

Háskóli Íslands  
Hugvísindasvið  
Viking and Medieval Norse Studies

# The King's Two Bodies?

*Snjáskvæði* and the Performance of Gender

Ritgerð til M.A.-prófs í Viking and Medieval Norse Studies

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May 2018

## Abstract

The *sagnakvæði*, narrative poems composed in the eddic metre *fornyrðislag*, are found only in manuscripts from the 17<sup>th</sup> century or later. However, many of them seem to predate their manuscripts by several centuries, making them products of the later middle ages. Their composition in *fornyrðislag* metre and their use of motifs seen in other Icelandic literary genres of the later middle ages (most notably *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*) place them squarely within a continuous tradition of Icelandic literature. Despite this fact, relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the *sagnakvæði*. This thesis takes as its focus the *sagnakvæði Snjáskvæði*, a poem in which an elf-queen is cursed by her stepmother to appear as a man in the human world, and comprises a translation of *Snjáskvæði* into English, along with an in-depth commentary on the poem. This commentary explores the preservation of both the text of *Snjáskvæði* in its various manuscripts, and its underlying narrative, which draws upon a number of international folk-tale motifs and which was reworked into *Snækóngrímur* in the latter half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Steinunn Finnsdóttir. The main focus of the commentary is on the transformation of the elf-queen Hildigerður into the human king Snjár, looking at the role this motif plays in the construction of gender in this poem. This scene is compared to other scenes of gendered transformation in medieval Icelandic literature, such as those seen as part of the shield-maiden motif in the *fornaldarsögur*, as well as to the motif of the disguised elf-queen seen in other Icelandic folk-tales, such as *Úlfhildur álfkona* and *Hildur álfadrottning*. I argue that such scenes' emphasis on the external trappings of gender, such as the mailcoat and helmet Hildigerður dons in order to begin her life as Snjár, expresses a conception of gender that was fundamentally defined through social perception and interaction.

## Ágrip

Sagnakvæði eru frásagnarljóð undir fornyrðislagi og finnast aðeins í handritum frá 17. öld eða síðar, en mörg eru eldri en handritin sem varðveita þau. Nýlegar rannsóknir benda til þess að sagnakvæðin, eða a. m. k. hluti þeirra, geti verið ort á síðmiðöldum. Notkun fornyrðislags og minna sem birtast í öðrum bókmenntagreiunum síðmiðalda (sérstaklega riddarasögum og fornaldarsögum) bendir til stöðugrar hefðar í íslenskum bókmenntum. Þrátt fyrir þetta hefur tiltölulega lítilli athygli verið beint að sagnakvæðum.

Í þessari ritgerð er athyglinni beint að sagnakvæði sem heitir *Snjáskvæði*, ljóði sem sjallar um álfadrottninguna Hildigerði. Hildigerðu varð fyrir þeim álögum stjúp móðar sinnar að taka á sig yfirlit karlmanns í mannheimum. Ritgerðinni fylgir þýðing af *Snjáskvæði* frá íslensku yfir á ensku, ásamt skýringum. Í meginmáli er fjallað um varðveislu kvæðisins í helstu handritum og rætt er um þann söguþráð sem liggur að baki ljóðinu og bygger mjög á alþjóðlegum minnum. Auk prósatexta, var sagan endursöpuð í mismunandi rímum nokkurra skálda frá 17., 18. og 19. öld. Meginatriði umfjöllunarinnar er umbreyting álfadrottningarinnar í mennska konunginn Snjá og leitast er við að varpa ljósi á birtingarmynd kyngervis í kvæðinu. Umbreyting Hildigerðar er borin saman við aðrar umbreytingar á kyngervi í íslenskum miðaldabókmenntum, til dæmis þær sem birtast í fornaldarsögum, eins og skjaldmeyjaminninu. Þá er kvæðið borið saman við þjóðsögur frá 19. öld um dulbúnar álfkonur, til dæmis sögurnar *Snotra* og *Úlfhildur álfkona*. Í ritgerðinni er því haldið fram að sú áhersla sem lögð er á veraldleg klæði á borð við brynjuna og hjálminn sem Hildigerður klæðist þegar hún umbreytist í Snjá konung, feli í sér skilning á kyngervi sem er í grundvallaratriðum skilgreint út frá félagslegum viðmiðum og viðtöku.

## **Acknowledgements**

As has been my constant refrain this semester, 'it takes a village to raise a thesis.' First and foremost, my thanks go to my supervisor, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir for her support and advice. Discussions with her always helped to turn a confused mess of thoughts into something approaching a valid argument. Next, I'd like to thank Haukur Þorgeirsson of Árnastofnun for his enthusiasm for the project, as well as his apparently inexhaustible patience with my endless questions on metre, manuscripts and just about everything else. This thesis would be a lot poorer without his many helpful suggestions. I'd also like to thank my parents, for moral support, proofreading under pressure and smuggling a surprising number of care packages through Customs. Finally, thanks go to Emily, Amy and Samantha, providers of emotional support, proofreading and cake throughout the highs and lows of this degree.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction to the project

The *sagnakvæði* are a small group of narrative poems in *fornyrðislag* metre with ‘fairy-tale motifs’. The precise age of the *sagnakvæði* is uncertain; all are found only in manuscripts from the 17<sup>th</sup> century or later but it is generally accepted that most, if not all of them, circulated in the oral tradition for some time before being committed to paper.<sup>1</sup> Despite their late preservation, they show strong connections to earlier Icelandic genres, especially the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*,<sup>2</sup> and their use of *fornyrðislag* metre has the hallmarks of being the result of continuous usage, rather than antiquarian recreation.<sup>3</sup> They also frequently resemble the *ævintýri* (folk- or fairy-tales) and *sagnir* (legends) collected by folklorists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whether at the level of individual motifs, or as more complex narratives. Relatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the *sagnakvæði*, although closer examination of the genre would shed light on many aspects of the development of Icelandic poetry, such as the role of women as creators and preservers of tradition, and the interaction between orality and literacy.

Eight poems are generally considered to be *sagnakvæði*: *Kötludraumur*, *Snjáskvæði*, *Kringilnefjukvæði*, *Vambarljóð*, *Hyndluljóð*,<sup>4</sup> *Gullkársljóð*, *Bryngerðarljóð* and *Þóruhljóð*.<sup>5</sup> This thesis focuses on *Snjáskvæði*, a *sagnakvæði* in which an elf-queen is cursed by her stepmother to appear as a male king in the human world. As no in-depth study of *Snjáskvæði* yet exists, Chapter 1 presents an overview of *sagnakvæði* scholarship in order to provide some context for the current work. Chapter 2 discusses

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Gísli Sigurðsson, “Kötludraumur: Flökkuminni eða þjóðfélagsumræða?,” *Gripla* 9 (1995): 189; Haukur Þorgeirsson, “Gullkársljóð og Hrafnagaldur – framlag til sögu fornyrdislags,” *Gripla* 21 (2010): 299; Jón Helgason, *Norges og Íslands digtning. Nordisk Kultur VIII:B* (Uppsala, 1953): 167.

<sup>2</sup> Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, “Reflexes of the fornaldarsögur in Icelandic poetry,” ed. Matthew Driscoll et al., *The Legendary Legacy. Transmission and reception of the Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2018): 19–51.

<sup>3</sup> Haukur Þorgeirsson, “Poetic Formulas in Late Medieval Icelandic Poetry,” *Retrospective Methods Network Newsletter* 4 (May 2012), 182; Jón Helgason, *Norges og Íslands digtning*, 167.

<sup>4</sup> Sometimes called *Hyndluljóð yngri* to avoid confusion with the poem of the same name found in the Poetic Edda.

<sup>5</sup> Texts of all these poems can be found in Jón Árnason & Ólafur Davíðsson (eds.), *Íslenzkar gátur, skemtánir, vikivakar og þulur. IV. Þulur og þjóðkvæði* (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1898).

the manuscripts of *Snjáskvæði* with a view to producing a preliminary date for the poem. The only extant edition of the poem is found in Ólafur Davíðsson's *Íslenskar gátur, skemtanir, vikivakar og þulur*. This text combines stanzas from a variety of manuscripts to produce a text with no historical basis, and so the study carried out in Chapter 2 also forms the basis for producing a best-text edition of *Snjáskvæði* based on the oldest witness, AM 147 8vo.<sup>6</sup> This edition can be found as part of Appendix 1. Chapter 3 explores the relationship of *Snjáskvæði* to other Icelandic texts, especially the folk-stories concerning disguised elf-women, such as *Snotra* and *Una álfkona*. Although *Snotra* in particular shares many narrative elements with *Snjáskvæði*, the gendered nature of Hildigerður/Snjár's transformation is not found in these folk-tales. Parallels can, however, be found in the accounts of maiden kings and armed women of the *fornaldarsögur* and eddic poetry, in which women take on male titles such as 'king', dress as warriors and sometimes even adopt a male name and pronouns. The situation in *Snjáskvæði* is different due to the involuntary nature of Hildigerður's transformation, but Chapter 4 compares these occurrences of gendered transformation and disguise as part of a discussion of the construction of gender in medieval Icelandic literature.

## 1.2 *Sagnakvæði* scholarship

Scholarship dealing with the *sagnakvæði* is thin on the ground and there have been no in-depth studies of *Snjáskvæði* itself. Until comparatively recently, discussions of this genre were relegated to brief mentions in broader surveys of Icelandic literature. In general, the *sagnakvæði* have been spared the somewhat dubious reputation of the *rímur*, the most popular form of narrative verse in the later medieval period, due perhaps in part to their close connections to the rather nebulously defined 'folk'. Such connections manifest themselves in the insistence in 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-century scholarship that, despite their late preservation in manuscripts, the *sagnakvæði* are nonetheless

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<sup>6</sup> Jón Árnason & Ólafur Davíðsson (eds.), *Íslenskar gátur, skemtanir, vikivakar og þulur. IV. Þulur og þjóðkvæði* (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1898), 29–38.

‘særdeles gamle’,<sup>7</sup> and have long been preserved in ‘mundtlig tradition’.<sup>8</sup> These statements occur repeatedly in discussions of the *sagnakvæði*, but it is only in recent years that any sort of systematic attempt has been made to date individual *sagnakvæði*.

One of the earliest efforts to associate these poems with a specific time-frame is Gísli Sigurðsson’s 1995 examination of *Kötludraumur*.<sup>9</sup> Gísli argues that even the earliest manuscripts of *Kötludraumur* preserve a text so different from any ‘original’ as to make definite dating impossible, and it is instead more useful to use our extant texts to explore why *Kötludraumur* was so popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. By comparing the various recensions of *Kötludraumur* with societal changes of the late medieval period, Gísli makes a persuasive case for a marked increase in *Kötludraumur*’s popularity after the unpopular *Stóridómur* was issued in 1564, arguing that a story in which a woman becomes pregnant by someone other than her husband yet suffers no repercussions would have resonated with a people enduring new restrictions on sexual behaviour. However, Einar G. Pétursson has challenged this view, pointing out that the linguistic evidence of the oldest manuscripts suggests a much earlier date for *Kötludraumur*’s composition and arguing that the poem’s events would have had little relevance to people suffering under the *Stóridómur*, given its laws convicted very few women of adultery.<sup>10</sup> Einar’s argument for an earlier dating is based on the same linguistic and metrical criteria employed by Haukur Þorgeirsson, whose work I discuss below, but I am less convinced by his argument that a story several centuries old could not possibly find meaning among new audiences. The ongoing popularity of, for example, modern performances of Shakespeare is testament to a work’s enduring power to move an audience centuries after its original composition. That said, given that all *sagnakvæði* see a sharp increase in popularity in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (at least in so far as extant manuscripts can be taken as indicators of this), factors other than the *Stóridómur* must

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<sup>7</sup> ‘Especially old.’ All translations given here are my own unless otherwise noted. Jón Þorkelsson, *Om digtningen på Island i det 15. og 16. århundrede* (Copenhagen, 1888), 201.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Oral tradition.’ Jón Helgason, *Norges og Islands digtning*, 167.

<sup>9</sup> Gísli Sigurðsson, “*Kötludraumur*,” 189–217.

<sup>10</sup> Einar G. Pétursson, “Tvö skrif um *Kötludraum*. II. Grein Gísla Sigurðssonar ‘*Kötludraumur*. Flökkuminni eða þjóðfélagsumræða?,” *Gripla* 26 (2015): 213–228.

be in play to account for the reception of poems not dealing with extra-martial elven affairs.

Haukur Þorgeirsson has made the greatest advances in dating *sagnakvæði* through linguistic and metrical approaches. His most methodologically detailed study is of *Gullkársljóð*, in which he explores the level of adherence to the metrical requirements of *fornyrðislag* seen in both *Gullkársljóð* and *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* (a poem not generally considered a *sagnakvæði*, although composed in *fornyrðislag* and similarly preserved in 17<sup>th</sup>-century manuscripts).<sup>11</sup> On the basis of *Gullkársljóð*'s remarkably consistent adherence to the earlier rules regarding stress-patterns and s- and j-alliteration, as well as its lack of any post-14<sup>th</sup>-century loanwords, Haukur argues for a date of c.1350 for its original composition.<sup>12</sup> Following the same methodology, he also advocates a pre-1400 dating for *Þóruhljóð*,<sup>13</sup> and suggests a 15<sup>th</sup>-century date for *Vambarljóð*, although this is in advance of a full linguistic and metrical study.<sup>14</sup> The picture that emerges from these studies is a varied one, suggesting that *sagnakvæði* as a genre should not be seen as the product of any particular period; instead, their disparate ages argue in favour of the view that the *sagnakvæði* preserved in manuscripts are only a small sample of a much broader tradition.

Other studies, notably Haukur's 2012 article on *Vambarljóð* and Frog's two response articles, have considered the connection of *sagnakvæði* to other Icelandic genres at the linguistic level.<sup>15</sup> Haukur's study identifies numerous verbal formulae shared by *Vambarljóð* and other texts, most commonly other *sagnakvæði*, but also the eddic poem *Gripisspá* and some of the poetry from *fornaldarsögur* such as *Qrvar-Odds saga*.<sup>16</sup> He argues that such formulae should not necessarily be seen as the result of direct borrowing from one poet by another, but rather as evidence for a shared poetic

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<sup>11</sup> Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Gullkársljóð," 299–334.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>13</sup> Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Þóruhljóð og Háu-Þóruleikur," *Gripla* 22 (2011): 219.

<sup>14</sup> Haukur Þorgeirsson, "How Can You Tell Who's Talking? – Transitions between Direct Speech and Narration in *Vambarljóð*," *Retrospective Methods Network Newsletter* 6 (May 2013): 20.

<sup>15</sup> Frog, "On the Case of *Vambarljóð* I: Comments on Formulaicity in the *sagnakvæði*," *Retrospective Methods Network Newsletter* 5 (December 2012): 22–38; Frog, "On the Case of *Vambarljóð* II: Register and Mode from Skaldic Verse to *sagnakvæði*," *Retrospective Methods Network Newsletter* 5 (December 2012): 49–61; Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Poetic Formulas," 181–196.

<sup>16</sup> Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Poetic Formulas," 181–196.

tradition between these texts, one that does not extend to the *rímur*, which have very few phrasings in common with *fornyrðislag* poetry.<sup>17</sup> Frog expands on Haukur's suggestions that the difference in phrasing between *rímur* and *sagnakvæði* might be due to their written, as opposed to oral, composition, drawing on examples from across the Icelandic literary corpus in order to demonstrate a fundamental difference between the poetic vocabularies used for written and oral poetry.<sup>18</sup> What emerges from these studies is a strong line of continuity between the *sagnakvæði* and other uses of *fornyrðislag*.

At the level of shared motifs and potential narrative influence, several scholars have pointed out the relationship between the *sagnakvæði* and the Icelandic folk- and fairy-tales collected by folklorists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Einar Ól. Sveinsson observes the recurrence in Icelandic material of the international folk-tale motif AT 306—the love of an elf for a human woman—and, regarding *Snjáskvæði* in particular, notes its similarity to the folk-tales *Una* (or *Úlfhildur*) *álfkona* and *Snotra*.<sup>19</sup> These correspondences are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3 of this thesis. Another *sagnakvæði*, *Póruljóð*, has been connected with the pastime of *Háu-Póruleikur*, a costumed game played at winter dance-gatherings, first mentioned in 17<sup>th</sup>-century travel-guides to Iceland, although a full account only appears in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>20</sup> These connections with 'folk' material demonstrate the many roots *sagnakvæði* had in the communities which produced them. The poems therefore offer one possible means by which to approach these societies, however distant in time.

As well as these folk traditions, recorded only comparatively recently, the *sagnakvæði* also share narrative material with literary works. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir has noted the resemblance of certain passages in the *sagnakvæði* to episodes from *fornaldarsögur* and the legendary eddic poetry whose subject matter sometimes overlaps with these sagas.<sup>21</sup> She also draws attention to the more extensive

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>18</sup> Frog, "On the Case of *Vambarljóð II*", 53.

<sup>19</sup> Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *The Folk-Stories of Iceland*, rev. Einar G. Pétursson, trans. Benedikt Benedikz (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2003), 87–88.

<sup>20</sup> Anna McCully Stewart, *Knock, knock. Who's there? A Translation and Study of Póruljóð* (unpublished MA thesis at the University of Iceland, 2017), 30–32; Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Póruljóð," 221.

<sup>21</sup> Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "The Tradition of Icelandic *sagnakvæði*," *Retrospective Methods Network Newsletter* 6 (May 2013): 16; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "Reflexes of the *fornaldarsögur*", 39.

correspondences between the *strengleikur*<sup>22</sup> *Jónet* (French: *Yonec*) and *Gullkársljóð*, which both tell the story of an imprisoned maiden whose supernatural lover, wounded by the maiden's captor, leaves a trail of blood which the woman follows back to her lover's home kingdom.<sup>23</sup> Less pronounced similarities have also been seen between the *lai* of *Tidorel* and the scene in *Snjáskvæði* in which Hrafn follows Snjár into the lake.<sup>24</sup> It is uncertain in what form the *strengleikar* were known in Iceland, since with the exception of *Guimars ljóð* their texts are only preserved in a Norwegian manuscript,<sup>25</sup> but the appearance of such a remarkably similar narrative in both *Jónet* and *Gullkársljóð* certainly suggests the material had made its way to Iceland in some form before the *sagnakvæði*'s composition.

The most extensive study of *Snjáskvæði* is found in Shaun Hughes' discussion of *Snækóns rímur*, composed by Steinunn Finnsdóttir in the late-17<sup>th</sup> or early 18<sup>th</sup> century, which explores the ways in which Steinunn's work builds on the earlier *sagnakvæði*.<sup>26</sup> Hughes argues that Steinunn's addition of an ending in which Hrafn and Hildigerður get married serves as a means to securely enmesh two potentially queer characters—the king who is really a queen, and the man who stares at the king all day long—in a heterosexual matrix, reflecting Steinunn's position as a member of the Icelandic bourgeoisie.<sup>27</sup> Hughes convincingly demonstrates the potential for sexual queerness in *Snækóns rímur* but leaves the gender-related queerness of both *rímur* and *sagnakvæði* relatively unexplored. My own research builds on the potential for queer readings of these texts demonstrated by Hughes' work, focusing on gender and the *sagnakvæði*, rather than sexuality and the *rímur*.

