



**UNIVERSITY
OF ICELAND**

**MA thesis
in Viking and Medieval Norse Studies**

Monstrous Heroism and the Heroic Monster

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February 2023

ICELANDIC AND COMPARATIVE CULTURAL STUDIES

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MA thesis in Viking and Medieval Norse Studies

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Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies

University of Iceland

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This thesis satisfies 30 credits towards an MA/BA
in Viking and Medieval Norse Studies in the Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural
Studies,
School of Humanities, University of Iceland.

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Ágrip

Undanfarin ár hefur fjölbreytt rannsókn á skrímslum í miðaldabókmenntum notið mikilla vinsælda. Oft hafa skrímslin verið rannsakað frá sjónarhorni fræðikenningu um *liminality*. Þessi fræðikenning er þó nokkuð þröngsýn; til þess að greina merkingu skrímslanna í íslenskum miðaldabókmenntum getur verið athyglisvert að skoða bæði speki, spádóm og aðstoð sem skrímslin veita söguhetjunum. Oft sýnir söguhetjan sig að vera bæði fáfræðingur og skaðvirkur. Sögur um skrímsla eru þéttofið net af bókmenntum, goðsögnum, og ritúölum. Í þessari ritgerð rannsaka ég þrjár tegundir af skrímslum: Dreka (Fáfnir), risa (í Grottasöngvum) og drauga. Slík skrímsli eru með stórmerkilegu merkingu í frásögnunum: Þau eru nálæg guðdómleika. Hetjan, þvert á móti, verður að skrímsli.

Abstract

Monsters in medieval literature have been studied through a variety of lenses, often through the uncanny and liminal perspective in an array of diversified forms. Still, however, this perspective is limited in its scope of the monstrous role. An interesting contrast arises when the use of wisdom, prophecy, and aid is rendered by the monster in whatever form it may assume. The hero is revealed as both ignorant and often destructive due to this ignorance; an inextricable web fashioned between literature, ritual, and mythology. This thesis investigates three forms of monstrosity: dragons (Fáfnir), giants (*Grottasǫngr*), and revenants (Glámr) through an inverted lens. Such monsters assume an even greater function in these narratives, aligning themselves closer with divinity while the hero, in transgressing ritual and mythological processes, attains the role of monstrosity.

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Monstrous Heroism and the Heroic Monster

1. Introduction

Monstrosity and heroism are topics discussed in the context of narrative role, function, and definition. Monsters slide between the natural and supernatural worlds, capable of both imparting true wisdom (often a harsh flame of clarity burning through mortal conflict/interests) and identifying another's fate. Hero and monster interact as if under the pretext of ice and fire, a conflation of opposing elements dictating creation of plot, progression and direction of hero, and as an inextricable loom on which reality itself is manifested and balanced. Scholarly discussion gyrates around a few key concepts: the "other", liminality, and the societal bases on which these originate (explored later). These can be further broken into cultural norms which pervade and distinguish definitory roles furthered in the contextual framework of narrative and anagnorisis. Interaction between heroism and monstrosity has been thoroughly vetted in the apparent dichotomy of contrast, yet the reversal of the roles and their interdependence has been neglected. How then, are monsters vessels of anagoge for the hero? Are they more valuable to the narrative than the hero him/herself? Such investigations require bases in both sagas and myth, as they often influence the other in revelatory fashion.

This thesis is concerned with such questions of role, and how they invert, overlap, and adapt in specific interactions between monsters and heroes. The definition of a monster entails such a diverse array of elements that these bases must be acknowledged as a precursory and necessary venture. Following, interactions between various monsters and heroes will be analyzed as case studies under the anterior explorations of definition, then further explicated with dialogue, agency, and significative function. Special emphasis will be placed on the information relayed between hero and monster in dialogue, how it impacts the course of the narrative, and finally, the relationship the monster has with the balance of mythological reality (order and chaos). These narrative facets will then be interpreted in terms of value, specifically dealing with role. Are the monster and hero of equal value (in other words, what is their necessity) from the standpoint of myth? Does the hero offer anything to the monster, or rather, does the monster offer something to the hero, and how does this define their roles in the literature? The primary theoretical framework will be that discussed in *The Monstrosity of Heroism*; the shifting of character between spaces,

hence, liminality.¹ The movement of the hero expands beyond that of cultural classification, blurring the distinction between him/herself and the monster being fought.² This ephemerality of the hero is of pivotal importance, as it regards role beside narrative space. Transience, of course, relies on definition, which leads us to the bases of monstrosity.

2. Pre-conditions

In contemporary light, monstrosity is seen from a more psychological view. It is contingent on consciousness fractured between forms of familiarity, estrangement and understanding.³ As posited, monsters are considered liminal and move across and between boundaries as a definitive feature of their nature.⁴ Awareness of psychological implication (as now presented in theory) in a medieval context is an active debate, although ancient philosophical schools such as that of Neoplatonism might be assumed to bear psychological implication with differing terminology.⁵ Interestingly, dualism is already present in the very terminology of *monstrare* (“monster”): to show and to warn.⁶ This dichotomy takes form via utility - warning implicating revelation, which in itself functions in an affirmative manner (bestowing/attaining wisdom) and hence, anagoge. Various schools of (albeit, Christian) thought considered monstrosity to be a disintegration of an otherwise unified state with emphasis on polarity.⁷ This references the aforementioned Neoplatonism considering involution of form. Monstrosity disrupts the ordered being, a primate nature which they transgress and therefore, elude. David Williams roots this upheaval of order in a psychological frame, positing monstrosity as initiating disintegration of form.⁸ This fulfills the purpose of self-autonomy in medieval thought.⁹ It emancipates the creator from the restraint of

¹ Hawes, Janice. “The Monstrosity of Heroism: Grettir Ásmundarson as an Outsider.” *Scandinavian Studies* 80, no. 1 (2008): 30.

² “The Monstrosity of Heroism”: 30-34.

³ Kearney, Eftir Richard, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness*, New York: 4-6.

⁴ Kearney, *Strangers, Gods, and Monsters*, 31.

⁵ Williams, David: *Deformed Discourse. The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature*, Montreal / Kingston 1999, 15; 59-61.

⁶ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses)”, in: Id. 9 (ed.): *Monster Theory. Reading Culture*, Minneapolis / London (1996): 4.

⁷ Williams, David: *Deformed Discourse*, 67.

⁸ Williams, David, *Deformed Discourse*, 76.

⁹ Ibid.

natural reality, and allots a sense of creation, exploration, and finally, discovery.¹⁰ Additionally, Marion Poilvez discusses the psychological frame of trauma in *Paranormal encounters in Iceland 1150-1400*.¹¹ In other interpretations such as that presented by Todorov, the “implicit reader” takes prominence.¹² This caricature of the reader is bound almost in a liminal state between disbelief and belief regarding *supra natura*. The reaction of this implicit reader leads to further definitions based on interaction and narrative space: the marvelous, the strange (*étrange*) and the fantastic. Such definitions depend on the occurrence’s relationship with reason, intervention and explanation.¹³

Salient, however, is the role which monstrosity plays within this ontological structure. As distinguished with the dualism of *monstrare*, the elusory plays a critical part in the defined. This appears to be known to the audience and creators of the narratives that hold the categorical signification “I/we” and “other” relative to the monstrous and heroic. Williams posits this notion as evinced in narrative but more importantly in ontology: “thus the identification of the monster with disorder makes it also the potential for order. As the appropriate sign for disorder, the monstrous reveals disorder as the precondition for being, since being depends on process/differentiation/opposition.”¹⁴ The chaotic is the formlessness from which being originated. Monstrosity, therefore, gives character and body to notions of dissimilitude and entropy. Although somewhat paradoxical, it nevertheless fulfills an ontological function. The question of function is then presented: which is disintegration from the whole? If entropy is a primordial state out of which order fashioned itself, order then assumes the role of “other” and of disintegration. The ontological function is inverted between these boundaries. This questions, therefore, the narrative significance of hero and monster. How do these figures cross boundaries, or rather, how should their natures be reevaluated? What realms, exactly, do they cross and what boon can they provide to each other? Furthermore, which of these boons reveals more value to the originator/bestower? This does not negate, however, the importance of the Christian interpretation in such stories (the stringent

¹⁰ Williams, David, *Deformed Discourse*, 78.

