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Hugvísindasvið

Viking and Medieval Norse Studies

Vǫlsungsrímur

A New English Translation with Commentary and Analysis

Ritgerð til MA-prófs í Viking and Medieval Norse Studies

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Abstract

Vǫlsungsrímur are a late 14th century cycle of *rímur* based on *Vǫlsunga saga*, the Prologue and *Gylfaginning* of *Snorra Edda*, and *Ynglinga saga*. This *rímnaflokkur* contains 279 stanzas in six fitts. It is believed to have been written by Kálfr Hallsson, or Kálfr Skáld, an otherwise unknown poet who also wrote the hagiographic skaldic poem *Kátrinardrápa*. The poet of *Vǫlsungsrímur* uses the first eight chapters of *Vǫlsunga saga* for his main narrative framework, prefacing this narrative material in the first fitt with a clever combination of elements of Snorri Sturluson's works describing the ascent of the gods from humans into deities through trickery.

Vǫlsungsrímur were edited by Finnur Jónsson around the turn of the 20th century, but otherwise little scholarly work has been devoted to this fascinating poem. For this dissertation, I have translated the *rímur* into English prose verse with a marginal gloss for *heiti* and kennings. Because *rímur* rely so much on the character of the Icelandic language to satisfy the demands of metre, alliteration, and rhyme, it is difficult to translate them without losing entirely the character of the original. Therefore, this translation is designed as an aid to reading and understanding the original, not a stand-alone translation.

The translation is followed by detailed commentary and analysis. I provide a brief survey of the field of *rímur* scholarship and a discussion of the genre's modern reception in academia. I analyze the poem to draw out the prominent themes, examine the poet's use of his sources, and attempt to draw out meaning from these findings within the poem's socio-historical context. I conclude that *Vǫlsungsrímur* uses and manipulates its sources to highlight the themes of betray of trust and false gods. I show that the poem reflects contemporary discussion and conflicts about legitimate authority. More specifically, *Vǫlsungsrímur* reflects the struggles for power between the *goðar* and the Icelandic Church, struggles for power between the Icelandic and Norwegian churches, and Icelandic anxieties about the power of the Norwegian Crown.

Ágrip

Vǫlsungsrímur er rímnaflokkur frá 14du öld sem byggjast á *Vǫlsunga sögu*, á *Prólógusi* og *Gylfaginningu Snorra Eddu*, auk *Ynglinga sögu*. Rímurnar eru sex og vísurnar 279 alls. Talið er að Kálfr Hallsson hafi ort þær, eða Kálfr Skáld. Hann er annars óþekkt skáld sem þó er vitað að hafi samið *Kátrinardrápu*, sem er helgikvæði í dróttkvæðum hætti. Skáldið sem orti *Vǫlsungsrímur* byggir frásögn sína á fyrstu átta köflum *Vǫlsunga sögu*, en styðst í fyrstu rímunni haganlega við margs konar efni úr verkum Snorra Sturlusonar þar sem hann lýsir því hvernig æsir beittu brögðum til að verða að guðum.

Finnur Jónsson gaf út *Vǫlsungsrímur* í byrjun 20. aldar en annars hafa fræðimenn lítt sinnt þessu áhugaverða kvæði. Í ritgerðinni eru rímurnar þýddar á ensku í óbundið mál, ásamt spássíuskýringum á heiti og kenningum. Bragreglur um stuðla, höfuðstafi og innrím valda því að erfitt er að fylgja þeim í þýðingu á erlent mál án þess að merking glatist alveg. Því er þessi þýðing hugsuð sem hjálp fyrir þá sem vilja njóta kvæðisins á frummálinu en ekki sem sjálfstætt bókmenntaverk.

Þýðingunni fylgja nákvæmar skýringar og greining. Gefið verður stutt yfirlit um rannsóknir á rímum ásamt umfjöllun um viðtökur fræðimanna á bókmenntagreininni. Kvæðið er greint með tilliti til helstu viðfangsefna, hvernig skáldið nýtir heimildir sínar, en einnig verður reynt að skilja það í samhengi samtíma síns. Niðurstaðan er sú að í *Vǫlsungsrímum* víkur skáldið frá heimildum sínum til að undirstrika þemun svik á trausti og falsguði. Sýnt er fram á að kvæðið endurspeglar umræður í samtíma skáldsins og átök um réttmætt vald. Nánar tiltekið endurspegla *Vǫlsungsrímur* átök um völd milli goða og kirkju, milli norskrar og íslenskrar kirkju og áhyggjur Íslendinga um norskt konungsvald.

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Acknowledgements

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Notes on Terminology and Editions

Where possible, I use Icelandic terminology, using the proper Icelandic inflection to denote plurals. However, I have opted to use the English term "fit" instead of *ríma*, so as to avoid confusion between the genre or poem as a whole and the individual sets of stanzas. I refer to *rímur*-cycles in the plural, and use the Icelandic term *rímnaflokkur* to denote sets of *ríma*. *Rímnaskáld* is the Icelandic word for *rímur* poet (the same in both singular and plural nominative). *Rímnaháttur* (plural: *rímnahættir*) is the Icelandic for *rímur*-metres. Some of these choices lead to somewhat suspect use of Icelandic terms, but I believe are necessary for clarity in an English work.

Unless otherwise noted, all Old Icelandic quotations of *Vǫlsungsrímur* are from Finnur Jónsson's *Rímnasafn* edition, and all English quotations of the poem are my own; all Old Icelandic and English quotations of *Vǫlsunga saga* are from R.G. Finch's side-by-side edition and translation. Quotations from *Kátrinardrápa* are from Kirsten Wolf's edition of the poem in *Skald VII*.

Translator's Preface

My goal in this translation was not to produce a stand-alone English prose poem, but to provide an aide to reading and understanding the *rímur* in its original language. The strength of *rímur* lie in the combination of popular stories and beautiful poetic language; *Vǫlsungsrímur* alone uses dozens of different *heiti* for "king, "son," and "woman" in addition to a stunning variety of kennings. *Heiti* are essential poetic "substitutions" for common words. They stand in for the common word, creating lexical diversity and allowing the poet more word choices when following the strict rules of metre, rhyme, alliteration, and gender. Snorri Sturluson calls them *ókennd heiti*.[1] "They are often imbued with connotations in addition to the main concepts to which they refer, as when *brandr* 'sword' also carries its prose meaning of 'fire...'"[2] When the number of these *heiti* is considered, it is clear there is no equivalent in English. Any attempt to designate an English replacement for each poetic word would be incomplete and inconsistent. So, with this in mind, I have simply used the most common English equivalent with the Old Icelandic word in the marginal gloss. I have marked *heiti* in italics (along with less-common words, even if they would not be officially considered *heiti*). While I have tried to be consistent in marking all *heiti* for king, woman, and son, I have marked other *heiti* only where it would be interesting to the reader. The poem has many more common words for women than men, such as *víf* (wife), *brúðr* (bride), *mær* (maiden), etc, and I have translated those without marginal gloss. Any unmarked instances of man, woman, king, or son are common words such as *konungr*, *sonr*, *karl*, maðr, etc.

I have marked kennings in a similar fashion. Kennings are "highly systematized, often more or less figurative, periphrases consisting of at least two

[1] Whaley 2007, 486
[2] Ibid.

elements, often *heiti*."[3] The kennings in *rímur* tend be simpler than the skaldic tradition from which these devices are carried, most significantly in that they exceed two parts less frequently.[4] *Rímur* poets certainly invented new kennings for their narrative needs, especially as time passed and familiarity with the meanings of older kennings decreased. A variation on kennings particular to *rímur* are *eignarfallsumritanir* (genitive paraphrases).[5] The meaning of these kennings is the same as the genitive of the compound: *spectar grein* in *Vǫlsungsrímur* I, 5 ("branch of wisdom") just means "wisdom." In fact, it has been argued that these should not be classified as kennings, but instead are a rhetorical technique paralleled in German poetry in the late medieval ages (*Genitivumschreibung*).[6] I have tried to translate the individual parts of each kenning as precisely as possible, putting the meaning of the word alongside the translation throughout the poem.[7]

The format of *rímur* allow for the advancement of a narrative in rich, musical language. It is no surprise that some scholars have proposed that *rímur* were used as accompaniment to dancing. [8] Of course, the very qualities that make these poems so enjoyable to read (even more so to hear read, as seems mostly they were intended to be[9]) are what make them so difficult to read, even for those competent in Old Norse or Modern Icelandic. This is where I believe a translation can be most useful, as an introduction to the genre and a tool for reading it in the original. A translation reproducing the narrative faithfully can be of further use in academia by providing access to post-Freestate reception of familiar stories without requiring

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[3] Whaley 2007, 486
[4] Hughes 2007, 209
[5] Ibid.
[6] Davíð Erlingsson. 'Blómað mál í rímum.' *Studia Islandica* 33 (1974), 7-98; Hughes 2007, 210
[7] For a more detailed introduction to *heiti* and kennings, see Björn K. Þorólfsson's *Rímur Fyrir 1600*; Shaun Hughes' "Late Secular Poetry" in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*; and Diana Whaley's "Skaldic Poetry" in *A Companion...*
[8] Hughes 1978; Here, Hughes argues against this view, but provides a good overview of its arguments.
[9] See Khun 1990-2

students and scholars to devote the time needed to read these poems, which are often very long, in the original. With these goals in mind, I have tried to produce an English prose verse translation that follows the original language as closely as possible, on occasion sacrificing aesthetics for accuracy.

Vǫlsungsrímur: A New English Translation

Fitt I

1. I shall blend for the cheerful children
who asked, for the first time, mead of poetry
the *waterfall of Són* and *Supptung's mead* mead of poetry
together with the *memorial cup of the gods.* mead of poetry

2. I knew Óðinn son Borr
wished to rule Asia;
he always awakened a *waterfall of spears*,[1] battles
the eagle won the choice of corpses.

3. The *king* is both beautiful and fair *gramr*
and wonderfully promising in all things,
smooth-spoken and quite agreeable,
liberal with the *hand's snow*.[2] gold/silver

4. The *king* is reckoned wise and right, *vísir*
this was written down;
indeed, he was strong and cunning,
no one was his measure.

5. *Branch of wisdom*[3] and stately prophetic skill,[4] wisdom
he would never spare riches'
the manifold magic with which this king is adorned
is well-known throughout the world.

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[1] Finnur Jónsson transcribes this as *uigra fors*, but in *Ordbog* he thinks it may be a form of *foss*, especially in this instance (1926-28, 104, entry for *fors*). However, if it
[2] To be open-handed with gold is to be generous.
[3] This is a "genitive paraphrase" or *eignarfallsumritanur*. These special kennings have the meaning of the genitive in the phrase. According to Shaun Hughes, this was a rhetorical device used in German poetry from 1250-1400. It was used in *rímur* for abstract concepts such as human emotions (2007, 209-210).
[4] The edition reads *spaleik prvdr*, but in *Ordbog*, Finnur Jónsson suggests that this should be *prýddr*. (1926-28, 342, entry for *pruðr*). That would make sense, since *prýddr* fits the rhyme scheme.
\etter in the rhyme scheme.

6. Óðinn handed over his eye,
one of the two to a *tree of gold*;[5] man
with this he increased his understanding in payment,
and he drank from the well of Mímir.

7. The *king* knows each art, *hilmir*
he gains all authority;
the *king* has missed no skill, *gramr*
liberal with the *land of snakes*.[6] gold

8. Ásgarðr is the name of the famous city,
which Óðinn came to rule;
the entire city glitters with the *market of the hand*[7] gold
and the glorious *fire of the sea*. gold

9. And that fair hall of the *king,* *þengill*
covered in silver white,
the inside was all over
equal to gazing on gold.

10. The book wishes to explain
the size of the city to mighty folk;
now it is come into my *poem*, *mærð*
much of this to explain to you.

11. On the *doors' deer* were entryways house
numbering five hundred and four tens;
our trusty kinsmen
the Turks have made these.

12. I do not know if greater halls
existed in the world before;
eight hundred *men* *kall*
could walk through a door at once.

13. In Óðinn's hall it was never dusk,
there is all kinds of good things;
there it was spacious for many *men,* *fyrðar* (pl.)
everyone got a seat.

[5] Kennings for men or women are often in the formula "X of gold/rings." "Tree of gold" is a typical man-kenning.
[6] Dragons lie on gold, so any formula that can translate to "land/bed of snakes" is a gold-kenning.
[7] Gold jewelry is displayed on the hand as in a marketplace.

14. A troop of *men* was arranged — *skati*
between the hall of the *king* and the gates; — *skjǫldungr*
the followers of the king were great as trolls,
stronger was one than eight.

15. The *king* was both strong and large, — *gramr*
he had more cunning than everyone else;
mightiest-grown in strength was Ásaþór
of Óðinn's valiant *heroes*. — *kapp*

16. Óðinn established law in the land,
how *people* should conduct themselves; — *lýðr*
the *king* is much displeased, — *vísir*
if any wish to disregard it.

17. The *king* arranged twelve noble *men* — *dǫglingr*; *drengr*
to carefully deliver judgments;
the floor of the *king's* hall was covered — *hilmir*
in hard *shore of snakes*.[8]

18. The *king* spoke ancient prophecies, — *fylkir*
he knew mythical tales of old,
and with him came also peaceful years;
most trusted him to rule.

19. The people of Turkey believed in the *king*; — *stiller*
I tell this, that many deceptions,
a multitude of wishes and an abundance of money-
Óðinn gave them.

20. Many a *Freyr of ore* believed — man
in the *king of magic arts*; — sorcerer
each who dies by weapons expects that he
shall in Valhalla pass the night.

21. The letter makes it clear to me:[9]
when the *people* were in distress — *lýðr*
they bade Óðinn to save them
both in life and in death.

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[8] A frequent man- and woman-kenning formula is "God/Goddess of gold," goddesses for woman-kennings and gods for man-kennings.

[9] "Letrid giorir þat liost firi mier" is a reference to the poets' source. Such formulaic phrases are common in *rímur*. They lend credibility and help to fill out lines (See Kuhn 1990-93).

22. The realms of Europe and Asia
Óðinn had to command,
the region of worthy *men*   *þegn*
was divided by these two[10] in thirds.

23. This delusion has become great,
men believed both   *virðar* (pl.)
Óðinn the king and Ásaþór
to rule over all the world.

24. The *king* professes to see by his wisdom,   *gramr*
which comes by the spirit of pagan prophecy:
all his might would come to naught,
but the way of Jesus will stand.

25. Óðinn prepared with all art
an abundance of money and of men;
the *king* wanted in this way to save himself from Christ   *fylkir*
and fled into the Northern World.

26. Over Ásgardr the king sets
his brothers Vila and Vel;
I heard[11] that the race of the *king* did not lack wealth,   *skjǫldungr*
I am able to recite that to *kings*.   *skati*

27. The *king* steered first into the east of *Garðar*,   *gramr*; Russia
from there he desired to head to *Saxland*;   Germany
then the confident king lovingly
causes his progeny to grow.

28. I shall name Njǫrðr and Freyr,
they were the hand of the *king*;   *niflungr*
meanwhile, the *king* sat on Óðinn's island   *gramr*
and sent his bondswoman.

29. That *king* has been named Gylfi,   *gramr*
who knew much of magic;
the *king* ruled foremost over *Svíþjóð*,   *siklingr*; Sweden
it gladdened him to possess it.

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[10] Probably a reference to the duo of Óðinn and Þórr found in the next stanza.
[11] "Frá ec" is a common *rímur* formula that essentially means "I heard." It serves as a handy two syllable filler and reinforces the credibility of the poem by reminding listeners/ readers that it is based on a source, not just made up by the poet (See Kuhn 1990-93).

30. A *Hlín of gold* was named Gefjon, woman
she was the of the race of Asia;
she gave the *king* her entertainment, *skjǫldungr*
so the fables tell.[12]

31. Promptly gave plough-land for entertainment
that our woman seated on a bench will divide;[13]
four oxen of the *king* *dǫglingr*
dragged it both day and night.

32. The *woman* has made *snót*
ample sorcery with such wailing;
her sons she has placed before the plow
the same as the oxen in shape.

33. The land, which Gylfi gave
to Gejfun as the reward for poetry,
oxen dragged out to sea;
the *king* was made aware of this. *ǫðlingr*

34. They loosened up the entire land,
then the sea flowed in after;
truly shall such excavations
appear unstable to the *Svíar*. Swedes

35. This I tell within *Sviptungr's discovery*, mead of poetry
that the sons of the *Freyja of magics*, sorceress
they set this green ground
over by the island of Óðinn.[14]

36. Gefjun rules the grassy ground forever
and made many works;
the woman later had Baldr
the true son of Óðinn.

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[12] Finnur Jónsson here translates "Skrǫksǫgur urðu gættar" as "lögnehistorier blev fortalte (1926-28, 153, entry for *gæta*).

[13] Finnur Jónsson translates *pallr* as "de på bænken siddende kvinder" (1926-28, 286, entry for *pallr*). The bench probably refers to some aspect of the plowing i.e. standing on the plow as it is pulled.

[14] "Odens ey" is modern day Odense, an island in Denmark east of Sjælland, which is the island Gefjun supposedly plowed out of the mainland (Murphy, 2011).

37. Bays lie in the sea in such a way,
I wish to explain that to people;
there may *men* find Sjælland, *ýtar* (pl.)
those who see reason.

38. The *king* of Swedish men *ræsir*
sees their predicament clearly:
that he has much smaller insight
into the arts than the Æsir.

39. Óðinn sought the realm of the *king*, *ǫðlingr*
with all his *valiant men*; *drengr*
both land and burned gold
he[15] offered to him with troops.

40. So Óðinn spoke the eloquent words:
"I shall not refuse this;"
immediately he established the *king's* hall *þengill*
in the place which is named Sigtuna.

41. In every way this is an even more beautiful city
than the Turkish one written about before;
the *king* arranged towns and plazas *buðlungr*
for his mighty *men*. *bragnar* (pl.)

42. Such law speech and rule of the land
the *king* arranges in all things *lofðungr*
as Óðinn set down and before was prophecied
to the excellent people of Ásgardr.

43. The dead people should all burn
in a mighty blaze
there with many *breakers of rings,*[16] *men*
and both women and men.[17]

44. Elevated men could be certain
to pass the night in Valhǫll,
but says the sea-dead[18] will soon
find lodgings with Hel.

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[15] That is, Gylfi offered the land.
[16] To break rings into pieces implies that one is giving away parts of the ring, and "giver of gold" is a man, because men/kings give away gold.
[17] This is describing a pagan funeral practice, a set of cultural traditions laid down by a false god.
[18] That is, the drowned.

45. The *king* was so rich in gold	*gramr*
that he gave to inclined hands,	
shield and spear to his men,	
the hewer of helm and blade.[19]	
46. The wife of the *king* was called Frigg,	*fylkir*
beautiful daughter of Fjǫrgyn;[20]	
men describe *the land of the fold*	woman
as most wise in the arts.	
47. The *king* Oðinn was so given to women	*gramr*
that scarcely was his equal found;	
the prominent *king* begot many sons,	*fylkir*
few are able to note them by name.	
48. I shall name Skjǫldr, son of the *king*,	*niflungr*
sufficiently eager for battle;	
worthy *kings* of the Danish *people*	*dǫglingr*; *ǫld*
come from him.	
49. I name Ingi[21] Óðinn's *son*,	*niðr*
never lenient in battles;	
his genealogy is an excellent company,	
the famous kings of Uppsala.	
50. I tell the truth about Sæmingr,	
of the son of the excellent *king*;	*siklingr*
from this descendant of a king	*ǫðlingr*
the lineage of the earls of Háleygir was increased.[22]	
51. The *king's son* was named Sigi,	*siklingr*; *mǫgr*
he was promising in appearance:	
an illustrious forehead with fair eyes,	
a countenance bears he of white.	

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[19] I am not sure if this is a kenning or just a poetic description.

[20] Fjǫrgun is actually a name for Óðinn, and this is a mis-use of the phrase based on earlier phrases like " Fjǫrgun's maid." That should mean "wife of Óðinn," but was misread as "daughter of Óðinn." This same mistake can be found in Snorra Edda (Murphy, 2011).

[21] Translates as "king"; by the "facts" given here in the poem, this is the same Yngi/Yngvi found in *Ynglinga saga*.

[22] The people of Hálogaland, which is Hålogaland in modern Norwegian spelling. Hálogaland in the sagas referred collectively to the northernmost provinces of Norway. *Háleygjatal* is genelogical listing of kings similar to *Ynglingatal*, and is only preseved in part in other works.

52. The son of the *king* was tall and sturdy,	*hilmir*
he was mighty in strength;	
he appeared remarkable to men	
and gracious with the *snow-drift of the hand*.	gold

53. Now Njọrdr's wife[23] put together	
a feast for the *king*;	*niflungr*
-this *Rán of the cloak*[24] was named Skaði-	woman
to serve the pure wine.	

54. The *thane* owned this thrall,	*þegn*
I wish to explain this to the people;	
Breði he was named who worked with honor	
and hunted a multitude of beasts.	

55. I shall name *Refill*,[25] his dog,	
proved in many opportunities;	
I tell the truth to *men*,	*garpr*
he grimly destroyed wolfs.	

56. Sigi was with his father,
I shall tell what happens;
he asks to accompany Breði
on a hunting trip in mild weather.

57. Breði killed one bear,	
the sun shone bright from a clear sky;	
the *king's* son became rather slow,	*hilmir*
he didn't catch one bit of game.	

58. Then a burden of heavy anger	
was in the mighty *son* of the *king*;	*niðr*; *ræsir*
the *man* badly upheld peace,	*drengr*
he killed the thrall and committed murder.	

59. He dragged Breði into a broad snowdrift,	
then he killed the dog;	
the *king's* son has proved his might,	*ræsir*
this makes the *woman*[26] angry.	*sprakki*

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[23] Skaði
[24] Rán is a goddess, so this is a woman-kenning the type "Godess of clothes/fabric."
[25] Translates as "ribbon" or "strip"; also the name of a sea-king in *Snorra Edda*.
[26] It appears that Skaði is a woman in the poem, perhaps even the goddess.

