling, 23–5; Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest*, 98.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ See above, Chapter IV, n. 74.

⁵⁶ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 18.

⁵⁷ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest*, 100.

⁵⁸ Jürg Glauser, *Isländische Märchensagas: studien zur Prosaliteratur im spätmittelalterlichen Island*, vol. 12, Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie (Basel: Helbing & Lichtenhahn, 1983), 205. This pattern of rape and then concession to marriage also occurs in *Sigurðar saga turnara*, *Sigrgarðs saga frækna*, *Sigurðar saga þogla*, all built, says Glauser, on *Clári saga*.

force).⁵⁹ It is only after this degradation that Philotemia agrees to marry him. In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, meanwhile, the paradigm is subverted. The trappings of romance melt away and the reality that there is no happy ending for the pair becomes apparent:

„Nei,“ sagði hann, „eigi skal þér þess kost. Skaltu fara til skipa með mér ok vera þar þá stund, sem mér líkar, því at ek nenni eigi fyrir metnaðar sakir at hefna þér engu, svá illa sem ek var leikinn ok háðuliga“

„Þér munuð nú ráða verða at sinni,“ sagði hún. Konungr hvíldi hjá drottningu margar nætr. Ok eftir þat fer drottning heim, ok er henni nú þvilíkt heft sem nú var sagt, ok unir hún stórilla við hag sinn.⁶⁰ (Appendix I:2:V:6)

Helgi was ‘always ready to rape her if necessary’.⁶¹ His extant disregard for Ólöf’s consent now transforms into a punishment rather than a means of taming the maiden-king into marriage. There is something particularly bitter about the phrase ‘Konungr hvíldi hjá drottningu margar nætr’ — out of context, this sentence might depict a happy marital coital union between a naturally apposite ‘konungr’ and ‘drottning’, and seems to call back to the union that Ólöf could have had with Helgi had she not been so prideful. This appears to be a warped mirror of the maiden-king romance trajectory *Helga þátrr* had followed until Helgi said ‘„Nei“’. Here, the pattern of rape before marriage is inflected and subverted: ‘Helgi refuses Ólöf when she is finally willing to marry him’.⁶² Denzin has pointed out that it is unclear whether Ólöf’s proposal ‘is sincere or a strategic ploy’.⁶³ Has she reached the same point of desperation as the raped maiden-kings of Norse romance, but simply before the rape rather than after it? Or is she simply trying to barter with Helgi, knowing now that she is in a desperate situation? No longer in possession of a *svefnþorn*, away from her castle and in the unfriendly shadows of the forest, the only weapon left in her arsenal is her quickness of wit.

⁵⁹ *Dínus saga drambláta*, 64.

⁶⁰ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 18–9.

⁶¹ Ármann Jakobsson, “Queens of Terror,” 178.

⁶² Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest*, 95.

⁶³ Denzin, “Tragical-Comical-Historical-Pastoral... Romance,” 212.

But this wit is not enough, and Ólöf is refused marriage and instead receives ‘humiliation, rape, and revenge’.⁶⁴

Ólöf also verbally capitulates („Þér munuð nú ráða verða at sinni“), transferring her agency to Helgi and enacting Phelpstead’s assertion that ‘It is the male prerogative to choose and to decide, and male dominance is symbolized by and enacted in phallic aggression, the repeated rape of the women’.⁶⁵ As Helgi’s fame and reputation are restored, rape is — at least diegetically — seen as appropriate revenge for tarring and shaving. Immediately after Ólöf’s plight is described, it is said that ‘Eftir þat heldr Helgi konungr í hernað ok var ágætr maðr’ (After that King Helgi continued to bring war and was a most celebrated man).⁶⁶ Instead of gaining glory and fame by marrying Ólöf, as he had originally intended, his transferral of *svívirðing* from himself to her by raping her helps him to regain status as a successful warring king instead. She figuratively penetrated and castrated him, and for that he rapes her. The crimes are presented as apposite. Ólöf had already thought that the kind of marriage Helgi was proposing — essentially a ‘skyndibrullaup’ (hasty marriage) designed for the groom to have sex with the bride as quickly as possible — was dishonourable enough, and so rape without marriage is an extreme exacerbation of that dishonour.

YRSA

Rape’s prominence in the narrative does not stop here, and the ‘account of Helgi’s vengeance, which is dispatched with one sentence in *Skjöldunga saga*, becomes an expansive

⁶⁴ Ármann Jakobsson, “Roi Chevalier,” 151.

⁶⁵ Phelpstead, “Sexual Ideology,” 7.

⁶⁶ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 19.

narrative in *Hrólfs saga kraka*.⁶⁷ Most unusually for rape and its aftermath in the Old Norse corpus, there is a depiction of the victim's suffering that occurs as a result of the act: firstly Ólöf is described in emotional terms as 'unir hún stórilla við hag sinn' (very upset with her lot), and secondly she has a daughter, who she hates so much that she names her after her dog and sends her to live with a poor farmer.⁶⁸

Ok er stundir liðu fram, fæðir Ólöf barn. Þat var mæ. 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. Hún var væn at álitu. 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 hafði barn átt ok fætt.⁶⁹
(Appendix I:2:V:7)

Whatever sympathy we may have felt for Ólöf dissipates because of her cruel treatment of her daughter in naming her after a dog — a name that 'sounded strange and was considered unbecoming a queen' — and abandoning her.⁷⁰

Helgi and Yrsa's relationship is also built on Helgi's disregard for her consent, as many scholars have noted.⁷¹ Just as he set out to marry Ólöf whether or not she consented, he shows the same lack of regard for Yrsa's will. Upon meeting her, Helgi perceives that Yrsa has 'Óþrælslig augu' ('unslavely' eyes) — apparently possessing the same innate regality as Melkorka and, indeed, Helgi and his brother Hróarr (recognised earlier by the *völva* as

⁶⁷ Marianne E. Kalinke, "Textual Instability, Generic Hybridity, and the Development of Some *Fornaldarsögur*," in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), 217. The *Sköldunga saga* passage reads 'Olavam enim cum choro fæmineo villâ sua digressam ex improviso interveniens surripuit, inqve sylvarum densissimarum perplexitates asportans triduo secum in latibulis ad hoc delectis stupravit; ex qvo concubiti nata est filia Yrsa, apud matrem in Saxonia educata' (Once Olava when out with her women, he surprised them and took her into the deepest woods and lay with her for three nights in a secret place; from this they had a daughter Yrsa who was raised in Saxonia with her mother), 24.

⁶⁸ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 19.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Axel Olrik, *The Heroic Legends of Denmark*, trans. Lee M. Hollander (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1919), 269.

⁷¹ Critics such as Kalinke have highlighted Yrsa's protestations, saying for instance that she 'asked Helgi not to do this' "Transgression," 162; Ármann notes that she 'protested (however feebly)' Ármann Jakobsson, "Queens of Terror," 182; Denzin notes her 'protestations' not to be taken away, "Tragical-Comical-Historical-Pastoral... Romance," 213.

possessing princely eyes) — but he fails to recognise that she is his child.⁷² Kalinke suggests that ‘Helgi chooses not to follow through on a warning sign, the fact that her eyes, as he notes, are not those of a servant’, implying that he displays an almost wilful ignorance concerning this girl’s provenance, hence why he is unfazed by the incest when it is later revealed.⁷³

When Helgi asks to marry Yrsa,

Hún bað hann þat eigi gera, en hann tekr hana sem áðr ok hefr sik til skipa ok siglir síðan heim í sitt ríki.⁷⁴ (Appendix I:2:V:8)

A direct parallel is drawn to Ólöf with the phrase ‘sem áðr’. Nevertheless, it is later stated that — much to Ólöf’s dismay — ‘Helgi ok Yrsa untust mikit ok una vel ráði sínu’ (Helga and Yrsa loved each other greatly and were happy with their marriage).⁷⁵ Furthermore, when Aðils boasts about killing Helgi, Yrsa calls him ‘„sem mér er mestr vandi við ok ek unna mest”’ (“[he] to whom I have the most obligation to and who I love the most”).⁷⁶ As we will likewise observe with Áslaug and Ragnarr, a marriage could certainly become happy in spite of being founded on rape and, as Phelpstead states, ‘this incestuous [marriage] between Helgi and his daughter is the only one that is explicitly said to have been founded on a deep reciprocal love’.⁷⁷ That this is the only reciprocated love in this saga is deeply ironic as its foundation is ‘tragic incest’.⁷⁸

Ólöf’s Redemption

⁷² *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 19; 9.

⁷³ Kalinke, “Transgression,” 162.

⁷⁴ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 20.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.

⁷⁷ Phelpstead, “Sexual Ideology,” 7.

⁷⁸ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest*, 95.

When Ólöf learns of their union she does not speak out, but

gerði þat í hug sér, at þetta mundi Helga konungi vera til harms ok svívirðingar, en til einskis frama né yndis.⁷⁹ (Appendix I:2:V:9)

Lise Andersen Præstgaard writes that Ólöf ‘revenge herself upon [Helgi] in demoniacal manner by luring him into marrying their common daughter Yrsa’.⁸⁰ This seems, however, to be more in line with Saxo’s version of the matter in which the particularly wicked Thora sends Yrsa to seduce her own father.⁸¹ Ólöf passively allows the marriage to proceed, a ‘horrendous act of omission’ that serves ‘to emphasize the deficiency of Helgi and Ólöf.’⁸² Conversely, Ármann places the blame for the incest squarely on Helgi’s shoulders, suggesting that ‘Helgi had taken it upon himself to abduct Yrsa’.⁸³ Indeed, Yrsa resists the abduction; it is Helgi’s lust and disregard for consent that drives the relationship onwards. There is a sense here that his sexually violent actions and uncontrollable lust elicit tragedy; his sexual violence towards Ólöf results of course in Yrsa, and so there is very much the sense that he is the engineer of his own incestuous relationship. Yrsa then could be construed as the punishment for this sexual violence: his uncontrollable urges lead him to have sex with his own daughter and father his own grandchild.

After discovering that Yrsa and Helgi’s marriage is happy, Ólöf sets out to their hall. However, the narrative then takes a surprising turn: when she converses with Yrsa, Ólöf and Helgi’s game of ‘svívirðing’ abruptly ends. First Yrsa accuses her of treating her ‘Óvirðuliga’

⁷⁹ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 20.

⁸⁰ Lise Præstgaard Andersen, “On Valkyries, Shield-Maidens and Other Armed Women — Old Norse Sources and Saxo Grammaticus,” in *Mythological Women: Studies in Memory of Lotte Motz*, ed. Rudolf Simek and Wilhelm Heizmann (Wien: Fassbaender, 2002), 307.

⁸¹ According to Saxo’s version, ‘Siquidem filiam nubilis etatis de industria littori immissam concubitu patrem maculare precepit’ (She deliberately sent her daughter, now of marriageable age, down to the shore, instructing her to fornicate with her father and so defile him), *Gesta Danorum*, 1:Liber Secundus, 106.

⁸² Denzin, “Tragical-Comical-Historical-Pastoral... Romance,” 213.

⁸³ Ármann Jakobsson, “Queens of Terror,” 180.

(shamefully) and accuses Ólöf of knowing who her true parents are. When Ólöf reveals that she is her mother and Helgi her father, Yrsa responds:

„Mína ætla ek móðurina versta vera ok grimmasta, því at þetta er þau ódæmi, er eigi munu fyrnast um aldr.“

„Helga hefir þú goldit at í þessu,“ segir Ólöf, „ok reiði minnar, en nú vil ek bjóða þér til mín með sæmd ok virðingu ok gera til þín í alla staði eftir því, sem ek kann bezt.“⁸⁴ (Appendix I:2:V:10)

This is quite a departure from the cruel Ólöf that we have known for the rest of the saga. She blames Helgi for Yrsa's suffering, but so too does she admit her own fault and henceforth shows only magnanimity towards Yrsa. Phelpstead comments that

Yrsa has hitherto been merely a pawn in Ólöf's planned revenge, but at this point the queen demonstrates a solidarity with Yrsa, which perhaps arises from their common position as wronged women.⁸⁵

Importantly, this solidarity represents something that Phelpstead does not comment upon, which is a shift in Ólöf's character from cruelty to kindness. Yrsa does leave with her mother, because of the ‘,ódæmi, sem á liggja’ (monstrosity/shame which lingers).⁸⁶ If Ólöf's motivation in bringing Yrsa home is to make Helgi miserable, this is not stated. Ólöf's last act in the saga is to administrate who Yrsa will marry next, but despite the paucity of suitors (due to their fear that Helgi would come after them), she is not quick to marry Yrsa away and in fact gives her the final say, insisting that ‘,ekki setjum vér hér syn fyrir með hennar ráði’ (we will not deny this with her agreement’).⁸⁷ She seems genuine in her remorse towards Yrsa, offering her ‘sæmd ok virðingu’. The word ‘svívirðing’, as I have said, is nucleic within *Helga þátr*, acting as the verbal axle upon which her and Helgi's back on forth is affixed. Now, it has lost its prefix and is just ‘virðing’, but it is important to note that Ólöf does not want this for herself: she wants it for her daughter. After this, ‘Ólöf er nú burt

⁸⁴ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 25–6.

⁸⁵ Phelpstead, “Sexual Ideology,” 7.

⁸⁶ *Hrólfs saga kaka*, 26.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

ór sögunni' (Ólöf is now out of the saga), the classic formula common to the *Íslendingasögur* that tells the audience this character arc is complete and will not 'create further conflict'.⁸⁸ Ólöf's redemption arc makes her, in the end, a far more likable figure who eventually overcomes her hatred of her rapist and the child he gave her to such an extent that she is able to show that child kindness and bring her home. This is in direct opposition to Helgi, who continues to be governed by lust above all else, and continues to rape women.

THE RAPE OF THE *ÁLFKONA*

As Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir has astutely observed, 'Helgi has one serious flaw, lust for women, for whom he has no respect'.⁸⁹ His third sexual encounter is with the *álfkona*. As with Yrsa, this episode has been far less commented on than the Ólöf episode; Phelpstead, despite his otherwise excellent analysis of the dynamics of the sexual violence done to Ólöf, refers to the encounter with the *álfkona* simply as 'an affair'.⁹⁰ Other critics, meanwhile, have not refrained from deeming it rape.⁹¹ Wallowing because his daughter-wife has remarried, Helgi adopts something of a hermit lifestyle. Any sympathy he might have garnered for having unknowingly married his daughter is surely undermined by his wish to stay married to her since this is clearly 'wrong and sinful'.⁹²

⁸⁸ Kalinke, *Bridal-Quest*, 185.

⁸⁹ Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir, "A Valiant King or a Coward? The Changing Image of King Hrólfur Kraki from the Oldest Sources to *Hrólf's saga kraka*," in *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi: Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8–2.9 2001*, ed. Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, and Agneta Ney (Uppsala: Swedish Science Press, 2001), 142.

⁹⁰ Phelpstead, "Sexual Ideology," 8.

⁹¹ See for instance Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "Love or Lust?," 197; Ármann Jakobsson, "Queens of Terror," 182; Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir, "Valiant King," 142.

⁹² Ármann Jakobsson, "Queens of Terror," 181.

But when a stranger taps at his door in a blizzard, Helgi thinks it would be ‘ókonungligt’ (unkingly) not to help.⁹³ On this occasion, says Ármann, ‘King Helgi behaves as befits a king, whose chief virtue is his service to his people’.⁹⁴ In a surprisingly generous move, he permits the visitor to lie in his bed, even though he finds them ‘ríss’ (repellent).⁹⁵ Because of his selflessness in letting a foul creature share his bed, the visitor transforms into ‘kona sva væn, at eigi þykkist hann aðra konu fríðari sét hafa’ (a woman so beautiful, he did not think he had seen a lovelier woman).⁹⁶ Similarly in *Gríms saga*, the ugly Geirriðr convinces Grímr to kiss her and share his bed with her, and when he wakes up she has transformed into the beautiful Lofthæna, his betrothed.⁹⁷ The marriage and sex that ensue are wholly consensual. This is patently not the case in *Helga þáttr*:

Hún maelti: „Nú vil ek fara í burt,“ segir hún, „ok hefir þú leyst mik úr miklum nauðum, því at þetta var mér stjúp módur sköp, ok hefi ek marga konunga heim sótt enda lægðu nú eigi með lýtum. Vil ek nú hér ekki lengr vera.“ „Nei,“ sagði konungr, „engi er þess kostur, at þú farir svá skjótt, ok munum vit eigi svá skilja. Skal nú gera til þín skyndibrúllaup, því at mér lizt vel á þik.“ „Þer hljótið at ráða, herra,“ sagði hún, ok svá hvíldu þau þá nótt. En um morgininn tekr hún til orða: „Með lostum hefir þú nú til mín gert, en þat skultu vita, at vit munum barn eiga. Ger nú sem ek mæli, konungr, vitjaðu barns okkar annan vetr í þetta mund at naustum þínum, eða muntu gjalda, ef þú gerir eigi svá.“ Eftir þetta fór hún í burt.

Helgi konungr er nú nokkut kátari en áðr.⁹⁸ (Appendix I:2:V:11)

The *álfkona* is not present in the other representations of the Helgi matter. Valgerður suggests that her narrative purpose is to ‘demonstrate Helgi’s vices’, and Denzin similarly proposes that it is to emphasise Helgi’s ‘deficiency as a romance protagonist’.⁹⁹ The seemingly

⁹³ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 27.

⁹⁴ Ármann Jakobsson, “Roi Chevalier,” 160.

⁹⁵ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 28.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Gríms saga*, 193.

⁹⁸ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 28–9.

⁹⁹ Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir, “Valiant King,” 143; Denzin, “Tragical-Comical-Historical-Pastoral... Romance,” 215.

sardonic use of the word ‘ókonungligt’ suggests that Helgi is capable of assessing what the ‘kingly’ thing to do is, but as soon as lust is involved his temperance evaporates.

The *álfkona*’s verbal capitulation, which precedes her sexual capitulation, is reminiscent of Ólöf’s and may likewise be seen as a recalibration of gender roles. Such a recalibration, however, is not necessarily an indicator of consent and, as this thesis’ introduction outlined, verbal consent is an imperfect distinguisher for rape as it potentially precludes coercion. Lying in the king’s bed could hardly be said to be a scenario free of coercive connotations. Helgi’s utterance of ‘„Nei“’ here lexically parallels his ‘„Nei“’ to Ólöf, this repetition across rape scenes enforcing his active disregard for the wishes of his bedpartners. Indeed, the *álfkona* goes on to accuse him of being unable to resist his own lust and this is compounded by his neglect in meeting her a year later. Helgi’s actions have ‘sown the seeds of future misfortune and affirm the text’s consistent moral that men’s uncontrolled sexual desire for women has harmful social consequences’.¹⁰⁰ While Ólöf’s rape appeared to be presented as fitting, Helgi is in no way exculpated from the rape of the *álfkona*. When Helgi does not obey the *álfkona* she curses him, saying ‘„ættman þínir munu þess gjalda“’ (your kin will pay for this), a threat which inevitably comes true as their daughter, Skuld, grows up to be the downfall of Hrólfr, Helgi’s child with Yrsa.¹⁰¹ This vengeful act ensures the destruction of his child — and only son — with Yrsa, the only woman he loved. Unlike Ólöf, the *álfkona*’s vengeance seems wholly justified: she tried to resist Helgi and urged him to take responsibility for fathering a child with her, but he ignored her on both counts. Her rape, then, appears wholly unwarranted.

Like Yrsa, Skuld is named out of negative emotion towards her father, her mother’s rapist. Each daughter’s nomenclature reflects how each mother views their child, primarily

¹⁰⁰ Phelpstead, “Sexual Ideology,” 9.

¹⁰¹ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 29.

influenced by their views on Helgi. If Skuld represents what the *álfkona* sees Helgi as — a debt that he owes her — then it is arguable that Yrsa represents how Ólöf sees Helgi: as a dog. The *álfkona* names her child in front of Helgi to pointedly announce to him how he has failed her, whereas there is no indication that Ólöf wanted Helgi to meet Yrsa. The nomenclature of the latter consequently seems more like a private slight rather than one designed to deliberately shame Helgi or prompt him to action.

THE PERMISSIBILITY OF RAPE

Rape in *Helga þáttur* is at once acceptable — encouraged even — and yet deplorable. Many critics have pointed out the apparent misogyny inherent to *Hrólfs saga kraka*, with Phelpstead claiming that it is difficult not to read Ólöf's portrait as 'essentially misogynistic'.¹⁰² I myself have commented elsewhere on the pervasiveness of the saga's themes of sexual and gendered violence, including the brutality of attacks such as that of Hjalti against his mistress when he bites off her nose.¹⁰³ However, I also argue here that these misogynistic themes are not uncomplex. There are layers of irony to the depictions of Helgi and Hjalti in their displays of hypermasculine violence. Although Helgi dies fighting 'hraustligr' (valiantly), and after his death the saga narrator refers to him as 'ágætan' (famous; excellent) and 'víðfrægr' (renowned) — hardly the attributes of a villain — his primary traits of 'ambition and revenge are neither very Christian nor chivalric'.¹⁰⁴ His sexually-violent tendencies lead directly to his own downfall in all three instances; as Sandra Ballif Straubhaar says, Helgi 'courts every

¹⁰² Phelpstead, "Sexual Ideology," 4.

¹⁰³ Grace O'Duffy, "Eating Hearts and Biting Noses: Masculinity and Misogyny in *Hrólfs saga kraka*," *Scandinavian Studies* 97, no. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 31; Ármann Jakobsson, "Queens of Terror," 180.

kind of doom — for himself and the next generation — in his three ill-chosen partners’.¹⁰⁵ Ármann, too, is dubious of an unremitting assessment of the text as misogynistic, stating that ‘the women of the saga frequently seem much stronger than the men, and it is not impossible that some masculine self-criticism may be discerned under a thick layer of misogyny’.¹⁰⁶ This *þáttur* is one of the most complex, multi-faceted depictions of rape in the corpus and it would be all too easy to view the treatment of Ólöf as inherently misogynistic. Neither is it a feminist tale, although it might invite some feminist escapist fantasies about rape and retribution. However, Ólöf’s redemption and the presentation of rape as a grave offence against the other two women in the *þáttur* may cast some doubt over the question of whether rape really is as exalted as it initially appears to be when it is used against Ólöf herself.

ÁSLAUG’S PROPHECY

On more than one occasion, women in the *fornaldarsögur* are presented as sagacious in their choice of suitor. In *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, Ingibjörg is given her choice of husband, although she is unsure of her own ability to choose well: ‘„Svá lízt mér sem þetta sé meira vandamál en þat sé mín”’ (“It seems that this is a more difficult situation than I can cope with”).¹⁰⁷ According to Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, the narrator of the saga

establishes that female characters possess mental qualities that allow them to identify and advocate the most prudent course of action [...] Ingibjörg’s foresight in picking Gautrekr as her husband results in the continuation of his lineage and the birth of the saga’s outstanding hero’.¹⁰⁸

Here Ingibjörg’s choice is prudent and hints that good things happen when women decide their own fates. In *Völsunga saga*, Hjördís is allowed to choose between two husbands; like

¹⁰⁵ Sandra Ballif Straubhaar, “Iarpskammr: Tribal Taxonomy and Transgressive Exogamy in the *Fornaldarsögur*,” in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012), 108.

¹⁰⁶ Ármann Jakobsson, “Queens of Terror,” 186.

¹⁰⁷ *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, 55.

¹⁰⁸ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Bodies, Words, and Power*, 29.

Ingibjörg, she is uncertain, saying ‘„Vant sýnist mér þetta mál“’ (“This isn’t easy”) and, also like Ingibjörg, she picks the older but more renowned of the two suitors: Sigmundur.¹⁰⁹ This, of course, leads to the birth of the most legendary hero of Norse legend, Sigurðr.

Although these women express concern about their own abilities to choose their suitors, their agency is portrayed as ultimately positive, with advantageous outcomes. Áslaug, from *Ragnars saga*, is another example of venerated female choices in matters of marriage and sex. She spends much of her childhood kept in a harp by the giant Heimir, who wants to protect her from harm. Although sad and isolated, no harm comes to her until the *karl* and *kerling* kill Heimir and find Áslaug hiding in the harp. They raise her as their daughter, but to account for the genetic unlikelihood of their combined ugliness producing such a beautiful child, the *kerling* plans to ‘láta gera henni koll ok ríða í tjöru ok öðru’ (shave her and cover her in tar and other things) to reduce her beauty.¹¹⁰ Like Melkorka, it is initially presumed that ‘hún mætti ekki mæla, er hún svarar þeim aldri’ (she could not speak, because she never answered them), but this seems ultimately inconsequential in the narrative, as Áslaug does later speak to them and her former mutism does not seem to be overly significant.¹¹¹

When word of Áslaug’s beauty reaches Ragnarr *loðbrók*, he immediately wants to marry her and demands, with riddling stipulations, that she come to him:

„Hvárki vil ek, at hún sé klædd né óklædd, hvárki mett né ómett, ok fari hún þó eigi ein saman, ok skall henni þó engi maðr fylgja.“¹¹² (Appendix I:2:V:12)

Her agency here is key. She is not dragged to the ships, but he wants her to come voluntarily and to actively solve the riddles necessary to meet his conditions. She does so, wearing an ‘aurriðanet’ (salmon net) and covering herself with her hair so that she is not ‘ber’ (naked),

¹⁰⁹ *Völsunga saga*, 135.

¹¹⁰ *Ragnars saga*, 225.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid., 233.

eating a small amount of ‘laukr’ (leek) and bringing a dog as her companion.¹¹³ Despite the similarity of the ‘aurriðanet’ to Yngvildr’s ‘ræksn’, Áslaug is well-covered and notably wraps herself in her hair which is ‘bjart’ (bright) as ‘gull’ (gold) and which has been repeatedly made the focus of the men’s attention to her beauty; it is thus synecdochic for her outward appearance as the object of male gaze and desire.¹¹⁴ She then speaks to Ragnarr, pointing out that she has not defied his order and declaring that she is unaccompanied and bares no flesh: ‘manngi er mér í sinni, / mitt er bert hörund eigi’ (no man is with me, my flesh is not bared).¹¹⁵

In boarding the ship, she enters the lion’s den:

Nú sendir hann menn at móti henni ok lætr fylgja henni á skip sín. En hún kveðst eigi fara vilja, nema henni sé grið gefin ok förunaut hennar. Nú er henni fylgt á konungs skip, ok er hún kemr í fyrirrúm, seilist hann í mót henni, en hundrinn beit í hönd honum. Þeir menn hans hlaupa til ok drepa hundinn ok reka bogastreng at hálsi honum, ok fær hann af því bana, ok er eigi betr griðum haldit við hana en svá.¹¹⁶ (Appendix I:2:V:13)

Fearing for her safety, Áslaug asks Ragnarr to promise not to harm her. Her dog attempts to protect her and is killed for doing so, and it is noted that the promise of peace Ragnarr made will not be kept for her any more than it was for the brutally murdered dog. Yet Áslaug appears at first to be treated well: Ragnarr asks her ‘„á mér taka höndum“’ (“to take me in [your] arms”) but she rebuffs him, saying ‘„heðan mik fara láta“’ (“let me go hence”).¹¹⁷ When he says he thinks she will go with him, ‘kvað hún eigi svá vera mega’ (she said it could not be).¹¹⁸ He is persistent and ‘kvaðst hann vilja, at hún væri þar um nótt á skipi’ (said that

¹¹³ Ibid., 234.

¹¹⁴ See above, Chapter III, n. 165.

¹¹⁵ *Ragnars saga*, 235.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 236.

he wanted her to spend the night on the ship).¹¹⁹ But ‘Hún segir, at eigi skal þat vera’ (she says that it shall not be).¹²⁰ The next time she comes to the ship, ‘segir Ragnarr, at hann vill, at þau Kráka hvíli bæði saman’ (Ragnarr says that he wants Kráka and him to sleep together).¹²¹ Again, she refuses and ‘Hún segir, at eigi mátti svá vera’ (She said that it would not be).¹²² Her three rejections of his propositions are subtly lexically different each time: perhaps she is reaching for different words to tell Ragnarr ‘no’. The fourth time, she insists that they wait for marriage so that their sexual union will be honourable not just for her, but for Ragnarr and any children she might bear:

„ok vil ek, at þú drekkir brúðlaup til mín, þá er þú kemr í ríki þitt, ok þykki mér þat mín virðing sem þín ok okkarra erfingja, ef vit eigum nokkura“¹²³ (Appendix I:2:V:14)

Torfi Tulinius has noted that for Áslaug to fulfil her aim in safeguarding ‘the honour — and the rights — of all parties concerned, marriage is preferable’.¹²⁴ Ragnarr ‘veitti henni sína bæn’ (granted her request), and this wording certainly implies he is doing her a favour by not sleeping with her when she does not want to.¹²⁵ At last, their wedding night arrives:

Ok inn fyrsta aftan, er þau koma í eina rekkju, vill Ragnarr eiga hjúskaparfar við konu sína, en hún biðst undan, því at hún segir, at á baki muni bera nokkut, ef hún réði eigi. Ragnarr kvaðst ekki trúa mundu á þat, kvað þau ekki framvís karl ok kerlingu. Hann spurði, hvé lengi svá skyldi vera. Þá kvað hún:

„Þrjár vit skulum þessar,
ok þó saman, byggja
hvárt sér nætr í höllu,
áðr heilug goð blótím;
þá munu-t mein á mínum

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.,

¹²¹ Ibid., 238.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Torfi H. Tulinius, *The Matter of the North: The Rise of Literary Fiction in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, trans. Randi C. Eldevik, Viking Collection (Odense: Odense University Press, 2002), 132.

¹²⁵ *Ragnars saga*, 238.

megi til löng of verða;
heldr ert bráðr at bryja
þann, er bein hefir engi.“

Ok þó hún kvæði þetta, gaf Ragnarr at því engan gaum ok brá á sitt ráð.¹²⁶ (Appendix I:2:V:15)

Ragnarr's promise of peace towards Áslaug is broken, just as it was for her dog. He rapes her. While she complied with his riddling requests about what she should wear, eat and who she should travel with), he simply flagrantly disregards hers. He seems to believe that her prophecy comes from the *karl* and *kerling* and so he disregards it entirely; his sexual frustration overpowers any sense of rationality he has when listening to his wife.

ÍVARR HINN BEINLAUSI

This prophecy comes to fruition when Ragnarr ignores Áslaug: their son Ívarr is born 'beinlauss ok sem brjósk væri þar, sem bein skyldu vera' (boneless, and it was as if gristle was there where the bones ought to have been) and, as a result, must 'bera sik á stöngum, því at hann mátti eigi ganga' (carry himself on staves because he cannot walk).¹²⁷ According to Tulinius,

That Ragnarr's unwillingness to wait three days after the wedding results in the birth of a deformed child is a symbolic way of saying that no good can come of flouting rules and imposing one's will on a woman.¹²⁸

The saga writer seems to prioritise the act of listening to one's wife over satisfying one's lust. Jóhanna echoes Tulinius, asserting that Ragnarr's refusal to listen to Áslaug shows that 'women's advice has the function to express privileged social values that ought to be followed'.¹²⁹ Ívarr's deformity has the dual effect of condemning Ragnarr's lustfulness and

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 239.

¹²⁸ Tulinius, *Matter of the North*, 133.

¹²⁹ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Bodies, Words, and Power*, 41.

sanctifying Áslaug's right to choose when to have sex. Marital rape was not criminalised in medieval Iceland, as I have discussed, but when Áslaug's prophecy is realised, the saga writer certainly undercuts Ragnar's right to have sex with his wife whenever he wants, regardless of her willingness.

Despite this implicit condemnation of what, to a modern reader, would be termed marital rape, immediately following the rape it is said that 'Nú líða stundir fram, ok var samför þeira góð ok miklar ástir' (Now a little while passed and their marriage was good and full of love).¹³⁰ Just as with Yrsa and Helgi, the blossoming of love after rape here seems jarring, and should perhaps be read with Daniel Sävborg's work on saga formulae in mind. According to Sävborg, phrases such as 'Tókusk góðar ástir með þeim Kjartani ok Hrefnu' (Love blossomed between Kjartan and Hrefna) and 'Takast nú ástir með þeim hjónum' (Love blossomed between the couple) are common in the *fornaldarsögur*, *konungasögur* and, most of all, the *Íslendingasögur*.¹³¹ In addition to having a structural function, since this formula 'usually concludes an episode describing the proposal, the betrothal, the wedding preparations and the wedding between two important characters', Sävborg says that

We should not be misled by the explicit mention of love in this formula. Nothing in the context indicates any sort of passion or even strong emotion in these cases. The meaning of the formula is to mark the marriage as successful and the new family as functional.¹³²

Sif Ríkhardsdóttir expands Sävborg's argument, delineating 'matrimonial love' from 'romantic love', the former indicating 'positive — possibly loving — marital relations between the new couple and hence a successful marital contract' with its primary focus being the stability of the household, and the latter suggesting love 'in the form of desire or

¹³⁰ *Ragnars saga*, 239.

¹³¹ Sävborg, "Formula," 63. Here Sävborg quotes *Laxdæla saga*, 139, and *Finnboga saga*, 301.

¹³² Sävborg, "Formula," 63.

passion'.¹³³ According to Sif, 'The specificity of the feelings (love, trust, desire, affection etc.) experienced is thus secondary to their impact on the stability of the marital relationship'.¹³⁴ While 'miklar ástir' may well indicate romantic and sexual love, its focus may be more on the stability of a marriage. In any case, Áslaug and Ragnarr's marriage is considered to be full of love — whether it be a perfunctory, stable love or a love built on romantic and sexual desire — after the marital rape. Marital rape here does not make Ragnarr unforgivable. However, its scars are left on Ívarr.

In *Páttir af Ragnars sonum* Ívarr is given the epithet *beinlausir* (boneless). Rory McTurk has noted that 'mention is made of his childlessness, and it is implied in that context that he was impotent, and that this was the reason for the nickname'.¹³⁵ There may be some connection between Ragnarr's sexual deviance and his son's sexual impotence: in a potential mark of hereditary sin, Ragnarr's 'sin' is transmitted to his child, Ívarr. This is reminiscent of *Bisclavret*; after Bisclavret bites his wife's nose off — this 'facial disfiguration representing the predilection for sexual sin' — her daughters are born 'esnasees' (de-nosed).¹³⁶ Post-lapsarian doctrine dictates that 'sex became the means by which Original Sin was transmitted: because sex was impossible without lust, children who were conceived through intercourse inevitably received this taint'.¹³⁷ However, unlike the wife in *Bisclavret*, Ragnarr himself does not bear the mark of his sin: only his child suffers. The punishment of Ragnarr's

¹³³ Sif Ríkharðsdóttir, "Secular love - ást," *forthcoming*.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Rory McTurk, "Ívarr the Boneless and the Amphibious Cow," in *Islanders and Water-Dwellers: Proceedings of the Celtic-Nordic-Baltic Folklore Symposium Held at University College Dublin, 16-19 June, 1996*, ed. Patricia Lysaght, Séamas Ó Catháin, and Dáithí Ó hÓgáin (Dublin: DBA Publications, 1996), 189. 'Ívarr inn beinlausir [...] átti ekki barn, því at hann var svá skapaðr, at honum fylgdi engi girnd né ást' (Ívarr the Boneless had no child because he was made in such a way that he had neither love nor lust), *Páttir af Ragnars sonum*, 300.

¹³⁶ Alison Langdon, "La Femme Bisclavret: The Female of the Species?," *Medieval Feminist Forum: A Journal of Gender and Sexuality*, 54, no. 1 (2018): 41; "Bisclavret," in *Les Lais de Marie de France*, ed. Jean Rychner (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1983), 71, l. 314.

¹³⁷ Katherine Harvey, *The Fires of Lust: Sex in the Middle Ages* (London: Reaktion Books, 2021), 12.

sin manifests in his child. Áslaug's predicted curse comes to fruition, and Ívarr is thus born a corporeal representation of his father's transgression, but Ragnarr himself is unblemished.

ST AGNES

Áslaug ascribes *virðing* to her sexual union with Ragnarr. She describes their consummation in terms of worship, asking for three nights to pass 'áðr heilug goð blótím' (before we make our sacrifice to the holy gods).¹³⁸ The sacred sexual union of bride and bridegroom became increasingly emphasised as time went on in Iceland, with much greater emphasis placed on the virginity of the bride, and there is no doubt a natural tension between the Christian values of saga writers and the heathen values of the heroes and heroines depicted in the legendary sagas.¹³⁹ In *Friðþjófs saga*, for instance, Baldrshagi is a grove dedicated to Baldr so sacred that 'skyldi þar ekki saman koma konur ok karlar' (men and women should not be there together).¹⁴⁰ Áslaug's desire for her sexual union with Ragnarr to be dedicated to the gods likely renders her more sympathetic to a Christian woman conscious of her virginity. Ragnarr, meanwhile, comes across as lustful and unable to control his sexual desires despite the wishes of his wife and the wellbeing of his future son. He is anathema to the paradigm of the chivalric knight which was proliferating across the literary milieu of medieval Iceland:

A chivalrous knight is able to control his sexual desires and he also considers the consequences of his actions. These characteristics distinguish him from other men in the romances. The heathen, for example, acts without respecting the code of chivalry. He lacks the ability to reason and his urges cannot be subdued.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ *Ragnars saga*, 238.

¹³⁹ Agnes Arnórsdóttir has noted this increased emphasis in later Christian literature as opposed to twelfth- and early thirteenth-century documents, Agnes S. Arnórsdóttir, *Property*, 280.

¹⁴⁰ *Friðþjófs saga*, 80.

¹⁴¹ Henric Bagerius, "Romance and Violence: Aristocratic Sexuality in Late Medieval Iceland," *Mirator* 14, no. 2 (2013), 85–6.

Ragnarr instead embodies the lustful heathen. While Áslaug was very explicit about the fact that she was following Ragnarr's demands and upholding his wishes, he does not abide by her desires and this contrast is palpable.

Tulinius has emphasised Áslaug's significance to female members of the saga's contemporary audience, stating that 'Concubines among this saga's audience might have toyed with the fantasy of having noble blood in spite of their ostensibly inferior status'.¹⁴² In this regard we might think of Melkorka, too, with her elevated bloodline. Áslaug, descended from Sigurðr the dragon slayer, succeeds in getting what these real women lack: 'married status along with a man's love'.¹⁴³ Tulinius paints Áslaug as a fantasy figure for lower-status women, linking her to St Agnes, whose hair grows so long 'at hun þotti betr klædd af haare sinu en klædum' (that she was thought to be better clothed with her hair than her clothes).¹⁴⁴ Her modesty protects her from the advances of a man who wants to make her a 'portkona' (prostitute).¹⁴⁵ Tulinius proposes that when Áslaug is clothed in mere net and hair, this is likely an allusion to St Agnes and it

seems not unlikely that Icelandic women of this time period, not always well treated in their relationships with men, might have felt devotion to Agnes and have been able to recognize the hagiographic allusions in Áslaug's story.¹⁴⁶

This allusion is all the more likely because of the narrator's neglect in explaining how Áslaug's hair grows so long despite having tar put on her head, and Tulinius further proposes that if there is an allusion to Agnes when Áslaug wears her hair in this manner, she is refusing 'in essence, to be treated like a prostitute'.¹⁴⁷ The quasi-Christian focus of Áslaug on the gods and on the sanctity of her sexual union with Ragnarr lends further credence to this

¹⁴² Tulinius, *Matter of the North*, 132.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁴⁴ *Agnesar saga meyar*, 18.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁴⁶ Tulinius, *Matter of the North*, 134.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 134.

allusion and Tulinius' proposal that Áslaug is a heroine to a female audience, a figure of fantasy in a system where women were so dependent on their own lineage. If they lacked such a lineage, then they needed to secure a formal marriage to a higher status man. Ragnarr's rape of her, then, undercuts this potential idealisation with the reality of violence against women. However idealised Áslaug may be, she is not safe from unwanted sexual advances — not even those of her own husband. The disfigurement of Ívarr is not just a mark of Ragnarr's sexual crime but also functions as a constant reminder that as a woman, Áslaug is unable to protect herself — and her child — from Ragnarr's lustful violence. Even in fantasy, the overwhelming reality of sexual violence prevails.

In each of these sagas, the rapists — Heiðrekr, Helgi, and Ragnarr — get their comeuppance, and each of these instances are poetic in their dealings of justice. Heiðrekr rapes and kills his *hertekin* mistress, Sifka, and is then killed by slaves who themselves are kidnapped in war. For Helgi and Ragnarr, the literal products of their rape — their children — are physical manifestations of their crimes. And yet, none of these rapists are portrayed as true villains in their respective narratives. Áslaug and Ragnarr go on to have a loving marriage. Heiðrekr's murder of Sifka is, in certain redactions, portrayed as warranted, a response to her vindictiveness. Helgi's rape of Ólöf is immensely complex, and within their internal feud of *svívirðing*, sexual violence is a valid weapon. These women's reactions — their rebellion, their retributions — also invite speculative readings of the reactions of female audiences, with Ólöf's power in deterring Helgi appealing, and yet the ultimate subjugation of herself, Sifka and Áslaug all speak to an inevitability of rape. However, many of these raped women could also be seen as heroines in their own right. Although Sifka fails to get revenge on her rapist, a group of slaves manage to murder him in the end. Áslaug is a quasi-Christian figure to be sympathised with, whose pleadings with her lustful husband go unheard and result in the disfiguration of their child. Yrsa and the *álfkona* are certainly not depicted as deserving

their rapes. Even the evil Ólöf is redeemed in the end. These female perspectives thus speak to a remarkably complex portrayal of rapists as at once vilifiable and vindicable, and this complexity only deepens when we examine male perspectives, as Chapter VI demonstrates.