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<sup>22</sup> *Strengleikar* (pl.): prose translations into Old Norse of medieval French *lais*, said to have been commissioned by King Hákon Hákonarson in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>23</sup> Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "Old French *lais* and Icelandic *sagnakvæði*," in Karl G. Johansson & Rune Flaten (eds.), *Francia et Germania: Studies in Strengleikar and Piðreks saga af Bern* (Oslo: Novus, 2012), 265–288.

<sup>24</sup> Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "Tradition of Icelandic *sagnakvæði*," 18.

<sup>25</sup> Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "Old French *lais*," 265.

<sup>26</sup> Shaun F. D. Hughes, "Steinunn Finnsdóttir and *Snækónsrímur*," in Martin Chase (ed.), *Eddic, Skaldic, and Beyond: Poetic Variety in Medieval Iceland and Norway* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 162–189.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

As the above shows, scholarly interest in *sagnakvæði* has increased greatly over the last few years, bringing a range of approaches to the genre, from metrical analysis to queer theory, yet there remains a great deal of scope for future work. In particular, there have been few in-depth studies of individual *sagnakvæði*, especially from a standpoint of literary criticism, as opposed to linguistic or metrical analysis. This is where the current work comes in, applying approaches that have been used to discuss *sagnakvæði* more generally to a detailed exploration of *Snjáskvæði*. The work of this thesis owes a particular debt to Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir's work in showing the connections between *sagnakvæði* and other genres of Icelandic literature, Haukur Þorgeirsson's studies on the dating of *sagnakvæði*, and Shaun Hughes' article demonstrating the applicability of queer readings to these texts.

## 2. The texts of *Snjáskvæði*

It is possible to speak of two *Snjáskvæði*: the late-medieval *sagnakvæði* and a much lengthier composition found in manuscripts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This thesis deals with the former, although as the 19<sup>th</sup>-century composition covers the same narrative material, it will be briefly discussed later in this chapter (Chapter 2.3). All unqualified references to '*Snjáskvæði*' should therefore be taken as referring to the *sagnakvæði*. The basic narrative is as follows:

King Snjár rules over the Hálegjar people. He is reckoned to be very wise, but his lineage is a mystery to all. One day, a ship is wrecked on his shores and he offers to let the survivors stay with him for the rest of the winter. All but one declare that they have somewhere else to stay, but a man called Hrafn accepts the king's offer. He points out that he is poor, having lost all his possessions in the wreck, and will be unable to repay Snjár for his kindness. The king says that the only repayment he needs is for Hrafn to reveal some aspect of the king's nature on the first day of summer. Hrafn spends time with the king's men and learns that none of them know where the king sleeps at night. One night, Hrafn goes outside to check on the weather and sees that Snjár has left his court and run out into the nearby lake. When he does not emerge, Hrafn follows him and finds himself in a strange but beautiful land. Here he witnesses strange scenes: Snjár being greeted as the wife of King Hálfðan, a young child rebuffed in his attempts to play with Snjár's gold ring, and two maidservants quarrelling over a dead calf. He awakens back at the king's court and keeps what he has learnt to himself until the court celebrates the return of summer. On this day, Snjár asks him what he can tell of the king's nature, and Hrafn recounts what he has seen. Snjár commends him for his wisdom and discretion and explains that he, Snjár, is in fact Hildigerður, the only daughter of the king of Álfheimar, cursed by her stepmother to appear as a man in the human world, only able to return to her husband and child at night and in secret. Every winter she has offered winter-lodgings to guests on the condition that they discover her secret, but for nine winters everyone has failed. Had Hrafn also failed, she says, she would have been forced to live out her days like a wolf among beasts. For his part in breaking the curse,

Hrafn is handsomely rewarded, in most versions being granted the kingdom of the Háleygjjar to rule while Hildigerður presumably returns to her own land.

This is the basic storyline followed by all of the manuscript witnesses. However, considerable variation can be seen in the wording, stanza order, and indeed in the stanzas which are included at all. Figure 1 (below, p. 15) gives some idea of the complexity of preservation here, though does not show the complicated rearrangement of stanzas in the various manuscripts.

## 2.1 Manuscripts of *Snjáskvæði*

*Snjáskvæði* is not preserved in any manuscripts from before the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest known text seems to have once been contained in AM 114 8vo, which in its extant form contains only *Kjalnesinga saga* and *Jökuls þáttr búasonar*. An accompanying note from Árni Magnússon states that when he received it the manuscript also included *Snjáskvæði*, *Kötludraumur*, part of the *Edda*, Björn of Skarðsá's *Grænlandsannáll* and 'fleira rusl'!<sup>28</sup> A colophon at the end of *Jökuls þáttr* gives the manuscript's date of completion as 4<sup>th</sup> November 1661, almost four years before our earliest extant example of the text, that of AM 147 8vo, which was written on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1665 according to its own colophon.<sup>29</sup> It is unclear where these additional texts ended up. Another manuscript, AM 154 8vo, seems to represent an attempt on Árni's part to collect many different versions of several *sagnakvæði*, including two versions of *Kringilnefjukvæði*, six of *Kötludraumur* and four of *Snjáskvæði*, as well as a version each of *Vambarljóð*, *Hyndluljóð* and *Bryngerðarljóð*. If he had begun this project when he divided up AM 114 8vo, he presumably would have included AM 114 8vo's text of *Snjáskvæði* with the rest of this collection. However, none of the versions contained in AM 154 8vo bear much resemblance to the surviving leaves of AM 114 8vo, being all in markedly different hands and inks. The fate of AM 114 8vo's text therefore remains a mystery.

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<sup>28</sup> 'More rubbish.' AM 114 8vo, Acc. Mat. 1r.

<sup>29</sup> AM 147 8vo, 151v.

ÓD st. no.	AM 147 8vo	AM 148 8vo	AM 154 I 8vo	AM 154 II 8vo	AM 154 III 8vo	AM 154 IV 8vo	NKS 1141 fol.	Thott 489 8vo
<i>Mansöngur</i>								
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
<i>Fornyrðislag</i>								
1								
2								
3								
4								
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
10								
11								
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14								
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**Fig. 1:** Stanzas of Ólafur Davíðsson's edition found in each manuscript. The lighter colour indicates stanzas where only some lines are present.

In his 1898 edition of *Snjáskvæði*, Ólafur Davíðsson lists nine manuscripts whose variants he takes into account when compiling his edition:<sup>30</sup>

- AM 147 8vo, *Kvæðabók Gissurar Sveinssonar* (1665)<sup>31</sup>
- AM 148 8vo, *Kvæðabók úr Vigur* (1676–1677)<sup>32</sup>
- AM 154 I 8vo (pre-1687)<sup>33</sup>
- AM 154 II 8vo (c. 1700)<sup>34</sup>
- AM 154 III 8vo (1670)<sup>35</sup>
- AM 154 IV 8vo (c. 1700)<sup>36</sup>
- NKS 1141 fol (c. 1700–c. 1799)<sup>37</sup>
- Rask 87 (c. 1700–c. 1799)<sup>38</sup>
- Thott 489 8vo (c. 1700–c. 1799)<sup>39</sup>

However, upon closer examination of the texts found in the above manuscripts, I believe Rask 87 can be discounted; save for one line at the end of its 25<sup>th</sup> stanza and its lack of a *mansöngur*, it is identical to AM 154 IV 8vo. The remaining eight witnesses will be discussed in more detail below. Ólafur also lists several manuscripts which he does not use in his edition:

- BL Add.11.177. 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup> The text as originally copied here corresponds almost exactly with that of AM 147 8vo. However, several stanzas have been

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<sup>30</sup> Jón Árnason & Ólafur Davíðsson (eds.), *Íslenskar gátur*, 38.

<sup>31</sup> Dated based on its colophon. AM 147 8vo, 151v.

<sup>32</sup> Dates of writing given as 11<sup>th</sup> April 1676 on 76r and 21<sup>st</sup> October 1677 on 213r.

<sup>33</sup> See below (p. 21) for an explanation of this dating.

<sup>34</sup> Kristian Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1894), 419.

<sup>35</sup> Dated based on its colophon. AM 154 III 8vo, 4v.

<sup>36</sup> Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 419.

<sup>37</sup> Kristian Kålund, *Katalog over de oldnorsk-islandske håndskrifter i Det store kongelige bibliotek og i Universitetsbiblioteket (udenfor den Arnamagnæanske samling) samt den Arnamagnæanske samlings tilvækst 1894–99* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1900), 119.

<sup>38</sup> Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 549.

<sup>39</sup> Kålund, *Katalog over de oldnorsk-islandske håndskrifter i Det store kongelige bibliotek*, 365.

<sup>40</sup> Anonymous, *Numerical List of Icelandic Manuscripts in the British Museum*, vol. 2 (London, 1864), 210.

added in the margins and the order of some stanzas changed by a later hand, apparently by reference to *V*, the lost poetry book of Magnús Jónsson that served as an exemplar for NKS 1141 fol, JS 405 4to and Thott 489 8vo, or a closely related version of the text.

- JS 405 4to. 1819.<sup>41</sup> A sister manuscript of NKS 1141 fol. The text of *Snjáskvæði* is identical in both, barring orthographic variation.
- NKS 1894 4to. c. 1700–1800. Contains a copy of the text from AM 154 I 8vo in the hand of Markús Magnússon.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to these, the catalogues of the National Library of Iceland list the poem as appearing in the following manuscripts—again mostly copies of earlier texts—though the four marked with an asterisk in fact contain the much longer 19<sup>th</sup>-century composition mentioned above:

- JS 230 4to. Written c. 1750 by Jón Egilsson of Vatnshorn.<sup>43</sup> This text contains the *Hlýð þú*, *Guðrún* stanza found elsewhere only in AM 154 I 8vo. In general, its text follows that of AM 154 I 8vo, but occasionally with stanzas rearranged following the order seen in *V*'s descendants.
- JS 258 4to. Compiled 1840 by Gunnlaugur Jónsson of Skuggabjörg, apparently from the same exemplar as JS 591 4to. Close to the version found in Rask 87, barring some reordering of lines and stanzas. Contains a variant of ÓD st.16: 'Riðu þeir frá Hátúna hratt um grundir / svo hugði að öllu Hrafn vandlega.'<sup>44</sup>
- JS 406 4to. A 19<sup>th</sup>-century<sup>45</sup> scholarly edition of the poem. Named exemplars: AM 147 8vo, AM 148 8vo, NKS 1141 fol and Rask 87.

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<sup>41</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbóksafnsins*, vol. 2 (Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands, 1927), 567.

<sup>42</sup> Jón Árnason & Ólafur Davíðsson (eds.), *Íslenzkar gátur*, 38.

<sup>43</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason, *Skrá*, vol. 2, 530.

<sup>44</sup> JS 258 4to, 25.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 537.

- JS 581 4to. A 19<sup>th</sup>-century<sup>46</sup> scholarly edition of the poem, including critical apparatus.
- JS 591 4to. Compiled 1854 by Gunnlaugur Jónsson of Skuggabjörg, apparently from the same exemplar as JS 258 4to.
- JS 595 4to. A collection of poetry compiled by the folklorist Jón Árnason c. 1845–1860.<sup>47</sup> The text of *Snjáskvæði* is a scholarly edition, combining stanzas from several unnamed witnesses.
- \*JS 480 8vo. 19<sup>th</sup> century. The earliest known witness of the longer redaction, containing the following colophon: ‘Skrifað að Rey[k]jarfirði af Benedikt Gabríel fyrir dóttur sína Sigríði Benid[ikts]dóttur árit 1822 – þann 21<sup>sta</sup> Apríl.’<sup>48</sup>
- \*Lbs. 276 fol. 1861 collection of poetry in the hand of Páll Hjaltalín.<sup>49</sup> Contains a 130-stanza version of the longer redaction, here called ‘Hið gamla Snjás kvæði það réttasta sem til er’. This must be the ‘annað *Snjáskvæði*, miklu lengra’ which Ólafur Davíðsson reports having seen in only one place: ‘í hdr. í fol, sem dr. Jón Þorkelsson yngri á, og ritað er með hendi Páls verslunarstjóra Hjaltalíns í Stykkishólmi’.
- Lbs. 848 4to. A 19<sup>th</sup>-century<sup>50</sup> scholarly edition of the poem with critical apparatus from a manuscript called ‘E’.
- Lbs. 936 4to. A 19<sup>th</sup>-century scholarly edition of the poem, made c. 1880 by Friðrik Eggertz Eggertsson,<sup>51</sup> with critical apparatus from a manuscript called ‘E’, attributed here to Einar Hálfðanarson.
- Lbs. 202 8vo. A 19<sup>th</sup>-century (c. 1850–1870)<sup>52</sup> scholarly edition with critical apparatus.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 599.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 602.

<sup>48</sup> JS 480 8vo, 420.

<sup>49</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason (ed.), *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins*, vol. 1 (Reykjavík: Landsbókasafn Íslands, 1918), 92.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 394.

<sup>52</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason (ed.), *Skrá*, vol. 2, 49.

- \*Lbs. 449 8vo. A 19<sup>th</sup>-century<sup>53</sup> edition of the longer redaction, again rather charmingly called ‘Sniás kvæði hið réttasta’.
- \*Lbs. 2309 8vo. A c. 1840 copy of the longer redaction.<sup>54</sup>

Neither of these are complete lists. Ólafur Davíðsson does not seem to have been aware of any of the manuscripts now in the possession of the National Library except JS 405 4to; conversely, the National Library’s list does not include JS 405 4to. It is therefore likely that additional manuscripts containing *Snjáskvæði* exist, perhaps in repositories outside Iceland. An exhaustive survey of all the manuscripts of *Snjáskvæði* is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, and I will therefore confine my study to the eight manuscripts which I judge to have textual value.

As mentioned above, AM 147 8vo is the oldest extant text of *Snjáskvæði*. This is a large collection of poetry compiled by the priest Gissur Sveinsson, possibly the oldest such collection known from Iceland.<sup>55</sup> A colophon to the manuscript states that it was written at Gissur’s farm of Álftamýri in the Westfjord region of Iceland on 12<sup>th</sup> July 1665, in Gissur’s own hand.<sup>56</sup> *Snjáskvæði*—here called *Snjals kvæde*—is the 24<sup>th</sup> poem of the collection and can be found on pages 49r–50r. Gissur’s text consists of 42 stanzas of *fornyrðislag*. It does not include the *mansöngur*, which is only present in AM 154 IV 8vo, nor does it contain the references to entertaining a young girl or woman, most frequently identified as ‘Oddný’, which are found in several of the other manuscripts. Nevertheless, the main bones of the story are present and for reasons which are discussed more fully below (Chapter 2.4) I have chosen to make this the base-text for my analysis.

AM 154 8vo is an interesting manuscript. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, it seems to represent a deliberate attempt on the part of Árni Magnússon to

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<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 444.

<sup>55</sup> Jón Helgason, “Inngangur”, in Jón Helgason (ed.), *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar, AM 147 8vo* (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafélag, 1960), 53.

<sup>56</sup> AM 147 8vo, 151v.

collect variant versions of a number of poems.<sup>57</sup> He seems to have had most success with *Kötludraumur*, of which AM 154 8vo contains six versions, but still managed to acquire four versions of *Snjáskvæði*. The manuscript is clearly a compilation, composed of parts from other manuscripts: several of its quires are in fact quarto size, rather than octavo, and the paper and script type vary widely throughout the manuscript.

AM 154 I 8vo is an unusual witness, being the only known complete translation of a *sagnakvæði* before the appearance of Anna McCully Stewart's translation of *Pórljóð* into English in 2017.<sup>58</sup> The poem is given in half-stanzas, each with an accompanying Latin translation, occasionally with parenthetical glosses of the original text in order to make sure the translator's efforts cannot be misunderstood. Árni Magnússon's note accompanying this part of the manuscript attributes it to the hand of the priest Sveinn Jónsson (1603–1687), who was also responsible for a translation of part of *Völsunga saga* into Latin (AM 4 fol), and notes that Árni received the manuscript from Christian Worm in 1706. It is unclear whether Sveinn should be considered the translator as well as the scribe of AM 154 I 8vo, though his work with *Völsunga saga* shows he would have been capable of the job. If Árni's attribution of the scribe is correct, this would place AM 154 I 8vo as originating before Sveinn's death in 1687, putting it among the four oldest versions of *Snjáskvæði*.

AM 154 II 8vo is also a significant witness as it contains a note from Árni stating that the text here was recorded from an 'óskýrr[i] kerling[u], er það hafði numið af móður sinni'.<sup>59</sup> This is the only version of *Snjáskvæði* known to have been recorded directly from an oral informant and is one of only two *sagnakvæði* known to have been so derived; the other is a fragment of *Vambarljóð* collected from an 'afgammali kellingu, móður Guðmndar Bergþórssonar'.<sup>60</sup> The dating of AM 154 II 8vo is imprecise; Kristian

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<sup>57</sup> AM 153 8vo contains several notes from Árni to Guðrún Hákonardóttir requesting that she collect *fornkvæði* for him. For Árni, the term *fornkvæði* encompassed *sagnakvæði* and indeed in one note he explicitly reminds Guðrún that he would like copies of *Bryngerðarljóð* and *Gullkársljóð*, which he notes as being 'álíka og *Sniáskvæði*' and 'sama og *Pórljóð*'. Jón Helgason, *Íslensk fornkvæði. Íslandske folkeviser*, vol. 4 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), xlii. It should be noted that Jón Grunnvíkingur was responsible for assigning shelfmarks to Árni's collection and so may have been the one to gather together these texts.

<sup>58</sup> McCully Stewart, *Knock, knock. Who's there?*, 71–74.

<sup>59</sup> 'An unclear old woman, who had it from her mother.' AM 154 II 8vo, 1r.

<sup>60</sup> 'A very old woman, the mother of Guðmundur Bergþórsson.' Jón Árnason & Ólafur Davíðsson (ed.), *Íslenskar gátur*, 54.

Kålund dates it to c. 1700, which would fit with the note in AM 154 I 8vo that this part of the manuscript was acquired by Árni in 1706—plausibly he was assembling the various parts of AM 154 8vo around this time and had this new recording made to accompany them.<sup>61</sup>

The second-oldest witness is AM 154 III 8vo, whose colophon dates it to 1670. The text preserved here is very similar to that found in AM 154 IV 8vo and Rask 87, with only minor variations in wording and a couple of instances of lines being reordered.

