

Háskóli Íslands
Hugvísindasvið
Íslensk miðaldafræði

Ketils saga hængs,
Gríms saga loðinkinna
and the narrative of survival

Ritgerð til MA-prófs í íslenskum miðaldafræðum

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Preface

Ágrip

Framlag mitt er þýðing á *Ketils sögu hængs* og *Gríms sögu loðinkinna* úr forníslensku yfir á ensku. Síðan greini ég sögurnar sem frásagnir (narratives) og túlka í bókmennta- og menningarlegu ljósi. Samhliða því sem ég sé sögurnar sem frásagnir kanna ég þær sem skemmtiefni. Bókmennta- og menningarlegir þættir þessara sagna, sem athugaðir eru í einstökum köflum þessarar ritgerðar, eru fjölmargir og dýpka skilning okkar á aðráttaraflí þeirra. Í umfjöllun um fornaldarsögur og bókmenntategundir er greint frá því hvernig þessar sögur voru samdar og síðan flokkaðar. Þær sögur sem innihalda goð- og hetjusögulegt efni eru undirstaða norrænar sagnagerðar. Munnleg hefð og kveðskapur undir edduháttum skýra formgerð og stíl sem leiddu til ritaðrar sögu. Notkun ættfræði og landafræði er einnig lífvænleg leið til þess að skipa niður efni í frásögn og miðla menningu. Íslensk sagnaskemmtun á miðöldum er umhverfið þar sem þessar sögur blómstruðu og urðu vinsælar. Tröll og annað þjóðsagnaefni er heillandi efni sem gefur sögunum sinn svip. Blöndun heiðni og kristni eru til vitnis um það sem líta má á sem andstæður í íslensku miðaldasamfélagi þar sem forn sagnaarfur var skráður og varðveittur. Þessar sögur má lesa á marga vegu en ég legg til að þær séu lesnar sem skemmtisögur um að lifa af, einkum þar sem þær sameina raunveruleika og hið yfirnáttúrulega í frásögnum sem höfðuðu til Íslendinga á miðöldum og entust öldum saman.

Summary

After providing English translations of the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas, *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, I analyze them as narratives of survival and I interpret them in light of literary and cultural factors. In using the word narrative I also examine the parallel theme of entertainment. The literary and cultural factors explored in individual sections of this paper are plentiful in these brief sagas and give a fuller understanding of their appeal. Legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*) and genre deal with how

the sagas became composed and classified. The mythical-heroic aspect provides the basis for and the content of the stories in northern narrative history. Oral tradition and eddic verse help to explain the formats and styles that led to the written sagas. Genealogy and geography are other viable ways of organizing narrative as well as transmitting vital cultural information. Medieval Icelandic *sagnaskemmtun* (storytelling entertainment) is the setting in which these tales prospered and became popular. Trolls and folklore provide captivating story material that lends the sagas some of their significant character. Heathen-Christian syncretism represents the seemingly ambivalent medieval Icelandic social milieu that recorded and preserved ancient storytelling lore. The sagas can be read in many ways and I propose viewing them as entertaining narratives of survival especially because they combine the real and the supernatural in tales that spoke to medieval Icelanders and endured across ages.

In the spring of 2006 I took a seminar at Harvard University in Old Norse with Prof. Stephen Mitchell. I was a librarian with a latent desire to study. Because my area of specialization was Scandinavian, I thought Old Norse would be a way of focusing my linguistic and cultural interests. Prof. Mitchell gave us *Ketils saga hængs* as our main reading selection. As I deciphered the text late at night I was continually struck with wonder at the marvels of the medieval language and what it seemed to reveal about the culture.

Ketils saga hængs and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* are unusual narratives. They are brief and yet they contain a body of material rich in interpretive possibilities on a variety of levels. When I had acquired sufficient knowledge to read Old Norse-Icelandic, *Ketils saga* surprised me because of its uniqueness. It was unlike any other early literature I had encountered in other traditions. How and why did people assemble stories such as these in a rich language on a remote island in the Middle Ages? Its content stretches back and forth in time and place. It is fashioned in a symbolic language whose charm extends beyond the historical and cultural context in which it was written. It contains seemingly archaic curiosities and at the same time addresses contemporary concerns. I wanted to translate it into English to make it more accessible to a larger body of readers.

By 2005 Gavin Chappell's translation of *Ketils saga hængs* and Peter Tunstall's translation of *Gríms saga loðinkinna* were available in English and these can be found online, however the hosts change. In 2012 Ben Waggoner did an English translation of these two sagas together with *Örvar-Odds saga* and *Áns saga bogsveigis* and published them as *The Hrafnista Sagas* for Troth Publications. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards published an English translation of *Örvar-Odds saga* as *Arrow Odd: A Medieval Novel* with New York University Press, 1970, which is also available as *Seven Viking Romances*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985. Willard Larson translated *The Saga of Aun Bow-Bender: A Medieval Norse Tale* in 1995 for Gateway Press. Shaun Hughes made available in English, with apparatus, *The Saga of Án Bow-bender* which appears twice as *Medieval Outlaws: Ten Tales in Modern English*, Sutton, 1998; and *Twelve Tales in Modern English*, Parlor, 2005.

My text is based on Guðni Jónsson's 1954 edition *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, vol. 2, Íslendingasagnaútgáfan. His work follows very closely Carl Christian Rafn's 1829-1830 *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* but differs in orthography. The manuscripts Rafn referred to are primarily AM 343 a 4to and AM 471 4to in the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies, Reykjavík, Iceland. The extant sources date from the mid to late fifteenth century and accompany other legendary, romance, and post-classical medieval Icelandic selections. *Ketils saga hængs* is generally believed to have been written in the thirteenth century, *Gríms saga loðinkinna* is thought to have been written in the fourteenth century as a bridge between sagas about father, Ketill, and son, Örvar-Oddr, and *Örvar-Odds saga* is understood to be the oldest of the three, written in the thirteenth century. However the content of the sagas as oral tradition is widely thought to predate the written versions by at least a few centuries.

Some translations of Old Norse may tend to hew to classical dictionary definitions. There is a temptation to use words that English shares in common with Icelandic or to use only Germanic words with the intention of retaining the style of the language. Such efforts may result in awkward prose. In this translation I have committed to fidelity, more in spirit than in letter, striving for an enjoyable reading experience in modern English. I wanted to avoid linguistic temptations and get at what the text was saying. It is nevertheless a faithful translation. Icelandic names I transfer are as in the

original text with interpretations provided. The chapter headings follow Guðni Jónsson's edition.

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I am grateful to Suzanne Thygesen for reading versions of this, for proofreading the text and translations, and for sound stylistic and other scholarly advice.

In a presentation of her work in the autumn of 2014 at the University of Iceland, Ásdís Egilsdóttir discussed some academic matters that challenged me. She proposed translation as an academic enterprise. She spoke of the riches to be mined in medieval Icelandic religious writing. She brought up masculinity as a gender topic. I felt compelled to ask about some of these issues and thought I was venturing bold questions. Having been brought up Catholic I questioned the excessive formulaic and outlandish miracles recorded in bishops' sagas. She said people at the time took them seriously, bringing up issues of reception with insights into medieval culture. One goes deeply into a text and discovers, through reading, through acts of discourse, then and now, the context revealed in reception. In a sense one is listening and through this one comes to understand people. Concerning translation I said that it is not viewed as academic and was not an acceptable route of publication for beginning scholars. She responded that it is the ultimate close reading and she explained the heuristics of the act of textualization and contextualization. Cultures meet in translation. *Translatio* as a medieval topic involves anything from exhuming relics from one sacred place and transferring them to another to transferring knowledge and awareness from one culture another. Further she talked about the interpretation and analysis that were made possible by translating. Having been granted leave to work with her I discovered wholly unexpected intellectual and artistic affinities

with her to the extent that I was surprised to see her show up at an orchestra concert I was performing. It turned out that her daughter and grandson participate in national symphonies and conservatories. Conversations with Ásdís offered moments of clarity, vision, and motivation that one deeply seeks in a discussion in the humanities, not to mention the inexplicable value of a fortuitous and exemplary mentoring relationship. She encouraged me to make use of untapped modes of writing and self. *Leiðbeinandi*, advisor, in Icelandic refers to one who indicates the way. The rest she left to me. As it should be. For this and much more I am duly grateful.

Enjoy the sagas. Read them aloud. Read them to friends.

-- Chip Robinson

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Ketils saga hængs (The Saga of Ketill Salmon)

1. Ketill hængr's (Ketill Salmon's) youth¹

There was a man named Hallbjörn who was also called half-troll.² He was the son of Úlfr inn óargi (The Fierce) and lived on the island of Hrafnista which lies outside of Raumsdal.³ He was a rich man and prominent among the farmers there in the north. He was married and had a son named Ketill. He was of large build, and manly, but not good-looking.

When Ketill was some winters old,⁴ he used to like to sit in the kitchen. Valiant men thought whoever did that laughable. It was Ketill's habit, when he sat by the fire, to rest one hand against his head, and with the other to poke at the fire at his knees. Hallbjörn asked him not to do this and said that then things would improve between them. Ketill did not reply at all. He disappeared somewhat later and was gone for three nights. Then he came home with a finely made chair on his back. He gave it to his mother and said that he had more love to repay her than his father.

One beautiful summer day Hallbjörn had the haying done but there was still much to do. Hallbjörn went into the kitchen to Ketill and said: "Do as I say, my boy, and help with the haying today, because everyone is needed."

Ketill jumped up and went out. Hallbjörn got him two draft animals and a woman to help with the work. He drove the hay to the barn so vigorously that in the end eight men had to stack it up and everyone thought they had plenty to do. When evening came, all the hay had been secured and both animals were worn out.

Hallbjörn said: "Now I think it's a good idea, son, that you take over running the farm because you are young and coming up in the world and capable of everything. I am getting old and stiff and not much use for anything."

¹ *Hængr*: male salmon in most sources, also male trout, or male fish. About Old Icelandic nicknaming see Paul R. Peterson, "Old Norse Nicknames" (doctoral thesis, University of Minnesota, 2015). *ketill* means 'kettle' or 'cauldron.'

² Here half-troll refers to a person born of a Norwegian father and a Sámi mother.

³ Ramsta(d), Namdalen, Norway. The manuscripts use an incorrect form Raumsdal = Romsdal (Hermann Pálsson 2002, 260:56). Naumudal occurs in the B manuscript 471 (*Fornaldar sögur Nordrlanda* 1829, II:[109]).

⁴ Medieval Icelandic years were measured in winters. Years were divided into winter and summer, changing in October and April (Árni Björnsson 2000, 15, 31-33).

Ketill said he didn't want that. Hallbjörn gave him a rather large ax and very sharp, a wonderful weapon. He said: "There is one thing, my son, that I most want to caution you about. When the day is done, I want you to spend very little time outside, and above all do not leave the farm and go north on the island."

There were many things Hallbjörn explained to his son Ketill.

It was said about a man named Björn (Bear), who lived not far from there, that he was constantly mocking Ketill and calling him Ketill Hrafnistufi (Hrafnista-Fool). Björn used to row out to sea to fish.

One day when he had gone out to row, Ketill took a fishing boat and fishing line and hook and rowed out to the fishing bank to fish. Björn was up ahead with his companions and when they saw Ketill they laughed a lot and made great fun of him. Björn was leading the charge as usual. They fished well but Ketill only caught a ling, a rather poor one, but no other fish. When Björn and company had stored their catch they pulled up their lines and prepared to head for home. And so did Ketill. They just laughed at him.

Then Ketill said, "Now I want to leave you my catch and that person among you shall have it who gets hold of it first."

Then he snatched up the ling and hurled it at their ship. It hit Björn's ear so hard that his skull was fractured and he was flung overboard into the deep and never came up. The others rowed back to land and so did Ketill. Hallbjörn paid little attention to this.

One evening after nightfall Ketill took his ax in his hand and went north on the island. And when he had come a good distance away from the village he saw a dragon flying toward him from the north out of the rocks. He had a coil, a fish tail like a serpent, and wings like a dragon. It seemed to Ketill that fire burned from his eyes and jaws. Ketill thought that he had never seen such a fish or any other monster, so that he would rather have to defend himself against many men instead. The dragon attacked him and Ketill defended himself well and in a manly way with the ax. It went on like this for a long time until Ketill was able to strike at the coil and there cut the dragon apart. It fell down dead.

Then Ketill went home and his father was out in the yard. He welcomed his son and asked whether he was aware of any provoking beings north on the island.

Ketill answered, “I don’t have any tales to tell, where I saw the fish swim, but it’s true that I hewed apart a male salmon in the middle, the kind that hunted the spawning fish.”

Hallbjörn answered, “You will think it of little worth later, such trifles, that you count these kinds of creatures as small fish. Now I will add to your name and call you Ketill Salmon.”⁵ They settled down quietly for a while.

Ketill was back to sitting by the fire. Hallbjörn often went fishing and Ketill asked to go with him. Hallbjörn said that it was more suitable for him to sit by the fire than to be on sea journeys. And when Hallbjörn came to his ship, Ketill was already ahead of him and Hallbjörn could not force him back. Hallbjörn went to the stem of the vessel and asked Ketill to take over the stern and push. Ketill did so and it went nowhere.

Hallbjörn said, “You are unlike your family members and I think it will be a long time before strength can be seen in you. Before I became old I used to push the boat myself.”

Then Ketill became angry and launched the craft so forcefully that Hallbjörn was flung onto the rocks on the shore and the boat didn’t come to rest until it was far out on the water.

Hallbjörn said: “You let me enjoy our father-son relationship little if you mean to break my bones. And I have to say that it seems to me that you are strong enough. Because I wanted to test your strength and I resisted as firmly as I could but you sent it off just the same. I think I have a good son in you.”

Next they went to the fishing spot. Hallbjörn looked after the hut and Ketill rowed out to sea. He had a significant haul of fish. Then two fierce men rowed toward him and asked him to release his catch. Ketill refused and wanted to know their names. One said he was called Hængr and the other Hrafn and that they were brothers.⁶ They attacked him but Ketill defended himself with a club and struck Hængr overboard, killing him, but Hrafn rowed away. Ketill went back to the hut and his father walked toward him and asked whether he had met any people during the day. Ketill said that he had met the two brothers Hængr and Hrafn.

⁵ Usually when someone is named in this way, he or she receives a name-fastening gift. It could be considered the ax Ketill received from his father Hallbjörn that accomplished the slaying of the dragon.

⁶ Their names mean Salmon and Raven.

Hallbjörn said: “How did your exchange with them go? I know all about them. They are bold men and outlaws from the settlement because of their disturbances.”

Ketill said that he had driven Hængr overboard and that Hrafn had fled.

Hallbjörn said, “You are keen for big fish, my son, and your name has been well chosen.”

The next day they went home with their takings. Ketill was eleven years old by then and with this their kinship improved.

2. Ketill killed two giants⁷

It was a poor year for crops in Hálogaland and they had to depend for their livelihood on the sea. Ketill said that he wanted to go fishing and not remain completely helpless. Hallbjörn offered to go with him. Ketill said he was able to manage the boat himself.

“That is unadvisable,” Hallbjörn replied, “and you mean to be self-willed. Then there are three fjords I must mention to you. One is called Næstifjörðr, the second Miðfjörðr, and the third Vitaðsgjafi.⁸ It has been a long time since I came through two of them but there was fire in both of the huts.”⁹

That summer Ketill traveled to Miðfjörðr and there was fire burning in the hut. Deep within the fjord Ketill discovered a large cabin and the farmer was not home when Ketill arrived. He saw a great catch there as well as deep pits dug into the earth. He pulled everything up out of them and threw things here and there. There was whale and polar bear meat, seals and walrus and all kinds of animals. But at the bottom of each pit he found salted human meat. He flung everything out and destroyed whatever was there.

In the evening he heard a great sloshing of oars so he went to the seashore. The caretaker of the cottage was rowing toward land. His name was Surtr.¹⁰ He was gigantic

⁷ *jötunn* is most often translated as ‘giant,’ although the origins of this word, as well as of *troll*, are obscure.

⁸ Næstifjörðr (nearest fjord), Miðfjörðr (middle fjord), Vitaðsgjafi (sure giver) (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 712). Also Vitazgjafi, a mythic reference to a grain field that always yielded, it relates to the fertility god Freyr. See Anne Holtmark, *Studier i norrøn diktning*, (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1956), 38-58 (Hermann Pálsson 2002, 261:65).

⁹ Wayside shelters for travelers would have provisions including means of warmth.

¹⁰ *Surtr*, or *Svartr*, means ‘The Black’ and relates to the mythic fire giant mentioned in *Völuspá* and other eddic sources (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 605).

and hideous. When his boat touched the shallows he stepped ashore, lifted the craft, and carried it to the boathouse, wading through the muck almost up to his knees.

He began muttering to himself with his deep voice: “Something has gone to shambles here,” he said, “my possessions have been strewn about, and it has gone worst with that which is best of all, my human carcasses! Such a thing has to be repaid. It hasn’t turned out properly that my friend Hallbjörn sits quietly at home while Ketill hængr, the kitchen fool, has come here. It would certainly never be too much for me to reward him. It would be almost a disgrace if I should not be able to overcome him, considering that he has grown up as a cinderfella sitting by the fire.”

He turned toward the hut while Ketill moved to place himself behind the door with his ax poised. When Surtr came to the cabin he bent low through the doorway, poking his head in first, then his shoulders. Ketill split his neck with the ax, which sounded a high pitch as it sliced off his head. The giant fell dead onto the floor of the hut. Ketill loaded his boat and traveled home in the autumn.