CHAPTER VI: VIKING LAW AND VIGILANTE VILIFICATION: HOW MEN FEEL ABOUT RAPE

„*kann ek lækning at gera vel at kvensemi*“

While the previous chapter primarily looked at victims of rape, this chapter examines how men respond to rapists. In *Hálfðanar saga Brönuþóstra* and *Áns saga bogsveigis*, two would-be rapists are mutilated and castrated. These mutilations seemingly decry rape and even act as a preventative measure, inhibiting the would-be rapist from carrying out future assaults. The *víkingalög* in *Örvar-Odds saga* are even more exacting in their ethical stipulations to protect women from being raped, which are framed around the prohibition of enacting sexual violence. However, just as the narratives in the previous chapter seemed, at times, to equivocate about the severity of rape as a crime, this saga is witness to a particularly contradictory set of attitudes towards sexual violence. The titular character seems, in some instances, to actively lambast rapists and willingly accepts the *víkingalög*. Later, he himself becomes sexually violent. While *Hálfðanar saga* and *Áns saga* outline their rapists as wholly villainous, rape is not an absolute marker of villainy in *Örvar-Odds saga*, demonstrating the complex moral barometer of the *fornaldarsögur* when it comes to sexual violence.

CASTRATING THE RAPIST

HÁLFDANAR SAGA BRÖNUÞÓSTRA

The moral alignment of the would-be-rapist in *Hálfðanar saga* is easy enough to identify: Brana refers to Áki, the king's warden, as 'inn illi' (The Evil). Áki is jealous of Hálfðan, who humiliates him on numerous occasions. This series of humiliations culminates when Hálfðan

eventually unseats Áki in a joust and ‘Áki hugsar um þat nótt ok dag at svíkja Hálfðan’ (Áki thinks night and day about how to get back at Hálfðan).¹ His solution is to rape Ingibjörg, Hálfðan’s sister (episode presented in full at Appendix I:2:VI:1). This passage contains several kernels of information concerning attitudes towards sexual violence in the saga. Firstly, Áki believes rape can be weaponised to disgrace a woman’s kin, which harkens back to Chapter II, in which I discussed the use of rape in male-male feuds in the *Íslendingasögur*. However, when he fails to perpetrate this sexually violent deed, he himself ends up disgraced for having attempted to rape Ingibjörg. Contrary to *Jónsbók* and *Grágás*, both of which stipulate punishments for intent to rape as well as rape itself, Áki does not seem to face any legal punishments for his attempt, although he is shamed for it (Appendix II: *Grágás* K‡90; *Grágás* K§155; *Jónsbók*, IV.2; *Jónsbók* V.5). It is unclear to what extent Ingibjörg and Hálfðan would have been shamed if Áki had been successful, but his attempt alone means that he ‘þóttist mikla sneypu fengit hafa’ (felt as though he had been much disgraced).

However, this is not enough to lose him favour with the king, and despite the attempted rape — as well as the warnings Hálfðan receives from Brana and Ingibjörg that Áki is not to be trusted — he is still in a position to hold a feast which many people, including the king and Hálfðan, attend. It seems odd that Hálfðan would overlook Áki’s attempt to rape his sister; even odder still is the fact that at this point Hálfðan still does not view Áki as a threat, and Brana must once again save him after Áki gets him and his men drunk and tries to torch the castle with the men inside. As Brana says, ‘„Þat er forn orðskviðr ok er sannr, seint er afglapa at snotra, þar sem þú átt hlut at”’ (“There is an ancient proverb which is true, as far as you are concerned, which says that a fool becomes wise late”),

¹ *Hálfðanar saga*, 311.

reminding Hálfðan of her warnings about Áki.² There is a strong sense that Hálfðan should have dealt with Áki previously to prevent him from attacking Hálfðan's family: permitted to go free after trying to rape Ingibjörg, he is able to commit further violence.

Indeed, it is the concern women have for their own safety and that of other women that stops the rape: Hálfðan did not heed Brana when she said ‘„Láttu hann ekki svíkja þik”’ (“Do not let him betray you”), nor did he listen to Marsibil when ‘bað hann þó varast Áka, segir, at hann muni svíkja hann’ ([she] told him to be wary of Áki, saying that he would surely betray him).³ It is telling that Ingibjörg invokes Brana to help her: she relies on the aid of her brother's former troll-mistress. In this episode, Hálfðan's inability to protect Ingibjörg is unfavourably contrasted with Brana, as well as Þorfiðr early in the saga, who protects his foster-children from Sóti, ‘who also had sexual designs on Ingibjörg’.⁴

Ingibjörg cannot rely on Hálfðan to keep her safe from Áki, and it was Hálfðan's refusal to listen to Brana and Marsibil that enabled Áki to begin his attack on Ingibjörg. It is notable here that — aside from male intervention — only superhuman abilities are sufficient to save a woman from rape. This is the case for Ólöf and her *svefnþorn* in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and for Helga in *Bárðar saga*. Perhaps Brana is not just an object of male fantasy, then, as suggested by Roby and McKinnell, but female fantasy as well: her sudden appearance is the only thing that stands between Ingibjörg and sexual assault, and the fact that Ingibjörg calls on her rather than shouting for her brother or the other men in the vicinity implies a faith in magic that is not present for men.⁵ It is difficult not to wonder how sexual assault — a reality as much for medieval Scandinavian women as it is for women today — and these narratives

² Ibid., 313.

³ Ibid., 306; 310.

⁴ John McKinnell, “The Fantasy Giantess: Brana in *Hálfðanar saga Brönufóstra*,” in *Fornaldarsagaerne: Myter Og Virkelighed: Studier i de oldislandske fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson, and Annette Lassen (København: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, Københavns Universitet, 2009), 212.

⁵ See Roby, “Licit Love Visit,” 46–7; McKinnell, “Fantasy Giantess,” 209.

in which magic is a fictional saviour from it, would have affected the women of contemporary audiences, who of course could not have relied upon the intervention of a magical giantess for protection. As I explore in Chapter VII, however, magic itself also poses a degree of sexual threat to women.

A ‘prototypical evil Germanic counsellor’, Áki proceeds to attempt to set ablaze a castle with Hálfðan’s men inside.⁶ He later attempts to turn the king against Hálfðan by suggesting that Hálfðan had illegitimate sex with the princess Marsibil: ‘„Vitið þér, herra, at Hálfðan hefir barnat dóttur yðra?“’ (“Did you know, sir, that Hálfðan has impregnated your daughter?”)⁷ This prompts the king to send Áki and his men after Hálfðan and, in this skirmish, Áki kills Sigmundur, Hálfðan’s close friend. It is only at this point that Hálfðan finally eliminates Áki as a threat:

Ok eftir fall Sigmundar reiðist Hálfðan ákafliga, svá at hann drepr alla menn af Áka, en handtekr hann sjálfan ok skerr af honum nefit ok stakk bæði augun ór honum ok skerr af honum bæði eyrun ok geldir hann. Síðan brýtr hann í honum báða fótleggina ok snýr aftir tánun, en fram hælunum, ok setr hann síðan á bak ok snýr essi hans heimleiðis til konungshallar.⁸ (Appendix I:2:VI:2)

As Peter Jorgensen has phrased it, ‘Hálfðan captures Aki and, in a passage uncharacteristic of even the bellicose sagas, proceeds to mutilate the wicked man in a painfully thorough manner’.⁹ Hálfðan then despatches Áki to the king, who shuns him: ‘Rekr konungr hann í burt, ok kemr Áki ekki síðan við þessa sögu’ (The king drove him away and Áki does not come into the saga again).¹⁰ When Hálfðan ‘segir mönnum, hvat í hafi gerzt með þeim Áka, en létu vel yfir’ (tells his men what he had done to Áki, they thought it was well done).¹¹ Sóti, who had previously tried to marry Ingibjörg, also meets his end on the battlefield: ‘slæmir

⁶ Peter A. Jorgensen, “Beowulf’s Swimming Contest with Breca: Old Norse Parallels,” *Folklore* 89, no. 1 (1978): 52; *Hálfðanar saga*, 313.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 315–6.

⁹ Jorgensen, “Beowulf’s Swimming Contest,” 58, n. 6.

¹⁰ *Hálfðanar saga*, 316.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Hálfðan undan honum báða fætrna í knjáliðunum’ (Hálfðan cut his legs off, one below and above the knee).¹² Similarly to Áki, Sóti had committed considerable crimes besides his sexual advances towards Hálfðan’s sister, but it is nonetheless significant that both of these villains of the saga have as part of their villainy strong sexually-violent qualities and that both are mutilated horribly. Áki represents a particularly unrelenting threat that ought to have been neutralised earlier by Hálfðan; as advisor to the king, his greatest punishment is to be deformed to the extent that he is cast out from civilised society.

The sexual slant to two of his crimes (attempted rape and the sexual defamation of Hálfðan), however, renders castration a fitting punishment. According to Anthony Adams, castration is

a punishment that weakens a man physically and socially. This castration (or partial castration) is a type of mutilation with clearly sexual undertones, combining elements of corporal mutilation and a humiliating sexual assault that could even be read as a type of rape.¹³

Indeed, Gary Taylor highlights how ‘castration has often been used as a judicial or extrajudicial punishment, particularly for sexual crimes, from ancient Assyria to medieval Europe to Arkansas in the late twentieth century’.¹⁴ Interestingly, castration and blinding (as well as the removal of hands or feet) are all deterrents used by Þornbjörg/Þórbergir in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* to deter unwanted suitors.¹⁵ Sørensen describes these actions as ‘methods of humiliation that are discussed in the laws and were practised in real life in the thirteenth century’.¹⁶ While legal codes have strong penalties for castration and other mutilations, the removal of genitals has a literary and historical tradition as an appropriate

¹² Ibid., 317.

¹³ Anthony Adams, “‘He Took a Stone Away’: Castration and Cruelty in the Old Norse *Sturlunga saga*,” in *Castration and Culture in the Middle Ages*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 198–9.

¹⁴ Gary Taylor, *Castration: An Abbreviated History of Western Manhood* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 165.

¹⁵ *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, 70.

¹⁶ Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 64.

punishment for a crime of a sexual nature, and Hálfdan's other mutilations of Áki are no less apt.¹⁷

Hálfdan also cuts Áki's nose off. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the removal of a nose can have particularly sexual connotations; Leslie Dunton-Downer suggests a Lacanian reading of the nose as a phallus (and therefore of rhinectomy as figurative castration) and also suggests that the absence of a nose can be seen as a physical indicator of leprosy, a disease associated with sex.¹⁸ I have written elsewhere on the significance of Hjalti biting off his mistress' nose in *Hrólfs saga kraka* as a targeted sexual attack.¹⁹

Hálfdan also gouges Áki's eyes out. Eldar Heide — speaking on *Áns saga*, which I will be discussing next — regards this as a symbolic repetition of the literal castration 'since blinding in Old Norse literature functions as symbolic castration'.²⁰ Annette Lassen has pointed out that 'the punishment of blinding is often followed by castration', suggesting that 'Through blinding and castration the victim is deprived of his social position'.²¹ Castration is not always a punishment for sexual or sexually-connoted crimes, but rather 'Power and masculine sexuality are [...] linked', and so castration might be interpreted as a method of disempowering while simultaneously emasculating a victim.²² This triumvirate of mutilations is a thorough physical and social dismemberment of Áki *inn illi*, and each one has sexual connotations in a manner that seems to befit Áki's crimes.

¹⁷ *Grágás* classes wounding of tongue, eyes, teeth, nose, ears, genitalia or a shame-stroke across the buttocks as 'in meire sár' (major wounds) (Appendix II: *Grágás* K†86); *Jónsbók* classes the mutilation of hand, foot, eye, tongue or genitals as a 'níðingsverk' (Appendix II: *Jónsbók*, IV.2).

¹⁸ Leslie Dunton-Downer, "Wolf Man," in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York; London: Routledge, 2015), 209–10.

¹⁹ O'Duffy, "Eating Hearts."

²⁰ Eldar Heide, "*Áns saga bogsveigis*: A Counterfactual *Egils saga* and Yet Another Twist on the Myth of Þórr's Visit to Útgarða-Loki," *Edda* 105, no. 2 (2018): 156.

²¹ Annette Lassen, "Hoðr's Blindness and the Pledging of Odinn's Eye: A Study of the Symbolic Value of the Eyes of Hoðr, Odinn and Þórr," in *Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference. 2-7 July 2000*, ed. Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2000), 221. Lassen points to the fate, for instance, of Magnus *in góði*, who loses his eyes and one of his legs before being castrated (*Magnúss saga blinda ok Haralds gilla*, 287).

²² *Ibid.*, 221.

ÁNS SAGA BOGSVEIGIS

We can observe a similar triumvirate of sexual mutilations as sexual punishments in *Áns saga*. Elizabeth Ashman Rowe dubs this a ‘Norwegian family saga’ which, as a ‘generic hybrid’, is ‘defiantly on the side of the comfortably-off and hard-working’ and its central figure of the anti-establishment Án departs from mythic-heroic sagas focused on ‘an aristocratic milieu derived from the literary tastes of the rich and famous’.²³ It contains an episode of attempted rape orchestrated by Ketill, one of the king’s retainers, who has repeatedly taken the lead in the mocking of Án and utters a particularly sexual insult wherein he accuses Án of homosexual thoughts: ‘„Ek ætla, at þú þreyir at karlmanni nokkurum, ok viltu serða hann“’ (I think that you desire a certain man, and you want to fuck him’).²⁴ Later, Ketill’s antagonism towards Án reaches new heights: he goes to a farmhouse and says his name is Án before vocalising his intent to rape the farmer’s daughter. Spotting the farmer’s daughter, Drífa, Ketill (pretending to be Án) says,

„Ek ætla mér at byggja rekkju með henni í nótt, ok mun yðr eigi betr boðit.“
 Karli kveðst ekki mikit um þat. Ketill kveðst gert hafa meiri stórvirki en ná rekkju henni.²⁵ (Appendix I:2:VI:3)

The real Án, who has been listening in secretly, now announces his presence. The farmer is eager for Án to stay, while the latter asks if Ketill had used his name. Ketill says he did so ‘í gaman’ (in jest), but this sparks Án’s rage, possibly because it may itself be yet another sexual innuendo.²⁶ In *Skírnismál*, for instance, Skírnir curses Gerðr that ‘grát at gamni / skaltu í gøgn hafa’ (you shall have weeping instead of [sexual] pleasure) and in *Hávamál*,

²³ Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, “Generic Hybrids: Norwegian ‘Family’ Sagas and Icelandic ‘Mythic-Heroic’ Sagas,” *Scandinavian Studies* 65, no. 4 (1993): 539; 548.

²⁴ *Áns saga*, 378.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 383.

Óðinn boasts of being able to obtain a girl's 'gaman' (*pleasure/play*) through magic.²⁷ Ever more inflamed, Án accuses Ketill of mocking him and calls him a 'skiptingr' (changeling).²⁸

Finally, Án says,

„kann ek lækning at gera vel at kvensemi. Ek heyrða áðan, at þú leitaðir eftir við dóttur bónda um hjáhvílur.“

Hann tók nú í lyrg honum ok lét hann skurka út ok kvað vísu:

„Þat munt finna,
er þú flór mokar,
at þú eigi ert
Án bogsveigir;
þú ert brauðsveigir
heldr en bogsveigir,
ostasveigir
en álmsveigir.“

Hann batt hann ok rak af honum hárit ok bar í tjöru ok mælti, at svá skyldi hverr fljúga sem fjaðraðr væri. Hann stakk ór honum annat augat, síðan geldir hann hann.²⁹ (Appendix I:2:VI:4)

Rather like Hálfðan and Áki, Án then sends Ketill back to the king, to whom Ketill reveals all that has happened to him 'en sjón var sögu ríkari um augu hans ok eistu, at á burt var hvárttveggja' (but his appearance told a more potent story since both his eye and testicle were gone).³⁰ He is cast out by the king: '„Afhendr ertu mér,“ sagði konungr ok rak hann á burt frá sér' ("You are unfit to me," said the king and drove him away from him).³¹

Án's attack on Ketill is three-pronged: first is the shaving and tarring, second is the removal of an eye, and third is the removal of his testicles. It is my view that each of these punishments is a form of literal or figurative castration or emasculation, and that this particularly sexually connoted attack is fitting for Ketill for two reasons.

²⁷ *Skírnismál*; 386, st. 30; *Hávamál*, 355, st. 161.

²⁸ *Áns saga*, 383.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 384.

³¹ *Ibid.*

First is Ketill's sexual joke against Án. To Rowe, Án is a 'non-heroic protagonist in a heroic society [...] In ethical terms, he is a man without honor. Not only does he not have any, he never seems to realize that there is such a thing', and he refuses to act in the honourable way his brother encourages.³² Interestingly, Rowe proposes that 'He does not mind being mocked or being accused of having homosexual tendencies'.³³ I would disagree, however. Given what Án goes on to do to Ketill, it is difficult not to see this punishment as at least partially motivated by Ketill's mockery. Accusations of homosexuality were, after all, some of the most heinous within Norse-speaking societies, and even the insinuation of homosexuality was grounds for killing (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§238). It should be noted, though, that this legal code is only concerned with men who are accused of being 'ragr eða stroðen' (perverse or bugged), and Gareth Lloyd Evans suggests that in medieval Icelandic texts, cultural vilification 'often applied to the receptive partner alone'.³⁴ Nevertheless, Án's punishment of Ketill certainly seems to assert the kind of phallic aggression often initiated by accusations or insinuations of homosexuality or lack of virility.³⁵ Eldar Heide has suggested that the verse uttered by Án to provoke Ketill's accusation of homosexuality was deliberate: 'Án must have realised that he would be understood in this way [...] it is not difficult to think Án is doing his best to be written off as completely round the bend'.³⁶ Án, according to Heide, wants the retainers to think him a fool and thereby underestimate his abilities, which would ultimately give him the upper hand.

³² Rowe, "Generic Hybrids," 550.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Evans, *Men and Masculinities*, 92.

³⁵ For instance, Grettir's sense of emasculation by the maid-servant; see also Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, for instance 27–28; 57).

³⁶ Heide, "Counterfactual *Egils saga*," 151. The verse in question is 'en ek at Þegni / þrey nátt sem dag' (and I long for Þegn night and day), *Áns saga*, 378. Án's brother Þórir explains that Án means the sword Þegn; Án himself says he is referring to Þórir. ON *þegn* means 'thane; man', and so the understanding of Án's verse in a homosexual way seems obvious.

Secondly, Án's much more immediate motivator, as he declares before seizing and torturing Ketill, is curing him of his 'kvensemi' and — as is made clear by the verse he utters — punishing him for attempting this rape while pretending to be Án. That Ketill had intended to rape Drífa under Án's name seems clear. Although Heide proposes that 'Ketill has tried to use Án's reputation as a master archer to get himself into bed with the girl', there is no mention of Drífa's opinion and the coercive overtones of Ketill's speech are clear.³⁷ Certainly, he could hardly have hoped to curry favour with the farmer in the guise of Án, since the real Án had just gained renown for killing two chieftains who the farmer viewed as 'vinhollir' (steadfast friends).³⁸ His brandishing of Án's arrow thus has more violent than boastful implications and the farmer accepts him in spite, not because, of these deeds.

This recalls Ófeigr's critique of Sölmundr, who 'gerir eptir bóndadóetrum' (goes after farmer's daughters) in *Ljósvetninga saga*.³⁹ This censure highlights a power imbalance here that we have observed again and again throughout this thesis: Helgi's abduction of Yrsa as a farmer's daughter; Ragnarr's seduction of Áslaug; and the triptych of sexual encounters in *Bósa saga*. Ketill is an armed retainer and the farmer is vulnerable. Because of this inherent power imbalance, Jacob Bell considers this episode an example of how 'the lines between consent and coercion are thin indeed'.⁴⁰ Ketill makes it clear that the farmer has no choice in the matter when it comes to Ketill taking his daughter to bed and Drífa herself is not consulted on the matter either. The farmer certainly does not condone the seduction; Bell says, 'Regardless of her father's sullen protest, Ketill takes the girl to his bed'.⁴¹ Although I think Bell accurately captures the sense of the father's reaction, Ketill does not actually take Drífa to bed; Án steps in before this can happen and this is made especially clear as one of

³⁷ Ibid., 156.

³⁸ *Áns saga*, 382.

³⁹ See above, Chapter III, n. 71.

⁴⁰ Bell, "Reconsideration," 9.

⁴¹ Ibid.

Án's accusations against Ketill is that „þú leitaðir eftir við dóttur bónda um hjáhvíkur“ (you wanted to sleep with the farmer's daughter): that he *intended* to take her to bed.⁴² Furthermore, the farmer seems to want Án to stay in his house, and this is likely to protect his daughter from Ketill. Ketill's motivation in framing Án remains somewhat unclear: Án is already severely out of favour with the king, but perhaps Ketill intends this crime to be yet another mark against Án's name. Perhaps the sexual crime is another way, besides the accusation of homosexuality, of sexually humiliating Án. It is fitting, then, that his punishment of Ketill is literal and symbolic castration.

Firstly, Án shaves and tars Ketill. As Án says Ketill should ‘fljúga sem fjaðraðr væri’ (fly like a feathered thing), this punishment may also be an oblique reference to tarring and feathering, although it is unclear if Án actually feathers him.⁴³ As I discussed in relation to *Hrólf's saga kraka*, such a punishment is extremely emasculating: an outwardly obvious (and therefore socially stigmatising) symbolic castration. Án's second mutilation is to stab one of Ketill's eyes out, likewise a symbolic castration. Finally, Án's attack culminates with the literal castration of Ketill: the removal of his testicles.

Án's phallic aggression enables him to ‘finally rid himself of the stigma as *argr*’ initiated by Ketill.⁴⁴ Furthermore, while the other two punishments have sexual undertones, this one is overtly sexual and serves as the ultimate recompense for Ketill's ‘*kvensemi*’ (lust for women). Án's ‘*lækning*’ (cure) for Ketill's *kvensemi* is presumably this literal castration,

⁴² *Áns saga*, 383.

⁴³ Tarring and feathering appears to have been a popular practice during the Middle Ages; according to Hans-Jörg Uchter, ‘Rechtsquellen bewerten das T. und F. als Mittel der Volksjustiz ohne ordentliches Gerichtsverfahren’ (Legal sources class [tarring and feathering] as a means of popular justice without due process), Hans-Jörg Uther, “Teeren und federn,” in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, ed. Doris Boden, Rolf Wilhelm Brednich, and Kurt Ranke, vol. 13 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 305. It was thus largely a form of *de facto* punishment. There are, however, accounts of it in the Swedish maritime law *Bjarkeyjarréttir*, in which it is listed as a punishment for thieves, *Bjarkeyrretten: Nidaros eldste bylov*, ed. J. Hagland and J. Sandnes (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1997), 94. If this is the implication, then this could be a fitting punishment for Ketill, who has stolen Án's name and bow.

⁴⁴ Heide, “Counterfactual *Egils saga*,” 156.

and — considering the personal vendetta that prompts Án to mutilate Ketill — it is possible to read this as retribution masked as remedy. It must be noted that *Grágás* allows the ‘gelding’ of ‘vagrants’ (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§254), and the translators of *Grágás* have proposed that ‘the measure appears to be preventive rather than retributive. Of the Scandinavian laws only the Norwegian prescribe castration as a penalty and then very rarely’.⁴⁵ According to this Norse legal tradition — and to Án himself — this mutilation is preventative, not a punishment. Yet from the context in the saga, it is certainly both a preventative, inhibiting Ketill’s sexual ability and hence his ability to rape, as well as a punishment for all he has done to wrong Án.

Án holds a flagrant disregard for king and law. His extra-legal mutilations are unbound by law, honour, retribution or consequence. When he mutilates Ketill, he is already extremely out of favour with the king and, as Rowe suggests, he demonstrates ‘his anti-royalist attitude by scornfully calling his mutilated victims ‘„konungs gersimi”’ (“treasures fit for the king”).⁴⁶ Án is ‘an outlaw who has right on his side because he is fighting a tyrannical king’, and his vigilante mutilations can be interpreted as punishments evenly weighted for what Án views as the victim’s transgressions.⁴⁷ He carries out two other mutilations in the saga — the beheading of Gáran and leg-breaking of Ívarr — that are likewise framed as poetic justice, with the mutilated body parts mirroring the crimes Án perceives them to have committed against him. Ketill’s brutal maiming and threefold castration in *Áns saga* therefore represents the eponymous character’s understanding of a fitting punishment of a would-be rapist. In the case of both *Áns saga* and *Hálfðanar saga*, would-be rapists suffer horrific torment in vigilante mutilations. They seem, to some extent, to get their just desserts, be that

⁴⁵ *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás, the Codex Regius of Grágás, with Material from Other Manuscripts*, trans. Andy Dennis, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins, vol. 2 (Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba Press, 1980–2000), 50, n. 132.

⁴⁶ Rowe, “Generic Hybrids,” 551.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

in the opinion of Án or of Hálfðan and his men. Their villainy, which includes sexual crimes, renders them as archetypal villains who must be socially eradicated by the heroes. Rape is, in these sagas, a severe crime deserving of similarly severe consequences.

Án: Sexual Aggressor?

The Drífa episode does not end with Ketill's castration. Án stays at her father's homestead, helping him to rebuild in the summer and is subsequently invited to stay over the winter. There is some ambiguous evidence of sexual violence in this sequence; as he leaves, Án tells the farmer

„En ef svá verðr sem mér er grunr á, at dóttir þín sé með barni, þá eru fáir blóramenn, ok vil ek ganga við faðerni“⁴⁸ (Appendix I:2:VI:5)

The word 'blóramaðr', meaning 'man to be blamed' (related to the phrase 'göra e-t í blóra við' meaning 'to commit an offence behind another person'), certainly implies fault with Án, yet contextually this does not necessarily imply rape but rather the fathering of an illegitimate child.⁴⁹ The only interaction Án and Drífa explicitly have in the narrative is to make fun of each other's clothing. At one point the farmer tells Drífa and the other women 'eigi skúlka hann' (not to mock [Án]).⁵⁰ This may not necessarily be foreboding; it could just be a request to be polite to their helpful guest. Of Án it is said:

Honum leizt vel á karlsdóttur, þó at hún hefði kallsat hans klæðasniðit, ok var hann sér um þat várkunnlátr.⁵¹ (Appendix I:2:VI:6)

This latter point is to my mind the biggest indicator that their relationship is likely consensual: the word *várkunn* means 'compassion; pity; mercy'.⁵² There is little to suggest he

⁴⁸ *Áns saga*, 386.

⁴⁹ ONP, 'blóramaðr'. Án says the child should be sent to him if it is a boy and not if it is a girl — but even in the case of the former, he is still leaving the child to be raised fatherless.

⁵⁰ *Áns saga*, 385.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 386.

⁵² ONP, s.v. 'várkunn'.

feels any ire towards her for mocking him and *várkunnlátr* implies an empathy that does not align with the presence of sexual violence. Overall, I think it unlikely that this is an episode of sexual violence, but Drífa's low social status does enable her to fall prey to Án in the sense that he illegitimately gets her pregnant and leaves. This tryst adds a potential layer of complexity to the narrative: if Án, who has gone to great lengths to deal a poetically fitting mutilation of a man who tried to rape a farmer's daughter under his name, then himself goes on to coerce this same farmer's daughter into a sexual relationship with him, or at the very least to impregnate and abandon her, then this skews what is otherwise depicted as a hard moral line against rape.

It must also be noted that, in the case of both Áki and Ketill, their sexual crimes are not just their attempted rapes, but also their sexual defamations of their mutilators: Áki accuses Hálfðan of impregnating a princess and Ketill accuses Án of homosexual thoughts. The punishments both heroes commit against these sexual aggressors thus seem multifaceted. Perhaps Án's own licentious actions towards Drífa suggest that Hálfðan and Án's actions against would-be rapists are so aggressive because they themselves feel personally attacked, rather than evidencing an altruistic concern for the sexual integrity of women. Án certainly has no qualms about leaving Drífa to raise their illegitimate child alone. Double standards like these are nowhere more obvious than in *Örvar-Odds saga*.

THE ODDNESS OF *ÖRVAR-ODDS SAGA*

HJÁLMARR'S *VÍKINGALÖG*

Stipulations condemning violence against women are a hallmark of Hjálmar's *víkingalög* in *Örvar-Odds saga*. Hjálmar 'inn hugumstóri' (the big-hearted) is positioned as an extremely

moral man; as Fulvio Ferrari says, ‘sein Seelenadel steht außer Frage’ (the nobility of his soul is without question).⁵³ The first action Hjálmar takes in the saga is to have ten of his ships sit out of the skirmish with Oddr so that both sides are equally matched, marking him out as demonstrably fair; furthermore, he rejects Oddr’s suggestion that he mount an attack against King Hlöðvér for rejecting Hjálmar’s proposal to princess Ingibjörg.⁵⁴ Hjálmar thus chooses to suffer unrequited love rather than disrupt peace. He is marked out as an innately fair man, and his *víkingalög* (Viking law) outlines his moralistic way of life:

„Þat er fyrst at segja, at ek vil aldri eta hrátt né lið mitt, því at þat er margra manna siðr at vinda vöðva í klæðum ok kalla þat soðit, en mér þykkir þat þeira siðr, er líkari eru vörgum en mönnum. Ek vil aldri kaupmenn ræna né búkarla meir en svá sem ek þarf at hafa strandhögg á skipi mínu í nauðsyn. Ek vil ok aldri konur ræna, þó at vér finnum þær á landi uppi með miklum fjárlutum, ok eigi skal konur til skips leiða nauðgar, ok ef hún kann þat at segja, at hún fari nauðig, þá skal sá engu fyrir týna nema lífi sínu, hvárt sem hann er ríkr eða óríkr“.⁵⁵ (Appendix I:2:VI:7)

Hjálmar’s ethical code is three-pronged, with the harshest penalty designated for the third of his stipulations, which relates to the protection of women:

1. *Distance the Self from the Berserkr*

That Hjálmar wishes his crew to be distinct from a band of *berserker* is evident in that ‘he and his men will not eat raw meat, a typical berserk characteristic’.⁵⁶ The undesirable, antisocial qualities of the *berserkr* are highlighted again by Hjálmar on his deathbed when he says

⁵³ *Örvar-Odds saga*, 230; Fulvio Ferrari, “Mouvance des Textes und feudale Reinterpretation: *Das Beispiel der Örvar-Odds saga*,” in *Neue Ansätze in der Mittelalterphilologie - Nye veier i middelalderfilologien*, ed. Susanne Kramarz-Bein (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2005), 208.

⁵⁴ *Örvar-Odds saga*, 233; 236.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 234.

⁵⁶ Carolyne Larrington, “A Viking in Shining Armour? Vikings and Chivalry in the *Fornaldarsögur*,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 4 (2008): 276.

„látir mik eigi verða lagðan í haug hjá svá illum vættum sem berserkirnir eru, fyrir því at ek þykkjumst miklu betr at mér en þeir.“⁵⁷ (Appendix I:2:VI:8)

The practice of eating raw meat is also associated with the violent shapeshifter Grímr in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, thought to be the son of a *sjógýgr* (sea-hag) and to have ‘át hrátt ok drakk blóð’ (eaten raw meat and drunk blood).⁵⁸ Hjálmar distances himself from such practices. The widespread figuration of *berserkir* as ‘heathen devils’ suggests that, in presenting himself as a foil to them, Hjálmar is potentially aligned with Lars Lönnroth’s ‘Noble Heathen’, a figure I discuss in further detail in relation to Oddr himself.⁵⁹ This figure is a vehicle for Christian writers to reconcile ‘pagan tradition’ with ‘the teachings of the Catholic Church’ and thus to depict pagan characters like Hjálmar and Oddr as ‘noble, wise, generous, compassionate, restrained, equipped with a second sight and a feeling of Divine Presence’.⁶⁰ Representing a ‘mixture of native and foreign: the Old Norse ideal of a great chieftain, tempered by the influence of Medieval speculation about the Gentiles which have not the Law’, Hjálmar’s laws cement him as the archetypal Noble Heathen.⁶¹

2. *Only Rob What is Necessary*

The second rule emphasises not taking more than is necessary for survival, and to not take from those who are poor or cannot defend themselves, or those who live far from the shore.

3. *Do Not Attack Women*

⁵⁷ *Örvar-Odds saga*, 262.

⁵⁸ *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 167.

⁵⁹ Benjamin Blaney, “The ‘Berserkr’: His Origin And Development in Old Norse Literature” (PhD thesis, University of Colorado, 1972), iii.

⁶⁰ Lars Lönnroth, “The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas,” *Scandinavian Studies* 41, no. 1 (1969): 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

A particular interdiction is placed on robbing women (even if they carry considerable wealth), and on bringing women to the ship against their will. The connotations of bringing a lone woman to the male domain of the ship are inherently sexually violent, especially when we consider that Helga took Ólöf to his ship to rape her in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, as well as the numerous examples of kidnapping and sexual subjugation in a ship setting in the *Íslendingasögur* such as Þorgils in *Flóamanna saga* or Yngvildr on Karl Karlsson's ship. The use of the word *nauðga* — given its presence in the *Jónsbók* lawcode relating to rape (Appendix II: *Jónsbók* IV.2) — is extremely important in the *víkingalög*, and Hjálmar does not outline a penalty for any act other than bringing a woman to the ship *nauðga*, for which a perpetrator pays with his life no matter what. This act is therefore outlined as the most severe crime that can be committed within Hjálmar's *víkingalög*.

Old Norse 'Ladies' Clauses'

Carolyne Larrington has convincingly suggested that Hjálmar's *víkingalög* is an example of how some *fornaldarsaga* authors 'adopted chivalric ethics in their reimagining of the identities of their remote Viking ancestors'.⁶² His insistence on such a law implies the need for it, which in turn suggests an anxiety over the sexual integrity of women. This absorption of a more European, courtly ethos, Larrington argues,

enables contemporary authors to suggest that the ancestors of the violent and ambitious men of the *Sturlungaöld*, far from being lawless predators, were in fact chivalrous and law-abiding knights *avant la lettre*, gaining honour, wealth, and good fortune through quasi-feudal support for kings, their class solidarity with other heroic adventures, and courtly service to women.⁶³

This reconfiguration of these ancestors as chivalrous certainly resonates with Lönnroth's 'Noble Heathen' figure. It is useful to compare Hjálmar's *víkingalög* and its somewhat

⁶² Larrington, "A Viking in Shining Armour?," 270.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 285.

quasi-*proto-feminist* stance on robbing women with other similar laws from across the Old Norse corpus to amass legal evidence in literary contexts. The recurrence of Norse laws containing their own ‘Ladies’ Clauses’ points to a widespread concern for the sexual safety of women, which in turn points to growing concerns about the sexually-violent behaviour of men.⁶⁴ Hjálmar’s *vikingalög*, according to Larrington, supplants or supplements the law codes of the Jómsvíkingar, laid out in *Jómsvíkinga saga*. These laws outline how one might increase one’s fame and strength — ‘at þeira ágæti yrði sem víðfrægast ok afli þeira yrði sem mestr’ (so that their renown and strength are praised as far as possible) — and they dictate behaviours such as fearlessness, honesty and diplomacy.⁶⁵ The only aspect of the *Jómsvíkingalög* referring to women is as follows: ‘Engi maðr skyldi konu hafa í borgina’ (No man must have a woman in the city).⁶⁶ N. F. Blake suggests that

The laws belonging to various bodies of men are mentioned now and again in the sagas, but they seem to refer to a code of conduct or to prevailing customs rather than to a definite set of a laws.⁶⁷

De facto laws are similarly referred to in *Vatnsdæla saga*; these *hermanna lög*, however, are not defined.⁶⁸ Einar Sveinsson likens these to the laws in *Gesta Danorum*, in which Frotho

⁶⁴ ‘Ladies’ Clause’ is used to refer to the stipulation about knightly behaviour towards women in the Pentecostal Oath in Malory’s *Morte D’Arthur*. Note that there is a contradiction here between the Caxton and the Winchester manuscripts; the former says ‘alweyes to doo ladyes / damoysels / and gentylwymmen socour vpon payne of dethe’, Thomas Malory, *Le Morte Darthur: The Original Text Edited from the Winchester Manuscript and Caxton’s Morte Darthur*, ed. P. J. C. Field, 1st ed. (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), III, 15. The Winchester MS sets out a specific provision against rape: ‘and all wayes / to do ladyes / damefels / and Iantilwomen and wydowes, [t]rengthe hem in hir ryght[s] and neu[er] to enforce them vppon payne of dethe’, London, British Library, MS 59678, 43v. Michael Stroud suggests that the difference between the two indicate Caxton’s erasure of the realities of sexually violent knights: ‘Malory, writing from a realistic perspective, recognizes the knight as a potential source of harm as well as help, and structures the oath accordingly. Caxton, however, removes the suggestion’, “Chivalric Terminology in Late Medieval Literature,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 2 (1976): 331.

⁶⁵ *Jómsvíkinga saga* 17–8.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 17, n. 3.

⁶⁸ This is noted by Einar Sveinsson in the *Íslenzk Fornrit* edition of *Vatnsdæla saga*, 5, n. 5 as well as Walter H. Vogt, *Vatnsdæla saga*, Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek, 16 (Halle an der Saale: M. Niemeyer, 1921), 3, n. 3.

implements the army's code of laws. These laws, like the *Jómsvíkingalög*, have an emphasis on bravery and, like Hjálmar's *víkingalög*, prohibit the violation of women:

si quis uirginis stuprum ui petere ausus esset, supplicia abscissis corporis partibus lueret, alioqui mille talentis concubitus iniuriam pensaturus.⁶⁹ (Appendix I:2:VI:9)

The punishment here — castration — certainly adheres to the standard of punishment for rape demonstrated by the mutilations of *Hálfðanar saga* and *Áns saga*. In *Hálfs saga Hálfrekkar* there is yet another set of loosely defined laws which Walter Vogt, Einarr Sveinsson and Blake all identify as reminiscent of the *hermannalög* and the *Jómsvíkingalög*. In this saga, Hálfr and his men keep these laws 'fyrir kapps sakir' (for the sake of *vehemence/competition*), and they are as follows:

Þat var eitt, at engi þeira skyldi hafa lengra sverð en alnar, svá skyldi nær ganga. Þeir létu gera söx til þess, at þá skyldi högginn stærri. Engi þeira hafði minna afl en tólf meðalmenn. Aldri hertóku þeir konu né börn. Engi skyldi sár bindi fyrr en at jafnlengd annars dags. Við engum var þeim tekit, er minni var at afli eða hreysti, en nú var sagt.⁷⁰ (Appendix I:2:VI:10)

Again, these laws place emphasis on strength and bravery, with some provision for women and, here, children. *Hrókr inn svartí*, part of Hálfr's band, appears to expand on these laws before honourably winning Brynhildr's hand:

Bað hann eigi í her
höftu græta
né manns konu
mein at vinna.
Mey bað hann hverja
mundi kaupa,
fögru gulli,
at föður ráði.⁷¹ (Appendix I:2:VI:11)

⁶⁹ Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, 1:Liber Quintus, 324–5.

⁷⁰ *Hálfs saga ok Hálfrekka*, 107–8.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

From Hrókr's words, it thus seems that Hálfir's imposed laws respect marital customs, with an emphasis on acquiring familial consent before marrying a woman and on not harming her or indeed any prisoners of war. However, Bell has judiciously pointed out that

In the saga, Hálfir's rules are considered draconian and stifling, so his stance against raping female captives or abducting other men's wives or daughters is, in this context, seen as an inhibitor to the natural order of things, implying that such acts were acceptable enough for their prohibition to be seen as unorthodox.⁷²

In *Ynglinga saga*, a *vikingalög* forbidding men and women from drinking in pairs together is broken by Hjørvarðr so that he can sit with Hildigunnr. He successfully asks for her father's permission to marry her the next day.⁷³ Such rules, then, are not necessarily reflective of general opinion on appropriate behaviour towards women. Hjálmar's *vikingalög*, with its much harsher penalty for rape than for instance in Saxo (in which a man would be punished with castration or else a fine), similarly does not necessarily aid in the construction of *Örvar-Odds saga* as some sort of proto-feminist text advocating for the rights of women and, in fact, is directly at odds with the actions of Oddr and even Hjálmar himself.

ODDR: A MORAL PAGAN?