60. Sigi came back late in the evening	
and set himself to drinking;	
Skaði was very harsh in speech,	
spoke with grim displeasure.	
61. "Where is Breði?" declared the *Hlín of rings*,	woman
the *king* decided to reply:	*bragningr*
"that thrall of yours did not wish	
to serve me, for shame.[27]	
62. "He was suffocated in weak snow,	
I say this matter is dealt with enough;	
otherwise I tell that a strong troll	
has taken to killing."	
63. "Your words are not true,"	
replies the *woman* to this,	*sprakki*
"You must have killed Breði in the snow,	
both he and the dog are dead."	
64. My verses shall not be laid,	
I bring to an end the *memorial cup of the of the gods*;	mead of poetry
to a *man* I tell of childish deeds,	*rekkr*
and I desire on that point to cease.	

Fitt II

1. *The thick malt of Þriði*[28] is blended	mead of poetry
from *the flood of the sea of Þráin*[29]	mead of poetry
with *the drink of the mind of Sigmundr*[30],	mead of poetry
as I tell you this second part.	
2. The wife assigned the man-hunt	
to four men to search;	
men found his body,	*bragnar* (pl.)
Breði in an large snow-drift.	

[27] It is difficult to decide whether this "til vansa" is directed at Skaði or whether it refers to the reason that Breði supposedly would not serve.
[28] Þriði is a name for Óðinn.
[29] Þráin is a dwarf name.
[30] Sigmundr in this instance is a name for Óðinn.

3. The *men* then found in a ditch | *garpr*
the dog deprived of life;
then each of the *men* who were able | *hǫldr*
went home and told the wife.

4. *Men* made the true work, | *virðar* (pl.)
hardly fit for *woman*; | *sprakki*
by 'Breði' is that broad drift known
after that and also by 'rakka.'

5. Sigi was then judged guilty,
and so concluded this *fight*, | *hjaldr*
and so was driven ignominiously far from the realm;
he never saw his inheritance[31] again.

6. Óðinn arranged for his son
on warship to leave the land;
he made flow the *wine of wounds* from men | blood
and earns a money-bag by sword.

7. Sigi won both honor and valor,
I can explain this to *men*; | *seggr*
one way or another he gained the rule of a kingdom
and a company of *men* to lead. | *rekka*

8. Two sons of a *king* ruled | *stillir*
over great Garðaríki[32];
they had a wise sister,
her like has not been seen.

9. Sigi came there with his host,
to ask for their sister;
the *king's* sons quickly refused, | *niflungr*
now grows *the storm of Þriði*. | batttle

10. Sigi won there with honor and valor
victory in the midst of check-mates;
thus the *king* got the grace of the bride, | *bragningr*
the brothers accepted him for her.

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[31] The word used here is *óðal*, which can be translated as allodial land. The principle of *óðal* was brought to Iceland from Norway and implies "a particular relationship between a kin group and a plot of land, which could not be removed from the kin group without its consent" (Hastrup 1990, 82).
[32] Russia, Russian empire.

11. The *king's* sons swore a truce,	*siklingr*
they each deceived Sigi;	
if anyone acts in this way,	
he should be labeled 'scoundrel'.[33]	
12. The *king's* sons kept from the *king*	*mildingr*; *stillir*
all of the maiden's dowry;	
Sigi went home with the *Hrund of gold*,	woman
adorned with honors and prowess.	
13. Sigi decided to go raiding each summer,	
but he sat at home in the autumn;	
then is become clear to *men*,	*ýtar* (pl.)
the valiant *king* was generous.[34]	*gramr*
14. I shall name Rerrir the *king's son*,	*ræsir*; *kundr*
who proved famous and excellent;	
he came to be defending a field of the king,	
his blade became faulty and broke.	
15. The mother-brothers of the *king's* son	*mildingr*
kept the memory of the old disputes;	
they planned to deprive of life,	
his father who ruled in the kingdom.	
16. Some *people* tell it this way,	*ýtar* (pl.)
the *king* was betrayed in the sworn truce;	*gramr*
he proved his advantages in *battle*	*róma*
in the hearts of *men* in the district.	*rekkr*
17. Sigi fell there with his company-	
so shall I tell in verse-	
they granted the truce with stiff choices	
and wanted to break their oaths.	
18. Rerrir was not in the place of *battle*	*róma*
when the *king* lost his life;	*ræsir*
the army was summoned by the *king's* son	*hilmir*
to deprive *men* of life.	*hǫldr*

[33] The word used here is *níðingr*: "legally the strongest term of abuse...for a traitor, a truce-breaker, once who commits a deed of wanton cruelty, a coward, and the like" (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1874, 456, entry for *níðingr*).
[34] When he is home from raiding, then his gifts of gold, presumably, make it clear he is generous.

19. *Men* were summoned to the battle,	*rekkr*
Rerrir won much in valor;	
full well has he avenged his father	
and he felled both the kings.	

20. The two-fold kingdoms and the name of *king*	*ræsir*
Rerrir took for eight winters;	
scarcely was found the *king's* equal,	*tiggi*
the destroyer of the snakes' benches[35].	man

21. The *king* won such great fame,	*mildingr*
that I am slow tell it all;	
tell I that in order to honor the ties of marriage,	
he chose it for himself.[36]	

22. Ingi was the name of that strong *king*,	*stillir*
who ruled the Swedish empire;	
the noteworthy *king*	*ræsir*
leads his men to the *fire of the sea*.	gold

23. The *king* had a daughter,	*dǫglingr*
honor-adorned and mild;	
Ingigerðr, *men* named for me	*ýtar* (pl.)
the *Hildr of gold*[37].	

24. The *fir of leeks*[38] was bright and ruddy,	woman
she knew an abundance of arts,	
the nobly born maiden was skilled in language,	
she defeated men in tafl.[39]	*hǫldr*

25. Rerrir came there with his *men*,	*rekkr*
he finds the favor of the *king*;	*ræsir*
the *king* gives hope to the *Lín of gold*[40]	*bragningr*; woman
he asks to make an agreement on the dowry.	

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[35] Benches of the snakes= bed of snakes> gold, destroyer of gold> man/ warrior/ king; to destroy gold means to give it away i.e. be generous.
[36] That is, he decided to get married.
[37] Hildr is a valkyrie name.
[38] Fir as in fir tree.
[39] A chess-like game played in Viking/ medieval times
[40] *Lín* is a goddess name. Finnur Jónsson thinks this is an older form of Hlín (1926-28, 245).

26. "I'll choose," declared the *king* then,	*þengill*
"but the *silk-Freyja* is yours;"	woman
the *king* pretends	*dǫglingr*
to hold an assembly in three days.	
27.The battle began at the will of the *king*,	*ræsir*
Rerrir hewed mightily with his blade;	
the company of *men* was exceedingly worthy,	*oddr*
Ingi sunk down into the ground.	
28. The *king* set up Ingi's mound[41]	*ǫðlingr*
and his *men* around him on each side;	*ýtar*
the *king* gathered swords and gold,	*siklingr*
so shall he beautifully adorn the grave.[42]	
29. Now the *king* celebrated both his wedding feast	*bragningr*
and the funeral feast for Ingi;	
spared not with the fair people	
the cost of *the bed of snakes*[43].	gold
30. He was *king* in Swedish land	*siklingr*
and likewise over Garðaríki;[44]	
he was famous in honor and valor,	
hardly was his likeness found.	
31. This *king*- as I was told-	*gramr*
and the *land of the tears of Frigg*[45]	woman
begot no heir for themselves	
all through many years.	
32. The stately *king* and the *strand-Gná*[46]	*tiggi*; woman
called on Frigg:	
Óðinn must give them an heir,	
he asked that he grant this to his son.	

[41] His grave mound.
[42] Finnur Jónsson notes that "gǫfga þegna" means specifically to adorn/ decorate "om begravelse" (1926-28, 253).
[43] Dragons sleep on gold, so the "bed of snakes">gold; Finnur Jónsson ammends "frægnings" "frænings" and "binga" to "bingar" (1926-28, 115).
[44] The Russian empire.
[45] *Tears of Frigg*> gold, land of gold> woman.
[46] Gná is a goddess name.

33. Óðinn heard the king's prayer,	*bragningr*
was prepared to give more	
so that the fair race does not come to naught,	
he shall not deny this.	
34. Óðinn sends the green apple	
which they should bite,	
his kinsman and the fair wife,	
the *king* must trust in this.	*vísir*
35. Then into the lap of the *king*	*lofðungr*
Hljóð[47] let the apple drop,	
the *king* and the fair bride gave praise,	*bragningr*
this made him cheerful.	
36. The king went to a little house	*gramr*
to lay with the *Þrúðr of snow-drifts*;[48]	woman
they bit the apple very eagerly,	
the baby grew within the bride.	
37. It went this way a long time	
for the *silk belt of clothes*;	woman
I was told that the *woman* of the *king*,	*sprund*; *mildingr*
she cannot not give birth to the child.	
38. Then the *king* levies ships	*lofðungr*
and men for war in the land;	
the *king* separates from the *scarlet Gná*,	*gramr*; woman
such is a result of fate.	
39. *The brother-daughter of Býleistr*[49]	Hel
offered a home to the *king*	*stillir*
after much *swords' song*,	battle
which the king won with prowess.	*siklingr*
40. The king spoke this word-	*þengill*
men lay it in memory:	
"health shall come to you in this world,	
support of rings," declared the wise *king*.	woman; *gramr*

[47] A valkyrie and a daughter of Ódinn.
[48] Þrúðr is a daughter of Þór, so this woman-kenning is of the type "Goddess of gold/silver."
[49]Býleistr is Loki's brother. Hel, the goddess of the dead, is Loki's daughter.

41. "Now the *land of rings* is with child,"	woman
declared the *giver of Draupnir's sweat*,[50]	man
"I desire that *people* will name	*lýðr*
this *king's son* Vǫlsungr."	*lofðungr*; *kundr*
42. "Far-renowned shall this *king's son*	*vísir*; *kundr*
become by his prowess;	
this tree of Óðinn's race[51]	
bears the might of every *king*."	*stillir*
43. The queen told the *people*	*drótt*
of the loss of the *king* in such a way;	*dǫglingr*
the *woman* was more depressed than cheerful,	*drós*
then her strength declined.	
44. It was three full winters-	
it is difficult to speak of such matters-	
the bride lay with child,	
but could not birth the baby.	
45. The queen foresaw her death	
and reported this to *worthy men*,	*drengr*
"but my son shall hold	
my counsel in his heart."	
46. Deep-laid are the counsels of the fair queen,	
dead sank that wife;	
the belly of the *woman* was sliced with a knife,	*fljóð*
the king-son[52] grasped life in this way.	
47. And so with a knife the *king's* son	*mildingr*
was freed to meet his mother;	
the *woman* died from the pain of wounds,	*svanni*
and so that wife is freed.	
48. The *king's* son got the name of Vǫlsungr,	*vísir*
became great and powerful;	
no *king* was equal to him,	*hilmir*
nowhere was found his likeness.	

[50] Draupnir is the name of a Óðinn's famous gold ring that multiplies itself. The story is told in *Gylfaginning*.
[51] Words for tree frequently are used in kennings for men and women. Here it is used poetically in a kenning-like arrangement that could perhaps be classified as a genitive paraphrase.
[52] "kongson"

49. To cut the *king's* nails and hair,	*skjǫldungr*
was the first task in caring for him;	
it was as fair as the *tears of Frigg*-	gold
the *memorial cup of the gods* ends.	mead of poetry

Fitt III

1. I remember the agreeable *Bil of gold*,[53]	woman
compose *the boat of Vestri*[54];	mead of poetry
I always talk in rhyme-play,[55]	
if *men* are inclined to ask.	*rekkr*

2. I heard an account of how fair minded	
was the *thrower of the snake's benches*;	man
great was the magic craft of Óðinn,	
knows how to impose it on many.	

3. Vǫlsungr was so promising and handsome,
wise and eloquent in speech,
very pleasing and skillful with words,
generous with the *flame of the hand*. gold

4. The *king* was so very strong,	*stillir*
he hewed mightily with a blade;	
likewise with splendor, rich and noteworthy,	
ruled over every land.	

5. The *king* has then passed	*fylkir*
twelve *swords of want*,[56]	winters
when the *destroyer of the snake's seat*	man
sailed in ships on the *floor of the dolphin*.	ocean/sea

6. This *king* made strong coastal raids,	*hilmir*
no moderation follows;	
a blaze was kindled wherever the *king* went,	*bragningr*
he behaved this way for a long time.	

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[53] Bil is a goddess.
[54] Vestri is a dwarf name.
[55] "Rímu spil" "the game of *ríma,*" that is the game of poetry.
[56] It could also be translated "snakes of want/need"; These two lines are difficult to understand, but Finnur Jónsson has noted that "fellda tolf nodru galla" means "afslutte 12 år, være 12 år gammel" (1926-28, 88, entry for *fella*). That is, the king is twelve years old or has passed twelve years of age.

7. The Vikings spread across the lands,	
they had to succumb;[57]	
the *king* paid them death for breath,	*bragningr*
he made black men[58] die.	
8. Vǫlsungr is so manly and vigorous,	
there hardly exists his likeness;	
every *champion[59]* wishes to see	*kempa*
the king terrorize away from his kingdom.	
9. The *king* had this line of work	*þengill*
thirteen winters in a row;	
many became joyful when the king	*hilmir*
goes home from the *quarrel of spears*.	battle
10. With his *sword*[60] that *king's* son,	*kneitir*; *þengill*
he had won three great realms;	
now he made the name of Vǫlsungr.	
widely known to *men*.	*virðar* (pl.)
11. Vǫlsungr's fame[61] became known	
west around the world's cities,	
as well as both east and south-	
these are not lies.	
12. Now long governed in the realm	
the *destroyer of Fáfnir's land*;	*man*
he seeks to have a *woman* so fair	*frú*
that he desires to marry.	

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[57] "Begja háls" means "böje halsen, bukke under" (Finnur Jónsson 1926-28, 24, entry for *beygja*).
[58] *blámenn* usually refers to Africans
[59] *Kempa* is an older form of *kenpa* (Finnur Jónsson 1926-28, 208, entry for *kempa*).
[60] *Kneitir* is a *heiti* for "sword" because it is the name of St. Olaf's sword.
[61] Finnur Jónsson ammends *nafn* to *frami* (1905-12, 327). It is clear that *nafn* doesn't quite fit, since it does not agree in gender with *kuðr*. However, it is a stretch to suggest a scribal misreading from *frami*, which looks quite different, even though it makes much more sense grammatically. Unfortunately, Finnur did not leave any explanation for his choice. Such bold emendations are rare even in his earlier edition, *Fornískenskir Rímnaflokkar*, where he was far more liberal in his handling of the manuscript text.

13. Óðinn sends Hljóð[62] to the *king*, *hilmir*
to him for his own wife;
he scarcely met the experienced *woman* *fljóð*
than it was a gain to him.

14. The highborn *king* begot ten *gramr*
strong sons and one daughter;
the foremost boy was named Sigmundr
he knows how to redden spears.

15. The *king's* children are wise and promising, *þengill*
this is widely admired;
the maiden was as wise and sensible
as the powerful wife.

16. Twins, name I the children of the *king*, *tiggi*
the two young ones before you;
Signý was the name of the *silk-Hǫrn*,[63] woman
she was wise in speech.

17. All of the king's children were courteous,
that is widely known;
the hawk and eagle tear warm flesh[64]
wherever the Vǫlsungar[65] fight.

18. Few stood now against the father and son,
when *men* blew trumpets; *fyrðar* (pl.)
the name of Vǫlsungr and the king's stately children *vísir*
went widely about the land

19. The Vǫlsungar wanted to try to raid
widely about the land;
they knew how to redden the shield
of an *executor of Fáfnir's land*. man

20. The company of Vǫlsungr is glad from wine,
there was all kinds of pomp;
to *people* the king gave *Lýðr*
down of snakes[66] and *speech of Iði*.[67] gold; gold

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[62] Óðinn's daughter, the valkyrie who delivered the apple before.
[63] *Hǫrn* is a name for Freyja.
[64] Warm flesh means newly slain corpses.
[65] The plural of Vǫlsungr, that is the clan of Vǫlsung.
[66] Down means a bed.

21. No *king* has become	*vísir*
equal to Vǫlsungr in prestige;	
his kinsmen take his name of honor-	
that was long discussed.	
22. Siggeir ruled over Gautland[68]	
-so do I extend the poem-	
the *king* went to meet Vǫlsungr	*vísir*
with five hundred *bold men*.	*drengr*
23. *Men* drank the wine freely	*virðar* (pl.)
in Vǫlsungr's costly hall;	
the *king* made his request	*bragningr*
openly before the excellent people.	
24. "This is my business here,	
I wish to get myself a bride;	
I intend to become your in-law unhindered,	
that seems to me a benefit."	
25. The powerful *woman* meets to marry	*frú*
the worthy *destroyer of points*;	man
he forcibly told the educated *woman*[69]	*frú*
his mind about this plan.	
26. A time for the wedding was hastily named	
and many *men* were invited;	*lýðr*
the feast was announced to the kingdom of Vǫlsungr,	
and all was prepared with pomp.	
27. Now soon at the named time came	
all the Gautland-men of the *king*;	*niflungr*
the beautiful hall was arranged for each	
caster of Fáfnir's hollow.[70]	man

[67] See the "Commentary and Analysis" section of this study for more on this particular kenning.
[68] Gautland is Southern Sweden.
[69] This seems to be the only instance of a word rhyming with itself in the poem. Matthew Driscoll remarks that "any decent poet would avoid rhyming a word with itself," so we must wonder if this is perhaps a scribal error, perhaps a misreading of a word or the accidental repetition of *frú* (1997, 233).
[70] Hollow means bed.

28. Then all the walls of the *king's* hall — *þengill*
are covered with gilded shields,
ready and encircled with *hand's snow*, — gold/silver
and green silk curtains.

29. One rock stood in the broad room,
Botstokkr[71] men call it;
there was a glorious choice of *valiant men*, — *drengr*
the people scarcely found their like.

30. A blooming tree with apples stands
next to this stone;
this tree is covered with leaves,
nowhere is another like it seen.

31. The *kings* and the valiant company of *men* — *vísir*; *virðar* (pl.)
drank wine and mead,
and inside there sat full of cheer
eighteen hundred *men*. — *kall*

32. A man walked in to the hall of the *king* — *hilmir*
and held a sword in its scabbard;
in bare feet this *man* is come, — *kall*
close fitted are his trousers.[72]

33. The guest had a Greek hood,
he greeted none of the men;
he was one-eyed and is this true:
he salutes no *man*. — *drengr*

34. He seemed to men quick to act, — *virðar*
he wasn't lacking in that;
the *breaker of rings* had on outermost — man
a blue-striped hooded cloak.

35. Into the the *Týr of gold* rock sticks — man
a *blade* up to the hilt; — *brandr*
"Here is a trusty *king's* choice," — *tiggi*
spoke the limping man.

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[71] "Atonement-trunk." In *Vǫlsunga saga* this is *Barnstokkr* or "child-trunk." For more on this change and its possible implications, see Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, 303-304.
[72] That is, his clothes were very strange.

36. "I give the sword to the *tree of gold* among you,	man
who draws it out of the rock by himself;"	
the *people*, after a little time,	*lýðr*
they could not see the man anywhere.	
37. One after another *caster of the day's wave*[73]	man
walked up to the stone,	
but this *sharp salmon of wounds*	sword
can be moved by none.	
38. The *land of the whetstone* was hard to each	sword
caster of Draupnir's sweat;	man
Sigmundr gave mercy to the sword	
and says that it should be called Gramr.[74]	
39. Then Siggeir demanded to buy the sword,	
but Sigmundr does not want to part with it;	
he became mightily angry	
because the *king* had plenty.	*ræsir*
40. Now right away that night the *king*	*niflungr*
offered to leave the feast;[75]	
Signý angrily accompanied the *king*;	*siklingr*
I recount Siggeir's demand.	
41. "Vǫlsungr, I ask, if you wish,	
to invite the *destroyer of rings*;	man
you should accept from me a feast	
at the end of thirteen weeks."	
42. "I grant to you," declared the prominent king,	*fylkir*
"your first request;"	
the Gautlandish[76] *king* sailed away,	*gramr*
with malice he had offered the feast.	
43. The *king* prepared with a choice of *men*	*ræsir*; *rekkr*
and his vigorous sons;	
I have finished in the *hall of the mind*[77]	breast
this fair *warship of Suðri*.	mead of poetry

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[73] Day's wave> light=gold, caster of gold= giving away gold> man.
[74] *Gramr* is a *heiti* for "king" and an adjective meaning "fearsome."
[75] That is, he announced he would leave the feast.
[76] "gauzki"

Fitt IV

1. I pour the glorious *beer of Durnir*	mead of poetry
for the *people* a fourth time;	*drótt*
so Vǫlsungr went to the feast,	
that *men* remember.	*virðar* (pl.)
2. The *destroyer of the snake's lands*	man
sails quickly out of the land in ships;	
the *king* intends to visit his daughter	*mildingr*
and smooth-speaking son-in-law.	
3. The *fold's hollow* meets her father,	woman
the wife delivered these words:	
she bids the *king* to sail away,	*hilmir*
"and save your life."	
4. The *woman* speaks with her father and brothers:	*fljoð*
"You will never find Siggeir;	
if the *king* plots, then you will lose	*lofðungr*
your life in the *clash of weapons*.	battle
5. "Throughout nearest realms has the *king*	*niflungr*
gathered nearly every man	
straight to redden shield,"	
so the *lady* did speak.[78]	*svanni*
6. "We are not willing to lose you,[79]	
but you must quake, *king*,	*milldingr*
for you have the brought to me the unstable throng	
for finery rather than battle."	

[77] This may refer to the act of speaking the verses or chanting them, an act which can be conceptualized as happening in the chest, where one stores the breath needed to recite/chant. "sinnu sal" could also be translated as "my hall," but Finnur Jónsson lists this specific instance as a kenning for breast (1926-28, 309, entry for *salr*).
[78] The exact phrase here is "red so mæla suanne"; *réð* is often used in poetry as a filler word and serves in these instances as an auxiliary verb marking the preterite, so *réð mæla* just means "did speak."
[79] Finnur Jónsson translates "oss er yðvart líf ekki falt" as "vi vil ikke miste eder" (1926-28, 82, entry for *falr*).