¹¹ Jakobsson, Armann, and Miriam Mayburd. *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150-1400*. Kalamazoo: MIP / Medieval Institute Pubs (2020): 71-79; see also Ármann Jakobsson *The Troll Inside You: Paranormal Activity in the Medieval North*: 162-163.

¹² Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, Paris (1970): 28-62.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la littérature fantastique*, 83.

differentiation between good and evil). It only attempts to elucidate a deeper, more complex relationship between the philosophical bases for each character and its role within the narrative.

2.1 Medieval Perspectives

One of the first questions necessary, however, is the utility and interpretation within a medieval context. How were these texts seen by the audience who transcribed them? The *fornaldarsögur* contain a high volume of monstrosity and fictional, heroic characteristics in comparison to other sagas and help enlighten the medieval view of such texts. The origination of the *fornaldarsögur* is traced to Eddic poems in circulation anterior to the compilation of the sagas.¹⁵ Hesitancy resided, however, as attested by Sverrir Thomasson; the justification posited by Snorri for usage of poetic tradition as source material in *Heimskringla* evinces a sentiment of mendacity regarding their content.¹⁶ Furthermore, the authors of *Njáls saga* and *Borgils saga* reference their own narratives (and their ensuing monstrosity) with a recognition of historical falsehood but an acceptance of their entertaining qualities.¹⁷ The first and most obvious context is that of cultural transition. Many of the motifs we find in the *fornaldarsögur* for instance are those inherited from a pre-Christian oral tradition.¹⁸ They were adapted into a Christian society despite having pagan roots. The general attitude to these texts and beliefs was likely synchronic but of disbelief. The sentiment is that of utility, but not literality. The *fornaldarsögur* also provided a means to trace lineage for the medieval aristocracy.¹⁹ Icelandic chieftains used these sagas to solidify their power in medieval Icelandic society by claiming descentance from kings and heroic figures.²⁰ Furthermore, there was an attempt to integrate into customs already inveterate in other

¹⁵ Tulinius, Torfí H.: “The *Matter of the North*: fiction and uncertain identities in thirteenth-century Iceland”, in: Clunies Ross, Margaret (ed.): *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, Cambridge (2000): 64.

¹⁶ Sverrir Tómasson. *Formálar íslenskra sagnaritara á miðöldum*. Reykjavík, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar (1988): 215; *Úr Döllum til Dala Guðbrandur Vigfússon Centenary Essays*, ed. Tory McTurk and Andrew Wawn, Leeds Texts and Monographs, New Series 11, Leeds 1989: 317-325.

¹⁷ Tulinius, Torfí H.: “The *Matter of the North*”, 65.

¹⁸ Tulinius, Torfí H.: “The *Matter of the North*”, 45.

¹⁹ Tulinius, Torfí H.: “The *Matter of the North*”, 45.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

European contexts.²¹ Thematically, therefore, we can deduce a formation of identity; a desire to establish itself as a distinct, yet cultured and contemporary society through narrative field.

Additionally, monstrosity was a form of geographical myth as some monsters were based in *terra incognita*. These originate in geographical bases such as India or Ethiopia.²² Monstrous races developed from the Greeks and continued to the Romans (Solinus, Pliny) who maintained and influenced medieval utility and understanding of the concept.²³ Ktesias from Knidos is one such example. Ktesias treated and populated India with a diverse array of monstrous races such as pygmies, sciapods, cynocephali, the martikhora, etc.²⁴ Such marvelous creations were later maintained and developed by Megasthenes' treatise, describing fantastic animals and races.²⁵ Early influential sources of medieval conception include *Historia naturalis* (Pliny, 77 A.D.) and later, *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* (Solinus, 3rd century A.D.).²⁶ Later sources preserve such fantastic creatures, including *Imago Mundi*, *Image du Monde*, *Otia imperialia*, *Trésor*, *Ymago Mundi* (Pierre d'Ailly), Adam of Bremen's *Gesta hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* and finally, Agrippa's *mappa mundi*.²⁷ Information contained in these mythological creatures became limited and indeed, channeled into the Christian mythos. The tradition therefore became one of reconciliation and synchronism. Wittkower posits St. Augustine's book *Civitas Dei* as an apt example: "Whether certain monstrous races of men are derived from the stock of Adam or Noah's sons?"²⁸ Further, Isidore recognizes "from the Holy Trinity through the hierarchy of the church to man himself, and here the fabulous races had to appear as inhabitants of the distant parts of the globe."²⁹ As Christianity inherited such fantastic beings from earlier centuries, it developed a system of reconciliation and attributed monstrosity a new role in its structure.

This reconciliation takes the form of the medieval grotesque style. Indeed, the two definitions (grotesque and monstrous) often function interchangeably. The new structural bounds of monstrosity came in the form of moral implication. Alixe Bovey discusses monstrosity as moral

²¹ Ibid.

²² Williams, David, *Deformed Discourse*, 13.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Wittkower, Rudolf. "Marvels of the East. A Study in the History of Monsters." *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 5 (1942): 160.

²⁵ Wittkower, Rudolf. "Marvels of the East", 162.

²⁶ Wittkower, Rudolf. "Marvels of the East", 167.

²⁷ Wittkower, Rudolf. "Marvels of the East", 170-174.

²⁸ Wittkower, Rudolf. "Marvels of the East", 167.

²⁹ Wittkower, Rudolf. "Marvels of the East", 169.

allegory.³⁰ This relationship is one regarding the orientation of the soul to Christian teaching. The distorted monstrous form reflects their status in the Christian mythos and moral structure. The original purity of soul became disfigured due to moral corruption. This manifests in dismal, exaggerated and twisted features of animals, people, and their hybrids. It is an external, physical embodiment of the internal state of soul.³¹ In this manner, the medieval populus likely saw monstrosity as a form of Christian teaching. Either the creatures were descended from biblical figures such as Cain, Adam or Noah, or they were deformed by their immoral acts and became monstrous due to depravity of the spirit. We have then, a reference again to monstrosity as a vessel of wisdom. For example, a bestiary (13th cent.) held in Westminster specifies the qualities that caused such depravity; “the pygmies stand for humility and the giant for pride, the cynocephali typify quarrelsome persons and the people who cover themselves with the lower lip are the mischievous.”³² Not only was it allegorical, but also anagogical. This refers us back to the value of the heroic and monstrous roles which will be discussed in depth later in this thesis. In brief: the monster bestows wisdom to the hero of a specific anagogical order, despite originating from chaos and formlessness and hence, participates in unified contradiction.

In this allegorical and antisignification frame, monstrosity is an active paradox.³³ In other words, the paradoxical nature of signifying that which cannot be signified, the “other,” the formless chaos from which order emerged, the representation of chaos within an ordered structure.³⁴ Despite a chaotic nature, it provides ontological knowledge to the hero that he/she is often unaware of himself and therefore assumes an anagogical role thereby creating higher order otherwise unavailable to the hero.³⁵ This portent of high value is posited in the following question by Williams: “Why are the monstrous races placed at the edges of the world in mediaeval maps when, while branding them as exiles, such a location identifies the monsters as God’s only neighbors and suggests their proximity to the Divine?”³⁶ Such a complex narrative role is one that must be investigated within the realm of the sagas.