Indeed, Oddr's attitude towards sexual violence is not as clear-cut as his eager acceptance of the *vikingalög* makes him out to be. Hjálmar insists that Oddr abide by the *vikingalög* if they are to become allies and Oddr appears to agree heartily, saying ‘„Góð þykkja mér lög þín“’ (“I think your laws are good”).⁷⁴ Earlier in the saga, Oddr's brother Guðmundr appears to delight in tormenting Lappish women, which Oddr refuses to take part in and even seems to take offense at:

⁷² Bell, “Reconsideration,” 13.

⁷³ *Ynglinga saga*, 68.

⁷⁴ *Örvar-Odds saga*, 234.

Um morguninn ganga þeir á land af skipi Guðmundar ok renni í hvern gamma ok ræna Finnurnar. Þær þola þetta illa ok æpa mjök. Þeir ræða um á skipi við Odd, at þeir vili á land ganga, en hann vill eigi leyfa þat. Þeir Guðmundr koma nú til skips um kveldit.

Oddr mælti: „Vartu á land upp?“

„Þat varna,“ sagði hann, „ok hefi ek þat svá gert, at mér hefir mest gaman at þótt, at græta Finnurna, ok muntu vilja far með mér á morgun?“

„Þat ferr fjarri,“ sagði Oddr.⁷⁵ (Appendix I:2:VI:12)

Guðmundr's attack here is directed at women. He takes particular pleasure in making them scream. This gendered violence certainly has sexual connotations; as I argued both in my discussion of *Grettis saga* and *Bósa saga*, crying or screaming out can be dually read as sexual and/or fearful, especially the word *æpa*, which features in Grettir's rape of the maidservant.⁷⁶ Guðmundr makes sport of terrorising these women — whether or not the attacks are sexual in nature — and Oddr is the only one to refrain from this sport, even talking his own men out of joining in. His disdain for Guðmundr's activities is blatant and when he eagerly accepts Hjálmar's ethical law, with its special focus on women, this is both in keeping with his character and also positively aligns him with the moral code of the saga. Guðmundr and his crew appear cruel in comparison for causing pain for pain's sake. For Tulinius, Oddr's refusal to attack the women of Bjarmaland highlights his nature as 'innately chivalric' and makes him worthy of Lars Lönnroth's 'Noble Heathen' profile.⁷⁷ Jonathan Hui similarly suggests that Oddr shows the 'wisdom and experience' of this profile through his ethically-based approval and agreement with Hjálmar's *vikingalög*.⁷⁸

This 'Noble Heathen' figure Lönnroth identifies in the sagas 'serves the function of being an ethical model for the living while at the same time sanctioning their social customs

⁷⁵ Ibid., 214.

⁷⁶ See above, Chapter I, n. 121; Chapter IV, n. 53.

⁷⁷ Tulinius, *Matter of the North*, 162.

⁷⁸ Jonathan Y. H. Hui, "The Making of Paranormal Weapons: Pointed Messages in *Qrvar-Odds saga*" (paper presented at the 4th Symposium of Old Norse Folklorists Network in Tartu on 11 December 2015), 9.

by giving them the stamp of approval of the past’, a solution to the inherent conflict of pagan and Christian traditions.⁷⁹ According to Lönnroth:

Other pagans may be eager to solve their problems through some kind of rash and violent action but the noble heathen is always slow to take revenge, careful not to break the law, and patient in his search for the most peaceful solution.⁸⁰

Oddr practices such noble restraint in Bjarmaland, restraining his crewmates and exhibiting open disdain towards the other crew members for taking delight in wreaking havoc. It therefore seems in keeping with Oddr’s behaviour to readily accept Hjálmar’s *vikingalög* since he is already ‘instinctively compl[ying] by them’.⁸¹ However, the chivalric ethics stipulated within the *vikingalög* do not stop both Oddr and Hjálmar from harrying foreign lands: immediately after Hjálmar’s outlining of the law they both appear to terrorise the locals, regardless of gender, in Scotland and in Ireland:

Þeir koma við Skotland ok gera þar upprásir, herja ok brenna hvervetna, þar er þeir koma, ok eigi léttu þeir fyrr en þeir skattgilda landit. Þaðan fara þeir til Orkneyja ok leggja þær undir sik ok sitja þar um vetrinn. En um vartit fara þeir til Írlands ok herja bæði með sjónum ok upp á landit. Þess fór Oddr hvergi, at eigi fylgdi Ásmundr honum. En þar flýðu undan bæði á merkr ok skóga börn ok konur ok karlar, en fálu fjárhlut sinn ok sjálfa sik.⁸² (Appendix I:2:VI:13)

The manner in which ‘börn ok konur ok karlar’ are put in apposite terms is directly at odds with the distinction explicitly made in the *vikingalög* not to rob women. The delineation between raiding both on the shore and inland also goes against Hjálmar’s stipulations only to raid for necessity and only along the shoreline. According to Larrington:

Chivalric ethics have clearly impacted on *Örvar-Odds saga*, substantially affecting the author’s vision of Viking identity, but they have not by any means overwritten the old social memory of ravaging, burning, and gaining booty.⁸³

⁷⁹ Lönnroth, “The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas,” 29; 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁸¹ Tulinius, *Matter of the North*, 161.

⁸² *Örvar-Odds saga*, 237.

⁸³ Larrington, “A Viking in Shining Armour?,” 284.

That the pronouncement of the chivalric *vikingalög* is so closely followed by this indiscriminate harrying behaviour suggests an inconsistency in *viking* ethics, or at least an inability — or unwillingness — to adhere to them. Oddr in particular is inconsistent in following the rules as shown by his refusal to let his men torment the Lappish women earlier in the saga, followed by his swift acceptance of and subsequent flouting of the *vikingalög*. Paul Edwards and Hermann Pálsson have highlighted Oddr's apparently fair treatment of women, observing that Oddr 'refuses to molest the poor Lappish women and clearly doesn't think highly of Gudmund's eagerness to do so. The same quality emerges from his acceptance of the laws of Hjalmar'.⁸⁴ These critics do not note, however, Oddr's desire to rape Ölvör. This marks the biggest inconsistency in Oddr's attitude towards women, casting him as a would-be rapist, a significant departure from his attitude to the Finnish women. Such an extreme repudiation of the *vikingalög* directly challenges Hjálmar's decree to have any rapist killed.

ÖLVÖR

While raiding in Ireland, Oddr's beloved foster-brother Ásmundr is mortally wounded by an arrow. To Oddr, this is a devastating loss. After killing a few Irish men in retaliation, 'Oddr er svá í illum hug við Íra, at hann ætlar at vinna þeim allt þat illt, er hann megi orka' (Oddr was thinking so badly towards the Irish that he thought of dealing them all the ill that he could possibly work).⁸⁵ He follows a path and comes to a 'jarðhús' (underground cabin), in which he finds four women. When considering the potential connotations of this *jarðhús*, it is useful to refer to Paul Battles' study of the *eorðscraefe/eorðsele* in which the Wife in the Old

⁸⁴ Paul Edwards and Hermann Pálsson, *Arrow-Odd: A Medieval Novel* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), xvii.

⁸⁵ *Örvar-Odds saga*, 238.

English *Wife's Lament* resides. Battles identifies a number of similar subterranean abodes in several other sources and proposes an interpretation of the *eorðsele* as a possible place of refuge from attack. Although Battles does not mention *Örvar-Odds saga*, he finds reference to souterrains in numerous sagas and other medieval texts, with several relating specifically to the concealment of women.⁸⁶ Battles finds three Scandinavian examples where women are sequestered underground specifically for their safety.⁸⁷ The *jarðhús* then seems to be an established place of refuge for a variety of people, particularly women who, like the Old English Wife, 'may have concealed herself in an *eorðscræf* during the heat of invasion to protect herself from rape and capture'.⁸⁸

Indeed, when Oddr finds the women in the *jarðhús*, he appears determined to rape one of them. This is evident considering his seething, active vendetta against the Irish, his desire to cause as many Irish people as possible pain and the fact that he immediately selects the most beautiful of the women (presented in full at Appendix I:2:VI:14). Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir suggests that 'it can be assumed that he has only sexual conquest in mind when he pulls her out of her hiding place on their first encounter'.⁸⁹ Yet Ölvör's apparent mystical qualities are enough to save her from this sexual conquest. She disarms him at first by knowing his name; Oddr is surprised by this and calls her a *tröll*. It must be kept in mind that Oddr has an established hatred of supernatural women, given his behaviour towards the

⁸⁶ Paul Battles, "Of Graves, Caves, and Subterranean Dwellings: *Eorðscræf* and *Eorðsele* in the *Wife's Lament*," *Philological Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (1994), 271–8; in Laȝamon's *Brut*, for instance Loctrine conceals his secret lover Astrilde in an *eorð-hus*; *Layamon: Brut*, ed. G. L. Brook and R. F. Leslie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 60, l. 1181; in *Saga af Tristram ok Ísödd*, Tristram and Ísödd hide in a souterrain under a tree, 160.

⁸⁷ In *Flóamanna saga* women Þorgils takes to his ship are hidden underground, see above, Chapter III, n. 147; a woman hidden underground is found and raped by the villainous Gunnarus in Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, 1:Liber Septimus, 498, and women are concealed 'í einu jarðhúsi' (in a *jarðhús*) to avoid being attacked by Scots in *Göngu-Hrolfs saga*, 267.

⁸⁸ Helene Scheck, "Seductive Voices: Rethinking Female Subjectivities in *The Wife's Lament* and *Wulf and Eadwacer*," *Literature Compass* 5, no. 2 (2008): 223.

⁸⁹ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Bodies, Words, and Power*, 208.

seeress Heiðr at the beginning of the saga. Ölvör also has apparent knowledge of Hjálmar's *vikingalög*, as she almost directly quotes Hjálmar here, using nearly identical wording: ‘„skal ek kunna at segja honum, ef ek fer nauðig til skipanna”’ (“I shall also know what to say to him, if I am brought to the ships by force.”).⁹⁰ She appears to know what Oddr intends and that he has vowed against such a crime, and by invoking Hjálmar's law she reminds him implicitly of the punishment for the crime (death) if he goes through with it. However, this still does not deter him: at this point, it seems that he is willing to risk his life to rape Ölvör and thereby punish the Irish. Ölvör's body is constructed a Lucretia-esque ‘body politic’, and her violable self — in Oddr's view, it seems — is an appropriate terrain upon which Oddr can map his punishment of the Irish. She is thus synecdochic for Irish national identity and, in his moment of rage, Oddr appears to believe that he can wreak vengeance on the Irish men that killed his friend by raping the princess. His phallic aggression is aimed not just at her, but also at the men of the nation she represents: she is a locus on which Oddr affixes his androcentric aggression, a vehicle through which he can carry out vengeance.

The other women in the *jarðhús* try to protect Ölvör at this point, but she has a different plan, and one that will ultimately be to the advantage of her family and her country: she offers to make him a magical shirt. Oddr agrees to leave her and come back to claim the shirt she offers in a year's time. Upon his return, he asks her what reward she wants for the shirt. She expresses concern for her country and asks Oddr to stay and help her; he offers to marry her: ‘„Þá munum vit kaupa fleira,” sagði Oddr, „ok skaltu þat til vinna at ganga með mér ok vera mín eiginkona”’ (“We must come to a settlement,” said Oddr, “and you must agree to come with me and be my wife”).⁹¹ She reluctantly accepts: ‘„Manngjarnliga mun þér mælt þykkja,” sagði hún, „ok skal þetta kjósa”’ (“You must think me very man-eager,” she

⁹⁰ *Örvar-Odds saga*, 238.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 243.

said, “but I’ll accept”).⁹² Oddr helps to rid Ireland of attacking Vikings but wants to leave after three years have passed. He and Ölvör argue about who should keep their child and, as Larrington says, ‘Hjálmar, ever the arbiter of decent behaviour, ordains that the girl should stay with her mother’.⁹³

Hans Jacob Orning has suggested that ‘Det er ingen tvil om at *Örvar-Odds saga* kan leses som en beretning om en helts utvikling’ (There is no doubt that *Örvar-Odds saga* can be read as an account of a hero’s development).⁹⁴ What, then, does Oddr’s intense desire to rape this Irish princess suggest of his narrative development? Rape is certainly condemned in the saga, as outlined in Hjálmar’s *vikingalög*. Larrington suggests that Ölvör is a test of Oddr’s ‘commitment to the *vikingalög*’, and when he decides not to rape her, ‘his adherence to the provisions of the *vikingalög* wins him the magic shirt; his gallant behaviour towards Ölvör is rewarded with both the talismanic object and with a sexual relationship’.⁹⁵ *Örvar-Odds saga* — in particular its older redactions — has often been read as a conversion story, and in line with this it is possible to view Oddr’s desire to rape Ölvör as a temptation which he resists and for which he is thus rewarded.⁹⁶ However, even after his baptism in the river Jordan, Oddr is, as Riti Kroesen attests, hardly an

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Larrington, “A Viking in Shining Armour?,” 275.

⁹⁴ Hans Jacob Orning, “Örvar-Oddr og Senmiddelalderens Adelskultur,” in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavík: University of Iceland, 2012), 294.

⁹⁵ Larrington, “A Viking in Shining Armour?,” 275.

⁹⁶ Hans Jacob Orning has outlined three dominant views on this, and he summarises them thus (“Örvar-Oddr og Senmiddelalderens Adelskultur,” 304): firstly, Torfi Tulinius, who suggests that the Christianising motif is of diminishing importance compared to the death motif in later redactions, *Matter of the North*, 163. Secondly, Fulvio Ferrari’s stance identifies Christianity as a more central motif in the older version of the saga and proposes that Oddr is portrayed as less victorious than the villain Ögmundr, whose role is drastically emphasised in the later versions of the saga, “Ögmundr: The Elusive Monster and Medieval ‘Fantastic’ Literature,” in *Studi Anglo-Norreni in Onore di John S. McKinnell*, ed. Maria Elena Ruggerini (Cagliari: CUEC, 2006), 376. Finally, Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards likewise identify an ambiguity in the younger versions in which Oddr does not win an unequivocal victory and suffers from a lack of moderation, *Arrow-Odd: A Medieval Novel*, 49. Overall, these three views suggest a less clear-cut moral victory for Oddr in the later versions of the saga.

exemplary Christian: being a Viking and fighting his enemies in a ruthless way is no problem to him, although he had already before his conversion tried to introduce some ethics in his life; like his friend Hjálmar he had sworn not to fight against women and children and not to eat raw meat.⁹⁷

This is not to say that violence as a whole was condemned by Christianity. We might think of the *miles Christi* figure, and the violent means used by Óláfr Tryggvason, ‘championed by twelfth-century and later Icelandic monks’ to convert Iceland to Christianity.⁹⁸ But Oddr continues to raid violently without the intent of converting his victims; he is certainly not depicted as an idol following his conversion, nor is he an infallible figure: he is strong, courageous and loyal, but also gloomy and indecisive, as pointed out by Oskar Bandle.⁹⁹

In *Örvar-Odds saga*, rape is portrayed as one of the worst crimes that can be committed: those who speak out against it, such as Hjálmar, are presented as ‘good’. Oddr, aligned with at first with this anti-rape ethic, appears not to be permanently marred for wanting to rape Ölvör. Indeed, his attitudes towards violence against women are quite varied: at the beginning, he is so aghast at Heiðr’s prophecy that ‘Hann spratt upp við, er hún mælti þetta, ok rekr sprotann á nasir svá hart, at þegar lá blóð á jörðu’ (He sprang up at what she said, and struck her on the nose with a stick so hard that blood poured to the ground).¹⁰⁰ Later, King Herrauðr gives Oddr a *skjaldmaer* (shield-maiden) to protect him. She struggles to jump over a marsh and Oddr throws her in, presumably killing her, saying ‘„Far þú þar nú, ok hafi þik öll tröll“’ (“Off now with you, the trolls can have you”).¹⁰¹ Kroesen suggests that she could be a ‘typical symbol of heathendom’ and so Oddr’s antipathy is a result of his

⁹⁷ Riti Kroesen, “The Christianization of Two Initiatory Patterns in the *Örvar-Odds Saga*,” in *The Sixth International Saga Conference, 28.7-28.8 1985: Workshop Papers I-II*, ed. Jonna Louis-Jensen, Christopher Sanders, and Peter Springborg, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Det Arnamagnæanske Institut, 1985), 648.

⁹⁸ John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 9. See also Kathleen M. Self, “Remembering Our Violent Conversion: Conflict in the Icelandic Conversion Narrative,” *Religion* 40, no. 3 (2010): 187.

⁹⁹ Oskar Bandle, “Um þróun *Örvar-Odds sögu*,” *Gripla* 7, no. 1 (1990): 58.

¹⁰⁰ *Örvar-Odds saga*, 208.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 323.

Christianity rather than misogyny. However, it must be noted that when Oddr accepts the gift of the *skjaldmær*, his reluctance is because of her gender, not her religious affiliation: ‘„Þar hefi ek hvergi komit, at konur hafi verit brjóst fyrir mér, en þó skal þetta þiggja, alls þú þykkist vel bjóða“’ (“I have by no means ever had a woman be my protection, but I shall accept her, as you mean well”).¹⁰² This may point to a gendered attack — or at least one stemming from Oddr’s wounded masculinity and the suggestion that he has need of a woman in battle — rather than a religion-based one. Furthermore, in the drinking contest episode, Oddr accuses his opponent of debating whether to have sex with an animal or a servant girl:

„Sjólfr, vart eigi,
þar er sverð ruðum
hvöss á jarli
fyr Hléseyju;
en þú hallaðist
heima á milli,
kynmálasamr
kálfis ok þýjar.“¹⁰³ (Appendix I:2:VI:15)

Oddr thus aligns slave girls with animals, implying that it is as shameful to have sex with one as it is with the other. Of course, given my discussion on the sexual availability of slave girls in Chapter III, as well as the different rules which apply to the rape of lower-class women as opposed to courtly ladies in relation to *Bósa saga* and the *pastourelles*, this may not be outright general misogyny so much as a reflection of widespread class-based misogyny that pervades Old Norse literature. It does, however, add to the substantial list of Oddr’s misogynistic thoughts, actions and utterances.

Oddr’s attitude to women is far from a consistent one. Yet rape is verbally delineated as bad in this saga more so than in any other *fornaldarsaga* and even though Ölvör bribes him out of raping her and the situation works out well for both of them, it is hard to overlook

¹⁰² Kroesen, “Two Initiatory Patterns,” 653; *Örvar-Odds saga*, 323.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 315.

Oddr's sexually violent intentions. Perhaps his compliance with Ölvör is supposed to redeem him from both wrath and lust and thus feed into the saga's status as a conversion narrative, or perhaps his desire to flout the *vikingalög* is demonstrative of the immense affection he had for Ásmundr. *Örvar-Odds saga* is an anti-rape saga with a sexually violent hero, and this creates a tension that extends throughout the narrative.

Indeed, despite the misogynistic attitudes to sexual violence observed in *Bósa saga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Örvar-Odds saga* and elsewhere, this chapter and the previous one demonstrate that several *fornaldarsögur* depict a strong sentiment of resistance to rape. Hálfðan is criticised for being blind to Áki's villainy and Áki goes on to try and rape his sister. He is not societally shunned, but goes on to reoffend, attempting to murder and defame Hálfðan. He, like *Áns saga's* Ketill, receives his dues in the end. Rape is certainly an inconsistent and conflicted theme in these sagas, and carries a plethora of ambiguities and complexities. But these texts speak to a need to construct and enact laws in order to safeguard women from rape, alongside accounts of vigilante punishments which consist of figurative and non-figurative castrations alike. Fantasy elements that allow women to escape rape are also present in the corpus, standing in sharp contrast with the realities of rape for female audiences. These texts whisper and at times wail about deep-rooted anxieties surrounding the topic: how it ought to be punished, how rapists ought to be regarded, and how women might protect themselves or be protected by men. Whereas the *Íslendingasögur* concealed so much with euphemism, the *fornaldarsögur* seethe with conflicting concerns for the sexual violence present in Norse societies just as it is now, and as it has been for millennia.

CHAPTER VII: 'TURNING THE MIND OF THE WHITE-ARMED GIRL'

„þér svikuð mik frá öllu yndi“

Sorcery is by no means absent from the *Íslendingasögur*, but it occupies the *fornaldarsögur* – set in the mythical-heroic, distant past — far more centrally:

With their narrative worlds rooted in our reality, the *fornaldarsögur* display some of the gritty realism of the *Íslendingasögur* but blend it smoothly with fantastic occurrences, supernatural beings and a multitude of Other Worlds to create some of the most enjoyable Old Norse fiction.¹

Margaret Clunies Ross' third characterising facet of the genre is that 'the *fornaldarsaga* world admits of a greater number of paranormal beings and happenings than one usually finds in some other kinds of saga literature'.² This chapter will explore the paranormal happenings that relate to the manipulation of women's minds designed to make them feel love or lust that they would not otherwise feel. Rebecca Merkelbach has highlighted the absence of 'fertility or love magic' in the *Íslendingasögur*, observing that 'instead, storms and landslides are triggered, love is destroyed, and battles are influenced by magic'.³ Aside from a notable exception in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, the *Íslendingasögur* thus stand apart from the *fornaldarsögur*, wherein magic abounds in matters of love and lust. This chapter will provide a survey and analysis of the recurrent use of enchantment as a means to

¹ Helen F. Leslie, "Border Crossings: Landscape and the Other World in the *Fornaldarsögur*," *Scripta Islandica* 60 (2009): 119.

² Margaret Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur*, vol. 1, *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), lvi–lvii. The first facet is its setting in the prehistoric past; the second is its typical setting in mainland Scandinavia or an exotic location; the fourth is its inclusion of poetry largely in eddic metres.

³ Merkelbach, *Monsters in Society*, 127.

‘turn the minds’ of women so that they are subsumed by love or lust against their natural inclinations.

A FRAMEWORK FOR MAGIC AND CONSENT

RETHINKING TERMINOLOGIES: APHRODISIACAL MAGIC

Oft-used terminologies such as ‘love magic’, ‘erotic magic’, or ‘sex magic’ each pose certain difficulties in meaning, or else evoke unfortunate, flippant or unduly positive connotations. ‘Love magic’, for instance, is itself something of a problematic term. These two words, strung together, evoke something romantic or benign. In fact, the very nature of ‘love magic’ is anything but benign and, despite the name, ‘such manipulations can hardly have seemed like “love” to the women targeted by male lust’.⁴ I here adopt the more clinical term ‘aphrodisiacal magic’ an approach which will hopefully circumvent the connotations of the previously mentioned terms.

METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

The Introduction of this thesis addressed the potential anachronistic pitfalls of applying concepts of consent to the literature of the medieval North. Bringing magic into dialogue with consent complicates this further.

Firstly, we must consider what ‘magic’ is. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir’s working definition takes “‘magic” as a general term for all supernatural events understood to be caused by a saga character by a variety of means for any number of reasons’.⁵ The simplicity of this definition functions well for the study of magic in saga literature, although it is

⁴ Stephen A. Mitchell, “*Skirnismál* and Nordic Charm Magic,” in *Reflections on Old Norse Myths*, ed. Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjødt, and Rasmus Trandum Kristensen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 76.

⁵ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Bodies, Words, and Power*, 47–8.

impossible to know where the *fornaldarsögur* writers' subjective boundaries between reality and magic lie; indeed, magic today remains highly subjective within different cultures and is variable according to individual belief. Much like Helen Leslie's evaluation of the *fornaldarsögur* as a blend of gritty realism and fantastic occurrences, Hans Jacob Orning has suggested that 'Rather than viewing [magic] as an escapist trait, the distant topic of these sagas could serve as a cover-up for discussing contemporary tensions and themes'.⁶ The idea that supernatural beings and motifs were employed in order to discuss contemporary tensions under the veil of the fantastical, however, is complicated by the apparent widespread belief in magic in the Middle Ages. Stephen Mitchell's landmark study underscores the potential perceived reality of magic within the medieval Nordic world, arguing that Old Norse literary sources offer

a glimpse into the vast tradition intertwining lust, love, violence, and magic that once existed in the medieval Nordic world. The deadly earnestness with which this tradition was regarded is underscored by a variety of literary, ecclesiastical, and historical references.⁷

Magic falls into, for instance, legal jurisdiction, wherein it is presented as a threat to everyday life (Appendix II: *Grágás* K.17; *Jónsbók* IV.2). *Grágás* distinguishes between 'fjølkyngi' and 'fordæðuskapr', which we might translate as 'white' and 'black' magic, respectively. The latter is legally framed as the more severe crime with the higher penalty of full, rather than lesser, outlawry.

The legal, literary, historical, and archaeological evidence for the perceived reality of magic in the Norse Middle Ages raises questions regarding how to square aphrodisiacal magic with very real issues surrounding an individual's (in)ability to consent: if this branch of magic was broadly perceived to have been real in the cultural milieu of the sagas'

⁶ Hans Jacob Orning, "The Magical Reality of the Late Middle Ages: Exploring the World of the *Fornaldarsögur*," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 35, no. 1 (2010): 4.

⁷ Mitchell, "Nordic Charm Magic," 78.

compositional period, then aphrodisiacal magic would potentially — and perhaps even via a placebo effect — have posed a very real danger to sexual autonomy; as real, for instance, as drink- and needle- spiking today. I propose that, in this sense, it is useful to consider modern legal frameworks for deception and consent. Jane E. Larson’s article reframes sexual fraud as a tort which

leads to nonconsensual sex because it deprives the victim of control over her body and denies her meaningful sexual choice. Like other sexual acts that are not fully consensual, sex induced by fraud has the potential to cause grave physical and emotional injury’.⁸

Similarly, aphrodisiacal magic deprives its object of mental control, as it essentially consists of forcibly changing the mind and thereby controlling the very thoughts, actions, and sexuality of its victim. It may also function as a method of deceiving the individual with the intention of seducing them. Aphrodisiacal magic has at its core violent intentions: casting a spell to violate someone’s sexual autonomy might be considered on a par with the use of date-rape drugs, or the act of taking advantage of an intoxicated person whose lack of cognitive control vitiates their ability to consent to sex. How, then, might we conceptualise magic as at once a ‘paranormal happening’ within a genre that often foregrounds the fantastical and which, to a medieval populace, was potentially perceived to be real? Moreover, how do we assimilate these tensions with medieval concepts of sexual violence and consent?

To answer these questions, this chapter will consider to what extent aphrodisiacal magic might have been considered a violation in a medieval Icelandic setting. Certainly, aphrodisiacal magic is presented as disruptive and often disastrous, and Richard Kieckhefer has pointed out that

⁸ Larson, “‘Women Understand So Little’,” 380.’

Because it violated the free will of those it ensnared and disrupted the social order, erotic magic was categorized not with the white magic of healing, prevention of misfortune, and recovery of goods, but with the black or maleficent magic of sorcery.⁹

Aphrodisiacal magic is, then, a violation of the mind, and — if it leads to sexual acts — a violation of the body. Kieckhefer’s study is rightly troubled by the distinction between magic designed to provoke long-term love or short-term lust.¹⁰ Enchantment with the goal of inciting long-term love is innately complex. Viewing this life-altering, permanent aphrodisiacal magic as leading to non-consensual romantic or sexual relationships calls into question some of the great love stories of the epoch, such as *Tristram and Ísönd*, whose inadvertent consumption of the ‘leyniligan drykk’ (secret drink) makes them fall madly in love.¹¹ Sometimes, the *fornaldarsögur* depict a brief spell of forced lust lasting only long enough for a brief seduction. Elsewhere, we read of women having their minds permanently altered, with their infatuations leading to marriage and an apparently happily ever after. Such instances are so drawn out that they potentially transcend any modern frameworks we have for establishing ability to consent, such as in cases of intoxication.

Aphrodisiacal magic is at times employed for humour, with a man’s unquenchable libido played for laughs at the expense of a woman’s sexual well-being. In the texts that form part of my study, I examine the relationship between cognisance and consent across various texts to assess the gravity of the sexual violence implicit in aphrodisiacal magic. The *fornaldarsögur* show an array of reactions to enchantment: a woman who is enchanted via rune-stick and bedtrick and eventually killed off with no apparent sympathy; a woman who is aware of her enchantment yet is willing nonetheless; a woman who is aware of the curse and conscious of the sexual violence used against her by multiple enchanted men; and a woman

⁹ Richard Kieckhefer, “Erotic Magic in Medieval Europe,” in *Sex in the Middle Ages: A Book of Essays*, ed. Joyce E. Salisbury (New York; London: Garland, 1991), 31.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹¹ *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, 118.

whose somewhat sympathetic portrayal shows her as mentally numbed during her repeated sexual assault and who, it is made clear, would not have consented to the sexual advances of the subject had her rapist not enchanted her. Victim to one of the most horrific sexual assaults of the Old Norse corpus, she is my first case study.

BLÁ AND BÓLGIN: INVASION OF BODY AND MIND IN GÖNGU- HRÓLFS SAGA

The fourteenth-century *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* chronicles a self-contained episode in which Ingibjörg is enchanted by Möndull, a dwarf. She is forced to have sex with him on consecutive nights in front of her husband. She is physically deformed as part of the enchantment, and the experience is portrayed as unpleasant for her husband as well. Her own emotional reaction to it, however, is barely described. Despite clearly being depicted as the perpetrator of a heinous deed, her rapist's crimes are either forgotten or forgiven by the protagonist, Hrólfr, and his retinue. This exoneration seems due primarily to Möndull's value as an ally possessing magical powers. Upon entering the saga, the handsome and enigmatic Möndull quickly gains the trust and attention of Jarl Þorgnýr to the point that the jarl 'gleymdi þar fyrir sinni ríkisstjórn' (forgot about his government).¹² The jarl's counsellor, Björn, soon grows vocally critical of the jarl's over-confidence in Möndull, who then decides to pay Björn's wife a visit while Björn is out of town. It is said that he 'lék við hana mjök blíðliga, en hún tók því vel' (he joked with her cheerfully and she took it well) before asking her to sleep with him, offering her gifts and belittling her husband. Ingibjörg is outraged by his advances:

¹² *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 220.

Þar kom, at hann leitaði við hana samfara ok fór þar um mörgum fögrum orðum. Hann bauð henni af sér at þiggja marga góða gripi, en lastaði Björn í hverju orði ok kvað hann ekki at manni vera. Ingibjörg reiddist þessu mjök ok svaraði honum hæðiliga ok sagðist aldri með honum ganga skyldu. Möndull tók þá kōnnu ok brá undan yfirhöfn sinni ok bað hana drekka sáttarbikar þeira, en hún sló hendinna neðan undir kerit ok upp í andlit honum.

Hann reiddist við þetta ok mælti: „Eigi skulum vér fyrr skilja, þú ok Björn, bóndi þinn, ef ek hefi launat ykkur því, sem þit eruð maklig, fyrir þá svívirðing, er þit hafið mér gert, bæði með orð ok verk.“¹³ (Appendix I:2:VII:1)

She is then mysteriously stricken by a strange illness, mentally and physically. Meanwhile, Möndull plots to ruin Björn's reputation by giving the jarl a precious belt, which he later frames Björn for stealing. Björn's punishment is to be placed into Möndull's custody and it can be assumed that this is thanks to Möndull's influence over the jarl's decisions.¹⁴ This unusual form of custodial punishment serves primarily to facilitate Möndull's ultimate revenge on Björn and Ingibjörg:

Möndull var nú í garði Bjarnar ok rak í burtu alla hans heimamenn. Hann tók Ingibjörgu ok lagði í sæng hjá sér hverja nótt, Birni ásjáanda, ok hafði hún allt blíðlæti við hann, en mundi ekki til Bjarnar, bónda síns. Þótti nú Birni þungliga at fara, ok líða nú svá þessar sjau nætr, sem frá var sagt.¹⁵ (Appendix I:2:VII:2)

Björn is forced to watch as his wife, enchanted into insanity, is raped by another man and — as part of the enchantment — appears to enjoy it, the word *blíðlæti* indicating her affection for Möndull. Möndull's act of retribution here is primarily directed at Björn, who is painfully aware of the scene unfolding in front of him, but it also serves to satisfy his own lust for Ingibjörg. Her emotions are warped by the enchantment; hence, she enjoys the sex with Möndull in the moment but, given her strong adverse reaction to his prior sexual advances, it can be safely assumed that she would not have consented had she not been enchanted.

¹³ Ibid., 221.

¹⁴ Under *Grágás*, the penalty for theft is severe: full outlawry (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§227). Note that in *Jónsbók*, a belt is specifically given as an example of an item costing less than one ounce-unit and carrying a penalty of petty larceny if stolen; the punishments escalate for repeat offenders. *Grágás* does not specify the penalty for theft of items worth less than an ounce-unit (Appendix II: *Jónsbók* IX.1).

¹⁵ *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 224.

At this point, the saga returns to the eponymous Hrólfr, who has been detained and mutilated by the villainous Vilhjálmr. He manages to escape his confines and make his way to Björn's house. We see, from Hrólfr's perspective, a woman who we assume must be Ingibjörg, carrying firewood. She is now described as 'blá at yfirlit sem klæði ok mjök bólgin' (having a countenance as dark as her clothes and completely swollen).¹⁶ Möndull drags Björn behind him and Hrólfr watches as Möndull 'sezt niðr við eldinn ok setr konuna hjá sér ok kyssti hana' (sat down by the fire and puts the woman on his knee and kissed her).¹⁷ Björn complains to Möndull (in doing so providing exposition to the as yet unnoticed Hrólfr), '„Illa gerir þú, Möndull, er þú hefir svikit konu mína, en forlogit mik við jarl“' ("You do ill deeds, Möndull, and you have deceived my wife, and slandered me to the jarl"), which prompts Hrólfr to snap into action and easily overpower Möndull, who immediately confesses to his misdeeds.¹⁸ Begging for his life, Möndull swears allegiance to Hrólfr and promises to heal him, while also revealing that he is a dwarf. Following his confession, he assumes his natural, dark-skinned form before healing Ingibjörg, as commanded by Hrólfr, and agrees to help Hrólfr in battle in the future.

MÖNDULL

The fact that Möndull is a dwarf facilitates his sexual violation of Ingibjörg. Not only are dwarves considered to be inherently lustful beings, but their supernatural powers also enable them to pursue this lust and 'we may understand that, without their magical endowment, dwarfs would not be able to attain a human bride'.¹⁹ Möndull declares that his plan all along

¹⁶ Ibid., 229.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Lotte Motz, *The Wise One of the Mountain: Form, Function, and Significance of the Subterranean Smith: A Study in Folklore*, Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1983), 114.

was to enchant and kidnap a woman, but it is notable that he does still try to seduce Ingibjörg without enchantment first, perhaps more out of hope than expectation. When he is rejected, he turns to his magical powers to vitiate the rejection and remove Ingibjörg's ability to withhold consent.

The reputation of dwarves seems to vary somewhat in the Old Norse corpus; some are helpful, some are evil, some are neither. Jurij Kusmensko proposes that dwarfs are largely friendly figures in Norse mythology, although they can be ambivalent and 'Möndull är ett bra exempel för denna dubbla funktion' (Möndull is a good example of this double function).²⁰ Ármann Jakobsson identifies Möndull 'more as a knave than an antagonist with trickster-like features such as his double character, his amorality, and trickery, and his status as superhuman and animalistic at the same time'.²¹ I would argue that Möndull is truly antagonistic during the Björn/Ingibjörg episode of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, having committed numerous unspeakable crimes that are so obvious and conniving that he is, momentarily at least, the absolute villain of the story. However, as soon as he is captured and interrogated by Hrólfr, his nature changes completely and he adopts the role of the grateful dwarf and the subservient coward. He goes from occupying the 'malevolent role' to a being a 'beneficent agent'.²² Möndull repeatedly rapes Ingibjörg for the purpose of satisfying his lust and desire for revenge. This is certainly depicted as villainous, perhaps even as evil. Regardless, he goes on to become one of Hrólfr's allies and Hrólfr even declares that 'allir skyldi hans ráð hafa ok hann vildi gjarna hans föruneysi þiggja' (everyone should follow [Möndull's] advice and he

²⁰ Jurij Kusmenko, "Samer som övernaturliga väsen i fornnordisk litteratur," *Scandinavistica Vilnensis* 9 (2014): 74.

²¹ Ármann Jakobsson, "Enabling Love: Dwarfs in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances," in *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland: Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, ed. Johanna Denzin and Kirsten Wolf (Ithaca, NY: University of Cornell Press, 2008), 193, n. 46.

²² John D. Martin, "Hreggviðr's Revenge: Supernatural Forces in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*," *Scandinavian Studies* 70, no. 3 (1998): 320.

was eager to receive his company).²³ As with Oddr and Bósi, Möndull's sexually-violent inclinations do not condemn him for the rest of the saga, at least in the eyes of Hrólfr, who is ultimately framed as morally good.

In raping Ingibjörg, Möndull is motivated not only by lust but also, dually, by contempt.²⁴ Paul Battles outlines dwarves' definitive binary behaviours of reciprocity: they are either grateful or vengeful depending on their treatment.²⁵ Vilhjálmr in *Sigurðar saga þögla* verbalises this in regard to a wider topology of supernatural beings but his words are clearly largely in reference to his dwarven self:

„nær öll tröll og álfar eru hefnisöm“, segir hann, „ef þeim er misgert eða misboðið, og eigi síður leggja þau kapp á að launa vel, ef þeim er vel gert“²⁶ (Appendix I:2:VII:3)

However, lust and the desire to attain a noble woman are Möndull's self-declared original motivators:

Fór ek þess erendis hingat, at ek ætlaði at heilla Þóru jarlsdóttur eða Ingibjörgu ok hafa þær burtu með mér. En fyrir því at Björn sá gerst, hvern ek var, þá vildi ek svá fyrir koma honum.”²⁷ (Appendix I:2:VII:4)

Möndull's destruction of Björn for sensing his treacherous nature dovetails with his ultimate aim: to capture a woman. The last we hear of him also relates to such desires; Battles points out that ‘the Möndul-episode in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* is framed by references to his violent desire for human women’.²⁸ Indeed, the fact that Möndull ‘never loses his appetite for noble women’ frames his exit from the saga.²⁹

²³ *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 237.

²⁴ Paul Battles, “Dwarfs in Germanic Literature: *Deutsche Mythologie* or Grimm's Myths,” in *The Shadow-Walkers: Jacob Grimm's Mythology of the Monstrous*, ed. Tom Shippey (Tempe, Arizona: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 47.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 46. The ‘grateful dwarf’ motif was first outlined by Helmut de Boor, who found it to be their secondary characteristic after smithing, “Der Zwerg in Skandinavien,” in *Festschrift Eugen Mogk, zum 70. Geburtstag, 19. Juli 1924*, ed. Elisabeth Karg-Gasterstädt (Halle an der Saale: M. Niemeyer, 1924), 553.

²⁶ *Sigurðar saga þögla*, 118.

²⁷ *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 230.

²⁸ Battles, “Dwarfs in Germanic Literature,” 47.

²⁹ Ármann Jakobsson, “Enabling Love: Dwarfs in Old Norse-Icelandic Romances,” 188.

dvergr tók orlof af Hrólfi, ok þakkaði hann honum sína fylgd ok gaf honum þá hluti, er hann vildi hafa. Gyða, systir Eireks konungs, hvarf burt ór Garðaríki, ok var þat geta sumra manna, at Möndull hafa haft hana burt með sér.³⁰ (Appendix I:2:VII:5)

Hrólfr is said to have given Möndull everything he had asked for right before the saga writer states that Möndull has kidnapped a princess. This indicates either that Möndull kidnaps Gyða unbeknownst to Hrólfr, an action emblematic of his insatiable lust, or that Gyða is part of what Möndull asks for, and Hrólfr allows him to take her. At the very least, Hrólfr turns a blind eye. This suggests, quite bleakly, that the dwarf is permitted to continue committing sexual violence against noble women because his magical attributes make him useful to Hrólfr: Möndull's usefulness counteracts his malevolence. Hrólfr's lenience towards his sexually-violent behaviour enables him to repeat offend without consequence. Although he is largely exonerated within the saga, he is not necessarily exonerated for the audience. His parting act — the kidnap of another woman — reminds the audience of the dwarf's fickle nature and insatiable lust for noble women.

INGIBJÖRG

Möndull is far more important to the overall saga and is a much more fleshed out character – albeit one constructed with existing dwarf motifs — than his victim, Ingibjörg. Her emotional reaction to the ordeal of being robbed of her memory, physically transformed and raped for seven nights is simply to thank Hrólfr for saving her, and even the construction of this sentence is rendered plurally by the narrator, with only Björn being mentioned by name: ‘Þökkuðu þau Björn Hrólfi’ (Björn *et al.* thanked Hrólfr).³¹ This clause, with its plural construction, only implicitly refers to Ingibjörg. Möndull, in contrast, is allowed to express his emotions regarding his own personal sense of loss:

³⁰ *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 266.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 230.

„Hefi ek hart af fengit okkrum viðskiptum ok þat harðast, at ek skilda við Ingibjörgu, en þó mun nú svá verða vera.“³² (Appendix I:2:VII:6)

Although the reader is surely not supposed to pity him for this — and this could be an instance of dry humour on the part of the saga writer — it is nonetheless significant that he is permitted to voice his woes while Ingibjörg is not.