AM 154 IV 8vo is the only manuscript to contain the eight-stanza *mansöngur* found at the start of Ólafur Davíðsson's edition. The *mansöngur*, as is typical of the genre, speaks of the poet's unluckiness in love and introduces the theme of lovers separated by cruel supernatural intervention, here effected by the norns, foreshadowing Hildigerður's fate in the main body of the poem. Despite this thematic relationship, however, it seems unlikely that the *mansöngur* was originally attached to the rest of the poem. *Mansöngvar* are more typical of the *rímur* genre than that of the *sagnakvæði*; indeed, this is the only example of a *sagnakvæði* containing a *mansöngur*. Moreover, these eight stanzas are in *ferskeytt*, a *rímur* metre, rather than the *fornyrðislag* of the rest of the poem.

AM 148 8vo is among the older witnesses of *Snjáskvæði*, dated to 1676–1677 according to the colophon accompanying its text of *Hugvinnsmál*. It is a collection of poetry assembled for Magnús Jónsson of Vigur by many scribes. Jón Helgason identifies twelve separate hands within the manuscript, with the scribe of *Snjáskvæði* being one of the most prolific. This hand may even be that of Magnús himself, judging by its similarity to letters thought to have been written by Magnús.<sup>62</sup> The text is markedly different to that found in AM 147 8vo and instead bears a closer resemblance to that of AM 154 III and IV 8vo, as well as Rask 87 (see the discussion in Chapter 2.1.1 below).

NKS 1141 fol is an 18<sup>th</sup>-century copy of a now-lost poetry book (V) made for Magnús Jónsson of Vigur. The text it preserves is largely similar to that of Thott 489 8vo, although missing ÓD st. 5 and 6. The scribe of V seems to have had a tendency towards

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<sup>61</sup> Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnemagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, vol.2, 419.

<sup>62</sup> Jón Helgason, "Inngangur", in Jón Helgason (ed.), *Kvæðabók úr Vigur, AM 148 8vo* (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðaaafélag, 1955), 17–18.

archaisms, judging by the texts in NKS 1141 fol and JS 405 4to, which prefer long-abandoned forms such as *mjök*, *ok* and *ek em*, as well as the removal of the epenthetic *u*, even to the point of hypercorrection in words like *jöfr* (OI: *jǫfurr*) and *götr* (OI: *gǫtur*, sg. *gata*).

Thott 489 8vo shows signs of being an early attempt to create a completionist version of *Snjáskvæði*, containing more stanzas than any other witness, including the two describing Snjár's court which are not found anywhere else. The text of Thott 489 8vo is mostly derived from V and it is therefore extremely similar to that of NKS 1141 fol and JS 405 4to.

### 2.1.1 Relationship of the manuscripts

When dealing with a text like *Snjáskvæði*, which was still circulating freely in the oral tradition for at least several decades after our first extant manuscript, traditional Lachmannian methods of stemmatics seem a somewhat reductive approach.<sup>63</sup> That said, while the classical philological goal of reconstructing an 'ur-text' is not necessarily a worthwhile pursuit, or even feasible in this case, it can nonetheless be helpful to consider the ways in which the extant texts can be grouped together, and through this shed some light on the transmission history of *Snjáskvæði*.

Given that we know from Árni's note in AM 154 II 8vo that *Snjáskvæði* was still alive and well in the oral tradition c. 1700, it is almost certain that any picture of manuscript transmission given was complicated by influences from oral tradition long after the poem's first recording, as well as by the process of reoralisation. This section therefore only gives a broad outline of some possible groupings of the extant witnesses.

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<sup>63</sup> The 'Lachmannian method' is based on the work of Karl Lachmann, the principal idea being to reconstruct the 'original' form of a text by eliminating the errors found in later copies through a process of comparison. Though Lachmann never published a stemma, Lachmannism is nowadays virtually synonymous with 'stemmatics': the practice of drawing a 'family tree' of manuscripts, based on their commonalities and differences, with the aim of tracing patterns of descent from an archetype as close to the original text as possible. For an introduction to Lachmann's methods see Paul Maas, *Textual Criticism*, trans. Barbara Flower (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963).

Jón Helgason's study of the important *kvæðabækur* of the 17<sup>th</sup> century argues in favour of a common line of descent for AM 147 8vo, BL Add. 11.177, NKS 1141 fol. and JS 405 4to.<sup>64</sup> My own study looks only at the texts of *Snjáskvæði*, rather than their manuscripts as a whole, but my findings agree with Jón's, though I would also add the text in AM 154 I 8vo to this group. For this study, I examined the stanzas present in each witness (see Fig. 1 above) and looked at the order in which these stanzas were preserved. The relationship between the manuscripts descended from *V*, the lost *kvæðabók* from Vigur,<sup>65</sup> was particularly apparent, with these witnesses sharing a common tendency towards archaic forms which were no longer in common usage by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, exemplified most obviously by their hypercorrect removal of the *u* in almost all places where we would expect to see *-ur*, even in feminine plural forms. In addition, these manuscripts all repair the missing alliteration at the start of st. 36 by the addition of the word *svanni* to alliterate with *svein* (see below p. 27).

AM 154 III 8vo and AM 154 IV 8vo preserve similar versions of the poem in terms of stanza order and variant lines, with the exception of the *mansöngur* found only in AM 154 IV 8vo. Their shared stanza order is often quite different to that found in AM 147 8vo, AM 154 I 8vo and the descendants of *V*, and they therefore seem to belong to a different strand of the tradition which branched off before AM 147 8vo was recorded in 1665.

It is difficult to fit both AM 148 8vo and AM 154 II 8vo into the overall picture. The latter case is unsurprising, since we know this witness was recorded from oral tradition c. 1700 and therefore has not taken part in the process of written transmission at all. AM 148 8vo is more surprising, since despite being produced for Magnús Jónsson at Vigur, it only occasionally agrees with any of the other witnesses connected with Vigur, preserving many lines and half-stanzas which are not found in other witnesses. Occasionally, it corresponds most closely with AM 154 II 8vo, which may suggest that it too was taken from an oral version of *Snjáskvæði* circulating in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>64</sup> Jón Helgason, "Inngangur", *Kvæðabók Gissurar Sveinssonar*, 47.

<sup>65</sup> JS 405 4to, NKS 1141 fol. and Thott 489 8vo.

While there are plenty of differences between the various witnesses of *Snjáskvæði*, all witnesses preserve a sufficiently similar ‘core’ of stanzas in roughly the same order that it does not make sense to speak of multiple redactions of the text. The younger *Snjáskvæði*, found in manuscripts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, may well constitute a second redaction, but it would require a more in-depth study than is possible here to reach a definite conclusion on the matter.

## 2.2 Editing *Snjáskvæði*

*Snjáskvæði* has previously been edited by Ólafur Davíðsson in his and Jón Árnason’s 1887–1898 edition of *Íslenzkar gáttur, skemtánir, víkivakar og þulur*.<sup>66</sup> His edition is an eclectic one, taking Thott 489 8vo as the base text, but including stanzas found in other witnesses—indeed, often stanzas found in a single witness, such as the eight *mansöngur* stanzas which are found only in AM 154 IV 8vo, or the exchange between Snjár and Hrafn found in ÓD st. 33–34, which only appears in AM 148 8vo. As such, although his edition has been an invaluable aid in working with the very varied manuscripts of *Snjáskvæði*, the text presented in *Íslenzkar gáttur* cannot be said to represent a poem that is known to have ever existed as a coherent whole.<sup>67</sup> The existing edition therefore seems like an unstable footing from which to carry out the close-reading analysis which forms the latter part of this thesis and I have therefore decided to take the text in AM 147 8vo as the basis for my analysis, with readings from other manuscripts noted where appropriate.

The text contained in AM 147 8vo is not the most complete version—that can be found in Thott 489 8vo, whose compilatory tendencies have already been noted. However, it does cover all the main narrative points in a logical order and does not appear to warrant much in the way of emendation to improve its sense. Like all witnesses, it contains several examples of imperfect or missing alliteration, sometimes including lines in which two alliterative feet appear in the second half-line and none in

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<sup>66</sup> Jón Árnason & Ólafur Davíðsson, *Íslenzkar gáttur*, vol. 4, 29–38.

<sup>67</sup> This is the case with many of the texts edited by Ólafur; see Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, “(Ó)Traustar heimildir: Um söfnun og útgáfu þjóðkvæða”, *Skáldskaparmál* 4 (1997): 210–226.

the first, e.g. *Því það var gáta / mörgum manni* (st.10). It is frequently the case that no witness contains a more metrically sound version of these lines and any emendation would be purely speculative. These lines have therefore been left unemended in the edition found as part of Appendix 1.

### 2.3 Dating *Snjáskvæði*

As is the case for all *sagnakvæði*, *Snjáskvæði* is only found in manuscripts from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. However, there was a general consensus amongst the poetry collectors who compiled these manuscripts that the poems they were recording were *fornkvæði*: ancient verses. This view has recently been borne out by Haukur Þorgeirsson's studies of two *sagnakvæði*, *Gullkársljóð* and *Háu-Þórujljóð*. His metrical and linguistic analysis suggests that both these poems could date from as far back as the mid-14<sup>th</sup> century, although with the caveat that we cannot know how closely any of our extant witnesses resemble an 'original' form of the poem.<sup>68</sup> It is not the goal of this thesis to make a full analysis of *Snjáskvæði* with a view to dating it. However, there are several indications that this poem is several centuries older than its manuscripts.

#### 2.3.1 J-alliteration

The first of these is its use of j-alliteration. As Ragnar Ingi Aðalsteinsson's study of skaldic poetry from the 9<sup>th</sup> century to the 20<sup>th</sup> has shown, poets before the 16<sup>th</sup> century freely alliterated /j/ with all vowels. However, this practice sharply declines over the course of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and thereafter poets seem to have found it acceptable to alliterate /j/ only with itself.<sup>69</sup> The text of *Snjáskvæði* as it appears in AM 147 8vo contains three examples of alliteration on /j/, all of which alliterate with a vowel:

*þar er jafnsælir*

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<sup>68</sup> Haukur Þorgeirsson, "*Gullkársljóð og Hrafnagaldur Óðins*", 315; "*Þórujljóð*", 218–219.

<sup>69</sup> Ragnar Ingi Aðalsteinsson, *Traditions and Continuities: Alliteration in old and modern Icelandic verse* (Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press, 2014), 187.

*allir voru (st.9)*<sup>70</sup>

*þar var enginn*

*jöfur af leikum (st.9)*

*jörð sá hann græna*

*og ótal fjár (st.13)*

AM 154 II 8vo, recorded from an oral informant, contains a further example:

*svo skalt þú eiga*

*jóð í vonum (AM 154 II 8vo, st.41)*

Haukur Þorgeirsson has suggested that this example may have been subject first to metrical corruption, with the synonym *sveinn* replacing *jóð* in AM 147 8vo, presumably once /ei/ and /j/ no longer alliterated, and then repair. Some of the manuscripts closely related to AM 147 8vo have the additional word *svanni* in the a-verse, thereby creating acceptable alliteration between *svanni* and *svein*.<sup>71</sup>

The fact that all examples here show /j/ alliterating with vowels and not with itself strongly suggests that *Snjáskvæði* predates the start of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

### 2.3.2 S-alliteration

The date can perhaps be pushed further back by looking at the poem's use of s-alliteration. Alliteration on the letter /s/ is a complicated matter in Icelandic poetry. There is a general consensus amongst scholars that the clusters /sk/ and /sp/ have

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<sup>70</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from *Snjáskvæði* are taken from the normalised Modern Icelandic edition found as Appendix 1 of this thesis.

<sup>71</sup> Haukur Þorgeirsson, pers. comm., 8<sup>th</sup> March 2018.

always alliterated only with themselves.<sup>72</sup> Ragnar Ingi argues that the cluster /sm/ should also be added to this list, but this is less certain due to the relatively low occurrence of alliteration on /sm/.<sup>73</sup> Ragnar Ingi Aðalsteinsson's studies of the development of alliteration in Icelandic poetry over time show that in the earliest dateable poetry /sl/ and /sn/ could alliterate with /sj/, /sv/ and /s/ + vowel, but that with the development of an epenthetic *t* in these sounds (/stl/ and /stn/) this system of alliteration broke down during the 14<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>74</sup> Examination of the AM 147 8vo text of *Snjáskvæði* reveals a number of examples in which /sl/ and /sn/ alliterate with other /s/ sounds:

*Snjals í veldi*  
*saman þrjátíu* (st.3)

Ég er *snöggur*, kóngur,  
það máttu *sjá* (st.6)

*Síðan lét hann sér um skör*  
*svanmjöll bera* (st.12)

Nú hef ég *sagt þér*,  
*Snjall*, það ég vissi (st.27)

As with many *sagnakvæði*, *Snjáskvæði*'s alliteration can at times be imperfect. Most striking in this context is the line:

Þá var *Snjall* kominn  
*skammt úr garði* (st.11)

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<sup>72</sup> Ragnar Ingi Aðalsteinsson, *Traditions and Continuities*, 133. Such 'rules' should not be envisioned as a prescriptive list, but rather as part of a poet's or audience's 'poetic ear'—a subconscious awareness of which sounds worked together.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 56–57.

According to the rules of alliterative metre given above, /sk/ should never alliterate with anything other than itself, yet all manuscripts of *Snjáskvæði* contain variants on this line, including AM 154 II 8vo, recorded from an oral informant. There are several possible explanations for such imperfect alliteration. The most obvious is that the poet simply was not very adept at *fornyrðislag* alliteration; there are a number of other examples of imperfect or absent alliteration in the various witnesses that might support this view. However, these could be the result of the poem's transmission in later centuries. It is unclear how closely any of our extant manuscripts resemble an 'original' *Snjáskvæði*. Another possible explanation, which I lean towards, is that the 14<sup>th</sup> century was a period when the rules regarding s-alliteration were changing. Though the poet of *Snjáskvæði* seems to have adhered to the old rules fairly consistently, they may well have known poets and poems which followed the newer rules, leaving them doubting their own sense of alliteration enough to alliterate /sk/ with /sn/.<sup>75</sup> The mid-14<sup>th</sup> century is also when Kálfur Hallsson's *Katrínardrápa*, which is another text with many examples of dubious s-alliteration, is thought to have been composed.<sup>76</sup>

Ragnar Ingi's study focuses predominantly on skaldic and *rímur* metres, simply because these are the metres used by the named poets whose biographical details allow him to date their poetry. As *fornyrðislag* poetry is almost without exception anonymous it does not form part of his study and his results may therefore not be perfectly applicable to *sagnakvæði*. Nonetheless, the fact that there are so many examples of the earlier system of s-alliteration present in a comparatively short text (four in 168 lines) certainly argues in favour of an early date for *Snjáskvæði*.

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<sup>75</sup> As the author of *Snjáskvæði* is anonymous and therefore with no known gender, I have chosen to use 'they' in its colloquial singular sense, as the closest thing English has to a singular gender-neutral pronoun.

<sup>76</sup> Vésteinn Ólason, "Kveðskapur frá síðmiðöldum: Trúarkvæði," in Böðvar Guðmundsson et al. (eds.), *Íslensk bókmenntasaga II* (Reykjavík: Mál og Menning, 1993), 315.

## 2.4 Later reception of *Snjáskvæði*

After the 17<sup>th</sup> century, *Snjáskvæði* seems to have lived an active life amongst the poetically-inclined of Iceland. Not only was it collected in the *syrpur* and *kvæðabækur* listed above, but it also served as a source of inspiration for at least three poets, leading to the creation of three *rímur* cycles and a lengthy composition in *fornyrðislag*.

Steinunn Finnsdóttir (c. 1640–c. 1710) was the first named poet whose work was inspired by *Snjáskvæði*. She was the daughter of Finnur Jónsson, a priest in Melasveit. Though descended from several notable Icelandic families, not much is known about her life; her year of birth can only be extrapolated from the 1703 census entry, which states that at that time she was 62 years old. A letter from Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson confirms that she had been living at the bishop's residence in Skálholt for five years in 1662 and she therefore had at least peripheral connections to the literary and antiquarian circles in which Brynjólfur was active.<sup>77</sup> Steinunn composed two *rímur* cycles based on fairytale material: *Hyndlu rímur*, based on *Hyndluljóð yngri* (the *sagnakvæði* rather than the eddic poem), and *Snækóns rímur*, based on *Snjáskvæði*.<sup>78</sup> A number of scholars have argued that the *sagnakvæði* and *ævintýri* were viewed as suitable material for women and children until they came to male scholarly attention in the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>79</sup> and it is therefore unsurprising that Steinunn, whose *mansöngvar* show such keen awareness of her role as a female poet,<sup>80</sup> should choose them as her subject matter. One manuscript containing *Snækóns rímur* does exist from Steinunn's lifetime (AM 146 b 8vo, c.1700), but shows errors consistent with its being copied from an earlier manuscript.<sup>81</sup>

Though *Snækóns rímur* tells largely the same story as *Snjáskvæði*, both its beginning and ending are noticeably different.<sup>82</sup> In *Snjáskvæði*, Snjár is firmly

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<sup>77</sup> Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, "Inngangur", in Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1950), xii.

<sup>78</sup> Steinunn Finnsdóttir, *Hyndlu rímur og Snækóns rímur*, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1950).

<sup>79</sup> Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir, "Ljúflingar og fleira fólk: Um formgerð, hugmyndafræði og hlutverk ískenskra huldufólkssagna", *Tímarit Máls og menningar* 3 (1982): 319–336; Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Gullkársljóð og Hrafnagaldur", 302; Hughes, "Steinunn Finnsdóttir and *Snækónsrímur*", 162

<sup>80</sup> Hughes, "Steinunn Finnsdóttir and *Snækónsrímur*", 162–163.

<sup>81</sup> Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, "Inngangur", xviii.

<sup>82</sup> See Hughes, "Steinunn Finnsdóttir and *Snækónsrímur*" for a fuller discussion of these differences.

established as the ruler of the Háleygjar from the start of the poem; we only learn that he won his kingdom by waging war on the previous king in Hildigerður's explanation at the end of the poem. However, *Snækóns rímur* opens the action with Geir as king of the Háleygjar, events building up through a heated exchange of envoys to the final battle in which Geir is killed and Snær takes over. This is in keeping with Steinunn's general tendency in the *rímur* to arrange events in their logical order and offer a greater explanation of events which in the *sagnakvæði* remains elusive and enigmatic.