The following summer he made for Vitaðsgjafi. Hallbjörn had tried to dissuade him, saying that it was better to come home in one piece with everything intact. Ketill replied that it would do no good if he didn’t prove himself, “and I have to go,” he said.

“You will find it haunted there,” Hallbjörn said, “and it is clear that you would prefer to while by my fires and to contend with me in sundry things.” Ketill said that he guessed right.

Next he went north to Vitaðsgjafi. There he found a cabin and arranged it for himself. There were so many fish that a person could just catch them with his hands. Ketill strung up his haul in the boathouse and went to sleep. But when he awoke in the morning his catch was gone.

The night after that Ketill stayed awake. Then he saw a monster of a figure go into the boathouse and then tie up a large bundle. Ketill pounced on him and went for his shoulders with the ax so that the bundle dropped. The giant jerked back so suddenly when he was injured that Ketill lost his ax. It was stuck in the wound. This creature was called Kaldrani.¹¹ He scrambled to the fjordhead and into his cave, with Ketill in pursuit. There trolls sat by the fire, laughing a great deal, and remarking that Kaldrani had gotten a fitting punishment for his deeds. Kaldrani said his wound needed ointment

¹¹ *kaldrani* or *kallrani* means ‘taunt’ or ‘sarcasm’ (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 330).

more than chiding. Just then Ketill entered the cave and said he was the doctor. He asked them to get him some ointment, saying that he would mend his wound. The trolls scurried deeper into the cave. Then Ketill seized the ax from the wound and struck the giant his deathblow. He went back to the hut, loaded his boat, and went home. Hallbjörn welcomed him and asked if he had happened upon anything. Ketill said it was far from the case.

Hallbjörn said that that being so he looked rather exhausted,¹² “so you had a quiet stay?” he asked.

“Yes,” replied Ketill.

3. Ketill visited Brúni and dispatched Gusir

In the autumn before the first winter nights,¹³ Ketill prepared his boat. Hallbjörn asked him what he had in mind. Ketill said that he intended to go fishing.

Hallbjörn told him that it was not what people did, “and you do this without my permission.”

Ketill went nonetheless. When he had come north to the fjords, a fierce tempest drove him off course out to sea and he wasn't able to reach the harbor. He drifted toward a crag north of Finnmark,¹⁴ coming to land where there was an opening among the cliffs. There he set up camp and slept. He was awakened by the sound of his ship shaking completely. He got up and saw that a troll-woman had taken hold of the prow and was shaking the vessel.¹⁵ Ketill jumped into the boat, first retrieving his butter-chest,¹⁶ before he cut the rope and rowed away. The storm continued to rage. Then a whale swam alongside Ketill, protecting him from the weather. And it seemed to him that there were human eyes in the whale.¹⁷

¹² *endr(-)rjóða* often translated as ‘reddened hands’ also means ‘downcast’ as glossed in Cleasby-Vigfusson (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 129) and *aldeles udtømt* (completely exhausted) (Fritzner 1973, I:335). Both sources refer to Scheving's note in *Forspjallsljóð*. [Fritzner: Hallgrímur Scheving, *Forspjallsljóð*. (Viðey: Helgi Helgason, 1837), 43].

¹³ The first winter nights were a traditional time of feasting (Árni Björnsson 2000, 262-64).

¹⁴ Finnmark is the northernmost region of Norway and immediately means the magical north inhabited by the Finns, not Finnish people, but Sámi, who have the reputation of being shamans or sorcerers.

¹⁵ Troll-women shaking boats is a motif (Helga Kress 2002, 84-85).

¹⁶ Butter was a prized commodity, especially to the Finns (Sámi) as depicted in this literature.

¹⁷ Shamans and supernatural beings are represented as shapeshifting.

Then he drifted against some reefs, the craft was broken into bits, and he landed on one of the islands. He could see nothing but a dark outline of land. After resting he swam there. When he reached land he spotted a path leading in from the foreshore by which he came upon a farmstead. There was a man outside before the doorway splitting firewood. His name was Brúni. He welcomed him and spoke this verse:

Welcome Hængr!
You can lodge here
and be with us
the whole winter.
I will engage you
to my daughter
before morning
unless you decline.¹⁸

Ketill replied with this verse:

I will lodge here!
It seems to me
the sorcery of the Finns
caused the terrible weather.¹⁹
The whole day
I bailed alone as if three.
A whale stilled the sea.
I will lodge here.

Then they went inside. There were two women there. Brúni asked whether Ketill wanted to sleep with his daughter or alone. She was called Hrafnhildr and was

¹⁸ If a promising young man came by he might be encouraged to be matched to the farmer's daughter. This was to form an alliance for political security and for exchange of resources, particularly by fostering children.

¹⁹ The so-called Finns had magical power over weather.

remarkably imposing of stature but noble and bountiful of heart. It is said that she had a face half a yard wide.²⁰ Ketill said he wanted to lie with Hrafnhildr.

Then they went to bed. Brúni spread an oxhide up over them. Ketill asked what it shielded. “I have invited Finns here, my friends,” said Brúni, “and I don’t want you to come into their sight. They are after your butter-chest.”²¹

The Finns came and they were not narrow-faced. They said, “We think this butter is choice fare.”

Then they went their way. And Ketill remained and amused himself with Hrafnhildr. He also always went to the shooting range and participated in activities. Sometimes he went hunting with Brúni. In the winter after Yule Ketill wished to travel. But Brúni said that he would not be able to because of the severe winter and foul weather. “And Gusir, the king of the Finns lurks out in the forests.”

In the spring, Brúni and Ketill prepared to travel. They went to the opening of the fjord. And as they were parting, Brúni said, “Go the way that I show you, and not through the forest.”

He gave him arrows and a bow and encouraged him to make use of them if necessary. Then they separated and Brúni went home.

Ketill mused, “Why would I not go the shorter way and not be spooked by Brúni’s ogresses?”

Then he turned into the forest and he saw an impressive whirlwind of loose snow and a man on a sled with two reindeer pursuing him.²² Ketill greeted him with this verse:

Get down from your sled,
calm your reindeer
late-traveling man,
and say your name.

²⁰ *alin* is the old measure, the ell, cf. Latin *ulna*. It was the distance between the elbow and the end of the middle or index finger, eighteen inches or half a yard (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 13). The description of Hrafnhildr’s face is to emphasize that she is a giantess or troll-woman, a Finn, an Other.

²¹ At the same time Brúni is protecting Ketill and Hrafnhildr from the power of the Finns’ eyes. In the opening of *Örvar-Odds saga* (*The Saga of Arrow-Oddr (Arrow-Point)*) it is explained that Hrafnhildr peeked out from under the oxhide and saw a Finn with a hairy cheek. At this moment Grímr was conceived and was born with a hairy cheek (*Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 1954, II:[201]).

²² In folklore, a whirlwind is the means by which supernatural beings, such as elves or fairies, are conveyed (Feilberg 1910, 23). A sorcerer Finn could also effect this as an illusion.

The man replied:

Noble Finns
call me Gusir.
I am chief
of all our nations.

What kind of man is that
who comes to meet me
and prowls like a wolf of the woods?
You will utter words of despair
if you escape
three times in Þrumufjörðr.

“I reckon you’re not very clever.” They met by Ófara-Þruma. Ketill answered him with this verse:

I am called Hængr
come from Hrafnista
Hallbjörn’s avenger.
Why do you creep so, little man?
I have not come for sweet words
with a cowardly Finn,
but to ply the bow
that Brúni supplied me.

Gusir seemed to know now who Hængr was, because he had become quite famous. Gusir spoke this verse:

Who would ski
so early in the day,
harsh tempered

and eager for a fight?
We should sport
at reddening arrows
against each other,
unless your courage fails you.

Ketill said:

They call me Hængr
for short.
Now I will provide you
with resistance.
Before we part,
you will surely see
how farmers' arrows
hit their targets.

Gusir said:

Prepare yourself
for bitter combat.
Raise your shield.
I shoot with force.
I will mark you
for death
unless you turn over
all you possess.

Ketill said:

I will never leave
anything to you

and never run
from you alone.
Sooner shall you have your shield
cloven before your breast
and the world grow dim
in your sight.

Gusir said:

You will master
neither gold
nor treasure
in comfort at home.
Soon death
will greet you
if we go out
to play with blades.

Ketill said:

I have come neither
to exchange gold with Gusir
nor to be the first
to concede my peace.
For me swift death
is much better
than timidity
and flight.

Then they bent their bows, placed arrows on strings, and aimed for the points of the other. Each and every one of the twelve arrows they both launched met and fell to the

ground. Gusir had one shaft left; Ketill also had a spike. Then Gusir took his dart, which seemed bent, and tried to straighten it. Ketill said:

Now he is doomed,
the craven Finn,
when he straightens
his arrow underfoot.

Then they resumed shooting, and this time the weapons didn't meet in flight; Ketill's spike found its mark in Gusir's chest and that was his death wound. Brúni had arranged for the shaft to appear crooked to Gusir,²³ because he was next in line to rule the kingdom if anything happened to Gusir, and he felt wronged by their previous dealings. Gusir had owned the sword that was named Dragvendill, the finest of all swords.²⁴ Ketill took it from the fallen Gusir, as well as the arrows Flaug (Flight), Hremsa (Shaft), and Fífa (Cotton Grass).²⁵

Ketill returned to Brúni and told him what had happened. Brúni related that he could nearly feel the stroke of his brother's deathblow. Ketill assured him that now he had obtained the kingdom for him. Brúni saw him to the edge of the settlement and they parted in a bond of warm friendship.

Nothing further was reported of Ketill's passage but that he arrived home in Hrafnista. He met a farmer and asked him what ships were on their way to the island. The farmer responded that they were guests who came to honor Ketill's funeral feast if no news of him had been sent. Ketill took a rickety rowboat to the island, went into the hall, and people rejoiced at his return. The feast was turned into a celebration in honor of Ketill's homecoming. This time he remained there for three winters.

²³ Brúni used Sámi magic.

²⁴ Dragvendill is mentioned in *Gríms saga loðinkinna* and in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* (The Saga of Egill Skallagrímsson).

²⁵ *ffifa*, *eriphorum*, also suggests lightness and swiftness (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 155). Cotton grass can look like a dart or, in the wind, a dart in flight or aflame. Candlewicks were made of it and they resemble arrows. A candle flame resembles an arrowhead.

A ship came to the island. On it were Hrafnhildr Brúnadóttir (Brúni's daughter) and her son by Ketill who was named Grímr.²⁶ Ketill invited them to stay.

Hallbjörn spoke up: "Why do you invite this troll to be here?"²⁷ He bristled at her arrival and shunned her.

Hrafnhildr said that she meant nothing untoward to either of them by her being there. "But I will leave here and Grímr our son, the hairy-cheeked, will stay with you." He was named this way because one of his cheeks was furry. He was born with it like that. It was such that no metal could cut into it.²⁸

Ketill asked Hrafnhildr not to become angry on account of the situation. She said they would attach little importance to her anger. Then she departed for home, rowing north along the coastline. She asked Grímr to be there three winters and said then she would come back for him.

4. On Ketill's marriage and about the duel

There was a good farmer named Bárðr who had a beautiful daughter called Sigríðr. She was considered the best match. Hallbjörn asked Ketill to find a wife and to leave off thinking so much about Hrafnhildr. Ketill said he had no mind for marriage. He was silent since he parted with Hrafnhildr. Ketill decided he would travel north along the coast. Hallbjörn said he was going to go and find a suitable match for Ketill, "and it's a shame that you insist on loving that troll."

Then Hallbjörn went to see Bárðr with a marriage proposal. The good farmer said it was apparent that Ketill had made longer and more treacherous trips than one to woo a woman.

"Do you think I am lying?" replied Hallbjörn.

Bárðr the farmer answered: "I know that Ketill would have come if he had a mind to it and I have neither the means nor the intention to decline your offer for my daughter." They came to an agreement and set a date for the wedding celebration.

²⁶ *grímr* is from *gríma* meaning 'hood,' 'mask,' 'cowl,' or 'disguise.' It was one of Óðinn's names as he was often traveling disguised. Poetically it can refer to the night and even to a serpent (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 216).

²⁷ Hallbjörn is a half-troll.

²⁸ The supernatural quality by which a person could not be injured by weapons. It may be Sámi magic or an attribute given to someone by the god Óðinn.

Then Hallbjörn left for home. Ketill didn't ask for any news. Hallbjörn said many people were more curious about the nuptials than Ketill was. Ketill paid no attention to this. The wedding celebration went forward as planned and the gathering was splendid. On their wedding night Ketill did not undress when they went to bed together. Sigríðr wasn't concerned about this and they quickly got along well together.

After this, Hallbjörn breathed his last, and Ketill took over the running of the farm with its many householders. Ketill and Sigríðr had a daughter. She was named Hrafnhildr.

After three winters had passed, Hrafnhildr Brúnadóttir came to visit Ketill. He invited her to be with them but she said she wouldn't stay. "You have brought this about, as far as our visiting and being together is concerned, because of your unreliability and unsteadfastness."

She made her way to her ship with a heavy heart and great sadness and it was easily seen how deeply she felt about parting with Ketill. Grímr remained there with them.

Ketill became the most influential man there in the north and people had a lot of confidence in him. One summer he traveled north to Finnmark to meet Brúni and Hrafnhildr. Ketill and Grímr took a small craft. They made land at a cliff by a river. Ketill asked Grímr to fetch them water. When he went to the river he saw a troll there. It prevented him from approaching and tried to catch him. Grímr was frightened and ran back to tell his father. Ketill went to confront the troll and uttered this verse:

What is this monstrous omen
that stands by the cliff
and gapes over the fire?
Our neighborly relations
will improve I think.
Look at the sky!²⁹

The troll disappeared and father and son went home.

One autumn some vikings came to see Ketill. One was called Hjálmr (Helmet) and the other Stafnglám (Prow Watcher). They had harried and plundered far and wide.

²⁹ Trolls turn to stone when they see daylight. *ljóðvegr = ljósvegr (Lexicon Poeticum 1966, 379).*

They wanted to establish peaceful terms with Ketill, which he granted them. They stayed with him over the winter and they were held in high regard.

That winter during Yuletide, Ketill made a resolution that he would never force his daughter Hrafnhildr to marry against her will.³⁰ The vikings praised him for this.

Once Áli Uppdalakappi (Uppdale Champion) came to visit. He was from a family in Uppland. He asked for the hand of Hrafnhildr. Ketill said he didn't want to compel her to marry, "rather I must discuss the matter with her."

Hrafnhildr said that she did not have any affection for Áli or want to tie up her fate with his. Ketill relayed the matter to Áli and he challenged Ketill to a duel.³¹ Ketill said he would go. The brothers Hjálmr and Stafnglámur offered to fight for Ketill. He asked them instead to be shield bearers for him.

When they came to the battle plain Áli moved to strike at Ketill yet the shield didn't protect against the hit. The point of the sword hit Ketill's forehead, scraping down to the nose, causing him to bleed heavily. Then he spoke this verse:

Hjálmr and Stafnglámur
protect yourselves.
Give the old man room
to advance somewhat more.

Spears fly.
The victor of the valley is brave.
Swordplay is savage.
The old man's beard is red with blood.
Tunics tangle.
Shirts of iron shudder.
Coats of ring-mail convulse.
The maiden-seeker has been affrighted.

³⁰ Not unlike New Years' resolutions, oaths were sworn at Yule. In an oral culture with a strict honor code before laws were written down, spoken oaths were upheld (Árni Björnsson 2000, 324).

³¹ See Hermann Pálsson and Stefanie Würth, "Hólmgöngur in der altnordischen Literatur: Historischer Gehalt und Literarische Gestaltung," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik*. 41(1995): 37-69.

Then Ketill swept his sword up over their heads as Áli wrenched up his shield while Ketill hacked at his feet, severing both. Áli fell there.

5. About Ketill's great deeds

Later a great famine came again. The fish seemed to avoid the coast, the grain failed, Ketill had many people to provide for, and Sigríðr said they needed provisions for the household. Ketill said he was not used to being challenged in this way and sprang for his boat. The vikings asked him where he intended to go. "I am going fishing," he said. They offered to travel with him. He said that he was in no danger and asked them instead to take care of the farm while he was away.

Ketill arrived at a place called Skrofar. When he entered the harbor, on the promontory he saw a troll-woman in a skimpy leather gown. She had just come out of the sea and was black as pitch. She grinned and grimaced at the sun.³² Ketill spoke this verse:

What is that giantess
I see on the ancient headland
who sneers at this man?
By the risen sun,
I have never seen
anyone so hideous.

She replied:

I am called Forað (Danger).³³
I was born far north,
robust in Hrafnsey,
loathsome to farmers,
swift to attack,

³² It seems anomalous that this troll-woman is able to look directly at the sun.

³³ Or monster, ogre; dangerous situation; precipice, pit; bog, morass (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 163).

whatever evil can be gained.

And she went on:

I have turned many men
to earth,
especially those who came fishing.
Who is this squabbler
who has come to these reefs?

Ketill answered her: “Call me Hængr.” She told him: “It would be better for you to be home in Hrafnista than trailing about these distant shoals all alone.” Ketill spoke this verse:

I thought I was self-sufficient
before we came here
on our expeditions,
to hear ogresses talk.
I object to any lazy fellow.
I have come to fish.

I will not cease to strive
whatever Forað says.
Needs impel me.
Family must be saved.

I would not risk
sealing on these islets
if they swarmed
back at home.