Although Ingibjörg remains silent, the physical changes she undergoes during and after Möndull’s enchantment can be used to interpret her emotions. Besides forgetting Björn and showing affection to Möndull, she is said to be afflicted by an illness and to change in appearance: she first turns *blá* (dark; blue), and then becomes *bólgin* (swollen).

Blá

After Möndull fails to seduce Ingibjörg, she

tók krankleika nokkurn undarligan um vetrinn. Hún gerðist öll blá sem hel, en sinnaði um engan hlut, sem hún væri vitstola³³ (Appendix I:2:VII:7)

The word ‘blár’ has been the source of some consternation in Old Norse studies; Kirsten Wolf has convincingly argued that it denotes a dark colour, likely blue, and ‘is used to refer to black people’ but also has strong associations with death and the underworld.³⁴ It is also used for supernatural beings although in the latter case, *svartr*, rather than *blár*, conveys ‘negative associations’.³⁵ Dark skin is generally, however, a pejorative attribute in the Old Norse corpus. Introducing a character as having light or dark skin is an established mechanism for ‘conditioning audience reactions to a character’, according to Lars Lönnroth, who further argues that ‘Blond and beautiful persons will generally turn out to be good, while

³² Ibid., 231.

³³ Ibid., 222.

³⁴ Kirsten Wolf, “The Color Blue in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature,” *Scripta Islandica* 57 (2006): 74.

³⁵ Ibid., 72.

dark and ugly persons generally turn out at best to be rather problematic'.³⁶ *Rígsþula*, dubbed by Rai Daimon a 'brochure on colorism', tracks the origin of the three social *ættir* (strata): firstly, 'Þræll' (Slave), who is described as having 'hǫrvi svartan' (black skin) and being 'fúlligt andlit' (ugly of face); secondly, 'Karl' (Householder), described as 'rauðan ok rjóðan' (red and ruddy); thirdly, 'Jarl' (Earl) described as follows: 'bleikt var hár, / bjartir vangar' (blond was his hair, bright his cheeks).³⁷ Dark skin thus signifies the lowest social stratum, and this potentially inflects Ingibjörg's subordination by Möndull: she is not just sexually subjugated, but socially too, and when she is not being sexually violated by the dwarf, she seems to be doing household chores, such as carrying firewood. He has successfully attained and subjugated a noble woman, and a woman who has previously rejected him at that. Möndull's disguised form is described as 'lágr á vöxt ok mjök riðvaxinn, fríðr at yfirlitum; utaneygðr var hann mjök' (short and very square-built, fair of face, and he had very bulgy eyes).³⁸ Through Hrólfr's eyes, we see the chromatic contrast between the enchanted Ingibjörg and the disguised Möndull:

Hann sér þá, hvar kona gengr ok hefir eld meðferðar. Þessi kona var blá at yfirlit sem klæði ok mjök bólgín. Hún kveykti eld. Litlu síðar kemr inn maðr í skarlatsbúnaði ok skarband um enni af gulli gert.³⁹ (Appendix I:2:VII:8)

He is dressed in scarlet and gold whereas she is dressed in dark colours that match her skin. If we assume — and the saga does not make it clear — that Möndull deliberately changes her skin colour, surely the fact that her dark skin closely resembles his own true skin-colour (he reverts to being 'svartr ok ljótr' [black and ugly] after being discovered by Hrólfr) suggests that he wants to subjugate her in as many different ways as he can.⁴⁰ He dresses her in drab

³⁶ Lars Lönnroth, "Rhetorical Persuasion in the Sagas," *Scandinavian Studies* 42, no. 2 (1970): 166; 167.

³⁷ Rei Daimon, "How White is Heimdallr?," *Viator* 51, no. 1 (2020): 125; *Rígsþula*, 450, sts. 7; 8; 452, st. 19; 455, st. 32.

³⁸ *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, 220.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

clothes while he is robed in splendour, and darkens her skin while his is light, thereby making her (by Old Norse beauty standards) less attractive and seemingly of a lower class. Dwarves often try and seduce higher class women, and in this instance Möndull forces Ingibjörg to be seduced and manipulates her social status to be lower than his, going against the established order. Balance is restored when his skin turns dark and he restores hers to white:

ok var hann svartr ok ljótr eftir skapan sinni. Leysti hann Björn, en færði Ingibjörgu ór klæðum ok smurði hörund hennar með góðum smyrslum ok gaf henni minnisveig at drekka, ok vitkaðist hún þá skjótt, en hvítnaði hörundit, ok tók þá heilsu sína ok týndi allri ást við dverginn. Þökkuðu þau Björn Hrólfi, sem verðugt var.⁴¹ (Appendix I:2:VII:9)

The way Möndull and Ingibjörg's skin tones change in tandem binds her to him. He is in control not just of her mind and body but her outward appearance and, implicitly, how society would perceive her. Although her colour changes before his sexual abuse of her begins, the fact that this change endures and is further augmented by her swelling suggests that he contaminates her not just through enchantment but also through his sexual abuse of her.

Dark skin is also a recurrent feature of supernatural beings and so Ingibjörg's changes in appearance could be constructed as a symptom of demonism. Giantesses 'frequently appear as black, hideous beings, dressed in skins and of great size and strength'.⁴² Since Ingibjörg is described as *bólginn*, as I will discuss below, this may be a reference to a giantess-like build and skin colour, thus further constructing her as monstrous. Philip Lavender has also proposed a possible parallel between Ingibjörg and Glámr in *Grettis saga*, stating that 'Ingibjörg turns blue and depraved as a result of some wizardry of Möndull, in a way that

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Davidson, "Fostering by Giants," 70. For instance the troll girl Þorsteinn chases in *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts* is described as 'en álots bæði svört ok blá' (in countenance both black and blue/dark), 360; the troll woman in *Gríms saga* is described as 'svartleit' (black-faced) and 'Svört var hún bæði á hár ok á hörund' (she was black in both hair and hide), 191.

might remind us loosely of, for example, the demonically possessed Glámr in *Grettis saga*.⁴³ Just like Ingibjörg, Glámr is described as ‘blár sem hel’ (*blue/dark* as hell) and, somewhat like Ingibjörg, Glámr was thought to have been possessed by a ‘meinvætrr’ (wight).⁴⁴ Similarly, when *Eyrbyggja saga*’s ‘vampirical ghost’ Þórólfr is exhumed, his corpse is described as ‘enn ófúinn ok inn trollsligsti at sjá; hann var blár sem hel ok digr sem naut’ (as yet unrotten and troll-like to behold, he was as *blue/dark* as hell and as big as a cow).⁴⁵ Albert Sturtevant suggests that *blá* probably denotes ‘the colour of the living dead’; it may be, therefore, that this colour is not just supposed to demonise Ingibjörg but to make her less than alive, almost dead.⁴⁶ Hel herself is described by Snorri Sturluson as ‘blá hálf en hálf með hǫrundar lit’ (half *blue/dark* and half flesh-coloured).⁴⁷ Compounding this is the fact that Ingibjörg is ‘vitstola’: metaphorically dead to the world.

In the absence of verbal emotional expression, the physical changes Ingibjörg undergoes may, however — be indicative of emotional reaction to her ordeal. According to Joanna Bourke, ‘The intense focus on the body as marker of identity and as a locus of truth is a profoundly modern conception’ and thus the violation of the body as a violation of the self is likewise a new concept.⁴⁸ However, ‘In Old Norse-Icelandic sources, literary and legal, the body is expressive and the message it communicates is value’ and the ‘body is something to be read and heeded’ because of its potential ‘as an accurate indicator of an individual’s character and humanity’.⁴⁹ There is, accordingly, a strong association between emotive

⁴³ Philip Lavender, “‘Sumar eptir fornkvæðum eðr fróðum mönnum ok stundum eptir fornum bókum’: Some Observations on the Sources of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*,” *Scandinavian Studies* 90, no. 1 (2018): 89, no. 13.

⁴⁴ *Grettis saga*, 112.

⁴⁵ Ármann Jakobsson, “Vampires and Watchmen: Categorizing the Mediaeval Icelandic Undead,” *JEGP* 110, no. 3 (2011): 296; *Eyrbyggja saga*, 169–70.

⁴⁶ Albert Morey Sturtevant, “The Use of Colors in the Elder Edda,” *Germanic Review* 13 (1938): 298.

⁴⁷ *Gylfaginning*, 27.

⁴⁸ Bourke, *Rape: A History*, 425.

⁴⁹ Eichhorn-Mulligan, “Old Norse-Icelandic Bodies,” 198; 206; 200.

reactions and changes in skin colour. In *Njáls saga*, after Hildigunnr advises him to avenge Hǫskuldr,

Flosi brá svá við, at hann var í andliti stundum rauðr sem blóð, en stundum fólr sem gras, en stundum blár sem hel.⁵⁰ (Appendix I:2:VII:10)

Ívarr the Boneless similarly turns ‘blár’ after hearing of his father’s death and

litr hans var stundum rauðr, enn stundum blár, enn lotum var hann bleikr, ok hann var svá þrútinn, at hans hörund var alt blásit af þeim grimmleik, er í brjósti hans var.⁵¹ (Appendix I:2:VII:11)

However, just because both Ívarr and Ingibjörg swell and turn *blár*, this does not necessarily mean that they are experiencing the same emotions, especially given the discrepancy in the events and context surrounding their physical change in colour and size. Certainly, Ívarr’s changes in facial colour are rapid and likely temporary, whereas Ingibjörg’s *blá* hue seems fixed for the duration of her enchantment; it may, therefore, indicate a permanent emotional state indicating an extreme negative emotion such as grief, anger or fear, and/or a change of physicality designed to imply Otherness and possibly a liminal state of not-quite-being.

Bólgin

Like changes in skin-colour, swelling can also be an indicator of an emotive response. Sarah Baccianti has highlighted the fact that ‘change in facial colour, in addition to swelling, as an externalization of an emotion is a common feature of Old Norse literature’.⁵² Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir elucidates how these

hydraulic metaphors for emotions are used to describe powerful and decidedly negative feelings such as anger and grief, at high-tension points in the narratives. During emotional upheaval, the fluids move towards and from the walls of the body,

⁵⁰ *Njáls saga*, 292.

⁵¹ *Ragnars saga*, 272.

⁵² Sarah Baccianti, “Swelling in Anger: Somatic Descriptors in Old English and Old Norse Literature,” in *Emotion and Medieval Textual Media*, ed. Mary C. Flannery (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 64.

manifesting in colour changes (pallor, blushing, and black colour), red patches, and bodily swelling.⁵³

Ingibjörg is described as ‘mjök bólgin’, and swelling is often associated with ‘extreme grief or anger’.⁵⁴ This certainly chimes with Ívarr’s change in skin-colour and physical swelling in reaction to the news that his father has been killed. Similarly, at the burial of his son Bøðvarr, Egill Skallagrímson swells so much that his tunic bursts off him.⁵⁵ In *Ólafs saga Odds*, Queen Þyri, feeling intense grief from the death of her husband, declares that her heart has ‘þrútit orðit í ómegni hugarins’ (become so swollen with the weakening of the mind).⁵⁶ Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, after Sigurðr dies, ‘svá var hon móðug, / myndi hon springa’ (she was so sorrowful that she would surely burst).⁵⁷ Þyri’s self-identified physical swelling as an effect of mental erosion chimes with Ingibjörg, as does Guðrún’s swelling because of her intense grief; swelling has such strong associations with strong, negative emotions that Ingibjörg’s physical changes may well be the result of mental turmoil or erosion.

The specific combination of *blár* and *bólginn* is used elsewhere in the corpus. There, too, it is used in an instance of supernatural malady. In the *Vitae Patrum*, a boy encounters a dragon; the vernacular version says,

hafde sveininn fyrir eina samt syn drekans mist vitzins, en af eitrfullum hans blæstri var hann bædi blár ok bolginn.⁵⁸ (Appendix I:2:VII:12)

This is a departure from the Latin text, in which the boy is described as ‘exanimis’ (lifeless) and ‘turgens’ (swollen).⁵⁹ Father Ammon ‘smyrr sveininn med vidsmiörvi, ok vard hann

⁵³ Brynja Þorgeirsdóttir, “Grotesque Emotions in Old Norse Literature: Swelling Bodies, Spurting Fluids, Tears of Hail,” in *Emotional Alterity in the Medieval North Sea World*, ed. Erin Sebo, Matthew Firth, and Daniel Anlezark (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 34.

⁵⁴ Baccianti, “Swelling in Anger,” 64.

⁵⁵ ‘þat eg sagn manna, at hann þrútnaði svá, at kyrtillinn rifnaði af honum ok svá hosurnar’ (some said that he swelled up so much that his tunic was rent from him, as were his hose), *Egils saga*, 244.

⁵⁶ *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*, 354.

⁵⁷ *Guðrunarkviða I*, 329, st. 2.

⁵⁸ *Vitæ Patrum*, 410.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

þegar heill' (smears the boy with an ointment and he was healed).⁶⁰ Being both *blár* and *bólginn* in both these cases indicates a supernatural ailment, and both the *svein* and Ingibjörg are said to have lost their wits, and both are cured with ointment.

Because we only see Ingibjörg's swelling through Hrólfr's eyes, it is uncertain whether it is an emotional side-effect or one designed to Other her. The prominence of swelling as an emotional signifier certainly makes the former possible; however, the associations of *hel* with the demonic make it equally possible that the latter is its purpose. Indeed, it may be both; whether or not there was authorial intent to construct this dual reading, a saga-savvy reader would perhaps automatically associate swelling with extreme emotion. Sif Rikhardsdottir has argued that the generic conventions of saga literature promulgate interpretations based on a reader's familiarity with these generic conventions:

The emotional subject of the text is thus created by the audience as they infuse the character's action with meaning drawn from their own conceptions of emotional interiority, behavioural codes (cultural as well as literary) and the signifying potential of the narrative framework and context.⁶¹

Just as a reader could infer emotionality from 'the somatic reaction of Egill's body' as it 'strains to contain the emotions evoked by the loss' of Bǫðvarr, in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* the convention of swelling as an emotive signifier might lead the reader well-versed in saga literature to imagine that Ingibjörg's swelling could be a somatic marker of extreme grief.⁶²

In curing her, Möndull humiliates her and Björn one last time; there is something innately sexual about the way he undresses her and smears her naked body in ointment. Nothing emotive is said about these actions, but these emotive silences speak for themselves. An audience could glean a great deal from the silence that terminates Ingibjörg and Björn's ordeal: Björn would surely feel furious that Möndull is once again undressing and intimately

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Sif Rikhardsdottir, *Emotion*, 77.

⁶² Ibid.

touching his wife; the bewitched Ingibjörg may feel some sort of pleasure due to her false love for her captor. From both of these reactions Möndull would presumably derive glee. Ingibjörg's total physical recovery may indicate that she recovers from her ordeal mentally as well, although this is not mentioned and it is unclear if she remembers her ordeal or has any trauma from it. After the episode, she and Björn are out of the saga, and so there is no sense of lasting damage done to her. When admonishing Möndull for his crimes, Björn says that he has 'svikit' his wife. The word *svíkja* connotes deception and betrayal rather than anything sexual or physical, as though this is the greater crime the dwarf has committed: his trickery, rather than his sexual and physical crimes against her.⁶³

Björn (and Möndull) are allowed to express their emotions to some degree. Ingibjörg does not, as far as the narrative shows, verbally express her plight. Rather her physical reactions hint at how enchantment enhances the violence of her sexual subjugation, corporeally altering her as a potential complement to her change in cognitive faculties. The effects of the dwarf's enchantment blur the boundaries between somatic markers, social class and supernatural Otherness. The duality of being the colour and shape of both demonic beings and staple saga figures in their most intensely emotively-charged states demonstrates how attending to aphrodisiacal magic can provide a window into the mind of the silent woman.

PARODY AND THE PRE-EMINENCE OF LIBIDO IN *ILLUGA SAGA* *GRÍÐARFÓSTRA*

The short *fornaldarsaga Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, 'whose earliest witness is a manuscript from the sixteenth century (AM 123 8vo)', presents an instance of a curse that results in

⁶³ ONP s.v. 'svíkja'.

warped perception and, it appears, in rape.⁶⁴ When the titular Illugi enters the cave of the ‘tröllkona’ (troll-woman) Gríðr, the narrator details her ugliness, but Illugi considers her daughter Hildr to be ‘svá fríð, at Illugi þóttist enga fríðari sét hafa (so beautiful, that he thought he had never seen anyone more beautiful).⁶⁵ Gríðr then orders ‘„at þú farir í hvílu með dóttur minni, ok leik allt þat, er þik lystir“’ (that you go to bed with my daughter and play all you [sg.] like”).⁶⁶ A dichotomy is specifically drawn between how Illugi and Hildr feel about this:

Gengr hann at hvílunni ok kastar klæðum, en kerling þjónar dóttur sinni, ok kómu þau í eina hvílu bæði. Illugi snýst at henni ok gerir sik blíðan, en hún gerir enga gleði af sér.⁶⁷ (Appendix I:2:VII:13)

Gríðr then, despite her earlier invitation, attempts to kill Illugi. When he shows no fear, she appears to be impressed and he sleeps with Hildr again: ‘Ferr Illugi nú ok snýst at konu sinni ok er nú allra blíðastr við hana’ (Illugi does this now and returns to her and now was as happy as could be with her).⁶⁸ At this point, Gríðr now reveals that she and her daughter are bound by a curse: Grímhíldr, her step-mother, had begun to have adulterous thoughts when Gríðr’s father had grown old, so she poisoned him and damned Gríðr to live in a cave as a ‘tröllkona’, cursing Hildr as follows:

„Dóttir þín skal fara með þér, ok hverr maðr, sem hana lítr, skal fella til hennar mikla ást. Þú skalt hvern myrða, er þú sér í hennar sæng“.⁶⁹ (Appendix I:2:VII:14)

The curse will be broken when a man shows no fear when confronted by Gríðr’s knife and accordingly, she gives Hildr to Illugi in marriage because ‘„þú hefir mér ór álögum komit“’ (“you have freed me from the spell”).⁷⁰

⁶⁴ *The Saga of Illugi, Gríður’s Foster-son*, ed. and trans. Philip Lavender (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2015), v.

⁶⁵ *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, 418.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 419.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 420.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 421.

Grímhildr's curse functions thus:

1. All men who see Hildr fall in love with her
2. The men must sleep with Hildr
3. Gríðr must kill them in Hildr's bed (unless they show no fear)

The stipulations of the spell are unclear and inconsistent in many ways. It certainly seems that, because of (1.), Illugi falls in love with Hildr. However, his infatuation is not said to wither once Grímhildr's spell is broken. This could be due either to an inconsistency regarding which conditions of the spell are breakable, or it could imply that Illugi truly fell in love with Hildr regardless of the spell. Björn, Illugi's adviser, 'kvað Illuga hana hafa sóttu í hella, ok segir Björn, at hún sé in mesta tröllkona' (said that Illugi had contracted maladies because of her in the cave, and Björn said that [Hildr] was the worse of troll-women).⁷¹ However, Björn has been repeatedly set up as villainous, described at the beginning of the saga as 'lyginn' (deceitful), and when Gríðr kills him for calling Hildr *tröllkona* there is no indication that anyone in the saga is particularly bothered.⁷²

Rule (2.) is necessitated by rule (3.): Hildr must endure having sex with every single man that sets eyes on her because these men must be physically present in her bed in order for her mother to try and kill them. Gríðr explains that she has killed sixteen men in total, and this means that Hildr has been forced to have sex with each of these men, against her own will — as is made very clear by the emotive description 'hún gerir enga gleði af sér' while Illugi 'gerir sik blíðan'. In turn, this means that these sixteen men were cursed to have sex against their will, similarly. If Illugi is himself enchanted, then he himself may not, without the influence of the curse, want to have sex with Hildr. That Gríðr must force her daughter to

⁷⁰ Ibid., 422.

⁷¹ Ibid., 423.

⁷² Ibid., 414.

have sex with the enchanted men, but that her daughter must be unwilling throughout, is part of the complex and confusing curse invoked by Grímhildr. It seems that Gríðr repeatedly yanks Illugi away from Hildr during the sexual intercourse itself and this *coitus interruptus* is, as Philip Lavender notes, ‘arguably played for humour’, the comedy heightened by Illugi’s unerring intent and his libido taking precedence over his life.⁷³

Lavender cautions, however, that despite this potential humour, ‘we should not fool ourselves into believing that we are not witnessing a rape scene’.⁷⁴ Hildr is not a blank, unemotive presence in the scene. She gets ‘enga gleði’ (no joy) from having sex with Illugi for the first time and becomes ‘ákafliða hrædd’ (exceedingly scared) when they are being attacked later on.⁷⁵ Gríðr is bound by the spell to force Illugi to have sex with Hildr, but then when he does so says

„Heyr þú, vándr herjansson, hví hugðir þú ek munda þola, at þú blygðaðir dóttur mína? Nei,” segir hún, “þú skalt fá dauðann í stað.”⁷⁶ (Appendix I:2:VII:15)

Whether the insult she throws at Illugi is an indicator of her true feelings about having to force her daughter to have sex with random strangers and become her ‘sexual prop’, or part of the spell which requires her to convince the men to have sex with her and only then become enraged and murder them, is hard to tell.⁷⁷ It could very well be both.

Nonetheless, when Illugi breaks the spell, Gríðr gives Hildr to him as a reward and we do not hear Hildr’s feelings on the matter: all that is said about their relationship from this point onwards is that they have no children. Hildr joins the ranks of the *foraldarsögur*’s

⁷³ *Saga of Illugi*, xxii.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, 422.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 419.

⁷⁷ Philip Lavender, *Long Lives of Short Sagas: The Irrepressibility of Narrative and the Case of Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra*, Studies in Northern Civilization (Copenhagen: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2020), 213.

‘marriageable damsels.’⁷⁸ The parodic elements of the text — the extremity of the curse, the layering of female curse upon female curse, as well as the indifference towards the enchantment and murder of sixteen men — all seem likely to be for comedic effect. The implementation of a ‘happily-ever-after’ accompanied by serial matrimony as an end to the characters’ narratives neatly enforces neatly the idea of the curse as comedic in nature rather than having any lasting impact on any of the characters’ emotions; as Lavender comments, ‘all the pieces must finally come to rest in the normative heterosexual patriarchal dream’.⁷⁹ While the very essence of the curse as being inherently disturbing is hinted at with the deeply uncomfortable contrast between Illugi’s fervour and Hildr’s reluctance, this discomfort is ultimately obscured by the humour engendered by Illugi’s libido and his fight with Gríðr, and further undermined by the blanket happiness of the narrative’s ending.

The excessive violence of Grímhildr’s curse pits woman against woman and prompts the infatuated Illugi to favour libido over life: misogynistic *topoi* restore peace at the end of the saga, as each woman is married off and the ill-effects of the curse are left in the cave. The curse has a host of victims, casting a mother as the author of the sexual violence done unto her daughter, and a series of faceless men as hapless victims of mental invasion, coercive assault and murder. It is even unclear how much Illugi consents to the sexual violence he enacts upon Hildr in the saga, as he himself may be affected by aphrodisiacal magic as an indirect result of the curse. Yet these issues are waved away by the breaking of the curse and any gravity that might be ascribed to the violent assaults is diminished by humour and thinly veiled metaphors for orgasm. Aphrodisiacal enchantment, in this brief saga, is a site for parody and violence without lasting consequence. The wounds made by the enchantment are only skin-deep, the breaking of the curse salve enough to cure the traumas of the magic.

⁷⁸ See above, Chapter III, n. 47.

⁷⁹ Lavender, *Long Lives*, 213.

FOUR WEDDINGS AND SEVERAL FUNERALS: MAGIC AND MATRIMONY IN *STURLAUGS SAGA STARFSAMA*

Sturlaug's saga starfsama features a particularly high concentration of deception and magical manipulation. All four of the lead male characters in this saga win their brides through deception or intimidation. First is Sturlaugr himself, who manages to marry Princess Ása after she rejects and humiliates him, by convincing the king to let him duel for Ása's hand on his behalf and thereafter take Ása 'til kaups' (as a reward) himself.⁸⁰ Second is Frosti who, at Sturlaugr's behest, enchants and marries Princess Mjöll in a dual deception which I discuss in some depth below. Third is the episode in Gautland. When Sturlaugr's forces overwhelm those of King Dagr, he gives the conquered monarch two options: 'hann skyldi gifta Áka dóttur sína eða deyja ella' (he must give his daughter to Áki in marriage or else die).⁸¹ Dagr chooses the former.⁸² And lastly is Framarr's fulfilment of his vow

at hann skal kominn í rekkju Ingigerðar, dóttur Ingvars konungs í Görðum austr, ok hana kysst hafa fyrir in þriðju jól eða deyja ella.⁸³ (Appendix I:2:VII:16)

With the exception of Frosti, all of these male characters are rewarded with princess brides in exchange for their violence. Magic is weaponised against one princess in particular, facilitating the saturation of deception used to ensnare Princess Mjöll.

MJÖLL

Princess Mjöll's episode in the saga is brief and self-contained. She is not mentioned before Sturlaugr demands that Frosti enchant her, nor is she referenced again after her death. This

⁸⁰ *Sturlaug's saga starfsama*, 117.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 152–3.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 153.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 147.

does not necessarily mean, however, that she is an unfamiliar character to the audience; Tom Grant has identified numerous other appearances of Mjöll and her father Snær across the corpus and suggests that they are legendary figures stemming from a much older tradition, with *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* consisting of one of their later appearances.⁸⁴ She is a source of knowledge to be tapped, as well as a nexus of power that must be extinguished before it can be activated. Perhaps as something of a fantastical figure, Mjöll becomes a more vulnerable site for the enactment of magical violence than are the other women of this saga, since her manipulation — facilitated by both a rune-stick and a bedtrick — is two-fold.

The Rune-Stick

The eponymous Sturlaugr has, at the point of Mjöll's introduction, spent much of the saga searching for the horn of the elusive aurochs and gives his sworn brother Frosti the following mission: ‘„Þú skalt fara norður á Finnmörk ok koma kefli þessu í kné dóttur Snæs konungs“’ (“You must go north to Finnmörk and bring this stick onto King Snær's daughter's knee”).⁸⁵ Frosti obeys the command, sails to Finnmörk, and tries to catch a glimpse of the princess but is prevented in doing so by a wooden fence encircling her bower. Winter passes, and one day an opening appears in the fence: he can at last see into Mjöll's chamber. This precipitates a voyeuristic scene as Frosti, undetected, gains visual access to the female sanctuary of the bower and is able to watch Mjöll in her private space and throw the stick into Mjöll's lap:

⁸⁴ Tom Grant, “Born of Snow: The Development of Snær *inn gamli* and His Family in Scandinavian Sources,” in *Sagas and the Circum-Baltic Arena: Pre-print Papers of the 18th International Saga Conference, Helsinki and Tallinn, 7th–14th August 2022*, ed. Frog et al. (Helsinki: Folklore Studies, Department of Cultures, University of Helsinki, 2022). Grant's recent work sheds lights on work on the mysterious figure of Snær *inn gamli* who ‘evades easy categorisation’, 107. Snær appears in numerous texts in both Danish and Icelandic texts as a seemingly legendary figure recurrent in genealogies. There are three other Icelandic texts in which Snær has a daughter or daughters, all with ‘snow’ names: *Ynglinga saga*, 28–9; *Hversu Noregr byggðist* in *Flateyjarbók*, 1:22; *Bárðar saga*, 102.

⁸⁵ *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, 147.

Hann gengr inn ok sér, at þar sitr kona á stóli ok kembir sér með gullkambi. Hárit lá á dýnunni hjá henni fagrt sem silki. Hann sér nú yfirlit hennar, ok þóttist hann eigi hafa sét fegri konu en þessa. Hann mátti eigi kyrr vera, er hann mátti eigi fram koma því, er hann vildi, tekr nú keflit ok kastar í kné hennar. Hún sópar frá sér hárinu ok tekr keflit ok lítr á. Ok er hún hafði á litit ok lesit, lítr hún út til skíðgarðsins ok brosti ok þótti allvænliga um þat, sem á var ristit keflinu.⁸⁶ (Appendix I:2:VII:17)

Later, Mjöll visits Frosti while everyone else is asleep and asks him, ‘„Er þat satt, er ritat er á keflit? ”’ (“Is it true, what’s carved into the stick?”).⁸⁷ When Frosti tells her it is, she says,

„Saman kemr þat með okkr Sturlaugi, því at sá er engi maðr undir heims sólunni, at mér finnist meira til. Vilda ek gjarna vera hans frilla, ef hann vildi svá. Munda ek eigi spara alla blíðu honum at veita með faðmlögum ok hæverskligum blíðubrögðum, kossu ok kærleikum.”⁸⁸ (Appendix I:2:VII:18)

With this, she and Frosti immediately set off for Sweden, apparently travelling by magical means.

It is evident that Mjöll has been enchanted by the rune-stick that Frosti throws onto her lap and as a result is afflicted by sudden amorous devotion towards Sturlaugr. As far as the saga relates, Mjöll has never previously met (and potentially has never even heard of Sturlaugr), and it can therefore safely be assumed that the *kefli* had magical qualities. This is the only logical explanation for the fact that Mjöll, a princess, is immediately willing to become the mistress of a man with whom she has seemingly had no prior interaction. The effusiveness of the physical intimacy she wants to instigate with him is, in its excess, evidence of aphrodisiacal magic and she immediately sets off to be with Sturlaugr, appearing to magically transport herself and Frosti to Sweden. Upon their arrival, Sturlaugr makes it clear that Mjöll is his victim — ‘„Nú er genginn refr ór skorum”’ (“Now the fox is out of its

⁸⁶ Ibid., 148.

⁸⁷ Ibid.,

⁸⁸ Ibid., 148–9.

hole”) — and that the rune-stick was a method of bringing her to him so he could extract information from her about the ‘úrarhorn’ (aurochs horn).⁸⁹

The use of natural material to aphrodisiacally enchant a woman also occurs in *Hálfðanar saga Brönufostra*. After their romantic interlude, Brana tells Hálfðan to leave, but also instructs him to make the princess Marsibil fall in love with him. She says:

„hér eru grös þau, er ek vil gefa þér. Þau skaltu gefa konungsdóttur, ok muntu þá fá hennar ást. Þau hafa þá nátturu, ef hún leggur þau undir höfuð sér ok sefr á þeim, þá ann hún þér sem lífi sínu.“⁹⁰ (Appendix I:2:VII:19)

Hálfðan, under the guise of a merchant, gains entry to Óláfr’s court in England. Much like Framarr spying on Ingigerðr, Hrafn peering into Helga Bárðardóttir’s chamber, Sigurðr watching Brynhildr at her needlework in Heimir’s chamber, or Óðinn watching the sun-kissed body of the sleeping maid of Billing, Hálfðan is able to watch Marsibil in her private space.⁹¹ This is a recurring theme in the *fornaldarsögur*: invasion of space precipitates invasion of the mind and/or body. Just as Frosti hurls the *kefli* into Mjöll’s lap, so too does Hálfðan suggestively set the *grös* onto Marsibil’s.

A key part of the *grös*’ power evidently resides in their deictic placement under the head of the sleeping victim. Marsibil initially rejects the herbs when Hálfðan offers them to her but then takes them up and places them under her head to sleep upon them, without instruction. An implied aspect of the *grös*’ magic is that, upon touching them, the victim is compelled to do this. Marsibil appears to be aware of the infatuation’s artificiality: she draws a direct link between the herbs and her sudden love for Hálfðan. This knowledge does not appear to dampen her infatuation and speaks either to the intensity of the spell or to a lack of concern about the assault on her cognitive faculties.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 149.

⁹⁰ *Hálfðanar saga*, 305.

⁹¹ *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*, 155; *Bárðar saga*, see above, Chapter II, n. 69, *Völsunga saga*, 166; *Hávamál*, 341, st. 97.

While there are undeniable similarities between the aphrodisiacal enchantment of Mjöll and Marsibil, the very specific act of throwing a stick onto a woman's lap to cause her to be enamoured with a man also appears in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*. Princess Ólof of Valland is given the choice to marry either Beli or Jökull; when it becomes obvious that she prefers Beli, Jökull's ally 'varpaði Ógautan kefli í kné henni, en svá brá henni við þat, at hún neitaði Bela, en gekk at eiga Jökul' (Ógautan threw a stick onto her knees and she was so affected by this that she forsook Beli and went to marry Jökull).⁹² The sexual implications of a cylindrical piece of wood being thrown onto a woman's lap are obvious, although this episode diverges from that of Mjöll in that Ólof is affected merely by the touch of the stick, whereas Mjöll reads the runes before feeling their effect.

The aphrodisiacal rune-stick recurs across the Old Norse corpus. In *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*, a whalebone inscribed with runes is placed under a girl's pillow for similarly sexually coercive purposes. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir has identified this incident as a possible allusion to sexual assault: the scene in question concerns Helga, a young girl suffering from 'krömm mikil' (a long wasting sickness).⁹³ The source of the sickness is located by Egill: a whalebone carved with incorrect runes under her pillow. He cuts some new runes upon it and Helga slowly begins to recuperate, and it later transpires that a man had carved the runes for her when she rejected him:

En maðr sá, er Helgu hafði rúnar ristit, var þaðan skammt á brott; kom þat þá upp, at hann hafði beðit hennar, en Þorfinnr vildi eigi gipta hana; þá vildi bóndason gleþja hana, en hon vildi eigi; þá þóttisk hann rísta henni manrúnar, en hann kunni þat eigi, ok hafði hann þat ristit henni, er hon fekk meinsemi af.⁹⁴ (Appendix I:2:VII:20)

Jóhanna's reading of this incident proposes sexual misdemeanour on the part of the farmer's son: 'one wonders whether her sickness couldn't rather be attributed to the trauma of sexual

⁹² *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, 49.

⁹³ *Egils saga*, 229.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 238.

assault than to rune magic, and that the episode is a way of talking about rape and the pain it causes, whether consciously or not'.⁹⁵ Lars Lönnroth, too, has picked up on the sexually violent nature of the same scene in *Egils saga* and suggests that the sexual aspect may be masked in part due to the sexually repressive culture of medieval Iceland:

Liksom viktorianerna läste pornografi och gick på bordello i helmighet, synes islänningarna i smyg ha diktat *mansöngs kvæði eða vísur* och ristat runkavlar i syfte att väcka den älskades passioner.⁹⁶ (Appendix I:2:VII:21)

Egils saga contains the only attestation of the word *manrún* but aphrodisiacal runes appear frequently throughout the Old Norse corpus.⁹⁷ Most famously, in *Skírnismál*, Skírnir uses the following as a threat: 'Tamsvendi ek þik drep, / en ek þik temja mun, / mæ, at mínum munum' (I strike you with a taming-wand, so that I might tame you, girl, according to my wishes).⁹⁸ I have already noted the phallic aggression of Skírnir's threats against Gerðr.⁹⁹ He then specifically refers to three 'stafi' (staves) he intends to use to control her:

Þurs ríst ek þér
ok þrjá stafi,
ergi ok æði
ok óþola;
svá ek þat af ríst
sem ek þat á reist,
ef gørisk þarfar þess.¹⁰⁰ (Appendix I:2:VII:22)

Skírnir thus appears to threaten Gerðr with runes that he has carved on his 'tamsvendi' to imbue her with a lustful madness.

In *Hávamál*, Óðinn famously boasts of his ability to 'hverfa' (turn) the mind of a 'hvítarmri konu' (white-armed girl):

Þat kann ek it sextanda

⁹⁵ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Valkyrie*, 47.

⁹⁶ Lönnroth, "Fornisländska äktenskapsnormen," 164.

⁹⁷ ONP s.v. 'manrún'.

⁹⁸ *Skírnismál*, 385, st. 26.

⁹⁹ See above, Chapter I, n. 90.

¹⁰⁰ *Skírnismál*, 387, st. 36.

Ef ek vil ins svinna mans
 hafa geð allt ok gaman,
 hugi ek hverfi
 hvítarmri konu,
 ok sný ek hennar ǫllum sefa.¹⁰¹ (Appendix I:2:VII:23)

His Latin equivalent in *Gesta Danorum* uses an aphrodisiacal rune-stick to rape Rinda after her repeated rejections:

Quam protinus cortice carminibus adnotato contingens lymphanti similem reddidit, receptam toties iniuriam modesto ultionis genere insequitus.¹⁰² (Appendix I:2:VII:24)

This seems to be less of a direct means of enchanting Rinda to rape her and more of a punishment for her constant rejections. However, the combination of the runes, the piece of wood and the invocation of a frenzy within the context of sexual coercion certainly draws the episodes in *Skírnismál* and Saxo together.¹⁰³ Eventually Rinda falls ill and Othinus, disguised as a female nurse, ties her to her bed and rapes her before eventually curing her of her fever. Here, deception, disguise, and runic enchantment play into his long, drawn-out game of trying to rape Rinda. This has led to differing interpretations of the magic in this episode: Mitchell suggests that ‘Óðinn’s ‘success’ in Saxo is thus the result of his guileful nature, not magic’ and Richard Cole corroborates that this ‘rape does not rely on magical inducements.’¹⁰⁴ But according to John McKinnell,

Saxo probably distorted some features of this myth [...] Rinda falling ill by chance is [...] unconvincing: her illness/madness should be caused by the charm.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ *Hávamál*, 355, st. 161.

¹⁰² Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, 1:Liber Tertius, 164–6.

¹⁰³ That the ‘carminibus’ (spells) can be interpreted as runes seems clear if not just from context then the fact that Saxo describes how Danes recorded ‘carminibus’ using letters engraved on rocks and stones, surely referring to runes: ‘uerumetiam maiorum acta patrii sermonis carminibus uulgata lingue sue literis saxis ac rupibus insculpenda curasse’ (they saw that the letters of their own language were engraved on rocks and stones to retell those feats of their ancestors which had been made popular in the songs of their mother tongue), *ibid.*, 1:Præfatio, 6–7.

¹⁰⁴ Stephen A. Mitchell, *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*, The Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 79; Richard Cole, “The Threat of Induced Desire in *Skírnismál*,” in *Myth, Magic, and Memory in Early Scandinavian Narrative Culture: Studies in Honour of Stephen A. Mitchell*, ed. Jürg Glauser and Pernille Hermann, Acta Scandinavica (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 95.

¹⁰⁵ McKinnell, *Meeting the Other*, 159.

Given the other literary evidence that touching a rune-stick could cause a lustful frenzy or at least a romantic change of heart, I tend to agree with McKinnell.

Thus, although *Egils saga* contains the only verbal attestation of *manrúnar*, they seem to occur elsewhere in the corpus and twice in the *fornaldarsögur*. They inspire not only love in Mjöll towards Sturlaugr, but also spike an urge in her to lower her status in order to attain his affection: she, a princess, is eager to be his *frilla*. Like Ingibjörg, there is an element of degradation here, and Frosti — a proxy of Sturlaugr’s aphrodisiacal spell — is just as culpable in invading Mjöll’s privacy by peeking into her bower before throwing the rune-stick into her lap.

The Bedtrick

The rune-stick is not the only method of deception used to get Mjöll to relay her information about the *úrarhorn*. Now that she is enchanted to be in love with Sturlaugr, he demands that Frosti — who is, at this point, conveniently revealed to bear a striking resemblance to Sturlaugr — dress up as Sturlaugr to marry Mjöll, so that she thinks she is marrying Sturlaugr when in fact she is marrying Frosti. He then tells Frosti to ‘kemr í sæng hjá Mjöll konungsdóttir’ (come into the bed of Princess Mjöll) and ask her where the *úrarhorn* comes from. Mjöll, along with everyone else, is fooled by the disguise and ‘lítr allhýrliga til brúðgumans ok hyggr allgott til ráðanna’ (looks happily at her bridegroom and is very happy with how things are turning out).¹⁰⁶ In *Sturlaug’s saga*, this motif seems to function as a point of comedy. The last-minute observation that Frosti looks enough like Sturlaugr for Mjöll to be fooled seems contrived and the double-layering of the deception against Mjöll defies Occam’s razor. Why have Mjöll fall in love with Sturlaugr, only to have Frosti pretend to be

¹⁰⁶ *Sturlaug’s saga starfsama*, 150.

Sturlaugr? Why not just have her fall in love with Frosti, who is clearly himself sexually interested in her? The contrivance of the deception makes her a fool twice over. Not only has Mjöll had her mind altered by aphrodisiacal magic to love Sturlaugr, but she is also tricked into having sex with Frosti posing as Sturlaugr, and thus falls victim to the bedtrick, a motif widespread in medieval literature. This is, in essence, when a person is deceived into having sex with someone, because they believe it is someone else. This deception can occur either through magic or another form of trickery. Crucially, the subject of the bedtrick acts with intent to seduce via deceit, which brings to mind Larson's sexual deception tort. Wendy Doniger has written extensively on the sexually violent nature of the bedtrick:

Though it is less physically violent than a brutal physical rape, the bedtrick is a kind of delayed-reaction rape, a retroactive or retrospective rape, a rape with a time lag: first it fucks your body, and later it fucks your mind. Your body says yes, and then, later, your mind says no.¹⁰⁷

When it comes to the bedtrick, certain questions are raised about the relationship between body and mind and the extent to which the *fornaldarsögur* portray the bedtrick as an assault against body and/or mind. Mjöll does not, it seems, find out about her aphrodisiacal enchantment, or the bedtrick that ensues, before her fiery death and thus she is denied any revelation about her deception. In *Völsunga saga*, meanwhile, the magical bedtrick is a prominent theme and this has strong implications for the portrayal of enchantment and conceptions of consent in the *fornaldarsögur*. While Brynhildr and Sigurðr (body-swapped with Gunnarr) do not have sex, the deception is an egregious violation to Brynhildr.