As for the ending, either Steinunn was aware of a very different tradition concerning Hrafn and Hildigerður's futures than is reflected in any of our extant witnesses, or else she was dissatisfied with the admittedly somewhat abrupt way the *sagnakvæði* tends to end, with Hildigerður telling Hrafn that he will be the greatest king of all time before the poet suddenly switches to directly addressing Oddný, his presumed audience, informing her that she has now listened to the whole poem. In *Snækóns rímur*, however, the story continues: Hildigerður (here called Ólöf) returns to her elf-kingdom and Hrafn rules in Hálogaland for a time, but Ólöf's husband dies and Hrafn grows discontented with the merely mundane. Once again, he travels the land of the elves where, upon seeing a dejected Ólöf, he marries her and they rule Álfheimar happily together for many years, eventually passing the kingdom onto their children. Shaun Hughes has argued that this innovation on the part of Steinunn is a reflection of her secure and respectable position in Icelandic society, and that by marrying off the Other in the form of the elf-woman Ólöf, Steinunn attempts to assert control over the essential wildness of the *huldufólk*.<sup>83</sup> This is one possible explanation for her narrative choices. However, it should also be borne in mind that Steinunn is a woman writing for other women, if her self-deprecating *mansöngvar* are to be believed. The ending of the *sagnakvæði* is a happy ending as far as Hrafn is concerned, having proved his manliness and been richly rewarded for it, but Hildigerður's future is less satisfying. The implication in the *sagnakvæði* is that she will forsake her active role as sole ruler of the Háleygjar to go back to her husband and a child she pointedly ignores the only time the two of them interact in the poem. Unlike the *sagnakvæði*, *Snækóns rímur* takes the time to explicitly

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<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

address Hildigerður/Ólöf's future and fashions an ending in which both Hrafn's and Ólöf's happiness is assured.

Two other poets are known to have composed *rímur* after *Snjáskvæði*, but neither has ever been edited and information about their authors is considerably sparser than for Steinunn. The first of these is Guðrún Jónsdóttir of Stapadalur (1767–1850), who composed a number of *rímur* inspired by both Icelandic folklore and the romance genre, e.g. *Blómsturvalla rímur* and *Rímur af Jökli Búasyni* (although no manuscripts survive of the latter text; it was attributed to Guðrún by Sighvatur Grímsson Borgfirðingar).<sup>84</sup> Her *Snjás rímur* is preserved in JS 433 8vo, which has been dated to c. 1750–c. 1850, although the earlier boundary of the range seems unlikely given that Guðrún was not born for another seventeen years.<sup>85</sup> The third *rímur* poet was Gísli Sigurðsson (1772–1826) of Klungubrekka at Skógaströnd, who was a prolific author of *rímur* on a whole variety of subjects, including himself.<sup>86</sup>

The longer *fornyrðislag* redaction of *Snjáskvæði*—often titled *Snjáskvæði hið réttasta* or similar—is found in four 19<sup>th</sup>-century manuscripts: JS 480 8vo, Lbs. 276 fol, Lbs. 449 8vo and Lbs. 22309 8vo. JS 480 8vo seems to contain the earliest witness of the text, dated in the colophon to 1822 and containing the intriguing detail that this copy was made at Reykjavík by Benedikt Gabríel Jónsson for his daughter Sigríður. The colophon's use of the word *skrifað* suggests that the poem was not Benedikt's own composition but rather that he was copying from a pre-existing text. A detailed investigation of this poem and its provenance would certainly prove an interesting future research project; a cursory overview suggests that the longer redaction was influenced by Steinunn's *rímur* in its structuring of the material, following her in opening the story with an account of the conflict between Geir and Snjár, but at the same time it is very clearly a continuation of the earlier *sagnakvæði*, maintaining the same metre and preserving some stanzas almost intact.

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<sup>84</sup> Finnur Sæmundsson, *Rímnatal*, vols. 1–2 (Reykjavík: Rímnafélagið, 1966), 56–57.

<sup>85</sup> Páll Eggert Ólason (ed.), *Skrá*, vol. 2, 700–701. Here Páll cautiously attributes *Snjás rímur* to Þorsteinn Jónsson of Önundarfjörður.

<sup>86</sup> Finnur Sæmundsson, *Rímnatal*, 44–45.

That so many poets throughout the centuries were inspired by the story of Hildigerður and Hrafn is a testament to the enduring popularity of the themes it deals with: exile and the sorrow that comes with hiding one's true identity, mixed with a dash of the thrill and threat of a supernatural Other that can ultimately be confronted and overcome through human ingenuity and daring.

### 3. Subject matter

A summary of the events of *Snjáskvæði* can be found at the start of Chapter 2, while the full text may be found in Appendix 1. From these, it is apparent that *Snjáskvæði* draws on a number of narrative strands in order to weave its story, some of which are present in sufficiently wide a range of international folk-tales to be designated 'motifs' by folklorists. The practice of compiling motif-indices has been criticised by several folklorists, in part for the excessively Indo-European focus of the practice,<sup>87</sup> but also because of the methodological unsoundness of attempting to create discrete categories out of complicated tales in which many of the elements designated as separate motifs by Stith Thompson and his successors overlap and interact.<sup>88</sup> However, enumerating the various motifs present in a text can form a useful framework through which to explore one story's connection to others. This is the approach that will be taken here with *Snjáskvæði*.<sup>89</sup>

#### 3.1 Motifs

##### 3.1.1 Transformation

*D11 – Transformation of woman into man.* Hildigerður appears to her court as the male King Snjár. It is unclear how exactly the transformation is carried out—whether it should be taken as a magical, shapeshifting event, or whether it should be read on a more

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<sup>87</sup> Alan Dundes, "The Motif-Index and the Tale Type Index: A Critique," *Journal of Folklore Research* 34, no. 3 (1997): 196.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 197; Anna Birgitta Rooth, *The Cinderella Cycle* (Lund: Gleerup, 1951), 237–240.

<sup>89</sup> Motif numbering is taken from Inger M. Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*. Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana 27. Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1966.

prosaic level, in which Hildigerður's body does not change, but she is nonetheless forced to present herself as male, on pain of death if anyone penetrates her disguise. Both interpretations will be discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

*D525 – Transformation through a curse.* Though there is no specific mention of a curse, Hildigerður's transformation nevertheless seems to be effected wholly through speech acts. As the text goes in AM 147 8vo, the 'island-dweller' who has married Hildigerður's father promises Hildigerður that she will be grimly rewarded for her former lack of courtesy. She then speaks prophetically:

*“Þú munt eiga*

*svein í vonum.*

*Seggir ætla þig þó*

*son þíns föðurs.”* (st. 36)

“You are expecting

to have a boy.

Yet men will think you

your father's son.”

Hildigerður then recounts:

*“Mig bað hún*

*mínu eðli leynd,*

*nema ég dapurlega*

*mig dauða vildi,*

*utan drengur á mér*

*deili vissi,*

*hverjum ég veitti*

*veturlengis grið.”* (st. 37)

“She bade me

conceal my true nature,

unless I sadly

wished to die—

unless a man

discovered my condition,

one to whom I had offered

winter-long lodgings.”

No physical action is undertaken; Hildigerður's stepmother merely commands it to be so, and it is. The wording of a spell as a compulsion is also seen in *Úlfhams rímur*.<sup>90</sup> In

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<sup>90</sup> Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, *Úlfhams saga* (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 2001), clxxix.

the very next stanza, Hildigerður tells how she was arrayed in the masculine accoutrements of armour and weapons. In other versions of the text, there is an intervening stanza in which Hildigerður's father arrives and kills his new wife to either his eternal sorrow or joy, depending on the manuscript. Yet even with the evildoer dead, Hildigerður is still compelled to do her bidding.

A further magical-seeming element to the transformation is Hildigerður's statement that she has been like this for nine winters already and if Hrafn had not spoken the truth and revealed her nature she would have been doomed to live out her days *sem úlfur með dýrum*. It is unclear how literally this should be read. In a world it is accepted that elves live under the lake, it does not seem too incredible that Hildigerður may literally be turned into a wolf as punishment for failing to break the curse in time. However, *sem* implies this is a metaphorical meaning: *like* a wolf among wild beasts, but not *actually* a wolf. In this case, the line may be taken as a scornful comment on the inferiority of humans, such that to live among them would be like living with animals, or as a comment on the threat she and her curse pose them. Though the more usual term would be *vargur*, there is a strong association between wolves and outlaws/outcasts in Icelandic literature, and the line therefore also speaks to Hildigerður's miserable state of exile.

*D621.0.1 – One shape by day; another by night.* It is unclear whether Hildigerður regains her true shape when she returns to her homeland at night, but she is certainly recognised by the people as *konu Hálfðanar* in all texts.<sup>91</sup> Some texts, all descendants of the lost *kvæðabók V* specifically note that Hrafn sees the people greet *kóngur háleyskur*,<sup>92</sup> suggesting that she retains her masculine appearance even in her own world, but that people who already know her true nature are able to perceive her as she really is.

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<sup>91</sup> 'Hálfðan's wife.'

<sup>92</sup> 'The Háleygjan king.'

*D661 – Transformation as punishment.* Hildigerður's stepmother says that Hildigerður *grimmast gjalda skyldi* for her lack of courtesy,<sup>93</sup> before pronouncing her fate to live as a man amongst humans.

*K1837 – Disguise of a woman in man's clothes.* Applicable if we read Hildigerður's transformation into Snjár as being entirely effected through disguise, rather than through magical shapeshifting. See Chapter 4 for a fuller discussion.

*M411.1.1 – Cursed by stepmother.* The terms *eybyggja* is frequently used in Icelandic folk-stories for precisely the sort of stepmother figures seen in *Snjáskvæði*.<sup>94</sup>

### 3.1.2 The Land of the Elves

*F153 – Otherworld reached by diving into lake.* See F212 below.

*F162.1.1 – Everblooming garden in otherworld.* Despite the fact that the events in Hálogaland supposedly take place over the course of a winter, all texts contain a description of the verdancy of Álfheimar when Hrafn visits:

<i>Jörð sá hann græna</i>	He saw a green earth
<i>og ótal fjár</i>	and countless sheep
<i>og alblómgaða</i>	and all the woods
<i>alla skóga. (st. 13)</i>	fully in bloom.

It is of course unsurprising that the homeland of a supernatural people should be superior to the mundane world of both the Háleygjar and the poem's audience, this superiority in turn marking the new land as an otherworld in which the audience should expect mysterious events to unfold. The emphasis on *skógar* also serves to distinguish

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<sup>93</sup> 'Should be most grimly rewarded.'

<sup>94</sup> Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, *Úlfhams saga* (Reykjavik: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar, 2001), clxxi; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Folk-Stories*, 24.

the land of the elves from the deforested Iceland with which the poet and their audience would have been familiar, making it a still stranger setting. The beauty and rich living conditions of Álfheimar also serve to emphasise the paradise from which Hildigerður has been exiled in her punishment.

*F171 – Extraordinary sights in otherworld.* Hrafn witnesses two of the king’s maidservants quarrelling over a dead calf, an event which is never explained in the *sagnakvæði* although the *Snotra* folk-tale treats it slightly more extensively. Recounting this scene forms an integral part of Hrafn’s ‘revelation’ of the king’s true identity later in the poem, with the implication that this is a singular sight indicative of the king’s supernatural nature. A further scene is also recounted by Hrafn: the moment when a young boy tries to play with Hildigerður’s ring and is roundly ignored by his mother. Both scenes perhaps signal only the seriousness of Hildigerður’s dilemma—breaking the curse is so important that she will neglect this rare opportunity to interact with her son—but this scene, in which a woman who appears as a man neglects the fundamentally feminine practice of motherhood, also reveals some of the ambiguities of gender at the poem’s heart.

*F212 – Fairyland [= Álfheimar] under water.* All witnesses contain at least one stanza to the effect that Hrafn gets to the land of the elves by following Snjár when he runs out into the lake:

<i>Hugur léði þá</i>	Thought then delayed
<i>Hrafni hið besta.</i>	the most excellent Hrafn.
<i>Síðan lét hann sér um skör</i>	Then he let the snow-of-swans
	(water)
<i>svanmjöll bera.</i>	wash over his head.
<i>Hann sá vísir</i>	He saw the ruler
<i>á vatnið út hlaupa,</i>	run out into the water,
<i>en öðlinginn</i>	but the king

*aldrei upp koma.* (st. 12)

never came up.

The motif of elves, fairies and other supernatural creatures living under water is widely attested, especially in Irish folktales.<sup>95</sup> A connection between expanses of water and the supernatural is seen across a wide range of cultures and has a long history in Scandinavia and Iceland, with wetland offerings known from the Mesolithic Period until well into the Viking Age.<sup>96</sup>

F222 – *Fairy [= elf] castle.* All witnesses describe the marvellous hall which Hrafn sees:

*Skein sólin á sal  
silfrinu þöktu.* (st. 13)

The sun shone on a hall  
thatched with silver.

Fairies and other supernatural creatures possessing wealth beyond the dreams of mortals is a common theme in fairytales across cultures, and this idea is also reflected in the lavish gifts with which Hildigerður rewards Hrafn when he breaks the curse (see F330). The detail that the hall is ‘thatched with silver’ recalls the descriptions of several halls roofed with silver or gold, as described in both *Snorra Edda* and several eddic poems:

*Sal sér hon standa  
sólu fegra,  
gulli þakðan,  
á Gimlé.* (Vsp. st. 62)<sup>97</sup>

She sees a hall standing,  
fairer than the sun,  
thatched with gold,  
at Gimlé.

*Glitnir er inn tíundi,*

Glitnir is the tenth,

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<sup>95</sup> Tom Peete Cross, *A Motif-Index of Early Irish Literature* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1952), 244.

<sup>96</sup> Flemming Kaul, “The Bog - the Gateway to Another World”, in Lars Jørgensen, Birger Storgaard and Lone Gebauer Thomsen (eds.), *The Spoils of Victory: The North in the Shadow of the Roman Empire* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseet, 2003) 18–43.

<sup>97</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason (eds.), *Eddukvæði. I. Goðakvæði* (Reykjavik: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 307.

<p><i>hann er gulli studdr, ok silfri þakðr it sama (Grímn. st. 15)<sup>98</sup></i></p>	<p>it is supported with gold and roofed with silver just the same.</p>
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*Þar er ok sá er Glitnir heitir, ok eru veggir hans ok steðr ok stólpa af rauðu  
gulli, en þak hans af silfri.<sup>99</sup>*

*Þar er enn sá staðr er Himinbjörg heita. [...] Þann gerðu guðin ok þøktu  
skíru silfri.<sup>100</sup>*

Details such as this further support the argument that *sagnakvæði* form part of a continuous line from some of the oldest eddic poetry, despite their late preservation.

*F330 – Grateful fairies [= elves].* The precise nature of Hrafn’s reward varies from witness to witness, but AM 147 8vo gives the general idea:

<p><i>“Einn skaltu þínu höfðinu ráða. Þar læt ég fylgia með fimm gullhringa, hjálmi ærlegastan, hlífar vænlegastar, bitran mækir og brand roðinn.</i></p>	<p>“You shall keep your head whole. I will cause to accompany it five gold rings, a most honourable helm, most handsome shields, a bitter blade and a reddened sword.</p>
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<p><i>“Stendur á ströndu</i></p>	<p>“That which I, the ruler, give</p>
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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 371.

<sup>99</sup> ‘There is also that one [hall] which is called Glitnir, and its walls and posts and pillars are made of red gold, and its roof of silver.’ Anthony Faulkes (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson. Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 2005), 19–20.

<sup>100</sup> ‘There is yet that place which is called Himinbjörg. [...] The gods made it and roofed it with shining silver.’ *Ibid.*, 20.

<i>sá ég, stillir, gef:</i>	stands on the strand:
<i>hafnar hrökkvir</i>	a ship of the harbour
<i>hlaðinn gersemum.</i>	laden with jewels.
<i>Hans er þér allvel</i>	This is granted to you
<i>unnt að njóta;</i>	to enjoy very much;
<i>hafðu hann, frægur drengur,</i>	have it, famous fellow,
<i>í förum lengi.” (st. 28–29)</i>	on journeys for a long time.

F383.4 – *Fairy [= elf] must leave at cock-crow*. Usually this motif means that supernatural beings must leave the human world at cock-crow, suggesting that daylight is inimical to supernatural powers (e.g. the pan-Scandinavian motif of trolls being turned to stone by the rising sun). However, in *Snjáskvæði* we see a reversal of the usual trope: when Hildigerður states that she must return home before cock-crow, she must mean her court in Hálogaland.

### 3.2 Connections with other genres

The prominence of these motifs in *Snjáskvæði* speaks to its strong connections with folk- and fairy-tales. In particular, its ties to several Icelandic folk-tales will be discussed in the next section. The motifs seen in *Snjáskvæði* are also found in several other Icelandic texts. Unfortunately, the sole motif-index dealing in any detail with Icelandic material only looks at *early* Icelandic literature, meaning poetry from the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda and all genres of saga, but not including *rímur*, ballads or *sagnakvæði*.<sup>101</sup> It is nonetheless instructive to see which of the genres included in Inger Margrethe Boberg’s survey share motifs with *Snjáskvæði*. For the most part, these are *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*—the border between these two genres is not always sharply defined—with occasional appearances from more nominally historical texts such

<sup>101</sup> Boberg, *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature*. Volume 6 of the second edition of Jón Árnason’s *Þjóðsögur og ævintýri* also includes a brief motif-index of the fairytales.

as *Ynglinga saga* and Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, both of which share the *fornaldarsögur*'s interest in the legendary past of Scandinavia.

Motif number	<i>Fornaldar sögur</i>	<i>Riddara sögur</i>	<i>Konunga sögur</i>	Mythological material	Other
D11					
D525	4	6			
D621.0.1					
D661	3	3		1	
F153					
F162.1.1				1	
F171.1					
F212		1			
F222					
F330					
F340					
F370					
F383.4					
K1837		1		1	1
M411.1.1	3	5	2	1	

**Fig. 2.** Table showing appearances of *Snjáskvæði*'s motifs in other Icelandic literature, after Boberg, Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature.

That there should be so much shared material between the *fornaldar*- and *riddarasögur* and the *sagnakvæði* is unsurprising. All three genres make comparable use of the fantastical, creating worlds in which it is accepted that elves live underwater, gemstones can transform their user's appearance, and giants need heroes to marry their beautiful daughters. In addition, both saga genres show the influence of medieval French literature, with some *riddarasögur* being direct translations (or perhaps more accurately 'reworkings') of tales which already existed in French.<sup>102</sup> The line of influence

<sup>102</sup> Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, "From Heroic Legend to 'Medieval Screwball Comedy'? The Origins, Development and Interpretation of the Maiden-King Narrative", in Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen & Agneta Ney (eds.), *The Legendary Sagas. Origins and Development* (Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press, 2012), 229–249.

on the *sagnakvæði* is less clear, due to their comparatively late preservation, but several scholars have commented on the similarities between the *lai* of *Yonec* (translated as the *strengleikur Jónet*) and the *sagnakvæði Gullkársljóð*.<sup>103</sup> However, although *riddarasögur* do frequently feature a disguise motif (e.g. Sigurðr’s repeated transformations in *Sigurðar saga þogla*), the changes do not as a rule fall across gender lines. Instead, the motif of women dressing as men is far more widely attested in the indigenous material—texts set in Scandinavia, drawing on theme found across early Germanic literature—than in those texts where the romantic Continental influence is more apparent.