³⁰ Bovey, Alixe. *Monsters and Grottesques in Medieval Manuscripts*. University of Toronto Press (2002): 25.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Wittkower, Rudolf. “Marvels of the East”, 177.

³³ Williams, David, *Deformed Discourse*, 103.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Williams, David, *Deformed Discourse*, 17.

An intriguing delineation, however, is that of the human body and that of the animal. In Norse myth, there is an emphasis on monstrous races such as giants and trolls. Monstrosity partakes in the grotesque tradition in which bodily boundaries are symbolic, as previously discussed.³⁷ The alteration of body parts symbolized specific characteristics of the monster and is commonly held in other medieval cultural contexts. Furthermore, the concept revealed in *monstrare* is maintained by Isidore in an indirect way. Isidore puts emphasis on bearing power to make, beget, point to, and demonstrate.³⁸ This occurs in the realm of unknowing, *terra incognita* and forms the epistemological bridge that leads to anagoge. Returning, however, to the specific *form* of monstrosity, we might concur that in Norse myth monstrosity bears a close relationship with nature and functions less as a combination of differing pieces and more like a separate but complete being. This leads us to specifying monsters and their realm in the context of the Norse.

2.2 Monstrous Characteristics in the North

Monstrosity in the sagas partakes in a cultural tradition that is not unique to the North. Motifs regarding these transmitted narrative pieces were thoroughly investigated and taxonomized by Stith Thompson in his *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*.³⁹ In terms of the *fornaldarsögur*, variations in manuscripts preserve a multiplicity of interpretations and relations between plot points generally, but also with those of monstrosity. We may take *Orvar-Odds* saga as an example. Oddr encounters the abode of a giant which forebodes danger to the hero. This abode is seen in two different ways in separate manuscript redactions termed redaction M and S by Fulvio Ferrari.⁴⁰ In redaction M, this house is discovered to be the remnants of a Christian church.⁴¹ *Ketils saga Haengs* relays a similar building as a hut laid empty at the time of discovery. In these redactions, the giants assume two forms: vile and evil creatures most akin to trolls, and secondly as beautiful

³⁷ Wittkower, Rudolf. "Marvels of the East", 177.

³⁸ Williams, David, *Deformed Discourse*, 13.

³⁹ Thompson, Stith. *Motif-index of Folk-Literature: A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, 1955.

⁴⁰ Ferrari, Fulvio: "Ögmundr, The Elusive Monster and Medieval 'Fantastic' Literature", in: Maria R. Ruggerini (ed.): *Studi anglo-norreni in onore di John S. McKinnell*. 'He hafað sundorgecynd', Cagliari 2009: 369.

⁴¹ Ferrari, Fulvio: "Ögmundr", 370.

and gentle (although not intelligent).⁴² There exists an array, therefore, of manifestations of a single monstrous race. These remain in the same saga, but can differentiate according to the manuscript. Ferrari claims these variations depend on the narrative types which they occupy: that of folklore and that of cosmology.⁴³ In a manner akin to Todorov, Ferrari puts additional emphasis on audience: “this time the author intentionally seeks ambiguity and hesitation in the way the audience responds.”⁴⁴ Despite this narrative and definitory flux, some factors remain integral to the environmental emergence of monstrosity.

Similar to other cultural myths, monsters inhabit spaces beyond or at the limits of human control. These take the form of natural occurrence: forests, rivers, mist, seas, etc.⁴⁵ When the hero ventures to these lands, he/she encounters manifestations of monstrosity. Clear narrative markers differentiate the realms of *natura* and *supra natura*, and cause the hero to lose his/her sense of the known. Þorsteinn in *Þorsteinn þáttur bæjarmagns*, for example, encounters a *dvergr* in a clearing marked by a large stone, and later leaves a well-trodden path only to encounter *álfar*, *risar*, and *jötnum*.⁴⁶ In this way the hero crosses the boundary between order and chaos, venturing as a stranger into the primordial ontological state. Here the *supra natura* resides, the realm in which the hero finds himself at the mercy of fate and typically assumes his position as a “hero.” The locus of order moves with the hero as she encounters monstrous beings but her role is not assumed without it. In entrance to this realm, the hero may leave marked by her journey. A good example of this is *Egils saga*: Egill moves into this other-world only to encounter a conflict between a *jötunn* and a *flagðkona*.⁴⁷ Egill intervenes but loses one of his hands:

‘Jötunninn hjó til Egils, ok kom á höndina við úlfliðinn ok tók af. Fell á jörð bæði höndin ok sverðit.’ Here the Other World mutilates a denizen of This World with lasting consequences that do not fade even when Egill leaves the Other World.⁴⁸

⁴² Ferrari, Fulvio: “Ögmundr”, 371.

⁴³ Simek, Rudolf, *Altnordische Kosmographie*, Berlin-New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1990: 465-73; Schulz, Katja, *Von Wissenshütern und Wildnisbewohnern in Edda und Saga*, Heidelberg, Winter, 2004: 23-24, 245-7; see also *Monster im Mittelalter. Die phantastische Welt der Wundervölker und Fabelwesen*. 2nd edition. Cologne (2019).

⁴⁴ Ferrari, Fulvio: “Ögmundr”, 372.

⁴⁵ Helen F. Leslie, “Border Crossings: Landscape and the Other World in the Fornaldarsögur,” *Scripta Islandica* 60 (1990): 123-132.

⁴⁶ Helen F. Leslie, “Border Crossings”, 126-127.

⁴⁷ Helen F. Leslie, “Border Crossings”, 132.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Here, however, we have again a form of paradox. As monstrosity exists in this chaotic space, it can recognize and alter the fate of our hero, as well as mark the venturer upon his return to order. This can take the form of demarcation recognizable to society (Egill's hand). Monstrosity appears to be both beyond any concept of fate and a passage to it. An example might be Útgarda Loki, who tests Þórr in his castle and at the end of such tests, condemns him to never again cross into his territory, thereby altering the future. Chaos, this primordial substance, is represented by monstrous forms (therefore representing the formless, the ephemeral). These monstrous forms, despite their chaotic nature, command the fate of denizens (of order) in a way unavailable to the hero. In so doing they *enact* fate, they impose order onto the hero that impacts her present and her future in a more metaphysical form of demarcation and alteration.

As bestowers of boon on the heroic journey, monstrosity can offer a variety of gifts to the hero. These gifts typically revolve around the definition of the heroic role. This concept is discussed by Kathryn Hume:

Whether giant or dwarf, dragon or *draugr*, the supernatural creatures function as foils for the hero, and in the sagas, the hero's confrontation with a monster follows one of four patterns: (1) The monster exists to test the protagonist and to affirm his status as a professional hero. (2) The monster preys upon society, thus letting the hero put his strength to the service of others. (3) The supernatural being serves as a comic or ironic device for reducing exaggerated heroes to more human stature. (4) The monster forms part of a deliberate comment on the nature of heroism.⁴⁹

All of these aspects (trial, affirmation, society, reduction) relate directly to the heroic role of both narrative identities (monster and hero). The archetypal journey relayed in such narrative has been likened to the residuum of initiation rituals.⁵⁰ This is maintained in the separation, experience, and lastly return to the society of origination with new boons (weapons, stature, etc) as both reward and offering.⁵¹ This change of identity has an individualistic flavor, although often brings

⁴⁹ Hume, Kathryn, "From Saga to Romance: The Use of Monsters in Old Norse Literature", in: *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 77, Chapel Hill (North Carolina) 1980: 8.