7. The *king* answered his daughter: *dǫglingr*
"I shall not fear death,
if I am betrayed by my son-in-law,
then many shall burn.

8. "Fear not, you excellent maiden,
about any *meetings of arrows*; battles
have you not heard that we are afraid
of neither fire nor arrow.

9. "A hundred times has this *king* *gramr*
fought battles under standards;
in Russia I was battle ready,
I proved myself with the Saracens.

10. "One time the end-day of life comes
to all *men* eventually; *lýðr*
a famous *king* does not deny this, *siklingr*
and his death does not fear.

11. "Be friendly with your husband,
you should not summon death;
you remember my death, *woman*, *drós*
if you could avenge the *king*." *dǫglingr*

12. "A heavy choice is given to the fair wife
by the *king* to them, the arms[80] *vísir*
who have stolen from me such a father
and my famous brothers."

13. Then the depressed *woman* parted *drós*
with the king and her *brothers*; *hlýri*
I can tell that the worthy *headdress of strands*[81] woman
flowed into tears.

14. The *king* speaks kindly with his kin: *hilmir*
"Nowhere shall we run,
yet *men* would think it better *virðar* (pl.)
to embrace the lovely wife at home.

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[80] That is, Siggeir.
[81] Words for clothing, such as *silki-* are often used in woman kennings.

15. "If *men* come to the *roar of weapons*,"	*virðar* (pl.); battle
so I heard that Vǫlsungr spoke,	
"gladly shall we forward walk	
where the tempered spear whistles."	

16. The *king* walks from the warships	*skjǫldungr*
the short distance to the green field;	
before the *king* saw the banners,	*mildingr*
the mob ran forward from the hall.	

17. The difference in the number of men was clear,	
these *dauntless warriors* met each other;	*garpr*
without delay the *battle* became strong	*róma*
and proved itself keen-edged.	

18. Siggeir had a mob of men-
it is barely possible to count-
and went against his in-law,
who had three hundred men.

19. Vǫlsungr waded into the *roar of weapons*,	battle
he caused men to fall;	*virðar* (pl.)
the *king's* sons hastened forward,	*skjǫldungr*
they were soon in the midst of the *battles*.[82]	*víg*

20. The gilded arrow of the *king*	*stillir*
sought out the breasts of *men*;	*gumnar* (pl.)
the count was twelve against one	
for the trusty men of the *king*.	*fylkir*

21. The old *king* was in this	*gramr*
so grim in the keen battle;	
none was so valiant or forward	
as the will of the *king* demanded.	*fylkir*

22. The *king* brandished the bitter blades	*stiller*
in both *strands of hawks*;[83]	arms
in song I tell that he split	
the *land of the mind*[84] on gilded shields.	breast

[82] The neuter substantive *víg* is, in "the oldest sense of the word, prevalent in old poems and in [compounds]" (Cleasby and Vigfússon 1874, 715, entry for *víg*).
[83] Hawks rest on arms.
[84] Like *sinnu salr* earlier, this is hard to understand, but Finnur Jónsson translates it as another breast-kenning (1926-28, 229, entry for *land*).

23. He gave *men* mighty blows,	*rekkr*
his sons tried to support him	
in the *mist of spears*;	battle
deep became the *wave of wounds*.	blood
24. Now he cleared a spacious path to them,	
they each broke through to the *king*;	*fylkir*
this *Gautr of ore*[85] killed many	man
a *destroyer of Fáfnir's reef*.	man
25. Their father went	
eight times through the ranks;	
many sank before a gilded arrow,	
tell I that is held in memory.	
26. During the ninth time the *king*	*niflungr*
became a dead-man when he tried to break through	
the ranks of the *king,* where the stiff steel	*gramr*
cleaves strong shields.	
27. The worthy sons of the *king*	*hilmir*
hewed strongly with two hands;	
chains are inflicted on the brothers,	
and at the same time they are separated.	
28. The *men* were bound fast	*bragnar* (pl.)
by both their hands;	
the boys held the bast-band[86]	
and threw the gilded shields.	
29. Vǫlsungr's company was so completely	
killed that none remained;	
the fair *woman* asked about	*fljóð*
her father's death by the mob.	
30. The *Gná of the gold frontlet* bore heavy grief,	woman
yet she walked to find the *king*;	*stillir*
Then Signý spoke with the *king*,	*siklingr*
I am able to relate this to *men*.	*seggr*

[85] Gautr is a name of Óðinn, so this is a man kenning of the type "God of gold."
[86] Shield strap for carrying.

31. "*King*, do not kill so early	*bragningr*
my band of brothers;	
rather let the strong stocks	
clutch the sons of the *king*."	*stillir*
32. "Worse is that to a brave *man*,"	*seggr*
the *king* said of that way;	*vísir*
"than to quickly lose his life	
before the edge of *Laufi*."[87]	sword
33. "True is that ancient speech	
of men to me,"[88] declared the *woman*:	*fljóð*
"content yourself and meanwhile	
increase in the eyes of the *Nauna of rings*.[89]	woman
34. The *king* lets it be this way,	*vísir*
the good idea that the wife speaks;	
the stocks are then set up in place	
to hold the sons of the *king*.	*stillir*
35. The naked bound *king's* sons sit,	*niflungr*
and the night was dark;	
the enormous she wolf came there	
to attack with incredible strength.	
36. A *king's* son before the kneeling brothers	*bragningr*
she bit and took to eat;	
she took him with dark teeth,	
then he was troll-like food.[90]	
37. The night seems long enough	
to the *Nanna of the snake's land*;[91]	woman
early the *armor of gold* sends someone[92]	woman
to visit her brothers.	

[87] *Laufi* is a sword name.
[88] A proverb/ idiom probably having something to do with wisdom, likely to the effect of "according to the old sayings..."
[89] Nauna is the name of a goddess.
[90] Trolls eat people, so she is eating "troll-like food."
[91] Nanna is Baldr's wife, a goddess.
[92] The literal translation would be "sends to visit her brothers," but it seems the messenger, who shows up in the next verse, is implied.

38. Soon the messenger boy came back
and said the following to the wife:
"One of your *brothers* is lost, *hlýri*
but the others still hold life.

39. Your pleasing *brothers* are as if *barmi*
the *king* had gladdened the *valiant men* *buðlungr; drengr*
or they were drinking the costly wine;
none fears death."

40. This one *king's son* survived, *lofðungr; niðr*
who long bore the fame of them all;
the *lady* feels pain *svanni*
for the most excellent son of the *king*. *siklingr*

41. At night the boy was able
to grieve for each of the *kings*; *siklingr*
Sigmundr was wise and vigorous
like the *brothers* of Sýgny. *barmi*

42. The *land of gold*[93] meets Sigmundr woman
late in this evening;
she rubbed ham around the stocks' bonds,
so as to entice the monster.

43. Onto the *king's* tongue and teeth *tiggi*
and roof of his mouth, the *woman* smeared honey; *snót*
the *king* became better than sheep *fylkir*
since the *woman* came.[94] *fljóð*

44. The she-wolf came near again,
she has the nature of trolls;
her tongue gets the tasty grease
and she tears the bonds completely.

---

[93] Women wear gold so "land of gold" is a frequent woman-kenning.
[94] That is, he was not just a helpless sheep once she had set her plan in motion.

45. The bewitched *woman*[95] laid her tongue	*snót*
inside the wary *king*;	*tiggi*
I heard that to fight back his teeth	
became strongly fixed in answer.	

46. She set her strong claws into the stocks,	
the *king* leapt by his feet;	*gramr*
out of the troll, as we tell,	
went the entire tongue with its roots.	

47. Screaming, the she-wolf leapt away,	
but the tongue stayed behind;	
early in the morning the *hollow of the linden*[96]	woman
met the young freed boy.	

48. The *woman* walked with him to a forest,	*fljóð*
and she accompanied the *king* to a house of earth;	*stillir*
acts quickly to heal him	
and fixes the wounds sufficiently there.	

49. So the generous *woman* decided	*ristill*
to separate from the valiant *king's* son,	*ræsir*
Vitulus- I bring this *ship of Vestri*[97]	mead of poetry
Vates[98]- to an end.	

Fitt V

1. And now shall go the fifth	
excellent burden of Fjǫlnir;[99]	mead of poetry
now I am bound to give her praise	
if I can find it.	

---

[95] For this reference to the she-wolf as a bewitched woman, see Chapter 6 of *Vǫlsunga saga*: "En þat er sǫgn sumra manna at sú in sama ylgr væri móðir Siggeirs konungs ok hafi hon brugðit á sik þessu líki fyrir trollskapar sakir or fjǫlkyngi." ["And some people have it that the wolf was King Siggeir's mother who had assumed that shape on account to witchcraft and magic."] (Finch 1965*a*, 8).

[96] A linden is a kind of tree, so this is a woman-kenning of the type "X of the tree."

[97] Vestri is a dwarf name

[98] *Vitulus Vates* is Latin for "calf bard" i.e. *Kálfr skáld*. This appears to be the author's signature.

[99] Fjǫlnir is a name of Óðinn.

2. Of this shall I tell next,
of the *Þrúðr of the arm's snow*; woman
the *woman* has been affected strongly *fljóð*
by the deaths of her father and *brothers*. *barmi*

3. Siggeir thinks to himself that victory is gained,
I heard that this pained Sygný;
the *king* thought all Vǫlsungar dead *vísir*
and lost any fearfulness.

4. Now the *king* had three boys *siklingr*
with his own *wife*; *fljóð*
the wise *woman* sends them all *frú*
to Sigmundr in secret.

5. Then he gave his sister-*son* *mǫgr*
seed out of a skin-bag to prepare;
next gets there ample water,
if he is disposed to spread the bread.

6. Vǫlsungr's son went to hunt
and comes back in the evening;
the *king's* son wanted the *Þór of gold*. *ræsir*; man
to deliver the bread.

7. "My kinsman, that which you gave to me
early caused me wonder;
in the meal was so large a worm,
that I could not knead it.

8. I heard that the *king*, full of anger, *hilmir*
then grabbed his *whetstone's floor*; sword
the boy was then twelve winters old
when the *king* deprived him of life. *vísir*

9. The *lady* would allow her brothers *svanni*
to deprive all of Siggeir's boys
of life if Sygný counsels;
this was grim to the wife.

10. When the one year was passed he killed
another of son of Siggeir;
he did not get the bread kneaded
when he offered him such work.

11. The *king's woman* visits a witch,	*vísir*; *sprund*
that was a little good luck;	
she caused her in short time	
to switch with her in appearance.	
12. Sigmundr met the fair wife,	
and she didn't want to name herself,	
because she wanted to conceive	
so that she could revenge the *king*.	*lofðungr*
13. The *caster of bright gold*,	man
did not recognize his sister	
he has a sleep with the *silk-Hlín*[100]	woman
in the same bed and covers.	
14. A little later the crafty *woman*	*frú*
snuck away from the *king*;	*harri*
then the *bridge of the snake's land* left,	woman
took back her shape from the *woman*.	*svarri*
15. And so it went, as I now chant,	
about the *linden of sea's fire*;	woman
the gentlest *bridge of rings*	woman
birthed a child in the set time.	
16. Then Sygný had a boy child,	
shall name him Sinfjǫtli;	
he shall redden the blue blade	
in the *red sweat* of *men*.	blood; *bragnar* (pl.)
17. He has reached five and three	
death-diseases of Fáfnir[101]	winters
when the daughter of Vǫlsungr shows	
her afflictions to Sinfjǫtli.	
18. She sewed to him the shirt-sleeves,	
they are both full of grief;	
the boy gives attention to the afflictions,	
together went the skin and clothes.[102]	

[100] Hlín is the name of a goddess.
[101] I am not sure how this kenning work to create its meaning, but Finnur Jónsson lists it as a winter-kenning (1926-28, 56, entry for *dauðasótt*); that is, Sinfjǫtli is now eight winters old.
[102] That is, when she rips the sleeves off his hands after sewing them to him, as is told in *Vǫlsunga saga*.

19. The *woman* talks with her boy, *svanni*
Signý remembers her trials;
"My brother shall not soon have need
to accuse you of cowardice."

20. He declared that the skin didn't hurt;
"So now we two shall part,
I cannot hinder your *brother* *hlýri*
from such desires of her."[103]

21. The crafty *Lín-oak*[104] accompanied woman
her son away in secret;
"I will send you," declared the *silk-earth*, woman
"on a journey to my brother."

22. "My mother told me to greet you,
I shall not conceal this;
your sister has sent me
to serve you."

23. Vǫlsungr's son offered to train
the *giver of Fáfnir's lands*- man
"Now shall the boy shape bread
while I seek firewood."

24. When the flour was prepared,[105] the *king* said, *mildingr*
"Were you able to prepare this?
Didn't you find the evil living thing?
Didn't you find the worm frightening?"

25. "At first with my finger
I found something moving;
it added moisture."
I heard that the boy said this.

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[103] That is, he cannot, or will not, hinder Sigmundr from acting out Sygný's desires for revenge.
[104] *Lín* is the name of a goddess, probably an older form of *Hlín*. Having two options for the same name would be helpful for alliterative purposes. Here the poet is able to use this particular kenning where he needs an "L" alliteration.
[105] Finnur Jónsson translates "krikt mjǫl" as "mel hvori noget levende (der bevæger sig) mærkes" (1926-28, 219, entry for *krikt*).

26. "I have torn the worm asunder,	
I made the meal into lumps;	
it seems to me," declared the *king's son*,	*þengill*; *kundr*
"not necessary to fear a snail.	
27. "I have spread the entire bread,	
king, you may eat;	*bragningr*
king, you need not	*ǫðlingr*
fear any such thing with me.	
28. "When shall you remember the foremost *king*,	*fylkir*
your father killed by the *king*?	*tiggi*
Here still you have to avenge, *king*,	*gramr*
six and three *brothers*."	*hlýri*
29. So then the *king* becomes friendly,	*bragninr*
he smiled with white teeth;	
"truly, handsome boy, you have	
the countenance of our men."	
30. The *men* went late during the night	*seggr*
to visit the hall of Siggeir;	
there inside would sit	
the sad and terrified queen of the *king*.	*dǫglingr*
31. They got themselves a fair seat,	
then desired to stay;	
the *willow of gold* heard	woman
that the *valiant men* wanted to prepare for this.	*garpr*
32. The *Týr of rings* ordered to bite to pieces[106],	man
the *king* ordered this to hear:	*bragningr*
"There is a lack of food-supply here for the Vǫlsungar;	
I shall bleed them."	
33. The wife declared him wisdom-lacking,	
the *woman* from grief,	*vǫrð*
that they should tear up *men*	*bragnar* (pl.)
"who you slayed long ago."	
34. The bender *of strong shields* bit so loudly	man
the *burden of the shoulders*,	head
the *king* and all the people heard it;	*fylkir*
it increased difficulty to the *woman*.	*frú*

[106] Finnur Jónsson translates "bíta hnot" as "bide itu" (1926-28, 27, entry for *bíta*).

35. The children of the *king* played with gold	*lofðungr*
and sought the red ring;	
they told the *king* and also the *Hǫrn of gold*[107]	*fylkir*; woman
that they saw poor men.	
36. She brought the children to her brother,	
the bride acted out of difficulty;	
"Sigmundr, they have searched for you,	
fling them both dead."	
37. "I will not kill more of your children,"	
the *king* answered the women;	*bragningr*; *teitr*
then Sinfjǫtli hewed	
both his siblings with the *sword*.[108]	*hneitir*
38. Sinfjǫtli let fly	
the *trunk of the scalp* into the *king's* hall;	head; *siklingr*
the *king* recognized the *brows' mountains*,	*bragningr*; head
I would not blatantly lie.	
39. Siggeir then had his men	
attack them both,	
but the Vǫlsungar defended themselves	
well with masterly skill and valor.	
40. The *battle* was so hard and long,	*hildr*
the *sword* clashes into shields;	*hneitir*
the *men* are both captured	*bragnar* (pl.)
in the *song of points*.	battle
41. It is reported to me of their skills,	
which hardly seem true,	
they beat to death by their will	
sixty guilty men.	
42. The night was dark, when naked	
down in a grave so deep	
are thrown, and the bed was grim	
to the *trees of Sǫlli's mantles*.	men

[107] *Hǫrn* is a name of Freyja.
[108] *Hneitir*, a *heiti*, has a direct translation of "slayer."

43. I have heard that the large stone
stood in between them;
each man lay on his side,
so had commanded the evil *king*. *gramr*

44. The capable *woman* got some provision in straw *fljóð*
to her famous son;
the *woman* managed to give this to the *heroes*, *kæra*; *kappi*
to provide for the full need.

45. There does the *malt lake of Herjan*[109] mead of poetry
desire to rest itself for a time,
so that *men* are able to lay in memory *drengr*
the *bear of the dale of Durnir*.[110] mead of poetry

Fitt VI

1. There have I turned away from *men*, *hǫldr*
I was hardly able to rest;
the king and the boy were in the grave, *gramr*
I recount that which they said.

2. "Here in the straw is the fat ham"-
I heard that the boy said this-
"our blessed mother
has even delivered the sword to me." *mækir*

3. "Then you need not," declared the foremost *king*, *fylkir*
"fear death's approach nor hunger;
my good Gramr[111] well knows how
to cut through stone and earth."

4. The *king's shield damager*[112] split the slab- *ræsir*; sword
I heard the rest-
with the bitter blade they sliced
the rock equally and dressed.

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[109] Herjan is a name of Óðinn.
[110] Bear of the dale >ship; Durnir is a dwarf name.
[111] In *Rímnasafn*, Finnur Jónsson capitalizes any words he thinks are names. However, this could also be translated as "my good sword," with *gramr* treated only as a *heiti*.
[112] Literally "ritar grand" translates to "damager of shield," but that felt a bit awkward in English.

5. Then they dug through rock and earth-
I heard that Gramr cuts well-
until they came to fair land
and are able to see the *king's* hall. *fylkir*

6. The *men* carried to the *king's* hall *virðar* (pl.); *vísir*
the dry branches and firewood;
then the merry *kinsmen of Burri*[113] Sinfjǫtli & Sigmundr
kindled the *troll of the pile*. fire

7. *Men* guarded the door of the hall, *hǫldr*
then the *king* drew his sword; *hilmir*
the cruel *fire* burned joyfully, *hyrr*
the fuel for it was abundant.

8. The *king* answers, and is not smiling; *vísir*
he gives this speech:
"Which *Týr of shields* attacks man
with plenty of smoke and flame?"

9. "The youngest son of Vǫlsungr
knows how to wield fire;
this *fire* and the *boy of Suðri*[114] *hyrr*; man
shall cost you your life.[115]

10. "Now Sigmundr himself wants
to here avenge his grievances;
King, you have thrice before *þengill*
summoned me to death.

11. "The *king* put to death my able father *niflungr*
and most of my *brothers*; *barmi*
King, your body shall burn, *bragningr*
both the skin and guts."

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[113] Burri is Óðinn's father, so Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli are the descendants of Burri.
[114] The meaning for this keening is not clear, and Finnur Jónsson does not provide one, only including a question mark after the entry (1926-28, 360, entry for *Suðri*). However, it appears from the context to mean man or warrior. Suðri is a dwarf name.
[115] In *Ordbog til Rímur*, Finnur Jónsson transcribes this as "selja þér eð dýra," meaning "vist en talemåde 'at sælge dyrt' ('det skal koste dit live')" (1926-28, 313, entry for *selja*). His entry for the word *eð* reads "dette ord, der må være en blandingsform af *að* og *er*, findes oftere i håndskriter f. eks [*Grettisrímur*] I, 42, men hvorvidt den er bleven brugt af diterne, er ikke helt sikkert" (1926-28, 70).

12. The *king* speaks with his sister — *hilmir*
and talks in this way:
"I want to ask that you
grant that which I would allow.

13. "Do you want to walk from the fire
out the gate of the cheerless hall?
You will get neither harm nor grief,
and you will rule all."

14. "I am now lost to all happiness,"
declared the *Freyja of snake's down*, — woman
"I was unwilling to marry the king,
but now I am willing to die.

15. "Towards death have I aimed and hit,
I got great sorrows,
I have now fully purchased,
avenged my father and *brothers*. — *barmi*

16. You are the true father of Sinfjǫtli,
Sigmundr," declared the *branch of gold*; — woman
"We shall be forced to part,"
the daughter of Vǫlsungr tells the *men*.[116] — *virðar* (pl.)

17. "I have lost a father in the *storm of arrows*," — battle
the *king* speaks in anger; — *fylkir*
"I, your *brother*, bear dangerous grief, — *hlýri*
I will never forget the *woman*. — *fljóð*

18. This is much more worthy," [117]
the wise *king* declares, — *mildingr*
"but it is clear to the *men* — *bragnar* (pl.)
that you will burn here inside."

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[116] This last line is tricky. It could mean a) declares the worthy daughter of Vǫlsungr." (kveðja + virðr, adj.) or b) the daughter of Vǫlsungr tells the men (kveða + virðar, pl., m. substantive). *Virðr* is not usually used as an adjective in this context, but *dóttur* in the oblique case would need to change to *dóttir,* the nominative inflection, for the second option to be completely accurate. *Dóttur* could be used as a nominative in the 17th century, but it is hard to tell if that would apply to this mid-16th century manuscript. *Kveðja* can also mean "to bid goodbye," adding a third option for this translation (these linguistic nuances were explained to me by Haukur Þorgeirsson).
[117] I believe "it" here is the option to walk out of the fire.