Sigurðr, disguised as Gunnarr, jumps through the ring of fire, he and Brynhildr lie side by side in bed, separated by a sword, and the saga therefore makes it extremely clear that they do not have sex:

¹⁰⁷ Wendy Doniger, *The Bedtrick: Tales of Sex and Masquerade*, *Worlds of Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 79.

Þar dvelst hann þrjár nætr, ok búa eina rekkju. Hann tekur sverðit Gram ok leggur í meðal þeira bert.¹⁰⁸ (Appendix I:2:VII:25)

Sigurðr does, however, take the ring Andvaranaut from her finger and, although this is with her knowledge and acquiescence, she believes that Gunnarr, not Sigurðr, is enacting this. Following Albrecht Classen's logic that Siegfried's theft of Brynhildr's belt and ring is a symbolic rape in the *Nibelungenlied*, we might interpret Sigurðr's theft of Andvaranaut from Brynhildr's finger similarly.¹⁰⁹ It is this symbolic evidence that Guðrún later uses to prove to Brynhildr that she has been tricked. Upon seeing this ring, Brynhildr realises that she has married Gunnarr under false pretences and, 'Þá fölnar hún, sem hún dauð væri' (Then she turned pale, as if she were dead).¹¹⁰

For Brynhildr, the deception is such a profound invasion of her self that it is earth-shattering. She repeatedly laments the deception: '„vissu þér þat, at þér véltuð mik, ok þess skal hefna“' ("you knew that you were tricking me, and I shall have vengeance for this"); '„Mér var engi væri í þessum svikum“' ("No one was worse to me in this fraudulence"); '„þér svikuð mik frá öllu yndi“' ("you have tricked all delight from me").¹¹¹ Although the bedtrick is therefore not a physical sexual assault against Brynhildr, her reactions resonate strongly with Doniger's appraisal of the reactions of those who find out they have been bedtricked:

The reactions of people who discover that they have been the victims of a bedtrick include disbelief, fury, sadness, embarrassment, loss of self-esteem, and sometimes madness. Most texts don't even describe the reactions to the bedtrick, assuming that they are obvious: the experience of loss, imperfection, and abandonment. Since we tend to believe that the sexual act reveals the most intimate truth about our partners and ourselves, our deepest sense of self may be challenged when this assumption is shattered by the violent deception of the bedtrick.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ *Völsunga saga*, 177.

¹⁰⁹ Classen, *Sexual Violence*, 44.

¹¹⁰ *Völsunga saga*, 179.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 180; 184; 186.

¹¹² Doniger, *Bedtrick*, 78.

Brynhildr's desolation following the revelation reveals the deep, open and unhealing mental wounds caused by the bedtrick and the intensity of the unforgivable violation done to her by Sigurðr and Gunnarr. The *mise-en-scène* of Brynhildr's suicide is, as Judy Quinn has suggested, carefully curated: Brynhildr orders that her servants ‘„Látið þar á milli okkar brugðit sverð sem fyrr, er vit stigum á einn beð ok hétum þá hjóna nafni”’ (“Lay between us the drawn sword just as it was when we climbed into one bed and swore to marry”).¹¹³ Quinn proposes that ‘the arrangement of the bodies on the pyre, as though they were reliving their first night together, is celebratory of their betrothal, despite the uncomfortable reality that the couple dies in separate blood-soaked beds’.¹¹⁴ However, given that Sigurðr was in the guise of Gunnarr when the marriage vow was made, and that this illusion led to the demise of Brynhildr and Sigurðr's relationship and thus both of their deaths, it seems to me that Brynhildr surely reconstructs this falsely romantic scene for her death as an evocation of this key, traumatic memory.

This is a marked contrast to Mjöll. After she has related the origins of the *úrarhorn* to Frosti, who she believes to be Sturlaugr, a conversation overheard by the real Sturlaugr, he suddenly has the pair of them killed:

gengr Sturlaugr í burt, ok er nú eldr lagðr í skemmuna ok brennd at köldum kolum Frosti ok Mjöll. létu þau þar svá líf sitt. Váru þetta allt ráð Véfrejju, því at Mjöll var svá fjöllkunnig, at hún mundi þegar kastat hafa fjölkynngi einhverju á þau Sturlaug ok Véfrejju, ef hún hefði þetta fyrir vitat.¹¹⁵ (Appendix I:2:VII:26)

Twice-duped, her mind addled and deceived into sex with the wrong man, her double deception ends in her brutal murder. Overall, Mjöll gets a particularly raw deal: she is enchanted into loving Sturlaugr, marries a man disguised as Sturlaugr, and then on their

¹¹³ *Völsunga saga*, 193–4.

¹¹⁴ Quinn, “Scenes of Vindication,” 90.

¹¹⁵ *Sturlaug's saga starfsama*, 151–2.

wedding night is burnt to cinders with her false groom. It is explained that Sturlaugr kills her because she practices magic herself and presumably, if she became aware of the deception that had been used on her, she would have taken vengeance. Fooled twice over and incinerated, there is no space for a revelation, no space for ‘a rape with a time-lag’. There is just a rape and then a murder. The multiple strands of female submission and the eradication of female experience in the saga do not allow for a recognition of deception as in the case of Brynhildr: Mjöll’s body only exists as a site of voyeurism and violence, her mind a space for Sturlaugr and Frosti to play in before mining it for information and her body for sexual gratification, respectively. Her absence from the saga until her enchantment effectively depersonalises her. Ingigerðr, by contrast, is not silent, but silenced. The layers of deception, facilitated by enchantment, used against these two women of *Sturlaug’s saga* points to an inevitability of submission, with men finding inventive and ultimately inescapable means of bending women to their will.

THE REALITY OF MAGIC: DWARVES, RUNE-STICKS, AND ORCHIDS

While each of the episodes I have discussed seems fantastical, it is possible that certain aspects of the enchantments in the *fornaldarsögur* are not merely unrealistic products of male fantasy, or even just a method of framing the uncomfortable truths of reality with the distance of the unreal. This section explores the possibility that, in addition to the legal provision for magic in law codes, the specifics of certain aphrodisiacal aspects of the *fornaldarsögur* may have been considered to be very real to a Norse audience and therefore equally real threats to a female audience.

DWARVES

It is possible that some real fears about dwarves lingered in the minds of Icelanders; such fears did potentially exist in other societies with cognate legends and shared ancestral figures from folklore. Battles has suggested that there were some genuine fears surrounding dwarves in Anglo-Saxon culture. He proposes that certain Anglo-Saxon remedies indicate a belief or residual belief that ‘dwarfs were seen as agents of various diseases’ and ‘were thought to have the power to influence human health’¹¹⁶ Battles also suggests that the plant ‘dwarf dwos(t)le’ was ‘probably named for its use in counteracting the harmful influence of dwarfs’.¹¹⁷ The Old English *Metrical Charm 3*, ‘Wið Dweorf’, moreover, depicts a dwarf engaging in ‘witch-riding’, and thus ‘testifies vividly to a belief in the “tangible activity” of dwarfs’.¹¹⁸ David Gay has pointed out that the concept of witch-riding survives in Icelandic folktale.¹¹⁹ Recent research by Caroline Batten suggests that runic charms from across the North Atlantic depict illness not as a consequence of humoral imbalance, but the incursion of alien matter and forces into the body, usually described as adversarial, inhuman entities: *þursar* (ogres), *álfar* (elves), *dvergar* (dwarves) and demons.¹²⁰ They point to an eighth-century fragment of human cranium inscribed with a charm to treat pain caused by a dwarf.¹²¹

ulfur auk upin auk hutior ‘ hialb buri (i)s uipr ¶ þaima uiarki auk tuirk unin buur.

Ulfur ok Óðinn ok Há<tiur>. Hjalp <buri> er viðr þeima verki. Ok dverg unninn. Bour(r).

¹¹⁶ Battles, “Dwarfs in Germanic Literature,” 35.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 35. In the charm, which David E. Gay suggests is a ‘charm against witch-riding’, a dwarf ‘hæfde him his haman on handa, cwæð þæt þu his hæncgest wære’ (had a bridle in his hand and said you were his steed’ and proceeds to ride his victim, “Against a Dwarf: Edited Text and Source Details,” *Old English Poetry in Facsimile*, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2019, l. 18; “Anglo-Saxon Metrical Charm 3 Against a Dwarf: A Charm against Witch-Riding?,” *Folklore* 99, no. 2 (1988).

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 174–5.

¹²⁰ Caroline Batten, “Spears and Spikes: Illness, Emotion and Bodily Invasion in Old Norse Abscess Narratives,” *Emotions History Culture Society* 8, no. 1 (2024): 80–1.

¹²¹ Ibid., 86.

(Ulfr and Óðinn and Há-<tiur>. Help is <buri> against that pain. And the dwarf (is) conquered. Bourr.)¹²²

Sexually violent dwarves such as Möndull may, therefore, have some perceived basis in medieval Icelandic reality.

RUNE-STICKS

Indeed, archaeological runic evidence suggests that fear of aphrodisiacal magic was widespread in the Medieval North. About *Skírnismál*, for instance, Carolyne Larrington suggests ‘that some of the contemporary audience of the poem would have believed that runic curses could be effectively deployed in the real world to affect women’s sexual response’.¹²³ Thus, the threats levelled against Mjöll, Ólof, Helga, Gerðr, and Rinda may not just be a product of mythology. While Mindy MacLeod cogently points out that ‘The runic episodes described in these Icelandic sagas are of literary rather than historical interest and of little help in uncovering the extent of medieval runic practices’, legal and archaeological evidence of the perceived reality of magic can in turn help us to view the literature as reflective of potentially real fears, rather than mere fictional constructions.¹²⁴ There is a wealth of archaeological material surviving, especially from the eleventh century onwards, that bear inscriptions of clear relevance to the present study.¹²⁵

¹²² Runor, ‘DR EM85;151B’.

¹²³ Larrington, “Mær and Munr,” 5. Larrington draws here from Else Mundal and Gro Steinsland, “Kvinner og medisinsk magi,” in *Kvinnors rosengård: Medeltidskvinnors liv och hälsa, lust och barnafödande: Föredrag från nordiska tvärveten- skapliga symposier i Århus august 1985 och Visby september 1987*, ed. Hedda Gunneng et al. (Stockholm: Centrum för kvinnoforskning vid Stockholms Universitet, 1989).

¹²⁴ Mindy MacLeod, “*Bandrúnir* in Icelandic Sagas,” *Scripta Islandica* 52 (2001): 47.

¹²⁵ Katja Schulz notes that this may simply be down to preservation makeup: ‘From the middle of the eleventh century onwards, the number of preserved wooden or bone staves whose sole purpose was to carry an inscription increased dramatically. Their comparative scarcity in earlier times, however, may be due to the simple fact that wood or bone decays faster than stone or metal’, “Inscriptions In Old Norse Literature,” in *Writing Beyond Pen and Parchment*, ed. Ricarda Wagner, Christine Neufeld, and Ludger Lieb (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 43.

According to James E. Knirk’s findings, ‘some 3% of the corpus of Norwegian inscriptions with younger runes concerns love or eroticism’.¹²⁶ I have compiled a database of rune-sticks relating to love in Appendix III. Many of these love-themed objects bear innocent declarations of love such as N A36, a cow rib from Oslo which reads **an sa × þer × es × risti × runa þesar × þortis** *Ann sá þér, er risti rúnar þessar, Þordís!* (He who carved these runes loves you, Þordís!). Other inscriptions — especially in light of the literary evidence — reveal potentially less benign romantic intentions that are possibly designed to be aphrodisiacal charms. The other side of N A36 for example, reads (in a different hand) **þora ek kan kilia** *Þóra! Ek kann gilja* (Þóra! I can beguile...), which might add a more sinister dimension to the first side, with its apparently innocent amorous declaration. Item N A41 from Oslo bears the phrase **kYs mik** *kyss mik* (kiss me):



Fig. 10. ‘Kiss me’ cow bone, dated 1075-1100¹²⁷

Of course, this could be an innocent request. But if some rune-sticks were believed to have aphrodisiacal properties, then it could reveal a layer of coercion: a command, rather than a request. A Danish *rúnakefli* (ca. 900–1050) DR EM85;350 reads **§A uan þik iba ‘ fiukati ‘**

¹²⁶ James E. Knirk, “Love and Eroticism in Medieval Norwegian Runic Inscriptions,” in *Die Faszination des Verborgenen und seine Entschlüsselung – Rāði sār kunni: Beiträge zur Runologie, skandinavistischen Mediävistik und germanischen Sprachwissenschaft*, ed. Jana Krüger et al. (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 223.

¹²⁷ Ann Christine Eek, ‘Kiss me!’ Cow bone from Oslo, Museum of Cultural History.

osa ‘ auaoubi §B (f)u ~ (n)iluiiai ... §A *Vann þik æva fjúkandi, Ása(?)* ... §B (The storming one never won you over, Ása has luck in struggle), and Richard Cole suggests that this is ‘either a spell or a love letter’.¹²⁸ This dual interpretation showcases how runic inscriptions centred around love can easily be construed as innocent amorous declarations or as curses, designed to force the spell’s object into romantic or sexual subjugation.

As shown in Appendix III, I have identified around 30 of these rune-sticks as containing messages relating to love, with 19 of these being potential avowals of love, 12 containing requests or demands, and around 19 pertaining to possible aphrodisiacal magic.¹²⁹ N B628 bears the rather crude message:

§A *rannuæih ~ rauþu (s)(k)a--(u) : st[^]erþ* §B *þat : se : mæira : in : man[^]ns:-æþr*
~ *ok : min[^]na : en* §C *hæstræþr* §D *a*

§A *Rannveig Rauðu ska[lt]u streða/serða.* §B *Þat sé meira enn manns[r]eðr ok minna enn* §C *hestreðr.* §D ...

(§ A You will fuck Rannveig the red. §B It will be bigger than a man’s prick and smaller than a horse’s prick) (Appendix III:N B628).

This could be some sort of instruction or expression of desire; if a curse then it denotes a particular graphic desire levelled at Rannveig the Red. The most obvious example of aphrodisiacal magic, the four-sided N B257 certainly seems, at least in part, to be a curse:



Fig. 11. N B257

¹²⁸ Richard Cole, “Runes and Rye: Administration in Denmark and the Emergence of the Younger Futhark, 500–800,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 65, no. 4 (2023): 836.

¹²⁹ Many of these are part of a find in Bergen which marked the largest find of medieval rune-sticks, with 672 of them discovered due to a fire in Bryggen.

One side of this item bears a striking resemblance to *Skírnismál*, reading:

§C e[^]k sende[^]r : þer : ek se a þe[^]r : ylhia[^]r : e[^]rhi o[^]k oþola : a þe[^]r : rini :
uþole : a[^]uk : i(a)luns : moþ : sittu : ald[^]ri : sop þu : ald[^]r(i) –

§C *Ek sendi þér, ek sé á þér, / ylgjar ergi ok óþola. / Á þér renni óþoli ok jötuns móð.
/ Sittu aldri, soþú aldri...*

(§C I send on you, I chant onto you the she-wolf's perversion and intolerable longing. May unsatisfied longing come upon on you and the giant's rage May you never (be able to) sit (still), may you never sleep ...) (Appendix III:N B257)

Daniel Sävborg discusses the importance of using this rune-stick to interpret *Skírnismál* as it suggests that ‘We do not seem to have to do with literary loans, or with a motif in narrative discourse at all, but rather with a native tradition of magic in real life’.¹³⁰ Likewise, the archaeological reality of these ‘enchanted’ rune-sticks brings the threats levelled at the women of the *fornaldarsögur* out of fantasy and into a perceived reality. Records of the power of aphrodisiacal runes survive into the early modern period. A sixteenth-century Icelandic grimoire, produced under the wave of fear surrounding sorcery that crashed through the period, contains two spells for those who wish to ‘förhäxa en kvinna, så att hon icke går till någon annan än dig’ (hex a girl so that she loves no one but you).¹³¹ Both invoke Óðinn and his knowledge of ‘kvinnorunor’ (women-runes). It appears, from the grimoire, that Óðinn and his capabilities in ‘turning the mind of women’ may have been a source of inspiration to men who were unsuccessful with women.

ORCHIDS

Rune-sticks do not appear to be the only material evidence of the perceived reality of magic in relation to the texts I have discussed. The effect of the *grös* given by Brana to Hálfðan to

¹³⁰ Daniel Sävborg, “Painful Love and Desire in *Skírnismál*,” *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* 74 (2022): 506.

¹³¹ Nat. Lindqvist, *En isländsk svartkonstbok från 1500-talet* (Uppsala: Appelbergs Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1921), 57–61.

enchant Marsibil, may very well have been viewed by a contemporary audience as a reality rather than an aspect of what we might now call the ‘fantastical’. A particular type of orchid referred to in Iceland as *brönugras* is, according to folkloric sources, derived from Brana’s name in *Hálfðanar saaga Brönufóstra* and the root of this plant is believed, when placed under the pillow of an intended lover, to manifest love.¹³² Since the aphrodisiacal qualities of the orchid have been touted for millennia, presumably the naming of the flower after Brana post-dates its associations in Iceland with inducing love.¹³³ It is possible therefore that, rather than just a literary motif, these *grös*, which then took on Brana’s name, reference a botanical product genuinely believed to have the power to make someone fall in love with the person who put them under their pillow. While this may seem to transcend reality by today’s standards, the tubers of *brönugras* (*Dactylorhiza maculata*) and closely-related species of orchid have been found to have real aphrodisiacal effects as well as improving the ‘health of sexual organs’, and this lends credibility to the idea that an audience of *Hálfðanar saga* may well have believed Brana’s ‘herbs’ to possess love-inducing qualities.¹³⁴ The ability to improve ‘the functionality of the sexual organ’ is a far cry from being able to permanently alter someone’s mind and inspire the love Marsibil exhibits towards Hálfðan, but this scientific reality may have underpinned the perceived reality of aphrodisiacal magic for

¹³² Jón Árnason, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1862), 646.

¹³³ According to John Scarborough, the orchid (‘ὄρχις’ literally meaning ‘testicle’) has long been noted for its aphrodisiacal qualities since at least the fourth century BCE, by Theophrastus of Eresus, “The Pharmacology of Sacred Plants, Herbs, and Roots,” in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Dirk Obbink and Christopher A. Faraone (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 148; Theophrastus, *Historia Plantarum*, ed. Friedrich Wimmer, *His Opera Quae Supersunt Omnia* (Vratislaviae: Apud Ferdinandum Hirt, 1842), 339–43.

¹³⁴ Hamed Haddad Kashani et al., “The Effect of Aqueous Extract of Salep Prepared from Root-Tubers of *Dactylorhiza maculata* (Orchidaceae) on the Testes and Sexual Hormones of Immature Male Mice,” *Journal of Medicinal Plants Research* 6, no. 24 (2012): 4105.

medieval Icelanders.¹³⁵ The potentially real aphrodisiacal qualities of this plant demonstrate the hazy boundaries between magic and reality in regards to love magic.

Again and again, we observe men refusing to take ‘no’ for an answer: Möndull, Illugi, Framarr, Frosti, Sturlaugr, Hálfðan, Gunnarr. These texts contain astounding narrative contrivances that seem to function only to exaggerate the manifold ways in which women can be subjected to sexual violence, with enchantment presenting opportunities for exoneration of the rapist, vitiation of consent of the victim, hyperbole and, perhaps most concerningly of all, humour. The fact that to contemporary audiences, dwarves, *manrúnar*, and *brönugras* may all have had perceived — and in the case of the latter, real — aphrodisiacal functionalities makes it clear that the attempts made by men to subject women to sexual violence may have been the source of a real fear, including fears that a mind could be permanently altered, as is the case with Mjöll and Marsibil. The revelation of aphrodisiacal deception is — in the case of Brynhildr — too much to bear. These examples, however, show a marked lack of concern for the impact of sexual assault against both men and women. Marsibil, aware of her enchantment, is unable or unwilling to fight against her infatuation. Mjöll is murdered before she can realise that she has been deceived. Hildr’s mind is never invaded during the curse in *Illuga saga*, forcing her to consciously endure the sexual violence afflicting her. *Göngu-Hrólf’s saga*, with Ingibjörg turning *blá* and *bólginn*, depicts both a profound interiority and an erasure of — or indifference to presenting — lasting trauma. These narratives demonstrate how magic functions to open more avenues for men not just to ignore a woman’s right to withhold consent but to vitiate it altogether, with little concern for psychological and sexual invasion of women’s bodies and minds respectively.

¹³⁵ M. Thakur and V. K. A. Dixit, “Aphrodisiac Activity of *Dactylorhiza Hatagirea* (D. Don) Soo in Male Albino Rats,” *Evid Based Complement Alternat Med.* 4, no. 1 (2007): 30.

VBOTA MAAL: CONCLUDING REMARKS

var inn mesti úlfabytr til þeira at heyra

The legal and literary artifacts explored in this thesis profess a deep concern for the consequences of rape on both rapist and victim: once committed, it can neither be glossed over nor reversed. *Jónsbók* classifies rape as ‘vbota mál’ (a deed without remedy) (Appendix II: *Jónsbók* IV.2), highlighting the act as one of the most serious crimes that could be committed, beyond financial recompense. In *Grettis saga*, Þorfinnr’s wife’s reaction to the mass rape nearly experienced by her and her household is that ‘vér hefðim aldri bót fengit’ (we never would have got a remedy).¹ But this is the utterance of just one woman, in a text pockmarked by conflicted attitudes to rape: the eponymous hero saves women from rape, yet also fuels their fears as they await their fates, and later in the saga he himself likely goes on to rape a woman without repercussion. Pruning back the briars that wreath this topic, the landscape of sexual violence in Old Norse literature is populated with complexities and contradictions that twist and turn. It is clouded with grey areas: sagas often refrain from providing clear answers to moral problems posed by their protagonists’ and antagonists’ attitudes to rape.

It has previously been stated that there is no Old Norse term for rape, and this I disagree with: in fact, there are many. From the *Íslendingasögur*, *fornaldarsögur* and beyond, we can begin to build a vocabulary of sexual violence in Old Norse. ‘Shame’ words, such as *skemmð*, *skömm*, *svívirðing*, *spilla*, festoon the later *Íslendingasögur*, and certain phrases across both legal and literary texts suggest an emphasis on physical force: ‘tók hann hana

¹ *Grettis saga*, 72.

með afli’ (he took her with force);² ‘med afle’ (with force);³ ‘maðr brytr kono þa til svefnis’ ([a] man [who] forces a woman to sleep with him) (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§90); ‘Ef maðr fellir ser kono’ (If a man falls on to a woman) (Appendix II: *Grágás* K§155). Yet constructions of rape are not limited to ‘brute force’.⁴ Other phrases demonstrate a particular emphasis on consent: in *de jure* law ‘ef maðr tekr konu nõðga’ (if a man takes a woman against her will) (Appendix II: *Jónsbók* IV.2); in Viking law, ‘„eigi skal konur til skips leiða nauðgar“’ (“no woman are ever to be brought to my ship against their will”);⁵ in experiential narratives, ‘hon vildi þat eigi’ (she did not want that), ‘„hefi ek ekki viljat samþykkjast honum“’ (“I have never allowed him”), ‘Hún bað hann þat eigi gera’ (She asked him not to do that), and ‘bað ófagnað eiga jarls/kylbu/stúfa/ hans’ (she told him his jarl/club/stump was unwelcome).⁶ Sexual violence is also, especially in the *Íslendingasögur*, obfuscated by euphemism or else elided from the text almost completely. This compels the reader or audience to read into interstices and to sift through the evidence, whether there is a paucity or wealth of it, that might suggest a sexual act is non-consensual, unwanted, or coerced. Such interstices foster textual anxieties: the broad semantic meanings of words like *fifla*, *glepja*, and *svíkja* create narrative uncertainties, which force us to search for clues elsewhere.

That feeling of uncertainty extends, too, to not knowing whether, for instance, we are supposed to laugh with a lothario or balk at his aggression. *Njáls saga*’s Hrappr places the reader in such a predicament, but so too do *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*’ protagonists, who seem at times to be more heroes than anti-heroes despite their violence against women, especially when we consider their victory lap as nation leaders at the end of the saga. It is sometimes

² *Sigurðar saga þogla*, 208

³ *Dínus saga drambláta*, 64.

⁴ Bourke, *Rape: A History*, 12.

⁵ *Örvar-Odds saga*, 234.

⁶ *Bárðar saga*, 124, 152; *Hrólfs saga kraka*, 20; *Bósa saga*, 298; 315; Jiriczek, *Die Bósa-saga*, 39.

unclear whether we are supposed to side with these sexual aggressors, or to feel sympathy for their victims. Indeed, these stances are perhaps not entirely mutually exclusive within the moral logic of certain sagas. In *Flóamanna saga*, Þorgils is lightly condemned as a would-be slaver in Ireland but then goes on to rescue Icelandic women from *ránsmenn*. Demonstrating a personal ethos concerning the protection of women, and a simultaneous willingness to traffic them, does not seem to be a point of contradiction or contention in these narratives. As I mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, ‘rapist’ is a fairly recent terminology concept: indeed, the sagas contain protagonists who rape, but who are certainly not defined by this act. For them, it is not an ‘vbota mál’.

Some of the *fornaldarsögur* frame sexual violence as integral to the moral barometer of the saga itself. Broadly showing a much greater interest in sex and sexual violence, these texts have especially complex presentations of rape where the ambiguous morality of the rapist is often foregrounded. It is often unclear who, if anyone, we are supposed to side with: king or maiden-king; Bósi or *bóndadóttir*. Rape is given prominence within narrative frameworks such as those of *Bósa saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*. It is an especially important moral crux in *Örvar-Odds saga*, in which the stringent outlining of the requirement to protect women from rape in the *vikingalög* is so patently foiled by the behaviour of both Hjálmar and Oddr through their non-discriminate harrying, and most notably of all by Oddr’s desire to rape Ölvör.

For some men, however, sexual aggression is their defining characteristic: some are flagged as sexually violent from the outset and this trait goes on to drive their narratives. One anachronistic term to apply to them might be ‘serial rapists’: such is their tendency to rape women that narrative expectations come to be built on the inevitability of this violent proclivity. In *Ljósvetninga saga*, the ‘óeirðarmenn miklir um kvennafar’ (most unruly men in

the business of women) predictably go on to kidnap women.⁷ Björn *inn blakki* is reputed for kidnapping women and cuckolding their husbands — precisely what he then goes on to attempt with Ári. Þórir *þomb* and Qgmundr *illi* in *Grettis saga* are similarly predisposed to attack women. In *Göngu-Hrólf's saga*, Möndull's defining feature is his urge to kidnap high-born women. *Hrólf's saga kraka's* Helgi and *Bósa saga's* Bósi each orchestrate a triptych of assaults. 'Sverðhúss Grani' is even named for his reputation as the 'mikla skapraun' (great source of affliction) that he is to women, his epithet crudely invoking the 'phallic sword' motif.⁸ Violent lust becomes a defining feature of these men, but violence does not always condemn them to infamy. Indeed, in the case of 'Sverðhúss Grani', his epithet seems just as humorous as it is foreboding.

The aforementioned 'phallic sword' motif, which has proved to be so recurrent throughout saga literature, certainly seems to be a source of humour or parody whereby sexual violence often mirrors scenes of violence (or vice versa). The uncomfortable polysemy of screaming as a marker either of pain and fear or of sexual pleasure is deployed by numerous saga writers within both the *fornaldarsögur* and *Íslendingasögur*. It seems likely, at times, that this conflation of meanings is intended with humour in mind; indeed, the ambiguity of these scenes can be read either as violent rape or as a potentially pleasurable sexual encounter. This speaks to the popular dovetailing of violence and sex as a narrative device, just as with the linguistic paronomasia of *æpa*. Sometimes the texts seem to speak to two audiences simultaneously: one that laughs at the coalescence of sex, violence, and humour, and another that might shrink back in fear at the prospect of being visited at home by a man with a reputation for rape so great that it has earned him an epithet.

⁷ *Ljósvetninga saga*, 4.

⁸ *Króka-Refs saga*, 151.

Through these narratives, we can peek through at the precarity of possessing a rapable body in the medieval North. A recurrent theme throughout this thesis has been the notion that some women are more vulnerable than others, more ‘rapable’: women of lower class; ‘ute’ women; enslaved women; Othered women. There is, at times, evidence of emotivity and resistance displayed by some of these women that hints at a concern for intersectional wellbeing within literary texts. Such concerns are largely absent from the lawcodes, which account for women based on the extent to which they can be commodified. Indeed, saga literature is seemingly troubled, at times, by the vulnerability of female bodies. Women today are told that they cannot dress a certain way, or behave in a certain way, lest they find themselves in danger of encouraging men to rape them. Similarly, Ólof in *Víglundar saga* tells her housekeeper that ‘at hvern morgin skyldi hon læsa karldyrum’ (every morning she should lock the men’s door), just as Narfi tells his men not to stray so far from the house ‘at Helga væri þar ein eptir’ (that Helgi might be left alone).⁹ These moments gesture towards an ambient anxiety about bodily vulnerability. Just as women today fear being stung with a needle or having their drinks spiked, real perceptions of the reality of being hit with a rune-stick or given some magic *grös* come to light in the *fornaldarsögur*.

This thesis has shown that rape is neither absent from, nor inconsequential to, Old Norse saga literature. It snakes throughout the corpus, at times insidious and at times unmistakable and snapping for attention with fangs bared. It does not only function within androcentric spheres, and the wide range of female reactions exhibited within both the *Íslendingasögur* and the *fornaldarsögur* display a deference to female emotion and a sympathy for women’s experiences. Narrative silences provoke the audience’s emotional engagement with the text. The ambiguous ‘illicit love visits’, the attempted rapes, the mystery

⁹ *Víglundar saga*, 77; *Króka-Refs saga*, 151.

of whether a sexual encounter occurred at all, whether it was unwanted, and whether it left any wounds of trauma — these all raise probing questions that an audience must answer for themselves with the information given. However, many female reactions are foregrounded, and the women studied in this thesis are a testament to the inadequacy of critical approaches that construct a monolithic ‘trauma aesthetic’ for women who have experienced sexual violence. Whether it be the silence left by an unplayed harp, or the transformation of white skin into swollen, dark, death-like somatic extremes, women’s reactions to rape have not only narrative importance, but importance in and of themselves. The range of female reactions represented in saga literature seems deliberately engineered to draw attention precisely to these reactions, as in the case of Bósi’s triptych of sexual assaults and the different reactions of the identically-named *bóndadætr*. Some women, such as Yngvildr, seem eventually to have ‘aldri bót’ for their traumas, but the Old Norse sagas are not populated by a single ‘collapsible woman’ model of abuse.¹⁰

There is, perhaps, a glee displayed in some of these narratives, regarding the torment dealt to these women. Narratives sometimes flout believability in order to bring increased suffering to women. It defies sense that Yngvildr would be repeatedly found again and again by her tormentor across the North Atlantic trading ports; or that Mjöll would be so extraneously enchanted and duped; or that the various redactions of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* vary so greatly in their portrayal of Sifka/Sváfa and, in particular, in their presentation of whether or not she is vindictive. The range of weapons available to men with which to commit sexual violence is vast and varied: magic is used to turn women’s minds; women who appear at first to resist rape seem to, eventually, enjoy it; they are coerced; they

¹⁰ Veselka, “Collapsible Woman,” 56.

are threatened; they are kidnapped; they are commodified. Many of the women in these narratives are mentally eroded by the end of their ordeals, in one way or another.

However, the arsenal of resistance is no less extensive. Again and again throughout both the *Íslendingasögur* and the *fornaldarsögur* we see women revolting and rebelling, trying to protect themselves and other women. Proto-feminist escapist narratives are potentially detectable in such texts, with women using supernatural tools like sleep-thorns as a defence mechanism. Others use their supernatural powers to fend off unwanted advances, or spontaneously uncover a royal heritage that elevates them above enslavement. Helga Bárðardóttir manages to fend off Hrafn's attempt at rape single-handedly; Yngvildr remains stalwart against Karl for decades before finally being worn down; and Melkorka acts mute but raises her Icelandic-Irish son to speak her mother tongue in private as an act of rebellion. As much as there is a glint of glee detectable in the hyperbolic sexual torments suffered by women, there is often a poetic aspect to the punishments levelled at those who commit sexual violence as well: men are punished by prophecies that conspire to have them father children that represent their sexual crimes; or by their victims with sexual punishments like tarring and feathering; or by other men with castration, literal and figurative.

The notion of a sisterhood also arises out of the shared anxieties and experiences of these literary women. *Víglundar saga*'s Ólof dresses as a man to protect both herself and her housekeeper from rape; the *meykongr* Ólöf and her daughter finally align as two women abused by the same man; Brana uses her supernatural powers to save Hálfðan's sister Ingibjörg from Áki's plan to rape her; and the Irish women all try to stop Oddr from taking Ölvör to rape her. Although they may be depersonalised, there is a solidarity, too, to the groups of women in *Hallfreðar saga* and *Grettis saga*, the latter emitting 'inn mesti úlfabýtr'

(the greatest wolf-cry) as they wait, it seems, for their fate at the hands of the *berserker*.¹¹

This mass lupine shout resonates with a conglomerate of untold emotions at which we can only guess: fear, betrayal and despair, perhaps.

Some of the more uncomfortable revelations regarding the depiction of sexual violence in this study are that rape is not always an irredeemable act in these texts, rape can be deserved and rapists can advocate for women's rights. The co-existence of humour and anxiety within narratives of sexual violence in Old Norse seems uncanny and uncomfortable, and yet perhaps, like many of the aspects of sexual violence presented in the *Íslendingasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*, not uncanny enough. In the *Íslendingasögur* women are trafficked based on their physical beauty; speaking to Yazidi survivors of rape in 2016, Christina Lamb reports on how they describe being 'divided into ugly and beautiful then paraded to ISIS fighters in a market to be bought as their sex slaves'.¹² 'Sverðhúss Grani' is named for his sexual aggression towards women; Wayne Couzens, who raped and murdered Sarah Everard in 2021, was nicknamed 'the rapist' by his fellow police officers.¹³ Íñigo Errejón, a bastion of feminism in the Spanish political scene, recently stepped down after being linked to a host of sexual abuse allegations.¹⁴ This is not so far from Hjálmar and Oddr, who vouch for female protection before terrorising women.

There is always space for history to inform the present and the future. Here, literary history interacts uncomfortably with the here and now. Many works of rape scholarship end

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹² Christina Lamb, *Our Bodies, Their Battlefield: A Woman's View of War* (London: William Collins, 2019), 15.

¹³ "Sarah Everard murder: Wayne Couzens given whole-life sentence," *BBC News* 2021, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-58747614>.

¹⁴ Sam Jones, "'We acted late': Spain's Sumar party apologises amid sexual assault claims," *The Guardian* 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/oct/28/we-acted-late-spains-sumar-party-apologises-amid-sexual-assault-claims>.

on notes of hope, giving rape a history in order to ‘deny it a future’.¹⁵ Mine is no different. There are many uncomfortable truths and truisms to be exhumed and examined within the Old Norse field and beyond. While we should be glad that we have made begun to chip away at the monolith of modern rape culture since the literature of a thousand years ago, the fact that this literature sometimes feels like a mirror staring back at us, uncanny and somewhat unchanged, should remind us that there is much work yet to be done. We must continue to study the literary history of rape in the hope of one day being able to leave it in the dust of the past.

¹⁵ Brownmiller, *Against Our Will*, 404.

APPENDIX I: TRANSLATIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. But we think we can better meet the criticism of foreigners when they accuse us of being descended from slaves or scoundrels, if we know for certain the truth about our ancestry.

SECTION 1:
THE
ÍSLENDINGASÖGUR

CHAPTER I:
EUPHEMISMS, MISTS, MASKS, METAPHORS AND MOTIFS

1. the violent attack on female honour is a vanishing exception, if one disregards, as is only right, abductions and love affairs, which *in dubio* presuppose the consent of the female part.
2. In all instances the role of the woman does not extend beyond the scene: she remains fully in the background.
3. Ingólfr continued to visit Valgerðr often, when he travelled to or from the Þing. Óttarr did not like this; she made lots of clothes for him, made with great skills and elaborate work.
4. “those men who might consider asking for her hand, if they knew that you had been visiting with her, it might be that they would see you as a troll on their doorstep, as you are.”
5. During that season it was said that Helgi Droplaugarson paid visits thither to Helga Þorbjarnardóttir, and it was not said that this was contrary to her will, as was evident.
6. Þormóðr made many visits to Qgur and sat for a long time talking with Þórdís, Gríma’s daughter, and from his visits and chats arose talk that he must be *seducing* Þórdís.
7. “There is talk among many people, Þormóðr, that you are *seducing* Þórdís, and that pleases me little, that she is getting a reputation because of you.”
8. And like the mists dragging upwards from the sea and turning to dwindling darkness, and after comes bright sunshine with gentle weather, so did these verses dredge all uncertain thinking and cloud from Þórdís’ mind, and afterwards the light of her mind poured hot love unto Þormóðr with warm gentleness. Þormóðr then often came to Qgur and was received well.

9. En er á leið morgininn, stóðu heimamenn upp, ok kómu konur tvær í stofu fyrst; þat var griðkona ok dóttir bónda. Grettir var við svefn, ok höfðu fötin svarfakz af honum ofan á golfit. Þær sá, hvar maðr lá, ok kenndu hann. Þá mælti griðkona: „Svá vil ek heil, systir, hér er kominn Grettir Ásmundarson, ok þykki mér raunar skammrifjamikill vera, ok liggr berr.

When morning came, the farmhands arose and two women were the first to enter the sitting-room; it was a housemaid and the farmer’s daughter. Grettir was asleep, and his clothes had fallen off him down onto the floor. They looked at the man lying there and recognised him. Then the housemaid said: “I say, sister, here lies Grettir Ásmundarson naked, and I think he is rather broad-chested. It’s surprising to

En þat þykki mér fáðæmi, hversu lítt hann er vaxinn niðri, ok ferr þetta eigi eptir gildleika hans qðrum.“ Bóndadóttir svarar: „Hví berr þér svá mart á góma? Ok ertu eigi meðalfífla, ok vertu hljóð,“ „Eigi má ek hljóð um þetta, sæl systirin“, segir griðkona, „því at þessu hefða ek eigi trúat, þó at nokkurr hefði sagt mér.“ Fór hon nú yfir at honum ok gægðisk, en stundum hljóp hon til bóndadóttur ok skelldi upp ok hló. Grettir heyrði, hvat hon sagði; ok er hon hljóp enn yfir á gólfít, greip hann til hennar ok kvað vísu:

Váskeytt es far flösu;
fár kann sverð í hári
æskiruðr fyr qðrum
qrveðrs séa gqrva;
veðjak hins, at hreðjar
hafit þeir en vér meiri,
þótt éldraugar eigi
atgeira sin meiri.

Síðan svipti hann henni upp í pallinn, en bóndadóttir hljóp fram. Þá kvað Grettir vísu:

Sverðlítinn kvað sæta,
saumskorða, mik orðinn;
Hrist hefir hreðja kvista
hœlinn satt at mæla;
alllengi má ungum,
eyleggjar bíð Freyja,
lágr í læra skógi,
lotu, faxi mér vaxa.

Griðka æpði hástqfum, en svá skilðu þau, at hon frýði eigi á Gretti, um þat er lauk.

Grettis saga, 239–40.

me how little he has grown down below — it doesn't match the rest of his size at all. The farmer's daughter answers: “How can you talk so freely of such things? You're just a foolish girl — and be quiet.” “I can't keep quiet about this, dear sister”, says the housemaid, “because I would never have believed this if anyone had told me.” She then went over to him to have a peek and now and then ran back to the farmer's daughter, bursting out laughing. Grettir heard what she said, and when she ran across the floor again, he grabbed her and spoke a verse:

“Fickle are the actions
of this foolish girl,
few arrow-storms' wish-trees
know how to clearly
see the sword in others' hair;
I'd wager that my scrotum is bigger
than theirs,
even though the warriors'
weapon is bigger.”

Then he flung her on the bench, and the farmer's daughter ran away. Then Grettir spoke a verse:

“‘Little-sword,’ said the woman,
the seamstress called me,
Hrist of the branch of the scrotum,
prone to truth-boasting:
for a long time a mane can grow
in the forest of my young thighs,
Freyja of the island-legs,
ready yourself.”

The housemaid shouted at the top of her lungs, so that when they parted she did not taunt Grettir, when it was done.