She said:

I don't deny,
widely-traveling messenger,
that you may live
longer than others,
if you tell dauntless warriors
of our encounter,
little lad.
I see your courage quaking.

Ketill said:

When I was young, I stayed at home.
Then I often ventured alone
to outlying fishing banks.
Many night-riding witches
I saw on the road.
Snorting monstresses don't trouble me.

You are so long-faced, grandmother,³⁴
you can let your nose do the rowing.
I could not find a more repulsive ogress.

She approached him and said:

My journey started in Angr (Varangr).
Then I wandered to Steigen.
My short sword jingled and clanked.
I dawdled then to Kqrmt.
I'll start fires in Jaðr
and fan them at Útsteinn.

³⁴ *fóstra* (foster-mother) as a term of endearment refers to the culture of fostering family members away from home.

Next I'll head east at Elfr,
before the day shines on me,
and accompany the bridesmaids
and soon wed an earl.

The road hugs the length of Norway's coast. She asked him: "What are you planning now?"

"To cook meat and fix a meal," he said. She added:

I will cast a spell on your cooking fire
and knead you too
until this giantess seizes you.

"That is to be expected of her," said Ketill. She fumbled for him. Ketill delivered a verse:

I trust in my arrows,
and you in your strength.
A dart will pierce you
unless you retreat.

She replied in verse:

Flaug and Fífa
I thought were far from me,
yet I fear not even
Hremsa's bite.

Thus were Ketill's arrows named. He placed one on the bow and shot at her. Just then she changed into the shape of a whale and plunged into the sea as the arrow entered under her fin. Then Ketill heard a terrible shriek.

Next he saw the giantess and declaimed: “Fate will certainly have changed, as far as Forað’s marrying the earl goes, as her bed is now unattractive.”

Ketill came up with a haul of fish and loaded his boat.

One night he awoke at a tremendous crack in the forest. He leapt up and saw a troll-woman with a mane falling over her shoulders.

Ketill called out: “Where are you headed, old woman?”

She jerked her head toward him in irritation and said: “I am going to a troll meeting. Skelkingr, the king of the trolls, is coming from Dumbshafi in the north. So are Ófóti from Ófótansfjörðr and Þorgerðr Hörgatröll and other formidable creatures beings from the northern parts.³⁵ Don’t delay me. I don’t like you since you subdued Kaldrani.

Then she waded out to sea and on to the ocean. There was no lack of witches flying on night rides over the island that night but that did Ketill no harm. He was ready to depart for home, where he remained undisturbed for a while.

Some time later, Framarr, king of the vikings, came to Hrafnista. He was a sacrificer to the heathen gods and no iron could bite into him. His kingdom was in Húnaveld in Gestrekaland. He performed sacrifices at Árhaugr upon which no snow would stick.³⁶ His son was called Böðmóðr, who had a large farm near Árhaugr. He was a popular man. However, everyone bore ill will toward Framarr. The god Óðinn apportioned to Framarr the quality that no iron could pierce him. Framarr asked to wed Hrafnhildr. Ketill’s response was that she herself would choose the man.

She declined Framarr: “I didn’t choose Áli for a husband, and I would want this troll even less.”

Ketill returned to Framarr with her answer. He became very angry at this rebuke and challenged Ketill to a duel at Árhaugr on the first day of Yule. “And you will be a common scoundrel if you don’t appear.”³⁷

Ketill said he would go. Hjálmar and Stafnglámur offered to go with him. Ketill said he wanted to travel alone.

³⁵ Þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr, here rendered as a troll, is a deified local spirit of Hálogaland mentioned in mythical-poetic and saga sources as, for example, the bride of King Hǫlgi after whom Hálogaland is named. She was worshiped by Earl Hákon. Accounts about her share patterns with those of the goddess Freyja. In the mythical sources she is a giantess and harmonizes with this saga in which it is suggested by context that she figures among unchristian or undesirable nature spirits (McKinnell 2002; 2005, 81-85; Røthe 2010, 147-49).

³⁶ *haugr*, howe or grave mound, was a sacred and supernatural place. Here named Árhaugr, it suggests a place where sacrifices were offered to the god Freyr for peace and good crops, “*til árs ok friðar*.”

³⁷ A man challenged had to respond as a matter of honor. See also Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man*, 1983.

Shortly before Yule, Ketill arranged for passage to land in Naumudalr. He had on a fur cloak. He got on his skis and made his way up along the valleys and then across a forest to Jamtaland and then east into Skálkskógr woodlands to Helsingjaland and east again over Eyskógamörk forest. It separates Gestrekaland and Helsingjaland. It is ninety miles long and thirteen and a half wide and dangerous to traverse.³⁸

There was a man named Þórir who lived near the forest. He told Ketill that troublemakers hid in the woods and he offered Ketill his support. “The one in charge is Sóti (Soot-Colored Horse). He is ruthless and rugged.”

Ketill expected no harm to come to him at their hands. Ketill entered the forest and arrived at Sóti’s hut. He was not home. Ketill got the fire going. Sóti returned and did not greet Ketill. Then he brought out food for himself.

Ketill sat by the fire and said, “Are you so stingy with meat, Sóti?”³⁹

Sóti tossed a few pieces Ketill’s way. And when they had eaten their fill, Ketill lay down by the fire and snored loudly. Then Sóti sprang up and Ketill awoke and said: “Why are you hovering about here, Sóti?”

He answered: “I was blowing on the fire that was almost extinguished.”

Ketill went back to sleep. Then Sóti pounced, wielding an ax with both hands. Ketill arose saying: “You seem to want to chop up some big pieces now.” Ketill sat up the rest of the night.

In the morning, Ketill asked Sóti to go with him into the woods, and he did so. Later, when it grew dark, they lay down to sleep below an oak tree. Sóti thought Ketill was asleep because he was snoring loudly. Sóti jumped up and struck at Ketill so that his hood was flung off. But Ketill was not in the cloak.

Ketill had been keeping watch and wanted to test Sóti. He shot up and said: “We should try wrestling with each other.”

Ketill yanked Sóti over a log, hewed his head off, continued on his way, and arrived at Árhaugr on Yule eve. This mound was sacrificed upon by Framarr and his landsmen

³⁸ An approximation. *röst* ‘rest’ or a metaphorical mile, the distance between resting points (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 508); half a Scandinavian mile, then eleven kilometers approximately (Petersen 1834, 132-35). In the text: “tuttugu rasta langr, en þriggja breiðr” (*Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 1954, II:174).

³⁹ As with honor, hospitality was a fundamental cultural value in the medieval north.

for a prosperous season. There was a dense snowstorm. Ketill went up onto the mound and sat facing the storm.⁴⁰

When the men assembled at Böðmóðr's farm, he addressed them: "Do you think Ketill has come to Árhaugr?" The men said there wasn't much hope of it.

Böðmóðr said: "There is that man whom I can scarcely recognize. Go now and find out who he is and invite him to be with us."

They went to the mound and didn't find Ketill. They told Böðmóðr the news. Böðmóðr said he must have gone up the mound. Then he went to the mound and then up on top where he saw a great heap on the northern face. Böðmóðr uttered this verse:

Who is the high one
who sits on the cairn
and keeps a watch on the weather?
I think this frost-hardened man
is odd
when he takes no shelter.

Ketill spoke this verse:

Ketill I am called,
come from Hrafnista.
There I was born;
with a heart full of courage
I know how to protect myself.
I do, however, want a place to stay.

Böðmóðr said:

Get up;
get off the mound
and come to my home.

⁴⁰ See the discussion about grave mounds in the section on heathen-Christian syncretism below.

We'll have much to talk about
every day
if you stay with me.

Ketill said this verse:

I will rise up
and go from this mound,
since Böðmóðr invites me.
Even if a brother
were closer to me,
he couldn't offer better than this.

Böðmóðr took Ketill by the hand. And when he stood up, his feet slid on the mound.
Then Böðmóðr spoke this verse:

You have been called, foster brother,
to go to a deadly contest
and fight with Framarr for property.
Óðinn gave him victory
in his youth.
I think he is used to death matches.

Then Ketill became enraged when he mentioned Óðinn, because he didn't believe in Óðinn. He spoke this verse:

I never worshipped
Óðinn with sacrifices,
however long I've lived.
I know that
Framarr will fall
before this noble head.

Then Ketill went with Böðmóðr and stayed with him that night and sat next to him at the head of the table. In the morning Böðmóðr offered to go with Ketill or get him a fellow to oppose Framarr. Ketill turned down the offer. “Then I will accompany you,” said Böðmóðr.

Ketill accepted this and they went to Árhaugr. Framarr approached the mound howling.⁴¹ Böðmóðr and Ketill were there with many men. Framarr announced the terms of the duel. Böðmóðr held the shield for Ketill but no one did so for Framarr. He said: “Now you will be my enemy rather than my son.”

Böðmóðr said he had renounced their kinship by practicing sorcery. Before they attacked, an eagle flew at Framarr from the forest and rent his clothes.⁴² Then Framarr uttered a verse:

The eagle is displeased,
I do not fear wounds,
His golden clutches
get into my veins.
The eagle shrieks in keen anticipation,
how he is foreknowing,
often I used to gladden the eagle,
and now I seem desperate to the scavengers.

Then the eagle attacked so forcefully that he had to raise weapons to defend himself. He resorted to verse:

You wave your wings,
I pledge you weapons.
You hover about, wide-flyer,
as if you know me doomed.

⁴¹ This is the behavior of a berserker.

⁴² The eagle is one of Óðinn’s creatures. Óðinn could blunt weapons, particularly of enemies, but could not always be counted on for his support. From *Örvar-Odds saga*: “illt er at eiga Óðin/at einkavin” (it is ill-advised to have Óðinn as one’s only friend) (*Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 1954, II:331).

You are mistaken, battle starling,
We will have victory.
Throw yourself at Hængr,
He shall now die.

The one who had a right to strike first was the one who was challenged. Ketill swiped at Framarr's shoulder. He stood passively; the sword did not bite. But he reeled nonetheless because the blow was so great. Framarr struck at Ketill's shield. Ketill struck Framarr's other shoulder, and it also did not bite. Ketill said:

You hesitate now, Dragvendill,
with the eagle's morsel.
If you meet with evil magic,
you might not bite.
It has not protected Hængr,
from repelling
edges tempered in poison,
though Óðinn blunted them.

And yet he spoke:

What is with you, Dragvendill,
why have you become dull?
I have now struck once more.
You are reluctant to bite.
You give way at the meeting of swords,
before you never tottered
in cracking metal,
there where heroes clashed.

Framarr came with these words:

The man's beard trembles now.
The weapons swerve from the elders.
He incites the sword to engage the blades.
The maiden's father is fearful.
The wound twig is whetted,
so that it might bite
ambitious men,
if courage suffices.

Ketill said:

You need not provoke us;
bold warriors unwilling to flee
seldom mastered me,
or defied my massive blows.
Bite now, Dragvendill,
or else go to pieces.
For both of us good luck turns,
if you fail the third time.

And still he said:

Fear not maiden's father,
while there is still luck in Dragvendill.
We know not for certain:
if he won't fail the third time.

Then he turned the sword in his hands and exposed the other edge. Framarr stood still as the sword swung to the shoulders, not stopping before the middle of the torso, where the side gaped. Then Framarr said this verse:

Courage is in Hængr,

Dragvendill is sharp,
he bit Óðinn's word,
as if it were not.
Baldr's father has gone under,
believing in him is voided.
Make good use of your lucky arm!
Here we will have to part.

Then Framarr died, and Böðmóðr followed Ketill from the place of summons. At this moment Böðmóðr said, "Now because of this, if you think I deserve any reward for my support, then I would like to ask you to marry me to your daughter."

Ketill received this well and said he was an honorable man. After this accomplishment Ketill went home and was very famous because of his great feats. He married Hrafnhildr to Böðmóðr. Ketill ruled Hrafnista while he lived, and Grímr, the hairy-cheeked, after him. Örvar-Oddr was Grímr's son.

And here the saga ends.

Gríms saga loðinkinna (The Saga of Grímr Hairy-Cheek)

1. Grímr found a wife and she disappeared

It is said of Grímr loðinkinni (Hairy-Cheek) that he was both large and strong, and the most dauntless man.⁴³ He was called Hairy-Cheek because one of his chins was covered with dark hair and he was born that way. No iron could bite upon it. Grímr took over the farm in Hrafnista after his father Ketill hængur. He became wealthy. He ruled mostly alone over the whole of Hálogaland.

Haraldr was a wealthy, powerful, and famous chieftain eastwards in Vík.⁴⁴ He was married to Geirhildr, daughter of King Sölgi, who was the son of King Hrólfr from Berg in Uppland.⁴⁵ Their daughter was called Lofthæna. She was the most beautiful and cultivated of women. Grímr loðinkinni sailed with seventeen men on a small craft to ask for Lofthæna's hand in marriage. All the parties agreed and he was to return in the autumn for the wedding. But seven nights before that Lofthæna disappeared, and no one knew what had happened to her. When he came to the wedding, he felt the loss of his beloved, since the bride was missing, and he seemed to know that her father had in no way caused it. He stayed there three nights, and they drank, but mirthlessly. Then he returned to Hrafnista.

Five years earlier, it had happened that the wife of Haraldr the chieftain died. A year later, he found a wife from the north in Finnmark, who was named Grímhildr Jösursdóttir and whom he brought home with him.⁴⁶ It was quickly seen that she would spoil everything. She was wicked to her stepdaughter Lofthæna as became apparent later. Grímr was not pleased with his circumstances, since he had no news of his bride Lofthæna.

It came about, as was often the case, that there was a great famine in Hálogaland. Grímr loðinkinni prepared to leave home and travel on his boat along with two men. He

⁴³ See note 21 above in *Ketils saga hængs* about his nickname, explaining how he was conceived. See note 26 about the name Grímr.

⁴⁴ Meaning 'bay,' it refers to the area around Oslofjord.

⁴⁵ Mentioned in *Hversu Noregr byggðist* (How Norway was Settled) in *Frá Fornjóti ok hans ættmönnum* (Concerning Fornjótr and His Descendants) (*Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 1954, II:76).

⁴⁶ Her origin and name suggest a troll-woman and a wicked stepmother motif.

bore north for Finnmark and then east to the bay at Gandvík (Sorcery Bay).⁴⁷ When he came into the bay, he saw that there was plenty of fish. He brought his ship ashore, went to the hut, and kindled a fire for himself.⁴⁸

When they fell asleep that night, they were woken up by the arrival of a deep and dark snowstorm.⁴⁹ It was so fierce that everything grew stiff with ice, inside and out. In the morning, when they had outfitted themselves, they went out to the sea. Then they saw that all their catch was gone as if it had never been there. They thought they had picked a poor spot but there was no way out. They went back into the hut for the day.

During the night Grímr woke up to someone laughing outside the cabin. He jumped up right away, grabbed his ax, and headed out. He also had with him, as he otherwise always did, the arrows, Gusir's Gifts,⁵⁰ which his father, Ketill hængr, had given him. And when he came out, he saw two troll-women down at the ship. Each had stem and stern in hand and were shaking it as if they wanted to break it into bits. Grímr spoke and said this verse:

What are you called,
rock dwellers,
who want to damage
my ship?
By the looks of you
I have never seen
a more ghastly
pair.

The one who stood closest to him spoke this verse:

Feima, I am called,

⁴⁷ It also refers to the White Sea. In this literature it indicates a region where sorcerers thrive (*Lexicon Poeticum* 1966, 170). It also signals the hero's travels to a magical realm.

⁴⁸ In preparing a fire for himself there appears to be a disjuncture as Grímr's companions are mentioned in the next line.

⁴⁹ The storm and hoarfrost in this territory are suggestive of the whirlwind, mentioned in *Ketils saga hængs*, in which Gusir appeared. The allusions reinforce the fact that the men are in a treacherous and supernatural domain.

⁵⁰ The arrows Hremsa, Flaug, and Fífa which Ketill took from Gusir when he slew him in *Ketils saga hængs*.

and was born far north of here,
Hrímnr's daughter
from the high mountains.
Here is my sister,
the better of us,
Kleima by name,
who has come to the sea.⁵¹

Grímr said:

May Þjazi's daughters,
worst of women,
thrive nowhere.⁵²
Quickly shall I anger.
Before the sun shines,
I will certainly
send you as prey
to the wolves.

Kleima spoke:

It used to be
that our father
wielded magic to keep away
the fishing boats.⁵³

⁵¹ Feima, probably of Gaelic origin (*fjamh = fear*), means a bashful girl or young lass (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 150), but it is also used of female giants (*Lexicon Poeticum* 1966, 127). Kleima, a blot, a dab, or a smear, is the name of an ogress (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 342); it also is a female giant's name, with the additional connotation of a slow worker by way of Ivar Aasen in Norwegian (*Lexicon Poeticum* 1966, 340). Hrímnr is the name of a giant in the *Edda* from *hrím*, rime or hoarfrost, even soot (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 285-86); it is known as a giant's name in the *Pulur*, the name section of Snorri Sturluson's prose *Edda* (*Lexicon Poeticum* 1966, 284).

⁵² Mentioned widely in the poetic and prose *Eddas*, and in the poem *Haustlǫng* (*Lexicon Poeticum* 1966, 640), Þjazi the giant is being invoked here as the father of giantesses.

⁵³ Sámi fish magic. In addition to shifting weather, the Sámi also supposedly had the ability to affect the abundance of fish.

You could never
get away unharmed
from here unless
fate permitted it.