19. The *king* kissed the *Hlín of gold*,	*vísir*; woman
the *king's* son killed her;	*skyli*
with his *sword* he stabbed his mother,	*mækir*
I would not conceal this.	
20. The *fire* leapt up into the roof of the hall	*hyrr*
and over the brave people;	
it pulled everything to ashes	
as if it were tarred board and bark.	
21. Both did there lose life-	
I can call that fitting-	
Siggeir the king and the noble wife	
and a company of valiant *heroes*.	*kappi*
22. The *king* had this work,	*þengill*
the *destroyer of snake's land*;	man
sufficiently collected his father's inheritance;	
he was eager to return home.	
23. He drove away that *king*	*þengill*
who was wrongfully there before,	
killed there many a *king's* man-	*dǫglingr*
tell I that grief is abundant.	
24. Vǫlsungr's son took the name of *king*	*vísir*
widely over Hunland;	
when this *prince* slayed with a *blade*,	*brandr*; *ǫðlingr*
he gave bloody prey to the wolves and eagles.	
25. Widely about the land of the Franks	
the father and son went raiding;	
the *breakers of Fáfnir's land*	men
always bloodied shields.	
26. The *king* got himself a handsome *woman*	*þengill*; *sprund*
along with the *land of the snake*;	gold
Brynhildr was the name of this *ground of rings*,	woman
who the *king* gained for himself.	*bragningr*
27. Sigmundr had with his *woman*	*frú*
those very fine sons;	
now Hrómundr as Helgi,	
I quickly explain of the kings.	

28. I have found out that Helgi was famous,
tell I that he was wonderfully clever;
Sinfjǫtli has directly trained
the *man* in all warfare. *seggr*

29. This *king* was likewise strong, *stiller*
he mightily hewed with *blades*; *brandr*
this notable *king* was twelve winters old *tiggi*
when he began to rule over shields.

[The end.]

Vǫlsungsrímur: Commentary and Analysis

Discussion of the Genre and Analytic Framework

Since the days of Árni Magnusson, notorious for throwing out or cutting up for scraps any manuscripts he deemed worthless, Old Norse scholars have slowly adopted a more and more open mind about what texts do and do not have "worth" or "value" as artifacts or works of literature. [118] One collection of texts whose study was long overdue is the *fornaldarsögur*. In the last twenty years, these sagas have finally been given the attention they deserve after long being dismissed by scholars as "historically unreliable and of scant artistic merit."[119] While *Vǫlsunga saga* was one of a few notable *fornaldarsögur* that were considered older, and so worthy of scholarship, *Vǫlsungsrímur*, a cycle of poetry in *rímnaháttur* (*rímur* metre) did not benefit from the notoriety of its source material.[120] Though many *rímur* are based on the beloved *Íslendingasögur* and the newly prominent *fornaldarsögur*, they have yet to come far enough out of the shadow of their reputation as lesser literature to merit any large body of scholarship. Only Jeffrey Scott Love has really begun to incorporate *rímur* into the new interest in *fornaldarsögur*.[121]

Like the 14th and 15th century *fornaldarsögur, rímur* have been largely ignored as a result of the unbalanced attention given to the Icelandic Freestate and

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[118] See Driscoll 2010. For more on Árni's care of manuscripts in his collection, see Springborg, 1996.
[119] Driscoll, 2009, 2. The *Stories for All Time* project has made huge headways in producing and promoting scholarship and new editions of these sagas (Driscoll and Hufnagel 2015).
[120] For a brief introduction to the basic qualities and origin of *rímur*, see Hughes 2007. Here it will suffice to say for any unfamiliar with the genre that *rímur* are narrative stanzaic metrical poems written in Icelandic. They have rhyme and alliteration, and there are thousands of variations on several main metrical patterns. They are divided into individual parts called *ríma* ("fitt" in English). Size and subject matter vary immensely, as do most features of this genre, which stretches from the mid-14th century to the 20th.
[121] Love 2013; See "*A Brief History of the World of* Rímur *Studies*" in this study for more discussion on the significance of his work.

the literature it produced. This attention, of course, stems from still lingering notion that this period was "the golden age of Icelandic national life."[122] Though not often stated so bluntly in recent years, the notion still prevails that when Iceland lost its status as an independent land of independent people, it also lost its hitherto unusually high ability "to produce literature of any memorable quality, an ability it was not to regain until the nineteenth century."[123] In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Karen Swenson explains, scholars such as Lachmann, W.P. Ker, and Andreas Heusler were increasingly interested in charting works and genres on a linear timeline of literary evolution. Heusler even created a system of classification for medieval texts. In his "stemma-like-form-history," genres were identified by their "social significance and genealogical relationship to other forms similarly defined."[124] The result was a history building towards heroic legend and saga as the highest forms of literary art. This idea is no longer explicitly held, but its influence is surely a factor in the delayed study of later works and genres. Though *rímur* are attested as early as 1370, the heyday of the genre was in the 17th-19th centuries, and so these poems have been largely ignored by medievalists and Freestate scholars.

A Brief History of the World of Rímur *Studies*

In order to place my study of *Vǫlsungsrímur* in the larger context of *rímur* studies, a context that will reveal more acutely the need for literary analysis of *rímur*, I think it is useful at this point to provide a brief history of the study of this genre. I will draw from Stefán Einarsson's 1955 "Report on *Rímur*" and Shaun Hughes identically titled 1980 follow up article, supplementing their information with my own research and adding articles and studies written between 1980 and now. All the works mentioned here are listed in the main Bibliography at the end of

[122] Sigurður Nordal 1990, 90
[123] Hughes 2007, 205; Here he is summing up other views, not describing his own.
[124] Swenson 1991, 7

this study, where I hope they will help form a useful resource for those interested in further investigation of *rímur*.

The first publishing of *rímur* was undertaken in the early 17th century. The Bishop of Hólar, Guðbrandur Þorláksson, tried to "turn the popularity of the secular *rímur* to some spiritual advantage" in 1612 by publishing *Ein Ny Wiisna Bok*, containing *rímur* based on the Bible.[125] However, the history of *rímur* studies proper begins in the late 19th century with the editing of pre-Reformation cycles by Finnur Jónsson (1896, 1905-22) and Theodor Wisén (1881), the first scholarly work on these poems by Jón Þorkelsson (1880), and a metrical work by Helgi Sigurðsson (1891).[126] In 1934, Björn K. Þórólfsson published *Rímur Fyrir 1600*, which remains to this day the most comprehensive and important work on pre-Reformation *rímur*. *Rímur Fyrir 1600* established the division between medieval and modern *rímur*.[127] In the middle of the 20th century, the study of post-Reformation cycles was largely devoted to listing and cataloguing the almost one thousand *rímnaflokkar* (more when you include single *ríma*) belonging to this category.[128] When Stefán Einarsson was writing his "Report," he had to gather facts about post-Reformation *rímur* from an unpublished manuscript by Finnur Sigmundson, the Librarian at Reykjavík's National Library, which was eventually published as *Rímnatal* in 1966.

Outside of the work of Icelanders, only Sir William A. Cragie devoted any real attention to *rímur* in the first half of the 20th century. He first edited the 17th century *Skotlands rímur* (a cycle treating the Gowrie Conspiracy of the 16th century), and then went on to write extensively about the genre into his 80's, even founding *Rímnafélagið*, the Icelandic society that promoted *rímur* and was instrumental in making these works accessible in print.[129] His work, in conjunction with Icelandic scholars such as Björn K. Þórolfsson and Finnur Jónsson, helped to

[125] Hughes 1980, 482
[126] Hughes notes that while Helgi Sigurðsson's study is still the most comprehensive survey to date of *rímur* metres, "its greatest weakness is that it views the *rímur* as a static corpus and mixes together examples from all time periods when discussing a particular metrical variety" (1980, 479).
[127] Hughes 1980, 477
[128] Ibid., 480
[129] Craigie 1908

introduce more Icelandic and foreign scholars to *rímur* and laid the foundation for later study.[130]

In the mid 1970's, the Stofnun Árna Magnússonar in Reykjavík published a four-volume edition of early *rímur*, three of which contained previously unpublished *rímnaflokkar*. When Shaun Hughes was writing in 1980, the project was ongoing, but no more volumes were published after 1975. It appears the century of interest in *rímur* described by Stefán Einarsson in 1955 had slowed after his "Report." Hughes notes that the only other edition published between Stefán Einarsson's article and Hughes' 1980 follow-up was Theo Homan's monograph on *Skíða ríma* (which had already been edited five times before this).[131] Homan's book includes the first translation (as far as I know) of *rímur* into English. *Rímnafélagið* continued to publish into the second half of the 20th century, although more infrequently than before. Their last publication, *Rit Rímnafélagasins XI*, was released in 1976. Also deserving of note in this period, Sveinbjörn Beinteinsson's 1961-73 edition of the *rímur* of the 19th century Sigurður Breiðafjörð was significant because he included a marginal gloss for kennings and *heiti*.

It is telling that Hughes' list of substantial textual and linguistic studies on *rímur* is short enough that he can spend a few paragraphs explaining each one. He mentions individual studies by Páll Eggert Ólason (1915), Stefán Karlsson (1964), Davíð Erlingsson (1974), and Jón Helgason (1975). According to Hughes, *rímur* scholarship in the 1960's and 70's was often concerned with the relationship of the *rímur* to Icelandic ballads and other European traditions such as Danish or Faroese ballads. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1956) and Stefán Einarsson (1949) wrote about the possible foreign influences on the genre, touching on the Iceland and Faroese ballad traditions. Hughes deals with this debate in depth in a 1978 article centered on *Vǫlsungsrímur* and the Faroese ballad *Sjúrðar kvæði*. In the same publication, *Ballads and Ballad Research*, Vésteinn Ólason contributed to the conversation on *rímur* origins, focusing instead on the connections between Medieval Latin hymn metres and *ferskeytt*, the most popular *rímur* metre. Hughes writes that Vésteinn's article

[130] Stefán Einarsson 1955, 256-259
[131] Hughes 1980, 478

"marked a turning point in *rímur* studies" by challenging long held assumptions about the nature of *rímur*'s relationship to other Icelandic and foreign genres, proposing not only separate origins for *rímur* apart from foreign genres, but separate also from the Icelandic ballads.[132]

Two years after Hughes' "Report," Vésteinn published his doctorate dissertation, *The Traditional Ballads of Iceland: Historical Studies*, which contains a thorough chapter on *rímur*. As Hughes noted, Vésteinn's theories of *rímur* were very important to further studies, and he deals more with these in this work. In the early 1990's, Hans Kuhn published a fascinating study, "The *Rímur*-Poet and His Audience," which looked in depth at the formulaic elements of *rímur* and explored their uses in the context of spoken and performed *rímur*.[133] The work of Matthew Driscoll must, of course, be mentioned in any survey of the field. It certainly says something about the state of *rímur* scholarship that Driscoll's keynote speech the International Saga Conference in 2012 was titled "Why we should care about *rímur*;" that is, that the reasons still need to be explained and, on a more promising note, that they *are* being explained at such an influential event.[134] In 1997, Driscoll's "Words, Words, Words: Textual Variation in *Skikkjurímur*" examined the manuscript transmission of this *rímnaflokkar,* using the results to draw conclusions about the nature of *rímur* and, "by extension[,]...the nature of pre-modern textually" in general.[135] This was followed in 1999 by his edition and English translation, side-by-side, of *Skikkjurímur* in *Norse Romance Vol. II*. This is the only full *rímnaflokkur* published in English translation since Homan's monograph on *Skíða ríma*. The volume also contains *Möttuls saga*, on which *Skikkjurímur* is based, providing a

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[132] Hughes 1980, 496
[133] Kuhn 1990-93
[134] Driscoll 2012
[135] Driscoll 1997, 228; While only somewhat relevant to this study, I am compelled by common decency to point out that throughout this article, Driscoll pokes fun at scholars and scholarship that dismiss certain manuscripts as less valuable or devoid of value by referring to the third manuscript of *Skikkjurímur* as "the utterly worthless Stockholm manuscript," "the totally insignificant Stockholm manuscript," etc., even when using its variants to reach conclusions, a tactic I find quite amusing and effective.

convenient avenue for comparison for those wishing to further explore the handling of the source material in both prose and poetry.

A recent work of note is Jeffrey Scott Love's *The Reception of* Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks *from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*.[136] In addition to looking at thirty manuscripts of prose sagas, Love also examined three manuscripts containing *Hervarar rímur*, which were written by Ásmundur Sæmundsson. Love's goal in this work was "to gain a better understanding of how sagas were adapted to suit a variety of purposes as they spread from Iceland through successive generations," and his inclusion of *rímur* is significant.[137] *Rímur* are a vast, though largely unexplored, treasure trove of information about the reception of material from classical Iceland in the late medieval, post-Reformation, and early modern periods. Love's work emphasizes this and has, hopefully, set a precedent for more studies of a similar nature. Love also briefly touched on *Vǫlsungsrímur* in his paper "Legendary sagas and legendary *rímur*" at the *The Legendary Legacy* conference in 2014, which will be available in the conference publication due out in 2015 or 2016. In a paper presented at *New Focus on Retrospective Methods* conference in 2010, Frog discussed the "unusual compositional features of *Þrymsqviða*" and proposed that these features, "which set it apart from the eddic corpus, anticipate the later *rímur* tradition and in some cases might even be described as 'experimental.'"[138] His paper follows the new trend in questioning our previously held assumptions about the confines of genre in the medieval Norse world, assumptions about how clearly defined these genres are in style and in *floruit*.[139]

Lastly, it is worthwhile to mention the published and ongoing work of Haukur Þorgeirsson. Haukur's 2013 PhD. dissertation, *Hljóðkerfi og bragkerfi:*

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[136] Love 2013
[137] Ibid., 2
[138] Frog 2010, 35
[139] See Judy Quinn, etc. al. "Interrogating Genre in the *Fornaldarsögur*: Round-Table Discussion." *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 2 (2006), 276-296 and Marianne Kalinke, "Textual Instability, Generic Hybridity, and the Development of Some Fornaldarsogur." In *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, edited by Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, Ármann Jakobsson. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2012.

Stoðhljóð, tónkvæði og önnur úrlausnarefni í íslenskri bragsögu ásamt útgáfu á Rímum af Ormari Fraðmarssyni explores linguistic aspects of *rímur*, including information on *Vǫlsungsrímur*. He has also written several articles dealing with *rímur*, including two on *Lokrur*, a cycle of *rímur* which tell the story of Þórr's trip to Útgarða-Loki, and is currently editing the AM 146 a 8vo version of *Hrólfs rímur Gautrekssonar*.[140] In his "Report," Shaun Hughes noted the lull in *rímur* studies since Stefán Einarsson's 1955 "Report," but was hopeful concerning its future. He writes:

> "The future of *rímur* studies looks brighter than at any time since the turn of the century. There is an increase of interest in these poems both for their own sake and in connection with studies of the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, although it remains to be seen if this will result in a flurry of scholarly activity similar to that about the *rímur* a century ago."[141]

The increase of interest he mentions has taken its time to gather steam, but I believe the projects and studies mentioned in this brief survey suggest the *rímur* are finally on the verge of receiving the attention and scholarship they deserve from medievalists and scholars of Icelandic literature.

Shared Narrative Material and Saga-Privilege

It would seem that when there is a set of *rímur* based on a saga, scholars have a tendency to work from the assumption that the saga-derived text is an imitation or simple adaptation rather than a unique creation in its own right. Though *Vǫlsungsrímur* has been mentioned no more than a handful of times in scholarly work, making it impossible to really gauge it reception over the last century, the status of its source material casts a large shadow. I believe it is important to base an analysis of the poem on realistic assessment of the contemporary reception of both works, which is far more balanced than the early to mid-20th century reception that has in some ways privileged sagas and prose over poetic counterparts.

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[140] Haukur Þorgeirsson 2008; Haukur Þorgeirsson 2011
[141] Hughes 1980, 498

As a grand narrative with roots in heroic Eddic poetry and connections to the great epics in other Germanic countries, it is not hard to understand why *Vǫlsunga saga*, even though it is only preserved in one medieval manuscript, has become the central text against which all other forms of the narrative are understood and analyzed.[142] It is often seen as the greatest Norse manifestation of one of the most powerful Germanic legendary cycles. Even in the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth centuries, this saga, as it has been preserved in the manuscript tradition, heavily influenced such giants of culture as J.R.R. Tolkien, William Morris, and Richard Wagner. Before it was widely available and read in the English-speaking world, William Morris described the saga as "the most complete and dramatic form of the great Epic of the North," which had been "founded upon the debris of songs and poems."[143] Morris saw the saga as a great monument of his race. Though this seems a slightly exaggerated tribute, the sentiment continues to be echoed, albeit in less hyperbolic terms, in modern scholarship. In the introduction to his 1990 translation of the saga, Jesse Byock suggested that its resonance with audiences from medieval to modern has something to do with the fact that "*The Saga of the Volsungs* recounts eerie stories whose roots reach back into European prehistory," an epithet strongly reminiscent of Morris and Wagner's Romantic praise.[144]

There is no doubt that *Vǫlsunga saga* is an epic and gripping tale, but looking at the history of this story, from its roots in the poems of the *Codex Regius* to its adaptation to poetry by *rímur* authors and Morris, does the evidence point to the saga as the culmination of a great tradition? And were all later forms merely corruptions or dismissible later adaptations of the 'original?' NKS 1824 b 4to, the only extant medieval manuscript of *Vǫlsunga saga*, has been dated to 1380-1420.[145] That means that the composition date of *Vǫlsungsrímur* likely falls within the same

[142] At least in the field of Old Norse scholarship. While the *Nibelungenlied* is, of course, relevant to any discussion of the Vǫlsung narrative material, here I am speaking only of Old Norse works, Icelandic works, and those works directly connected to the northern manifestations of the legend.
[143] Morris and Eiríkur Magnusson 1870, "Translators Preface", "Introduction"
[144] Byock 1990, 5
[145] Driscoll and Hufnagel 2015

time frame as the writing of NKS 1824 b 4to.[146] The saga is believed to have been composed between 1200-1270, likely around 1250.[147] Though the genre of *rímur* extends into the 20th century, its beginning overlaps with the saga age. In a Heuslerian view of literary evolution, the saga-derived *rímur* would likely be considered a decline from the "pristine" saga-epic; however, a look at the literary culture of Iceland post-reformation, during the heyday of *rímur*, turns this "saga-privilege" on its head.

Quite a few *rímur* poets were inspired by *fornaldarsögur*. Several no-longer-extant sagas of this category are only known to us today because they were poeticized before being lost. But the saga to poem process was not unilinear. The phenomenon of new sagas being composed from *rímur* is detailed by Peter A. Jorgensen in "The Neglected Genre of Rímur-Derived Prose and Post-Reformation *Jónatas saga*."[148] Not only were sagas composed from *rímur*, but it also happened that more *rímur* were composed from *rímur*-derived prose narratives. In this fluid tradition of *rímur* and sagas interacting and reacting to each other, there are instances where the progression of genres looks something like this: *sa*ga > *rímur* > saga > *rímur*. If the poeticization of sagas by *rímur* poets were merely adaptation into a new form, then it would be illogical to compose *rímur* based on a *rímur*-derived saga instead of composing a new poem from the "original" saga. Instead, this pattern suggests that the phenomenon of *rímur* could have instead been motivated by a desire to creatively interact with existing narratives. Jorgensen proposes that this trend is part of a much larger literary tradition including such works as *Vǫlsunga saga* and Snorri's *Prose Edda,* works that are the result of creative compilation and interaction with existing source material.[149]

The *fornaldarsögur* were regarded as a lower class entertainment until this claim was disputed and turned on its head. *Rímur*, however, are still considered by many to be a lower form of literature, even though this hierarchy of genres against

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[146] I will discuss the dating of *Vǫlsungsrímur* later in this study.
[147] Torfi Tulinius 2002, 139
[148] Jorgensen 1990
[149] Ibid., 189

which it is measured holds little explicit sway in current scholarship. In 1991, Stephen Mitchel remarked that "it is periodically maintained, in a derogatory sense, that the *rímur* are intended for the 'common man,'" those people who could not fully appreciate the higher art of saga or skaldic poetry.[150] Perhaps this is linked to the genre's lack of ancient oral roots, an aspect of the sagas that is understandably fascinating to scholars; *rímur* were composed in a literate society with access to parchment and later paper to preserve their works as soon as they had created them.[151] Daisy Neijmann remarks that since *rímur* were composed anonymously for the first two centuries of the genre, "we may assume therefore that the *rímur* were regarded as nothing more than a popular form of entertainment."[152] She emphasizes the supposed lack of literary merit in this genre spanning over five centuries by explaining that "the composition and recital of *rímur* developed into a kind of national sport."[153] This use of the word "sport" instead of "a national literature" or even a "national pastime" is striking. Today, academics writing about vernacular traditions are rarely so quick to completely dismiss the nuanced cultural relevance of any art form. Even such "low-brow" poetic genres as hip-hop or rap are treated as art forms with more social significance than *mere* entertainment. It is clear that Neijmann is simply following the established tradition of dismissing *rímur* as texts of inherent cultural value. She quotes Sigurður Nordal, and remarks that his assessment of *rímur* is "apt:"

> ...probably the most absurd example of literary conservatism that has ever been noted. It can be said that they remain unchanged for five whole centuries although everything around them changes. And although they frequently have little poetic value and sometimes even border on complete tastelessness, they have demonstrated with their tenacity that they satisfy the needs of the nation peculiarly well…They gave each versifier an

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[150] Mitchel 1991, 174
[151] Driscoll 1997, 231
[152] Neijmann 1997, 27
[153] Ibid., 28

> opportunity to practice his sport, without demanding imagination or originality from him. They were an industry rather than an art… [154]

This attitude has shifted in the last fifteen years, as can be seen in the rise of New Philology and its dismissal of hierarchical text evaluation methods.[155] However, it has yet to manifest itself in the form of substantial research and publication on the genre of *rímur*.[156] Even in Erika Ruth Sigurðson's thorough and illuminating dissertation *The Church in Fourteenth-Century Iceland*, she leaves *rímur* out of the list of rich genres and texts hitherto ignored as sources for understanding the cultural milieu in which they were produced.[157] Sigurdson's dissertation is, nonetheless, an excellent example of how, by simply questioning the value judgments placed on different genres and document sources, new avenues to insight and understanding can be opened and reveal more information about the structures and ideologies that governed life in the medieval period.