⁵⁰ Danielli, Mary. "Initiation Ceremonial from Norse Literature." *Folklore* 56, no. 2 (1945): 229–45.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

progression in a societal context as well.⁵² This latter relation is argued (by Hume) to be rare in Icelandic narrative involving giants and dragons when compared with its brother, Beowulf, where “Grendel’s man-eating is vividly conceived of as a threat to the entire social fabric”.⁵³ The separation of role appears to be more dependent on the type of monster dealt with. Instead, in *Hrólfs saga Kraka* for example, she emphasizes the moral character of society as being divided, more fallible, and therefore an obfuscated delineation between heroic and monstrous roles as “the king’s heroes bait and torment a helpless boy who offers neither threat nor challenge.”⁵⁴ In a similar way *Grettis saga* mimics this interference of definition. Indeed, Grettir performs heroic functions with mythic adventures, but he also encounters mundane problems which he struggles to rectify.⁵⁵ The obfuscation we see in that of Grettir, giants and dragons might be a commentary on the shifting emphasis in medieval society from the romantic, legendary and perhaps pagan traditions into one considered Christian, mundane, and aligned with realism.⁵⁶ We see, therefore, that the role of monstrosity changed with the dominating theism and its doctrine.

Monstrosity can further be divided, however, into interaction(s) with the hero. Some monsters are killed as if “routine and trivial chore”⁵⁷ but others are given being through voice as well as supernatural power (influence over fate). These latter iterations of monstrosity will be focused on in this thesis, for they are given an agency different from the others and serve as a more complex topic of study. Finally, the character of different monsters reveals their diversity but also their unity in societal reflection. Monstrosity not only represents chaos in a mythic sense, but also collects and personifies negative traits inherent to the culture it originated. For example, *Draugar* may be representative of berserks with their bloodlust, selfishness, greed, will, and avarice.⁵⁸ They are “other” to the hero, containing the qualities that may obfuscate his role.⁵⁹ They carry similar strength and qualities of the hero, forming his “shadow.”⁶⁰ Interestingly, they also participate in the individuation aforementioned, in which objects form representations of the heroic or monstrous

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Hume, Kathryn, “From Saga to Romance”, 5.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Hume, Kathryn, “From Saga to Romance”, 6.

⁵⁶ Hume, Kathryn, “From Saga to Romance”, 7.

⁵⁷ Hume, Kathryn, “From Saga to Romance”, 8.

⁵⁸ Hume, Kathryn, “From Saga to Romance”, 13.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

psyche.⁶¹ This individuation, however, may interfere with the functioning of collective society, hence the “shadow” with corrupted ideals.⁶² Giants, for example, represent these asocial influences.⁶³ Dragons incorporate a new factor: that of destruction in addition to strength.⁶⁴ Monstrous animals appear to only function in an initiatory way, although the mythic balance achieved by this existence is not explored.⁶⁵ Social equilibrium, however, is.⁶⁶ Dependence remains on recognition of weakness; embodiment of value tested and dissected by monstrosity and in some sagas, heroism.⁶⁷

From a mythological standpoint, monstrosity is allied with both creation and destruction in primordial form. Most apparent would be the frost giants representing “earth oriented parts of the creation story and are connected to such forces as frost and fire, the boundlessness of the ocean, and the inexorability of old age and death.”⁶⁸ The natural environment was inextricably linked to iterations of monstrosity. It illuminates the recurrence of dualism in monstrous existence: order in strife with chaos inherent to nature (ex. fire and ice).⁶⁹ Indeed, progression or *creative force* seems to originate from strife between chaos (monstrosity) and order (heroism, Aesir) and its conflict.⁷⁰ As Hume states, “It is not love that moves the sun and all the stars (as Dante lyrically asserts), but strife. The sun flees across the sky from cosmic wolves; the firmament was made from the *disjecta membra* of a murdered giant.”⁷¹ Conflict thereby fashions equilibrium in society, although this in itself doesn’t guarantee permanence.⁷² Instead the overarching mythical (and ontological structure) remains: oscillation between iterations of the primordial chaos, whence emerged order and dissolution but thereby initiated creation, journey, and fate.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Hume, Kathryn, “From Saga to Romance”, 14.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Hume, Kathryn, “From Saga to Romance”, 19.

⁶⁷ Hume, Kathryn, “From Saga to Romance”, 14.

⁶⁸ Hume, Kathryn, “From Saga to Romance”, 17.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

2.3 Iterations of Monstrosity and Open Queries

There will be three forms of monstrosity discussed in this thesis: dragons (Fáfnir), revenants (Glámr), and giants. Additional (although minimal) comparative discussion in these contexts will be trolls. For each chapter, preconditions are set that define the traditions such iterations partake in. These may include historical, theoretical, and narrative structure. It will also focus on monsters who tend to bear more value than those of the first three patterns listed by Humes. There is an inversion of significant function that is most emphasized in the fourth pattern of revelation: role. If a monster's significance lies as emphatic only to the hero's attainment of heroic status without precursory and independent being (such as that discussed in the romantic tradition), this will not be discussed. One way to differentiate these two dichotomous natures is with voice. Does the monster have a voice with which to bridge the gap of opposition with the hero, as well as enlighten the semblance of order with its relation to chaos? There is an array in these sagas of folkloric motifs and well as mythological references. Although these function akin to each other, mythological references will take precedence due to their more overt ontological stature.

Following these chapters, there will be discussion regarding the motif of sacrifice and its value for the heroism-monstrosity dichotomy. The determinant form this motif may take bears prominence. In the iterations presented, was sacrifice performed? Who or what was sacrificed and how does this determine the heroic course post-ritual? This will combine theory and narrative analysis from a potentiality outlook. The exploration will apply archeological bases regarding ritual to narrative function, then analyze how this may impact the interactions between heroic and monstrous roles. Does this sacrifice (or lack thereof) define the heroic fate? The question will be posed: although the monster is often sacrificed for the hero, is there any value to the sacrifice of the heroic ego and its ensuing *draconitas*? If this is not sacrificed, what are the consequences? A relation will then be made to ontological and mythic balance such as that espoused in the Poetic Edda.

3. Dragons in Anagogic Revelation

Before we explore Fáfnir's role in *Völsungasaga*, it's necessary to acknowledge the extensive tradition in which Fáfnir partakes. The most commonly discussed relation is that to the story of *Beowulf*. Anterior to this, we have some of the earliest mentions of dragons in the Graeco-Roman mythos in which major heroes such as Perseus, Cadmus, Heracles, Odysseus and Jason all dealt with the *drakon*.⁷³ Furthermore, some heathen deities took the form of a *drakon* such as Asclepius, which elucidates importance in both narrative but also religious beliefs.⁷⁴ This Graeco-Roman tradition is that whence many other dragon-slaying narratives occur or originate.⁷⁵ The Latin derivative of the Greek *drakon* is *draco* which refers to large, even epic snakes (therefore naturally occurring snakes of a large size, or that of the *supra natura*, mythological stature).⁷⁶ These serpentine monsters assume a variety of positions: "serpents of the great mythical battles apart: serpents identified, integrated, or associated with underworld powers; serpents participating in metamorphosis; serpents acting as guards on behalf of gods; serpents participating in omens and prophetic dreams; serpents of ritual function; and serpents, often fantastical in form, decorating arms."⁷⁷ Intriguingly, the *drakon* and the slayer already had an intricate, mirrored relationship in the Graeco-Roman context. In order to fight the *drakon*, the best advantage would be to bear the attributes or nature of the *drakon* oneself.⁷⁸ An example of this were the 'Snakeborn,' or coterie of Ophiogenies who were the best slayers of snakes due to their partially serpentine nature.⁷⁹ This alliance or rather, symmetry of nature wasn't limited to the *drakon* and its slayer;

among the gods, the most dogged fighter against anguiforms is the goddess that most consistently fights alongside them too, Athene. [...] And so does the late antique Vlautian: he had Athene deploying her Gorgon-head to freeze the serpent-legs of the giant Palleneus into stone, whilst simultaneously slaying his humanoid part with a

⁷³ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn: Dragon Myth and Serpent Cult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013: 1.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 2.