Grímr replied:

I will swiftly
promise
both of you
sharp tips and edges.
Hrímnr's giantesses
will have to see
which work better
points or paws.

Grímr took one of Gusir's Gifts and hurled it at the one who stood farther from him so that she fell dead.⁵⁴ Feima said: "It has not gone well, sister Kleima."

Then she rushed at Grímr. He went for her with the ax and it hit her shoulder blade. She yelled and ran in along the beach. Grímr lost his ax with the blow. It was stuck in her wound. Grímr ran after her but the distance between them remained the same until they came to some high cliffs. There he saw a big cave up in them. There was a particularly narrow path to get there and she hurried along it as if it were flat ground. And as she was about to leap up the ridge, the ax⁵⁵ fell from the wound. Grímr grasped it and turned to hook the ax into one step as he stood in the other to hoist himself up by the shaft. This way he was able to get into the cave. There he saw a bright fire burning with two trolls sitting beside it. There was a man and a woman. They lay stretched on their backs with the soles of their feet touching, heel to heel. They were both dressed in

⁵⁴ *firr* (*Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 1954, II:188); *firr* = comp. of *fjarri* 'i Fjernhed, i det fjerne, langt borte' (Fritzner 1973 I:418, 426); *firri* 'farther' (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 154); however in a note Rafn gives "firr er fyrir" for B manuscript 471 (*Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 1829, II:146). Both AM 343 a 4to (58r) and AM 471 4to (57v) show [fir{r}].

⁵⁵ The text has *örin* (arrow) (*Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 1954, II:189) but it must mean *öxin* (ax) (*Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 1829, II:147).

short smocks made of shriveled hide. He could clearly see how they both were formed between their legs. He was called Hrímnir and she was Hyrja.⁵⁶ When Feima entered the cave, they greeted her and asked where her sister Kleima was.

She replied: “Just guess. She’s lying dead out on the shore and I have a deadly wound. And you two lie inside flat on the ground by the fire.

The giant said: “This hasn’t been much of a heroic feat, taking your lives, when one of you is six winters old and the other seven. Who in the world did this?”

Feima told him: “This was done by the cruel Grímr loðinkinni. This father and son are more suited than other men to killing off trolls and mountain dwellers. And now that he has done this, he will never reach his future wife Lofthæna. And this is amusing, seeing how little distance there is between them now.”

Then Hrímnir said: “It’s my sister Grímhildr who is the cause of that. She is the most accomplished at that sort of thing.”

Then Feima grew weary from blood loss and fell dead to the ground. At that instant Grímr walked into the cave and hewed at old Hrímnir so forcefully that his head flew off. Then Hyrja, she lunged at Grímr and they began to wrestle. Their combat was both arduous and prolonged, because she was the greatest troll and Grímr was powerfully strong. It ended with him wrenching her at the hip and tossing her so that she fell to the ground. He sliced off her head, left her for dead, and went to his hut.

2. Grímr released Lofthæna from the spell

The following day, the weather was good. Grímr and his men went along the shore and saw a sizable whale that had beached. They went there and started cutting up the whale. A while later Grímr noticed twelve men rapidly approaching. Grímr greeted them and asked them their names. The one leading them said his name was Hreiðarr inn hvatvísi (The Reckless). He asked Grímr why he was stealing his property. Grímr told him he found the whale first.

“Don’t you know,” said Hreiðarr, “that I possess everything that drifts ashore here?”

⁵⁶ Hyrja is another giantess name in the *Edda (Icelandic-English Dictionary 1957, 304)*, which additionally implies fire (Motz 1981, 505).

“I didn’t know that,” said Grímr, “but however that may be, then we’ll split it half and half.”

“I don’t want that,” said Hreiðarr. “You have a choice—leave the whale or we fight.”

“Why miss out on a whole whale?” said Grímr, “We’ll fight.” Then they began attacking each other and became locked into a ferocious struggle. Hreiðarr and his men were skilled in wielding weapons and dealt heavy blows. Within a short time both of Grímr’s men fell. The fiercest of hostilities followed and ended with Hreiðarr falling together with all his men. Grímr passed out from his wounds and from exhaustion. He lay there among the fallen at the water’s edge and awaited nothing but death.

But he had not lain there long when he saw a woman walking there, if she could be called such. She wasn’t much taller than a seven-year-old lass, but so wide that he couldn’t put his arms around her. She was long-faced and rough-jawed, hooked-nosed and high-shouldered, smirch-faced and foul-jowled, hideous and balding. Her hair and her skin were dark as tar. She had on a short leather tunic. It didn’t even cover so much as her buttocks. She didn’t seem very kissable because there was slimy snot draining down over her mouth.

She went to where Grímr lay and said: “It’s not going well for the chieftains of the Hálogalanders. Or, would you, Grímr, allow me to help save your life?”

Grímr answered: “I can hardly do that, as awful as you are, but what is your name?”

She replied: “I am called Geirríðr Gandvíkrekka.⁵⁷ You should be aware that I have some influence here around the bay, so you had best decide how you will choose.”

Grímr said: “There is the old saying that everyone is eager to live, so I choose to accept your help.”

She plucked him up under her tunic as if he were a baby and bolted with him so speedily that he noticed nothing but the wind on his face. She kept up until they came to a big cave. When she let him down, it seemed to Grímr that she was more horrid than before.

“Now you are here,” she said, “and I want you to reward me for saving you and bringing you here. So kiss me now.”

⁵⁷ Geirríðr Gandvíkrekka is a suggestive name. Like *brúðr* ‘bride,’ *ekka* ‘widow’ refers to a woman poetically. As with the name Grímhildr, it suffices to suggest a giantess or troll-woman. Geirríðr, Lady of Gandvík.

“There is no way I’m going to do that,” said Grímr, “as repulsive as you seem to me now.”

“Well, then I can’t offer you any help,” said Geirríðr, “and I see you’re as good as dead.”

“Then it will have to be that way,” said Grímr, “although it’s not what I prefer.”

He went to her and kissed her. She didn’t seem so horrible to touch as she was disgusting to look at. Evening came. Geirríðr got the bed ready and asked Grímr if he wanted to lie alone or beside her. He said that he would rather lie alone. She said she would spend no time healing him then. Grímr said that that would not do for him and that he would have to lie next to her if there were no other choice. And so he did. She mended all his wounds and it seemed to him that he felt neither burning nor pain. It was also strange how soft and gentle her fingers were, as ugly as her hands were. They were more like vulture claws than human hands. And when they went to bed, Grímr fell asleep.

When he woke up, he saw such a beautiful woman lying there in the bed next to him that it seemed to him he had scarcely ever seen anyone so lovely. He marveled at how much she looked like Lofthæna, his bride-to-be. Down by the end of bed he saw the gruesome troll-woman shape that Geirríðr Gandvíkrekka had as a guise. This woman, instead, was less threatening. He got up right away to drag the form to the fire, where he burned it to coals.⁵⁸

He went to her and sprinkled some drops of water on her until she revived. Then she said: “Now things have gone well for both of us. First I gave you life and then you released me from the spell.

“How did you get here or how did this happen to you?”

She replied: “Shortly after you departed from my father Haraldr in Vík, my stepmother Grímhildr approached me with these words: ‘Now I will repay you, Lofthæna, for the disobliging and disobedient way you have treated me since I came to the area. I now proclaim that you shall become the most grotesque troll-woman and disappear to the north in Gandvík where you shall settle in a side-cave and be forced to live near my brother Hrímnir and scuffle with him over many and difficult things, and have the worst of it, whoever of you two is the most vulnerable. You shall be hated by

⁵⁸ This was how to handle any residual black magic or evil from a troll form.

everyone, by both trolls and people. You shall also,' she continued, 'be spellbound like this your whole life and never be released unless some human man agree to these three things you ask of him, which I know can never happen. The first is that he let you save his life,⁵⁹ the second is that he kiss you, and the third is that he share the same bed with you, which is the thing that everyone should avoid most of all.' Now, Grímr, you accomplished these three things for me, as you had to do, and you were the most appropriate person to do so. Now, most of all, I want you to take me back east to Vík to my father and for us to celebrate our wedding feast as we intended.

They went to Grímr's hut and discovered an abundance of fish there. A whale could be found in every bay. He loaded his ship, and when everything was ready, he pushed off from land with the two of them aboard together, Grímr and Lofthæna. And he was able to rely on the family ability that his father Ketill hængr had, and other people of Hrafnista, in drawing up his sails in the stillness as a fair wind began to blow.⁶⁰ He sailed home to Hrafnista and it seemed to people that he had returned from hell.

3. Grímr dueled with Sörkvir

Not much later, Grímr made his way east to Vík and this time Lofthæna traveled with him. Grímhildr was in charge of just about everything all by herself there in the east. And when Grímr arrived, he had Grímhildr taken and a bag placed over her head and then she was stoned to death.⁶¹ Earlier he had told Haraldr the chieftain how things had gone. Then he celebrated his wedding with Lofthæna and afterwards returned home to Hrafnista. Haraldr the chieftain married for a third time, to Þórgunn Þorradóttir.

Grímr and Lofthæna had not been together long before they had a daughter who was called Brynhildr. She grew up in Hrafnista and was the most beautiful young woman. Grímr loved her very much. When she was twelve years old, a man came and asked to marry her. His name was Sörkvir, son of Svaði (Slip), son of Rauðfeldr (Red-Cloak), son of Bárðr, son of Þorkell bundinfóta (Bound Foot).⁶² She did not want to be with

⁵⁹ The literal translation is that he accept, or receive, life from her.

⁶⁰ Sámi magical quality also in *Örvar-Odds saga* (Hermann Pálsson 2002, 265:109).

⁶¹ This folkloric and saga motif signifies shielding people present from the evil eye when the sorcerer or evil creature is dying.

⁶² Mentioned in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* (The Saga of Bard the God of Snowy Fell (Bard's Saga)) and *Landnámabók* (The Book of Settlements) (ch. [S]347) (Hermann Pálsson 2002, 265-66:111).

him, and because of that Sörkvir challenged Grímr to a duel. Grímr agreed to it. Sörkvir was from Sogn on his mother's side, and he owned farms that he managed there. The duel was to take place in half a month's time.

There was a chieftain in Norway named Ásmundr. He governed Berurjóðr farmstead. He was married and had a son, Ingjaldr. He was the bravest of men and was long acquainted with Grímr; their friendship was strong. Ingjaldr was the older of the two of them. Grímr, however, was much stronger. Ingjaldr was married to Dagný, the daughter of Ásmundr, who was known from the ship Gnoð.⁶³ She was the sister of Óláfr liðsmannakonungr (Warrior-King).⁶⁴ He had a son by her who was called Ásmundr and was the foster brother of Oddr inn víðförli (The Widely-Traveled). He was with Sigurðr hringr (Ring) at the battle of Brávöllr and is otherwise known by the name of Örvar-Oddr (Arrow-Oddr, Arrow-Point).⁶⁵

Sörkvir presented himself at the duel at the agreed time accompanied by eleven men. They were all berserkers. Grímr was there too, and Ingjaldr came with him as well as many farmers from Hálogaland. They started to duel and Grímr was entitled to the first strike. He had the sword Dragvendill, which his father had owned. A man named Þröstr was the shield bearer for Sörkvir. Grímr drove with such a powerful blow that he split the shield lengthwise. The point of the sword hit Þröstr's left shoulder and sliced him apart above his right hip. The sword continued its thrust to Sörkvir's thigh and cut off both his legs, one above the knee and the other below. He fell dead. He and Ingjaldr turned to the remaining ten men and did not let up until they were all slain. Then Grímr spoke this verse:

Here we have felled
to earth
ingloriously
twelve berserkers.
Though Sörkvir

⁶³ Ásmundr is mentioned in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* (The Saga of Egill Single-Hand and Ásmundr Berserker Slayer). The last chapter refers to him building the ship Gnoð. Ingjaldr fostered Oddr as told in *Örvar-Odds saga* (Hermann Pálsson 2002, 266:112, 114).

⁶⁴ Óláfr is important in *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* (The Saga of Hrómundr Gripsson) (Hermann Pálsson 2002, 266:113).

⁶⁵ Örvar-Oddr and the battle are included in chapter nine of *Sögubrot af fornkonungum* (Fragments on Ancient Kings) (*Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* I:356, 357-61).

was the hardest
of the men
and Þröstr the second.

and he continued:

Foremost shall I
take after my father:
my daughter shall not,
as long as I live,
be given unwillingly
to any man,
precious young woman,
while Grímr lives.

Grímr traveled home after the duel and Ingjaldr went to Berurjóðr. Shortly thereafter, his father died and he came into possession of everything and became a cherished farmer and maintained a very welcoming household.

4. About Grímr's descendants

Some winters earlier Böðmóðr Framarsson had died. He and his wife Hrafnhildr [Ketilsdóttir] had a daughter who was named Þórný. Her son was Þorbjörn tálkni (Whale-Bone) the father of Ketill breiðr (The Broad), father of Þórný, who married Hergils hnapprass (Knob-Buttocks).⁶⁶ Hrafnhildr went home to her brother Grímr in Hrafnista.

A distinguished man, Þorkell, is mentioned. He was earl over Naumdal district. He traveled to Hrafnista and asked to marry Hrafnhildr. She consented to marry him. They

⁶⁶ *tálkni* can also mean 'fish gills' (*Icelandic-English Dictionary* 1957, 626). Both Þorbjörn and Hergils are mentioned in *Landnámabók* [1986: S121, H93]. Hergils hnapprass (Hergils hnappraz Práandaron) could be parsed as Button Buttocks. Buttons are not customary accoutrements in medieval Norway or Iceland. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards use Knob-Buttocks in their translation of *Landnámabók* (1972). Erik Herman Lind suggests that it likely refers to an Icelandic place name beginning with *Knapps-* or *Knappa-* (Lind 1929-30, 150). Paul R. Peterson addresses all these issues and opts for 'button ass' (Peterson 2015, 68, 162-63, 269).

named their son Ketill hængr, who burned Hárek and Hrærek in, the sons of Hildiríðr, because, before that, he slandered Þórólfr, his kinsman. Later, Ketill voyaged to Iceland and settled between Þjórsár and Markarfljót to live at Hof.⁶⁷ His son was Hrafn, the first lawspeaker in Iceland. His other son was Helgi, the father of Helga, who married Oddbjörn askasmiðr (Shipwright). His third son was Stórólfr, father of Ormr (Serpent) inn sterki (The Strong),⁶⁸ and Hrafnhildr, who was married to Gunnar Baugsson. Their son was Hámundr, father of Gunnar of Hlíðarendi,⁶⁹ and daughter Arngunnr, who married Hróarr Tungugoði. Their son was Hámundr inn halti (The Lame).

Veðrormr, son of Vémundr inn gamli (The Old), was a prominent chieftain. He asked for Brynhildr, daughter of Grímr loðinkinni. She accompanied him. Their son was Vémundr, Veðrormr's father, who fled east to Jamtaland away from King Haraldr, and cleared forest so that he could settle there. His son was Hólmfastr, and Veðrormr's sister was called Brynhildr. Her son was Grímr, who was named after Grímr loðinkinni.

Their kinsmen, Grímr and Hólmfastr, went on viking expeditions west and killed the earl Ásbjörn skerjablesi (Skerry-Breeze). They abducted Ólof, his wife, and Arneiðr, his daughter, who was given to Hólmfastr, whom he in turn gave to his kinsman Veðrormr. She was a servant there until Ketill þrymr (Alarm) married her and brought her to Iceland. Arneiðarstaðir in the east fjords is named after her.⁷⁰ Grímr married Ólof, daughter of Þórðr vagaldi (The Waddler), who had been married to an earl.

Grímr traveled to Iceland and settled Grímsnes all the way up to Svínarvatn and lived in Öndverðunes for four winters, then at Búrfell. His son was Þorgils, who married Helga, daughter of Gestr Oddleifsson. Their sons were Þórarinn of Búrfell and Jörundr of Miðengi. Grímr fell during a duel with Hallketill at Hallkelshólar, the brother of Ketilbjörn of Mosfell.

Grímr loðinkinni remained in Hrafnista, as was mentioned before. Later in life, he and his wife had a son who was named Oddr. He was fostered by Ingjaldr in Berurjóðr.

⁶⁷ Burning in refers to burning people in their homes. It is common to pass similar family names down to new generations. The information here is presented in more detail in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. "Both Þórólfr and Ketill Hængr descend from Úlfr inn óargi (The Fierce). He was Þórólfr's great-grandfather and Ketill's great-great-grandfather. This Ketill's settlement is described in *Landnámabók*" (Hermann Pálsson 2002, 266:116).

⁶⁸ Ormr is the protagonist in *Orms þáttur Stórólffssonar* (The Tale of Ormr Stórólffsson).

⁶⁹ One of the main characters in *Brennu-Njáls saga* (The Saga of Burned Njáll), that includes Njáll's significant burning in.

⁷⁰ Mentioned in chapters [S]278 and [S]388 in *Landnámabók* as well as in *Droplaugarsona saga* (The Saga of the Sons of Droplaug) (Hermann Pálsson 2002, 266:119).

He was variously called Örvar-Oddr or Oddr inn víðförli. Grímr was regarded as a great man. He was mighty and the most courageous of men. He was master over his own affairs. He died of old age.

And so here ends the saga of Grímr loðinkinni. However now begins Örvar-Odds saga, and it is a great saga.