It is to this opening of new sources and texts through the dismantling of outdated barriers that I hope to contribute with this examination of *Vǫlsungsrímur*. In *Speculum*'s 1990 special issue on "The New Philology," Gabrielle M. Spiegel proposed that, "all texts occupy determinate social spaces, both as products of the social world of authors and as textual agents at work in that world, with which they entertain often complex and contestatory relations."[158] It is with this in mind that I will attempt to show the value of *Vǫlsungsrímur* by analyzing it under the assumption that it is a valuable cultural artifact. When discussing most sagas, it is not necessary to begin one's analysis with an argument for the value of the genre

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[154] Nordal, Sigurður. "Samhengið í íslenzkum bókmenntum." [Continuity in Icelandic literature] Íslenzk Lestrarbók 1400-1900. Reykjavík. BSE, 1931, ix-xxxii]; Neijmann, 1997, 28-29

[155] Of course, this is mainly in the evaluation of manuscripts, but this attitude that older is not necessarily better and that textual artifacts of any age have value as such must accepted before the hierarchy of genres based on prose/poetry distinctions and age can be questioned and dismantled. For more on New Philology, see Driscoll 2010.

[156] The notable exceptions being the work of Driscoll and Love.

[157] Sigurdson 2011, 11. She lists the "riddarasögur, translated saints' lives, and other fantastic or imported genres" but leaves out poetry, skaldic or *rímur*.

[158] Spiegal 1990, 77

because these works are assumed to be worthy of research, whatever form one believes that research should take. This assumption of inherent value drives interest and research, which then validates the original assumption of value. Accordingly, I believe that the best way to show the value of *rímur* is to simply approach one text with the assumption that has inherent value and let my analysis prove that assumption. Although this may be inferentially circular logic, I believe it is necessary in order to move past the idea of *rímur* as merely "exercising the wit and providing a sense of formal aesthetics."[159]

In my analysis of *Vǫlsungsrímur*, I will operate within the approach described by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir: "...all preserved medieval texts, including legendary sagas and romances that previous scholars considered 'decadent' entertainment, foreground contemporary issues and are thus valuable evidence though which historical attitudes can be recovered."[160] As Sigurdson explains, literary production in fourteenth century Iceland was largely the domain of an elite group of clerics who were familiar with the learned writings of Europe and wrote across many genres.[161] It seems unlikely to me that a poet who produced a poem like *Kátrínardrápa*, firmly located in the Christian skaldic and hagiographic tradition, would write *Vǫlsungsrímur* without any intention besides mere entertainment.[162]

With this guiding principle in mind, I will be following, more or less, the analytic approach Torfi Tulinius uses to draw out the meaning of *Vǫlsunga saga* in *The Matter of the North.*[163] First, I will try to identify the structure and grand themes of the poem. Second, I will look at the poem's source material in order to find out how the poet has "nuanced or reaffirmed the meaning of the story-material he drew

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[159] Neijmann 1997, 29
[160] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2014, 89
[161] Sigurdson, 2011
[162] I would personally argue that every form of entertainment can be read as a text, from which information about its intended audience or user can be gleaned; however, here I refer to the idea that there are sagas or poetry composed "just" for entertainment.
[163] Torfi Tulinius 2002, 139-140

from...[nudging] the reader towards a certain interpretation of the story."[164] Lastly, I will sketch a quick portrait of the parts of Icelandic society and history relevant to this poem's socio-historical context in order and discuss the themes and authorial choices of the poem in light of this context.

Manuscripts, Dating, and Authorship

Vǫlsungsrímur were written in the mid- to late-14th century. They are found in two manuscripts written in the mid-16th century and early 18th century: AM 604 g 4to, part of the divided *Rímnabók*, and AM 606 k 4to. AM 604 g 4to is a parchment manuscript that came into Árni Magnússon's hands in 1707. Soon after, it was copied by Jón Sigurðsson *eldri* into a series of paper manuscripts, including AM 606 k 4to, which contains only *Vǫlsungsrímur*.[165] The prolific *rímnaskáld* Árni Böðvarsson composed a separate cycle of *Vǫlsungsrímur* in the 18th century, which must be left out of this study for the sake of brevity.[166] The older cycle, which this thesis will explore, is often referred to as *Vǫlsungs rímur óbórna* (the *rímur* of Vǫlsungr unborn), but here I will stick with the title given in *Rímnasafn*, "*Vǫlsungsrímur*," since I will be working almost entirely from that edition. All the editions and commentary on *Vǫlsungsrímur* that I use are based on AM 604 g 4to, since it was long considered the only manuscript of the poem.[167] *Vǫlsungsrímur* were first edited by Theodor Möbius in an 1860 edition of the Eddic poems.[168] It was edited twice by Finnur Jónsson, first in Modern Icelandic in *Fernir fornîslenskir Rímnaflokkar* in 1896 and later in the semi-diplomatic *Rímnasafn* (published 1905-1912).[169]

[164] Torfi Tulinius 2002, 140
[165] *Handrit.is*
[166] There are 12-13 known manuscripts of this set from the 18th century and later on *handrit.is*. Árni was the most productive and best-known *rímur*-poet in his century (Stefán Einarsson 1955, 256).
[167] I owe thanks to Jeffery Love here for suggesting that AM 606 k 4to might contain the elder *Vǫlsungsrímur*.
[168] Möbius 1860
[169] Finnur Jónsson 1896; Finnur Jónsson 1905-1912

Vǫlsungsrímur consists of six fitts (64, 49, 43, 49, 45, and 29 stanzas long, respectively). Björn K. Þórólfsson suggests that the length of the final fitt and its lack of closing statement mean that this fitt was cut short.[170] It does seem out of character for a *rímnaskáld* to forgo any final statement or conclusion at the end of the poem. As Vésteinn Ólason notes, it was a common practice in the older *rímur* for the narrator to speak at the beginning and end of each fitt.[171] However, since *Vǫlsungsrímur* is arguably one of the four or five oldest *rímur*-cycles, it is problematic to hold it to a "normal" that has been established based on the few *rímur* that came before it and those that followed in the next two centuries.[172] Haukur Þorgeirsson's list of *rímur* dated to 1350-1400 shows considerable variation in fitt length, from three fits of 29, 23, and 27 stanzas in *Þrymlur* to six fitts ranging from 51 to 67 stanzas in *Griplur*. In addition, it is important to note that the difference between the 29 stanzas of the final fitt of *Vǫlsungsrímur* and 46, the median of fitts two through five, is one less than the difference between the median and the 64 stanzas of the first fitt. If we were to take the length of the final fitt as evidence for corruption or loss, than the first fitt would need to be questioned as well.

It is not uncommon to find *rímnaflokkar* with a shorter final *ríma*. One such example is the version of *Hrólfs rímur Gautrekssonar* found in AM 146 a 8vo (dated 1600-1699 on *handrit.is*), which contains five fitts in a similar distribution to *Vǫlsungsrímur*: 65, 57, 71, 48, and 22.[173] There are several options when confronted with this distribution. First, as mentioned before, it could be a corruption (loss) of final stanzas. Second, it could be that the poet intended to continue on, but never got around to finishing. Third, if the poet had decided on a certain amount of source text to draw from, he may have misjudged how many stanzas it would take and thus ended up with a shorter final fitt. If the poem finishes at a convenient place, then this third option seems the best explanation. *Vǫlsungsrímur* does just this, stopping

[170] Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, 305
[171] Vésteinn Ólason 1982, 54
[172] For more on the dating of *Vǫlsungsrímur* in relation to other early poems, see the list in Haukur Þorgeirsson 2013, 249-257.
[173] Thanks to Haukur Þorgeirsson for pointing this parallel out to me.

where the first complete cycle of revenge ends in *Vǫlsunga saga*, using information from the Helgi chapters, which form their own separate sub-story in the saga, as an epilogue. Unless a different version of *Vǫlsungsrímur* is found in a medieval manuscript, it is likely that we will never know if the poet intended there to be more to the story. However, in the absence of any strong proof to the contrary, I will analyze the poem under the assumption that, whether or not it was altered between composition and its inclusion in AM 604 g 4to, the text preserved is a complete poem.[174]

The sources for *Vǫlsungsrímur* are *Vǫlsunga saga*, *Snorra Edda* (Prologue and *Gylfaginning)*, and *Ynglinga saga*.[175] The works of Snorri Sturluson are used for the first fifty stanzas of the first fitt, at which point the poem takes up the story of *Vǫlsunga saga* from the first chapter to the eighth (with concluding information taken from the ninth and tenth chapters, those dealing with Helgi, for the last two stanzas of the *rímur*). As the analysis in this study will show, it seems very likely that these *rímur* are based on the version of the *Vǫlsunga saga* that we know today (NKS 1824 b 4to). The poet is judicious in his alterations to the main sequence of events in the saga, but his alterations show that he was trying to understand it in light of his own historical and cultural context. For example, at the end of the first fitt and the start of the second, the poet gives the thrall Breði a dog named Refill, and after Sigi kills them, they both serve as origin-stories for the words for "snowdrift". Björn K. Þórólfsson suggests that the poet was trying to connect the saga account of snowdrifts being named after Breði with another word he knew connected to that concept, *rakka*.[176] This is not important for the plot (true for both the saga and the *rímur*) or the poet's interpretation of the story, but it is a great insight into the way he approached the existing text and brought it forward, reconciling an older story with his lexicon. The poet was freer with his use of Snorri Sturluson's works. Björn

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[174] Of course, it is likely that the manuscript contains mistakes, but I am referring here to the assumption that the poem is whole, if not 100% identical to its first written version.
[175] And, as I will touch on later, perhaps influence from *Ólafs saga helga* in one section.
[176] Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, 304

K. Þórolfsson believes that the poet had access to the Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol) and Codex Regius (GKS 2367 4 to) versions of *Snorra Edda*, but not the Codex Upsaliensis (DG 11) version.[177] As I will show further on, it is the poet's clever manipulation of Snorri's accounts of the gods that holds the key to understanding the poet's interpretation of his 13th century sources.

Almost every scholar who has mentioned *Vǫlsungsrímur*, including Finnur Jónsson, has attributed the poem to a certain Kálfr Skáld, although confidence in his identity varies. This is presumably the same Kálfr Skáld who authored the religious skaldic poem *Kátrínardrápa*. Finnur Jónsson at one point suggested that Kálfr Skáld might also be the author of *Fríðþjófsrímur*.[178] The most recent editor of *Kátrínardrápa*, Kirsten Wolf, suggests the mid-fourteenth century as a plausible *floruit* for Kálfr Skáld's active years.[179] Shaun Hughes placed *Vǫlsungsrímur* in the fifteenth century in a 1978 article,[180] but later wrote that it was a fourteenth century composition[181]; he does not provide his reasoning for either dating. As noted earlier, Haukur Þorgeirsson lists *Vǫlsungsrímur* as the fourth oldest in the genre, with a composition date between 1350 and 1400.[182] The poet describes himself in *Kátrínardrápa* as "arfa Halls" [son of Hall] and a *frater* [brother= monk], but according to Wolf, nothing is known about the poet or his monastic affiliations beyond what he himself reveals in his works.[183]

The primary reason why Kálfr Skáld is believed to have authored both poems is his self reference in *Vǫlsungsrímur* IV, 49: "Uitulis let eg Uestra knor/ uatis þenna falla" [*Vitulus* let I Vestri's ship/ *Vates* this fall]. "Vitulus Vates" is Latin for "calf bard," which would be "kálfr skáld" in Old Icelandic, a clever way for the author to state his name indirectly. It may be an early version of what later became the very popular practice among *rímnaskáld* of hiding their names in the *rímur* they

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177 Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, 300
178 Finnur Jónsson. *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie III.* København. 1924; Haukur Þorgeirsson 2009, 172
179 Wolf Skaldic Poetry edition (2007, p. 931). vol vii, part 2
180 Hughes 1978, 40
181 Hughes 2007, 208
182 Haukur Þorgeirsson 2013, 249-257
183 Wolf 2007, 931

composed. In *Kátrínardrápa*, the poet describes himself in stanzas 45-51 (the end of the poem), first stating his name in Icelandic, Kálfr, in stanza 49. This is noteworthy because in *Vǫlsungsrímur*, the only clear self-identification is the "Vitulus Vates" signature found in the last stanza of the fourth fitt, the 49th stanza. However, unlike in *Katrínardrápa*, there is no other self-identification in *Vǫlsungsrímur.* The integration of the Latin appellative into the verses is also strikingly similar. In both instances, the two Latin words begin the third and fourth lines of the stanza. In *Vǫlsungsrímur* lines 3-4 of IV, 49 (the last two lines of that fitt) are the lines mentioned above." In *Kátrínardrápa* lines 3-4 of stanza 51 read: "Vít*u*lus gaf honum viðarins heiti/ vátes †bernit†, en nú er hann fráter."[184] In *Kátrínardrápa*, which has eight lines per stanza, the Latin name appears in the middle, making its position in the line and in the poem significant.

Björn K. Þórólfsson is sure that Kálfr Skáld is the poet of both poems. He writes, "Það er vaflaust rjett, sem talið hefur verið, að sami maður ort Völsungsrímur og Kátrinardrápu."[185] [It is undoubtedly correct, as has been suggested, that the same man composed *Vǫlsungsrímur* and *Kátrínardrápa*.] Björn K. Þórólfsson suggests that *Katrínardrápa* was written around 1400 and believes *Vǫlsungsrímur* are about the same age. He bases this dating in part on the kennings in *Kátrínardrápa*, but does not go into detail about his evidence. Haukur Þorgeirsson presents two good examples of the similarities between the poems with his brief discussion of the word *pláta* and the gold-kenning *Iðja mál* [speech of Iði] stanza 38 of the *drápa* in his review of *SKALD VII*.[186] Kirsten Wolf, in her notes on the word *pláta*, writes that it is rare in *dróttkvætt* poetry, but as Haukur notes, it is common enough in the oldest *rímur*-cycles, even appearing in *Fríðþjófsrímur*. Wolf describes *Iðja mál* and other as kennings that use *Iðja* as "uncommon" kennings. However, as Haukur points out, in *Vǫlsungsrímur* III, 20 the kenning *Iðja rödd* [speech of Iði] is clearly used as a gold-kenning.[187]

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184 Wolf 2007, 963
185 Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, 305
186 Haukur Þorgeirsson 2009, 172
187 Wolf 2007, 955 and Haukur Þorgeirsson 2009, 172

As Haukur observes, the lack of any further comment or use of *Vǫlsungsrímur* in the *SKALD* edition is quite striking. Here we have fascinating evidence that this poet wrote *dróttkvætt* and *rímur*, a connection that has been under-utilized. Haukur says of this oversight that, "Sá ritskýrandi, sem tæki sér fyrir hendur að fjalla um *The Hollow Men* eftir T.S. Eliot en hefði aldrei lesið *The Waste Land* eftir sama höfund, þætti sennilega dálítið sérvitur."[188] Also absent, he points out, is any attempt to reconcile difficult words and kennings by comparing the *drápa* to *Vǫlsungsrímur* or other *rímur*.[189] These "missed connections" have since been added to the entry for *Kátrínardrápa* on the *Skaldic Poetry of the Medieval Ages* project website, but the fact that a poem by the same author was not used in the print edition to explain difficult words shows one of the consequences of leaving *rímur* out of the greater discussion on Old Icelandic literature.[190]

Literary Style, Authorial Presence, and Formulaic Language

All six fitts of *Vǫlsungsrímur* are composed in *ferskeytt* metre, one of the most common *rímnahættir*. *Ferskeytt* has four lines in lengths of 7,6,7 and 6 syllables with 4,3,4, and 3 stresses respectively, an *abab* rhyme scheme, and three part alliteration.[191] In *ferskeytt* the rhymes on the first and third lines are masculine, while the second and fourth are feminine. The poet of *Vǫlsungsrímur* mostly follows this last rule when it comes to the masculine rhymes, but is not so strict regarding the feminine, using other non-masculine words when needed. This same metre is used throughout *Ólafs ríma Haraldssonar*, the earliest extant poem classified as *rímur*. Haukur Þorgeirsson looked at the metre of the nine oldest extant *rímnaflokkar*, which can be dated to the second half of the 14th century. Except for *Sörla rímur*, the oldest in his estimation, which has irregular *ferskeytt*, *Ólafs ríma*

[188] Haukur Þorgeirsson 2009, 172
[189] Ibid.
[190] I will return later in this study to the further implications of *Kálfr Skáld*'s authorship on *Vǫlsungsrímur*.
[191] Hughes 2007, 207-208

Haraldssonar and *Vǫlsungsrímur* are the only two composed entirely in *ferskeytt*.[192] In 1883, Guðbrandur Vigfússon proposed that *ferskeytt* was modeled on a medieval Latin hymn metre popular in Iceland during the birth of the *rímur* genre. This idea was long passed over for speculation on European roots and the connection between *rímur* and Continental ballads, although it now considered to be accurate.[193]

Authorial presence in *Vǫlsungsrímur* is fairly standard for *rímur*, except for the fact that it has no *mansöngvar*. Besides the end of the final fitt, there is some sort of introduction or closing line at the beginning and end of every fitt. These mostly just say with various kennings that the poet will now recite poetry and that this part of the poem is done. He also mentions which fitt (numerically) he is about to begin, except for the third and sixth. In addition, the poet often uses these introductory moments to remind the listener what was happening when the previous fitt ended. Presumably, this was made necessary by the performance contexts of *rímur*, which are generally too long to be recited in one sitting.

Following are the main components of the introduction and closing of each fitt:

I, 1, 1-2
"Blanda skal ec firi bornnen glaud,
er beida j **fyrsta sinne**"

I, 64
"Min skal ecki liodin lǫ̇gd,
lyk ec asa minne,
tel ec at reike bernsku brogd,
bi ec at odi linne."

II, 1, 4
"sem ec þui **annad** frædi"

II, 49, 4
"falla asa minne"

III, 43, 3-4
"Full giortt hefi ec j sinnv sal
Sudra uænan karfa"

IV, 1
"Dyrann skeinke ec Durnnes bior
drott j **fiorda** sinne"

IV, 49, 3-4
"Uitulus let eg Uestra knor
uatis þenna falla."

V, 1, 1-2
"Fara skal en hin **fimta** nv
Fiolnes oska byrdi..."

192 Haukur Þorgeirsson 2013, 249-257
193 Vésteinn Ólason 1982, 60-61 and Ólason 1976; Hughes 2007, 207

III, 1, 1-2 Minne villda ec vella Bil
Vestra baten jdia

At the end of the fifth fitt, he concludes a bit differently, or rather, he pauses instead of concluding.

V, 45	V, 45
"Þar sem skal Herians hrosta tiorn	There does the malt lake of Herjan
hvilazt fyst at sinne,	desire to rest itself for a time,
þvi mega Durnis dæla biornn	so that men are able to lay in memory
dreingir leggia j minni."	the Bear of the dale of Durnir.
VI, 1	VI, 1
"Horfit hefi ec fra holdum þar,	There have I turned away for a break;
at hvilazt mætti uarlla;	I was hardly able to rest.
gramvr ok sueinn j grofenni var,	The king and the boy were in the grave,
greine ec þat er þeir spialla."	I recount their conversation.

In the previous introductions and conclusions, it was made clear that parts had begun and ended, but in V, 45 and VI, 1, it feels more like an extended fitt with a break in the middle. This could be a device to increase the tension at an already highly dramatic moment in Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli's revenge scene. It could also suggest that the final two fitts would have been performed in one sitting; combined they are not much longer than the first fitt.

Vǫlsungsrímur contains its share of the standard, formulaic fillers such as "frá eg," "tel eg," etc. that are so common in *rímur*. Vésteinn Ólason points out that in the older *rímur*, the voice of the narrator is found at the beginning and end of each *ríma*, but "apart from that, he does not intrude much in the narrative except in formulaic 'fillers,' which most frequently occur in the second line of a stanza."[194] While these two-syllable phrases may, as Hans Kuhn explains, "be stereotyped or simply inserted because they supply a number of syllables, alliterations, end rhymes or internal rhymes demanded by the stringent rules of the chosen metre," they still serve the purpose of "reminding the audience of the other 'scene,'" the dynamic

[194] Vésteinn Ólason 1982, 54

between poet/performer and audience.[195] In addition to filling out lines,"frá eg" can serve as a proof of authenticity, since it makes reference to the source material, establishing that the poet is not just making this up.[196] Other source references in *Vǫlsungsrímur* include:

References to a written document.
I, 10 "Boken uill af borgar stærð" [The book wishes to explain]
I, 21 "Letrid giorir þat liost firi mier" [The letter makes it clear to me]

References to oral tales/songs.
I, 30 "at skrǫ̊ksogur urdu gęttar" [so the fables tell]

References to hearsay/ legends.
II, 16 "Yta er þat sumra sognn" [Some people tell it this way]
V, 41 "Þat er mier greintt" [That is told/reported to me]

The poet also asserts his own credibility, such as in V, 38: "beintt mun eg ei þat liuga" [I would not blatantly lie] or VI, 19: "mvn ec þess ecki dylia" [I would not conceal this]. However, he does not merely vouch for his sources and fill metrical space. He also shares his opinion, a practice of *rímnaskáld* antipode to the saga authors' notorious reserve. Mostly, when he weighs in on a matter, it is to highlight the more villainous aspect of certain characters. These lines include his pronouncement in II, 11, when Sigi's brothers-in-law plan to betray the king: "nidings tekr sa nafnit vid,/ ef nockur gengr ꜳ þetta" [if anyone acts in this way,/ he should be labeled 'scoundrel']. But just because the brother-kings are scoundrels, does not let Sigi off the hook. In I, 64, the poet noted that Sigi's behaviour was childish: "tel ec at reike bernsku brogd" [to a man I tell of childish deeds]. As mentioned earlier, he uses his estimation of Siggeir's malicious intent in III, 42 to highten the suspense at the end of the third fitt.

Shaun Hughes describes the first person introduction in I, 1 as a "rudimentary" *mansöngur*, but considering that similar stanzas or half stanzas of

[195] Kuhn 1990-93, 456
[196] Ibid., 459

authorial self-reference and copious kennings appear at the beginning and end of most fitts, it seems a bit of a stretch to identify the first stanza as even a "rudimentary" *mansöngur*.[197] Hughes notes that the practice of attaching *mansöngvar* to *rímur*, which has become a fixed part of our description of the genre as a whole, did not become so closely associated with *rímur* until the fifteenth to sixteenth centuries.[198] Björn K. Þórólfsson remarks that while there are no *mansöngvar*, it is evident from III, 1, lines 3-4 that these *rímur* were written for a woman.[199] I do not see how that can be gleaned from III, 1, but V, 1 appears to be referencing a woman:"hrodar bvnden held ec nv/ henne ef yrdi" [now I am bound to give her praise/ if I can find it].