⁷⁷ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 3.

⁷⁸ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 215.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

sword. The humanoid can fight the humanoid, but the anguiform is best fought by the anguiform. [...] When Athene dons the aegis she could be thought to take on the attributes of the anguiform monster of which it is the trophy. There was more than one sense in which a victor over a *drakon* could be regarded as becoming a *drakon* himself.⁸⁰

Of further interest to us (as will be explored in dialogue between Fáfñir and Sigurðr in *Völsungasaga*), is the motif of flashing eyes. This motif is one that was also utilized in the Greek mythos for both the power of divinity but also power of monstrosity and therefore implies a distinct relationship between monstrosity and divinity similar to that of *terra incognita* (on the edges of the world and proximity to the divine). Indeed, this is described in relation to Typhon by Hesoid: “Fire flashed forth from the eyes under the brows of his awesome [sc.serpent] heads. And from all his heads as he gazed (*derkomenio*) fire burned.”⁸¹ Bacchylides identifies this descriptor with the Nemean *drakon* which was killed by Adrastus as *xanthoderkes* which could mean “fiery-eyed;”⁸² Euripides’ *Ion* describes his mother Cruesa as *drakon* with a gaze like that of fire; Euphorion paints fire flashing forth from the eyes of Cerebus that resembles lightning and fire flashing from Etna.⁸³ Indeed the term *drakon* is a derivative of *derkomai* which suggests the gaze was integral to the nature of the creature itself.⁸⁴ *Derkomai* translates to ‘see’, ‘look at’, ‘flash a look’, “thereby making the *drakon* a ‘starer’ in origin and by definition.”⁸⁵ The transformation of human into *drakon* is also something familiar to the Greek mythos. Some examples of this would be Camdus, the slayer of the Serpent of Ares and Cychreus, a Saliaminian hero.⁸⁶ In an attestation found in Nonnus, Cadmus is Zeus’ ally in his conflict with Typhon, yet is of similar nature to serpents which eventually spurns his concluding transformation into a *drakon*.

Finally, the relationship between the *drakon* and treasure is one also found in these myths. This is explicated by Artemidorus and Festus who also apply the concept of monstrous gaze as a

⁸⁰ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 216.

⁸¹ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 218.

⁸² Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 223.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 237.

⁸⁵ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 173.

⁸⁶ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 193.

distinguishing factor.⁸⁷ The *drakon* or serpents were guardians specifically due to their vigilance, their watchfulness; Macrobius elaborated this point when he “told that the serpent was continuously watchful like the sun, which was why they were entrusted with the guarding of inner sancta (*adyta*), oracles and treasures.”⁸⁸ The association between monstrosity, therefore, and the containment of wealth is one much older than Norse myth itself. This wealth, as exhibited by Macrobius, wasn’t limited to treasure but also that of oracle, especially revelatory, *adyta*. The *adyta*, or sanctum of a temple (reserved for high priests and priestesses) is one container or vessel (along with oracles) of the highest level of divine knowledge. In the Norse context, monstrosity imparts wisdom which can be likened to divine knowledge and functions like an oracle. The wisdom, as shall be seen, often foretells the fate of the hero as an oracle might in the Greek tradition. This references us back to the intricacy of monstrosity and its bearing of anagoge. The idea is echoed in medieval maps via *terra incognita*, in the grotesque tradition of moral allegory, and finally, in *Beowulf*, a close kin to *Völsungasaga*. *Beowulf* and some Old Norse sagas are considered analogues whose narratives mirror each other, and likely denote influence.⁸⁹ These analogues are considered as *Völsungasaga*, *Grettis Hrólfs saga kraka* and *Samsons saga fagra*, but also that of *The Two Trolls*.⁹⁰ Other cultural analogues (some claiming to be even more similar to *Beowulf* than the Norse material) are Celtic tales such as *The Hand and Child*.⁹¹ Regardless, however, the archetype of a dragon and its characteristics are ones that will lead us into literary and textual analysis of *Fáfnir* in *Völsungasaga*.

To understand the implications of monstrosity and heroism a brief exploration of terminology will be explored before literary analysis. The first, potentially most revelatory epithet used by Sigurðr in *Fáfnismál* is *gofuct dýr*.⁹² This translates to “noble beast,” although there is scholarly debate as to whether another potentiality is “stag.”⁹³ In *Völsungasaga*, Guðrún describes a dream to Brynhildr:

⁸⁷ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 173.

⁸⁸ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 174.

⁸⁹ Rauer, Christine. *Beowulf and the Dragon : Parallels and Analogues*. Cambridge [England]: D.S. Brewer, (2000): 11.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Rauer, Christine. *Beowulf and the Dragon*, 13.

⁹² Massimiliano Bampi, *gofuct dýr. Ec heiti: Deer Symbolism in Sigurðr Fáfnisbani?*, 14th International Saga Conference of Uppsala (2009): 78-84.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

Þat dreymdi mik,” sagði Guðrún, “at vér gengum frá skemmu margar saman ok sámm einn mikinn hjört. Han bar langt af öðrum dýrum. Hár hans var af gulli. Vér vildum allar taka dýrit, en ek ein náða. Dýrit þótti mér öllum hlutum betra. Síðan skauztu dýrit fyrir knjám mér⁹⁴

Brynhildr interprets the large stag as Sigurðr, and other references to stags are those in *Fáfnismál*.⁹⁵ The use of this terminology is evidently to represent and laud the hero, extricating his stature by visual imagery.⁹⁶ This image has been widely seen as a remnant of pagan symbolism, often attributed the values “prosperity, rebirth and rejuvenation, with regeneration and fertility.”⁹⁷ Stag symbolism recurs throughout the Norse mythological structure as well as in sagas, specifically as one dealing with cosmic ontology. Some examples include Snorra Edda and the Poetic Edda (*Grímnismál*).⁹⁸ Four stags feed on the world tree Yggdrasil, while Eikþyrnir resides on top of Valhöll and devours those branches. We might conclude there is a destructive or at least, disintegrative element to the heathen symbol as communicated by the devouring of the world tree. In contrast, the Christian conception tends to a more differentiated view. The stag makes an appearance in the *Song of Songs* as a symbol for Christ, and this theme is maintained in a variety of scripture.⁹⁹ As will be seen later, the dialogue between Sigurðr and Fáfnir appears to partake in the pagan framework rather than the Christian. The lineage is traced to the Graeco-Roman narrative due to the anteriority and implicit, distinct similarities between them. It appears the heathen conception deals with elements of destruction in addition to maintaining balance (Yggdrasil) while the Christian is based on opposition of elements. In some instances of dialogue and description of *Völsungasaga*, there appears to be more kinship to this heathen symbolism and indeed, usage than with that of the Christian.