The narrative of survival

After proposing an analysis of *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* as narratives of survival, I then take into account intertwined literary and cultural factors that facilitate interpretation of the tales. They are: legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*) and genre, the mythical-heroic, oral tradition and eddic verse, genealogy and geography, medieval Icelandic *sagnaskemmtun* (storytelling entertainment), trolls and folklore, and heathen-Christian syncretism. In using the word narrative I also examine the parallel theme of entertainment.

If these medieval Icelandic narratives appeal and entertain, there must be something compelling about them which allows them to thrive in the telling and recording, which explains why the manuscripts were written and copied by clerics and learned laypeople, and which caused them to be distributed widely among farming households even into our age. In spite of their symbolic language of trolls and magic, *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* treat with some realism the challenge of living in a harsh landscape and the effort required to safeguard generations of a family such that medieval Icelanders would ask to hear these tales again. While these sagas can be read and interpreted on a variety of levels, for the purposes of my discussion here I wish to examine them as narratives of survival. With their many elements, including the mythical-heroic legacy they represent, their enduring motifs, their focus on the supernatural, and their humorous storytelling style, they address vital issues in an entertaining way.

Ketils saga hængs opens with a boy sitting by the fire in the kitchen at home. It closes with a depiction of a successful family man and community hero. In between is a tale of a person who rises to the occasion whenever the needs of others call on him to do so. *Gríms saga loðinkinna* continues the family story with new variations. In it a young couple faces supernatural challenges and the plot delves more deeply into the inner world of enchantment with encounters of an evil stepmother and cave trolls. The short saga forms a linking interval before the lengthy *Örvar-Odds saga*, the third in the family cycle of four, concluding with the later *Áns saga bogsveigis*, which together

comprise these *Hrafnistumannasögur* (Sagas of the Men, or People, of Ramsta) tied to Hrafnista or Ramsta(d), Namdalen, Norway. They are: *Ketils saga hængs* (The Saga of Ketill Salmon, or Trout), *Gríms saga loðinkinna* (The Saga of Grímr Hairy-Cheek), *Örvar-Odds saga* (The Saga of Arrow Oddr (Arrow-Point)), and *Áns saga bogsveigis* (The Saga of Án Bow-Bender). These stories have in common the nominal and tenuous genealogy of their principal characters but they nonetheless present us with distinct and unique literary examples. *Ketils saga hængs* is a humorous and magical legend with a dragon and trolls; *Gríms saga loðinkinna* is a genealogically-rich fairy tale in which male and female partners rely on each other to overcome a spell and establish their lives together; *Örvar-Odds saga* is a psychological epic of prophecy and pilgrimage; and *Áns saga bogsveigis* is a realistic, social critique and a tale of revenge against an evil king. The first two legendary sagas about the men of Hrafnista which are discussed here deal with these inner and outer worlds of personal and social survival. The narratives were popular, presumably because listeners and readers could identify with the particular reference made to surviving in the world while at the same time they could recognize or be entertained by the folkloric motifs presented in the storytelling. These narratives of survival, either read or recited, helped medieval Icelanders negotiate their places in the psychological and social landscapes.

Many legendary sagas are considered to be various bits of varying sources and narrative traditions somewhat cobbled together into a series of episodes. If *Ketils saga hængs* is viewed in this way, this can seem to be the case. If it is read as a narrative of survival, on the other hand, its careful composition becomes apparent. After establishing his family relationships as well as the fact that Ketill appears to be lazy, the saga depicts his first accomplishment, which is to help with the haying in an extraordinary way, such that he strains the resources of the farm. His next deed is to put down Björn the bully and his companions. This too is out of proportion because Ketill kills him and the others rush away in fear. In building interest in the plot, the narrative then presents Ketill's next feat, which is to slay a dragon. Already the tasks depicted display the various survival tactics a medieval citizen might be called upon to engage in: vital economic chores, power struggles and struggles for social standing, and dealing with natural and supernatural threats. The dragon in this setting represents an animal in the landscape as well as an otherworldly creature, two existential threats embodied in a

single figure. After these encounters Ketill spends time with his father and rests at home for a while.

When they go out to fish together, Hallbjörn challenges Ketill and then Ketill seems to tease his father by hesitating before ultimately tossing him overboard without inflicting lasting injury. Hallbjörn is impressed with Ketill's skill and control and sees hints of the qualities he longs for in his son. The next episode shows Ketill beating back the outlaws Hængr and Hrafn. Ketill is protecting the community by thwarting their troublemaking. It is mentioned that Ketill is eleven years old. In legendary saga literature this reflects an oral epoch preceding the one in which the sagas were written, indicating that Ketill is at an age of majority and that he is fully competent. The laws governing maturity and inheritance in medieval Iceland, such as *Grágás*, list the criteria for men in their mid-teens (Percivall 2008, 134-37). Saga literature in general refers to the early to mid-teens as coming-of-age in various capacities (Jón Viðar Sigurðsson 2008, 229-33). In this same sentence about Ketill's age, it is also mentioned that his relationship with his father improved.

As the plot unfolds, the threat of a famine is depicted. Ketill says that he doesn't want to sit by without being able to help. Hallbjörn is concerned about Ketill's safety but tells him about the region where he intended to fish. There Ketill discovers the giant Surtr's abhorrent stash of human meat and he dismantles everything. This is a symbolic act of heroism in which Ketill upholds the social and moral values of the community. At the same time he rids the world of yet another monster. The detailed description of the creature, Surtr, muttering to himself while creeping around the premises, his knowing supernaturally who did it, and even Ketill's audible slicing-off of his head: all these factors contribute to the entertaining quality of the narration. While it is clear that the unfolding of events is episodic, each challenge proves to be more than just a variation on a theme. There is intensification, for after stopping Surtr, Ketill faces trolls beginning with Kaldrani. To introduce this, there is another interlude with his father Hallbjörn in which the message about enjoying the comforts of home is repeated, as well as admonishments about Ketill's adventuring. The storyteller can be heard infusing humor into the narrative by telling about Ketill being a doctor intending to heal the wound he inflicts upon Kaldrani. Instead Ketill finishes him off. These sequences of intensification set up the dramatic and more complex plot elements of the saga.

Ketill is shipwrecked and guided by a whale who seems to have human attributes. This is suggestive of the trepidations of risky ventures and the sometimes unexpected assistance one receives from natural and supernatural forces. Here, it is Brúni, the Finn, or Sámi, or even giant or troll. Through his intervention, Ketill meets Hrafnhildr, through whom Grímr will come into the world. Ketill experiences love and community far away from home in a relaxed setting. While he is in the north for the winter he is given hospitality. This dwelling on farmsteads far from home also represents more than simply being a guest. It is a matter of surviving the winter. Then, in an unselfish gesture, Ketill dangerously sets out to confront Brúni's evil brother Gusir. In doing this, Ketill claims from him magical objects: the arrows Flaug, Hremsa, and Fífa, as well as the sword Dragvendill that is mentioned in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. The report of Ketill's fight with Gusir is an escalating scene in the action with its inclusion of eddic poetry. It illustrates a vivid engagement with a challenger, with wits matched in dialog coordinated with a choreographed duel. It is worth being reminded that the thread of the story is one of the hero Ketill being far from home on a mission to secure food for the family and community, thus helping others along the way, while freeing the world of dangers. It is entirely a narrative of survival with meaningful characters, objects, and a purposeful direction of plot.

When Ketill returns to Hrafnista he is visited by Hrafnhildr. Sagas are sometimes characterized as being matter-of-fact, without demonstrations of emotion. But this notion is unfounded. In *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* ample attention is given to the dimensions of the heart. The passage about Hrafnhildr and Ketill is poignant because it shows true personal warmth at odds with the social pressure to marry within one's community. It reveals the anxiety of coming to understand what one wants against what is expected of one for the good of others or simply because life sometimes takes unexpected directions. A hero, or a person listening to the story, can identify with the need to move forward in spite of suffering from unfulfilled longings. The section is amplified by Hallbjörn, the stern father figure, a half-troll himself, berating his son Ketill about loving a troll-woman. At this time a good match can turn on matters as seemingly base as breeding. Hallbjörn wanted Ketill to marry within the clan, as it were. For Ketill, personal ties are interdependent and complex and their son Grímr stays behind with his other family. Life goes on.

The climax of the saga deals with Ketill becoming established as a great chieftain while being continually beset by challenges to prove himself. Once Ketill is married, Hallbjörn dies and the focus shifts to the next generation. It appears Ketill is able to name his daughter after his beloved Hrafnhildr. Ketill takes the young Grímr on a journey during which he is frightened by his first encounter with a troll. Ketill is fulfilling the same parental and guiding role with his son that Hallbjörn before had performed with him. Characters are introduced along the way who will become instrumental to the plot. A challenge to the family comes when an undesired suitor, Áli, asks for Ketill's daughter Hrafnhildr. Ketill is obligated to accept a duel for refusing the forceful request because he has to uphold his daughter's—and his family's—honor. Áli, for his part, has to maintain his status as a man and a warrior. The description of the duel, with its poetic expressions and powerful blows, sets up the ultimate and defining conflict of a narrative of heroic survival. Once more a famine is mentioned, the household is in danger, and Ketill embarks on a physically impossible trek to secure provisions. The section is rich with geographical depiction, a lengthy verbal exchange with an eccentric troll, Forað, and a meaningful relationship with a helpful brother-in-arms, Böðmóðr. This generous recounting serves both to encapsulate the qualities of the saga collated thus far while regaling listeners with good storytelling through its reference to shapeshifting, witches, and a heathen berserker, Framarr. The final scene epitomizes heroic epic as a contest in verse and glorifies the creeds and deeds of the hero who acts on behalf of his people. The rich symbolism of the god Óðinn as an eagle, the flagging performance of the mythical sword, the exhaustion of the protagonist, and the stakes of the outcome would have spoken clearly to medieval listeners because it would have typified their conceptual world, reaffirmed collective values, and done so in a diverting and humorous way. It would have rehearsed the themes of survival while enlivening the experience. The tale ends with a satisfactory betrothal as well as with the legitimization of a legendary family.

The epic and saga of a family line embodying the values of survival continue with Grímr loðinkinni. This may be considered as bridging the gap between *Ketils saga hængs* and *Örvar-Odds saga*, yet it is not an entirely frivolous stepmother tale, for it applies the symbolic language of a good tale and touches on other themes listeners want to hear. It opens with the strong local chieftain characters Grímr and Haraldr and it also

introduces the bride Lofthæna and the scheming wife Grímhildr. There is a lack not only of his missing bride but also of food. Grímr has to set off in search of a solution to redress these urgent losses. He comes to an otherworldly place signaled by the uncanny ice storm. The story takes customary form with reference to troll-women and a conversation with them in verse. While supposedly taking place in the real world of Norway in a remote age, it at the same time invokes a dream world. The liminal setting between this world and the other allows for the transmission of messages through stories. It involves inner and outer survival and orienting oneself in life as it unfolds in the landscape and in the mind. There are invocations of the gods of Old Norse mythology and these are part of the ancient lore with which listeners would be familiar. Grímr engages in an action battle with trolls and goes into their cave. There is a strange scene of semi-naked trolls arrayed on the ground by the fire. After Grímr confronts these giants, he then fights with Hreiðarr over a beached whale. The whale is a significant supply of food and provisions and Hreiðarr is portrayed as a dishonorable competitor. Once he has revealed himself this way, he has to be dealt with. As in *Ketils saga hængs* humor is deployed in their exchange. The fight turns out to be brutal, however, and Grímr is left for dead.

This is where the bewitched Lofthæna enters the scene as a troll-woman and saves him. The style of the narrative can only induce wonder on the part of a listener. The great hero, the community leader, the powerful man Grímr, is snatched up under a tunic by a giantess girl and borne away to an unknown destination. One could ponder the irony and potential nuances of such a visual and symbolic sequence. For all the strength of representation of the male figure in older literature, here is a story in which a woman could be argued to be the heroine of the story, for without her agency the nominal protagonist could not function. Svanfríður Óskarsdóttir makes note of the fact that the true hero in *Gríms saga loðinkinna* is the woman Lofthæna because it is her aid that determines the outcome of the story (Svanfríður Óskarsdóttir 2008, 44-45). This sequence also plays out a variation of the troll-woman motif in which a king is made through the agency of a giantess. With roots in myth—the god Freyr courts the giantess Gerðr in *Skírnismál*—the pattern is that the hero visits a giantess, experiences an erotic relationship with her, and receives symbolic objects or gifts that serve to establish his kingship. The period in the wilderness represents his initiation (Røthe 2010, 135-37).

He will leave the giantess behind and wed another woman, as happens in *Ketils saga hængs*. In *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, rather than being from the north, Lofthæna is temporarily bound by magic as a giantess and permanently bound to Grímr as a human. Lofthæna and Grímr work together as a couple to survive. They save each other and in exile become confirmed emblematically as a couple. This couple forms a building block of the society back at home. And the family becomes engraved in the literary-historical record. It is legend and legend mediates the traces of real persons and events along with the myth and folklore that motivate and entertain listeners. Grímr and Lofthæna symbolize fundamental generational and sexual cooperation in moving life forward. That the story would include such a lengthy recollection of Grímhildr's curse serves to emphasize the requirement that the tale furnish the formula that accomplishes the work of the symbolic language of the psyche. Once the spell is broken and the couple is reunited they perform the logical task of taking vengeance on the witch. This does not mean that people are supposed to solve their problems with violence; rather, it represents confronting problems with courage. Further, this is often possible by enlisting the aid of others. People help people. This is what this sequence of Lofthæna and Grímr's trial suggests. And in this and in Grímr's later defense of his daughter, the tale displays emotion in saga literature. Once they overcome their challenge, as if by magic, the abundance returns to the land. Fish teem again in the bay and they are able to fulfill their mission and return home to help their friends and families. The narrative shows this by saying that it was as if he, or they, had returned from hell.

With insertions of related genealogy and history, the action continues in a duel with Sörkvir, who wants to marry Grímr's daughter Brynhildr. This brief saga includes a sample of eddic poetry characteristic of the genre and constitutes the climax of the tale. In it the values of defending one's kin and enabling one to choose the optimal course for oneself are pronounced. The conclusion of the saga reaffirms what was declared at the beginning, namely that Grímr was regarded as a great man and that he was master over his own affairs. It sets up the grand narrative of *Örvar-Odds saga*. For all its apparent fairy tale quality, and as a continuation of *Ketils saga hængs*, *Gríms saga loðinkinna* is still a narrative of survival. It is notable for the significant way it shows a man and a woman working together to build their lives together whatever

challenges besiege them. The otherworldly tones serve to transmit the themes and certainly to entertain.

The discussion up to this point has foregrounded the importance of survival as a theme. There are many narrative elements and features that work together to form entertaining stories of this sort. And there are riches to be interpreted in *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna*. The first of these riches is the somewhat artificial but useful generic category into which they have been classed.

Legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*) and genre

Legendary sagas or mythical-heroic sagas (*Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*) (sagas of ancient times of the northern lands) (Mitchell 1991, xii), are prose narratives in Old Norse-Icelandic based on oral tradition that deal with Norse mythology and Scandinavian culture before the settlement of Iceland around 870 (Simek and Hermann Pálsson 1987, 90-91). Norwegians were settling a new territory in Iceland, establishing a landowning society as opposed to a royal one, and navigating shifting religious beliefs. The tales were told on farms and performed at wealthy landowners' entertainments (see Hermann Pálsson 1962; Torfi Tulinius 2002, 64-65). They were written and read between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries (Mitchell 1991, xi). These sagas contain older, even archaic, mythic and folk motifs and ancient poetry from Germanic, Celtic and other lore (Buchholz 1980, 19; Torfi Tulinius 2002, 48-49). Even though the oral core of the material looks back to an earlier time and to Norse mythology, it is marked and colored by the medieval period in which it was written down. The narratives unite true and fantastic events and human and mythical beings. Taken down on parchment by Christian clerics and educated laymen, albeit at the behest of the aforementioned wealthy landowners, they display an ambivalent blend of paganism and Christianity. Despite being originally used to entertain, the legendary sagas are nevertheless a valuable source of information on the religion and history of early Scandinavia (Mitchell 1991, 40-41). They have inspired Wagner's operas and J. R. R. Tolkien's works. Few of these sagas have until now been translated or digitized but the situation in this regard is improving. The project "Stories for all Time: The Icelandic Fornaldarsögur" at the University of Copenhagen, sponsored by the Velux

Foundation, is digitizing the sagas and providing a scholarly apparatus.

The limits between various genres are indeed flexible and have led to a healthy and productive scholarly discussion (Quinn 2006). Prominent medieval Icelandic saga genres include the kings' sagas (*konungasögur*), the saints' and bishops' sagas (*heilagramannasögur*, *biskupasögur*), the sagas of Icelanders or family sagas (*Íslendingasögur*), the legendary or mythical-heroic sagas (*fornaldarsögur*), the knightly or chivalric sagas or romances—translated and indigenous (*riddarasögur*), and the post-classical sagas (*Síðbornar sögur*). Each of these purported types may involve a related type or subgenre such as other religious writings, contemporary sagas (*Samtíðarsögur*), or bridal quest romances (Kalinke 1990). Generally, individual elements may constitute a genre or a genre may become recognizable by the presence of particular features. At a basic level, generic clues, and even the time and place, let the listeners or readers know what to expect, among other things, whether they are dealing with fact or fiction (Torfi Tulinius 2002, 180). Science fiction is a genre that is extended by variations and innovations. Music, dance, theater, and art give generic indications: trio, bourrée, one-act, pastel. These are components that place artist and audience within the range of a particular type of experience. The experiences derived are still open to those who listen or watch. And maybe even because of this, over time the features of one genre are combined with another to form hybrids such as the later medieval Icelandic post-classical sagas which show clear aspects of the legendary saga, the romance, and the saga of Icelanders, among others. Their purpose seems to be more expressly entertainment, not without socio-political commentary, so that the content can come across as less reliably historical or sometimes even superficial. Some of these sagas, however, are well constructed and beautifully written. I mention them as a genre together with the legendary sagas in order to compare how the two are made up and how they function in a social and cultural context. I do so also because post-classical narrative is supposed to be composed partly of legendary sagas or grew out of them.