10. Here, too, rape and murder are united. In Grettir's metaphor, the phallus is a sword that pierces the woman's body. The woman's kicks and laughter are silenced, as the man reconstructs himself as “real man”.
11. What do you want, boy, in my seat?
You have seldom given

warm flesh to a wolf,
 I wish to keep to myself;
 you did not see the raven in autumn
 shrieking from atop the corpse-pile
 you were not there when
 edges, shell-thin, clashed.

12. Egill grabbed her and set her down beside him; he said:

I have travelled with bloody sword,
 so that the wound-bird followed me,
 and shrieking spear;
 it was hard-going from the Vikings;
 we made furious fights
 fire ran over men's abodes,
 I made bloody bodies slump
 inside city gates.

Then they drank together that evening and were very pleased.

13. Do you see this sword, maid,
 slim and carved,
 which I have here in my hand?
 I shall cut off your head
 from your neck
 if you do not say we have an agreement.
14. A shield and sword hung above her. Þorsteinn got up on to the bed and took down the sword and drew it. He stripped her and threw her clothes on the floor [...] He plunged the sword into the same spot and fell onto the hilt. The sword bit so that the point pierced the down-bed.
15. "He cannot have intercourse with me in a way that I can enjoy of him, but he is in all other aspects of his nature the manliest of men."
16. For let us see violence against those who have been taken and spread out, as they scream and cry. In this, it appears that these women take no pleasure in this event; but, without pleasure, it is not possible for seed to be emitted. Although, as for those women who are taken, out of principle, let her not take any pleasure in this event; in the end, however, owing to the weakness of her body, there will be pleasure [...] in the case of rape, there is no pleasure for the mind, but there is some pleasure, which must be a pleasure for the body.
17. It is not only the occasion of pain, but also the occasion of lust that can be inflicted on another's body by force, in the latter case, though shame fastness, to which a superlatively steadfast mind holds fast, is not thrust out, yet shame is thrust in, shame for fear that the mind too may be thought to have consented to an act that could perhaps not have taken place without some carnal pleasure.

18. I am sorry and outraged to hear men insist that women want to be raped and that they do not mind being forced, even if they defend themselves out loud. Because I cannot believe they take pleasure in such an abomination.
19. She asks you not to bother her
because what she asks you for, she fears: what she doesn't ask you for she wants you to pursue.
Proceed and then you'll get what you pray for.

CHAPTER II:
SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, AGAINST MEN?

1.

Ormr (Aggressor)Sigríðr (Woman)Þórðr (Woman's family)

whether Þórðr likes it
or not

She asked him not to do
that, saying that Þórðr
would like it even less.

And then Þórðr spoke with
Ormr: "I want you to cease
your visits as they create
discord with me and shame
with my sister."

He says, "I'm not going
to pay attention to your
foibles."

She asked why he did that,
"because this is against my
will, or are you not
heeding my brother's
warning?"

2. Two brothers were said to be the worst: one was called Þórir *þomb* and the other Qgmundr *illi*; they were from Hálogaland and were larger and stronger than other men. They went *berserk* and would spare no one, when they were in a rage. They took away the wives and daughters of men and kept them in their hands for a week or two and afterwards brought them back, as they had them; they plundered where they went and caused other catastrophes.
3. "It doesn't sit well with me that Þorgrímr *inn príði* has such esteem here in the region. I want to find out, if I have my way with his wife Ólof, whether he would attempt to avenge the deed, or his reputation would dwindle."
4. Ólof, the mistress of the house, had ordered her housekeeper that every morning she should lock the men's door when the men went out to work.
5. For even if some women who were forced to have intercourse have conceived, one may say with reference to them that in any event the emotion of sexual appetite existed in them too, but was obscured by mental resolve.
6. A Norwegian named Hrafn was staying with the family. It was often discussed among people that no one knew who that woman was. Hrafn was the most curious about this, and one night he went looking under the bed-hanging. He saw that Helga was sat up in a shirt. To him the woman looked very beautiful. He wanted to go up onto the bed and under *the/her* clothes beside her, but she did not want that. They then struggled and eventually when they parted Hrafn the Norwegian's right arm and left leg were broken.
7. She asked him to seek this out elsewhere. Grani said that it was dishonourable that such an old man had a young wife, so fair and beautiful. She said that she, rather than he, would decide that for herself. Grani said that he was not going to be able to resist, and seized Helga. She sprang up and braced herself: it turned into a wrestling match and at that moment Narfi came to the window and looked in. And when Grani saw a shadow at the window, then he broke out of Helga's grip and ran to the door. Narfi wanted to get in front of the door. Grani got there before him and ran made a break for it. Helga leapt towards

the door and wanted to restrain Narfi — “And let Grani go,” — she said, “because he has not ruined anything of yours.” Narfi thrust Helga from him and leapt after Grani and goaded him to wait.

8. Hastily I will seek to leave soon;
my grief does not fully shatter
for the waster of wealth,
I must become horrifically frost-bitten,
because I loved the heaper of riches,
appeased with joy and heat;
ever since I cannot hide my sorrow,
I sit alone; grieving the parting of ways.
9. A little while later Helga turned away and travelled far across Iceland and felt happy nowhere; she concealed herself in all places, and for the most part kept her distance from people.
10. Hallfreðr said, ‘I intend to lie with Kolfinna, and I *promise/allow* my men to do as they want’. There were many shielings, and it is said that each of the men had for himself a woman for the night.
11. She says, “You have won great renown and absolved me and my household from a shame from which we would never have got a remedy, had you not protected us.”

CHAPTER III:
THE DESTRUCTION, DEGRADATION, AND DESOLATION OF YNGVILDR
FAGRKINN

1. It is clear that it is not customary in Icelandic sagas for men to take revenge on a woman who in one way or another has become the cause of men's quarrels and murders, except in the case of witchcraft.
2. Then Yngvildr said, that the wound on Skíði's lip would be delayed in healing if a settlement were achieved.
3. Ill often comes from the words of women and it might be that from this talk, the worst that could possibly happen will happen.
4. It is now time, in the maiden's bed,
I am very angrily bereft
She does not fly into my arms.
The pretty girl, at the crowing of her parents,
They removed this obstinacy about us
The household said, to improve it, and rightly
Those who have risen
Your red inside her.
5. For the lowly prankster it is time to come into the maiden's bed; I am very downcast; the beautiful woman does not fly into my arms; her obstinacy will not improve, the household said it right, those who...
6. Ásgeirr said, "I had not supposed that you would do so with tricks or deception or lies." "I didn't lie", said Karl, "for although I said he was fallen, that is said when someone has fallen over." And then they went down to Brekka, and Karl then led Klaufi and Yngvildr fagrkinn to the same bed; Ásgeirr stayed behind while this went ahead.
7. He slumped in the door frame, when she welcomed him, and the sword Atlanautr slipped out of its sheath, and she picked it up and threw it out into the snow tunnel and said: "Make use of this, whosoever dares." She obstructed Klaufi until he was run through, and there he was killed. This was the work of the sons of Ásgeirr, and they picked Klaufi up and dragged him under a haybale at the back of the house. Yngvildr then went to her bed, and [her brothers] made to leave. Then Klaufi came to Yngvildr's bed, as soon as they were gone. She had her brothers called back, and then they cut off his head and lay it down at the soles of his feet.
8. He had Yngvildr fair-cheek travel with him, and he did that to torment her, and not to care for her.
9. "Now you have given me that, which we women think most beautiful and crave, and that is a fine complexion, and you have now taught me not to make inopportune requests of you."

10. He ordered Yngvildr to travel with him and kept her as close to him as possible. Karl was always going around with the drawn sword with which he had slaughtered her sons.
11. If there is any ambiguity in the narrative, Yngvildr's enslavement is twofold: she is not only sold into human trafficking, but she is Karl's bed slave.
12. "I'm inclined to agree, if Ingibjörg wants the same as me," [said the jarl]. Þorsteinn said that he wouldn't seek [her hand], if it was not pleasing to her. They then went to speak with her and told her their plan and asked how she would feel about the match and she said that her father should decide, but that it would suit her fine.
13. [he] wants to keep me in his hands and make me his concubine, and now I have never allowed him, and he has always treated me badly, but the worst is that he promised me to you. He refuses every suitor to me, taunting me as he does so.
14. And when Sölmundr wanted to take her and had lifted her out of the garden, then Ófeigr came and gripped onto her and pulled her back into the garden.
15. Hogni saw no other choice but than to let it be as Björgólfr wanted. Björgólfr paid an ounce of gold for her and they went to bed together; Hildiríðr went home with Björgólfr to Torgar.
16. When Leifr was preparing to leave, Þórgunna asked to go with him. Leifr asked whether her kinsmen were of any mind to agree to this. She said she did not care. Leifr said he was reluctant to abduct a woman of such high birth from a foreign country — "there are so few of us."
17. They are accompanied by beautiful slaves for trade with the merchants. They have intercourse with their female slaves in full view of their companions. Sometimes they gather in a group and do this in front of each other. A merchant may come in to buy a female slave and stumble upon the owner having intercourse. The Rūs does not leave her alone until he has satisfied his urge.
18. They possess manliness and courage when they attack other tribes on an open field, and persist in combat until they kill them, seizing their women and making the men their slaves.
19. they enslaved the remaining prisoners, and took the women and enjoyed them.
20. "they came in the night to my father's farm and burned him to death, with all the men of the household, but the women were let out, and then they brought me here with my mother, whose name is Sigriðr, and sold all the other women as slaves."
21. "It's thanks to Marsibilla that I have lived so long, because she told the father and son [i.e. Skram and his son] that the Norms had prophesied to her that she would die at once if I were slain, and they believed it"
22. It is, however, clear that the author thinks that she is still at a good age, and this is, among other things, a mark of how little he cares about historical truths.

23. He does not give up until he has disfigured the most beautiful woman, so that she is the mistress of any man who might desire her.
24. the fair women were caught, beneath the Danes,
locks held the girls.
Before you they were led to the ships,
the fetters bit their bright skin greedily,
the many women.
25. Men had this to remind them,
to get to know the women of Sveinn's men
after they had aimed
three times in Freyr's battles.
The hope is for a beautiful woman in Fjón.
It suffices to red the weapons.
26. The ideals of coercion of women "outside" and a desire for recognition of women "at home" could therefore exist at the same time.
27. At the time it happened widely in Norway, that outlaws and criminals leapt out of the woods and challenged men for the women or took away their possessions by force where they met little resistance.
28. "I was kidnapped by Snækollr Ljótsson, and he has these children with me; then he pushed me from him against my will."
29. "This man is a jarl and my son, and I am from Vík on my mother's side; you are best placed to use the treasures as is suggested, because a curse follows the sword. My son is called Hugl and he is offering you wealth rather than that you take me away. Good things will not befall if you take us away."
30. That same evening he spread out beside her. And the morning after, when the men got dressed, Hǫskuldr said: "I see little to be proud of about those clothes which Gilli the Rich gave to you, but it is true that it is more of a trial to clothe twelve women, rather than just one." Then Hǫskuldr opened up a chest and picked up fine women's clothes and gave them to her. It was then said by everyone that she looked well-clothed.
31. He led her to the ships and had a bath drawn for her and clothed her in fine clothes and made her as happy as when she was happiest
32. She placed her hands around Karl's neck and cried, and Karl had never seen that before, that she had been affected, no matter what had happened to her.
33. Ljótólfr took Yngvildr fair-cheek and people did not know whether she had been married off, but some said that she had killed herself out of unhappiness.
34. before I go with any man against my will, I would rather kill myself beforehand, so that no one can enjoy me.

SECTION 2:
THE
FORNALDARSÖGUR

CHAPTER IV:
BÓSI AND THE THREE *BÓNDADÆTR*

1. The overall structure of Bósa saga is based on this schematic triad, and its episodic structure is also subject to the law of three. Three times Bósi arrives at the lonely forest farmstead, three times he has to spend nights making love with country girls, who three times provide him with the necessary information to proceed with his three adventures.... and so on: the compulsion to formulaic repetition is obvious.

2.

Einn dag kómu þeir at húsabæ einum. Þar stóð karl úti ok klauf skíð. Hann heilsar þeim ok spyr þá at nafni. Þeir sögðu til it sanna ok spurðu, hvat karl hét, en hann kveðst heita Hóketill. Hann sagði þeim til reiðu nætrgreiða, ef þeir vildu, en þeir þágu þat. Karl fylgir þeim til stofu, ok var þar fámenn. Húsfreyja var við aldr. Dóttur áttu þau væna, ok dró hún klæði af gestum, ok váru þeim fengin þurr klæði. Síðan váru handlaugar fram látnar, ok var þeim reist borð ok gefit gott öl at drekka, ok skenkti bóndadóttir. Bósi leit oft hýrliga til hennar ok sté fæti sínum á rist henni, ok þetta bragð lék hún honum.

One day they came to a cottage. There was a man stood outside and he was chopping logs. He greeted them and asked their names. They told him their names and asked what the man was called and he said his name was Hóketill. He told them they could stay the night there, if they wanted, and they accepted. The man led them to a room with not too many people inside. The lady of the house was getting on in years. They had a beautiful daughter, and she took the guests' clothes and they were brought dry ones. Then they were brought water for hand-washing and the table was set for them and they were given good ale to drink, and the farmer's daughter poured it for them. Bósi often looked at her smilingly and trod on her instep with his foot, and she played the same trick on him.

Um kveldit var þeim fylgt at sofa með góðum umbúningi. Bóndi lá í lokrekkju, bóndadóttir í miðjum skála, en þeim fóstbræðrum var skipat í stafnsæng við dyrr utar. En er folk var sofnað, stóð Bósi upp ok gekk til sængr bóndadóttur ok lyfti klæðum af henni. Hún spyr, hverr þar væri. Bósi sagði til sín.

As evening drew in, they were led away for some sleep with good bedding. The farmer lay in a locked bed-closet and his daughter in the middle of the room, and the foster brothers were put up further out in a gable bed by the door. And when people were asleep, Bósi stood up and went to the farmer's daughter's bed and lifted the bed clothes from her. She asked who was there and Bósi told her.

„Hví ferr þú hingat?“ sagði hún.

“Why have you come over here?” she said.

„Því, at mér var eigi hægt þar, sem um mik var búit,“ ok kveðst því vilja undir klæðin hjá henni.“

“Because it was not pleasant for me, the way things were arranged for me,” and he said that he wanted to get under the sheets beside her.”

„Hvat viltu hér gera?“ sagði hún.

“What do you want to do here?” she said.

„Ek vil herða jarl minn hjá þér,“ segir

“I want to harden my jarl beside you,” said

Bögu-Bósi.

„Hvat jarli er þat?“ sagði hún.

„Hann er ungr ok hefir aldri í aflinn komit fyrri, en ungan skal jarlinn herða.“

Hann gaf henni fingurgull ok fór í sængina hjá henni. Hún spyr nú, hvar jarlinn er. Hann bað hana taka milli fóta sér, en hún kippti hendinni ok bað ófagnað eiga jarls hans ok spurði, hví hann bæri með sér óvæni þetta, svá hart sem tré. Hann kvað hann mýkjast í myrkholunni. Hún bað hann fara með sem hann vildi. Hann setr nú jarlinn á millum fóta henni. Var þar gata eigi mjök rúm, en þó kom hann fram ferðinni. Lágu þau nú um stund, sem þeim líkar, áðr en bóndadóttir spyr, hvárt jarlinum mundi hafa tekizt herzlan. En hann spyr, hvárt hún vill herða oft, en hún kvað sér þat vel líka, ef honum þykkir þurfa.

Greinir þá ekki, hversu oft at þau léku sér á þeirri nótt, en hins getr, at Bósi spyr, hvárt hún vissi ekki til, — „hvert at leita skyldi at gammseggi því, sem vit fóstbræðr erum eftir sendir ok gullstöfum er ritat utan.“

Hún kvaðst eigi minna mundu launa honum gullit ok góða nætrskemmtan en segja honum þat, sem hann vill vita.

Bósi þakkar henni nú sögu sína ok gerði henni góðan danganda í skemmtanarlaun, ok fór þá báðum vel, ok sváfu þau nú allt til dags.

Bögu-Bósi.

“What jarl is that?” she said.

“He is young and has never been in a forge before, but a young jarl ought to be hardened.”

He gave her a gold ring and went into the bed beside her. She now asks where the jarl is. He told her to take from between his legs, but she yanked her hand back and told him his jarl was unwelcome and asked, why he was carrying with him such an unfortunate thing, as hard as a tree. He said that he would soften in the dark hole. She told him to go on with it as he wanted. He now put the jarl between her legs. The path was not particularly spacious, but he managed to make the journey. They lay now for a time, as pleased them, before the farmer’s daughter asked, whether the jarl had taken the hardening. And he asked, whether she wanted to harden it again, and she said that she would like that well, if he thought there was a need.

It is not recorded, how often they entertained themselves that night, but it is believed that Bósi asks, whether she might know, — “where the vulture’s egg might be found, which we two foster brothers have been sent after, with gold lettering on written on the outside.”

She said that it was the least she could do to reward him for the gold and a good night’s entertainment to tell him that which he wanted to know.

Bósi thanks her now for her information and gave her a good banging as a pleasure-payment, and that suited them both, and now they both slept until daytime.

Bósa saga, 297–9; 300

3. “Lady,” said he, “it is only right that you pick names for us both, as will please you.”
4. But if the love even of peasant women chances to entice you, remember to praise them lavishly, and should you find a suitable spot you should not delay in taking what you seek, gaining it by rough embraces.
5. *Þeir gengu á land upp Herraúðr ok Bósi. Þeir kómu at húsabæ litlum ok kyrfiligum. Þar bjó karl ok kerling. Þau áttu dóttur væna ok vel kunnandi. Bóndi* *Herraúðr and Bósi went up onto land. They came to a humble little cottage. A man and a woman lived there. They had a beautiful, well-informed daughter. The farmer offered to have*

baud þeim nætrgreiða; þat þágu þeir. Þar vǫru góð hýbýli. Þeim var unninn góðr beini, ok vǫru tekin upp borð ok gefit mungát at drekka. Bóndi var fálátr ok óspurull. Bóndadóttir vat þar mannúðigust, ok skenkti hún gestum. Bósi var glaðkát ok gerði henni smáglingrur; hún gerði honum ok svá í móti.

Um kveldit var þeim fylgt at sofa, en þegar at ljós var slokit, þá kom Bögu-Bósi þar, sem bóndadóttir lá, ok lyfti klæði af henni. Hún spurði, hvat þar væri, en Bögu-Bósi sagði til sín.

„Hvat viltu hingat?“ sagði hún.

„Ek vil brynna fola mínum í vinkeldu þinni,“ sagði hann.

„Mun þat hægt vera, maðr minn?“ sagði hún; „eigi er hann vanr þvílíkum brunnhúsum, sem ek hefí.“

„Ek skal leiða hann at fram,“ sagði hann, „ok hrinda honum á kaf, ef hann vill eigi öðruvísi drekka.“

„Hvar er folinn þinn, hjartavinrinn minn?“ sagði hún.

„Á millum fóta mér, ástin mín,“ kvað hann, „ok tak þú á honum ok þó kyrrt, því at hann er mjök styggr.“

Hún tók nú um göndulinn á honum ok strauk um ok mælti: „Þetta er fimligr foli ok þó mjök rétt hálsaðr.“

„Ekki er vel komit fyrir hann höfðinu,“ sagði hann, „en hann kringir betr makkanum, þá hann hefir drukkit.“

„Sjá nú fyrir öllu,“ segir hún.

„Ligg þú sem gleiðust,“ kvað hann, „ok haf sem kyrrast.“

Hann brynnir nú folanum heldr ótæpiliga, svá at hann var allr á kafi. Bóndadóttur varð mjök dátt við þetta, svá at hún gat varla talat. „Muntu ekki drekkja folanum?“ sagði hún.

„Svá skal hann hafa sem hann þolir mest,“ sagði hann, „því at hann er mér oft óstýrinn fyrir þat hann fær ekki at drekki sem hann beiðist.“

Hann er nú at, sem honum líkar, ok hvílist síðan. Bóndadóttir undrast nú,

them stay the night; they agreed. It was a nice homestead. They were treated nicely, and a table was laid for them and they were given ale to drink. The farmer was silent and not inquisitive. The farmer's daughter was most accommodating, and poured the ale for the guests. Bósi was good-humoured and flirted with her; she did the same in return.

In the evening they were led away to sleep, and when the lights were dimmed, then Bögu-Bósi came to where the farmer's daughter lay, and lifted the bedclothes from her. She asked who was there and Bögu-Bósi told her.

“What do you want over here?” she said.

“I want to water my foal at your wine-well,” he said.

“Would that be easy, my man?” she said; “he is not used to such a well-house, as I have.”

“I shall lead him there,” said he, “and drive him deep into the water if he does not want to drink otherwise.

“Where is your foal, my heart-friend?” said she.

“Between my legs, my love,” said he, “and take him now, but quietly, because he is very shy.”

She now seized his penis and stroked it and said: “This is a nimble foal, but very erect at the neck.”

“The head does not suit him very well,” he said, “but the neck curves better when he has drunk something.”

“See now to it all,” she says.

“Lie back as makes you happy,” he said, “and remain as quiet as possible.”

He now waters the foal rather unsparingly, so that it was completely submerged in water. The farmer's daughter was very startled by that, so that she was scarcely able to speak: “Aren't you going to drown the foal?” she said.

“He shall have as much as he is able to,” he said, “because he is often unbridled when he does not get to drink as much as he wants.”

He now goes at it as he likes, and then rests. The girl wonders now, from where that wet

hvaðan væta sjá mun komin, sem hún hefir í klofinu, því at allr beðrinn lék í einu lauðri undir henni.

Hún mælti: „Mun ekki þat mega vera, at folinn þinn hafí drukkit meira en honum hefir gott gert ok hafí hann ælt upp meira en hann hefir drukkit?“

„Veldr honum nú eitthvat,“ kvað hann, „því at hann er svá linr sem lunga.“

„Hann mun vera ölsjúkr,“ sagði hún, „sem aðrir drykkjumenn.“

„Þat er víst,“ kvað hann. Þau skemmta sér nú sem þeim líkar, ok var bóndadóttir ýmist ofan á eða undir, ok sagðist hún aldri hafa riðit hæggengara fola en þessum.

Ok eftir margan gamanleik spyr hún, hvat mann hann sé, en hann segir til it sanna ok spurði á móti, hvat þar væri títt í landinu.

Ok fellr þar nú tal þeira, ok sofa þau af um náttina.

Bósa saga, 307–9; 310

6.

Ek vildi at þú skeptir kylbu mína, sagði hann. Þú munt þat betr kunna en ek. Betr tekzt tveimr en einum, segir hann. Síðan fór hann í sængina hjá henni. Hún spurði, hvar kylban væri. Hann bað hana taka [hdschr. tack] í millum fóta sér, en hún kipti hendinni ok bað ófagnað eiga hans kylbu, ok spurði, því hann færi með óvæni þetta, en hann kveðzt eigi missa mega. En hann kvað hana eigi til einskis skyldu liggja ok bað hana fara vel í rúmi ok láta sem hljóðazt ok liggja sem hann skipaði. Gaf hann henni fingrgull mikit ok gott, ok var eir í innan, líkaði henni þá vel ok bað skepta kylbu sína, sem hann vildi, ok kvómu þeim nú allir hlutir vel saman, ok skemtu þau sér um nóttina.

7.

þeir gengu til byggða, þar sem karl bjó ok kerling. Þau áttu dóttur væna. Þar var vel við þeim tekít ok gefít gott vín at

must have come, which she had in her cleft, because the whole bed was seething in a lather underneath her.

She said: “Is it not possible that your foal has drunk more than is good for him, and he has vomited up more than he has drunk?”

“Something is wrong with him,” said he, “because he is now as limp as a lung.”

“He must surely be ale-sick,” said she, “just like other drunk men.”

“That is certain,” said he. They entertained themselves now as they liked, and the farmer’s daughter was sometimes on top and sometimes beneath, and she said that she had never ridden a steadier foal than this.

And after much enjoyable play, she asks what sort of person he is, and he replies truthfully and asked in return what news there was in the land.

Their conversation dies here, and they sleep now through the night.

I want you to give my club a handle,’ he said. ‘You must know how to do that better than I. It is more easily done with two than with one.’ Then he went into bed beside her. She asked where his club was. He told her to take (what was) between his legs, but she yanked her hand back and said his club was unwelcome, and asked why he was travelling with that deformity, and he said he was unable to do without it. But he told her not to lie like that and told her to spread out and say nothing and lie as he told her. He gave her a nice, big gold ring which was copper on the inside; she was pleased then and offered to make his club a handle as he wished, and now all things between them went well and they entertained themselves throughout the night.

[T]hey went to a residence where a man and a woman lived. They had a beautiful daughter. They were received well and given good wine

drekka um kveldit.

Bögu-Bósi leit hírliga til bóndadóttur, en hún var mjök tileygð til hans á móti. Litlu síðar fóru menn til svefns. Bósi kom til bóndadóttur. Hún spyr, hvat hann vill. Hann bað hana hólka stúfa sinn. Hún spyr, hvar hólkrinn væri. Hann spurði, hvárt hún hefði engan. Hún sagðist engan hafa, þann sem honum væri hæfiligr.

„Ek get rýmt hann, þó at þröngr sé,“ sagði hann.

„Hvar er stúfinn þinn?“ sagði hún. „Ek get nærri, hvat ek má ætla hólkborunni minni.“

Hann bað hana taka á millum fóta sér. Hún kippti at sér hendinni ok bað ófagnað eigi stúfa hans.

„Hverju þykkir þér þetta líkt?“ sagði hann.

„Pundaraskafti föður míns ok sé brotin aftan af því kringlan.“

„Tilfyndin ertu,“ sagði Bögu-Bósi; hann dró gull af hendi sér ok gaf henni. Hún spyr, hvat hann vill á móti hafa.

„Ek vil sponsa traus þína,“ sagði hann.

„Ekki veit ek, hvernig þat er,“ segir hún.

„Ligg þú sem breiðast,“ kvað hann.

Hún gerði sem hann bað. Hann ferr nú á millum fótanna á henni ok leggr síðan neðan í kviðinn á henni, svá at allt gekk upp undir bringspölu.

Hún brá við hart ok mælti: „Þú hleyptir inn sponsinu um augat, karlmaðr,“ kvað hún.

„Ek skal ná því ór aftr,“ segir hann, „eða hversu varð þér við?“

„Svá dátt sem ek hefði drukkit ferskan mjöð,“ kvað hún, „ok haf þú sem vakrast í auganu þvegilinn,“ sagði hún.

Hann sparir nú ekki af, þar til at hana velgdi alla, svá at henni lá við at klígja, ok bað hann þá at hætta. Þau tóku nú hvíld, ok spyr hún nú, hvat manna hann væri. Hann sagði it sanna ok spyr, hvárt hún væri nokkut í kærleikum við Eddu konungsdóttur. Hún sagðist oft koma í skemmu konungsdóttur ok vera þar vel tekin.

to drink in the evening.

Bögu-Bósi looked smilingly at the farmer's daughter, but she eyed him a great deal in return. A little while later the people went to sleep. Bósi came to the farmer's daughter. She asks what he wants. He asked her to sheath this stump. She asks, what sheath that could be. He asked whether she might not have one. She said that she didn't have one that would fit.

“I can widen it, even though it is narrow,” he said.

“Where is your stump?” she said. “If I knew that, I might more accurately guess what I might expect from my sheath-hole.”

He asked her to take up what was between his legs. She yanked her hand back, and told him his stump was unwelcome.

“What do you think it is like?” he said.

“My father's steel shaft but with the disk broken off.”

“You are fault-finding,” said Bögu-Bósi; he pulled a gold ring off his hand and gave it to her. She asks what he wants in return.

“I want to stop up your spout,” said he.

“I don't know what that is,” says she.

“Lie down as widely as you can,” said he.

She did as he asked. He now goes between her legs and then puts himself down into her womb, so that he went all the way up underneath her ribcage.

She jolted hard at this and said: “You're bursting the stopper up around the eye, man!” she said.

“I'll get it back out of you after,” he says, “but how did you think of it?”

“As pleasing/numbing as if I had drunk fresh mead,” she said, “and keep the mop in sight!”

He spares nothing now, until she was completely nauseous, so that she came over all sickly, and asked him then to stop. They now took a pause and she now asks him, what sort of person he is. He told the truth and asks whether she was friendly with Edda the princess. She said that she often came into the bower of the princess and was received well there.

„Ek mun hafa þik at trúnaðarmanni,“ sagði hann, „ok vil ek gefa þér til þrjár merkr silfrs, at þú komir konungsdóttur í skóginn til mín.“

Hann tók nú ór pungu sínum þrjár valhnetr. Þær váru sem á gull sæi. Hann fekk henni þær ok bað hana segja konungsdóttir, at hún vissi einn þann lund í skóginum, at slíkar hnetr væri nógar.

Hún sagði konungsdóttir eigi uppörpna fyrir einum ok sagði henni fyljga at jafnaði gelding þann, „er Skálkr heitir ok er svá sterkr, at hann hefir tólf karla afl, hvat sem reyna þarf.“

“I will take you in confidence,” he said, “and I will give you three marks of silver if you bring the princess into the woods to me.”

He now took from his purse three walnuts. They looked as if they were made of gold. He gave them to her there and asked her to say to the princess that she knew a grove in the woods where such nuts were bounteous.

She said that the princess would not be helpless with just one man and said that a eunuch follows her at every turn, “who is called Skálkr and who is so strong that he has the power of twelve men, whenever there is need of it.”

Bósa saga, 315–6

8. The woman slipped in the vulture’s blood, and after that fell on her back, and the struggle between them was great, and they took turns being underneath. Bósi came up and gripped the head of the bull and hit the giantess on the nose. Then Herrauðr tore off her arm at the shoulder.
9. A bed stands in the middle of the hall’s floor, with five steps leading up to it. There the bride and bridegroom shall lie, and all the retainers shall stand watch around them, so that they will not be surprised.
10. Then Bósi set the princess on his arm and carried her to the ship, and they set sail and found Smíðr. The princess was downcast at this, but then Smíðr spoke with her and all her sad thoughts left her, and they sailed home to Gautland.

CHAPTER V:
RESISTING RAPE AND WREAKING REVENGE: HOW WOMEN PUNISH
THEIR ATTACKERS

1. Over Saxland at the time there ruled a queen whose name was Ólöf. She was in a sense like a warrior king. She went about with shield and byrnie and bore a sword and a helmet on her head. This was her nature: beautiful of face, but cruel in temperament and proud. People used to say that she was the best match in all the northern lands at that time, who knew about such things, but she wanted to marry no man.
2. The king had drunk such a lot that he fell down asleep onto the bed. The queen makes use of this situation and sticks him with a sleep-thorn.
And when all of the men had left, the queen stands up. She shaved all his hair off him and covers him with tar.
3. When they opened [the sack] they find the king there, bewitched in a dishonourable way. The sleep-thorn fell away then, and the king awoke — not from a good dream — and was now in a vile temper towards the queen.
4. And when they came to the forest, then Helgi grabs her in his hands and says theirs was a fitting meeting to avenge his disgrace.
The queen said that she had conducted herself badly towards him, — “and I now want to compensate you, and you shall wed me honourably.”
5. only when her pride has been broken with force and the princess has been reduced to a whore does the hero again elevate her to his subordinate wife.
6. “No,” he said, “you shall have no choice in this. You will go with me to the ships and stay there a while, as pleases me, because I — for my pride’s sake — am not minded not to wreak vengeance on you, as cruelly and as shamefully as you made sport of me”
“The decision must now be with you,” she said. The king spent many nights beside the queen. And after that the queen went home, and she had now had vengeance done to her just as was promised, and she became very unhappy with her condition.
7. And when a little while had past, Ólöf had a child. It was a girl. She completely disregarded the child. She had a dog named Yrsa and she named the child after that, and so she was called Yrsa. She was beautiful of face. And when she was twelve years old she was sent to tend the herd, and she never knew anything other than that she was the daughter of a farmer and his wife, because the queen had kept it so quiet, that few people know that she had a given birth to a child.
8. She asked him not to do this, but he takes her away as before and carries her to the ships and then sailed home to his kingdom.
9. in her mind she calculates that with this King Helgi would be brought harm and shame, and no luck or delight.
10. “To my mind I have the worst and cruellest of mothers, what are you are telling me is so monstrous it will never be forgotten.”

“You have paid on Helgi’s behalf for this,” says Ólöf, “and because of my anger, and now I want you to come home with me with respect and honour, and I will do the best for you that I can in all things.”

11. She said, “Now I want to go away,” she says, and you have released me from great difficulties, because this was my step-mother’s curse, and I have sought out the homes of many kings but they failed to end it because of my looks. I do not want to be here any longer.” “No,” said the king, “there is no question of you leaving so quickly, and we will not part like this. We will have a hasty wedding, because I like you a lot.” “It is up to you to decide, my lord,” she said, and so they slept together that evening. And in the morning she spoke the following words, “Because of lust you have now done this to me, and you should know that we will have a child together. Do as I say now, king, visit our child next winter at this time at your boat-house, or you will pay if you do not do this.”

After this she went away.

King Helgi was now a bit happier than before.

12. “I want her neither clothed nor unclothed, fed nor unfed, and not to come alone but neither with any person.”
13. Now he sends men to meet her and have her led to his ship. But she said she did not want to go unless peace be granted to her and her companion. Now she was led to the king’s ship and when she came to the ship’s main cabin, he reached out for her and the dog bit his hand. His men lunged at it and struck the dog and strangled him with a bowstring around his neck and he was killed by this, and the promise of peace was no better kept towards her.
14. “and I want you to drink to me at our wedding feast when you come to your kingdom, as I think that better befits my honour as well as yours and our children’s, if we have any.”
15. And the first evening, when they come into one bed, Ragnarr wants to consummate the marriage, but she shied away from it because she said that there would be consequences if her advice was not heeded. Ragnarr said that it could not be true, he said that the karl and kerling were not prophetic. He asked how long it should be so. She said:

“We should spend these three nights apart,
 though we live together
 in the hall,
 before our sacrifice to the holy gods;
 thus this denial of mine
 prevents lasting damage to my son,
 who you are so keen to conceive,
 he will have no bones.”

And although she said this, Ragnarr paid her no attention and followed his own advice.

CHAPTER VI:

VIKING LAW AND VIGILANTE VILIFICATION: HOW MEN FEEL ABOUT RAPE

1.

Áki hafði frétt, at Hálfðan átti systur eina, ok ætlaði hann hennar vilja at fá til óvirðingar við Hálfðan ok stendr upp eina nótt ór sæng sinni ok gengr til skemmu þeirrar, er Ingibjörg ok Hildr lágu í. Hann var í skyrtu ok línbrókum. Eigi váru fleiri menn í skemmumni. En er Áki klappaði lófa sínum á hurðina ok mælti hljótt, at þær skyldi upp lúka, ok kvað Hálfðan þar vera, bað hún Hildi at fara til dyranna. Hilda fór til dyranna ok lýkr upp hurðinni ok sér, at þetta er Áki. Verða þær nú svá hræddar, at þær vita eigi, hvar þær skulu hafa sik, en Áka varð bilt inn at ganga ok studdist fram á dyrustafinn.

Ingibjörg mælti: „Þat vilda ek, at Brana, fóstura Hálfðanar, hjálpaði mér.“ En er hún hafði þetta mælt, var Áki fastr við hurðina, svá at hann mátti hvergi þaðan fara, en veðrit tók at hvessa ok frysta, ok lók Áka at kólna, svá at hann skalf af kulda. Þar varð hann at standa alla nóttina. Ok um morguninn, er menn Hálfðanar kómu til skemmunnar, sáu þeir Áka, þar er hann stóð, ok sögðu Hálfðani. En þegar hann kom til, varð Áki þegar lauss, ok mátti hann eigi mæla. Hálfðan lét flytja hann til herbergis sjálfs hans. En þegar er Áki mátti mæla. Hálfðan lét flytja hann tin herbergis sjálfs hans. En þegar er Áki mátti mæla, ásakaði hann sik mjök ok þóttist mikla sneypu fengit hafa. Hann hugsaði nú at svíkja Hálfðan sem mest.

Hálfðanar saga, 311.

Áki got news that Hálfðan had a sister, and he thought that he would take her to cause shame to Hálfðan and one night he gets up out of his bed and goes to the bower in which Ingibjörg and Hildr were lying. He was in a shirt and linen breeches. There were not many people in the bower. But when Áki tapped on the door with his palm and said quietly that they should open up and said that Hálfðan was there, she ordered Hildr to go to the door. Hildr went to the door and opened it and sees that it is Áki. They now become so afraid that they don't know where they should go, but Áki was quick to go in and stood against the doorframe.

Ingibjörg said: “I wish that Brana, Hálfðan's foster-mother, would help me.” And when she had said that, then Áki was suddenly against the door, so that he could not get away from there, and the wind started to stir up and cause a frost and locked Áki in a rime, so that he shivered from the cold. He remained stood there the whole night. And in the morning, when Hálfðan's men came to the bower, they saw where Áki was stood and told Hálfðan. And when he came there, Áki was let loose but he could not speak. Hálfðan had him taken to his own room, and when Áki was allowed to speak, he berated himself and felt as though he had been much disgraced. He now thought about getting back at Hálfðan more than ever.

2. And after the death of Sigmundur, Hálfðan becomes vehemently angry, so that he kills all of Áki's men, and seizes him himself and cuts his nose off him and gouged both of his eyes out of him and cuts both of his ears off and castrates him. Then he breaks both of his legs and twists his toes away from his heels and sets him on the back of his horse and sends his steed homeward to the king's hall.
3. “I want to share her bed tonight, and nothing better will be offered to you.”

The farmer said he did not like that. Ketill said he had achieved more feats than simply sharing her bed.

4. “I know a remedy that will do well for your lust for women. I heard earlier, that you wanted to sleep with the farmer’s daughter.”

He seized Ketill’s forelock and forced him out roughly and uttered a verse:

“You will surely now discover,
when you shovelled the cow-shed,
that you are not
Án bow-bender;
you are bread-bender;
rather than bow-bender
you are cheese-bender,
rather than weapon-bender”.

He bound him and shaved off his hair and tarred him and said that he should fly like a feathered thing. He then gouged one of his eyes out and gelded him.

5. “If, as I suspect, it turns out your daughter is with child, there are few men to blame, and I will admit to my paternity”.
6. He was attracted to the farmer’s daughter, even though she had mocked the cut of his clothes, and he was merciful towards her in this.
7. “The first thing to say is that neither I nor my army will eat raw meat, because many people are in the habit of wringing some flesh in cloth and calling it cooked, but I think the habit befits wolves better than men. I never want to rob merchants or farmers more than what I have need of to raid on the shore with my ship. I will never rob women, though we find them up on land with valuable goods, and no women are ever to be brought to my ship against her will, and if she can show that she’s been taken to the ship against her will, the one who took her shall be put to death, whether he is powerful or not.”
8. “let me not be lain in a mound next to such terrible wights as *berserkir*, because I consider myself much better than they.”
9. if anyone dared to rape a virgin, the punishment was castration; otherwise he would have to pay compensation of a thousand marks for his lechery.
10. One was that they should never bear a sword longer than their forearm, so that they would have to get in close. They had short-swords made so that they would have heavier blows. None of them had less than the strength of twelve ordinary men. They never took women or children. None of them were to bind a wound before a day had passed. None would be accepted who had less strength and courage than is now stated.
11. [Hálfr] told us at war not
to harm anyone in shackles,
nor to get a man’s wife
through harm.
Every woman, he said,

should be won
with fair gold
and father's say-so.

12. In the morning they went ashore from Guðmundr's ship and, raided every Sámi hut, and robbed the Finn women. The women endured this badly and screamed a lot. On Oddr's ship they talk about how they wanted to go ashore but Oddr would not let them. Guðmundr and his crew came back to the ship in the evening.

Oddr said, "Did you go ashore?"

"You warned me against it," said he, "and I have done so, and I have had the very best of fun, making the Finnish women cry. Might you want to come with me in the morning?"

"Far from it," said Oddr.

13. They came to Scotland and raided there, harrying and burning everywhere they went, and they did not stop until they had forced the land to pay tribute. Then they went to Orkney and took it under their control and stayed there for the winter. And in the spring they went to Ireland and they harried both along the coast and further inland. Oddr went nowhere unfollowed by Ásmundr. And at the sight of both children, women and men flew into forest and wood, and concealed their valuables and their selves.

14.

Þar finnr hann fjórar konur í jarðhúsinu, ok var ein miklu vænst. Hann þrífr þegar í hönd henni ok vill kippa henni ór húsinu.

Hún tók þá til orða: „Láttu mik lausa, Oddr,“ sagði hún.

„Hvat tröll veiztu til þess,“ sagði hann, „hvárt ek heiti Oddr eða annan veg?“

„Ek vissa þat,“ sagði hún, „þegar þú komt hingat, hvern þú vart, ok svá veit ek, at Hjálmar er með þér, ok skal ek kunna at segja honum, ef ek fer nauðig til skipanna.“

„Eigi skaltu fara at síðr,“ sagði Oddr.