Summary of Vǫlsungsrímur Narrative

It will be useful at this point to summarize the narrative of *Vǫlsungsrímur*. The poem begins with the rise of Óðinn to power in Asia and ends with a brief mention of the reign of King Helgi, son of Sigmundr. The first fitt, the longest at sixty-four stanzas, deals primarily with the character and exploits of a vaguely human, vaguely deity Óðinn. This king comes to rule Ásgarðr, lays down laws for its residents, and tells them false legends so as to trick them into believing he is a god. The people begin to look to Óðinn for salvation "bædi lifs ok daudim" [both of life and in death] (I, 21). However, the poet states, Óðinn will eventually be defeated by the "Jesu vegr" [way of Jesus] (I, 24, 4), in other words Christianity, from which he flees to the northern lands (I, 24). He sets up a new kingdom in Sigtuna, which he buys from King Gylfi. Gylfi has been tricked by Gefjun and now wishes his land to be ruled by the Æsir. He gives it to Óðinn. Óðinn and Frigg have innumerable sons together, one of which is the impressive Sigi. Sigi kills the servant and dog of the queen Skaði in anger. The first fitt ends with a cliffhanger: Sigi is confronted by the queen and king, but denies his guilt.

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[197] Hughes 1978, 39
[198] Ibid., 40
[199] Björn K. Þórólfsson 1934, 300

The second fitt resolves this conflict with the banishment of Sigi. His father Óðinn outfits him with a warship and men, and Sigi goes raiding. After a time spent killing men for money, Sigi comes to the court of two brothers who rule Russia and asks for their sister in marriage. They rudely refuse, forcing him to defeat them in battle in order to get what he wants. The brothers swear an insincere truce, which is a despicable thing even for such villains reminds the poet, and withhold their sister's dowry from her new husband. Sigi is happy with his wife, and they have a son name Rerrir. When the opportunity is right, Sigi's brothers-in-law attack and kill him in battle. Rerrir quickly summons a force and fully avenges his father in the course of one stanza. Rerrir takes over their kingdom, spends eight years winning fame and glory, and then decides to find a wife. He asks for the hand of Ingigerðr, daughter of the Swedish king Ingi. Ingi attempts to deceive Rerrir; he accepts his offer but attacks him when they have gathered for the wedding. Rerrir quickly defeats Ingi, buries him in a mound, and then holds a joint wedding/funeral feast. Like her mother-in-law, Ingigerðr is very happy with her husband, but she and the king are unable to conceive. They appeal to Frigg and Óðinn (in that order) for help. Óðinn is sympathetic to his "son," and sends his valkyrie daughter Hljóð with a magic green apple. Ingigerðr becomes pregnant, but cannot deliver the child. During her extended pregnancy, the king goes off to war. He receives a fatal blow (the poem says that says Hel offers him a home), but manages to speak to his queen before his death, instructing her to name their son Vǫlsungr. After three more years of pregnancy, the mighty Vǫlsungr is cut from her belly, and she dies. The second fitt ends by explaining that Vǫlsungr's hair and nails needed to be trimmed as soon as he was born.

The first eleven stanzas of the third fitt describe the impressive character of Vǫlsungr and the thirteen years he spends raiding, starting after he had passed twelve winters of age. After winning three whole countries, he wishes to get an equally impressive wife. Óðinn sends him Hljóð, and this power couple begets several equally impressive children, including Sigmundr and Sygný. Vǫlsungr and his accomplished children leave a bloody trail of glory wherever they go, making quite the name for themselves. It is presumably this reputation that causes King

Siggeir of southern Sweden to march up to the hall of the Vǫlsungs and forcefully request Sygný as his wife. A wedding day is set, and the halls are filled with six stanzas worth of rich decorations, men, and wine. All is going well until a limping, one-eyed old man shows up uninvited in the main hall. He sinks a regal sword into a large rock, says whoever can draw it can own it, and disappears. Only Sigmundr is able to draw the sword, and he names it Gramr. Siggeir immediately demands to buy the sword but is angrily denied by Sigmundr. After this argument, Siggeir leaves the feast early, but not before inviting Vǫlsungr to a feast in thirteen weeks. This fitt ends with Vǫlsungr preparing to attend Siggeir's feast. The poet makes a suspenseful ending by telling the audience that Sigeir has malice in mind.

The first fifteen stanzas of the fourth fitt are devoted an extended conversation between Sygný and Vǫlsungr; she urges him to stay home, and he tells her that he does not fear death and asks her to mourn him if he is betrayed. After this, most of the poem's events line up with those of *Vǫlsunga saga*. Vǫlsungr is killed in battle, and his sons are all captured. Sygný asks Siggeir to place her brothers in the stocks instead of killing them immediately. He does as she requests, and every night one of the brothers is killed by a trollish she-wolf. When only Sigmundr is left, Signý saves him by smearing the stocks with ham grease and putting honey in Sigmundr's mouth. The she-wolf breaks down the stocks trying to get the grease, and when she sticks her tongue into Sigmundr's mouth to retrieve the honey, he bites it off. Sygný leads her brother to an earth house, tends his wounds, and returns home.

The fifth fitt covers the death of Sygný and Siggeir's two unworthy sons when they do not pass Sigmundr's snake-in-the-meal test, her deception of Sigmundr and conception of Sinfjǫtli, Sinfjǫtli's passing of the test and his eagerness for revenge, and Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli's attempt to attack Siggeir's hall (meanwhile killing Sygný's other two sons). The interaction between Sygný and her son is quite interesting, because she talks to him about her woes while she sews his sleeves to his hands and then rips them off. This fitt ends with Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli's capture and escape from the mound with Sygný's help, a suspenseful pause in the final fight. The last and shortest fitt starts with Sigmundr and Sinjǫtli setting fire to Siggeir's hall, Sigmundr's attempt to convince Sygný to leave the hall, and her refusal, all very much in line with the story found in *Vǫlsunga saga*. After her refusal, however, Sigmundr kisses her goodbye, and Sinfjǫtli kills her with his sword. Sigmundr takes over the kingdom and goes on many successful raids with Sinfjǫtli. He marries a woman named Brynhildr and has two sons named Hrómundr and Helgi. Helgi becomes a great king, the likeness of Sinfjǫtli in every way. And so the poem ends, rather abruptly, with the two verses about Helgi.

Questions of Narrative Origin: Orals Sources? Which Vǫlsunga saga?

In *Rímnasafn*, Finnur Jónsson suggests that the poem is not based on *Vǫlsunga saga*, but on oral tales.[200] He does not state his reasoning for this hypothesis, but perhaps it is related to theories about the saga author's sources for these first eight chapters, the chapters that do not correspond to Eddic poems. Many scholars, including R. G. Finch and Jónas Kristjánsson, believe this first cycle of revenge is taken from a no longer extant **Sigurðar saga*.[201] The proposed date of this **Sigurðar saga* is ca. 1200, and Jónas believes it may have been composed from now lost poems in the same way as *Vǫlsunga saga* is composed from the Poetic Edda.[202] It is also possible that the saga author had access to the now-lost Eddic poems lost with the eight-page lacuna of GKS 2365 4to. I personally find most compelling Torfi Tulinius' view that these chapters "do not seem to be based on poetry," that they were composed by the saga author to foreground the stories of those Eddic poems which are extant in the *Codex Regius*.[203] However, I do not have the space here to do justice to this debate about the origins of this first cycle of revenge in the saga. However these chapters were composed, it is clear, as I will explain, that the poet of *Vǫlsungsrímur* was working with the same, or a very similar, text to that which we find in NKS 1824 b 4to. Of course the dating of this manuscript

[200] Finnur Jónsson 1905-12, 311
[201] Finch 1965*b* and Jónas Kristjánsson 1979
[202] Jónas Kristjánsson 1979
[203] Torfi Tulinius 2002, 141-144

(1380-1420 according to the *Stories for All Time* website) means that it is just as likely that the *rímur* were composed from an earlier manuscript of the saga.[204] Based on the culture of literary and manuscript production in 14th century Iceland (discussed later on in this study), it is probably that the poet was working from a written source, whether it was NKS 1824 b 4to or an earlier manuscript now lost to us.

The largest narrative difference between the two texts is the expanded narratives given to Sigi, Rerrir, and Vǫlsungr. In the saga, Vǫlsungr is alive for a grand total of three and a half chapters. His life in the saga, like Sigi's, is just part of an expanded genealogy leading up to the mighty Sigurðr. The saga builds up to Sigurðr's life, dwells on his exploits and death, and then spends the rest of the story resolving the conflicts caused by his murder. In *Vǫlsungsrímur*, the eponymous Vǫlsungr is not born until II, 46, almost halfway through the entire poem. He dies in IV, 26, his life spanning the center of the poem and its central conflict. The poem devotes its narrative genealogical introduction to Óðinn, building up to Vǫlsungr's life, exploits, and death. The rest of the poem is spent resolving the conflicts his death causes. This might explain the only other large change from the saga text, the omission in *Vǫlsungsrímur* of the werewolf episode from chapter eight. Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli's time under the wolf skins explores their relationship and their characters as individuals; it is not necessary in a story where they are part of the conflict's resolution rather than of its creation.[205] *Vǫlsunga saga* is a story centered on Sigurðr, a member of the *Vǫlsungar*, while *Vǫlsungsrímur* is indeed a story about Vǫlsungr himself.

There are several compelling reasons to believe that the poet of *Vǫlsungsrímur* did not only take a large portion of his narrative material from *Vǫlsunga saga* instead of oral sources or another version of the saga, but that he also followed closely the order of events from the chapters covered in the poem. The first

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[204] Driscoll and Hugnagel 2015

[205] Likewise, the bonding of the two men during the werewolf episode makes the accidental betrayal of Sinjfǫtli by Sigmundr much more tragic, but since the poem stops before that betrayal, the werewolf episode is irrelevant to the plot.

is simply that, based on the extant corpus, *rímnaskáld* rarely invented new stories, instead working closely from written prose narratives to create a versified versions of their sources.[206] *Rímnaskáld* worked in a highly literate environment, writing down poems as soon as they were composed and usually working from sources in manuscripts rather than stories held orally, even in the earliest part of the genre's lifespan.[207] So, if this poet looked to lingering oral versions of the Vǫlsungr narrative instead of existing prose texts, he would be an exception.

Even if the poet did have access to the NKS 1824 b 4to version of the saga, did he use it? At first glance, the first two fitts of the cycle do seem to diverge considerably from the saga narrative. However, allowing for the fact that almost the entire first fitt is taken from other sources (which will be discussed later on), the order of events in the poem very closely follows that of the saga from Sigi and Breði going hunting to the conclusion of Sigmundr's revenge on Siggeir. The only substantial differences between the narrative of the poem and the saga after the first fitt (besides the exclusion of the werewolf episode) are two thematically related expansions of events covered in one to two lines in the saga. The first is the expansion of this sentence in *Vǫlsunga saga*: "Ok því næst fekk hann sér gǫfugt kvánfang, ok gerisk hann ríkr konungr ok mikill fyrir sér, ok réð fyrir Húnlandi ok er inn mesti hermaðr." ["Next he made an important match, and became a powerful and important king, ruling over the land of the Huns, and he was a truly great warrior."].[208]

This sentence is immediately preceded by Óðinn escorting Sigi out of the land to some warships, a scene that is closely paralleled in *Vǫlsungsrímur*; it is immediately followed by the birth of Rerrir, also told in a similar manner in the *rímur*. However, in the *rímur*, the passing event described in the sentence above is expanded to fill stanzas II, 8-13. This additional material does not actually change any facts of the story. It simply tells the untold, at least in *Vǫlsunga saga*, story of Sigi taking a highborn wife by force and so gaining land and power. The second

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[206] Hughes 2007, 210
[207] Vésteinn Ólason 1982, 52
[208] Finch 1965*a*, 2

expansion, which corresponds to *Vǫlsunga saga*'s second chapter, is done in almost exactly the same way. The line in this saga reads: "Rerrir fekk sér nú herfang mikit ok konu þá er honum þótti við sitt hœfi..." ["Rerrir now aquired a great deal of plunder through his raids, and married a woman who seemed likely to make him a suitable wife..."].[209] Again, the facts of the saga are not changed in the poem, but the untold story contained in a few passing words of prose is told at greater length in *Vǫlsungsrímur* II, 22-30. In the first instance, Sigi takes a wife by force and subjugates her male guardians. In the second, Rerrir makes a marriage agreement, but is betrayed and forced to kill the male guardian of his new wife.

In *The Matter of the North*, Torfi Tulinius shows how the themes of *Vǫlsunga saga* are organized generationally. One of those themes is treachery by marital relations: "a member of one generation is betrayed by people akin to him through marriage, and one of his blood-kin in the next generation avenges his murder."[210] He suggests that the first eight chapters of the saga are written in a way that foreground the saga's themes. By coincidence or, more likely I suspect, the clever continuation of the saga structures in poetry, *Vǫlsungsrímur* works in much the same way. These added stories of wife taking resulting in bloodshed create generational precedent in the story. However, in the *rímur*, the pattern is subverted. The audience might expect that Vǫlsungr would face some conflict related to his marriage. However, at first glance, he does not fit the pattern of his father and grandfather. A closer look shows that he is indeed betrayed by Óðinn, his father in law, who causes his death indirectly by bringing the sword. Or, we could also see Vǫlsungr's peaceful marriage arrangements as a deceptive lull in the cycle of violence. Conflict does emerge from his marriage, but Siggeir arrives and causes conflict in a manner quite reminiscent of Sigi and Rerri, which results in the death of Vǫlsungr after all.

There is the question of whether the content of these expansions are original creations or insertions from other narratives. Björn K. Þórólfsson believs the story of Sigi's wife-taking in Garðaríki originates in this *rímur*, along with the story of

[209] Finch 1965*a*, 2
[210] Torfi Tulinius 2002, 139-158

Vǫlsungr spending thirteen winters raiding. He thinks the parallel story of Rerrir taking a wife from Sweden is influenced by a similar story in *Ólafs saga Helga*. [211] He does not say which saga, but Snorri's *Ólafs saga Helga* in *Heimskringla* seems the most obvious choice, since it is clear from the use of *Ynglinga saga* in the *rímur* that the poet was familiar with Snorri's history of the kings of Norway. The episode he appears to reference occurs in the first half of the saga, distributed across Chapters 78 through 93.[212] The story goes as follows: Ingigerðr is the daughter of King Ólaf Eiríksson of Sweden. The two King Ólafs are enemies, but Ingigerðr is one of a few people of high position in Sweden that want peace between them. One of Ólaf Eiríksson's advisors suggests to Ingigerðr that she create an alliance between the two kings by marrying Ólaf Haraldsson of Norway. She agrees to this, and it is suggested that she comes to love the king. However, her father is stubborn and only agrees to this plan after being shamed by his nobles. The Swedish king makes no preparations for the agreed marriage, and when it comes to Ingigerðr's attention that he plans to betray her betrothed, she warns Ólaf Haraldsson. Meanwhile, Ólaf Eiríksson welcomes the suit of the Russian king for Ingigerðr's hand. One of the Swedish king's nobles proposes a plan to bring Ingigerðr's sister Astríðr to the Norwegian king instead, and this is carried out. Ólaf Haraldsson marries Astríðr and Ingigerðr marries the Russian king. The story is set up for the betrayal of King Ólaf helgi, but he cleverly navigates the dangers and all ends well. This is an interesting contrast to *Vǫlsungsrímur*, where Rerrir walks into the trap of his intended father-in-law, but comes out on top, killing Ingigerðr's father and taking his lands.

Then there is the matter of the evidence in *Vǫlsungsrímur* of the use, not only of a narrative backbone from *Vǫlsunga saga*, but whole phrases from the saga. I will use examples from the first chapter of the saga to demonstrate this:

> *VS*: "... at Sigi hefire drepit þrælinn ok myrðan."[213]
> *VR* I, 58, 4: "deyddi hann þræl ok myrdi"

[211] Björn K. Þórolfsson 1934, 302
[212] Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1945
[213] Finch 1965*a*, 2

VS: "...fell Sigi með hirð sinni allri."[214]
VR II, 17, 1: "Sigi fell þar med sina hirdd"

VS: "Sonr hans, Rerir, var ekki í þeim háska..."[215]
VR II, 18, 1: "Rerri var eigi j romv staddr"

VS: "Hon lét falla eplit í kné konunginum."[216]
VR II, 35, 1-2: "Let þa Hliod i lofdungs knen/ litit epli detta"

Of course, the borrowing of lines and phrases is not nearly as exact or common as in, for example, the prosification of Eddic poems by the saga author.[217] However, considering that the strict demands of the *rímur* style, these phrases appear too close to the saga text to be dismissed as mere coincidence. In addition, ideas and idioms are preserved even where the language is altered. A good example of this is in the beginning of the second chapter of *Vǫlsunga saga*. The saga tells that Rerrir died and "ætlaði at sœkja heim Óðin..." [meant to join Óðinn].[218] The corresponding lines in *Vǫlsungsrímur* II, 39, lines 1-2 read "Byleiz tok at bioda heim/ brodur dottur stilli" [The brother-daughter of Býleistr (Hel) offered a home to the king]. Here we see a very similar euphemism for death employed with different language.[219] These elements are found throughout the poem, such as when Vǫlsungr charges through Siggeir's ranks eight times before dying on the ninth attempt, when the poem refers to the she-wolf as a bewitched woman even though only the saga explains that reference, or when Sigmundr smiles at the brave reply of Sinfjǫtli concerning the meal bag. Lastly, it is also worth mentioning that, despite his remarks about the poem's sources being oral tales, throughout the endnotes for *Vǫlsungsrímur* in

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[214] Finch 1965*a*, 2
[215] Ibid.
[216] Ibid., *3*
[217] See Finch 1965*b* for a detailed analysis of the author's work in converting Eddic poems into saga.
[218] Finch 1965*a*, 3
[219]The choice to change Óðinn to Hel is interesting. Perhaps it is because the poet already explained in the first fitt (I, 20) how Óðinn tricked his subjects into believing all warriors who die in battle would go to Valhalla: "Margr trvde æ malma Freyr/ millding galdra lista,/ sier uænti hver er af uopnum deyr/ Ual holl mune þeir gista."

Rimnasafn, Finnur Jónsson marked correlations between the *rímur* and the saga.[220] Combining this evidence with that of the previous two points, I believe it is can be claimed with much certainty that the poet did indeed have access to the written prose saga of the Vǫlsungs, likely the same or a very similar version to that which is preserved in NKS 1824 b 4to.

The Poet's Integration of Ynglinga saga and Snorri's Prose Edda

Since *Vǫlsunga saga* provides the largest amount of narrative material, which the poet follows closely, it is the selective and creative integration of other Old Norse prose sources into the *rímur* that best reveal the poet's intention and the unique perspective of the poem. The first fitt of *Vǫlsungsrímur* is a blend of information and narrative from the Prologue and *Gylfaginning* of *Snorra Edda* as well as *Ynglinga saga*, the first saga in Snorri's *Heimskringla*. The story of Óðinn in the prologue and *Ynglinga saga* are fairly similar, so it is not really possible to claim one or the other as the primary source of *Vǫlsungsrímur*'s first fitt, although it is safe to say that *Gylfaginning* is used mostly as a source for imagery, for example the descriptions of Óðinn's hall in Chapters 14, 17, and 39.[221] It appears that the poet wanted to include the story of Óðinn's human origins, but that no single form of that story was exactly right for his focus. While the prologue and *Ynglinga saga* both tell the story of the race of the Æsir moving from Asia to the northern lands and becoming deities, *Vǫlsungsrímur* focuses on just Óðinn, bringing in other Æsir only when necessary to explain Óðinn's history. Details from each of the three sources are combined and rearranged to create a unique prologue to the story of Vǫlsungr. It is not feasible here to list exactly which passages of prose correspond to each verse (or line, since in many cases the stanzas mix sources), but in the following table I give the example of the correspondence of these sources (by chapter) to stanzas 17-22 in *Vǫlsungsrímur* I.

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[220] Finnur Jónsson 1905-12, 348-350
[221] Faulkes 2005

Vǫlsungsrímur I	17	18	19	20	21	22
Ynglinga saga[222]	2	7	2	9	2	1
Snorra Edda Prologue[223]	4	10	4,10			11
Gylfaginning[224]	14					

Two aspects of the "collage" of sources stand out: the choice to use genealogical information from *Ynglinga saga* about King Ingi of Sweden (spelled Ingi in *Vǫlsungsrímur* and Yngvi in *Ynglinga saga*) and the insertion (presumably by the poet) of Christ into the narrative. The inclusion of Ingi/Yngvi in the poem's first fitt is significant because it is King Ingi of Sweden that tries to deceive Rerrir during negotiations for the hand of Ingigerðr in II, 26-27. The two stanzas that introduce Ingi are I, 49-50.

"Inga nefni ec Odens nid,
alldri j soknnvm vægir,
ætt rif hans er agæt lid
Upp sala kongar frægir.

I name Ingi Óðinn's son,
never lenient in battles;
his genealogy is an excellent company,
the famous kings of Uppsala.

Semings get ec at savnnv vit
siklings arfa ens snialla,
jokzt nv af þeim audlings nid
ætt Haleygia jarlla."

I tell the truth about Sæmingr,
of the son of the excellent king;
from this descendant of a king,
the lineage of the earls of was
increased..

These stanzas accomplish several things. First, they confirm that Ingi, who will show up later in II, 22, is indeed King Yngvi who rules Sweden from Uppsala. Secondly, they tie the characters of this story to reality by connecting them with the line of kings known as the Ynglings and the jarls of Haleygja, the anscestors of Earl Hákon. These two connections are taken from the prologue to *Heimskringla*: "Fjǫlnir er sá nefndr, er var sonr Yngvifreys, þess er Svíar hafa blótat lengi síðan. Af hans nafni eru

[222] Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1942
[223] Faulkes 2005
[224] Ibid.