In drawing a distinction between post-classical saga writing and legendary fiction in their sociocultural aspects, I also distinguish generic hybrids with generic blends. As a genre that fuses, chiefly, *Íslendingasögur* (Sagas of Icelanders or family sagas), *riddarasögur* (knightly sagas or romances), and *fornaldarsögur* (legendary sagas), among others, the post-classical sagas are considered later writing, are more

intended to be a written medium, and are adapted to their political and cultural milieu. With their varied placements of folklore, episodes of revenge, and courtly settings, they comment on such matters as religious belief, the behavior of neighbors, or the relationship between Iceland and Norway. Many display considerable prosaic craft. A narrative such as *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts* (The Tale of Þorsteinn Ox-Foot) includes a variety of access points. The *Íslenzk fornrit* (Icelandic classical literature series) editions document name and place references so that some characters are revealed to be real, while some seem to have been selected from *Landnámabók* (The Book of Settlements) and inserted out of context, and others are simply invented. The resulting narratives appear less intended to recall the past and oral tradition and more intended to be written, however much they may continue to be read or recited in order to delight listeners. Some sagas such as *Víglundar saga* (The Saga of Víglundur) are well composed and represent a prose form under development. Other sagas such as *Flóamanna saga* (The Saga of the Men of Flói) and *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* (The Saga of Hávarðr of Ísafjörður) seem to be stylistic imitations put together primarily to amuse. *Flóamanna saga* includes Sturla Þórðarson's *Landnámabók*, religious writing, legendary battles with gods and ghosts, and a knightly style (Heizmann 1993, 199). *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings* presents undeveloped characters, insertions of verse fragments, undependable names and places, a conversion story, and a certain amount of legendary saga style. This may be in part due to an attempt to reconstruct an earlier missing version that is mentioned in *Landnámabók* (McCreesh 1993, 273).

Compared with the post-classical material, I find legendary sagas to be less overtly concerned with current events. They are not placed within a discrete time frame and are more a blend of numerous factors that formed over a longer time. One factor to be considered is that they emerge at the junction between oral and written culture and in Iceland continue to inhabit both spheres over several centuries. Other factors to be taken into account are that rather than taking explicit shape from existing generic streams, they coalesce from a plethora of influences. They merge a wealth of oral and written culture, myth and folklore, real and supernatural, poetry and prose, name and place, and heathen and Christian traditions. But these things can be said about the other medieval Icelandic genres as well. In recent research Daniel Sävborg has shown that in written form the post-classical sagas predate the legendary sagas and he has also shown how

they influenced them. He shows the motifs they have in common and even suggests that the interest in the fantastic could have given rise to the legendary sagas in written form. He leaves open the question of the obvious legendary-narrative phenomenon which flourished in oral form (Sävborg 2012, 323-49). And the legendary saga designation itself, *Fornaldar sögur Norðrlanda* = *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, was established by Carl Christian Rafn when he published the legendary sagas for the first time in Copenhagen in 1829-1830. This all goes to illustrate the slippery but operative role of genre. And it is these numerous facets within the legendary genre that I will continue to examine in the following sections, especially as they provide evidence of entertainment in its broader role of informing and edifying. I will also try to highlight how these several qualities merge to make the sagas about Ketill and Grímr narratives of survival.

The mythical-heroic

Nostalgia is not always in fashion but medieval Icelanders had an interest in their past in northern Europe before settling Iceland. And they retained a fascination for the old lore in their Christian society. Storytelling as entertainment accumulated themes from people's travels, pilgrimages, and battles abroad. Some content can be traced to other traditions in the migration of peoples and some find similarities in other cultures' practices. Völsung and Nibelung matter and also the legendary hero Ragnar Loðbrók come to mind. They resonate even today. Our male protagonists Ketill Hallbjörnsson and Grímr Ketilsson are recorded in historical sources but their deeds must have passed from mouth to ear. The mythical-heroic tradition is tragic, while in *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* the content is comic and the outcomes are exemplary. Over time information about them was combined with the entertaining narrative elements and historical figures and events became significantly altered. Thus, the communal threat of a beast might be transformed into a supernatural creature or a dragon, and the heroic slayer might be deified. The heroes were linked with the Old Norse myths in protean fashions.

Elves, dwarves, and giants reside in Germanic folklore. In Norse mythology the giant Ýmir is the first life form (e.g., *Völuspá*, st. 3; *Gylfaginning*, ch. 4), and gods made the landscape from his body (*Vafþrúðnismál*, st. 21, *Grímnismál*, st. 40). Male

and female beings also issued from his body, engendering frost giants (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 4-5) (Røthe 2010, 108; Motz 1993, 622). The gods descended from the giantess Bestla (*Gylfaginning*, ch. 5), the mother of the god Óðinn, and Bestla is the ancestress of all the gods (*Gylfaginning* ch. 5); Óðinn's wife Jörð (Earth) was the mother of Þórr (*Gylfaginning* ch. 6) (Motz 1987, 467). Giants' daughters are courted for marriage by gods (such as Freyr and Gerðr in *Skírnismál*, st. 41). The gods obtain important assets from the giants, such as the mead of poetry (*Skáldskaparmál*, chs. 4-6). In the end-time narrative of Norse mythology, the earth will be destroyed in war and a conflagration initiated by the fire giant Surtr (*Völuspá*, sts. 52-57) before the dawn of a new creation. Until then, Þórr defends the gods with his hammer *Mjölnir* in their continual battle against the giants who threaten life (*Hárbarðsljóð*, st. 23, *Þrymskviða*, st. 18) (Motz 1993, 622). This gives one an idea of the mythic aspect underlying the legendary sagas.

The myth fragments are represented through the filter of the particular age that uses them and come to mean something different in medieval Iceland and in the saga form (Røthe 2010, 9-10). Although eddic verses are quoted, they are at a remove from the recitation or even chanting of heroic epics some hundreds of years earlier in Scandinavia. A Danish or Swedish story about Beowulf that takes shape in an Anglo-Saxon narrative art might communicate a warrior ethic and a human struggle with imperceptible yet formidable powers not really intending to portray a historical figure or to do so accurately. So, too, films or comic books about Norse gods or television programs that revisit viking times in supposed historic detail express contemporary concerns beyond what actually can be retrieved from the era depicted. So the mythical-heroic material with roots in Germanic tradition finds expression in medieval narrative and reveals something about the age in which it is written. Among many literary and cultural motivations, medieval Icelanders who were being governed from Norway were looking back with fondness at an age of accomplishment on a continent they had left behind (Mitchell 1991, 132). They were also generating fabulous tales for their own edification and entertainment. However much clerics and scribes tolerated, recorded, enjoyed, or edited the material, Annette Lassen reminds us that we will never know the true mythic material in its pre-Christian form. And yet it is notable that Óðinn as a mythological example is more frequent and more varied in the legendary saga corpus (Lassen 2003, 215, 216). Thus it seems as if the legendary fiction informs us more

about a view of mythology and less about the actual time and the people who preserved it up until that point.

Peter Buchholz, using an approach that emphasizes oral tradition going back to archaic times, emphasizes the role of extraordinary people and their accomplishments as the focus of interest in the saga narratives. He tries to bring the past to life. He explains how although the extraordinary character only represented a link in a tightly connected, supernaturally sanctioned order of being, the individual, especially the individual from the more privileged levels of society, was able within this order to make a name for himself that subsequently would be widely mentioned after his death. Individuals, sons of gods and cultural heroes, were the ones who facilitated human existence and made it bearable. Buchholz imagines how they lighted fires, cleared acreage, or fabricated bows and arrows. They tamed horses and healed illnesses. The repetition of such original feats recited about a famous person is not really what such great deeds represented to people. It was rather their being present in cases of danger or risk that led to their success and therefore the regard and fame in which they were held. In the archaic view of things, not every person could achieve great deeds. Certain qualities were necessary, qualities which one either possessed from birth or could acquire. A fundamental concept in Old Icelandic saga literature held that in certain family lines, such as that of the Hrafnista people, not only superior physical and mental abilities could be inherited but also supernatural ones, such as the ability to generate a fair wind for sailing or the ability to shapeshift, as in *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, especially when those who shapeshifted appeared as giants. It was also possible to inherit knowledge of magical practices from a foster mother or a beloved giant troll-woman, as can be seen in these same sagas. The views expressed here by Buchholz are not about unsuccessful modern-day attempts to explain the inexplicable in oral lore but rather about attempts to come more to terms with a form of existence that has predominated throughout human history but which today is only present in vestigial form; a form of experience in which the supernatural was self-evident (Buchholz 1980, 79).

In a scholarly critique, Vésteinn Ólason and Oskar Bandle find that Buchholz overstates his case not only in terms of the stages of orality and the development of the legendary saga (Vésteinn Ólason 1994, 125-26) but also with respect to the scope and continuity of the archaic and shamanistic elements which he sees (Bandle 1988, 199).

For his part Vésteinn Ólason acknowledges that Buchholz's approach is instructive and Bandle finds common ground about the basis of oral tradition in the formation of legendary sagas. I invoke Peter Buchholz because his perspective is useful in indentifying the sociocultural heritage as it came to be fused with tale elements. He tries carefully to reconstruct the context in which the mythical-heroic operated. He has studied shamanic cultural traces as they relate to Sámi or magical references in the legendary sagas. And he has investigated the oral tradition underneath the legendary fiction. Another scholar who breathes life into the myths in the context of medieval Icelandic saga writing is Margaret Clunies Ross (see Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, 1994, 1998). These archaic remnants, then the medieval manuscripts, and now online resources are all part of the long tradition of oral epics about heroes and how they are preserved and transmitted over time. Having looked at the mythical-heroic aspects of the sagas, I inquire into their basis in oral tradition.

Oral tradition and eddic verse

Many points can be made in any parsing of oral tradition, for there is little real access to an accurate understanding of an oral performance in an ancient tradition. Where medieval Iceland is concerned, the oral tradition primarily referred to here deals more with recitations of things written down. The oral tradition that led to these things being written down is far more elusive. Lawspeakers had to memorize entire sections of the law that were pronounced over a period of three years at the meetings of the Icelandic *Alþingi* (annual assembly) every summer. Similarly, there is an understanding that many of the songs, verses, and legends told in stories were comprised of elements that a teller had in repertoire in a pre-literary culture. And well into the medieval period Icelanders excelled as court poets for Norwegian and Danish kings improvising and declaiming skaldic poetry. For a time runic carving and arts were practiced in addition to the learned Latin writing in the Scandinavian north. In this respect memory and linguistic aptitude came to be acclaimed along with a knowledge of traditions (Buchholz 1980, 35).

Another aspect to be considered in the oral composition of tales is what Margaret Clunies Ross refers to as “narrative icebergs” (1994, 25), or what Carol

Clover calls the “immanent saga” (1985, 293; 1986, 24). Margaret Clunies Ross mentions that a literary motif in a text could suggest to an audience another or larger narrative they would already be familiar with. Carol Clover considers the comparative method of contemporary storytellers and applies it to medieval Icelandic literature. She explains that there are parts of a larger whole and that such parts could be used in varying sequences or episodes in a telling and the audience would be aware of the larger story. The audience would be aware of a larger or more comprehensive story even if all or if not all of it were recited. Of course, she notes, the entirety of the narrative would reside in the mind of the teller (Clover 1986, 36). Related to this is the oral formulaic theory developed by Milman Parry and Albert Bates Lord, which showed that there were cores of material or verse forms that were brought to bear on given oral performances. Gísli Sigurðsson has treated this topic from a comparative perspective and applied it to medieval Icelandic saga writing, at the same time enlivening it with an understanding about the complex relationship between the tale and the text in an interdisciplinary dimension (Gísli Sigurðsson 2004). When performances are recorded or written down, they become fixed and even canonized as literature. An example of this is the poetic *Edda* preserved in the manuscript *Konungsbók (Codex Regius, (Royal Book))* (see *Eddukvæði* 2014). Gísli Sigurðsson stresses the nature of new research and our understanding of oral tradition (Gísli Sigurðsson 2013). And Terry Gunnell has reminded scholars of the performative basis of this poetic corpus (Gunnell 1995, 1999, 2013).

Scholars came to prize the textual tradition to such an extent that the written form and even the manuscript became overemphasized at the expense of an understanding of the oral legacy. Even given the extant textual examples we have to wonder what did not come down to us, what was burned, rotted, or was discarded. *Ketils saga haengs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* contain eddic poetry. This suggests oral tradition but it doesn't guarantee this as verses may have been added subsequently. Nonetheless we can compare them to poems in the *Eddas* that are believed to be part of this oral heritage. Gísli Sigurðsson speaks of the common Germanic oral background in which it was not likely there was an original poem but only a continuity of recitation. Oral tradition was the main medium of the transmission of knowledge and it was inevitably altered when it was restructured in written form. What is lost is the dynamic

of the exchange between the performer and the audience that would underlie a particular performance in a particular place and time. There is interchange between this type of experience and the written form we have today (Gísli Sigurðsson 2013, 45-47, 49, 58). Terry Gunnell attempts to remind us of the importance of performance practice. Such eddic poetry was produced for aural reception and was not meant to be desiccated in writing and read; it was meant to be performed. Terry Gunnell explicates by way of the particular features of alliteration and meter the effects that a performer might have communicated based on the meaning of the verses. The verses carried sound and rhythm and facilitated an experience for listeners. The performer assumed a certain character with certain facial expressions and gestures. Smoke and shadows in the hall would contribute to the atmosphere. The assembled would have been drinking. Some might sense ghosts present in this altered state, in this state of mind distinct from daily reality, in this diversion. When this experience is translated into writing, a great deal is lost. When it is translated into another language, the significance of the metrical and aural craft is also lost. Gunnell likens it to musical notation in which we see ink spots on a page but hear no music (Gunnell 2013, 65-73). By the time medieval Icelanders listened to sagas about Ketill and Grímr in *sagnaskemmtun* (storytelling entertainment), they were likely removed from this type of experience, as the tale was recited to them or read to them from a manuscript. The verse tradition in these sagas issues from this oral legacy.

Skaldic poetry is usually by known poets, is often praise poetry in courtly meter (*dróttkvætt*), uses representational *heiti* (names) and metaphorical kennings with internal alliterate and assonant rhyme schemes. Eddic poetry is usually by unattributed poets, is mostly in the *fornyrðislag* (old word or saw) meter, and is more direct in conveying meaning with fewer circumlocutions. In this prosimetric form of the legendary sagas, the verses most often represent direct speech when set against the prose. Margaret Clunies Ross specifies monologs and dialogs among characters. While it was often assumed that prose grew from existing eddic verse, it is more likely that they were used in combination. There are prose passages in the poetic *Edda* and later compilers of legendary sagas would include new verse to complete a passage (Clunies Ross 2012, 122, 126, 132). These are general observations. There is a variety of meters used in eddic and skaldic poetry and these meters are found in both legendary and

historical fiction. While an oral poetic heritage can clearly be perceived behind these written narratives when they were being recorded, Margaret Clunies Ross aptly summarizes the prosimetrum in the legendary sagas as “poetic innovation” and “prose amplification” (Clunies Ross 2012, 135).

Eddic verses are assumed to be older than the prose text in which they are embedded. Yet at the same time tellers or scribes had the option of enhancing the narration, including by the invention of new verses. This would not be different from the earlier oral tradition of improvising verses to suit narrative needs and occasions (Buchholz 1980, 74-76). The received inventory would only be a part of the numerous influences that would come to make up the legendary saga genre, which includes Celtic elements (see Gísli Sigurðsson 2000), genealogies, historical events, folk motifs, tale types, and Norse mythology, to name some examples. One might imagine an animated teller, portraying a character as the register of the narration changes together with the recitation of the poetic verses compared with the performance of the prose passages (Buchholz 1980, 69-70). A feature of the eddic verse in *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* is the exchange of insults or challenges between characters. Along with the code of honor in medieval northern society, insults, especially those that call into question one’s manliness, were a punishable offense (Sørensen 1983). Similar to flyting in Old English tradition, *senna*, which means chatter, bickering, or an exchange or bandying of words, recalls eddic forms such as the god Loki’s insulting of the pantheon of Norse gods in the poem *Lokasenna*. This selection is representative, particularly because the provocation is sexual. In *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* the exchanges take place between heroes or between people and trolls. They whet their rhetorical weapons and provoke each other before a battle. This is in the long tradition of the improvised poetry of wits such as the insult contests of The Dozens or rapping in hip hop music. Fighting is a form of survival and a good fight makes for successful entertainment.