In light of this, it is significant that the setting for Snjár’s court should be amongst the Háleygjar, Hálogaland featuring as the kingdom of a number of legendary kings in texts such as *Ynglinga saga*, *Skáldskaparmál*, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* and *Orkneyinga saga*. *Þorsteins saga* also states that the place derived its name from its king Logi, known for his height as ‘Há-Logi’. In *Snjáskvæði*, Logi appears to be the name of Hildigerður’s father:

<i>“Það er að segja</i>	“There is this to say:
<i>að sæll Logi</i>	that Logi the Blessed
<i>löndum stýrði</i>	ruled the lands
<i>og liði mörgu.</i>	and many people.
<i>Hafði ég fengið</i>	I received
<i>ást af föður og móður:</i>	love from my father and mother:
<i>var ég álfkonungs</i>	I was the elf-king’s
<i>einka dóttir.” (st. 32)</i>	only daughter.”

I do not intend to suggest that *Snjáskvæði*’s poet must have known *Þorsteins saga*, or indeed any given *fornaldarsaga*, but it does seem likely that they were familiar with the narrative traditions which inspired both the fantastical *fornaldarsögur* and more nominally historical texts such as the *Gesta Danorum*.

<sup>103</sup> Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, “Old French lais and Icelandic *sagnakvæði*”, 274–275; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Folk-Stories*, 88; Haukur Þorgeirsson, “*Gullkársljóð* og *Hrafnagaldur*”, 315.

### 3.3 Folk-tale parallels

Almost every scholar who discusses *Snjáskvæði* also comments on its similarity to some of the folktales collected by Jón Árnason in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in particular the tale of *Snotra*, which was collected from the farmer Jón Sigurðsson, of Njarðvík in the east of Iceland.<sup>104</sup> The account in *Snotra* goes as follows:

The owner of the farm at Nes, in Borgarfjörður, is a woman of mysterious origins. She appoints a man to oversee her household and tells him that his life depends on being able to tell her where she disappears to during the Yuletide celebrations each year. The first three men fail in their mission and disappear, never to be heard of again. The fourth man keeps watch on Christmas Eve and follows when Snotra disappears. He follows her down to the seashore where she dons a pale-blue veil she has been carrying. At this point, she catches sight of her pursuer and throws him his own veil to wear. They both walk into the sea for some time and eventually emerge in a beautiful green country with a magnificent castle, where Snotra is greeted by a great crowd of people. They take her to the bigger of two buildings; the steward hides in the smaller one and watches the proceedings through a window for the next three nights. He witnesses all sorts of dances and entertainments, with Snotra sitting in a throne, arrayed as a queen. On the third evening, men bring the news that a cow has given birth to two calves but that one of them is dead. Two women were responsible for the cow's well-being and each blames the other for the calf's death. After three nights, Snotra takes her leave with much sorrow from the king and the people. She and her steward return the same way they came and when they reach land, Snotra says nothing of what has just happened. The next day, she comes to him and asks whether he can now tell her where she has been over Christmas, whereupon he recites the following verse:

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<sup>104</sup> Jón Árnason (ed.), *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, vol. 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Árni Böðvarsson & Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (eds.) (Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, 1954), 109–111. The variant *Snotra álfkona* is also found in Jón Árnason (ed.) *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur*, vol. 3, 162–163. This is a similar, though somewhat shorter account of a woman called Snotra who is this time the wife of Jón, the farmer at Nes. *Snotra álfkona* lacks the verses of 'Snotra' but does note of Snotra that 'vissi enginn ætt hennar' – 'no one knew her lineage' – much as is said of Snjár.

“Deildu tvær um dauðan kálf,  
drottning mín það veiztu sjálf;  
ógurlegt var það orðagjálfur,  
yfrið reiður varð kóngurinn sjálfur.”<sup>105</sup>

“Two women quarrelled over a  
dead calf,  
my queen, you know this yourself;  
the roaring of words was terrible,  
the king himself became  
exceedingly angry.”

Snotra declares that she is grateful to him: his words have freed her from a spell that prevented her from being with her husband except at Christmas. She bequeaths her farm to him, which has since been called Snotrunes, and promptly disappears, presumably back to her own land.

As well as *Snotra*, the tales of *Una álfkona*,<sup>106</sup> *Úlfhildur álfkona*<sup>107</sup> and *Hildur álfadrottning*<sup>108</sup> also bear some similarity to *Snjáskvæði*. Figure 3 shows the common elements across all four folk-tales and *Snjáskvæði*. All four of the folk-tales connect their events with the folk tradition of elves attending church or holding parties at Christmas, an element which is not found in *Snjáskvæði* but is a common motif in folk-tales concerning elves. All the stories except *Hildur álfadrottning* are localised to particular farms or areas within Iceland: *Una* with Rauðfell under Eyjafjöll in the south, *Úlfhildur* with Mývatn in the north, and *Snotra* with Snotrunes near Borgarfjörður-Eystri in the Eastfjords.

*Una álfkona* is a truncated form of the story, featuring only the motif of the disguised elf-woman—who is only ‘disguised’ insofar as she does not tell anyone that she is really the queen of the elves. Echoes of some of *Snjáskvæði*’s motifs are still present: for example, the passage to the land of the elves is reached by travelling to a wetland area (*dý*) where *Una* is able to pass into the earth, recalling the lake in *Snjáskvæði*.<sup>109</sup> However, the other folk-tales display more extensive similarities, as can be seen in Fig. 3. ‘Snotra’ shares the greatest amount of detail with *Snjáskvæði*, even

<sup>105</sup> Jón Árnason (ed.), *Þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, vol. 1, 111.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 101–102.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 102–105.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 105–109.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

down to the level of verbal echoes such as the line that runs *Deildu tvær um dauðan kálf* in 'Snotra' and *Deildu tiggja / drósir ungar / ambáttir tvær / um dauðan kálf* in *Snjáskvæði*. 'Úlfhildur álfkona' and 'Hildur álfadrottning' do not contain the detail of the dead calf, but do include a scene in which the elf-queen's child tries to play with her gold ring, which subsequently plays a role in revealing her true nature. The main differences arise through the shift in genre, from the legendary heroism of *Snjáskvæði*, with its kings and retinues and ancient battles, to the world of the Icelandic folk-tale. Rather than ruling a distant kingdom, Snotra controls the more prosaic territory of a farm in the Eastfjords of Iceland. Her 'court' is the workers of the farm; the bold warrior Hrafn becomes an unnamed *ráðsmaður*. In the other folk-tales, the elf-woman is not even the owner of the farm, merely a favoured worker, and the Hrafn-figure a lowly shepherd. As the real-world setting of the story becomes more localised and mundane, the land of the elves becomes increasingly enticing in its lush greenness, *vaxið ilmjurtum og ávaxtatríám*<sup>110</sup> and *alþakið af fögrum blómum*.<sup>111</sup> A shining sun also features prominently in these descriptions. This is in stark contrast to the Yuletide setting of the Icelandic portions of these stories, when the landscape would be at its gloomiest.

Though it is likely that the folk-tales had existed for some time before Jón Árnason's collection efforts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, his edition contains the earliest known versions of these stories and their earlier transmission remains a matter of speculation. That said, the fact that multiple tales exist from across Iceland which share both a similar storyline and a number of smaller details with *Snjáskvæði* suggests that the folk-tales are drawing upon the same underlying story as is found in *Snjáskvæði*, and in the case of *Snotra* may even have known a version of the extant poem, to which they have added other traditions concerning the activities of elves which are absent from *Snjáskvæði*.

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<sup>110</sup> 'Grown with sweet-scented herbs and fruit-trees.' *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>111</sup> 'All covered with beautiful blossoms.' *Ibid.*, 103.

<b>Motif</b>	<b>Una álfkona</b>	<b>Úlfhildur álfkona</b>	<b>Hildur álfadrottning</b>	<b>Snotra</b>	<b>Snjáskvæði</b>
Elf-woman disguised in the human world	x	x	x	x	x
Disguise crosses gender boundaries					x
Disguise crosses class boundaries	x	x	x	x	
Man must reveal truth or lose his life				x	x
Elf-woman disappears every night					x
Elf-woman disappears at Christmas	x	x	x	x	
One man follows the elf-woman	x	x	x	x	x
The passage to Álfheimur is underwater	(x)			x	x
Water is involved in the journey in another way		x			
Álfheimur is beautiful and fertile	x	x	x	x	x
Magnificent buildings	x	x	x	x	x
The disguised character is revealed to be the queen of Elfland		x	x	x	x
Her child plays with a gold ring		x	x		x
Two maidservants quarrel over a dead calf				x	x
The follower reveals the queen's identity	x	x	x	x	x
A period of silence is required				x	x
The revelation breaks a curse		x	x	x	x
The curse was laid by an older woman		x	x		x
The curse-layer is killed for her actions		x			x
The man is rewarded for his part in breaking the curse		x	x	x	x
Reward includes territory controlled by elf-woman				x	x
The elf-woman disappears after her identity is revealed	x	x	x	x	x

**Fig. 3.** Comparison of narrative elements in *Snjáskvæði* and the folk-tales.

## 4. Transformation and gender theory

As discussed in Chapter 3, *Snjáskvæði* shows a marked similarity to the folk-tale of ‘Snotra’ and others of the ‘disguised elf-woman’ type collected by Jón Árnason in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, a major point of difference is the gendered nature of the ‘disguise’ seen in *Snjáskvæði* but not otherwise associated with these tales. This chapter explores the precise nature of Hildigerður’s transformation into Snjár and offers a possible explanation for why the poem features a change of gender expression when none of the similar tales do.

### 4.1 Theoretical approach

As the title of this thesis suggests, I will be working with Judith Butler’s framing of gender as a performance in which ‘acts’ such as mode of speech, mannerisms, dress, etc. serve to both create and reinforce an individual’s gender.<sup>112</sup> The idea of gender as performance has been justly critiqued by both transgender theorists and gender essentialists for taking insufficient account of the effect that the material body has on any ‘performance’ produced, a point that Butler addresses in her later work.<sup>113</sup> However, Butler’s approach is particularly suitable for discussing fictional characters, whose gender is only made manifest by its externalisation, i.e. what the author chooses to tell us. The gender performed here is not necessarily a character’s own identity, but the author’s perspective on gender as a concept, however unconsciously displayed.

A key element of the performance theory of gender is its emphasis on the ways in which gender is produced through social interaction. This is both a strength and a weakness of the theory. As transgender theorists such as Julia Serano have pointed out, the idea that ‘all gender is drag’ or ‘all gender is performance’ can very easily be used to undermine transgender people’s experiences of their own gender identity, and indeed

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<sup>112</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>113</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter. On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York; London: Routledge, 1993); Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York; London: Routledge, 2004).

an emphasis on the externalised performance of gender does not adequately address the fact that many people experience an internal sense of gender at odds with the gender they are typically perceived as.<sup>114</sup> Serano therefore proposes a model which acknowledges the plurality of concepts grouped under the heading of ‘gender’, one which explicitly acknowledges the importance of internal identity, the physical body and social perception of performed gender.<sup>115</sup> Though this remains a simplification of a complex issue, as all models are, this remains a good framework through which to approach gender in real humans, but it was never intended as a tool for literary analysis. Fictional characters cannot be said to possess internal identity or indeed a corporeal form; though an author may describe both, any understanding of these things is produced solely through the author’s dialogue with their audience. This, I would say, is a kind of performance on the part of the author, one in which, however unconsciously, they reveal their own understanding of the gender system in which they operate.

#### 4.1.1 Gender theory and Old Norse-Icelandic literature

Despite the prominence of queer gender performance in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, with gods who can change sex and species, men who disguise themselves as women when it suits their ends, and women who take on male names, titles and even pronouns when they take up arms, there has been surprisingly little scholarship on Norse gender roles, especially not discussions which explore the gender system as a whole, rather than focusing on depictions of either men or, more frequently, women.<sup>116</sup> The majority of

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<sup>114</sup> Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl. A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boston: Seal Press, 2016), xvi.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 95–113. It should also be noted that ‘physical sex’ is not a pair of neat binary boxes any more than ‘gender’ is; in modern Western societies, it is most frequently assigned based on the appearance of external genitalia at birth, but factors such as hormone levels and chromosomal arrangements also play a part. See M. Blackless, et al., “How Sexually Dimorphic Are We? Review and Synthesis”, *American Journal of Human Biology* 12 (2000): 151–166.

<sup>116</sup> Examples of studies focusing on a single gender include: Helga Kress, *Máttugar meyjar. Íslensk fornþókmennitasaga* (Reykjavik: Háskólaútgáfan, 1993); Jenny Jochens, *Old Norse Images of Women* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature. Bodies, Words, and Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1983).

those studies which do look at the gender system as a whole tend to centre the practice of *seiðr* and its possible connection to the queer gender performances seen in the shamanic practices of a number of cultures. Even these studies tend to conceptualise gender as being composed of two discrete categories, with the magic happening through deliberate transgression of barriers that were impermeable for ordinary people.<sup>117</sup>

Within the field of Old Norse-Icelandic literary studies, Carol Clover has perhaps gone furthest in her efforts to envision a gender system not wholly based on a physiologically-dictated male/female binary. Her influential article ‘Regardless of Sex’ draws upon the work of Thomas Laqueur in constructing, instead of a binary, a spectrum ranging from *hvatr*, with its implications of virility and strength, to *blauðr*, associated with weakness and femininity.<sup>118</sup> Whereas Laqueur argues that the masculine was viewed as a default to which everyone reverted, Clover maintains that on the contrary it required constant effort to maintain a *hvatr* identity and avoid becoming *blauðr*. By structuring her system around actions and behaviours, instead of physical features or identities, Clover allows for the possibility that individual could move along these axes over the course of their lives, something she explicitly recognises in her analysis of the famous goading line from *Hrafnkels saga*, “Svá ergisk hverr sem eldisk”.<sup>119</sup> Clover’s article has been an important step in moving our discussion of gender away from the dictates of anatomy, but it has nonetheless been justly criticised for its assumption that masculine-coded behaviours were the only way for people of any gender to wield power with approval. As Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir points out, all genres of saga show female characters wielding power in a variety of ways, some of which seem to have been more accessible to them than to male characters.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> See, for example, Brit Solli, *Seid: Myter, sjamanisme og kjønn i vikingenes tid* (Oslo: Pax Forlag, 2002); Neil S. Price, *The Viking Way. Religion and War in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Uppsala: Department of Archaeology and Ancient History, University of Uppsala: 2002).

<sup>118</sup> Carol J. Clover, ‘Regardless of Sex: Men, Women and Power in Early Northern Europe’, *Representations* 44 (1993): 1–28; Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>119</sup> “Everyone gets queerer as they get older.” The word *ergi* is difficult to render in English, but when applied to men, it connotes improperly passive sexual behaviour and/or cowardice – the opposite of a good, *hvatr* man.

<sup>120</sup> Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 7.

Underlying both Carol Clover's and Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir's studies is the assumption that people only engage in gendered behaviours as a means of exercising power, and that their failure to perform certain behaviours is just that: a failure. The relationship between gender and power is an important issue for many societies, but to view pursuit of power as the sole motivation for gender performance ignores other possibilities, such as the expression of an internal sense of identity. Access to power may be one potential reason for people to engage in 'improper' gendered behaviour, as Neil Price persuasively argues was the case for *seiðr*-practitioners,<sup>121</sup> but an internal identity at odds with one's socially perceived gender may be another. I do not suggest that medieval Icelandic society had the same understanding of transgenderism as we do today, nor that poets and authors of the time were consciously seeking to portray individuals who would now be seen as transgender.<sup>122</sup> However, transgender people have existed across cultures and throughout history, whether or not their societies acknowledged the fact. All literature is to some degree an unconscious reflection of the social environment in which it was produced and it is therefore to a certain extent irrelevant whether its authors explicitly recognise the existence of people whose social gender and physical sex are incongruous; the existence of such people in the fabric of an author's social reality may manifest itself in a number of ways, such as the number of gender non-conforming characters seen in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

As William Layher has argued, we are perhaps more likely to see such characters in the more fantastical genres, such as the mythological material and *fornaldarsögur*.<sup>123</sup> The very nature of these works is precisely what makes them suitable sites for the discussion of non-normative gender performances, the setting and fantastical elements combining to safely distance these stories from the everyday world inhabited by their authors and audiences, allowing them to entertain ideas which, if presented too close to home, would have threatened the established social order. The *sagnakvæði* genre,

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<sup>121</sup> Price, *The Viking Way*, 213–214.

<sup>122</sup> Here and throughout this thesis I use the term 'transgender' as an umbrella term to cover all individuals whose gender identity, socially perceived gender and physical sex (as assigned at birth) do not align, whether or not such individuals have chosen to medically transition.

<sup>123</sup> William Layher, "Caught Between Worlds: Gendering the Maiden Warrior in Old Norse", in Sara S. Poor & Jana K. Schulman (eds.), *Women and Medieval Epic. Gender, Genre, and the Limits of Epic Masculinity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 191.

with its close ties to both *fornaldarsögur* and eddic material should also be viewed in this light.

#### 4.2 Transformation in *Snjáskvæði*

The story told in *Snjáskvæði* raises a number of questions about how gender was perceived as being performed and maintained by the poet(s) and their audiences. In the first place, it is open to interpretation whether Hildigerður is transfigured bodily to become Snjár, or whether ‘Snjár’ is more in the nature of a disguise, one whose very name suggests fragility, hinting at his potential to melt away like snow under close examination. In a world in which the existence of elves is uncontested and following in the eddic tradition’s acceptance of magical shapeshifting (e.g. in *Lokasenna*), it is tempting to conclude that this must be an example of complete, physical transformation, wrought by the enigmatic *eybyggja*, also identified as a *flagð* and therefore perhaps in possession of supernatural powers.<sup>124</sup>

However, Hildigerður’s description of how she became Snjár does not allude to her body in any way. Instead, she speaks of concealment:

“Mig bað hún  
mínu eðlinu leyndu.” (st. 37)

“She bade me  
conceal my true nature.”

The fact that this is phrased as an instruction to Hildigerður, a speech act carrying a degree of compulsion, but not something where the *eybyggja* can simply wave a hand and declare, “Your true nature is now concealed,” suggests that this is not shapeshifting magic at work. Such a reading is supported by Hildigerður’s subsequent explanation:

“Réð ég kvenglysi  
að kasta mínu.  
Steyptu seggir yfir mig

“I cast off  
my feminine attire.  
Men threw over me

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<sup>124</sup> ‘Island-dweller’; ‘ogress; female monster’.

<i>svalri brynju.</i>	a cold mailcoat.
<i>Settu skreyttan hjálm</i>	They set a decorated helmet
<i>á skarar fjall</i>	on my mountain-of-the-haircut
<i>en í hendi</i>	and in my hand
<i>hjaltorm búinn.” (st. 38)</i>	a decorated hilt-snake.”