The heroic description of *dýr* or rather, beastiality is one discussed by scholars such as Ármann Jakobsson. This can be traced directly to this interaction between otherness and the hero, or in different terms, the interaction between known (order) and unknown (chaos). It an interaction which defies the realistic elements of some sagas yet nevertheless create “dubious humanity” that

⁹⁴ Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda. 1. Ed. by Guðni Jónsson. Reykjavík (1950): 173-174.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Massimiliano Bampi, *gofuct dýr*, 80.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Massimiliano Bampi, *gofuct dýr*, 81.

emphasizes capacity for otherness.¹⁰⁰ We have examples of this mirroring effect between monstrosity and heroism in other sagas as well. Egill, for example, is not compared to a dragon such as Fáfnir but instead to a troll: *mikill sem troll*.¹⁰¹ In the same fashion, Skalla-Grímr is referred to as *þurs*. *Þurs* “is essentially a negative word: a þurs is a magical being who is anthropoid and yet bestial, hostile, and in some way subhuman.”¹⁰² This questions both Egill and Skalla-Grímr’s nature and role in a similar fashion to that of Fáfnir and Sigurðr.¹⁰³ Further examples include *Grettis Saga*, in which Grettir is misunderstood to be a troll when he unexpectedly rushes into a nearby household.¹⁰⁴ There is also a theme associated with magic that will be explicated later.¹⁰⁵ Generally, Jakobsson identifies the following characteristics of trolls:

1. The troll is a witch, a practitioner of magic, someone who can control the environment through a knowledge of dark arts that do not originate with the power of God.
2. The troll is strange and foreign: it is a different species or a different race whose very strangeness defines it.
3. The troll is in some way bestial. While anthropoid in appearance, it has the habits of beasts.
4. The troll is hostile and disruptive. It exists against the natural order of the world.¹⁰⁶

These align with the characteristics of monstrosity in multiple iterations across different sagas: as forms against order (chaos/entropy), associated with magic, other, and finally, of bestial nature. When the hero is referenced with terminology such as *dýr*, it positions the heroic nature beside that of monstrosity, holding the capacity to at least mirror, if not become monstrous as in the case of Fáfnir himself. Fáfnir was originally a heroic dwarf who became too greedy and transformed

¹⁰⁰ Jakobsson, Ármann. “Beast and Man: Realism and the Occult in ‘Egils Saga.’” *Scandinavian Studies* 83, no. 1 (2011): 30.

¹⁰¹ Jakobsson, Ármann. “Beast and Man”, 31.

¹⁰² Jakobsson, Ármann. “Beast and Man”, 38.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ See ch. 28.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Jakobsson, Ármann. “Beast and Man”, 33.

into a dragon due to flaws in his character. The roles and natures between hero and monster are further reversed or at least, interlaid with other characteristics.

In comparison, Fáfnir is referenced as wise as opposed to as a “noble beast.” For example, we receive this descriptor in *Fáfnismál*. Fáfnir assumes this nature (and indeed, role) in stanza 12:

*‘Segðu mér, Fáfnir,
allz þik fróðan kveða
ok vel mart vita:
hverjar ro þær nornir
er nauðgonglar ro
ok kíosa mæðr frá mögom?’¹⁰⁷*

The wisdom encapsulated by Fáfnir is shown in other ways as well. In the dialogue between them, Sigurðr asks for knowledge such as the origins of the norns.¹⁰⁸ In addition, instead of an emphasis on violence and action, the two characters interact in such a way that Sigurðr’s ignorance becomes apparent.¹⁰⁹ The limitations of the hero are designated in indirect form, and the questioning of capacity comes into play as the monster engages and overturns cultural and narrative role(s). Fáfnir challenges Sigurðr through *senna*, death song and wisdom poetry while he dies.¹¹⁰ There is a distinct sense “that the dragon is somehow outwitting Sigurðr.”¹¹¹ Furthermore, the dragon willingly provides information that bring both hero and monster to interplay, functioning symmetrically as referenced in the Graeco-Roman context. As stated by Ármann Jakobsson,

the dragon certainly has the upper hand [...] Though in his dying throes, he asks aggressive and clever questions, mostly attempting to wrest out of the young hero the identity of the man who he thinks has put him up to this [...] whilst warning him against the curse of the gold. The dragon’s last words are that if Sigurðr is not careful,

¹⁰⁷ Von See, Klaus et al. (eds.), *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*. Bd. 5 Heldenlieder: Frá dauða Sinfjötla, Grípisspá, Reginsmál, Fáfnismál, Sigrdrífumál, Heidelberg 2006, 353–495, here: 429.

¹⁰⁸ Ármann Jakobsson, “Talk to the Dragon: Tolkien as Translator.” *Tolkien Studies* 6.1 (2009): 31.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Midkiff, Emily. “‘Dragons are Tricky’ the Uncanny Dragons of Children’s Literature”. *Fafnir-Nordic Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy Research* (2009): 46.

¹¹¹ Ármann Jakobsson, “Talk to the Dragon”, 31.

they will both end up being killed by the same man. That would entail a strange sharing of fate for the dragon and his slayer.¹¹²

Indeed, multiple similarities exist between the characters although they appear to hold opposing roles. These include gold, the violence which define their lives, and their relationship with Reginn.¹¹³ In this interaction between hero and monster, we see “this dragon is not merely a monster in the wilderness. He is a teacher, a respectable figure, and he also had magical powers. [...] It also reminds us that there is in the hearts of others [...] a tiny essence of the dragon, that *draconitas* which made it possible for Fáfnir to turn himself into a dragon.”¹¹⁴ The qualities attributed to monstrosity can be assumed by the hero, while the monster bears primordial wisdom that outweighs the limitations of the hero and witness heroic actions from an objective standpoint. Therefore, the monster takes on the wisdom which simultaneously propels, complicates, and questions the heroic role. The descriptor of *fróðr mjök*¹¹⁵ and Fáfnir’s association with knowledge that outwits the hero elicits these terms in a broader cultural/narrative context. Monstrous embodiment of wisdom refers us to the relation between divinity and monstrosity, as well as the temple or adyta which holds special knowledge - including foreknowing (oracle).

This characteristic (wise) is often used for more cosmological beings. One immediately apparent is Óðinn.¹¹⁶ Gyflaginning describes Óðinn with the term *vísindum*; *Óðinn hafði spádóm ok svá kona hans, ok af þeim vísindum fann hann þat at nafn hans mundi uppi vera haft í norðrhálfu heimsins ok tignat um fram alla konunga.*¹¹⁷ *Spádómr* (prophecy or prescience) is a particular type of magic related directly to wisdom.¹¹⁸ *Víss* denotes knowledge or wisdom.¹¹⁹ To solidify this association, one of Óðinn epithets is *Fiölsviðr* translating to “wise in many things” which is also used as a term for a giant in *Fiölsvinnzmál*.¹²⁰ We have this identified relationship between the

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ármann Jakobsson, “Talk to the Dragon”, 32.

¹¹⁵ *Völsunga saga* (1959), 153.

¹¹⁶ See Lassen, Annette, Helen Lesley, and Margaret Cormack. *Odin's Ways: A Guide to the Pagan God in Medieval Literature*. New York and London (2022): 220.

¹¹⁷ Sturluson, Snorri. *Edda - Prologue and Gylfaginning*. Edited by Anthony Faulkes, 2nd ed., London: Viking Society for Northern Research (2005): 7.

¹¹⁸ Zoëga Geir Tómasson. *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*. University of Toronto Press (2004): 397.

¹¹⁹ Zoëga Geir Tómasson, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*: 500.

¹²⁰ Zoëga Geir Tómasson, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*: 140; see also Roscoe, Brett. “Sagacious Liminality: The Boundaries of Wisdom in Old English and Old Norse-Icelandic Literature.” (2014): 158.