The most well-known repository of eddic poetry is the poetic *Edda*. This is to be distinguished from Snorri Sturluson’s prose *Edda*. Verses that were collated from a variety of other eddic sources, such as legendary sagas, are found in *Eddica Minora* by Andreas Heusler and Wilhelm Ranisch (1903). In this literature the use of the old meters such as *fornyrðislag* instantly cues listeners to the fact that a legendary past is

being conjured up (Clunies Ross 2012, 125). *Ljóðaháttir* (verse, charm, or spell meter) represents direct, or first-person, speech (Gunnell 2013, 73). Margaret Clunies Ross explains that such poetry has the function of giving opinions as well as commenting on the action that has occurred or is going on in the narrative (Clunies Ross 2012, 129). After two strikes against Framarr, Ketill engages in a dialog with Dragvendill the sword, asking why it hesitates. This works as a dramatic pause in the action, when the listener is anticipating the outcome of a significant duel. Heusler and Ranisch shed light on the *sennur* or insult sequences that are in Eddic form and outline four episodes: Ketill and Gusir, Ketill and Forað, Ketill and Framarr, and Grímr and Feima. Heusler and Ranisch discuss potential inventions in the sequences and inconsistencies within the expected patterns. Concerning the exchange with Gusir, which is a lengthy one, Heusler and Ranisch emphasize the motif of the hero slaying a ruler and thereby winning the kingdom for the brother of the slain, in this case Brúni. Another motif is the acquisition of a weapon by an advisor, usually a giantess, in this case also Brúni, helping Ketill additionally by taking the form of the whale. In fact Ketill acquired the arrows from Gusir. He received a bow and arrows from Brúni before he set out, however the legendary magical arrows Flaug, Hremsa, and Fífa, and the sword Dragvendill he took from the fallen Gusir. The lines of the Gusir verses in most instances are a regular four syllables and there are also *ljóðaháttir* verses. Regarding the exchange between Ketill and the ogress, Heusler and Ranisch point to differences in the manuscripts as to how the action concludes. In one, a prose question by Ketill yields a stanzaic answer in irregular and fragmented *dróttkvætt* (courtly meter), a skaldic meter. The body of the verse, although irregular, is generally in *ljóðaháttir*. In the section involving Ketill and Framarr, Heusler and Ranisch bring up the note in the *Möðruvallabók* manuscript of *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* that mentions Ketill and his sword Dragvendill in connection with its acquisition by Egill from Arinbjörn, which may be an attempt to reinforce the historicity of Ketill. The information may have been interpolated into the later *Ketils saga haenges* manuscript. He refers to the deteriorated elements of *ljóðaháttir* in the first verses and to the irregular *málháttir* (loosely, speaking meter) in the remaining ones (7-14). In addition to the interest of Ketill engaging in dialog with his sword, there is Framarr's address to the eagle as the god Óðinn (Heusler and Ranisch

1903, LXIX-LXXV). The old verse forms recalled the past but they also reflected adaptation and ingenuity in the way they were used in the later prose.

This section has attempted to impart an understanding of the structures and roles of oral practice that passed on the memory of past attempts to survive, purposely doing so in an entertaining format. The next section shows how name and place performed a similar role in the written media.

Genealogy and geography

When Iceland was being settled, it was by landowning chieftains and not kings. They were leaving behind power-hungry authority in Norway in search of autonomy and sustenance in a new land. A new arrangement of leadership was taking hold and the alteration of the stories offered an opportunity for the sponsors of a given entertainment to establish their identity through tales. It also struck a chord with listeners who were transitioning, the immigrants themselves, to a new life in a new land by recalling familiar geographic and dynastic references in the narration. Genealogy and geography were structures around which the past could be reconstructed. People and characters were situated in the plot and linked to current action. Kinship mattered in reconstructing this past. The events were not necessarily accurate; they were handed down orally, they informed narrative, and they were affected by political and social considerations (Callow 2006, 297-303). Torfi Tulinius explains that people could demonstrate that they descended from a noble line, they could make administrative and land claims, and they could put themselves on a par with the ecclesiastical and ruling class abroad (Torfi Tulinius 2002, 45). Genealogy as part of the literature and even the use of the literature itself represented an elite undertaking especially when it was exercised at social gatherings (Torfi Tulinius 2002, 59-60).

Some of the legendary sagas speak of men whom Icelanders counted among their kin, whether these bona fide heroes really lived or not. It is not improbable that some lineages would be connected to kings, champions, even gods, after they were immortalized in the sagas. It might be more readily the case that saga authors generally claimed they were writing about the real forefathers of Icelanders and as a result the genealogical record would be older and more original than the written saga (Hermann

Pálsson 1962, 117). Those savvy in genealogy preserved and kept alive the memory of the famous forefathers of chieftains and other farmers. And this is basically the core of the forefather sagas such as *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar* and similarly *Gríms saga loðinkinna* and *Áns saga bogsveigis* because Icelandic families will have been traced to these people before the sagas were composed (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 117). To Grímr and Án were traced the Icelandic settlement families of Þórir snepill (Flap) Ketilsson, Án rauðfeldr (Red-Cloak) Grímsson and those of *Vatnsdæla saga*. Some settlers were said to have traced their family to Ragnar loðbrók. Because of the inaccurate recording of such time these genealogical records are doubtful. Also because the lineages traced between Ragnar and settlers are generally too numerous (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 118). Genealogy in the sagas of Icelanders is not always reliable, nor are the place names. It was less intentional and more likely to be the result of ignorance or negligence. However, it is understood that an author would also want to emphasize certain things to achieve good storytelling effects (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 139). Accurate or not, the genealogies are evidence of the staying power of generations in a new country.

Concerning the main characters in *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, nine of the original settlers in Iceland were from Hrafnista, Norway, according to *Landnámabók*. And if the families were prominent in Hrafnista, it then suggests preservation of this information in previous oral tradition (Vésteinn Ólason 1994, 107; Hermann Pálsson 2002, 31). Ketill hængr (Salmon) and Grímr loðinkinni (Hairy-Cheek) also appear in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* as father and son, dwelling in Hrafnista and ancestors of early settlers of Iceland. In *Landnámabók* versions they are documented as half-troll and hairy-cheek. This indicates descent from an animal or non-human beings and is transmitted by way of oral tradition (Martínez-Pizarro 1976-77, 278). Egill's grandfather was Kveld-Úlfr (Evening-Wolf) who was the son of Hallbjörn half-troll's sister Hallbera. This relationship is then used to explain Egill's dark and fiendish berserker character (Røthe 2010, 143:612). In addition to political motivations, people expressed an interest in the past and this type of acquisition of knowledge was encouraged (Torfi Tulinius 2002, 66-67). People were not only interested in searching for their ancestry but pains were also taken to promote the knowledge about ancient times, and genealogy was used to serve *sagnaskemmtun*

(Hermann Pálsson 1962, 118-19). It did so because it was this medium that conserved essential personal and national identity.

In terms of geography, Ketill and Grímr undertake their treks north because it is vitally necessary to obtain food. Famine becomes the reason for setting out on an adventurous and danger-filled journey (Hermann Pálsson 2002, 24). The primal challenge of contending with the natural world was one the Icelanders always faced and this is reflected in the tales (Vésteinn Ólason 1994, 114). As if the scenes in *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* of shipwrecks and snowstorms weren't enough, fighting monsters in the landscape could signify coping with that landscape. These naturalistic sagas described scenes of rural activity and inevitable violent acts and injustice. Destructive forces continually imposed themselves and disturbed the peaceful pattern of daily life (Hermann Pálsson 2002, 17). The heroes of Hrafnista then became defenders and mediators on the borderline between the civilized society in the south and the wilderness of the north (Vésteinn Ólason 1994, 109-11). As half human and half giant, their strength was supernatural, they were intermediaries between human beings and supernatural forces, and Icelanders descend from them (Svanfríður Óskarsdóttir 2008, 122). So it can be seen not only that genealogy and geography play a decisive role in composing effective stories but also that these stories would speak directly to the inner and outer realities of the people who received them, thus capturing their attention.

Medieval Icelandic *sagnaskemmtun* (storytelling entertainment)

For centuries, beginning in the early twelfth century, sagas were read aloud in aristocratic settings or on farms as a pastime for householders and guests (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 14). And the sagas were composed precisely with this in mind; the reading and writing of them was inseparable for they were in constant demand by listeners so sagas were continually being composed (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 15). They were in many cases commissioned by landowning chieftains or aristocrats and taken down on parchment and curated by clerics or able laypeople. Worn and smoke-grayed manuscripts would be passed from one farm to the next or content was retained in memory by storytellers. Iceland came to be distinguished for its growing and significant literature and Icelanders were also prized in Norwegian and other Scandinavian courts

as poets and storytellers. The sagas imparted knowledge and entertainment in equal measure. The information could consist of genealogy, customs, the recounting of events, and ancient lore from numerous sources, made entertaining and popular (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 99, 107). The sagas had a basis in oral tradition, and in oral and written form they were a way of passing on and preserving the old verse and prose forms (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 114). They were marked by a respect for traditions, recalling the acts of the chieftains and inspiring listeners to maintain similar bearing in their own lives. The sagas recorded times that stretched back even to the age of the gods and from whom some families claimed descent. They inspired people not just by maintaining tradition but also by reminding them of their place in society. Every level of society had access to such information through the sagas. Because Iceland's local authority was made up more of farmers than aristocrats, some of the stories challenged powerful and unjust figures. Hence we have several examples of outlaw heroes who were brave and accepted the consequences of their actions (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 101-04). Vésteinn Ólason provides a description of the types of heroes encountered in the stories as well as of the type of reception that could be expected of the listeners: "When Icelanders started to write down their tales as sagas this was in the beginning done by or for people who, although they belonged to the ruling class of society, were directly dependent upon natural resources in the same way as poorer members of the community" (Vésteinn Ólason 1994, 124).

There was, however, a recognition of how little access one had in an oral narrative art to sources. So the skalds would keep the basic cores of the sagas but augment them as best they could using their available skills and story material (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 114, 127-28, 138). The compilers of the sagas, as with other storytelling artists, obeyed certain rules about the treatment of material. An established core of the saga might not be changed but the storytellers had some liberty. They might augment character development, invent conversations, or expand on events (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 116). The so-called authors were responsive to the need for saga entertainment (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 119). Some sagas lay stress on their historicity, some delivered a message, yet all provided enjoyment. So different sagas came about with different intentions and aimed at differing audiences. This was the medium by which people who did not have access to learning could obtain information. They could

hear about the past, learn of the world across the sea, and absorb views on life. The main attribute was the role *sagnaskemmtun* (storytelling entertainment) had in the consciousness of a nation. Entertainment nonetheless predominated over the presentation of information (Hermann Pálsson 1962, 162-65).

In supposed succession to the tradition of *sagnaskemmtun* was *kvöldvaka*. It means “evening vigil” and designated evening entertainment on Icelandic farms, especially around the nineteenth century. It is not exactly clear historically to what extent it continues *sagnaskemmtun* as a tradition or concept. It does, however, offer clues to earlier Icelandic culture (see Magnús Gíslason 1977). In the wintertime people associated with a farm would gather to accomplish such tasks as knitting or producing sellable items while listening to the recitation of stories, the singing of songs, or the reading of religious works. The lighting of the lamp in the sitting room was the signal that the gathering was initiated. Such a gathering represented economic, intellectual, and social activity, bringing different levels of society together in a cooperative setting. Owners and workers, children and the elderly, and guests would come together. This reflects, over time, the customs of a poor and remote island nation with a strong sense of national identity, a culture that was less stratified socially and in which communication and cooperation were integral to survival. These moments of visiting, reading, and working together were important opportunities for acquiring knowledge and information, just as the medieval compilers of stories and manuscripts intended them to be. Certainly in this context, as then, the objective purpose was to provide entertainment (see also Olson 1982), although the activities that occurred simultaneously were necessary for survival.

This oral tradition would later include primarily *rímur*, loosely meaning rhyme, a term which refers to an Icelandic ballad form with its own metrical structure. Originating in the medieval period, *rímur* were prominent up until 1600 and beyond and were sung or recited during farm work or at the *kvöldvaka*. The stanzaic verses varied in rhyme scheme and were composed in a squared meter, *ferskeytt*, that resembled Latin hymns. The most popular subject matter was the legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*) and knightly romances (*riddarasögur*). Adept practitioners contributed more complicated metrical forms and poetic content. Although an Icelandic innovation, the roots of the

form extend back to Scandinavian and European balladry and German medieval poetry (Hughes 2005, 205-22).

It was in this medieval Icelandic setting that *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* were written, recited, read, and enjoyed. People would gather in farmsteads to work wool or repair tools and hear stories about ancestors and their achievements back in Norway. When Ketill and Grímr fought trolls the story matter would imitate the mythological patterns of the relationships between the gods and the giants as might be familiar to listeners from a recitation of a mythological eddic verse which had perhaps been heard many times. When farmers traveled in bad weather because a failed season had struck their land, listeners understood because they too were trying to cultivate a life in Iceland. They were also concerned about successful husbandry and supplies for the winter. Without highly formalized political structures, such as were established in other places, the local people of Iceland responded to cues in the stories about confronting dishonorable characters and maintaining order among neighbors. Because *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* aimed to furnish enjoyment as well as content, people would relish accounts of a father and son verbalizing and roughhousing on a fishing trip and they would take pleasure in a supernatural love story between a farmer and a troll-woman. Folklore and trolls were a potent substance for storytelling.

Trolls and folklore

When giants are portrayed in the legendary sagas, they are often simultaneously referred to as trolls. They live in caves and are closely tied to the local, natural landscape, usually one of mountains, rocks, snow, and ice (Mutz 1987, 464). They are sometimes regarded as representing the more chaotic aspects of nature such as the wilderness into which Ketill and Grímr venture. There are many names for supernatural beings in Scandinavian and Nordic folklore and in later literature the terms come to be conflated in meaning (Holsbøvåg 2006, 13-14, 164-65). A giant or dragon may just mean a monster that has to be destroyed (Kroesen 1996, 59-60). The hero, in line with the gods, is supposed to bring order to chaos so as to maintain community life. In folklore some people appease the natural spirits, exchange gifts and cooperate with them, and others find it necessary to rid the landscape of them. John McKinnell

examines the psychology of the motif of the helpful giantess as a pseudo-mother, recalling the mythic roots in *Þórsdrápa* concerning Þórr and Gríðr, and in *Hymiskviða*, concerning the giantess. In these myths and other stories, and as variations on a pattern, the powerful giantesses, like mothers, help the heroes to become men, giving them magical gifts and moral support (McKinnell 2005, 181-196). Indeed, a dual depiction of these beings in legendary sagas involves either a young hero's encounter with a giant and a love relation with his daughter, as in *Hálfðanar saga Brönufóstra* [*Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* 1954, IV:287-318], or a battle against a vicious monster, whom the adventurer must quash (Mötz 1993, 622). So following on examples in Norse mythology there are two aspects which can be defined: one grotesque and terrifying (Mötz 1987, 467-68), cannibalistic and abject (see Acker 2006), the other, loving and helpful, a supernatural guide, indispensable to success (Mötz 1987, 473).

Another characteristic trait of giant forms in legendary sagas is that they are linked with the Sámi people, often such that they descend from them or enter into a marriage with the Sámi (Røthe 2010, 104, 144). The giantesses can suggest the northern landscape says Gunnhild Røthe. She observes that the description of Hrafnhildr and her wide giant-face symbolizes Norway as it is rendered in the poem *Hákonardrápa* when it refers to Óðinn's broadfaced bride. Further, she draws the connection between Ketill's slaying of the dragon and the god Þórr who overcomes the Midgard serpent. It rehearses in a new guise the depiction of a hero who battles giant forces in nature (Røthe 2010, 143-47). These references also link up with the mythic background as well as offering new nuances of meaning in the legendary sagas.

As with most of the topics I have covered here, there is a worthwhile scholarly debate on this topic. Katja Schulz takes the view that the apparent male dominance gets turned on its head where the giantess dominates the action such as in erotic encounters, in existential need, and in the mastery of the natural environment. Morality is not black and white. The man is saved from death, the woman is released from her giantness. There is not a consistent subordination of the feminine (Schulz 2004, 185-86). Helga Kress offers a different view: "In Old Norse literature, giantesses pose a great challenge to the heroes' masculinity. Metaphorically the female as giant reveals male fear of a female power that is bigger and stronger than the men themselves. In the giantesses, nature and woman come together, and the hero has to conquer both" (Helga Kress 2002,

84). Lotte Motz counters: “It is my opinion that we must reconsider the traditional view which sees giantesses and female trolls customarily as demons and ogres—as the ferocious enemies of gods and men. The power wielded by giantesses was employed as frequently for the benefit of gods and men as for their destruction—even though the race of which they are a part often stands in conflict with the ruling gods” (Motz 1987, 474). Hilda Ellis seems to mediate between these two viewpoints when she writes: “It seems possible that there is something in common between this conception and the motif of a lovely woman disguised as a hideous troll or giant, which occurs so often in the *Fornaldar Sögur*. The woman under such an enchantment has usually to be embraced before her true shape can be discovered, while even those giantesses who do not actually change their shape generally introduce themselves in a ferocious and threatening manner, in contrast with their later treatment of the hero” (Ellis 1941, 74).

Gríms saga loðinkinna is built upon the stepmother motif. It is revealed that the stepmother Grímhildr has spitefully put a spell on Lofthæna. She is changed into a hideous troll and the only way she can be saved is for a human man to do three things: to let her save his life, to kiss her, and to sleep in the same bed with her. Such spells are a recurring motif in Icelandic literature and in the legendary sagas. The most common type, Aarne-Thompson tale type 556 (Stepmother variations), 728 (934 E) (The Magic Ball of Thread) (Thompson 1961, 201, 330), was found in the oldest Icelandic tales and was so widely distributed that it survived until recent times. The type that occurs in *Gríms saga loðinkinna* cannot be identified among the motifs listed. The most common type of spell (*álög*) has to do with transformation into an ugly giant, animal or monster. There is the dangerous mission (*forsending*), or supernatural task to be accomplished, sometimes tied up in the spells, and here Grímr and Lofthæna help each other. There is the task and then the release from the spell. These are paralleled in the Celtic *geasa* seen in Aarne-Thompson tale type 556 II (Curse and Countercurse) (Thompson 1961, 201) (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, XXIX-XXXIII).