In the next stanza, she tells us, “Svo herjaði ég á Háleygjar,” with no further adjustments to her appearance necessary, apparently.<sup>125</sup> Thus, the focal point of Hildigerður’s transformation into Snjár revolves wholly around external trappings: a mailcoat, helmet and sword, with no item of female clothing mentioned which could counteract the message that to be martial and to be masculine are one and the same. This is a point that I will return to at greater length in the next section (Chapter 4.3).

The externality of the disguise is also emphasised when the *eybyggja* tells Hildigerður:

<i>“Seggir ætla þig þó</i>	“Men will nevertheless think you
<i>son þíns föðurs.” (st. 36)</i>	your father’s son.”

There is no statement to the effect that Hildigerður will *be* a man. Instead, her masculine gender is produced wholly through social interaction—or in Butlerian terms, ‘performance’.

There is therefore nothing in *Snjáskvæði* to indicate that we are dealing with bodily transformation rather than simply an external disguise. In light of this, it is significant that none of Snjár’s court, nor the various men who overwinter there, think to question their king’s masculinity, despite the fact that in the latter case their very lives depend on being able to reveal some facet of the king’s true nature and they might therefore be expected to scrutinise the king closely. This willingness to accept a performed gender over anatomical signifiers is also seen in a number of other cases in medieval Icelandic literature, in which women disguise themselves as men—always as

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<sup>125</sup> ‘Thus I raided amongst the Háleygjar.’

warriors, it should be noted—and remain undetected by their comrades-in-arms.<sup>126</sup> This is perhaps poetic licence along the same lines as the transformative powers of Clark Kent’s glasses, but there are numerous examples of transgender people concealing their sex through clothing, without any of the medical assistance which is possible today, and we should not necessarily dismiss stories like Hervqr’s transformation into the viking leader Hjqrvarðr as an impossible fantasy.<sup>127</sup>

Jenny Jochens’ article ‘Before the Male Gaze’ makes several important points about the powerful effects of clothing in medieval Icelandic society. She notes that in a relatively poor society such as medieval Iceland, most people would possess very few changes of clothing, creating a far stronger link between an item of clothing and the identity of its wearer, such that the thought, “Gunnarr always wears that particular cloak,” very easily becomes, “The person in that cloak must be Gunnarr.”<sup>128</sup> She also points out the pragmatics of dressing in a cold climate, arguing that the emphasis on strictly gendered apparel seen in the *Grágás* lawcode is more understandable in a climate where most anatomical markers of sex would be difficult to discern under several layers of clothing.<sup>129</sup> This then goes some way to explaining the way in which *Snjaskvæði* shows it to be completely possible to shift one’s social gender purely through costume-change.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Examples include Hervqr in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, who heads a raiding band for some time under the name of Hjqrvarðr, and Þornbjörg/Þórbergir in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, who rules as King Þórbergir and later takes up arms to rescue her husband, who is apparently unable to recognise his wife as the *maður [...] inn vígligasti* [‘most warlike man’] who stands before him until she removes her helmet. C. C. Rafn (ed.), *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, vols. 1, 3 (Copenhagen: 1829–1830).

<sup>127</sup> For example, Dr. James Barry, who lived unchallenged as a man for over fifty years, rising to the rank of Inspector General of Hospitals for the British Army. Doubt was only thrown upon his masculinity after his death by the woman who—against his express wishes—prepared his body for burial. For an account of Barry’s life, see Michael du Preez & Jeremy Dronfield, *Dr James Barry: A Woman Ahead of Her Time* (London: Oneworld, 2016).

<sup>128</sup> Jenny Jochens, “Before the Male Gaze. The Absence of the Female Body in Old Norse,” in Joyce E. Salisbury (ed.), *Sex in the Middle Ages. A Book of Essays* (New York; London: Garland, 1991), 19.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>130</sup> The following discussion deals mostly with *fornaldarsögur* material, but for a comparative discussion of cross-dressing in the Icelandic family sagas, see Anna Zanchi, “Klæðskipti í Íslendingasöu. Norrænar fornþókmenntir í sjónarhorni kynjafræði” (MA thesis, University of Iceland, Reykavík: 2004) and a brief discussion in Anita Sauckel, *Die literarische Funktion von Kleidung in den Íslendingasögur und Íslendingabættir* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 103–114.

### 4.3 Armed women in fact and fiction

As discussed above, the transformation sequence in *Snjáskvæði* revolves around military trappings. Indeed, these are the *only* details the audience is given regarding Hildigerður's impersonation of Snjár, implying that the image of the warrior was intrinsically connected to the masculine gender in the minds of the poet and their audience. This subchapter therefore questions how representative this view was in medieval Iceland and how far such a view reflected the reality in Scandinavia.

The figure of the female warrior in Norse society has been a popular topic of discussion for many years. Armed women appear frequently throughout the medieval corpus, from Saxo Grammaticus' 12<sup>th</sup>-century *Gesta Danorum*, which describes Danish women who 'dressed themselves to look like men and spent every minute cultivating soldiers' skills',<sup>131</sup> to the 'maiden kings' of the late-medieval Icelandic chivalric sagas, some of whom see their kingly position as including a martial component. Pre-dating the earliest written sources for Scandinavia, the *guldgubbar* of the Late Germanic iron Age (small gold foils stamped with images, often found in the post-holes of Iron Age buildings) show iconographic depictions of apparently-female figure holding shields.<sup>132</sup> Despite the prominence of the 'armed woman' motif, however, a number of scholars maintain that the figure of the shieldmaiden is nothing more than a male chauvinist fantasy, or at best a literary motif with no basis in reality.<sup>133</sup>

The archaeological evidence for armed women in the Viking Age remains somewhat inconclusive, although this is due at least in part to the tendency of early excavators to assign sex to a grave based on its grave goods, rather than any osteological examination of the remains. This results in the circular reasoning that only men are buried with weapons, therefore any grave with weapons must be that of a man, which is a further data-point to support the assertion that only men are buried with weapons.

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<sup>131</sup> Hilda Ellis Davidson (ed.) and Peter Foote (trans.), *Saxo Grammaticus: History of the Danes* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1979), 212.

<sup>132</sup> Although see Ing-Marie Back Danielsson, *Masking Moments: The Transitions of Bodies and Beings in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* (Stockholm: Dept. of Archaeology and Classical Studies, Stockholm University, 2007) for a discussion of the complexities of gendering these images.

<sup>133</sup> Jenny Jochens, *Images of Women*, 106–107; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, *Women in Old Norse Literature*, 6.

Due to inaccurate records and poor find-preservation, it is not always possible to conduct new osteological examinations of the remains, and indeed in some case the remains were never found in a state that would allow any examination to be undertaken.

However, even following the sexing suggested by the original excavators, it is possible to find a few examples of women being buried with weapons. The definition of 'weapon' should probably not include knives, which were useful household tools for everyone, and the inclusion of axes, which also served a practical purpose in rural life, is also debateable. Likewise, spears and bows could well have been used for hunting rather than (or as well as) in combat. The majority of the 'female weapon graves' surveyed by Leszek Gardęła have knives and axes as the primary 'weapon', but there are also examples of a woman buried with a spearhead (the Gerdrup double grave) and another with a shield-boss and the remnants of what may once have been leather armour (Kaupan 296, part of a triple boat-grave).<sup>134</sup> Gardęła argues that the spearhead should be seen as a variant on the iron staff found in a number of female graves (e.g. Oseberg, Klinta 59:3, etc.), often interpreted as a tool for the practice of *seiðr*, and not as a weapon for combat. According to this survey, therefore, women buried with weapons of war are thin on the ground in Scandinavia, although the caveats above regarding the 'sexing' of these graves should be born in mind regarding this conclusion.

At the time of Gardęła's 2011 study, there were no known examples of women being buried with swords. However, in 2017 a team of archaeologists carried out genetic sexing on the remains from one of the 10<sup>th</sup>-century Birka chamber graves, Bj. 581.<sup>135</sup> This grave is a prototypical 'warrior' grave, an elaborate construction in which the

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<sup>134</sup> Leszek Gardęła, "'Warrior-women' in Viking Age Scandinavia? A preliminary archaeological study", *Analecta Archaeologica Ressoiviensia* 8 (2013): 273–339.

<sup>135</sup> Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson et al., "A female Viking warrior confirmed by genomics," *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 2017: 1–8. Since the original article was published, there have been numerous informal responses by other archaeologists pointing out the notoriously confused state of the finds from Birka. However, Anna Kjellström, an osteologist who worked on the 2017 article, has undertaken a full study of the human remains from Birka and concludes that the finds from Bj. 581 are very much as described in Stolpe's original excavation report, with no particular reason to question the connection of these bones with Bj. 581 (Neil Price, "Viking warrior women? Reassessing Birka chamber grave Bj. 581 and its implications" (presentation, Miðaldastofa, University of Iceland, 17<sup>th</sup> April 2018)). An article by Price addressing these issues is forthcoming.

deceased was laid to rest along with the bodies of two horses, gaming pieces, two spearheads, several knives, an axe head, an iron sword, and riding equipment, amongst other goods.<sup>136</sup> Its original excavators confidently declared its occupant to be male, but the results of the genetic testing carried out in 2017 found that the deceased almost certainly had XX chromosomes.<sup>137</sup> Despite the association that was quickly made between this individual and the ‘shieldmaidens’ of later literature, it should be noted that chromosomal analysis cannot tell us anything about a person’s social role. Even examinations of the grave goods cannot be treated simply as reflections of a lived identity, but should instead be viewed as objects which acquired meaning as part of the ritual process of the funeral.<sup>138</sup> For example, Heinrich Härke has questioned the label of ‘warrior graves’ when applied to graves containing weapons, showing that in a number of Anglo-Saxon examples, swords are interred with individuals who could not conceivably have wielded them in life (e.g. children being buried with swords they would not have been able to lift).<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, the grave’s position near the building known as the ‘garrison’ of Birka, which seems to have been destroyed by violent attack towards the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>140</sup> does argue in favour of its occupant having experience in using weapons like those found in the grave.

If the person buried in Bj. 581 was a warrior in life, as does seem to have been the case, the question of their socially perceived gender remains in doubt. Two X chromosomes do not necessarily mean that someone identifies as or is perceived as a woman. In terms of Serano’s model, social gender may not match physical sex and both may differ from an individual’s internal identity. Reading gender—as opposed to sex—from graves is primarily done on the basis of grave goods, but as the results from Bj. 581 show, our understanding of ‘female’ versus ‘male’ grave goods may need significant

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<sup>136</sup> Holger Arbman, *Birka. Untersuchungen und Studien. I. Die Gräber. Text* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1943), 188–190.

<sup>137</sup> Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. “A female Viking warrior”, 5.

<sup>138</sup> Howard Williams & Duncan Sayer, “‘Halls of mirrors’: death and identity in medieval archaeology.” In *Mortuary practices and social identities in the Middle Ages. Essays in burial archaeology in honour of Heinrich Härke*, edited by Duncan Sayer & Howard Williams (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>139</sup> Heinrich Härke, “‘Warrior Graves’? The Background of the Anglo-Saxon Weapon Burial Rite”, *Past & Present* 126 (1990): 22–43.

<sup>140</sup> Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson, “The Birka Warrior. The material culture of a martial society” (PhD thesis, Stockholm University: 2006), 69.

revision. It is therefore unclear whether we should interpret the grave at Birka as evidence for 'female warriors', in the sense of people who were perceived by those around them as women who fought, or whether it can be taken as evidence for a more complex system of gender in the late Iron Age than a male/female binary.<sup>141</sup>

However we interpret the results from Bj. 581, pending a fuller re-examination of the sexing of weapons-graves, we cannot know how widespread a phenomenon such people were in the Scandinavian Iron Age. It is however certain that the figure of the armed woman enjoyed considerable popularity in the literature of the medieval period. The earliest detailed account of such women appears in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* with the story of Alfhilda who, when her mother disapproves of her marrying her suitor Alf, dresses herself as a male seafarer and begins a life of piracy, only stopping when Alf defeats her in a sea-battle. Following this account, Saxo offers the explanation that it was once, if not common, at least a not-infrequent occurrence for some women among the Danes to take up arms and train as warriors, putting aside feminine 'pliancy' in favour of 'virile ruthlessness'.<sup>142</sup> William Layher has argued that Saxo's description here, which links the removal of femininity with the acquisition of masculinity, is influenced by the Galenic one-sex model popular amongst learned writers of the Middle Ages,<sup>143</sup> but it is also significant that Saxo cannot conceive of a warrior retaining any sort of femininity. Whereas the martial and the masculine are often presented as a package deal, femininity is portrayed as utterly antithetical to the warrior ethos.

Other medieval writers are at best ambivalent about the possible co-existence of femininity and warriorhood, for example in the case of valkyries. Though all valkyries have female names and are referred to with female pronouns when they appear, Kathleen Self has argued that they 'sit somewhat uneasily in the feminine category' if we insist on a strict male/female binary and that we should therefore see valkyries as a 'third gender'.<sup>144</sup> Several of Self's reasons for assigning 'masculine' attributes to the

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<sup>141</sup> A number of archaeologists and historians of pre-Christian Scandinavian religion have argued in favour of shifting our perceptions of Iron Age gender roles away from the modern binary. See for example Back-Danielsson, *Masking Moments*, *passim*. Price, *The Viking Way*, 215; Solli, *Seid*, 147–152.

<sup>142</sup> Davidson (ed.) & Foote (trans.), *Saxo Grammaticus*, 212.

<sup>143</sup> Layher, "Caught Between Worlds", 184.

<sup>144</sup> Kathleen M. Self, "The Valkyrie's Gender: Old Norse Shield-Maidens and Valkyries as a Third Gender", *Feminist Formations* 26, no. 1 (2014): 144. The term 'third gender' is problematic as it assumes that gender

valkyries seem dubious, especially her insistence that the ability to choose one's own partner is something Norse society permitted only to men, which contradicts the many literary examples highlighting the importance of the bride-to-be's opinion of the match. However, one specific scene, found in the Codex Regius of the Poetic Edda and repeated almost word-for-word in *Völsunga saga*, exemplifies the same kind of intrinsic connection between armour and masculinity as is seen in *Snjáskvæði*. In the prose introduction to *Sigrdrífumál*, in which Sigurðr encounters the valkyrie Sigrdrífa asleep on a mountain, we are told:

*Sigurðr gekk í skjaldborgina ok sá at þar lá maðr ok svaf með öllum hervápnnum. Hann tók fyrst hjálminn af höfði honum. Þá sá hann at þat var kona. Brynjan var fóst sem hon væri holdgróin.*<sup>145</sup>

In the order the poems appear in the Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4to), *Sigrdrífumál* is preceded by *Grípisspá*, in which Grípir predicts what seems to be this very encounter:

<i>“Sefr á fjalli</i>	“The prince’s daughter
<i>fylkis dóttir</i>	sleeps on the mountain,
<i>björt í brynju</i>	bright in her mailcoat
<i>eptir bana Helga.”</i> (Gsp. st. 15) <sup>146</sup>	after Helgi’s death.”

Here the figure on the mountainside is explicitly identified as female from the very beginning: *fylkis dóttir*. Yet despite this, and in spite of the fact that her mailcoat is apparently so form-fitting as to look like a second skin, the message of martial

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can be separated into discrete groups and that, moreover, there are only three of these. Rather than truly challenging a gender binary, it implicitly supports the idea of two ‘main’ genders and a third group of ‘everything else’. However, it remains in current usage in the scholarly community as an umbrella term for non-binary genders.

<sup>145</sup> ‘Sigurðr went into the shield-fortress and saw that a man lay there and slept with all the weapons of war. First, he took the helmet off of his head. Then he saw that it was a woman. The mailcoat was stuck to her as if it were grown into her flesh.’ Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason (eds.), *Eddukvæði. II. Hetjukvæði* (Reykjavik: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2014), 313.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 288.

masculinity presented by the presence of the mailcoat and helmet is enough for Sigurðr to believe that he sees a *maðr* lying there, an impression not corrected until he removes her (his) helmet. An identical scene also appears in the *fornaldarsaga Völsunga saga*, although here the mountainside sleeper is Brynhildr rather than Sigdrífa.<sup>147</sup> *Maðr* is occasionally used as a gender-neutral term for all humans in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, but here a masculine meaning seems indicated by the subsequent pronoun *honum*.

The idea that donning armour makes a woman unrecognisable is borne out by the descriptions of other armed women in the *fornaldarsögur*. The least masculine of these is Ólǫf in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, who never takes on a male persona, even though she goes *með skjöld ok brynju, ok girð sverði ok hjálm á höfði*.<sup>148</sup> Nonetheless, such behaviour is deemed by the narrative voice to be more *á þá leið, sem herrkonungar*, rather than the queen Ólǫf ought to be.<sup>149</sup>

Other characters go further. Hervor, the eponymous heroine of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, is characterised as a self-willed, quick-tempered individual from childhood. Indeed, in the Hauksbók version of the saga her relatives worry that it will cause problems for a girl-child to have so excessively virile a figure as a berserker for a father.<sup>150</sup> As a youth, she is described as *sterk sem karlmenn* and preferring to train with bow and sword rather than practise the gender-appropriate arts of embroidery and sewing.<sup>151</sup> Eventually her troublesome nature leads her to run away to the woods and earn her living by killing people for money. Her grandfather sends men to bring her home, but it is only a short while before she picks a fight with one of her grandfather's slaves and determines that she must travel to her father's grave in order to claim her birthright and disprove the slave's assertion that her father was a swineherd. As part of her preparation for the journey, she states that she intends to dress herself in a headdress and have a shirt and cloak made for her:

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<sup>147</sup> C.C. Rafn (ed.), *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda eptir gömlum handritum*, vol. 1 (Copenhagen, 1829), 165.

<sup>148</sup> 'With shield and mailcoat and a sword strapped on and a helmet on her head.' *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>149</sup> 'In that way like warlords are.' *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Layher, "Caught Between Worlds", 187.

<sup>151</sup> 'Strong like men are.' Rafn (ed.), *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, vol. 1, 430.

„Skal skjótliga	“I shall quickly
um skör búa	prepare for my hair
blæis lín,	soft linen,
áðr braut fari;	before I set off.
mikit býr í því,	Much depends on it
er á morgin skal	that tomorrow I shall
skera bæði mér	have cut for myself both
skyrta ok ólpu. <sup>152</sup>	shirt and cloak.”