Ynglingar kallaðir. Eyvindr skáldaspillir talði ok langfeðga Hákonar jarls ins ríka í kvæði því, er Háleygjatal heitir, er ort var um Hákon. Sæmingr er þar nefndr sonr Yngvifreys."[225]

A notable differnce in these two mentions of Ingi/Yngvi is his anscestry. In *Vǫlsungsrímur*, he is identified as Óðinn's son, whereas in the saga, he is the son of Njǫrðr, one of the Vanir sent to the Æsir as hostages. And of course, in *Ynglinga saga*, Ingi/Yngvi does not die at the hands of Rerrir. Instead he has a peaceful reign like his father before him, dies of a sickness, and is deified. This alternate parentage of Ingi in *Vǫlsungsrímur* is significant because it means he is not just some random character introduced to create conflict around Rerrir; he and Rerrir are both sons of Óðinn. It also replaces the connection in *Vǫlsunga saga* between the legendary kings and those living in historical times. When *Vǫlsunga saga* is combined with *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, as it often is in the manuscript tradition, it tells the story of the ancestors of real kings. However, since the poem only deals with the first part of the saga, that connection to real kings must be moved earlier in the genealogy. Of course, if Ingi does indeed die, then it can be debated whether he is intended to be a connection to historical kings or whether he represents the failure of these great lineages.

This emphasis on the single character of Óðinn throughout the first fitt is followed by his distinct role as the protector (some combination of father and patron saint) of Sigi, Rerrir, and Vǫlsungr. When Sigi is exiled for killing Breði, Óðinn goes with him and sets him up with ships and men. When Rerrir's wife cannot conceive, they pray to the gods and Óðinn hears them and sends his daughter Hljóð with a magic apple to solve the problem. When Vǫlsungr needs a wife suitable to his greatness, Óðinn gives him Hljóð. However, the role of Óðinn in the lives of these three men is more complicated than that. Yes, Óðinn helps Sigi, but once Sigi becomes a mighty king, he is betrayed and killed by his brothers-in-law. Rerrir manages to defeat and kill his treacherous brother-in-law, but if Óðinn is on his side we must ask why Óðinn was *not* on the side of his son Ingi. Rerrir's wife receives

[225] Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1942, 4

magical assistance from Óðinn to help her conceive, but that results in a three-year nightmare of unending pregnancy that could only be ended by cutting the child-sized "baby" out of her, resulting in her death. Vǫlsungr seems to be favored by Óðinn when he gives him his daughter Hljóð as a wife, but it is Óðinn in disguise who leaves the "gift of the sword" and so creates the conflict with Siggeir in which Vǫlsungr is killed. This appearance of Óðinn in Vǫlsungr's hall as a disguised old man is the last time he is mentioned in the poem. He enters in the first fitt as a great deceiver and exists as the catalyst for the death of the poem's protagonist. It is clear that Vǫlsungr is the protagonist of *Vǫlsungsrímur* and Óðinn is the antagonist.

How can we describe the character of Óðinn in the *rímur*? Does he reflect what we know about pagan religion? Does he fit the character we know from pre-Christian sources? Or is he a character created in a Christian context to represent the old religion that gave him his name? Looking at the aspects and character of Óðinn post-conversion, namely in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Peter Foote observed that, while Óðinn appears as a character in sagas and poems, he is a predictable, typecast character fulfilling the same rolls in every guest appearance:

> "He is the instigator of strife, the arch-deceiver, the source of black magic. He might be well characterised as *fjolkunnigr, margbrugðinn, flærðum, settr, slœgvitr, er talar með prettum, er setti manndráp*. As will be noticed, these are orthodox terms for the devil which I have plucked here from Eysteinn Ásgrímsson's *Lilja*. Óðinn does little more than appear in the Devil's guises, answering to the semblances of evil in the Christian classification of orders of demons..."[226]

Óðinn may have "survived" as a character into the Christian age, but this survival was as a Christian antagonist. Of course, by my own logic this would make Vǫlsungr a Christian protagonist. It would be hard to read this idea in the *rímur*. Instead, it seems that Vǫlsungr and his family's "conflict" with Óðinn is of a self-destructive nature. Any good Christian knows the Devil will fall in the end times, in much the same way as the Norse mythology of Christian times describes Óðinn's fated demise in Ragnarǫk. The protagonist/antagonist relationship between Vǫlsungr and Óðinn

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[226] Foote 1984, 97

that appears in the poem falls under the larger conflict of Christianity and paganism, as represented by Jesus and Óðinn.

The insertion of Jesus Christ appears to be unique to the *rímur*, and appears exclusively in stanzas 24-25 in the first fitt:

"Sia lez gramur af sine spect, sue er af fitons anda, eydazt mundi oll hans mect, en jesu vegr mun standa.	The king professes to see by his wisdom, which comes by the spirit of pagan prophecy: all his might would come to naught, but the way of Jesus will stand.
Odin bio med allre list aura gnott ok beima, fylkir vill svo fordazt Krist ok flydi nordr i heima."	Óðinn prepared with all art an abundance of money and of men; the king wanted in this way to save himself from Christ and fled into the Northern World.

In *Ynglinga saga* and the *Snorra Edda* Prologue, Óðinn's reason for going north is quite different. Chapter V of *Ynglinga* saga tells how the Romans were gaining ground and driving chieftains from their property not too far from Turkey, where Óðinn ruled. It is not clear whether they are directly responsible for his departure north, but the saga does say that Óðinn, because he was "forspár ok fjǫlkunningr"[227] [prophetic and skilled in the black arts], knew that he and his descendants would settle in "norðrhálfu heimsins"[228] [north half of the world]. In the *Snorra Edda* Prologue, it simply says that " af þeim vísendom fann hann þat at nafn hans mundi uppi vera haft í norðrhálfu heimsins..."[229] [by these wisdoms he found this, that his name would be lifted up in the northern half of the world]. Only in *Vǫlsungsrímur* is Jesus the reason for his journey northward. *Ynglinga saga* tells the story of Óðinn's accomplishments as the start of a great race of kings that continues into the known age, but Óðinn's inevitable downfall is stated clearly in *Vǫlsungsrímur*. In the poem he flees from Christ into the northern lands, where his name may grow strong for a time, but he will ultimately come to naught because of Jesus. This idea strongly

[227] Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1942, 4
[228] Ibid.
[229] Faulkes 2005, 5

echoes Biblical ideas of Jesus' triumph over death, a triumph that guarantees his ultimate victory over the Devil.[230]

God and the gods in Kátrinardrápa, Vǫlsungsrímur, and Snorra Edda

Before further exploring the Christian meaning in this poem, I would like to return to *Kátrinardrápa*, the skaldic poem written by the same "Vitulus Vates" of *Vǫlsungsrímur*. *Kátrinardrápa* is a hagiographic skaldic poem in *hrynhent* metre. It is found in the early 16th century manuscript AM 713 4to and later paper copies.[231]

> "...it tells the story of the passion of S. Catherine of Alexandria. Catherine, a young woman of noble birth and learned in the sciences, presented herself to the Emperor Maxentius...who was violently persecuting Christians, and endeavoured to prove how iniquitous was the worship of pagan gods. Unable to vie with her in point of learning, the emperor summoned fifty philosophers, with whom she successfully disputed and whom she converted. Enraged, the emperor then ordered her to be tortured and imprisoned. Meanwhile, the empress, eager to meet Catherine, went with Porphyry, the head of the troops, to visit her in the prison. Yielding to Catherine's exhortations, the empress and Porphyry were baptized and immediately won the crown of martyrdom. Catherine herself was subsequently beheaded."[232]

If this poem and *Vǫlsungsrímur* are indeed by the same author, as the scholars mentioned all seem to believe, then martyrdom of a female saint in Rome and the tragic tale of a race of northern kings descended from Óðinn appear at first to be

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[230] I am placing these references (all in NRSV) in a footnote, because without research into the wording and understanding of The New Testament in the Old Norse context, it is not possible to make direct parallels, only to suggest a common Biblical theme. John 16:33 "But take courage; I have conquered the world!"; Colossians 2:15 "He disarmed the rulers and authorities and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in it."; 1 Corinthians 15:57 "But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."; Hebrews 2:14 "...so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil."; 1 John 4:4 "Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."

[231] Wolf 2007, 932

[232] Wolf 2007, 931

quite a disparate pair of subjects. However, closer examination of shared material and a few passages from *Kátrinardrápa* will show that a shared authorship is not only possible, but may even provide insight into the meaning of *Vǫlsungsrímur*.

First, I want to look quickly at the poet's mention of himself in *Kátrinardrápa*. Near the end of the poem, after he has finished the narrative of Kátrín, he describes himself as a monk who was once very evil, but now wishes to repent of all his sin. He claims that "Hilmi eg fyr hneitis pálmum/hórdómi sem stuld og morði..." ["I hid from the palm-trees of the sword...adultery as well as theft and homicide.."].[233] Of course, as Wolf points out, this is a pretty standard self-deprecation and so there is no way of knowing whether it is true autobiography or merely poetic device. Either way, it is the way the author chose to portray himself and his poetic impulses: as a sinner who writes poetry as penance for bad decisions in the past.

Next, I want to take a brief look at two interesting passages in *Kátrinardrápa*. The first is stanza six, which introduces the antagonist of the poem, the Emperor Maxentius, who is a "stupidity-inclined" pagan.

> "Blótin vildi bragning*r* láta
> beldinn efla í sínu veldi
> hvern þann brjót, er af honum girni
> heiðr að þiggja, orma leiðar.
> Afarkostum liet ýtendr rastar
> alla sæta skeljungs fjalla
> glæstrar rekkju, ef gjöra ei traystaz,
> glóða hryti*r*, Þór eða Óðni."
>
> ["The arrogant prince wanted to let every breaker of the serpent's path..., who desires to obtain honour from him, strengthen the sacrifices in his country. The distributer of red-hot embers of the current...let all the offerers of the shining bed of the whale of the mountains... be exposed to hard conditions, if they did not trust Þórr or Óðinn."][234]

[233] Wolf 2007, 960
[234] Ibid., 936

Wolf notes that while this stanza is based on the prose source, the poet adds the names of pre-Christian gods, who are not mentioned by name in the prose.[235] This naming of the gods, so to speak, is interesting as an inverse parallel to the insertion of the name of Jesus into *Vǫlsungsrímur*. In the *drápa*, the pagan god who is the enemy of Christianity is named specifically. In the *rímur*, the enemy of the pagan god is named specifically. This clarifies that the emperor's brand of paganism is the same as the Icelandic audience's ancestors, perhaps making the story more relevant to them. It also pits the message of Jesus directly against Óðinn and Þórr, rather than against the general idea of paganism. Taken together, these namings of the gods, if you will, suggest that the poet was actively thinking about the portrayal of religion and deities in his works. That he actively included specific reference to these deities makes it difficult to believe that their inclusion in his works are just carried over as decorative elements, like the mythological kennings or other antiquarian flourishes found in many post-conversion works.

The next passage is just two lines from the tenth stanza: "'föður og son bið frá þier leiða/ fjandans tál og helgan anda." ["'ask the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit to remove from you the devil's deceit."][236]. Here, Kátrín is speaking to the emperor. The idea of his paganism deriving from deception, rather than ignorance or malice, may remind us of the first fitt of *Vǫlsungsrímur*, which explains in detail how Óðinn became an object of worship through active deception of his subjects. These moments of parallel could be just coincidental. Of course, I am not suggesting that these two poems completely share a meaning, but it is worth considering their implications on each other, especially in light of the authorial connection. While the poems deal with very different subjects, the choice of and manipulation of prose sources suggests a similar poetic approach. In the hands of this poet, the prose source of *Kátrinardrápa* is tailored to the Icelandic audience and their past, forming a story that illustrates the futility of Óðinn's worshipers trying to fight or escape the Cross (while Kátrín dies a bloody death, she manages to convert the empress, one of the king's powerful chieftains, and two hundred other prisoners in addition to

[235] Wolf 2007, 936
[236] Ibid., 938

defeating the 50 philosophers in a battle of wit). In *Vǫlsungsrímur*, the prose sources are manipulated to show the rise of Óðinn and his inevitable and foreshadowed fall, as represented by the ascendance and demise of his abandoned descendants.

Vǫlsungsa saga was composed well after the adoption of Christianity in Iceland. However, the saga was carefully constructed from the Poetic Edda, whose poems reach back into pre-Christian times. As R.G. Finch has shown, the prose saga was followed closely when possible, retaining evidence of its source in alliteration, phrases, and narrative choices. Even so, the story bears marks of its adaptation within a Christian society. As Torfi Tulinius shows, the "theme of intentionality" in the saga reflects the Christian theology of the time, in which "intentions are considered as important as deeds and in which sinners are encouraged to examine their consciences to detect the desire to sin."[237] However, most of this theme is developed in the story of Sigmundr and Sigurðr, so although it certainly can be identified in the *rímur*, it does not seem to be the idea that caught the poet's attention.

It is also worth considering the religious elements, pagan and Christian, that infuse *Snorra Edda.* Ursula and Peter Dronke have traced some of the 12th century Latin religious sources that may have directly or indirectly influenced Snorri's historical interpretation of the rise of the Old Norse gods from kings to deities. These Latin sources contain concepts including humans slowly being deified over time, the 'argument from design', and the distinction between worldly and spiritual wisdom.[238] Snorri's life was certainly not explicitly devotional compared to a poet who claims to be a monk doing literary penance through hagiography.[239] However, it is clear that Snorri was trying to make sense of the mythology that so obviously interested him with the oppositional worldview of the Church. The Dronkes note how the accounts of the gods in *Ynglinga saga*, the Prologue to *Snorra Edda*, and *Gylfaginning* do not quite line up. In this "state of disharmony" they see him,

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[237] Torfi Tulinius 2002, 158
[238] Dronke and Dronke 1977
[239] Although as I will soon discuss, this gap between their true identities may not be so large as it appears from the initial evidence.

"perhaps over many years- seeking different ways of presenting the Norse heathen tradition."[240] Snorri, they believe, saw in his native mythology positive intellectual value for Norse Christians.

One of these Latin sources is Martin of Braga's epistolary sermon *De correctione rusticorum*, which was read and adapted in part by later Anglo-Saxon and Norse homilists. This work tells a very similar story to that found in Snorri's writings:

> "Then the devil or his minions- the demons who were cast out of heaven...began to show themselves to men in diverse forms....The demons gave themselves the names of human malefactors, men who had spent their lives in every crime and misdeed, so that one demon called himself Jupiter, who had been a magician and tainted by monstrous adulteries..."[241]

Whether or not Snorri was familiar with this and other Latin works with a similar "origin story" of pagan gods, it is clear that his story of the Norse gods' beginnings belongs in a wider religious trend, not just an antiquarian one. If the poet of *Vǫlsungsrímur* was a monk, he would have been very familiar with learned Latin religious work. It is not hard to imagine Kálfr Skáld reading Snorri's writings and *Vǫlsunga saga,* then interpreting the latter in light of the former and his own theological learning.

So, in a long tradition of collecting, compiling, and interpreting past works, the poet of *Vǫlsungsrímur* fine-tuned Snorri's stories of the gods into a preface that would perfectly suit his interpretation of the first eight chapters of *Vǫlsunga saga*. There may be other explanations for the poet's choice to rearrange the source material of the first fitt but leave the narrative of *Vǫlsunga saga* relatively intact, such as the need to remedy the inconsistencies in Snorri's accounts that the Dronkes pointed out. However, it seems most likely that adding the carefully arranged material of *Ynglinga saga* and *Snorra Edda* as a preface to *Vǫlsunga saga* was motivated by a need to create a new ideological framework for telling the story of

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[240] Dronke and Dronke 1977, 153
[241] C.P. Caspari. *Martin von Bracara Schrift De correctione rusticorum*. Christiania: 1883; Dronke and Dronke 1977, 155

Vǫlsungr, descendant of Óðinn. If this is indeed the case, it parallels the process by which the author of *Vǫlsunga saga* developed his source material. But now, it is necessary to step back from the poem for a moment to explore the religious and intellectual milieu in which it was composed.

The Historical and Religious Context of Vǫlsungsrímur

The interpretation of these explicitly Christian elements in *Vǫlsungsrímur* is best accomplished here with a few overall observations on the history and Christianity of the 14th century in Europe and specifically Iceland. Of course, it is impossible to briefly summarize the entire spectrum of late medieval political and religious thought in Iceland, so I will instead dwell on those aspects which help to illuminate the themes of *Vǫlsungsrímur*.

The single most significant event between the composition of *Vǫlsunga saga* and *Vǫlsungsrímur* was the dissolution of the Commonwealth, or Freestate, in Iceland. Until 1262, Iceland had no king and order was kept through a yearly Alþing and more frequent local assemblies. However, as Kirsten Hastrup points out, the idea of a series of single events such as the end of the Commonwealth or the Reformation being the primary determinants of historical change neglects the constant evolution of societies. We should be wary of assuming that a society was so drastically altered by one event, rather than by a process of change involving or influenced by that event.[242] As Erika Ruth Sigurdson explains, the real break with the age of the Commonwealth was not at the moment of subjugation to the Norwegian crown in 1262; it came with the introduction of the new law codes, *Járnsiða* (1271) and *Jónsbók* (1281).[243] The new law codes ushered in what Björn Þorsteinsson called *norska öldin* (the Norwegian Age).[244] According to the Bishop's sagas, *Jónsbók* was not well received in Iceland. *Árna saga biskup* tells how the

[242] Hastrup 1990, 26
[243] Sigurdson 2011, 18
[244] Helgi Þórláksson 2007, 150

bishop and his friends, the king's officers, and influential farmers all signed a formal written criticism of the new law at the 1281 Althing.[245]

Járnsíða abolished one of the defining features of the Commonwealth, the *goðar*.[246] It is clear in the *Íslendingarsögur* that the *goði*/*bóndi* relationship, along with familial ties, was one of most powerful structuring forces in Icelandic society during the Commonwealth. Social networks, however, continued to be an integral part of the identity of the elite and the maintenance of that elite status. The end of the "institution" of *goðar* created room for a new network and new "big men", and the network of the subepiscopal elite soon filled that space; by the 14th century, Church connections often "mirrored these secular bonds of family and chieftain-follower."[247]

The Church had been rising in power well before the title of *goði* was abolished. Helgi Þorláksson describes a church with stabilized ecclesiastical administration as early as the beginning of the 12th century, following the establishment of Gizurr Ísleifsson as bishop of Skálholt in 1082 and Jón Ǫgmundarson as bishop of Hólar in 1106.[248] Katrina Attwood writes that, thanks in large part to Gizurr's reforms, "by the 12th century...the church was sufficiently established to offer a social, political, and ideological alternative to the royal court."[249] In addition to gaining money and power at home through the beneficial system of the *staðir*, the Icelandic church had strong ties to the Norwegian church.[250] At the end of the 12th century, the Norwegian Archbishop Eysteinn of Niðaróss (Archbishop from 1161-1188) appointed the Augustinian bishop Þórlákr Þórhallsson to teach the virtues and benefits of Norwegian church authority to the Icelanders. He was also charged with continuing Eysteinn's work in Norway to sanctify the institution of marriage by prohibiting concubinage and divorce,

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[245] Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 90
[246] Sigurdson 2011, 19
[247] Ibid., 143
[248] Helgi Þorláksson 2007, 145
[249] Attwood 2007, 50
[250] *Staðir*: Sites owned by the church after donation by chieftains or magnates who held the rights to the property after donation.

requiring a bride's consent for marriage, and establishing the church as the primary authority on all marriages.[251] Another wave of reforms came to the Icelandic church from Norway at the end of the 13th century which focused on clerical celibacy, bringing church property completely under the control of the clerics, and dividing legal matters between church and king in order to make ecclesiastical decision the final word on marriage, church property, and disputes involving clergy.[252] "In 1275, the new bishop of Skálholt, Árni Þorláksson, passed a new "Christian Law" section at the Althing as part of the Norwegian effort to enact reform in the Icelandic church.[253] Understandably, this law was contentious. Hólar only formally accepted it eight decades later, and it is not known whether the Norwegian king ever formally ratified it.[254] As Norwegian influence in Iceland waned at the end of the 14th century, so did the power of the Norwegian church: Rome took over the appointment of Icelandic bishops in 1380, beginning with a Dane in Skálholt and soon followed by another Dane in Hólar.[255] As can be seen from this brief look at the history of the church in Iceland in the medieval ages, the conflict between the church and lay magnates over the rights to church property, the *staðamál*, began soon after the establishment of the religion, spanned the end of the Commonwealth, and continued into the 14th and even somewhat into the 15th centuries. Though, as Gunnar Karlsson notes, Iceland would ultimately still retain a powerful aristocratic class, the *staðamál* victories of the church considerably reduced the power and influence of the *goðar* during the late Commonwealth and of the magnates during the *norska öldin*. In short, it appears fitting that Gunnar Karlsson called his chapter on the church in *Iceland's 1100 Years* "The Victory of the Church."[256]

Sigurdson explains that after 1262, many men rose to powerful positions in Iceland as members of the king's *hirð*. However, the peace the Icelanders had sought in accepting the rule of Norway was certainly not modeled in their ruling country.