The stepmother motif or the relationship to the giantess allows for working out of a host of sexual tensions and taboos that normally cannot be exercised in society (Schulz 2004, 197; Glauser 1983, 188). Whether personal, political, or ideological, the stories allowed one to address hopes and tensions that couldn't be discussed openly, especially because they were framed long ago and far away in a fictional or pre-

Christian setting (Torfi Tulinius 2002, 185-86, 227). So the example of the love relationship between a man and a giantess is a passing phase of initiation for the hero; he is equipped with magical objects, and it prepares him for finding his life partner. It is an outsider taboo relationship (Schulz 2004, 200; Røthe 2010, 133-35). The numerous traces in the legendary sagas of shapeshifting, of spirit-world journeys, and of the ragings of berserkers indicate of the ancientness of the stories and form part of the narrative inventory (Buchholz 1980, 95-96). The basic elements were easily imitated and propagated, and stimulated quite a listenership. Further, practices such as burning an animal skin after having inhabited it, after undergoing a shapeshifting experience, as happens in *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, reflected a reality in the practices of ancient magic (Buchholz 1980, 96).

The *kolbíttr* is the ashlad, the cinderfella, or male Cinderella, who seems lazy or foolish until he is tested. And then he exceeds every expectation of the hero. As seen in *Ketils saga hængs*, he is close to his mother but is at odds with his father. He remains in the kitchen, presumably also because it is the warmest spot in the dwelling. He avoids the company of the other young men (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2005, 2009). Although there are particular periods of initiation and rites of passage, there appears to be a ritualistic aspect to every heroic encounter. The hero reenacts the original impulse of creation, of seeking order over chaos, or recalls the first symbolic battle in which he represents the family or community, upholding tribal values in a struggle to survive (Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2009, 246-247).

Ketils saga hængs and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* show signs of “The Bear’s Son” tale type, also referred to as “The Three Stolen Princesses” in AT 301 (Thompson 1961), commonly said to be related to the Grendel episode in *Beowulf*. It was called Bear’s Son because of supposed bear characteristics in *Beowulf*. The name Bee-Wolf is a kenning for bear, or berserker, meaning were-bear or bear shirt. The etymology is uncertain. Bjarki as ‘little bear’ may be more mythical-heroic (Stitt 1992, 194). A sample of the pattern reveals bear-like attributes: “A1. The hero born of the union of a human being and an animal, most often a bear. Later variants present the non-human parent as a giant(ess) or a troll. A2. The hero retains a trait of the non-human parent: animal ears, paws, or an animal head” (Martínez-Pizarro 1976-77, 266). Half-trolls like Grímr would issue from a Norwegian, human father, and a Sámi, Finn, or troll mother,

and retain an identifying feature such as Grímr loðinkinni does. The tales use reliable sequences of motifs and constitute a tale type (Stitt 1992, 19). But such as they appear in *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna* they are fragmentary or derivative. Both heroes enter a lair or cave and fight a monster but they do not obtain any treasure or rescue a princess, per se. Nevertheless listeners might recognize a variation on the theme.

Originally identified in 1910 by Friedrich Panzer, Peter Jorgensen and Joaquín Martínez-Pizarro in separate projects saw the two-troll variant of this tale type that made the medieval Icelandic manifestations clearer (Stitt 1992, 21). The two-troll variant involves a single battle which is a tussle with a male monster who is fatally wounded and flees to his cave and another battle in which the hero follows the monster's tracks and goes into the underground lair to challenge the female (Jorgensen, 1975 [35]:2). The tale type shows variants in Germanic, Romance, Slavic, and Eastern folk literature and "describes the hero's victorious struggle with a demon in its subterranean lair" as well as "the hero's further adventures trying to leave the lair and to rescue the princess and the demon's treasure from the hands of his disloyal comrade(s)" (Martínez-Pizarro 1976-77, 265). J. Michael Stitt concludes that the precursors of this type are not merely kinds of fairy tales (*Märchen*) but have their origins in what he calls the "Indo-European dragonslayer tradition-complex" (Stitt 1992, 193).

When scholars were first investigating such legendary sagas as *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, they saw links with other stories such as *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* and were trying to discern whether there were shared narrative features and even where and when they originated. The elements were difficult to trace because of the fragmentary way they were employed. A storyteller with an audience in mind might focus on function and context and adjust material accordingly. Later, those who compiled the legendary sagas took viable material from other sagas within and outside the corpus, as well as from folk narratives, retaining effective sequences (Martínez-Pizarro 1976-77, 281). The Bear's Son pattern and the two-troll variant have been energetically challenged by Magnús Fjalldal. He argues against a relationship between *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga* as versions of the Bear's Son tale type, saying that the similarities are merely coincidental (1998). Later he deconstructs the relationship between *Beowulf* and the Old Norse two-troll analogs

(2013). In this research he maintains that rather than comparing episodes it would be more appropriate to look more closely for particular parallels in the texts (Magnús Fjalldal 2013, [542]). Magnús Fjalldal's work represents continued scholarly debate about approaches and methods. John McKinnell looks at what he terms the "Þórr pattern" and also the "Bear's Son pattern" (2005, 126-46). He also takes up what he calls the "Two Ogres" pattern particularly in connection with *Hálfðanar saga Brǫnufóstra* (2009). He analyzes *Gríms saga loðinkinna* as it applies to the "Þórr pattern" as the god interacts with giantesses (McKinnell 2005, 127-29, 137-38, 142, 194). The pattern has its origins in mythology and shows innovations in the legendary fiction. And while a reader may wonder about Grímr killing trolls who are six or seven years old, McKinnell notes that a hero must be unaware of this because they are giants and they are viewed as dangerous (McKinnell 2005, 129). It can be seen that the search for the intersections of structure and meaning in the story elements in the numerous texts is pursued by folklorists and literary historians with academic rigor.

Folklore is culturally rich and encompasses varying mentalities of belief. The two sagas under consideration here reflect this diversified thinking. They were written down in a Christian culture but they contain several streams of older influences that converged and which continued to be of interest to people so that they found ways of preserving and promoting them.

Heathen-Christian syncretism

The grave mound retains symbolism from former times in *Ketils saga hængs* when Ketill confronts Framarr in the final contest of the saga (Røthe 2010, 285-91). Archeological research on burial practices has contributed to some understanding of Old Norse religious practice (see Price 2014). Grave mounds contained objects required for the afterlife of the buried queen or chieftain. This may involve horses, food, jewelry, or even servants. It was a ritual site for contact with the deceased. It was the very locus and repository of generational lineage. Sagas depict scenes or dreams occurring on or within a mound such as in the sixth chapter in *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts* when Þorsteinn dreams at a mound that its inhabitant Brynjarr asks for Þorsteinn's assistance in overcoming the deceased evil warrior Oddr, also in the mound. In the fifth chapter of

Ketils saga hængs Framarr and his people sacrifice at a mound for good crops. When Ketill faces the weather from the top of the mound it could be understood that he is preparing to confront the Odinic forces tied to the location. Gunnhild Røthe describes the foster brotherhood Ketill shares with Böðmóðr. When he goes to get Ketill off the mound, he helps him up and Ketill slips. A manuscript version mentions Böðmóðr taking Ketill by the feet and pulling him across the mound. This symbolizes a chieftain in Namdalen changing status from king to earl as happens in *Heimskringla* and in *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum* (A Synoptic History of the Kings of Norway) (Røthe 2010, 287).

The mound also symbolizes rulership. Slipping on the mound suggests this change in status or in the balance of power (Røthe 2010, 288). Heusler and Ranisch consider it to be Böðmóðr's doubting of Ketill's preparedness to fight, to which Ketill responds vigorously that he never worshiped Óðinn and that Framarr will fall (Heusler and Ranisch 1903, LXXIV). It may mean here that the balance of power will fall out of Óðinn's favor. Also linked to the symbolism of the mound is the view of the king as a sage of his people. Óðinn was a shaman, among the various identities attributed to him. The mound has significance as a royal high seat so a central figure in a community would find a place on the mound and mediate between the unseen world and those whom he rules or serves (Røthe 2010, 289). In the saga there is a negative view of the power associated with the mound that is about to be subdued when Ketill vanquishes Framarr and the Odinic power he stands for. These are some of the pre-Christian symbols that are reflected in *Ketils saga hængs*.

Torfi Tulinius explains that in western Christianity, medieval Icelandic authors' treatment of their heathen past is uncommon. "Although Icelanders do not seem to have been less Christian than other peoples, they pursued the lore of their pre-Christian culture when other Christianized peoples were doing everything they could to forget or disguise theirs. An author such as Chrétien de Troyes would systematically Christianize the characters in his romances even though they were more or less directly inspired by pagan legends" (Torfi Tulinius 2002, 66, and note 93). Through education monks may have promoted an interest among the Icelandic clergy about the past (Torfi Tulinius 2002, 66-67). At the same time, young people of prominent families would be educated by or into the clergy. So there was influence both ways. These Icelanders may also have

benefited from the forbearance of tolerant Benedictines and their interest in history, or even relied on their foreign training in compiling and translating sources (Schier 1994, 248, 251, 256, 258-9). Another clerical connection is that the legendary sagas were preserved in church libraries (Mitchell 1991, 136). Further, Icelandic authors had an interest in their native gods and tried to compare them with classical ones in such texts as *Clemens saga* (Torfi Tulinius 2002, 67). The writer of this saint's saga uses Norse mythology to describe Greek and Roman mythology. This is also done in *Trójumanna saga* (Saga of the Trojans) (Torfi Tulinius 2002, 67-68). The genre of the legendary saga was one area in which people could find an outlet for their interest in heathen customs, superstitions, and magic. Since the introduction of the Christian faith, an interest in these phenomena was not allowed and on the surface there was contempt for them. But they were part of the culture before Iceland's Christianization. So it was legitimate to study such customs in connection with the study of ancient times, even if one could not interest oneself in them directly at a later period (Sverrir Jakobsson 2003, 229-30). "... the ancient pagan gods actually *increase*, rather than diminish, in appearances in the legendary sagas. And therein lies the story," Stephen Mitchell asserts, "for the Icelanders of the late Middle Ages were also looking backward, albeit at not so great a distance as we do today, at a Scandinavian 'Golden Age' in which they could take much pride and in which they could, perhaps, place their hope of a better future society" (Mitchell 1991, 134).

Peter Buchholz remarks that some of the wondrous events that happen in heathen times appear to Christian saga authors as hallucinations of the devil, which as such are nonetheless real. Old gods were sometimes regarded as demons or members of the devil's court; the monster Grendel in *Beowulf* was considered a descendant of Cain. Supernatural events were integrated into the new religious system and not simply discarded as lies (Buchholz 1980, 80). Further he notes that tellers often try not to extinguish the heathen traditions that had been handed down but rather to harmonize them with Christian ones, without any binding demand on a Christian interpretation. This suppressed views that could not be readily integrated. However it did facilitate the survival of archaic content right down into the age in which the sagas were composed (Buchholz 1980, 114). The attempt to achieve a synthesis of heathen and biblical traditions is recognizable in the Anglo-Saxon tradition. Such arrangements or

compositions preoccupied Old Norse and Irish prose tellers and writers who had to harmonize and also in certain circumstances to supplement the available lore (Buchholz 1980, 115).

Lars Lönnroth has contributed significantly to an understanding of the harmonies and contradictions of heathen and Christian principles with his idea of the noble heathen. “The theme of the Noble Heathen nevertheless shows that there were certain things in the pagan tradition which embarrassed at least some Christian saga writers to the extent that they felt a need to justify the past and to bring it into concordance with the values of their own time” (Lönnroth 1969, 28). A noble heathen could serve as a counterbalance to a bad Christian and serve as an ethical model. He could herald the new faith (Lönnroth 1969, 28-29). But as seen in *Ketils saga hængs* in the battle against the pagan and Óðinn-worshiping Framarr, or even in the ridding the world of trolls, troll skins, and evil stepmothers in *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, the outcomes are not explicitly Christian and the equivocality may be well placed.

Annette Lassen, in a broad and insightful study of Óðinn as recorded in medieval Icelandic literature, accounts for the vast diversity of depictions and uses of the god in codicological and conceptual contexts. For example, mention of Óðinn can occur for reasons of Christian ideology, as the objectives of a particular text, or to meet the requirements of the genre in which something is written. Some lines of poetry or kennings may have been so well known or expected that they would be regarded as cliché. Compared with the cult of Þórr that can be seen in place names in Iceland, there seems to be no such pronounced cult of Óðinn in Iceland in name, place, or text. As mentioned previously, the proliferation of Óðinn in legendary fiction may have been safe ground because it dealt with a time and place long ago and far away. One possible perspective Lassen suggests is that rather than looking at the pre-Christian religion, one might look at Odinic references as the subject matter of poetic craft. The focus on Odinic material reveals cultural and religious flux, influence, and interest as shown in various texts (Lassen 2011, 193-95). This is why in a saga such as *Ketils saga hængs* a character like Framarr is an opportunity for bringing up old lore such as grave mounds and berserkers. The hero deals with the threat just as he would with a natural one, defending his family and striving to survive. And people liked to hear it.

Svanfríður Óskarsdóttir makes the valid observation that many heathens and

Christians inhabited their private or individual selves, as seen in the hero Örrvar-Oddr, the next generation, and the next narrative of the people of Hrafnista, *Örvar-Odds saga* (Svanfríður Óskarsdóttir 2008, 104). This would be in keeping with the ethic of honor in the viking age or in medieval Scandinavia as reflected in the eddic poem *Hávamál*, attributed to Óðinn. But Svanfríður makes the further observation that the reality of these sagas may never have existed but in the minds of those who composed the stories as well as in those of their listeners. She says that the strongest connection to the reality of the sagas may lie in the discourse and self-image of the society at the time of writing (Svanfríður Óskarsdóttir 2008, 124).

Conclusion

In light of these analytical and interpretive considerations, the several narrative, literary, and cultural components are seen as indispensable to a fuller understanding of these sagas. The storytelling context not only reflects their role as entertainment but also their form as legendary sagas. These sagas are likely to have grown out of an oral tradition of narration that was subsequently set on parchment for preservation and distribution. The mythical-heroic matter also indicates roots in oral tradition in its references to gods, such as Óðinn, to trolls, beneficial and harmful; in its combination with eddic poetry, including *senna*; in its treatment of a central feature of early verse and narrative, the hero. Ketill and Grímr counter threats to the community, recalling the god Þórr, who combats giants. Following from this is the function of genealogy and geography in a saga that attempts to locate the story in a particular time and place, as well as to validate the hero or his family in terms of memorable lineages. Both in the manuscript preservation and in its distribution, a meeting of heathen and Christian cultures can be seen. Clerics curated the lore and ecclesiastical preoccupations would manifest in such concepts as the noble heathen. Folkloric schemes help to structure and enrich the storytelling: the *kolbíttr* character, the Bear's Son pattern, trolls (Sámi) and the supernatural, the stepmother motif, and Celtic, Germanic, and other influences. All these aspects help us to understand the narrative background, structure and content of *Ketils saga hængs* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna*. They were effective with audiences

because of their familiar frameworks, social and cultural messages, and universal appeal. And such legendary fiction remains interesting to audiences today.

Hearing a saga about a legendary family is like entering into a story already in progress. It is an ongoing story. It hovers over a borderline between this world and the otherworld with its real characters and historical events and its monsters and myths. The folklore informs the historical lore. Or the factual grounds the mythic. The values of a society are being communicated and passed down in inspiring verse and entertaining prose. One of the themes that endures from these narratives of survival is that in spite of something deep and dark, like hibernal twilight or seaside caves, regardless of pits of human meat, hideous and threatening gigantic trolls, criminals in the wilderness, or fierce storms, something must be done, something has to be overcome, inner human urges have to be addressed. The hero says, “I have to go.” But there is also a moral component because the motivation, ultimately, is not only personal but social. These are narratives about life—life in nature, family life, community life, inner life—the impelling life force. Inhabitants of medieval Iceland wanted to hear them over and over again. They were the popular genre of their time. At that time the power of belief held sway where today there is the same hunger for mysteries, the supernatural, and detective fiction, with perhaps less wonder and significantly less belief. The patterns align in the narration, then and now, by the way people employ stories in order to balance inner and outer realities. The amusing or diverting facets are not escapism but oblique means that facilitate the transmission of tradition and culture. Existing older material finds expression in a later age. Human creativity promotes the refashioning of narrative segments and effects. But there is a tension between the familiar and the novel. Which elements are indispensable to the success of the tale? Which can be reformulated? In translating these sagas I have sought to make available ancient narratives as they are so that a contemporary reader is given glimpses into a society as it was and can gain impressions of details wholly foreign to or utterly resonant with our contemporary human condition—to the extent that it is possible to document or interpret such details. Nonetheless the content of the sagas is versatile and entertains in that it allows, among other things, for people to revisit a place or time and to find redemptive meaning or renewal or insofar as it permits us to reenact an event. For the sake of an exercise I have proposed some meaning in these sagas. It is up to the reader

to derive personal meaning and certainly to enjoy the telling. And perhaps to take something of value back into the world.

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