Presumably this is meant to be a masculine costume, although other occurrences of the word *lín* (a strip of linen or an item made from it) in references to a head-covering suggest it to be an item of female dress, such as in *Þrymskviða*, where Heimdallr proposes that Þórr should be dressed in *brúðar líni*, usually interpreted as a bridal veil, in order to trick Þrymr into believing he is Freyja.<sup>153</sup> However, *skyrta* and *ólpa* are most often seen in reference to men’s clothing,<sup>154</sup> and the use of the word *skör* to refer to Hervör’s hair suggests that she has cut it short.<sup>155</sup> *Skör* is the only reference made to bodily transformation here, with hair being the most ephemeral part of the body to change. The rest of the description of Hervör’s masculine disguise revolves entirely around the clothing she will wear. In the following stanza she instructs her mother: “Bú þú mik at öllu [...] sem þú son mundir,” suggesting that the saga’s audience is intended to envision this planned outfit and connect it with her transformation into a masculine figure.<sup>156</sup>

Once this is done we are told that she ‘tók sér karlmanns gjörfi ok vopn, ok sókti þar til, er víkingar nokkrir voru, nefndist hún þá Hjörvarðr.’<sup>157</sup> From this point on, until she eventually tires of her adventures, the narrative mostly refers to her as Hjörvarðr

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<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 432.

<sup>153</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason (eds.), *Edduvkæði I*, 424.

<sup>154</sup> Sauckel, *Die literarische Funktion von Kleidung*, 12–14.

<sup>155</sup> Although as Jenny Jochens notes, the word is less strictly associated with masculine haircuts in poetry compared to prose. Jochens, *Before the Male Gaze*, 13.

<sup>156</sup> “Prepare me in all ways [...] as you would a son.” Rafn (ed.), *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda*, vol. 1, 432.

<sup>157</sup> ‘She took up a man’s apparel and weapons and headed for where some vikings could be found and then called herself Hjörvarðr.’ *Ibid.*

and uses male pronouns. William Layher does however note that Hervör's male persona slips around figures representing patriarchal authority, especially her father and future father-in-law (although this varies by manuscript).<sup>158</sup> He also notes that Hervör remains *hún* even after the confrontation with her father, until she arrives at Glæsvellir. He explains this as Hervör reverting to her real female gender when no men are around to measure herself against,<sup>159</sup> but the scene is arguably more a recognition of the fact that social gender, which is after all what the Hjörvarðr persona is, can by definition only be produced through social interaction. In the absence of any people with whom to interact, there is no way for Hervör to produce her male social gender and so she reverts to what the saga-author clearly perceives as her underlying female gender.

The character of Þornbjörg/Þórbergir in *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* also adopts a wholly male persona in the course of the saga.<sup>160</sup> Although introduced as an ideal young lady, beautiful, wise and skilled in needlework, Þórbergir also was inclined to 'skilmast með skjöld ok sverð; hún kunnir þessa list jafnframt þeim riddurum er kunnu vel ok kurteisliga at bera vopn sín.'<sup>161</sup> In this description we begin to see the influences of Continental romances on Icelandic literature: Þórbergir's martial behaviour is not associated with vikings like Hervör's, but rather viewed as a knightly art. Þórbergir as a character also represents an early stage in the development of a new type of female character in the sagas, that of the 'maiden king'.<sup>162</sup> When maiden-king-like figures such as Ólǫf or Þórbergir manifest in *fornaldarsögur*, which tend by their nature to draw upon Scandinavian historical and literary traditions rather than French ones, their role is one which incorporates a military aspect. As noted above, Ólǫf is called *herkonungir*, and when Þórbergir is propositioned by a would-be suitor, they fight on the battlefield at the head of their army. However, as the maiden king trope develops in the *riddarasögur*,

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<sup>158</sup> Layher, "Caught Between Worlds", 202.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>160</sup> Given that when this character has the agency to decide matters for themselves, they choose to live as entirely male, even amongst retainers who have presumably known them from childhood, I am uneasy with using female pronouns here. In recognition of the fluid gender performances exhibited by Þórbergir over the course of the saga, I have chosen to employ the gender-neutral singular 'they' to refer to them.

<sup>161</sup> 'Fenced with shield and sword. She knew this art just as well as those knights who can well and nobly carry their weapons.' C. C. Rafn (ed.), *Fornaldar sögur norðurlanda*, vol. 3 (Copenhagen, 1830), 68.

<sup>162</sup> Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, "From Heroic Legend to 'Medieval Screwball Comedy'?", 244.

these figures lose their physical aggression, becoming better known for their wisdom, beauty and often magical skills. Though they adopt the male title of king, they are no longer *herkonungr*; any violence performed against their suitors is results from their ingenuity, or else performed only when the maiden king is at no risk of violent reprisal.<sup>163</sup>

Pórbergr is unique among maiden kings in adopting a male persona to rule. This is a feature of both the long and short redactions of the saga.<sup>164</sup> In both they are introduced as ruling under the name of king, followed by a statement to the effect that no one dared address them as *mær* or *kona* for fear of her violent retribution.<sup>165</sup> Though we see other characters who adopt a different social gender for a time, Pórbergr's point-blank refusal to accept a female identity is unique in the saga corpus, to the best of my knowledge. It is possible to dismiss this simply as an attempt to reinforce Pórbergr's power in a masculine sphere by refusing to allow any shred of feminine 'softness' to taint it, but if this is the case, we would surely expect to see more female characters making the same bid for power. As discussed above, however, many maiden kings are shown to rule successfully without adopting any sort of male persona at all, suggesting that power and the ability to wield it were not viewed as purely masculine traits by the authors of these sagas. Even accepting the idea that to be taken seriously as a warrior necessitated taking on masculine traits, sometimes to the extent of performing a male social gender, Pórbergr is an extreme case in the medieval literature, one that can most plausibly be read as a character taking steps to create a social identity that aligns more closely with their internal identity.

As is typical of the sagas when discussing characters in disguise, Pórbergr is referred to with the male name and pronouns by which they are known to other characters throughout their rule. Although Hrólfr knows that he is visiting King Eiríkr's

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<sup>163</sup> See for example Sedentiana's treatment of Sigurðr's brothers in *Sigurðar saga þogla*. (In Agnete Loth (ed.), *Late Medieval Icelandic Romances*, vol. 2, Editiones Arnarnagnæanæ, Series B, vol. 21 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963).)

<sup>164</sup> For a fuller discussion of the two redactions' treatment of the 'Þorbjargar þátrr' see Marianne Kalinke, "Textual Instability, Generic Hybridity, and the Development of Some *Fornaldarsögur*", in *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney & Ármann Jakobsson (Reykjavik: University of Iceland Press, 2012), 201–227.

<sup>165</sup> 'Maiden'; 'woman'. See Ferdinand Detter (ed.) *Zwei Fornaldarsögur: Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar und Ásmundarsaga Kappabana; nach Cod. Holm. 7, 4to*. (Halle: Niemeyer, 1891) for an edition of the older, shorter redaction. The longer redaction is edited in Rafn (ed.), *Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda*, vol. 3.

daughter, in both redactions his first impression of Þórbergr is that he sees a ‘harðla voldugr maðr með konungs skrúða ágætum.’<sup>166</sup> In the longer redaction, Hrólfr accepts Þórbergr’s masculinity, addressing them as *herra* even as he asks for the king’s hand in marriage; as Marianne Kalinke has argued, the courtesy of accepting Þórbergr’s performed gender serves to underline the inappropriate discourtesy of Þórbergr’s response, painting this transgressive king in an even more negative light.<sup>167</sup> In the shorter redaction, Hrólfr is rude enough to ignore Þórbergr’s carefully crafted social gender, saying, “Hvárt skulum vér hér kveðja son eða dóttur, konung eða konu?”<sup>168</sup> Yet despite his dismissiveness, he subsequently admits that it is only from King Eiríkr’s account that he knows he is dealing with a daughter rather than a son.

Scholarly opinion differs as to why the armed women of Old Norse-Icelandic literature are so often presented as masculine. Carol Clover has argued, based largely on the concern *Hervarar saga* shows with issues of inheritance, that these figures reveal a potential social role for women in Norse society of ‘surrogate son’, pointing to legal provisions that allowed a single woman to inherit property as the only surviving relative.<sup>169</sup> William Layher, on the other hand, argues that the tendency to masculinise the shieldmaiden figure speaks to male anxieties surrounding female power and strength. He contends that by containing such power in the masculine sphere of combat, these dangerous women are encountered on terms that the male characters (and audiences) are equipped to understand and deal with.<sup>170</sup> Meanwhile, Miriam Mayburd frames Hervör’s cross-gender performance as an echo of the genderbending needed to perform acts of *seiðr*.<sup>171</sup> All these theories have their merits, but only Mayburd’s comes close to addressing the ways in which the portrayal of these characters and their ever-changing social identities hints at a fundamentally unstable gender system.

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<sup>166</sup> ‘A very mighty-looking man in a king’s splendid raiment,’ Rafn (ed.), *Fornaldar sögur norðrlanda*, vol. 3, 87.

<sup>167</sup> Kalinke, “Textual Instability”, 205–207.

<sup>168</sup> “Which should we greet here, daughter or son? King or woman?” Detter (ed.), *Zwei Fornaldarsögur*, 17.

<sup>169</sup> Carol J. Clover, “Maiden Warriors and Other Sons”, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85(1) (1986): 35–49.

<sup>170</sup> Layher, “Caught Between Worlds”, 202.

<sup>171</sup> Miriam Mayburd, “‘Helzt þóttumk nú heima í millim...’: A reassessment of Hervör in light of *seiðr*’s supernatural gender dynamics”, *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 129 (2014): 121–164.

The same anxieties which play out in *fornaldarsögur* also underpin the events of *Snjáskvæði*. The masculinity of King Snjár is produced entirely through the donning of weapons, the connection between warriorhood and masculinity so entrenched that, for both Snjár and the characters discussed in this section, their armour becomes the most significant part of their male gender performance by far. *Snjáskvæði* draws upon many of the elements more commonly seen in later folklore, especially the central role it gives to the *álfar*, but its creation of Snjár's masculinity through weapons, armour and warfare shows a direct line of continuity with the figure of the shieldmaiden/valkyrie seen in *fornaldarsögur* and eddic poetry, as well as the themes of concealed identity also found in these genres (c.f. the many examples of Óðinn visiting households under a false name, his true identity only revealed at his departure).

## 5. Conclusion

Though the number of post-medieval manuscripts are testament to the enduring popularity of the *fornaldarsögur* genre, the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries were the peak period in which these stories were composed. After this time, creative interest in the figure of the armed woman seems to have waned, judging by the changing role of the maiden king under the influence of continental romances,<sup>172</sup> not to mention how completely the role of Þornbjörg/Þórberg was excised from the 15<sup>th</sup>-century *Hrólfs rímur Gautrekssonar*.<sup>173</sup> Armed women do occasionally resurface, such as the eponymous Mábil in *Rímur af Mábil sterku*, found in a 15<sup>th</sup>-century manuscript,<sup>174</sup> but for the most part characters whose social gender changes so completely as Hervör's and Þórberg's are not seen in texts originating after the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

The metrical analysis carried out in Chapter 2.3 of this thesis suggests a preliminary date of around the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century for *Snjáskvæði*, which fits neatly with the period of peak *fornaldarsögur* composition. It is therefore unsurprising to see *Snjáskvæði*'s poet showing familiarity with some of the themes of the *fornaldarsögur*, including the anxieties surrounding an unstable gender system discussed in Chapter 4.3. The way gender is constructed in *Snjáskvæði* reveals its fragility and raises questions about what it means to 'really' be a man or a woman. Is Snjár less male if his gender is constructed solely through the external trappings of war, as seems to be the case, rather than through a magical transformation of Hildigerður's body? Is Hildigerður less female in Álfheimar because her physical appearance is still apparently that of Snjár? Not according to the poet, whose conceptualisation of gender seems to rest wholly on its production through social perception.

The story of Hrafn and Hildigerður remained popular for many years: *rímur* poets in three different centuries composed cycles based on its material and later poets reworked its *fornyrðislag* form into more epic proportions. It circulated in manuscripts

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<sup>172</sup> Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir, "From Heroic Legend", 229–249.

<sup>173</sup> Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir & Haukur Þorgeirsson (eds.), "*Hrólfs rímur Gautrekssonar*", *Gripla* 26 (2015): 94.

<sup>174</sup> Valgerður Kr. Brynjólfssdóttir, *Meyjar og völd: Rímurnar af Mábil sterku*, MA thesis at the University of Iceland, 2004.

from the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was still being transmitted orally by old women in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, poetry-collectors copied it for their children and scholars edited it in manuscripts and in print. It lay neglected for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but now has again attracted scholarly attention. *Snjáskvæði* offers not only the universal entertainment value of a well-told story with supernatural mystery and peril, but also offers the potential for more subversive, queer readings regarding its treatment of gender. It is to be hoped that the English translation which accompanies this thesis will help this fascinating poem to be enjoyed by a new audience in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## Appendix 1: Text and translation

The text of this edition is taken from the oldest manuscript of *Snjáskvæði*, AM 147 8vo, with only minor editorial intervention where sense and metre seemed to demand it. All such emendations are marked with an asterisk. The translation into English focuses on ease of comprehension, and is therefore a prose translation, while at the same time aiming to preserve something of a ‘fairytale’ flavour.

AM 147 8vo is one of several texts of *Snjáskvæði* that refer to their titular character as ‘Snjall’ rather than ‘Snjár’. In the discussion above, I followed the general trend in scholarship in using the name ‘Snjár’. In the edition below, however, I maintain the manuscript reading of ‘Snjall’.

<i>Diplomatic transcription</i>	<i>Normalised Modern Icelandic</i>	<i>Translation</i>
24. Snjals kvæde	24. Snjalskvæði	24. Snjalskvæði
1.	1.	1.
Fyrre atta eg mjer foftru væna su kunne vel til kvædis ad hlyda skemmtta eg mætre mey þórarins þö verd eg svinnre svans nornn ad kveda.	Fyrri átta ég mér fóstru væna. Sú kunni vel til kvædis að hlýða. Skemmta ég mætri mey Þórarins, þó verð ég svinnri svans norn að kveða.	In the past, I had for myself an excellent foster-mother. She well knew how to listen to poetry. I entertained the worthy daughter of Þórarinn, though I compose for the wise norn of the swan.

<p>2.</p> <p>Ried fyrir Háleyjum  hætt mæ'r dreka  þá var agiætur  öðlingur talinn  ætt hans kunne  einginn að segja  þó var snjall kongur  snotre að mörgu.</p>	<p>2.</p> <p>Reð fyrir Háleygjum  hætt mæ'r dreka.  Sá var ágætur  öðlingur talinn.  Ætt hans kunn  enginn að segja,  þó var Snjall kóngur  snotri að mörgu.</p>	<p>2.</p> <p>The dangerous maiden of  dragons ruled over the  Háleygjjar. That one was  accounted the greatest king.  No one was able to speak of his  lineage, though King Snjall  was wiser than many.</p>
<p>3.</p> <p>Komu skatnar  á skipe brotnu  snjals j veldi  þamann þrjátíge  hafði alla  aurana þeirra  Ogödslega  ægis meyrar.</p>	<p>3.</p> <p>Komu skatnar  á skipi brotnu,  Snjals í veldi,  saman þrjátíu.  Hafði alla  aurana þeirra,  ógöðslega,  Ægis meyrar.</p>	<p>3.</p> <p>Men arrived on a broken ship,  thirty altogether, into Snjall's  power. Ægir's daughters,  unkindly, had taken all their  gold.</p>
<p>4.</p> <p>Reid til fundar  með frydtt meingi  og baud heim þaðann  hverjum þeirra</p>	<p>4.</p> <p>Reið til fundar  með frítt mengi  og bauð heim þaðan  hverjum þeirra.</p>	<p>4.</p> <p>[Snjall] rode to meet them  with a handsome throng and  offered a home to each of  them. Then each declared that</p>

þá þóttust aller	Þá þóttust allir	they had lodgings, except for
þar víft hafa	þar vist hafa,	the one men called Hrafn.
vtan þann ytar	útan þann ýtar	
ad Hraffn kalla.	að Hrafn kalla.	

5.	5.	5.
Willttu heim med mjer	„Viltu heim með mér,	“Won’t you come home with
Hrafn til Dryckiu	Hrafn, til drykkju?	me, Hrafn, to drink? I have
eg er med meingi	Ég er með mengi	come with a multitude to meet
ä mote þier kominn.	á móti þer kominn.	you. I would have such a man
slykann villda eg	Slíkan vildi ég	as I declare you to be with me
þem eg seige þig	sem ég segji þig	in my following.”
mann j fylge	mann í fylgi	
med mjer hafa.	með mér hafa.“	

6.	6.	6.
Eg er fnoðggur kongur	„Ég er *snauður, kóngur,	“I am poor, king, this you may
þad mattu fjä	það máttu sjá.	see. I stand in all my
þtend eg j allre	Stend ég í allri	possessions. I have no treasure
eigunni minne	eigunni minni.	that’s especially good to give to
jeg ä öngvan grip	Ég á engan grip	a quick-tempered king.”
einka gödann	einka góðan	
bradlyndum til	bráðlyndum til	
Budlung ad giefä.	buðlung að gefa.“	

<p>7.</p> <p>þu þkalltt þitia og sæll vera og mjer øngvan Eyrer ad vinna Enn seigdu dyrum gram deile ad sumre þo ad døglingur dyljeft vid eige.</p>	<p>7.</p> <p>„Þú skalt sitja og sæll vera, og mér engan *eyri að vinna. En segðu dýrum gram deili að sumri, svo að döglingur dyljist við ekki.</p>	<p>7.</p> <p>“You shall sit and be merry and pay me no fee. But when summer comes, you must tell the noble ruler some detail so that the king is not concealed.</p>
<p>8.</p> <p>Reid til huða hesti af leste og hugde ad øllu heldur vandlega Enn Ødlingur ä þann þama apttan ä mildings Beck midjann nam sitja.</p>	<p>8.</p> <p>Reið til húsa hesti af lesti og hugði að öllu heldur vandlega. En öðlingur á þann sama aftan á mildings bekk miðjan nam sitja.</p>	<p>8.</p> <p>[Hrafn] rode to the buildings, got off his horse and thought it all over rather carefully. And the warrior, that same evening, took a seat in the middle of the king’s bench.</p>
<p>9.</p> <p>þar þä hann yta alla hryggva þar ad jafnþæler aller voru</p>	<p>9.</p> <p>Þar sá hann ýta alla hryggva, þar að jafnsælir allir voru.</p>	<p>9.</p> <p>There he saw men, all sorrowful, there that they all were equally happy. The king was not at all inclined to</p>

þar var einginn  
jöfur af leikum  
æ var Örskotinn  
að huxa vmm nðckud.

Þar var enginn  
jöfur af leikum;  
æ var örskotinn  
að hugsa um nokkuð.

games; he was ever distant,  
thinking on something else.

10.  
Seint er að spyrja  
þatt frá slyku  
því það var gáta  
mörgum manne  
það kunne einginn  
öðrum að segja  
hvar döglingur svaf  
vmm dökkva grýmu.