giants and the gods, one of wisdom. During a wisdom contest, a giant is described “as an old sage (*þulr*). Even if he does not win the wisdom contest against Odin, he is almost as wise as he is.”¹²¹ In the context of *Fiölsvinnzmál*, the reference to the giant is overt and distinct: a monster. This identifies evident boundaries from the onset of the story. Just as quickly, however, it partakes in the traditions and interaction already anticipated between hero and monster. The hero, Svipdag, wishes to enter Menglod’s hall but the monster (Fiolsvinn) bars his way and provides an obstacle to the heroic boon, partaking in archetypal roles. His monstrous nature appears to be evinced via both form (giant) but also in the manner described and perhaps, defined by the hero. As already discussed, the hero is an apex of limited being, which endows a structure (along with cultural assumption) on the monster by using specific terminology. The monster, however, inverts this by not only claiming itself to be wise, but referring to names imparted by unknown actors. In the case of Fiolsvinn, the giant tells Svipdag: “Much-wise I’m called and I’ve a wise mind indeed.”¹²² After attaching this descriptor to himself, his interaction with Svipdag mimics that seen between Fáfñir and Sigurd. Fiolsvinn proves his wisdom by his extensive knowledge whilst searching for the identity of the hero who attempts to traverse the boundary into Menglod’s hall. In this case, the knowledge proves useful for Svipdag’s exploits: the ruler of Menglod’s hall, the name of the gate and the chains that restrain it, the dogs who eternally guard it, etc. Of greater value is the usage of this name (and its connotations) both for a monster but for a god specifically assigned with pivotal role and importance in the Norse myths and corpus (Óðinn, *Fiolsviðr*). Of interesting similarity is the kinship between monstrosity and Óðinn. Lotte Motz identifies this: “Þórr became the trusted friend of men while Óðinn remained the terrible — Yggr. Þórr reified men’s confidence in their own strength, while Óðinn reified the awareness of their insufficiency.”¹²³ In the framework of the monstrous role, we see epistemological limitations of the hero repeatedly with their need to elicit information from the monster. The kinship between wisdom, monstrosity, and Óðinn mirrors this reification of the heroic insufficiency and/or even flaws. The monster reveals the hero’s limited knowledge and is even named according to their reservoir of wisdom. This is an inextricable part of the monster’s role and functions alongside Óðinn; both are intertwined with wisdom beyond

¹²¹ Lassen, Annette, Helen Lesley, and Margaret Cormack. *Odin's Ways*, 220.

¹²² Larrington, Carolyne. *The Poetic Edda*, 922.

¹²³ Motz, Lotte. *The King, the Champion and the Sorcerer: A Study in Germanic Myth*. *Studia Mediaevalia Septentrionalia* Bd. 1. Wien: Fassbaender, 1996: 100.

that of the hero and serve to him/her in an anagogical manner. This is akin to the Greek notion of *adyta*.

We have a distinct relation, therefore, between divinity and monstrosity but in the Norse context of wisdom and knowledge. Examples of this association follow: *En Æsir váru því vísari at þeir höfðu spádóm, ok sá þeir ferð hans fyrr en hann kom, ok gerðu í móti honum sjónhverfingar*.¹²⁴ Illusions and prescience are inseparable from wisdom. *Víss* repeats here in its comparative form. The Æsir were wiser, capable of foretelling the future and deceiving (illusions). Illusions are identified via *sjónhverfing*. We have *sjón*, or sight,¹²⁵ with *hverfa* meaning to turn or change motion.¹²⁶ Together these create deception, delusion, or redirection.¹²⁷ The recurrence of this association (magic, monster, wisdom) is echoed in other iterations of monstrosity such as trolls. The term troll was “used in reference to the practitioners of magic, along with any creature they might awaken, possess, or imbue with their sorcery.”¹²⁸ Manipulation of reality (magic) and encounters with the primeval state of disintegration/entropy can alter the fate of the hero, either allowing the assumption of heroism or refuting it. I refer back to the aforementioned examples of Útgarða Loki and Egill’s hand (or loss thereof - hence, a marking of journey and alteration of “ordered” form) and the consequences of his return to society (explored in the chapter on Sacrifice). This wisdom, as mentioned, also deals with foreknowledge. Prescience gives a sense of fatalism in both action and word.

Fate, of course, is a semblance of divine structure but is necessary and inextricable from the existence of chaos. Therefore, conflict originates from the tension between them. We see this most clearly in mythic battles (but also examples of fate) such as Ragnarök, which can reference us back to Hume’s comment on strife and its necessity: “It is not love that moves the sun and all the stars (as Dante lyrically asserts), but strife. The sun flees across the sky from cosmic wolves; the firmament was made from the disjecta membra of a murdered giant.”¹²⁹ Conflict thereby creates equilibrium in a paradox (monstrosity). We need only look to the occurrence of rebirth of order amidst strife in Ragnarök. The deer of Yggdrasil participate, indeed even initiate and maintain disintegration of order, but in so doing fulfill balance, fate, and new creation. This is why

¹²⁴ Sturluson, Snorri. *Edda - Prologue and Gylfaginning*: 7.

¹²⁵ Zoëga Geir Tómasson, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, 363.

¹²⁶ Zoëga Geir Tómasson, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, 219.

¹²⁷ Zoëga Geir Tómasson, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, 365.

¹²⁸ Jakobsson, Ármann. “Beast and Man”, 31.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

they may bear (in an assumed pagan context), the associations of rebirth, rejuvenation, regeneration, fertility, etc.¹³⁰

We see divinity referenced as bearing wisdom that in *Fáfnismál* is attributed to an entropic entity yet provides similar prophetic acumen and magical ability. We have already discussed the traversing of boundaries between order (hero) and chaos (primordial, unified). In brief summation: entropy (the primeval *supra natura*) resides which positions the hero in such a way to both challenge and attain his supposed “heroism”. Here chaos both disintegrates yet recreates order when an apex of order (hero) ventures into entropy (paradoxically taking the form of a monster and/or going beyond the realm of society). This entity associated with chaos is the creator of the heroic role, but also bears qualities attributed both to gods (*Æsir*) as well as manipulation of reality (magic/sorcery). Magic is a form of alteration of reality that appears to have a precondition of wisdom. Wisdom is the boon attained by the hero who in comparison, is extremely myopic and can easily cross into a state of flawed heroism, assuming monstrous characteristics referred to as *draconitas*. In another way, the unacknowledged flaws of the hero, when remaining unacknowledged (thereby lacking wisdom), can manifest monstrosity. Wisdom, unknown to the hero, is that quality that connects both divinity and monstrosity and provides foresight and magic. Indeed, in *Völsungasaga*, Fáfnir exhibits a form of this prescience (similar to Óðinn’s *spádómr* originating from *víss*) by his words to Sigurðr:

Sigurðr mælti, ‘Hvé heitir sá hólmr er blanda hjörlegi Surtr ok Æsir saman?’ Fáfnir svarar ‘Hann heitir Óskapr.’ Ok enn mælti Fáfnir, ‘Reginn, bróðir minn, veldr mínum dauða, ok þat hloegir mik er hann veldr ok þínum dauða, ok ferr þá sem hann vildi.’¹³¹

And further:

Sigurðr mælti, ‘Seg þú, Fáfnir, ef þú ert fróðr mjök: hverjar eru þær nornir er kjósa mögu frá moeðrum?’ Fáfnir svarar, ‘Margar eru þær ok sundrlausar. Sumar eru Ása ættar, sumar eru álfa ættar, sumar eru doetr Dvalins.’ [...] Fáfnir svarar, ‘Ríða

¹³⁰ Massimiliano Bampi, *gofuct dýr*, 78-84.

¹³¹ Finch, R G. *The Saga of the Volsungs: [volsunga Saga.] Edited and Translated by R.g. Finch*. London: Nelson, 1965: 31.