Nú taka þær konurnar til hennar ok vilja halda henni, en hún biðr þær hætta. „Ek mun kaupa at þér,“ sagði hún, „at þú látir mik fara í friði, því at mik skortir eigi fé.“

„Fjarri ferr, at ek vilja fé þitt,“ sagði Oddr, „því at mik skortir eigi gull né silfr.“

„Þá mun ek láta gera þér skyrtu,“ sagði hún.

There he found four women in the underground cabin, and one was more beautiful than the rest. He grabbed her by the arm and wanted to drag her out of the house.

She spoke thus: "Let me go, Oddr," she said.

"What tröll are you, that you know my name is Oddr and not something else?"

"I knew," she said, "as soon as you came here, who you were, and I also know that Hjálmar is with you, and I shall also know what to say to him, if I am brought to the ships by force."

"You shall come nonetheless," said Oddr.

Now the other women reached for her and wanted to protect her, but she told them to stop.

"I want to bargain with you," she said, "so that you let me go in peace, because I am not short of money."

"Far from it – I don't want your money," said Oddr, "because I am not short of gold or silver."

"Then I will make a shirt for you," she said.

„Þat er enn svá,“ sagði Oddr, „at ek á nógar skyrtur eða skyrtugerðir.“

„Kost muntu eiga,“ sagði hún, „ok eigi þvílíkrar, sem ek mun láta gera, því at hún skal saumuð með gull, en ger ór silki. Ek mun láta fyljga þá kost skyrtunni, at þú munteigi eiga þvílíkrar kosti áðr.“

„Lát mik heyra þá,“ sagði Oddr.

„Þik skal aldri kala í henni, hvárki á sjó né á landi. Þik skal eigi sund mæða, ok eiga skal þér eldr granda, ok eigi skal þik hungur sækja, ok eigi skulu þik járn bíta, ok við öllum hlutum mun ek hana gera nema við einum.“

„Hverr er sá inn eini?“ sagði Oddr.

„Þik munu járn bíta,“ sagði hún, „ef þú ert á flóttu, þótt þú sért í skyrtunni.“

„Annat vilda ek oftast vinna í orrostum en flýja,“ sagði Oddr, „eða hvé nær skal hún ger?“

„At öðru sumri,“ sagði hún, „jafnt í þat mund dags, sem nú er, ok er nú sól í suðri. Þá skulum vit hér finnast í þessu sama rjóðri.“

„Hvat kemr þér í hug,“ sagði Oddr, „ef þú efnir eigi þetta, hvern kost ek mun gera yðr Írum þá, svá sem ek á þeim illt at launa, er þeir hafa felldan Ásmund?“

„Þykkist þú enn eigi hafa hefnt hans,“ sagði hún, „þar sem þú hefir drepit föður minn ok bræðr minna þrjá?“

„Alls ekki þykki mér hans hefnt at heldr,“ sagði Oddr.

“Even so,” said Oddr, “I have enough shirts and shirt-makers.”

“You won’t have any opportunity,” she said, “to get one like the one I will make you, because it will be sewn with gold and made from silk. And I’ll imbue it with qualities unlike any you’ve ever seen before.”

“Let me hear about that,” said Oddr.

“In it you will never be cold, whether you’re at sea or on land. Swimming will not tire you, fire will not burn you, and hunger will not bother you, and iron will not bite you, and I’ll make it impervious to all things except one.”

“What is that?” said Oddr.

“Iron will bite you,” she said, “if you are running away, even though you are wearing the shirt.”

“There are things I’d rather do than flee from battle,” said Oddr, “and how quickly can you have this made?”

“Next summer,” she said, “the same time of day as now, and the sun is now to the south. Then we shall meet in the same clearing.”

“What do you think will happen,” said Oddr, “if you don’t do this, what the penalty will be for you Irish then, as I am owed so much because they killed Ásmundr?”

“Don’t you think you have already had vengeance for him,” she said, “since you have killed him and my three brothers?”

“I don’t think I’ve taken vengeance for him at all,” said Oddr.

Örvar-Odds saga, 238–9.

15. “Sjólf, you weren’t there
when we reddened keen sword
on the jarl
in front of Hlésey;
but you lounged
at home,
rather chatty,
between the calf and the servant girl.”

CHAPTER VII: 'TURNING THE MIND OF THE WHITE-ARMED GIRL'

1. It happened that he asked her for intercourse using many sweet words. He tempted her to accept lots of precious gifts, and he cursed Björn with every word and said that he was not a man. Ingibjörg was greatly enraged by this and answered him scornfully, saying that she would never go with him. Möndull then produced a pitcher from under his overcoat and asked her to drink from the peace-cup, but she struck his hand and the goblet went into his face.
He was fuming at this and said: "We will never part, myself, you and your husband Björn, until I have repaid you as is fit for the shame you have caused me both in deed and word."
2. Möndull now stayed at Björn's place and drove away his whole household. He took Ingibjörg and lay in bed beside her every night, with Björn looking on, and she behaved tenderly towards him, and did not remember Björn, her husband. Björn was distraught at this, and so passed these seven nights, as were mentioned earlier.
3. "almost all trolls and elves are vengeful", he said, "if they are mistreated or insulted, and you can expect to be rewarded well, if they are well-treated".
4. I came here with the intention that I wanted to enchant Þóra, the jarl's daughter or Ingibjörg and take them away with me. But because Björn knew who I was, I wanted to get back him.
5. the dwarf took leave of Hrólfr, and he thanked him for his help and gave him everything he asked for. Gyða, King Eirekr's sister, was taken away from Garðaríki, and some men supposed that Möndull had taken her away with him.
6. "I've had a terrible ordeal in all this, but the worst of it has been my separation from Ingibjörg, but that must be how it is."
7. was afflicted by an extraordinary illness that winter. She went as *blue/dark* as *hel* all over, and she cared about nothing, as though she had gone insane.
8. He saw a woman moving about there and she was carrying fire. This woman had a countenance as *blue/dark* as her clothes, and she was completely swollen. She lit the fire. A little while later a man came in, dressed in scarlet and he had a fillet made of gold.
9. and he was as black and ugly as he had been created. He untied Björn, and got Ingibjörg out of her clothes and smeared her flesh with a good ointment and gave her a memory-drink to drink, and she quickly regained her senses and her flesh whitened, and she got back her health and lost all her love for the dwarf. She and Björn thanked Hrólfr, as was right.
10. Flosi reacted in a way such that at one moment was his face as red as blood, at the next as pale as grass, and at the next as *blue/dark* as hell.

11. his colour was at one moment red, at one moment *blue/dark*, then he would turn pale, and he was so swollen that his skin was all bruised from the savageness that was in his breast
12. a young boy for one thing lost his wits because of the dragon, and from its poisonous breath he was both blue and swollen
13. He went to bed and cast off his clothes, and the old woman ordered her daughter to serve him, and they both came into the same bed. Illugi turned to her and made himself happy, but she was not herself happy.
14. Your daughter shall go with you, and every man who sees her shall fall deeply in love with her. You shall murder each one that you see in her bed.
15. "Listen, evil wretch, do you really think that I will suffer you to shame my daughter? No," said she, "You shall die instead."
16. that he shall enter the bed of Ingigerðr, the daughter of King Ingvarr in east Garðaríki and kiss her before the third Yule or else die.
17. He goes in and sees that a woman is sat on a chair and is combing her hair with a golden comb. Her hair lay on her feather bed beside her, as beautiful as silk. He now sees her face, and he thought that he had never seen a more beautiful woman than this one. He could not stay still, since he could not bring about what he wanted, and he now takes the stick and throws it on her knees. She sweeps back her hair and takes up the stick and looks at it. And when she has looked at and read it, she looks out towards the wooden fence and smiles and it seemed she was most delighted with what was carved upon the stick.
18. "Sturlaugr and I have come to the same conclusion then, because there is no man under the sun that is more appealing to me. I would happily be his concubine, if he wants it to be so. I wouldn't spare any graces towards him but I'd give him embraces and polite caresses, kisses and intimacy."
19. here are some herbs which I will give to you. These you must give to the princess, and thereby get her love. They have a power; if she lays them under her head and sleeps upon them, then she will love you as much as her own life.
20. But that man, who had cut the runes for Helga did not live far from there; it then came out that he had asked to marry her but Þorfinnr had not wanted to give her; then the farmer's son wanted to *seduce* her, but she did not want that; then he thought he would cut *manrúnar* for her, but he did not know how to, and he had cut runes which made her ill.
21. Just as the Victorians read pornography and went to the brothel in secret, the Icelanders seem to have secretly dictated love poetry and verses and carved rune sticks in order to arouse the passions of the beloved.
22. For you I carve 'ogre'
and three staves,

ergi [perversion; lewdness; lust] and *æði* [madness; frenzy]
and *óþoli* [restlessness]; so I carved that off,
as I carved it on,
if there is a need of this.

23. I know a sixteenth [spell]
if I want to have a clever woman's
heart and pleasure-play
I know how to turn
the mind of the white-armed girl
and alter all her mind.
24. As soon as the piece of bark inscribed with spells touched her, she was like one
demented, a moderate sort of punishment for the continual injuries he had received.
25. He stayed there three nights and they shared one bed. He takes the sword Gramr and lays
it between them both.
26. Sturlaugr leaves and now a fire is set in the bower and Frosti and Mjöll are burnt to cold
ashes. And so they lost their lives there. This was all as advised by Véfrejja, because
Mjöll was so skilled in magic that she would immediately have used some sort of magic
against Sturlaugr and Véfrejja if she had known this before.

APPENDIX II: LAWCODES

GRÁGÁS

SUBHEADING	OLD NORSE	TRANSLATION
<i>People must not... practise witchcraft¹</i>	7. (p. 22–3) Ef maþr ferr með galldra eþa gørningar, eþa fiolkýngi. þa ferr hann með fiolkýngi. ef hann queðr þat eþa kennir. eþa lætr queða. at ser eþa at fe sinv. þat varþar honvm fiorbavgs garþ. oc scal honvm heiman stefna. oc sækia við .xij. qvið. Ef maþr ferr með fordæs skap. þat varþar scoggang. þat ero fordæs skapir. ef maþr gérir i orðvm sinvm. eþa fiolkýngi sott eþa bana. fe eþa mavnnvm. þat scal sekia við .xij. qvið. ²	K‡7 (p. 39) If someone uses spells or witchcraft or magic — he uses magic if he utters or teaches someone else or gets someone else to utter words of magic over himself or his property — the penalty is lesser outlawry, and he is to be summoned locally and prosecuted with a panel of twelve. If a man practises black sorcery, the penalty for that is full outlawry. It is black sorcery if through his words or his magic a man brings about the sickness or death of livestock or people. That is to be prosecuted with a panel of twelve.
<i>Injuries assessed as major wounds</i>	86. (p. 147–8) Þessi averk metaz sem in meire sár. Ef maðr scer tungo or hofde manne eða stingr avgo or höfde manz eða brytr ten or höfde manz. eða scer af manne nef eða eyro. en þa er scorit er nemr briósc eða beín. eða gelldir man eða høg klam høg vm þio þuer.	K‡86 (p. 141) These injuries are assessed like major wounds: cutting out a man’s tongue, poking out a man’s eyes, knocking out a man’s teeth, cutting of a man’s nose or ears (and by cutting is meant when gristle or bone is reached), castrating a man, striking a shame-stroke across someone’s buttocks.
<i>Women on whose account a man</i>	90. (p. 164–5) Sex ero konor þær er maðr avigt	K‡90 (p. 154–5) There are six women a man has the right to

¹ This Appendix contains the full clauses of law codes referenced in this thesis. Subheadings are taken from *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás, the Codex Regius of Grágás, with Material from Other Manuscripts*, trans. Andy Dennis, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins, vol. 1, University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies (Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba Press, 1980). Page numbers are presented in the main body of the Appendix for ease of reading. For *Grágás*, I reference the codes by the letters/symbols/numbers assigned in this edition. Note that in the Appendix, all translations are taken from Dennis, Foote and Perkins’ two-volume edition; in the thesis main body, however, I occasionally give my own translations where there may be a particularly salient crux, and I draw attention to such changes in the footnotes of the thesis’ main body.

² All quotations denoted with ‘K’ are taken from *Konungsbók*, believed to have been written in around 1260 and the symbol ‘‡’ denotes the edition from which the Norse quotations are taken, *Grágás: Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid udgivet efter det kongelige Bibliotheks Haandskrift*, ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen, vol. 1 (Kjøbenhavn: Brødrene Berlings bogtrykkeri, 1852).

<p><i>has the right to kill</i></p>	<p><i>vm. Ein er kona manz. ii. dóttir manz. iii. móðir manz. iiii. er systir. v. er fostra su er maðr hefir fódðan. vi. er fostra su er man hefir fódðan. Þat er mælt. ef maðr kómr at þar er anar maðr brytr kono þa til svefnis er hann a vigt vm. þar a þeim vetvangi oc hafe hann fellda hana oc látet afallaz oc a hann þa vigt vm þar a þeim vetvangi eða sva ef hann fiðr hann i sama sæing konone sva at þav huile bæðe saman af því at hann villde misrøðo við hana drygia. oc a maðr þar vigt vm ihvaromtvegia stað þott misrøpan hafe eigi tekiz.</i></p>	<p>kill for. One is a man's wife, two a man's daughter, three a man's mother, four is his sister, five is the foster-daughter a man has brought up, six is the foster-mother who brought a man up. It is prescribed that if a man arrives to find another man forcing a woman to lie with him there, a woman he has the right to kill for, and the man has forced her down and lowered himself down upon her, then he has the right to kill on her account there at that place; or likewise if he finds him in the same bed as the woman, so that they lie side by side, because it was his will to have wrongful intercourse with her; then a man has the right to kill on her account in both instances even if intercourse has not taken place.</p>
<p><i>Which panels are to decide what</i></p>	<p><i>Þar er maðr vegr vm þa cono eða viðr a manne er eigi hefir tekiz misrøðan oc var til stýrt þar eigo einir vetvangs bvar at scilia hvartvegia vm vigit eða vm þav a verc sem ero oc sva vm þat er hann vill til ohælge enom vegna lata föra.</i></p> <p><i>En þar er misrøðan tócz.³ oc eigo vigs vetvangs bvar at scilia vm vig eða vm a verc. þav er ero en aðrir vetvangs bvar vm leg orð. þeir er þar ero næstir nema alt hafe a einom vetvange verit oc scolo þa enir sömo bvar scilia hvartvegia vm helgi manz oc ohelgi.</i></p>	<p>Where a man kills on account of a woman or inflicts injury on a man when wrongful intercourse did not take place but was intended, then neighbors of the place of action alone are to decide on both matters, on the killing or on what injuries there are, and also on whatever he wishes to bring forward to prove the forfeit immunity of the man killed.</p> <p>But if the wrongful intercourse took place, then neighbors of the killing place are to decide on the killing or on what injuries there are, but other neighbors are to decide on the intercourse, those who live nearest that place, but if everything occurred at one and the same place, then the same neighbors are to decide on both matters, his immunity or his forfeit of it.</p>
<p><i>If the killer and the principal are not the same man</i></p>	<p><i>Þat er mælt. at þar er maðr vegr man vm þa cono er maðr a vígt vm en anar maðr er leg orðz sacarenar aðile oc vill sa eigi sökia söcna þa er rett at sa bvi til socina er vigit hefir vegit oc söke þat mál eða sele avðrom manne sva sem hann se rétrr aðili at.</i></p>	<p>It is prescribed that where a man kills on account of a woman for whom he has the right to kill, but some other man is the principal in the intercourse case, and the latter will not prosecute the case [then it is lawful for the one] who did the killing [to prepare the case] and to prosecute it and to transfer it to someone else [as if] he were the rightful principal.</p>

³ Note than in St§293, this instance of 'misrøðan' is 'legorðz'. All quotations denoted with 'St' are taken from *Staðarhólsbók*, believed to have been written in around 1280, and are taken from the edition *Grágás efter det Arnamagnæanske haandskrift nr. 334 fol.*, *Staðarhólsbók*, ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen (Kjøbenhavn: Gyldendalske Boghandel, 1879).

<p><i>Panel of five to give clearing verdicts</i></p>	<p>Þeir menn er veria socna scola fyrir þa menn er at vigi hafa verit með veganda eða fyr hann sialfan. Þa scola þeir queðia til biarg quiða allra v. vetvangs bva þa er næstir voro vetvangi iþan sócnar quiðin er aber vigit eða sáren vm þat sem þeir vília honom til ohelge lata föra eða til varna hafa.</p>	<p>Those men who are to defend the case, on behalf of men who were at the killing or on behalf of the killer himself, they are to call five neighbors of the place of action, those living nearest to it, drawn from the prosecution panel which gives a verdict on the killing or the wounds, to give all clearing verdicts on whatever they wish to bring forward to prove the dead man's forfeit immunity or to use as grounds of defense.</p>
<p><i>Summon dead man as one who had forfeited immunity, or wounded man to outlawry</i></p>	<p>Ef maðr hefir vegit man vm kono er hann avigt vm. oc scal hann stefna enom davða manne oc mæla sva. Nefne ec iþat vætti. at ec stefni honom vm þat sem hann ræðr a at queþa. tel ec sect fe hans allt. tel ec hann ohælgan hafa fallit oc eiga eigi kirkio lægt af hannn vill sva at queþa. oc queþa á hvar hann stefnir til þings. hann a oc at stefna honom til scogar ef hann vill þat. oc telia oheilög sár hans ef hann er lifs.</p>	<p>If a man has killed a man on account of a woman for whom he has the right to kill, he is to summon the dead man and speak thus: "I name witnesses to witness that I summon him" — for what he decides to state. "I claim that all his goods are under penalty. I claim that he fell with forfeit immunity," and, if he wishes to state it in these terms, that he has no right to church burial; and he is to state to which assembly he summons the case. If he wishes, he also has the right to summon him, if he is still alive, to full outlawry and claim that his wounds have no legal redress.</p>
<p><i>Buying a concubine</i></p>	<p>112. (p. 192) Rétt er at maðr caþpe til carnaþar ser amböt xii. avrom fyrir lof fram.</p>	<p>K‡112 (p. 174) It is lawful for a man to buy a bondwoman as a bedfellow for twelve ounce-units without prior leave.</p>

<p><i>The right to give in betrothal⁴</i></p>	<p>144. (p. 29–30) Sonr xvi. vetra gamall eþa ellre er fastnandi moþor sinar frials borin oc arf gengr oc sva hygin at hann kuni fyrir erfð at raða. EN ef eigi er sonr þa er dóttir su er gipt er. oc a þa bönde hennar at fastna mag kono sína. En þa er faþir fastnande dottor sinar. En þa scal broþir samfeðri fastna systor sina. EN ef eigi er</p>	<p>K§144 (p. 53) A son sixteen winters old or older, freeborn and a lawful heir and intelligent enough to take charge of his inheritance, is the man with the right to give his mother in betrothal. And if there is no son, then a daughter who is married, and it is her husband who has the right to give her mother-in-law in betrothal. And then her father is the man to give a daughter in</p>
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⁴ The symbol '§' denotes the second volume of both the Norse edition and the English translation. As such, translations and subheadings from *Grágás* are hereafter taken from *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágás, the Codex Regius of Grágás, with Material from Other Manuscripts*, trans. Andy Dennis, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins, vol. 2, University of Manitoba Icelandic Studies (Winnipeg, Canada: University of Manitoba Press, 2000). Norse Quotations from *Grágás* are hereafter taken from *Grágás: Islændernes lovbog i fristatens tid udgivet efter det kongelige Bibliotheks Haandskrift*, ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen, vol. 2 (Kjøbenhavn: Brødrene Berlings bogtrykkeri, 1852).

<p><i>Betrothal of a widow</i></p>	<p>bróþir þa scal fastna moþir dóttor sina. þar at eins fastnar kona kono. Nu er <i>eigi</i> moþir þa á sa maðr er a systor hennar samfeðra. Þa á broþir sammøðri at fastna systor sina. Þa a sá maðr er a systor hennar sammøðra. En þa scal fastna in nanasti niðr karl manna arfgengra oc samlendra nema konor se þær nanare er boendr <i>eigi</i>. þa eigo bóendr þeirra.</p> <p>Þar er eckia er fastnoð manne þa scal hennar rað fylgia nema faþir fastne þa scal hann raða. Ef fleire menn ero til raðana þa scal sa raða er ellztr er brøðrana. EN ef þa scilr á þa scal sa raða er hennar raðe fylgir. EN ef þeir vilia duelia rað fyrir henne oc synia þeir ii. monnom þeim er iafn ræðe þotte. þa scal hon raða við in þriðia ef þat þickir oc iafn ræðe við rað frænda sins nokors.</p> <p>Eckia á fastnastz siálf manne þeim er hana atte fyr þott <i>eigi</i> se rað lograðanda til. ef meina lavst er með þeim nema þviat eins at þav væri scilit fyrir omaga sacir.</p>	<p>betrothal. And then a brother born of the same father is to give his sister in betrothal. And if there is no brother, then the mother is to give her daughter in betrothal. That is the only case where a woman betroths a woman. If there is no mother, then the man who is married to her sister born of the same father has the right to do it. Then a brother born of the same mother has the right. Then the man who is married to her sister born of the same mother has the right. But then the closest of her kinsmen who are lawful heirs and are in the country is to give her in betrothal, unless there are closer kinswomen who have husbands — then their husbands have the right to do it.</p> <p>Where a widow is betrothed to someone, her consent is to be obtained unless her father gives her in betrothal, then he shall decide. If more men than one stand to arrange the marriage, then the eldest of the brothers is to decide. But if they disagree, then the one who seconds her choice is to decide. But if they want to delay marriage for her and they refuse two men who were thought an equal match for her, then she shall make a marriage with the third, if that too is thought an equal match, given the consent of any one of her kinsmen.</p> <p>Even without the consent of her legal administrator a widow has the right to give herself in betrothal to a man who previously had her to wife as long as there is no hindrance between them and they were not separated on account of dependents.</p>
<p><i>Kissing is an offence</i></p>	<p>155. (p. 47–8) Ef maðr kysir kono a lavn fyrir avðrom monnom oc at raðe hennar oc varðar honom þat iii. marca secp EN sa a soc sem vm legorð. EN ef hon reiðiz við þa á hon siálf sökena oc varðar þa fiorbavgs garð. Ef maðr kysir manz kono lavn coss þat varðar fiorbavgs garð þoat hon lofe oc sva þott hon bane oc scal quedia ix. bva a þingi til.</p>	<p>K§155 (p. 69–70) If a man kisses a woman in private, with no one else present and with her consent, then he incurs a penalty of three marks, and the case lies with the same man as an intercourse case would. But if she takes offence at it, then the case lies with her and the penalty is lesser outlawry. If a man gives another man's wife a secret kiss, the penalty for that is lesser outlawry whether she allows it or whether she forbids it, and nine neighbours are to be called for the case at the assembly.</p>

<p><i>Other sexual affronts</i></p>	<p>Ef maðr biðr kono suefnis <i>oc varðar þat fiorbavgs garð</i>. þat ero stefno sacir <i>oc scal queðia heimilis bva ix. a þingi þess er sottr</i> er.</p> <p>Ef maðr gengr til sæingar kono <i>oc drygia misrøðo við hana oc varðar þat fiorbavgs garð</i>.</p> <p>Ef maðr feldr ser til velar við kono <i>oc varðar þat fiorbavgs garð</i>.</p> <p>Ef maðr fellir ser kono eþa fer isæing hia <i>henne. til þess at hann vill coma legorðe fram við hana oc varðar þat scog gang oc scal stefna heiman oc queðia til ix. bva a þingi þess er sottr</i> er. Kona a sacir þer allar ef hon vill reiðaz við enda <i>comi eigi fram legorðit ef hon vill sott hafa. en ella lögraðande hennar. ef hon vill eigi siøkia</i>.</p>	<p>If a man asks a woman to sleep with him, the penalty for that is lesser outlawry. Such are the summoning cases and nine neighbours of the man prosecuted are to be called at the assembly.</p> <p>If a man goes to a woman's bed in order to have wrongful intercourse with her, then the penalty for that is lesser outlawry.</p> <p>If a man puts on a woman's headdress in order to beguile a woman, then the penalty for that is lesser outlawry.</p> <p>If a man forces a woman down for his purpose or gets into bed beside her intent upon having intercourse with her, then the penalty for that is full outlawry and it is to be summoned locally and nine neighbours of the man are to be prosecuted are to be called at the assembly. If the woman is prepared to take offence, and given that intercourse did not take place, any such case lies with her if she wishes to prosecute, or if she is unwilling to prosecute, with her legal administrator.</p>
<p><i>Transvestism</i></p>	<p>Ef konor geraz sva af siða at þær ganga <i>ikarlfötom eða hverngi carla sið er þær hafa fyrir breytne sacir oc sva carlar þeir er kuena sið hafa huernge veg er þat er. þa varðar þat fiorbavgs garð. huarom sem þat gera. þat er stefno söc scal queðia til bva v. a þingi þess er sottr</i> er. sa á söc þa er sökia vill.</p> <p>Ef maðr ligr með kono friálse <i>oc heimilis fastri. oc varðar þat scog gang. þat er stefno söc oc scal queðia heiman fra vetvangi ef maðr veit hann en ellegar fra heiman fra vetvangi ef maðr veit hann en ellegar fra heimile hans. enda er rétt at queþia fra hennar heima ef hann veit huarki hina</i>.</p>	<p>If women become so deviant that they wear men's clothing, or whatever male fashion they adopt in order to be different, and likewise if men adopt women's fashion, whatever form it takes, then the penalty for that, whichever of them does it, is lesser outlawry. It is a summoning case. Five neighbours of the man or woman prosecuted are to be called for it at the assembly. The case lies with anyone who wants it</p> <p>If a man lies with a free woman who has a settled home, the penalty for that is full outlawry. It is a summoning case and [nine neighbours] of the place of action, if it is known, are to be called, but otherwise [neighbours] of his home. It is further lawful to call neighbours of the woman's home if neither of the other places is known.</p>
<p><i>Intercourse</i></p>	<p>156. (p. 48–51) Ef legit er með lögsculdar kono þá asa söcina er feit a at <i>henne en fiorbavgs garð varðar</i>.</p>	<p>K§156 (p. 70–3) For intercourse with a woman in legal debt-bondage the case lies with the man to whom she owes money, but the penalty is lesser outlawry.</p>

	<p>Ef legit er með ambátt þá secz maðr iii. <i>morcom vm þat oc scal queðia til v. heimilis bva aþingi þess er sótr er.</i></p> <p>Ef maðr ligr með leysings kono þa <i>varðar fiorbavgs garð. nema barnino væri frelsi gefit eða sva ef hon a son frialsan þa varðar scoggang oc scal þa queðia bva heiman til .ix. enda ero slíc mal vm lögsculdar konona ef hon asonin.</i></p> <p>Ef legit er með gongo kono. þa <i>varðar eigi við lög. ef maðr gengr igögn legorðeno en sökia a til faðernis. retrr varðar ef maðr dylr legorðit. þar scal queðia til v. bva a þingi. þviat eins varðar eigi við lög leg orðit ef konan hefir a þeim hálfom manaðe með husom farit er barn var byriat á.</i></p>	<p>If a man lies with a slave-woman, he is under penalty for three marks for that, and five neighbours of the man prosecuted are to be called at the assembly.</p> <p>If a man lies with a freedman's wife, then the penalty is lesser outlawry, unless the child was given freedom or, similarly if she has a free son: then the penalty is full outlawry and then nine neighbours are to be called locally for the case. Indeed, the same rule applies in the case of a woman in legal debt-bondage if she has such a son.</p> <p>If a man lies with a vagrant woman, he is under no legal penalty if he admits the intercourse, but he may be charged with fathering her child. In that case five neighbours are to be called at the assembly. The intercourse incurs no legal penalty only if the woman was on the move from house to house in the half-month in which the child was conceived.</p>
<p><i>On having a child by a vagrant woman</i></p>	<p>Ef maðr getr við þeirre kono barn er með husom fer. þa <i>scal hann taca við henne oc varðveita hana til þess er barn er alit. oc hon er heil þeirrar sóttar. oc sva ef hann vill til scirslo hallda. Ef maðr görir eigi sva þa varðar utlegð oc scal queðia til v. heimilis bva aþingi þess er sottr er. Sa a söc þa er vill nema einhuerr varðveite konona. oc legi costnað sin fyrir. þa a sa maðr sökena oc scal sökia til réttar þat mal oc til fúlgna tueðra oc scal queðia til v. heimilis bva aþingi þess manz er fe hefir lagt fyrir konona. eða barnit vm fúlgornar.</i></p>	<p>If a man has a child by a woman who is on the move from house to house, then he shall take her over and take care of her until the child is born and she has recovered from the confinement, and do the same even if he means to contest the charge by ordeal. If a man does not do so, the penalty is a fine and five neighbours of the man prosecuted are to be called for the case at the assembly. The case lies with anyone who wants it, unless someone takes care of the woman and lays out money of his own on her behalf. Then the case lies with him, and he is to prosecute for personal compensation and for double the cost of her keep, and in the matter of her keep five neighbours of the man who has laid out money on behalf of the woman or her child are to be called at the assembly.</p>
<p><i>Intercourse with an itinerant's wife</i></p>	<p>Ef maðr ligr með gongo manz kono oc <i>varðar sliet þat sem vm aðrar manna conor. oc aboande kono söc ef hann fer i löghrepp sinom. en þoat hann fare viðara ef hann er omage. oc a hann þa bœtrnar at taca vm konona sina þo at anar söke vm.</i></p>	<p>If a man lies with a vagrant's wife, then the penalty for that is the same as for intercourse with other men's wives, and the case lies with the woman's husband if he is itinerant in his established commune or itinerant over a wider area, given that he is a dependent. And he then has the right to take the compensation on account of his</p>

<p><i>A charge of fathering a child</i></p>	<p>Sliet <i>varðar</i> frændsemis spell þar oc sifia spell. <i>sem</i> a avðrom stöðom oc a sa þær <i>sacir</i> er sækia vill.</p> <p>Ef <i>maðr</i> þarf at sækia til faðernis lifanda manz eins saman þa <i>scal</i> hann stefna at heimile hans <i>eða</i> þar er hann heyrri sialfr til faðernis oc réttar oc <i>scal</i> <i>queðia</i> v. bva aþingi. oc rétt er at lysa aþingi oc sækia et sama sumar ef <i>hann</i> vill helldr.</p>	<p>wife even though someone else prosecutes for it.</p> <p>In such cases incest with kin or with affines incurs the same penalty as elsewhere, and the cases lie with anyone else who wishes to prosecute.</p> <p>If someone needs to charge a living man only with reference to fathering a child, then he is to summon him at his home or within his hearing with that charge and for personal compensation, and call five neighbours at the assembly. And it is lawful for him to publish it at the assembly and prosecute the same summer if he prefers.</p>
<p><i>Keeping a woman unlawful company</i></p>	<p>Hvartz <i>maðr</i> fylgir kono or fiordungi <i>eða</i> af landi þa <i>varðar</i> <i>fiorbavgs garð</i> þeim öllom er fylgia at sino raðe visir vitendr at osatt lögraðanda. þa <i>scal</i> <i>queðia</i> bva fra stefno staðinom.</p> <p>Ef <i>maðr</i> fylgir <i>cono</i> oc beínir for hennar til scips. þeirrar kono er af landi vill fara sva at <i>hann</i> veit at <i>eigi</i> fylgir frænda rað <i>eða</i> for raðanda. þa <i>varðar</i> <i>fiorbavgs garð</i> oc sva styri monnom er a brott feria hana oc sva þeim monnom er fylgio tacaz ahendr við hana en hásetom avðrom <i>varðar</i> .iii. <i>mercr</i>. Nu hvertki er <i>maðr</i> fylgir kono til þess er <i>hann</i> firir hana iþvi ráðe lograðanda oc <i>varðar</i> <i>fiorbavgs garð</i>.</p>	<p>Whether a man travels in a woman's company out of a Quarter out of the country, the penalty is lesser outlawry for anyone who goes with her of his own accord and wittingly and without the assent of her legal administrator. Then neighbours of the summoning place are to be called.</p> <p>If a man travels in a woman's company and helps her to get to a ship — and she a woman trying to leave the country — when he knows that she does not have the consent of a kinsman or administrator, then the penalty is lesser outlawry, and the same for the ship's masters who give her passage, and the same for those men who take it upon themselves to be her companions, but the penalty for other members of the ship's company is a fine of three marks. Now, to whatever destination a man travels in a woman's company in order to keep her away from her legal administrator by doing so, the penalty is lesser outlawry.</p>
<p><i>Intercourse with an Icelandic woman abroad</i></p>	<p>Ef <i>maðr</i> ligr með kono erlendis oc getr barn við þar oc <i>varðar</i> þat <i>scog gang</i> her. oc <i>scal</i> <i>eigi</i> taca til sócnar her aðr iii. vetr ero fra liðnir nema ut komi nokot þeirra fyr faðir <i>eða</i> moþir <i>eða</i> barnit. þa er þegar rétt at taca til sócnar her oc <i>scal</i> sækia við goða <i>quið</i>. Sva oc ef með manz kono er legit erlendis oc <i>varðar</i> þat <i>scog gang</i> her. oc eigo frændr kononar sækina her. en boandin</p>	<p>If a man lies with a woman abroad and has a child there, then the penalty for that is full outlawry here in Iceland, and no prosecution is to be begun here until three winters have passed unless one of them, father, mother or child, comes back sooner. Then it is at once lawful to begin a prosecution here and it is to be prosecuted with a chieftain's panel. Similarly if someone lies with a man's wife abroad, then the penalty for that is full outlawry</p>

	<p>bøtrnar. EN ef <i>hann</i> andas erlendis of a þa erfingi at taca botr ef boande <i>hennar</i> andaðiz avstr.</p> <p>Ef sculdleikar <i>ero</i> með þeim <i>monnom</i>. þa er slíc sócn til <i>vm</i> frændsemis spell her þa sem her <i>væri</i> gort ef sótt er <i>vm</i> legorðit.</p>	<p>here in Iceland, and the case lies with the woman's kinsmen here but the husband has the right to the compensation. But if he dies abroad, then the heir has the right to take the compensation, if the husband died overseas.</p> <p>If there is kinship or affinity between such men and women, then if the intercourse is prosecuted, the same prosecution for incest exists as it would had it been committed here.</p>
<i>Charge of intercourse and fathering a child</i>	<p>157. (p. 52)</p> <p>Maðr a cost at stefna sva <i>vm</i> legorð ef barn er alet at <i>hann</i> hafe legit með <i>KONONI</i> OC <i>nefna hana</i> oc íþær <i>vænþir</i> comit at <i>hann</i> mætti <i>vera</i> þess barns faðir. er hon ól oc <i>queþa</i> á hue nær hon varð léttare oc nefna barnit. EN ef sa <i>verðr</i> osanr at oc a <i>hann</i> þa cost at sokia <i>ANAN</i> ANAT sumar.</p> <p>Nv ligr <i>maðr</i> með næsta brøðro <i>sinni</i>. Vsque sa asoc er vill.</p> <p>Ef kona er olett. Vsque. <i>heimilis</i> bva IX. <i>KONONAR</i>.</p>	<p>K§157 (p. 74)</p> <p>If a child is born, a man may choose to summon someone for intercourse on the grounds that the man in question has lain with the woman — and name her — and gone so far that he could expect that he might be the father of the child she had had, and state when was delivered and name the child. But if the man is found not guilty of that, then he may choose to prosecute a different man the following summer.</p> <p>If a man lies with his second cousin... and so on to... the case lies with anyone who wants it.</p> <p>If a woman is pregnant... and so on to... nine neighbours of the woman.</p>
<i>Prosecution for fathering a child</i>	<p>158. (p. 53–6)</p> <p>Ef <i>maðr</i> soker <i>MAN</i> til faðernis barns, <i>hann</i> scal stefna <i>honom</i> <i>vm</i> þat at <i>hann</i> hafe legit með <i>konone</i> .N. oc í þær <i>vænþir</i> comit at <i>hann</i> hafe getit þat barn .N. er su kona ól þá. ef þeim <i>væri</i> þat scapat. Queða á hue nér hon varð léttare þess barns. oc nefna barnit ef han veit oc sva <i>konona</i>. oc sva þan er <i>hann</i> soker til faðernis. <i>Hann</i> scal stefna at heimili hins <i>eða</i> þar er han hittir hin sialfan at male. til faðernis oc réttar. <i>queðia</i> v. <i>heimilis</i> bva a þingi þess er sottr er. Rett er oc at lya oc sokia et sama sumar.</p>	<p>K§158 (p. 75–7)</p> <p>If a man charges someone with fathering a child, he is to summon him on the grounds that he has lain with the woman N.N. and gone so far that he could expect that, if it had been destined for them, he might have begotten the child N.N. to which that woman had then given birth. State where she was delivered of the child and name the child, if he knows its name, and also the woman and the man he charges with fathering the child. He is to summon with the charge of fathering the child and for personal compensation at the man's home or where he meets him to speak to in person. At the assembly call five neighbours of the man prosecuted. It is also lawful to publish and prosecute the same summer.</p>
<i>Rights of a wife</i>	<p>Ef <i>maðr</i> huilir <i>eigi</i> isama sæing</p>	<p>If on account of negligence a man does not</p>

<i>whose husband neglects her bed</i>	kono sinni. vi. missere fyrir oröctar sacir. oc eigo frændr fiar heimtingar hennar oc sva retta far hennar. Enda a hon þa siálf fe sitt at varðveita.	sleep in the same bed as his wife for six seasons, then any claim she has to property and to personal compensation lies with her kinsmen, but she herself has the right to take care of her own property.
<i>No defences valid in major incest cases</i>	Of frænsemis spell en meire oc sifia spell en meiri ef þeim socom verðr rett stefnt oc verðr maðr sanr at. þá eigo eigi varnir at metaz vm þav möl. Of manna konor eða nunor varðar slict sem vm frændsemis spell et meira eða sifia spell et meira.	If cases of major incest with kin or with affines are lawfully summoned and the man is found guilty as charged, then no defences in such suits are to be deemed valid. In cases concerning men's wives or nuns the penalty is the same as in cases with kin or with affines.
<i>False identification of parent</i>	Fiorbavgs garð varðar man villa öll. Þat er man villa ef maðr kenir ser anars manz barn. eða hann kenir oðrom manne sit barn visvitande. enda gera þeir allir man villo er iþvi standa hvart sem þeir villa faðerne eða moðerne. eða bæðe. Þat er et meira frændsemis spell. Vsque ix. bva aþingi.	All false identification carries a penalty of lesser outlawry. It is false identification is a man ascribes another man's child to himself or if he wittingly ascribes a child of his own to some other man, and indeed all who are involved in it deal in false identification, whether they falsely identify with father or mother or both. It is major incest with kin ... and so on to ... nine neighbours at the assembly.
<i>Penalty for abduction</i>	159. (p. 57) Ef maðr tekr kono navðga abrott oc vill eiga ganga varðar honom þat scog gang oc sva þeim er honom fylgia at þvi raðe. Slict varðar honom þoat anar maðr nemi kono abrott honom til handa oc at hans raðe oc sva þeim er iforini voro.	K§159 (p. 78) If a man takes a woman away under compulsion and means to marry her, his penalty for that is full outlawry, and so is theirs who are in the plot with him. His penalty is the same even if some other man abducts the woman for him and at his instigation, and so is theirs who went on the raid.
<i>Abductors forfeit immunity</i>	Ef menn calla til kononar ihendr honom eða þeim monnom er með honom fara oc na eigi þa ero þeir ohælgir við a verkom öllom við þa menn alla er til kononar calla. bva scal quedia ix. heiman þaðan fra er konan var numin. Sa maðr er sökir þat mál acost heiman þaðan fra er konan var numin. Sa maðr er sökir þat mál acost heiman at stefna ollom þeim þar er konan átte heimile þa er hon var numin enda a hann cost þess ef hann vill at lysa at lögbergi ahendr þeim oc sokia et sama sumar.	If men claim the woman from him, or from the men who go with him, and fail to get her, then these are of forfeit immunity in respect of all injuries inflicted by any of the men who claim the woman. Nine neighbours of the place from which the woman was abducted are to be called locally. The man bringing the case may choose to summon all the prosecuted locally, at the place where the woman had her home when she was abducted, and he may also choose if he wishes to publish it against them at Lögberg and prosecute the same summer.
<i>Penalty for</i>	Fiorbavgs garð varðar þeim	The penalty is lesser outlawry for anyone