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[251] Helgi Þorláksson 2007, 146
[252] Sigurdson 2011, 32-33
[253] Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 97
[254] Ibid.
[255] Sigurdson 2011, 40
[256] Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 96-99

Power shuffles and dynastic changes within the Scandinavian countries made the power available as a *hirðmaðr* unstable; after the mid-14th century, this was no longer a viable option for those seeking to climb the social and political ladder in Iceland.[257] The contract made between Icelanders and the Norwegian king in 1262 shows a desire for stability, peace, and security after the violence of the Age of the Sturlungar, a time of conflicts and power struggles that the king manipulated to neutralize any real resistance.[258] These expectations would have been disappointed by the perceived instability of the Norwegian crown.[259] The administrative arm of the monarchy was distinctly cyclical. Representatives of the king were rotated in one to three year terms in Iceland. For a brief period in the middle of the 14th century, the governorship of Iceland was even rented out to wealthy individuals who would then have the lucrative right to collect all royal taxes (which had been set quite high in the 13th century). Obviously, this combination of access to revenue with limited accountability after a fixed term led to exploitation and abuse.[260]

Elizabeth Ashman Rowe suggests that perceptions of the crown's lack of involvement in Iceland and its declining power and influence abroad may have "filled the Icelanders with a new sort of anxiety, a fear that the parent country had lost interest in or was abandoning its offspring."[261] The 14th century was one of great instability for Scandinavia. At the beginning of the century, King Hákon V Magnússon, who saw his realm as Nordic, rather than North Atlantic, moved his residence from Bergen to Oslo, making Iceland a more peripheral territory. His plans for expansion led him to betroth his two-year-old daughter, Ingeborg, to the brother of the Swedish king. [262] The rest of the century saw frequent shifts of power between the Norwegian and Swedish Crowns. The state in Denmark was not much better, with the Hanseatic League and German princes causing wars and the

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[257] Sigurdson 2011, 20
[258] Helgi Þorláksson 2007, 149-150
[259] Sigurdson 2011, 23-24
[260] Ibid., 25-29
[261] Elizabeth Ashman Rowe. *The Development of Flateyjarbok: Iceland and the Norwegian Dynastic Crisis of 1389*. (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005), 79; Sigurdson 2011, 22
[262] Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 100

dissolution of the Danish state in the 1330s.[263] To top it all, Scandinavia was ravanged by the Black Death in the middle of the century.[264] Iceland was only a short sail from Bergen, and between the regular crossings of Norwegian governors and the strong ties between the Icelandic and Norwegian church, the elite of Iceland would have been strongly aware of the power struggles in Scandinavia. According to Rowe, the death of King Ólaf Hákonsson in 1387, which made his Danish mother the *de facto* queen of Norway, was "the final blow to the personal relationship which the Icelanders had felt with their king."[265]

Now, I want to turn away from these more general observations about Iceland in the 13th and 14th centuries, and look at the development of monasteries and literary culture in this period. The first Benedictine house was founded in Þingeyrar in 1133.[266] By the start of the fourteenth century, Iceland had six active monasteries and two convents. These were likely quite small, with populations of about thirteen or less, sometimes even as low as six, but despite the limiting factor of population in Iceland, these monasteries were quite wealthy, and it is estimated that they owned 13% of all landholdings by the Reformation in the mid-16th century.[267] These houses were centers of learning, the Icelandic connection to the spiritual and secular learned literature of Continental Europe. This learning helped make possible the boom in book production in Iceland in the 14th century, which left us with three times the extant manuscripts than are dated to the thirteenth century.[268] The unprecedented creation of religious literature during the 14th century (bishops' sagas, translated saints lives, Christian skaldic poetry, etc) seems to fly in the face of the view of Sigurður Nordal's and other 20th century scholars that the Freestate was the peak of Icelandic literary culture or Gunnar Karlson's conclusion that "Icelandic culture lost something valuable" in the collapse of the

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[263] Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 100
[264] Ibid, 101. Iceland was not affected by this wave of plague. They would see their own plague in the beginning and end of the fifteenth century.
[265] Rowe 2005, 27; Sigurdson 2011, 22
[266] Attwood 2007, 50
[267] Sigurdson 2011, 91-93
[268] Ibid., 44

Freestate and that this point likely marks the end of it "cultural peak."[269] Gunnar Karlsson suggests that Iceland was "silenced" by this event, but looking at the literature produced during the 14th century, it seems rather that when the religious elite shifted into the power vacuum of the *goðar*, the subjects and focus of Iceland's literary endeavors shifted too.

Throughout her dissertation, Sigurdson stresses that literary production in the early to mid-14th century was in the hands of a "small group of elite clerical writers."[270] Many of these belonged to what Sverrir Tómason calls *Norðlenski Benedictaskólinn* (the North Icelandic Benedictine School), a group of writers working from the Þingeyri and Munkaþvéra monestaries.[271] Their work was "characterized by a new, more elaborate rhetorical style, as well as a new approach to [prose] source material."[272] This small group of elite clerical writers worked across genres, although whether or not they would have been as aware of the divisions between groups of texts as we are is up for debate. One of these writers was Einarr Hafliðason, the author of *Lárentíus saga biskups*. Einarr lived from 1344-1393 and was a priest at Breiðabólstaðr í Vestrhóp.[273] In addition to writing the primary source for Church history in the first third of the 14th century, Einarr's prolific repertoire included translations from Latin, annals, documents, romance exempla, and copying.[274] The monastic writers had already been working in what Attwood calls a "complex literate culture" for some time before the fall of the Commonwealth.[275] According to Attwood, evidence from twelfth century skaldic poetry already points to the monastic practice of writing down works during or shortly after composition. The "close dictional and structural parallels between the poems" and their prose sources even suggest that some composed their poetry with

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[269] As discussed earlier; Sigurður Nordal 1990, 90 and Gunnar Karlsson 2000, 86
[270] Sigurdson 2011, 78
[271] Sverrir Tómasson, 'Trúarbókmenntir í lausu máli á síðmiðöld,' in *Íslensk bókmenntasaga*, II, pp. 249-82; Marianne Kalinke, The Book of Reykjahólar, p. 38; Sigurdson 2011, 55
[272] Ibid.
[273] Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998
[274] Sigurdson 2011, 64-65, 79
[275] Attwood 2007, 50

their source texts on hand and before them. It was common for these poets, who most likely were "scions of the great Icelandic families whose sons had once composed for the courts of Norway," to write anonymously or adopt pseudonyms (here, we are immediately reminded of the mysterious Kálfr Skáld/ Vitulus Vates) to honor their monastic vows of humility, or at least the appearance of humility.[276]

Written in the midst of what Marianne Kalinke calls a "hagiographic renaissance," Einarr's *Lárentíus saga biskups* was also political in nature. [277] The saga recounts the life of the eponymous bishop, who becomes a monk at Þingeyrar and later the bishop of Hólar after serving as a priest in Niðaróss. Early in the saga, Einarr links Lárentíus to the Icelandic cleric Illugi, also called Hilarius. This cleric "displayed the Christian values of humility and generosity, as well as progressive...interest in promoting the creation of an ecclesiastical administrative centre over familial nostalgia for his 'paternal inheritance.'"[278] In addition to promoting the role of the church in Iceland, *Lárentíus saga* tells of conflicts, often leading to violence, between the lay people, the bishopric, and friars. While the idea of a more peaceful Iceland lingers in the popular understanding of the post-Commonwealth time, Helgi Þorláksson points out that, "Feuding was so ingrained and taken for granted in early Icelandic society that the church was powerless to eradicate it. Leading clerics acted rather as intermediaries in feuds."[279] In feuding, as in other roles, it seems a small circle of elite clerics had adopted many aspects of the *goðar*. Or perhaps that is just the way these writers wished to portray themselves and their contemporaries. Whether this and other sagas show what "really happened," what the authors thought had happened, or what the authors wanted their readers to believe had happened, they open a fascinating window on the mindset of 14th century cleric-authors and their aspirations. Helgi Þorláksson identifies the "moral" of *Lárentíus saga* as the idea that "Icelanders are better off

[276] Attwood 2007, 50
[277] Marianne Kalinke, *The Book of Reykjahólar*, p. 38 ; Sigurdson 2011, 55
[278] Sigurdson 2011, 83-84
[279] Helgi Þorláksson 2007, 148

with Icelandic bishops than Norwegian ones," that the ascendancy of the Icelandic church apart from foreign control is the best outcome.[280]

Writing primarily about the Burgundian region, J. Huizinga described the state of medieval Christianity as one oscillating between emotional extremes. He paints a picture of a religious community attempting to blend the centrality of revenge in honor-based, pre-Christian societies with the "gentleness and clemency" which the church preached. However, according to Huizinga, the "horror of sin" tended to add imperative to pre-existing notions of justice. He notes that, "sin, to violent and impulsive spirits, was only too frequently another name for what their enemies did."[281] While Huizinga's description may strike the modern reader as a bit archaic, the *Íslendingarsögur* and *konungasögur* certainly attest to this notion that concepts of sin and divine justice informed pre-Christian patterns of revenge and human justice, creating a thoroughly syncretistic religion in Scandinavia. The missionary kings Ólafr Tryggvason and Ólafr helgi were power-hungry leaders whose stories are filled with violence. However, theirs is a sanctified aggression, justified by their role in spreading Christianity. It is widely acknowledged, that as Christ and his religion spread north, he traded some of his meeker characteristics for those of a warrior king. Katrina Attwood's comments tie together the nature of Christianity in the north and Huizinga's observations on the medieval interpretation of sin and justice: "Christ is a conqueror-king in the Norse mould and, as such takes his place in the landscape familiar from Norse mythology."[282]

The term used to describe this blending of the new religion with the culture of the old is *syncretism*, which Peter Foote defines as "any kind of mixture of religion, even of any transfer or survival from one religious form into another, irrespective of its level..."[283] An example of this phenomenon in Iceland is the "assimilation of the bookish culture of Latin Christendom" with native traditions.[284] This influenced more secular vernacular works, such as *The First Grammatical*

[280] Helgi Þorláksson 2007, 152-153
[281] Huizinga 1990, 22
[282] Attwood 2007, 44
[283] Foote 1984, 85
[284] Ibid., 89

Treatise, as well as more distinctly spiritual works, such as the great Christian *drápur*.[285] The negative adoption of Óðinn's character discussed earlier is an example of what Foote calls "negative syncretism," a feature of medieval Norse religion that can, like Huizinga's syncretism of justice and sin, be found in the sagas of the missionary kings Ólafr Tryggvason and Ólafr helgi. This negative syncretism preserved pagan entities as oppositional characters, protagonists for the newly arrived conquering-king Christ; it also points to the larger phenomenon of Christian writers in Iceland using their rich, pagan history to create new works in line with Church thinking, creatively bringing the old stories forward into a new ideological climate.

Of course *Snorra Edda* is one of the more influential products of a milieu in which: "the practice of such poetry and making memorials of the past were respectable, even upper-class, pursuits... not felt to be dangerous learning, it could be cultivated with lively literary and antiquarian interest- so beside Einar Skúlason's *Geisli* we find his *Öxarflokkr*, warlike in the old style."[286] This appropriation, if you will, of older material to new purposes and ideologies was happening long before Kálfr Skáld took up his pen. In this instance, we can look to the manifestations of one cycle of Germanic legend in the unique works *Beowulf, Das Nibelungenlied,* Old Norse Eddic poetry, and *Vǫlsunga saga*. Marshall Sahlins put it this way: "Culture is therefore a gamble played with nature, in the course of which, wittingly or unwittingly…the old names that are on everyone's lips acquire connotations that are far removed from their original meaning."[287]

Conclusions

The scope of *Vǫlsungsrímur* changes the thematic emphasis of the story, decreasing the strength of certain themes of *Vǫlsunga saga* and amplifying others. One of the themes downplayed is the taking of vengeance. There is certainly a fair

[285] Foote 1984, 89
[286] Ibid., 90
[287] Sahlins 1985, ix; Hastrup 1990, 20

share of vengeance in the *rímur*, but without the stories of Sigurðr, Guðrun, and Brynhildr, it does not dominate the narrative of the poem like it does in the saga. The life of Vǫlsungr lacks the strong presence of revenge themes. In fact, Vǫlsungr is the only character in his genealogy (except for Helgi) who does not avenge someone, and the most dramatic act of vengeance, the death of Sigeir, does not happen until the final fitt. However, more central to the poem is a theme that often overlaps with vengeance: the betrayal of trust. "If one theme dominates *Vǫlsunga saga*," Torfi Tulinius writes, it is that of trust betrayed."[288] This is certainly the case in *Vǫlsungsrímur*, where this theme is foregrounded in the first bit of narrative, the story of the false god Óðinn. The first fitt emphasizes that Óðinn has tricked and deceived his subjects into believing in him. Stanzas I, 19-21 explain that his subjects trusted in him and detail the ways they have been deceived, including being tricked into thinking they will go to Valhalla and even being led to rely on Óðinn for their earthly and eternal salvation.[289] But when faced with the threat of Christ in stanzas I, 24-25, this false god flees, leaving behind his trusting subjects, betraying their trust that he would provide eternal protection.

This introduction to Óðinn's character sets the tone for his involvement throughout the poem. Óðinn is nowhere to be found when Sigi is being attacked by his brothers-in-law. Ingi, who is also a descendant of Óðinn, is killed by Rerrir, who celebrates his wedding to Ingi's daughter on the same day as Ingi is buried; his is a particularly humiliating death. Rerrir thinks that Óðinn has sent him help when he and his wife eat the magic apple, and although it does make Ingigerðr pregnant, that pregnancy becomes a nightmarish years-long gestation ending in a very painful death. Vǫlsungr's betrayal is made all the more despicable by his double-connection to Óðinn, who is his great-grandfather *and* his father-in-law. The betrayals of trust leading up to the sword-in-the-stone scene were all passive in nature; Óðinn leaves, is not present, or neglects to add the ability to birth the child to his blessing of

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[288] Torfi Tulinius 2002, 141

[289] I, 21, 3-4: "þeir badu Odin biarga ser/ bædi lifs ok daudm." [They asked Óðinn to save them, both in life and in death.]

conception. However, when he betrays Vǫlsungr, he actively walks into the hall and creates conflict with his "gift" of the sword.

So far, this pre-existing theme seems to be heavily stressed by the poet in the way he introduced and structured his story. However, there is the problem of the "happy ending." In the sixth fitt, Sigeir is killed, Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli take over the kingdom, and in the last two stanzas we learn of the impressive Helgi. Why do these characters find success? It could be argued that Sygný, Sigmundr, and Sinfjǫtli suffer immensely as a result of the conflict begun by the sword-gift. However, I think it is more productive to keep the focus on Óðinn, or in this case, his absence. After his disguised entry into Vǫlsungr's hall, Óðinn is, as the sagas often phrase it, "out of this story." The poet did promise in I, 24 that the way of Jesus would prevail over Óðinn's might. Perhaps this poet, who throughout engages carefully and cleverly with his sources, saw it as no coincidence the only main character in *Vǫlsunga saga* who gets a happy ending is Helgi, whose name means "holiness" and "sanctity."

Helgi and Sinfjǫtli are the only main characters in *Vǫlsungsrímur* who enter the poem after the last appearance of Óðinn, so a brief comparison and contrast between the two half-brothers may serve to draw out the meaning in the poem's ending. Sinfjǫtli is literally born for vengeance and takes his place in the conflict created by Óðinn. He comes from the son and daughter of Vǫlsungr, making him one hundred percent Vǫlsung. This also means he is descended from Óðinn on both his father and his mother's side. His purpose in life is revenge and conflict. One of the most striking divergences from the saga in the second half of *Vǫlsungsrímur* concerns the behavior of Sinfjǫtli and his killing of Sygný. In the saga, she kisses Sigmundr, and then walks into the flames and dies. In *Vǫlsungsrímur*, Sigmundr (or Sinfjǫtli, depending on how you read the poem) kisses Sygný then Sinfjǫtli stabs her, killing her himself instead of letting her walk into the fire. While Sinfjǫtli's actions can be read as noble, saving her from a worse death, he is also robbing her of the opportunity to nobly accept the fate she deserves for the evil she has done.[290] In this way, Sygný dies without being able to pay for her sins; she is deprived of her ability

[290] VI, 15, 1: "Til davda hefr mier stefntt ok steyptt..." [Towards death have I aimed and hit]

to do penance. Huizinga writes of the 14th and 15th century French and English practice of "refusing confession and extreme unction to a criminal condemned to death." This was a debated topic, since "sufferings and fear of death were to be aggravated by the certainty of eternal damnation."[291] It is likely that the audience of *Vǫlsungsrímur* would have been sensible to the perils of an unconfessed death.

We do not learn much about Helgi in *Vǫlsungsrímur*, but his two chapters in *Vǫlsunga saga* portray him as a noble prince who saves a woman in trouble, marries her with her consent, and lives (presumably) happily ever after. Helgi is born after the end of the conflict and bloodshed precipitated by the sword. Letting the poem stand alone for a moment, his character provides a hopeful ending. He becomes famous and powerful, much like Sinfjotli the poet tells us, but with the unspoken fact that his life, at least as it is represented in the poem, is so unmarked by conflict and suffering that it does not need more than two stanzas to tell.

The first fitt of *Vǫlsungsrímur* introduces Óðinn as a false god and a betrayer of trust who will eventually fall to Christianity; the advance of Christianity towards the Nordic countries is the very reason, according to the poem, that Óðinn flees northward in the first place. Perhaps the protection of a false authority is what makes Sigi and Rerrir bold enough to choose their wives by force, humiliating their wives' male relatives in the process. Either way, Óðinn's descendants suffer while he is present, a suffering that only ends once his last betrayal, the conflict in which Vǫlsungr dies, is resolved. I propose that it is no coincidence that Kálfr Skáld chose St. Catherine as the subject of one of his other works. Kátrin uses intellectual abilities and divine inspiration to prove that Jesus is the true God and that following the pagan gods, who he specifically names as Þórr or Óðinn, is foolish and wicked.[292] It is not much of a stretch to suppose that a poet thinking about arguments against the pagan gods and obviously well acquainted with Snorri's explanation of the gods and Latin learned culture would have seen the opportunity to develop this theme from the saga material.

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[291] Huizinga 1934, 23
[292] Wolf 2007, 936

This theme of false authority that the poet develops can also be interpreted in a historical context more immediate to the poet's life. My reading of this is two-fold. First, the fourteenth century saw tension over the *staðamál*, which at its core can be described as a conflict between family ties and the authority of the church. Second, the fourteenth century saw diminished trust in the Norwegian Crown on the part of the Icelanders and power struggles between the Icelandic Church and the Norwegian Church. As discussed earlier, the *staðamál* conflict was one of the primary domestic struggles of the Icelandic church. The rights to church property were very important to the growing institution of the church as well as to the *góðar* in the Commonwealth and the aristocratic class of Iceland after its collapse. In *The Christianization of Iceland*, Orri Vésteinsson argues that, "through the process of Christianisation, the clergy developed a sense of clerical identity, thus weakening their ties to family politics and placing their first allegiance to the Church."[293] *Vǫlsungsrímur* may reflect elements of this struggle. The stories of legendary kings were often used to bolster the power of the ruling families just as many of the *Íslendingarsögur* told stories of the powerful ancestors of the *góðar*. Even *Vǫlsunga saga* leads to the Norwegian kings of the Viking Age. In this historical context, *Vǫlsungsrímur* can be seen as a commentary on who has real authority from god and who does not, who is the real authority and who is a false authority. This reading of the poem might help illuminate the ending, where Óðinn is shown to be the false troublemaker he really is while the kings who no longer rely on him to live "happily ever after."

This theme of the false god, and the inevitable decline of his false authority, works on three levels. The first is the conflict between the old gods and the new. The second is the conflict between determining allegiance by kin and submission to the divine authority of the church. The third is on a more international scale. It is the relationship between Iceland and the Norwegian Crown and the relationship between the Icelandic church and the Norwegian church. Torfi Tulinius identifies

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[293] Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change 1000-1300* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); summarized by Erika Ruth Sigurdson 2011, 5-6

the theme of conflicting loyalties in *Vǫlsunga saga*, connecting it to the historical realities of allegiances and obligations shifting from kinsmen to monarchs and the state.[294] As I have just shown, the *rímur* reflect concerns about allegiances in matters of Church and religion, but they also reflect contemporary attitudes towards the demands of the Crown on Icelanders' allegiances. I showed earlier that Icelanders were not enthusiastic about Norwegian rule, despite having submitted to the crown without any large-scale pressures. *Vǫlsungsrímur* reflects these tensions between Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. One of the major additions to the saga source is Rerrir taking his wife Ingigerðr, who is the daughter of the Swedish king, Ingi. As the Norwegian royal family married into the Swedish royal family and the Norwegian seat of power moved southeast over 400km towards Sweden, away from Iceland, and governance of Iceland was rented out, the Icelanders may have perceived themselves and their concerns as becoming more peripheral to the attention of their monarch. Questions would have arisen over the stability of the Crown that commanded their allegiance. Rather than endorse the people's new obligations to the Crown, *Vǫlsungsrímur* are instead concerned with the role of the Church, as represented by Jesus and Christianity, in the answer to the question of legitimate authority.

So, is this a religious work or a political work? Can it be a narrative with an ulterior motive and still reflect a genuine religious attitude? There must certainly have been many religious elite in medieval Iceland whose interest in the ascendance of the church was simply that of powerful men trying to manipulate a source of power: an attempt to, as Nora Berend puts it, "control the sacred."[295] However, that does not mean that true belief, including true belief in the institutions of the church, could not have existed side by side with such political grasping. I do not see political motive and religious motive as mutually exclusive or even automatically opposed in nature. To try and limit *Vǫlsungsrímur* to one or the other would ignore the fact that this is a complex work of literature produced by a complex human in a complex social setting. To quote Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir:

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[294] Torfi Tulinus 2002
[295] Berend 2010, 13

> "Authors, redactors, commissioners and audiences are likely to have responded to the events around them though the compositions and consumption of literary texts, and consequently, manuscript production. These texts and artifacts both reflect but could also have had the effect of shaping individuals and group identities, which were possibly multiple, shifting over time and competing. They reveal particular desires, concerns, aspirations, anxieties and attitudes about the world, social behavior, gender roles, rulership and other issues."[296]

This is no less true for *rímur* than other genres. *Vǫlsungsrímur* presents a compelling story told in rich, exciting language, and the source narrative has been augmented with popular motifs to make it more relevant to a 14th century audience.[297] But it also reflects the preoccupations of this poet and his socio-historical context.

The primary endeavor of this study has been to show that socio-historical literary analysis of *rímur* is not only possible, but fruitful. Iceland's history following the Commonwealth is a fascinating subject; *rímur* can and should be used to glean valuable insight into the mentalities of this period and the attitudes of the many poets composing in this style. There is also so much that can be learned about the later reception of sagas from these poems. But most importantly, it is time we acknowledge and study *rímur* as the beautiful works of literary art that they are. To ignore them would be to ignore centuries of valuable texts born out of the same nation and language that has produced some of the most advanced and enduring works of the European medieval ages.

[296] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 89-90
[297] Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir writes that "bridal-quests" are "a prominent narrative paradigm in late medieval sagas..." (2014, 98).

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