10.  
Seint er að spyrja  
satt frá slíku;  
því það var gáta  
mörgum manni—  
það kunni enginn  
öðrum að segja  
hvar döglingur svaf  
um dökkva grímu.

10.  
It is difficult to learn the truth  
about such things; thus it was  
a riddle to many a man—no  
one could say to another where  
the king slept during  
darkness's mask (night).

11.  
Út þar geingenn  
eitt þinn árla  
vinur výkinga  
til veðurs að fjä  
heid var ä himnne  
og haudlognn miked  
þä var snjall kominn  
þkamtt wr garde.

11.  
Út var genginn  
eitt sinn árla  
vinur víkinga  
til veðurs að sjá.  
Heið var á himni  
og hauðlogn mikið;  
þá var Snjall kominn  
skammt úr garði.

11.  
One time, early, the friend of  
vikings had gone out to look at  
the weather. The heavens were  
clear and the earth was calm;  
Snjall had by then gone a short  
way out of the court.

12.	12.	12.
Hugur liede þá	Hugur léði þá	Then the best idea occurred to
Hrafne hid besta	Hrafni hið besta.	Hrafn. Then he let the snow-
Sýdann liet hann fjer	Síðan lét hann sér um	of-swans (water) wash over his
vmm skör	skör	head. He saw the ruler run out
svanmjöll bera	svanmjöll bera.	into the water, but the king
hann fä vöfjer	Hann sá vísir	never came up.
ä vatnid wt hlaupa	á vatnið út hlaupa,	
en ödlingenn	en öðlinginn	
alldrei upp koma.	alldrei upp koma.	
13.	13.	13.
Jörð fä hann græna	Jörð sá hann græna	He saw a green earth and
og otal fiär	og ótal fjár	countless sheep and all the
og alblomgada	og alblómgaða	woods fully in bloom, beautiful
alla fköga	alla skóga,	gardens, strong gates. The sun
gard glæfelegastann	garð glæsilegastan,	shone on a hall thatched with
Grund þaklegafta	grindur sterklegar.	silver.
skein sölenñ ä sal	Skein sólin á sal	
silfrenu þöckttu.	silfrinu þöktu.	
14.	14.	14.
Menn fä hann marga	Menn sá hann marga	He saw many men coming
ä möt henne ganga	á mót henni ganga.	towards her; they knew how to
kunnu ad kvedja	Kunnu að kveðja	greet Halfdan's wife. She told

konu Haldanar.	konu Halfdanar.	the men that she would bring
bera kvadft hun skötnum	Bera kvaðst hún skötnum	them only a short joy; she
þkamman fögnud	skamman fögnuð:	declared she must be home
hun kvadft heim þaðann	hún kvaðst heim þaðan	before the cock could crow.
adur enn haninn gyli.	áður en haninn gylli.	

15.	15.	15.
ad þvi ried fylker	Að því réð fylkir	The king first asked about this,
fyrft ad spyria	fyrst að spyrja:	“Have you, wife, taken a
hefur þu vöf þier	„Hefur þú, víf, þér	winter-guest for yourself?” “I
veturgieft teked.	veturgest tekið?”	have offered lodgings to a
vöft hef eg veitta	„Vist hef eg veitti	promising man. That fellow
vænum manne	vænum manni.	stares at me every day.
starer þá dreingur ä mig	Starir sá dreingur á mig	
dægrunum öllum.	dægrunum öllum.	

16.	16.	16.
Opt veit auga	„Oft veit auga	“Often the eye knows entirely
allt hvad feiger	allt hvað segir.	what to say. There are many
mörg eru dæme	Mörg eru dæmi	examples for every man. We
mannenum hvörjum	manninum hverjum.	will hereafter never see each
vid munum sýdar	Við munum síðar	other before the truth is
þiaft alldreige	sjást aldrei,	revealed in summer.”
fyr en ad sumre	fyr en að sumri	
hvad þannord giörer.	hvað sannorð gerir.“	

17.	17.	17.
Stod fyrir möður	Stóð fyrir móður	A boy stood before his mother
mǫgur á gólfe	mögur á gólfi	on the floor and stretched his
og riette til hrýnga	og rétti til hringa	hands towards her rings,
hendur grätande.	hendur grátandi.	crying. She was so eager to
so var henne antt	Svo var henni antt	speak with the lord, the lady
vid ødling ad ræða	við öðling að ræða,	behaved as if she never saw the
liet snöt fœm hun svein	lét snót sem hún svein	boy.
sæe alldreige.	sæi aldrei.	
18.	18.	18.
Deilldu tiggja	Deildu tiggja	Two maidservants of the king,
dröfer vngar	drósir ungar,	young ladies, quarrelled over a
ambätter tvær	ambáttir tvær,	dead calf. They said to
vmm daudann kálf	um dauðan kálf.	sorrowful Hildigerðr, “Now
ſagde higgre	Sagði hyggri	the bull’s child cannot be
Hilldegierde	Hildigerði:	saved.”
nu er Barnn Bola	„Nú er barn bola	
j Biðrg horfid.	í björg horfið.	
19.	19.	19.
Oþs mun hótum	„Oss mun hótum	“Grief will likely grow heavier
harmur ad þyngre	harmur að þyngri	for us than one missing young
enn þö ad vngneytis	en þó að ungneytis	bull, if I lose all my
eins vær fœknum	eins vér söknum,	possessions, deprived of

ef eg miðse alla	ef ég missi alla	everything and also of
eiguna mjna	eiguna mína,	pleasure.”
alls andvana	alls andvana	
Øvnad bære.	og unað *bæði.“	

20.	20.	20.
þar fã hann yta	Þar sá hann ýta	There he saw men, all
alla hryggva	alla hryggva,	sorrowful, when the elf-
þegar ad alfkona	þegar að álfkona	woman left the hall, and the
wtgieck wr sal	út gekk úr sal,	lord also had to, with the linen
enn ødlinginn	en ødlinginn	of the palms (woman), lose his
einnenn matte	einnig mátti	colour.
med löfa lÿn	með lófa lín	
lata dreyra.	láta dreyra.	

21.	21.	21.
Hugur liedu þä	Hugur léði þá	Thought then brought
Hraffne víßku	Hrafni visku,	wisdom to Hrafn, and from
þvi hann þöttest myklu	því hann þóttist miklu	this he thought himself much,
margfrödare	margfróðari.	much wiser. He awakened at
vaknadj hann hejma	Vaknaði hann heima	home, with the king's court.
med hird konungs	með hirð konungs.	The warrior declared that he
ßagdiß vÿkingur	Sagðist víkingur	had slept well.
vel hafa ßofid.	vel hafa sofið.	

22.	22.	22.
Æ Var þeingill	Æ var þengill	The prince was ever more
þeṣ hliodari	þess hljóðari	silent on this matter the nearer
ṣem ad sumre meir	sem að sumri meir	summer drew. Snjall's men
ṣækia nadi	sækja náði.	said what the custom was:
snjals sögdu segger	Snjals sögðu seggir	“Hrafn, escape your death from
þad er sid vanr	það er síður vanr:	this place!”
flydu brädlega Hrafn	„Flyðu bráðlega, Hrafn,	
bana þin hedann.	bana þinn héðan.“	
23.	23.	23.
þad er odreingelægtt	„Það er ódrengilegt	“It is unmanly that I should
ad eg döglingi	að ég döglingi	sooner fail the magnificent
miðg fiðlprudum	mjög fjölprúðum	ruler. The king will do for me
fyrer bregdiṣt	fyrir bregðist.	one of two things: deprive me
mig mun Ødlingur	Mig mun öðlingur	of life, or reward with riches.”
annad hverttveggja	annað hverttveggja:	
firra fiðre	firra fjöri	
eda fie gefa.	eða fé gefa.“	
24.	24.	24.
hvortt ætlar þu þad	„Hvort ætlar þú það –	“Do you think this—and we
og hyggum ṣo fyrer	og hyggum svo fyrir	think you therefore have a
dulkofur þier yfer	dulkofur þér yfir	concealing hood pulled over
höfud ṣetta	höfuð setta –	your head—that you think

ad þu hyggur	að þú hyggur	that the prince will bestow
ad Ø[dlin]gur muni	að öðlingur muni	gold upon you and not kill
giæda þig Gulle	gæða þig gulli	you?"
enn glata þier eige.	en glata þér ekki?"	

25.	25.	25.
Nu eiga segger	Nú eiga seggir	Now the men welcome the
sumre ad fagna	sumri að fagna.	summer. Then all the court
þä var j sæte	Þá var í sæti	had come to be seated.
sveit øll kominn	sveit öll komin.	"Declare before men your
lyftu fyrer virðum	„Lýstu fyrir virðum	vision: what sort of king you,
vitran þinne	vitran þinni:	Hrafn, have sought out at
hvörrn hefur þu Hrafn	hvorn hefur þú, Hrafn,	home."
kong heim vmm sökttann.	kóng heim um sóttann?"	

26.	26.	26.
Man eg ad deilldu	„Man ég að deildu –	"I remember that there
minnt ä það kongur	minnstu á það, kóngur? –	quarrelled—do you remember
drofer vngar	drósir ungar	that, king?—young maids over
vmm daudann kalf	um dauðan kálf.	a dead calf. A boy stood before
stöð fyrer mödur	Stóð fyrir móður	his mother on the floor and
mögur ä golfe	mögur á gólfi	wanted to play with the good
og villde ad göðu	og vildi að góðu	gold ring.
Gullinu leika.	gullinu leika.	

<p>27.</p> <p>Nu hef eg fagtt þier  Snjall það eg vísa  dreingia drotter  og deile ä mǫnnum  hvortt ä eg ad hallda  reikar fialle  mjnu ä möte  milldingur sögu.</p>	<p>27.</p> <p>„Nú hef ég sagt þér,  Snjall, það ég víska,  drengja dróttir,  og deili á mönnum.  Hvort á ég að halda  reikar fjalli  mínu á móti,  milldingur, sögu?“</p>	<p>27.</p> <p>“Now I have told you, Snjall,  that which I know, hosts of  men, and the truth about men.  Shall I keep my mountain-of-  the-hair-parting (head) in  return for this story, king?”</p>
<p>28.</p> <p>Einn skaltu þynu  höfðinu ræða  þar læt eg fylgia með  fimm Gullhrýnga  hialm ærlegaftann  hlýfar vænlegaftar  bitrann mækir  og Brand rodinn.</p>	<p>28.</p> <p>„Einn skaltu þínu  höfðinu ráða.  Þar læt ég fylgia með  fimm gullhringa,  hjálmm ærlegastan,  hlífar vænlegastar,  bitran mækir  og brand roðinn.</p>	<p>28.</p> <p>“You shall keep your head  whole. I will cause to  accompany it five gold rings, a  most honourable helm, most  handsome shields, a bitter  blade and a reddened sword.</p>
<p>29.</p> <p>Stendur ä ströndu  þä eg stiller gef  hafnær hröckver  hlaðinn gersemum</p>	<p>29.</p> <p>„Stendur á ströndu  sá ég, stillir, gef:  hafnar hrökkvir  hlaðinn gersemum.</p>	<p>29.</p> <p>“That which I, the ruler, give  stands on the strand: a swift-  mover of the harbour (ship),  laden with jewels. This is</p>

<i>hans</i> er þý allvel	Hans er þér allvel	granted to you to enjoy very
wnt að njóta	unnt að njóta;	much; have him, famous
hafðu <i>hann</i> frægur dreingur	hafðu hann, frægur dreingur,	fellow, on journeys for a long
j förum leinge.	í förum lengi.“	time.”

30.	30.	30.
Undruduþt aller	Undruðust allir	Everyone within the hall
jnnann hallar	innan hallar	wondered why she gave him
þvi hun liet <i>honum</i>	því hún lét honum	the best ship, but they knew,
hellft hnðr giefa	helst knör gefa,	just as well as before, what sort
Enn þeir viþsu	en þeir vissu,	of a man they had for a captain.
jafnnglðgggt þem adur	jafnglöggt sem áður,	
hvðrn þeir attu þter	hvorn þeir áttu sér	
ad yfer manne.	að yfirmanni.	

31.	31.	31.
Hrafn j hliode	Hrafn í hljóði	Hrafn quietly asked her why
hana að þpurdj	hana að spurði	the lady's nature was thus. “I
þvi að snotar hagur	því að snótar hagur	would think myself much,
þannenn væri	þannig væri.	much wiser, if others asked me
þættest eg myklu	„Þættist ég miklu	of this hereafter.”
margfrodare	margfróðari,	
ef að adrer mig	ef að aðrir mig	
eptter spyrdur.	eftir spyrdur.“	

<p>32.</p> <p>Það er að feigia að sællogie löndum styrde ok lide mörgu hafde eg feingid äft af födur ok modur var eg álfkonungs einka dötter.</p>	<p>32.</p> <p>„Það er að segja að Sæll Logi löndum styrði og liði mörgu. Hafði ég fengið ást af föður og móður: var ég álfkonungs einka dóttir.</p>	<p>32.</p> <p>“There is this to say: that Logi the Blessed ruled the lands and many people. I received love from my father and mother: I was the elf-king’s only daughter.</p>
<p>33.</p> <p>þau gipttu mig göfugum manni þann j álfheimum þau æðstann vífsu Enn það mæltu þegar eg þangað kom að eptter mínum munn þkylldu menn aller giðra.</p>	<p>33.</p> <p>„Þau giftu mig göfugum manni, þann í álfheimum þau æðstann vissu. En það mæltu, þegar ég þangað kom, að eftir mínum mun skyldu menn allir gera.</p>	<p>33.</p> <p>“They married me to a noble man, the one they knew to be the highest in Elfland. And when I came there they said this: that all men should behave according to my desire.</p>
<p>34.</p> <p>Bölsaga var mjer þu borin að eyrum að mín være moderinn moldunne auþinn</p>	<p>34.</p> <p>„Bölsaga var mér sú borin að eyrum, að mín væri móðirin moldunni ausin.</p>	<p>34.</p> <p>“An evil story was carried to my ears, that my mother was sprinkled with earth. And this as well: that an island-dweller</p>

Og það annað	Og það annað:	controlled all my father's
ad Eiebyggja	að eybyggja	wealth.
styrede mýns föðurs	stýrði míns föðurs	
mætunum öllum.	mætunum öllum.	

35.	35.	35.
Wt var eg geinginn	„Út var ég genginn	“I had gone out one time,
eitt sinn árla	eitt sinn árla.	early. In the sun, I combed the
kjembda eg við sölu	Kembdi ég við sólu	strands of the scalp. She
svarðar þáttu	svarðar þáttu.	declared that she would most
hun kvadst mjer það	Hún kvaðst mér það	grimly rewarded me: when
grimmaft	grimmast	young, I had shown her little
gjallda þkylldde	gjalda skyldi:	goodwill.
eg hafða vng við hana	ég hafði ung við hana	
alud litla.	álúð litla.	

36.	36.	36.
þu muntt eiga	„Þú munt eiga	“You are expecting to have a
svein j vonum	svein í vonum,	son, yet men think you the son
seggir ætla þig þö	seggir ætla þig þö	of your father. Lady, you shall
son þýns föðurs.	son þíns föðurs.	die if more know of this.
výf þkallttu deya	Víf, skaltu deyja	Clearly from this you sorrows
ef það vita fleire	ef það vita fleiri.	will increase.”
syntt munu þier að því	Sýnt munu þér að því	
suternnar vaxa.	sútirnar vaxa.	

37.	37.	37.
Mig bad hun	„Mig það hún	“She bade me conceal my true
mjnu Edlinu leyna	mínu eðlinu leyna,	nature, unless I sadly wished to
nema jeg dapurlęga	nema ęg dapurlęga	die—unless a man discovered
mig dauda villdi	mig dauða vildi,	my condition, one to whom I
vtann dreingur ä mjer	utan dreingur á mér	had offered a winter-long
deili viųe	deili vissi,	lodgings.
hvęrjum eg veitta	hverjum ęg veitti	
weturleingis Grid.	veturlęngis grið.	
38.	38.	38.
Ried eg kvennglyųe	„Ręđ ęg kvennglysi	“I cast off my feminine attire;
ad kasta męnu	ađ kasta mínu;	men threw over me a cold
steypptu seggir yfir mig	steypptu seggir yfir mig	mailcoat. They set a decorated
svaldre Bręnju	*svalri brynju.	helmet on my mountain-of-
ųettu skreyttann hialm	Settu skreyttann hjálm	shorn-hair (head) and in my
ä skarar fjall	á skarar fjall	hand a decorated hilt-snake.
enn i hendj	en í hendi	
hialltt ormur buinn.	hjaltormur búinn.	
39.	39.	39.
So herjade eg	„Svo herjađi ęg	“Like this, I raided amongst
ä Haleyjar	á Háleygjar.	the Háleygjar. Geir fell gladly
fiell gladır fyrir mier	Féll glađur fyrir mér	before me in battle. I have been
Geir j romu	Geir í rómu.	like this for nine winter in

hef eg þó níu vetur	Hef ég svo níu vetur	these lands, that no one knew
vered ä löndum	verið á löndum,	my true nature.
ad mitt Edlid	að mitt eðlið	
einginn víðe.	enginn vissi.	

40.	40.	40.
þotteft eg ä hauftin	„Þóttist ég á haustin	“In autumn it seemed to me to
hardkeyptt verda	harðkeypt verða,	be dearly bought, when I
þä eg seggjum baud	þá ég seggjum bauð	invited men to have a settled
seturgrid hafa	seturgrið hafa.	peace. From this it seemed
jllur vard ä því	Illur varð á því	bound to this evil end, because
end fíä bundinn	endi sjá bundinn,	no one could tell me the truth.
þvi ad fatt til mýn	því að satt til mín	
þagtt gat einginn.	sagt gat enginn.	

41.	41.	41.
þu hefur forvitnnaft	„Þú hefur forvitnast	“You have been most curious
vmm farir mýnar	um farir mínar	about my journeys, and have
og hefur haftt vid það	og hefur haft við það	kept your word about this. I
haldinyrde	haldinyrði.	would forever have been like a
hefda eg æ verid	Hefði ég æ verið	wolf amongst beasts (i.e.
þem Ulfur med dyrum	sem úlfur með dýrum,	outlawed, outcast) if you had
hafder þu til þagtt	hafðir þú til sagt	spoken of this before the
fyrer Sumer þetta.	fyrir sumar þetta.	summer.

42.

Nú er eg kominn aftur  
ad edle mýnum  
hefur dreingur vmm það  
driugum ollad  
Litlu mun þer  
launad verda.  
Skalttu hvörjum kóng  
ædre vera.

42.

„Nú er ég komin aftur  
að eðli mínum.  
Hefur drengur um það  
drjúgum ollað.  
Litlu mun þér  
launað verða.  
Skaltu hverjum kóng  
æðri vera.“

42.

“Now I have returned to my  
true nature. This man has been  
largely responsible for this.  
You will be little rewarded; you  
shall be higher than every  
king.”