<p><i>consorting with abductors</i></p> <p><i>An abducted woman temporarily loses the right to proceed at law</i></p>	<p>monnom ollom er samvistom ero við þa menn er iþeirri för voro er konan var nvmin visir vitendr. fra þvi er hon var numin abrott. oc til þess er sótt er vm. Þa menn er konona hafa numit eða þat hafa ráðit eða hafa hana ini. scal iþan fiorðungs dom sokia er bvar ero fleire or quaddir or fiorðungi.</p> <p>Þa er kona verðr numin abrott oc ahon eigi at selia fiar heimtingar sínar ne sacar einigar apr liðr þat alþingi er sott er vm nema hon come apr til lograðanda sina oc se eigi sacar til búnar.</p>	<p>who, from the time she was abducted until the prosecution for it is brought, wittingly shares living quarters with men who went on the raid when the woman was abducted. The men who abducted the woman or plotted it or harbour her are to be prosecuted in the Quarter Court for the Quarter from which most of the neighbours are called.</p> <p>When a woman is abducted, then she has no right to transfer any claims to property or any suits until the General Assembly is over at which her abduction is prosecuted, unless she comes back to her legal administrator and no cases to do with the abduction are prepared.</p>
<p><i>Further on abduction</i></p>	<p>160. (p. 57–8)</p> <p>Ef maðr nemr festar kono manz abrot þa varðar ollom þeim scog gang er lut eigo iþvi við lograðanda hennar oc sva við festar man hennar.</p> <p>Scog gang varðar þeim manne eigin orð er þa cono gengr at eiga er numin er abrott þoat hann væri eigi ifor þeirre.</p> <p>Of sacir þær allar er af kono namino geraz vm rað oc vm til farar vm nam. oc vm eigin orð. er rett at queðia bva fra heimili kononar. þviat eins scal stefna fra heimile hennar vm rað eða queðia bva ef sa er sótr er kona gengr at eiga. enda hafe hann eigi iför verit. Ef rað ero kend oðrom monnom þeim er eigi foro til. oc scal þeim stefna fra heimili sino eða þar er hann hittir þa at male. oc queðia bva aþingi.</p>	<p>K§160 (p. 78–9)</p> <p>If a man abducts another man's betrothed, then full outlawry is the penalty for all who have a part in it at the suit of her legal administrator and also at the suit of her betrothed.</p> <p>Marriage carries a penalty of full outlawry for a man who marries a woman who has been abducted, even though he did not go on the raid.</p> <p>In all cases which arise from the abduction of a woman — for plotting it and for going on the raid, for abducting her and for marrying her — it is lawful to call neighbours of the woman's home. Where plotting is the charge, summoning and calling neighbours are to be in relation to her home only if the man who marries her is prosecuted and did not himself go on the raid. If plotting is ascribed to other men who did not go on the raid, then he is to summon them at their homes or wherever he meets them to speak to, and call neighbours at the assembly.</p>
<p><i>A pregnant unmarried woman must identify the father of the child</i></p>	<p>161. (p. 58–9)</p> <p>Ef kona su er olétt er hon a eigi böanda oc comi sacar aðile til at spyria hana huerr faþir se barns þess er hon fer með oc er hon scylld at segia honom. EN ef hon vill eigi segia þa er þeim manne rétt er sacar aðili er at heimta til bva v. þa er stað þeim ero næstir er þa er</p>	<p>K§161 (p. 79)</p> <p>If a woman is pregnant when she has no husband and the principal in the case comes to her to ask who the father is of the child she is carrying, then she is required to tell him. But if she will not tell, then it is lawful for the man who is principal in the case to call the five neighbours who live nearest the place where the woman is</p>

<p><i>Penalty for the concealment of fatherhood</i></p>	<p>konan oc pína hana til sagna. Sva scal hann pína hana at hvarki verðe at orkumbl ne ilit.</p> <p>Ef sa maðr leynir því með henne visvitande er barn þat á þa scal eigi sættaz á legorð þat við hann nema einka leyfis se at beðit. Jafnt varðar þat þar við hvart þeirra sem þav hafe gert frændsemis spell et meira eða sigia slit et meira. sva varðar þar manvilla sem anars staðar. oc scal stefna þeirri soc heiman oc queðia til aþingi ix. heimilis bva þess er sottr er.</p>	<p>staying and use force to make her talk. He is to use force in such a way that neither lasting injury nor visible mark remains.</p> <p>If the man whose child it is willingly joins with her in concealing it, there is to be no settlement with him for the intercourse unless special leave is asked for it. The penalty for each of them for that is the same as if they committed major incest with kin or with affines. False identification carries here the same penalty as in other cases, and the case is to be summoned locally and nine neighbours of the person prosecuted at the assembly.</p>
<p><i>Concealed taking is theft</i></p>	<p>227. (p. 162)</p> <p>Ef maðr tecr fe fra manne hálfis eyres vert eða meira oc leynir þiof laǵnom. þa er costr at fora til þiofscapar oc stefna oc telia hann sekian scogar man ef quiþr ber han sanan at söc. oc queðia til xii. sökía vm illmælit.</p>	<p>K§227 (p. 177)</p> <p>If a man takes property from someone worth half an ounce-unit or more and conceals it like a thief, then it is possible to pursue it as theft and summon him and claim that, if a panel finds him guilty of the charge, he is under penalty as a full outlaw, and in such a case a panel of twelve is to be called for.</p>
<p><i>Words for which a man has the right to kill</i></p>	<p>238. (p. 183–4)</p> <p>Ef maðr heyrir iscallðscap orð þat er maðr a vígt vm. at hann se ragr eða stroðen. hefnir hann víge eða averkom oc scal hann vm ill mæle sökía.</p>	<p>K§238 (p. 198)</p> <p>If someone hears in poetry words of a kind for which a man has the right to kill — that he is womanish or has been buggered — and avenges it by killing or inflicting injuries, then he shall bring a suit for the malicious speech [in order to clear himself].</p>
<p><i>Love poetry</i></p>	<p>Ef maðr yrkir mansöng vm cono oc varðar scog gang. kona asöc ef hon er xx. eða ellre. ef hon vill eigi sökía láta. oc a lavg raðande hennar sökena.</p>	<p>If a man composes a love-verse on a woman, then the penalty is full outlawry. The cases lies with a woman if she is twenty or older. If she [is younger or] will not have it prosecuted, then the case lies with her legal administrator.</p>
<p><i>The right to give in betrothal</i></p>	<p>253. (p. 203)</p> <p>Sonr xvi. vetra gamall eða ellre er fastnande moðor sínar arfgengr. EN ef eigi er sonr þa er dóttir su er gipt er. oc a þa boande hennar at fastna mág cono sina. EN þa er faðir fastnande dottor sínar. EN þa scal broþir sam- feðri fastna systor sína. EN ef eigi er broþir þa scal moðir fastna dóttor sina. EN þa scal EN nánaste niðr fastna karlmanna. nema konor se nanare þær er</p>	<p>K§253 (p. 218)</p> <p>A son sixteen winters or older, a lawful heir, is the man with the right to give his mother in betrothal. And if there is no son, then a daughter who is married, and it is then her husband who has the right to give his mother-in-law in betrothal. And then her father is the man to give his daughter in betrothal. And then a brother born of the same father is to give his sister in betrothal. And if there is no brother, then the mother is to give her daughter in</p>

	boendr eiga. þa eigo böendr þeirra.	betrothal. But then the closest of her kinsmen is to give her in betrothal, unless there are closer kinswomen who have husbands — then their husbands have the right to do it.
<i>Castration of vagrants</i>	254. (p. 203–4) Rett er at gellda gongo menn oc varðar eigi við lög þoat þeir fae örkuembl af eða bana.	K§254 (p. 219) It is lawful to castrate vagrants and there is no legal penalty even if they get lasting injury or death from it.
<i>Transvestism</i>	Ef kona klæðiz karl klæðom eþa scer ser scavr eþa fer með vápn fyrir breytni sacir. þat varðar fiorbavgs garð. þat er stefno söc oc scal queþia til bva v. aþingi. sa a söc er vill. Slict er mælt vm karla af þeir klæðaz kuena klæðnaðe.	If in order to be different a woman dresses in men's clothes or cuts her hair short or carries weapons, the penalty for that is lesser outlawry. It is a summoning case and give neighbours are to be called for it at the assembly. The case lies with anyone who wants it. The same is prescribed for men if they dress in women's clothing.

<i>If an unmarried woman wishes to become a nun</i>	119. (p. 156) Eigi scal faþir neyða dottor sina til raða ef hon vill vigiaz lata til nunno. ⁵	220. (From St§119) (p. 267) A father is not to force his daughter into marriage if she wishes to let herself be consecrated a nun.
<i>A woman's choice of suitor</i>	Ef fleire menn ero til raðana. þa scal sa raða er ellztr er brøðrana. Ef þa scilr a enda biði hon þa raða fyrir. EN ef hon queðr a eitt hvat. þa scal sa þeirra raða er hennar raðe fylgir. ef þat þickir iafn ræðe. en engo ræðr alldrin þa. oc sva hvarvetna þes er eigi ero brøðr.	If more men than one stand to arrange her marriage, then the eldest of the brothers is to decide if they disagree and given that she asks them to take charge of the affair. But if she states an opinion, then [the one] who seconds her choice is to decide, as long as that is thought an equal match. And in that case age does not determine the decision at all, and the same applies in other cases where it is not a question of brothers.
<i>Accepting betrothal from a woman</i>	125. (p. 162) Eigi scal maðr festar taca af kono nema af moðor nema hann take af eckio eða meyio tvitögri. eða ellri. oc þo þviat eins at aðr hafi bøðit .ii. menn oc se þessi inn þriþi. enda se iafn røðe við huern þeirra. Sva scal sökia ef aðrar konor fastna sem vm legorð helldr en þesar sem nu voro talþar.	226. (From St§125) (p. 270) A man is not to accept betrothal from any woman other than the mother unless he accepts it from a widow or an unmarried woman of twenty or over, and then only if two men have already asked for her hand and he is the third, and given that they are an equal match. If women other than those just listed give in betrothal, the case is to be prosecuted in the way intercourse is

⁵ Quotations from *Grágás* are hereafter taken from *Staðarhólsbók*.

		prosecuted.
<i>Penalties and procedure in cases arising from abduction</i>	159. (p. 188) Ef menn ferja þa menn af lande heðan er kono hafa numma oc konona með þeim. oc varðar Fiör bavgs garð þeim mönnum öllum er samscipa þeim fara. enda varðar sva ef þeir fara sam scipa þeim manne er konona lét nema ser til handa þott hann være eigi iförine. Stefna scal þeim sökum at festar hælum. enda queðia þaðan bva ix. a þingi. Ef meiri ero rað kend vm kono nam þeim manne er eigi var i för þeirre. oc scal lata varða scog gang honom. ef menn vilia sokia hann. oc sva et sama þótt fleirom mönnum se rað kend. oc scal queðia til heimilis bva ix. heiman þes manz er sottr er. Þar er rett um sakir þær allar er bva scal queðia heiman til hvart sem vill at stefna heiman eða lysa a þingi. Þat er oc rétt um sakir þær er geraz af kono namino. í raðum eða i eigin orðe. ef sakar aþilia þickir ser þat högra at queðia bva ix. heiman um þan stað sem konan var a brot numin.	257. (From St§159) (p. 281) If men give passage out of the country to men who have abducted a woman and to the woman with them, then the penalty is lesser outlawry for all who sail in the same ship. And the penalty is the same if they sail in the same ship as the man for whom and at whose instigation the woman was abducted, even though he did not go on the raid himself. Those cases are to be summoned at the mooring stakes and nine neighbours from there called at the assembly. If a major share in plotting the abduction is ascribed to a man who did not go on the raid, then his penalty is to be made full outlawry, if men want to prosecute him — and likewise if plotting is ascribed to more men than one — and nine neighbours of the man prosecuted are to be called locally. In all cases where neighbours are called locally it is lawful to do whichever is preferred, summon locally or publish at the assembly. In all cases arising from a woman's abduction, with charges of plotting and of marriage, it is also lawful, if the principal in the case thinks it easier for him, to call locally nine neighbours of the place where the woman was abducted.
<i>Penalties and procedures in cases arising from abduction</i>	160. (p. 189) EN ef þeir ferja kono þa af landi a brot er numin er til eigin orðz. oc er rétt at stefna at festar hælom styre mönnum oc hásetom.	258. (From St§160) (p. 281) But if they give passage out of the country to a woman who has been abducted for marriage, then it is lawful to summon ship's masters and ship's company at the mooring stakes.
	171. (p. 204) Þa er brullavp gert at lavgom er lavgraðandi fastnar kono. enda se .vi. menn at brullavpi et fæsta oc gangi brvþgumi iliosi i sama sæing kono.	St§171 A wedding is performed lawfully if legal guardians betroth the woman and if six people are at the wedding and the bridegroom is led <i>with lights</i> into the same bed as his wife. ⁶

⁶ Translation my own.

JÓNSBÓK

SUBHEADING	OLD NORSE	TRANSLATION
<p>IV.2</p> <p>vm nidingsverk</p> <p>Concerning the deeds of a villain</p>	<p>(p. 36; 38)</p> <p>Þat er ok nidings verk ef maðr hóggr hond eðr fót af manni. eðr flíngr wt auga mannz. eðr skerr tungu or höfði manni. eðr gellðir. eðr meiðir mann at vilia sínum. Sua eru þeir ok vbota menn er hallda fyrir þessu einshueríu. sem fa er gerir. nema konungr læti reffa til land reínfanar. En ef þat veitir j vǫpnalkíptum. þa fare eftir þui sem konungs vmbodðs maðr skipar með goðra manna ráði.⁷</p> <p>Suo ok þeir menn er at sliikum oknýttum werða kenndir. at þeir hlaupa brott með éingínkonur ma/nna. þa ero þeir vbota menn bæði fyrir konungi ok karlí dræpir ok deýddir. Menn þeir er la/ta líf sítt fyrir þýflku eða wtilegu. huart er helldræna æ skípum eða landi. ok sua fyrir moðð ok forðædu lkap ok spafarar allar ok wtiletur. at vekia troll vpp ok fremía heiðni með þui. ok þeir menn sem gerazft flugu menn til. at dræpa þa menn er þeir eiga engar sakir víð. ok taka fe til. nema konungs vmbodðs menn læ/ti reffa til landreínfanar ok fríðar. Suo ok þeir menn er konur taka með raaní eða herfangí motí guðs retti ok mann/a. huart er þeir taka frændkonur manna. eðr annarra manna konur eða dættur. fyrir vttan vilia þeirra manna er forrædi eí/gu æ at lögum. ok sua fialfra þeirra. huer/ fu sem síðan gerizft vili þeirra er samuí/fta</p>	<p>(p. 37; 39)</p> <p>That is a dishonorable crime if someone cuts off another man's hand or foot, or pokes out his eyes, or cuts out his tongue, or castrates or mutilates a man intentionally. And they are also <i>úbótamenn</i>, who hold someone so that something can be done to him, just like the one who actually does it, unless the king should order them punished with expulsion in order to purify the land. But if that results in an exchange of weapons, then that is to be handled based on what the king's agent decides, with the advice of good men.</p> <p>Those men who are identified with such crimes as running away with men's wives are men without the legal right to atone by paying compensation, both in sight of king and kinsmen; they can and should be put to death. Likewise, those men who devote their lives to thievery or robbery, whether they rob men on shipboard or on land, or because of murder or witchcraft, and all kinds of soothsaying, or because of spending the night outside to practice witchcraft to wake trolls and thereby promote paganism; and the men who become assassins in order to kill only men against whom they have no quarrel and accept money for it, unless the king's agents punish them with expulsion and establish peace. The same goes for the men who take women by violence or booty in warfare contrary to the laws of God and men — whether they take men's kinswomen or other men's wives or daughters — against the will of those men who have authority over them in accordance with law or against the will of</p>

⁷ Both Old Norse quotes and the English translations are taken from *Jónsbók: The Laws of Later Iceland; The Icelandic Text According to MS AM 351 fol. Skálholtsbók eldri*, ed. and trans. Jana K. Schulman, Bibliotheca Germanica (Saarbrücken: AQ-Verlag, 2010). As with *Grágás*, I give my own translations in the thesis main body when such occasions are necessary. Numeric codes and subheadings correspond to those in Schulman's edition.

	<p>werðr.</p> <p>Þat er enn vbota mál ef maðr tekr konu nò/ðga. ef þar eru til .íj. löglig vítni at þat se fatt. Nu eru æigi vítni til en hon seg/izft nauðig tekín. ok segir hon þat samdægrris. þa dæmi .xíj. menn hínir sky/nfamazstu eftir þui sem þeim þickir lí/kenndi til bera. ok huart þeirra þicki likt til fannenda. En þott kona geti wart lík fyrir goðkuensku sinnar sakir. sua at hann komi æigi vilia sínum fram. þa berz með eingu moti at hann hafi æigi ref/líng fyrir eftir domi ef sannprofazft at hann hafði fullan vilia til þess. ok hall/di þo lífinu.</p>	<p>the women themselves, regardless of what the man and the woman's wish becomes later when they live together; all these are men without the legal right to atone by paying compensation.</p> <p>That is also an unatonable crime if someone rapes a woman, provided there are two lawful witness who say that that is true. Now, if there are no witnesses to the crime but she says that on the same day that it happened, then twelve of the most prudent men shall judge the case according to what seems to them most likely to have happened, and according to the evidence of the one of the two parties which they find to come nearest the truth. But even though the woman is able to defend herself because of her feminine virtue so that the man is not able to carry out his intent, there is no question but that he is to be punished according to a judgment if it is proven that he had the full intention to rape her, but he may keep his life.</p>
<p>V.1</p> <p>hier hefr kuenna gíp/tingar með almen/neligum erfðum</p> <p>Here begins the chapter on marriage and inheritance</p>	<p>(p. 84; 86)</p> <p>Fadir ok modir skal ráða giptingum dætttra sinna. ef þau eru til. En ef þeirra míllir. þa sk/ulu fòður frændr ok moður fræn/dr hínir nánuzstu giptingum ráða.</p> <p>Nu eru bròðr til nánuzstir. ok skilr þa a. þa skal sa ráða er hennar raði fyl/gír. ef þat þickir íafnræði. Ok skal sua hueru/itna þar sem fleiri eru iamkonnir til.</p> <p>Giptingar maðr skal skilia heíma/nfýlgíu ok tilgiöf fyrir frændkonu lí/nni. sua sem þeim kemr a samt. Þeir skulu ok þa eindaga nær brwðlaup skal wera. En ef þa skilr a vm malda/ga. þa láti feftar maðr bera tueggia manna vítni vm heíman fylgíu huat mælt war þeir er hia woro. En ef þa skilr a vm tilgiöf. þa níoti giptingar maðr tue/gia vatta með fyrra skilorði.</p> <p>Eigi skal j klæðum meira heíman gefazft með konu en þriðjungr. En</p>	<p>(p. 85; 87)</p> <p>Father and mother shall supervise the marriages of their daughters, if they are alive. But if they are dead, then the nearest kinsmen of the father and the nearest kinsmen of the mother supervise the marriages.</p> <p>If her brothers are her closest kinsmen and they disagree, then the one who is of the same opinion as she, if that seems an equal match, shall act, and he shall supervise everywhere when several suitors are on equal terms.</p> <p>The marriage-man shall settle the dowry and the bridal gift for his kinswoman as is agreed on by him and her fiancé. And they shall fix the day when the wedding shall be. But later if they do not agree about the terms of the dowry, then let her fiancé produce two men who were there to testify as to what was said about the dowry. But if they do not agree about the bridal gift, then the marriage-man shall make use of two witnesses with the former stipulations.</p> <p>A woman may not be given from home with more than a third of her dowry in</p>

	<p><i>þat sem gíp/tíngar maðr gefr meíra. þat skal wera j þeim lu/tum at þat megi wera þeim til þarfa eða afla er konu færR. En eínga heím/anfýlgiu ma arfi gíptíngar ma/nz ríufa ef sua er gert sem nu war íkílt.</i></p> <p>En ef kona gíptiz vtan ráð fóður síns. bróður eða móður. eða þess er gí/ptíngar maðr er fyrir ráði hennar. hafi fyrir gert ollum órfum þeim er hon stoð til eftir gíptíngar mann sua sem fu kona væri æigi getín til þess arfs. nema gíptíngar maðr vili fírra hana íafnræði. þa ma hon gíptaz með annarra íkynlamra fræ/nda sínna raði. ef þeim liz íafnræði eða betr. ok megi þeir þat með eiði sínum sanna. ok æ þo at leita þess aðr wið gíp/tíngar mann. En gíptíngar maðr er faðir eða bródir samfeddr. Þar næft mo/ðir íkilfeíngín ef hon er til. þa er karlmaðr tuitugr eða ellri ía er næft er erf/ðum eftir þa konu er gíptiz. En ía er líks dirfíz gíalldí fullrétti gíptín/gar manni eftir xíj. manna domí eða farí wtlægr af þeim fíorðungi. nema óð/rum frendum virðiz íafnræði sem fýRR segir. Eckia ma gípta sík ía/ íf hueríum sem hon víl við nóckurs fræn/da síns rað.</p> <p>En konur þær er líázst til þess at locka til líks eða annars ía/rlífis bórn manna eða frændkonur ok werðr þat vítnís fast. þa bæti eftir .xíj manna domí peníngum su er fe hefír til. en hín hafi refllíng eptir domí ,</p>	<p>clothing and whatever the marriage man gives in addition, that shall be those things which be of use or gain to the man who marries the woman. And the heir of the marriage-man may not invalidate the dowry-agreement if it is done as now was stipulated.</p> <p>If a woman marries without the consent of her father, brother, mother, or the marriage-man who is to arrange her marriage, then she has forfeited all the inheritance that she had a right to from the marriage-man, just as if she had not been born, unless the marriage-man wants to deprive her of an equal match, then she may marry with the consent of her other kinsmen, if they think that match an equal or better one, and they are able to vouch for that with their oaths, but one shall still first seek the marriage-man's agreement. The marriage-man is her father or her brother born of the same father, thereafter her lawfully wedded mother if she is alive, the a woman of twenty years or older — he who is next in line to inherit after the woman who is given in marriage. And he who dares such — to give her in marriage against her first marriage-man's wishes — is to pay her marriage-man full personal compensation according to the judgment of twelve men or shall be outlawed from the Quarter — unless her other kinsmen thought it was an equal match just as was said before. A widow may give herself in marriage to whomever she wants with the consent of any of her kinsmen.</p> <p>And those women who occupy themselves with enticing the children of men or kinswomen to such an immoral life and that can be proven, then she who has property pays compensation with money according to the judgment of twelve men; but she who does not have property will be punished according to a judgment.</p>
<p>V.5</p> <p>Vm legorðz íakír eígin kuenna ok íkílnadar íok við eígin konr</p>	<p>(p. 94)</p> <p>ÍEf maðr geíngR j íæng til kono. ok vill koma legorði æa hana. þo at hann komí æigi vilia sínum fram. þa bæti sa eptir .xíj. manna domí ,</p>	<p>(p. 95)</p> <p>If a man goes into a woman's bed and wants to have intercourse with her, even if he is not able to carry out his intent, then he is to pay compensation according to the judgment of twelve men.</p>

<p><i>About wives' sexual intercourse cases and cause of divorce with wives</i></p>		
<p>IX.1</p> <p>Hier hefr þiofa balk. greiner j honum huerfu með lógvm æ fyrir þiofvm at fía</p> <p><i>Here begins the chapter on theft that indicates how one is to [sic.] treat thieves according to the law</i></p>	<p>(p. 330; 332)</p> <p> En ef stelr hundi mannz eða kettí. knífi. eða. bellti. ok ollu þui er mínna er en eyrir. þat er huínzka. Ok ef maðr werðr fanr at. gialldi konungi .ii.^{ia} aura. en þeim eyri er at/tí ok heiti maðr at verri.</p> <p> En sa maðr er vinnu færR at serr til fostrs. stelr til eyris. sa er ecki war aðr at fliku kendr. þa skal hann æ þing færa ok leyfi hwð sína .iij. morkum Nu stelr hann annat sínni til eyris. leyfi h/wð sína .vi. morkum. En ef hann leysir æigi læti hwðína ok se bꝛugðit lukli æ kinn hanf. Nu stelr hann þriðia sín til eyris. lati huði/na. en konungr takí .vi. merkr at fe hans. En ef sa hinn samí stelr optar. þa er hann dꝛæ/pr.</p>	<p>(p. 331; 333)</p> <p>But if someone steals a man's dog or cat, knife or belt, or anything which is worth less than one ounce-unit, then that is petty larceny; if someone is convicted of that, then he is to pay a fine of two ounce-units to the king and of one ounce-unit to the one who owned the item and he is to be called a lesser man.</p> <p>If, however, someone who is able to find work to support himself steals goods equaling one ounce-unit, but he has not been identified with such an act before, then one is to bring him to the assembly and let him redeem his skin by paying three marks [to the king].</p> <p>Now if he steals goods equaling one ounce-unit a second time, then let him redeem his skin by paying six marks; but if he does not pay the fine, then he is to be flogged and branded on his cheek with a key. Now if he steals good equaling one ounce-unit a third time, then he is to be flogged and the king is to take a fine of six marks from his goods. But if the same man steals goods equaling one ounce-unit more often, then he is to be killed.</p>

APPENDIX III:
RÚNAKEFLI

INFORMATION					INTER- PRETATION				
NUMBER ¹	DATE/ AREA/ MATERIAL	RUNIC INSCRIPTION	STANDARD- ISED NORSE	MODERN ENGLISH	AVOWAL	CRUDE	REQUEST/ DEMAND	CURSE	POSSIBLE MAGIC
DR 261	375–500/ Lindholm/ bone	§A ek erilaz sa wilagaz hateka : §B aaaaaaaaazzn nn-bmuttt : alu :	§A <i>Ek erilaz sa Wilagaz haite'ka §B ... alu (Proto Norse)</i>	§A I the eril am called the wily §B ... 'alu' (ale?) ²	x				x
DR EM85; 350	900–1050/ Hemdrup/ wood	§A uan þik iba ' fiukati ' osa ' auaubi §B (f)u ~ (n)iluiái ...	§A <i>Vann þik æva fjúkandi, Ása(?) ... §B</i>	§A The storming one never won you over, Ása has luck in struggle	x			x	x
N 344	ca. 1200/Årdal/ pine	§A lige^r i : pa^le^ ^lifir hæimsleha hin^ n er bæþ undir ser beleitir sdundum §B þa^r munu matka^r ma^rher ga^uga sem a duni søfe^r dote^r at^l^la	§A <i>Liggr í palli, lifir heimskliga hinn er beð undir sér bleytir stundum. §B Þar munu maðkar margir gaufa, sem á dúni søfr dóttir Atla.</i>	§A (He) lies on the bench, lives foolishly; he who beds underneath him is sometimes soaked. §B There will many maggots swarm, as Atli's daughter sleeps on down.		x		x	x

¹ All data, including standardisations and translations, is collected from 'Runor' unless otherwise stated.

² Ivar Lindquist has suggested that these enigmatic runes are designed to force the love of a woman (he notes in particular the use of three 'nauðr' runes [†] which he interprets as 'tvång' [force]), *Galdrar. De gamla germanska trollsångernas stil undersökt I samband med en svensk runinskrift från folkvandringstiden* (Göteborg: Göteborgs högskolas årsskrift, 1923), 74.

N 603	ca. 1300/ Bergen/ wood	§A ... - g(r)(e):gie : igni:bus : ka^(e)sko : æius : koti:die : in amo^re : græs:ko ... §B ...--(s) : agam : teneri : uirgo : sik · agamus : ambos : (s)umus ... §C ...-n--a : luis : agone : Yilum·ena : kuæruli : tæria (r)-... ...	§A [<i>Virginis</i> <i>e]gregie</i> <i>ignibus</i> <i>calesco [et]</i> <i>eius cotidie in</i> <i>amore cresco;</i> ... §B ... <i>agam</i> <i>teneri virgo sic</i> <i>agamus ambos</i> <i>sumus ... §C</i> ... <i>lucis agone.</i> <i>Philomena</i> <i>querule Terea</i> <i>r[etractat], ...</i>	§A I am becoming inflamed with the fires (of love) for the exquisite maiden, and grow daily (more) in love with her ... §B ... §C ... with life's(?) despondency. Philomena lamenting struggles with Tereus ...	x			
N A36	1100–1500/ Oslo/cow bone	§A an sa × þer × es × risti × runa þesar × þortis §B þora ek kan kilia	§A <i>Ann sá þér,</i> <i>er risti rúnar</i> <i>þessar, Þordís!</i> §B <i>Þóra! Ek</i> <i>kann gilja.</i>	§A He who carved these runes loves you, Þordís! §B Þóra! I can beguile (any woman).	x			x
N A41	1100– 1500/Oslo/ cow bone	kYs mik	<i>Kyss mik.</i>	Kiss me.		x		x
N B11	ca. 1250/ Bergen/ wood	§A ~ felleg : er : fuþ : sin : bylli §B ~ fuþorg lbasn	§A <i>Ferlig er</i> <i>fuð, sin byrli.</i> §B <i>Fuð-örg ...</i>	§A Monstrous is the cunt, may the penis serve. §B Cunt- perverse/nymp homania ...	x			x
N B17	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	§A f·uþork : hnias · tbmly §B ost : min : kis : mik §C (-) ki	§A < <i>fuþork</i> > < <i>hnias</i> > < <i>tbmly</i> > §B <i>Ást mín, kyss</i> <i>mik. §C</i>	§A < <i>fuþork</i> > < <i>hnias</i> > < <i>tbmly</i> > §B My beloved, kiss me. §C		x		x
N B39	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	§A smiþur ~ saa^rþ ~ uiktisi §B af ~ snæltu~benu m	§A <i>Smiðr sarð</i> <i>Vigdís</i> §B <i>af</i> <i>snældubeinum.</i>	§A Smiðr fucked Vígdís §B of the Snelde-legs (ie, the Snelde- legs folk)	x	x		

N B99	ca. 1300/ Bergen/ wood	at(a^r)ji sk^yldi a^up foltu una þæims lifom u--	<i>Aldri skyldi Auðr fólðu unna þeim's lyfum u[nnu].</i>	Never should the woman (= I) love them who resisted magic.			X		X
N B111	ca. 1250/ Bergen/ wood	§A snot gat : la^ussa^ lata lingunir fyrir ur §B --- (o)m : æ- --r h(o)- mæ fyrir mo^nnom §C - æ(k)(u)mbæi(þ)iba^r(þ)(o)	<i>§A Snót gat lausan láta, Lín-Gunnr, fyrir ver §B [sín]um, e[nn] [e]r hó[n] mæ fyrir mōnnum, §C ...</i>	The wise woman must let go ... for her husband[/ lover] - she is still a maid for men [i.e. people still consider her too soft] - ... ³	X				
N B118	ca. 1200/ Bergen/ wood	§A u^ n þu · mæ · a^ n (e)^k · þæ · gunnild^ r · kys mik §B kan ek þik	<i>§A Unn þú mér, ann ek þér. Gunnhildr! Kyss mik, §B kann ek þik.</i>	§A If you love me, then I love you. Gunnhildr! Kiss me, §B I know you well.	X	X			X
N B145	ca.1250/ Bergen/ wood	§A fe^ll · til · fripra^ r · þ(e)^llu · fa^rl(e)^gh^ r a^r · m(e)^ r · a^rla · fiska^ll · festiba^la · fo^rn · byr hama^r¶¶no^ r^na §B · þeim (u)ihdi · he^uir þunda^r · þo^rnluprs · (e)o^lun·bupa ^r · g^lo^uma^r · gyghia^rto^u ma §C ka^lt^rs falkha · haldet ÷	<i>§A Fell til friðrar þellu fárligrar mér árla fiskáls festibála forn byrr hamarnorna; §B þeim lundi hefir Þundar þornlúðrs jölunbúðar glauma gygjartauma §C galdrs fastliga haldit. Omnia vincit Amor, et nos cedam[us] Amori. §D galdrs fastliga haldit. Omnia vincit Amor, et nos cedamus</i>	§A Sense/thoughts (= the old wind of the mountain- crag Norns) §B turned early for me toward the beautiful, §C dangerous woman (= held- fast spruce of the bonfire of the fish channel). §D The poet (= tree of Þorn's/giant's grinding-trough [= 'ship' lið ~ líð 'drink'],	X	X			X

³ Translation my own.

		omnia : uincip · amo[^]r · æþ nos c[^](c)itam(m)- - · amori · §D ga[^]ld[^]rs fasl(e)[^]gha · haldet ÷ omnia · uincip · amo[^]r · æþ · nos · c(e)damus · amori ·	<i>Amori.</i>	i. e. poetry [drink of Þundr (Óðinn)] was held fast by the madness of the tumult in the abode of the harmful woman (= witch of the magic reins). Love conquers all; let us too give in to Love. ⁴				
N B171	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	§A -(k)minum ~ sot- §B -- m(n) §C + uældrnotok(d) - §D okmæyarsih-	<i>§A Veldr nátt</i> <i>ok §B d[ag] ...</i> <i>mínun, §C</i> <i>sótt(-) ... §D</i> <i>ok meymar</i>	§A It causes (both) §B night and d[ay] ... my/mine; §C sickness/worries §D ...and the maiden's/maiden. ⁵	X			
N B184	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	fanabælti iok biacku þina	<i>Fanabelti jók</i> <i>bjarzku þina</i>	May the belt from Fana increase your beauty(?).				X
N B257	ca. 1335/ Bergen/ wood	§A rist e[^]k : bot:runa[^]r : rist : e[^]k biabh:runa[^]r : eæin:fa[^]l uiþ : a[^]luom : tuiua[^]lt uiþ : t[^]rolom : þreua[^]lt : uiþ : þ(u)-- §B uiþ e[^]nne : skøþo : skah : ua[^]lkyrriu : sua:at : eæi mehi : þo:at æ uili : læuis : kona : liui : þinu g- - §C	<i>§A Rist ek</i> <i>bótrúnar, rist</i> <i>ek bjargrúnar,</i> <i>/ einfalt við</i> <i>álfum, tvífalt</i> <i>við tröllum, /</i> <i>þrífalt við</i> <i>þursum...</i> <i>§B við inni</i> <i>skæðu skag-</i> <i>valkyrju, / svá</i> <i>at ei megi, þó</i> <i>at æ vili / lævis</i> <i>kona, lífi</i> <i>þinu...§C Ek</i> <i>sendi þér, ek sé</i> <i>á þér, / ylgjar</i> <i>ergi ok óþola. /</i>	§A I carve healing runes, I carve protective runes, once against elves, twice against trolls, thrice against giants ... §B against the harmful jutting (spear-carrying?) valkyrie so that she cannot though she may always			X	X

⁴ Translation here taken from Knirk, "Love and Eroticism," 226.

⁵ Translation here taken from *ibid.*

		e [^] k sende [^] r : þer : ek se a þe [^] r : ylhia [^] r : e [^] rhi o [^] k oþola : a þe [^] r : rini : uþole : a [^] uk : i(a)luns : moþ : sittu : ald [^] ri : sop þu : ald [^] r(i) - §D a [^] nt : mer : sem : sialpre : þer : beirist : rubus : rabus : eþ : arantabus : laus : abus : rosa : ga [^] ua - -	<i>Á þér renni óþoli ok jötuns móð. / Sittu aldri, soþú aldri... §D Ant mér sem sjalfri þér. Beirist rubus etc.⁶</i>	wish to, the evil woman hurt your life ... §C I send on you, I chant onto you the she-wolf's perversion and intolerable longing. May unsatisfied longing come upon on you and the giant's rage May you never (be able to) sit (still), may you never sleep ... §D Love me like yourself (fem.) Beirist rubus etc.				
N B371	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	§A fuþorkhni(a)- §B olafr · kyst(i) · (d)(t)(k)-	<i>§A <fuþorkhnia-> §B Ólafr kysti ...</i>	§A <fuþorkhnia-> §B Olaf kissed ...	X			
N B390	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	inkebiørk uni mer þa (e)r (e)k uar i spafa [^] kri	<i>Ingibjörg unni mér þá er ek var i Stafangri.</i>	Ingibjörg loved me when I was in Stavanger.	X			
N B434	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	§A ion sil kifuþ a mek en guþormr fuþcllæikir §B ræist mik en : ion fuþkula ræþr m(e)k	<i>§A Jón Silkifuð á mik, en Guðpormr Fuðsleikir §B reist mik, en Jón Fuðkula ræðr mik.</i>	§A Jón Silky- cunt owns me, and Guðpormr Cunt-licker §B carved me, and Jón Ball-cunt interprets me.	X	X		
N B465	ca. 1185/ Bergen/ wood	§A mun þu mek man ek §B þ [¶] ek un þu mer an ek þer	<i>Mun þú mik, man ekþ^{¶¶}ik. Unn þú mér, ann ek þér.</i>	Think of me, I think of you. Love me, I love you.	X		X	X

⁶ Standardisation and translation taken from John McKinnell, Rudolf Simek, and Klaus Düwel, *Runes, Magic and Religion: A Sourcebook*, Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia (Wien: Fassbaender, 2004), 131–2.

N B489	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	§A (k)(r)--(e)k : kona · kanik : (o)- §B ar(i) : lakapi : unim(e)(r)(k)- §C : (m) : ka(u)nostof^n akraunosta-	-ari lagaði. Unni(?) mér ... [mun m]ik, kona, kann ek ..., '???' ⁷	brewed. May love me ... [think?] of me, woman, I know ...'					X
N B493	1200–1250/ Bergen/ wood	bylli min un mer an ek þer af astom a^u^k af <allum> <huha>	Byrli minn! Unn mér! Ann ek þér af ástum ok af öllum huga.	My beloved (= host/server of drinks), love me! I love you with all my heart and all my mind. ⁸	X	X			X
N B496	1300–1330/ Bergen/ wood	§A ~ an ek : sua : ko^no : ma^nc : (k)(i)þa : taka : fioll ~ uip : lægjumk : sua : hugi a ~ ringæipr : at : io^rp : sprin(g)r ~ §B : ram en skal aþr en ek hoskge hamna huit er su miol er liggr	§A Ann ek svá konu manns viða taka fjöll við leggjumk svá hugi á, hring-reið, at jörð springr. §B Hrafn ... skal áðr en ek horskri hamna hvítr er sú mjöll er liggr.	§A I love so much (another) man's wife that the mountains will begin to tremble(?). We, the woman (= wagon?/Eir? [= goddess] of rings) (and I), love one another so much that the earth will burst.' §B The raven shall, before I reject the wise woman, [become] as white (as) the snow that lies [on the mountains?] ⁹	X				

⁷ Standardised Norse and translation taken from Knirk, "Love and Eroticism," 228.

⁸ Translation taken from *ibid.*

⁹ Translation taken from *ibid.*

N B535	ca.1170/ Bergen/ wood	---(o) ka ⁿ ek : sǣhia : þer ~ sem þu ma ^{nt} ~ røyna ~ af ~ mer : at ek ~ skal : una : þer ~ ænku ~ uær en mer : u-	... kann ek segja þér, sem þú mant reyna af mér, at ek skal unna þér engu verr enn mér. I can say to you, as you will experience with me, that I will love you no less than myself. ...	X	X		X
N B540	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	kis þu mik	Kyss þú mik.	Kiss me.		X		X
N B548	ca. 1300/ Bergen/ wood	§A ~ o ^l ber·ek · ypisæliu · a ^r mg(l)a- §B sek færþ a ^p u(s)u ærþa ygi(r) - §C : uil ^l dae ^k ~ grimnis ~ gil ^l di : (f(a) ^r (u)n ^h a ⁿ - §D n ^h ha ^u a ska ^l d af stælda ^r (s)-	§A Ql ber'k yppi-selju arm- glóðar(?), §B sé'k ferð Ásu(?) ærða, Yggjar ... §C Vilda'k Grímnis gildi grun ... §D Nú hafa skald af stældar ...	'I bear forth a poem (= Yggr's [Óðinn's] mead) to the woman (= willow who lifts the arm- ember [= golden jewelry]) ... I see Ása's(?) travel grow ... I wanted the poem (= Grímnir's [Óðinn's] drinking party) ... Now the skalds have steeled (i.e. put into a poem a parenthetical statement) ... ¹⁰		X		
N B552	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	ila hefer sa maþr er -(e)- (e)r sliga go(n)o (s)ein(i)uer	Ílla hefir sá maðr er [h]e[ff]ir slíka konu ...	Evil has the man who has such a woman ...	X			
N B556	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	§A - þþþ · -- §B -u mik man ek þik	§A §B [þ]ú mik man ek þik.	§A §B you me, I love you.	X	X		X

¹⁰ Translation taken from *ibid.*

N B605	1180–1190/ Bergen/ leather	§A imulil amo [^] r §B u ^{¶¶} icip omnia op	... amor v ^{¶¶} incit omnia, et	§A Love §B conquers all; also(?)	x				
N B628	1100–1500/ Bergen/ wood	§A rannuæih ~ rauþu (s)(k)a--(u) : st [^] erþ §B þat : se : mæira : in : man [^] ns:- æpr ~ ok : min [^] na : en §C hæstræpr §D a	§A Rannveig Rauðu ska[lt]u streða/serða. §B Þat sé meira enn manns[r]eðr ok minna enn §C hestreðr. §D ...	§A You will fuck Rannveig the red. §B It will be bigger than a mans prick and smaller than a horses prick.		x	x		x

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