*muntu þar til er þú finnr svá mikit gull at oerit er um þína daga, ok þat sama gull verðr þinn bani ok hvers annars er þat á.*¹³²

Fáfnir exemplifies this knowledge and wisdom when interrogated by Sigurðr. He adds a level of foresight which Sigurðr utilizes to avoid his own death, only to fall victim to the second warning Fáfnir gives, that of the cursed gold. The gold, or rather, Sigurðr's greed becomes the *draconitas* which propels his downfall. The wisdom/warning is emphasized when Sigurðr burns his finger while roasting Fáfnir's heart. He puts his finger into his mouth and is granted the ability to understand the language of birds due to tasting the dragon's blood.¹³³ Interestingly, the eating of the monstrous heart is directly related to the gaining of wisdom. The birds speak of Reginn's coming betrayal, causing Sigurðr to behead Reginn and keep Fáfnir's gold for himself.¹³⁴

*Þar sitr Sigurðr ok steikir Fáfnis hjarta. Þat skyldi hann sjálf fr eta. Þá mundi hann verða hverjum manni vitrari. Önnur segir, Þar liggr Reginn ok vill véla þann sem honum trúir.*¹³⁵

Fáfnir's words alter Sigurðr's actions and therefore dictate his fate in an indirect way. Despite this, of course, Sigurðr's actions are his own. Therein we have the mirroring between monster and hero, heroic strengths which if used improperly turn into weaknesses, and cross the border into monstrosity rather than heroism. Indeed this is written in Fáfnir's very nature which mirrors Sigurðr's capacity to enact flawed heroism. Fáfnir was a dwarf until his heroic strengths became his weakness, and he turned into a dragon. We see this by the description of his human form, *Fáfnir var miklu mestr ok grimmastr ok vildi sitt eitt kalla láta allt þat, er var,*¹³⁶ and the transformation when Fáfnir falls prey to greed, *hann lagðist út ok unni engum at njóta fjárins nema sér ok varð síðan at inum versta ormi ok liggr nú á því fé.*¹³⁷ It is at the moment of patricide, greed, and thievery, that Fáfnir becomes a monster; *'Síðan drap Fáfnir föður sinn,' segir Reginn, 'ok myrði hann, ok náða ek engu af fénu. Hann gerðist svá illr [...] ok varð síðan at inum versta ormi*

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Finch, R G. *The Saga of the Volsungs*, 29-32.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Finch, R G. *The Saga of the Volsungs*, 34.

¹³⁶ *Völsunga saga* (1954), 143.

¹³⁷ *Völsunga saga* (1954), 145.

[...]’¹³⁸ This is potent considering his words to Sigurðr. Fáfnir uses a very specific visual motif that harkens us back to the Greco-Roman tradition of monstrosity. I refer back to *xanthoderkes* (“fiery-eyed”),¹³⁹ *derkomai* (to ‘see’, ‘look at’, ‘flash a look’, “thereby making the drakon a ‘starer’ in origin and by definition.”)¹⁴⁰ etc. During their conversation, Fáfnir says to Sigurðr: *Inn fráneygi sveinn*. This may be translated as “the flashing eyes boy” or simply “your eyes flash, boy.”¹⁴¹ This is a distinct visual motif with historical roots that references monstrosity. This motif inverts the roles between the two characters. Although Fáfnir is described in epic stature as the “earth tremors were so violent that all the land about shook”¹⁴² as he slithered, the distinct motif of flashing eyes is not utilized for him, but for the hero. Given even more prominence is that a monster says this to the hero directly, appearing to recognize his own nature in the “heroism” employed by Sigurðr rather than a deity stating this to Sigurðr. It identifies characteristics unknown to the hero who bears limited cognition but clear to the monster who was a hero, and moved beyond this role (due to his *draconitas*) and into monstrosity. Furthermore, Fáfnir tells Sigurðr:

*Heiftyrði tekr þú hvetvetna því, er ek mæli*¹⁴³

This dialogue evinces aid rather than malignance in Fáfnir’s intention. Indeed, with his consistent warnings and prescience he attempts to redirect Sigurðr as though a friend rather than an enemy. The potency of Fáfnir’s warnings also resides in his usage of specific motifs previously identified which are not unique to the dialogue between Fáfnir and Sigurðr, but rather echo in iterations of monstrosity in other sagas and lays as well. Despite these, Sigurðr’s responses reveal his lack of wisdom or more accurately, limitations of knowledge. His view is obscured by “heroic” traits and so Fáfnir’s warnings fall on deaf ears. Sigurðr replies:

*Hverr vill fé hafa allt til ins eina dags, en eitt sinn skal hverr deyja*¹⁴⁴

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 223.

¹⁴⁰ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 173.

¹⁴¹ Finch, R G. *The Saga of the Volsungs*, 31.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ *Völsunga saga* (1959), 152.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

And indeed, Fafnir responds to Sigurðr's behavior:

*Fátt vill þú at mínum dæmum gera*¹⁴⁵

Fáfñir warns Sigurðr of his inevitable fate should he continue to seek heroism through superficial traits and desires. He speaks to Sigurðr as a friend rather than an enemy, one trying to redirect the hero from his unfortunate end. This insinuates both knowing (wisdom) belonging to the monster who, from an ontological perspective, resides in the realm beyond order (unified chaos) and has also lived a life victim to his *draconitas*. In many ways he is fit to warn the hero, to impart wisdom to which the hero must sacrifice his own sense of *draconitas*. In other words, he must not let his greed for both gold and fame direct his actions, else he will meet a fate akin to Fáfñir.

In summation, we have multiple references that complicate both the monstrous and heroic roles. The first is that of a hero enacting bestiality. Bestiality is a term used to denote dubious humanity and monstrous behavior. The descriptor is used in other narratives for the hero (ex. Grettir and Egill) yet bestiality is one that attributes chaotic nature.¹⁴⁶ In juxtaposition, Fáfñir is described as wise in contrast to bestial. This characteristic is not unique to Fáfñir himself, but echoes in other forms of monstrosity, revealing it as integral to their nature. Fáfñir's knowledge and wit far outweighs that of Sigurðr and aligns Fáfñir more closely with divinity (as seen by the descriptors of Óðinn and the Æsir). Furthermore, Sigurðr and Fáfñir have an interweaving, mirroring fate which references the 'Snakeborn'. This is one aspect that helps Fáfñir recognize and warn Sigurðr of his *draconitas* and its consequences. He warns Sigurðr of his own limitations in the manner Óðinn reveals insufficiency and is therefore terrible (Yggr). This aligns the wisdom with both divinity and monstrosity, but also with the specific form of magic: foreknowledge and therefore anagoge. Fáfñir exemplifies this, although not heeded by Sigurðr (and therefore, Sigurðr made no proper sacrifice). Further Fáfñir partakes in the Greco-Roman tradition of monstrosity and flashing eyes. He uses it, however, as a descriptor for Sigurðr, eliciting a sense of monstrous nature incipient in his actions (his *draconitas*). Lastly, much of what Fáfñir tells Sigurðr is meant to aid rather than fight with the hero, despite the hero seeing Fáfñir as a monster and not of nature to the gods. Fáfñir both identifies and challenges this tendency directly which Sigurðr promptly

¹⁴⁵ *Völsunga saga* (1959), 152.

¹⁴⁶ Jakobsson, Ármann, "Beast and Man", 30.

ignores and therefore, falls prey to the consequences of his *draconitas*. Together, these narrative roles appear to be reversed from the common assumption of monster with evil and hero with good. The monster is instead aligned with aspects of divinity, while the hero is aligned with the bestial qualities of the monster rather than heroism itself.

4. Giants in Anagogic Revelation

Of the most concern for the relationship between monstrosity and divinity (and therefore, the anagogical quality of monstrosity) is that of the *jötunn*. The giants are one of the primordial, world-creating forms of monstrosity that are closest to the deities. Indeed, the Norse gods, similar to those of the Greek, have lineage in these primeval beings (and their incipient, chaotic nature). In an image identical to that of the hero, the nature of divinity is closely related to that of entropy and the original nature (or state) of reality. Divinity is therefore, as heroism, ‘Snakeborn’ and yielding *draconitas*. In this manner, both heroism and divinity partake in the unifying factor of monstrosity and therefore, chaos. As stated by literary scholar Riti Kroesen: “the hero must perform this task, in other words: he must be the successor of the gods, and the defender of ordered community”.¹⁴⁷ *Ymir*’s body is the root whence the world grew. Here we have the ontological base previously discussed: the original, unified chaos out of which fracture into order occurred. Like other manifestations of monstrosity, however, the giants are still of pandemonic nature yet carry deep levels of wisdom. An example of this integral, monstrous nature is that of *Hræsvelgr*, “a giant from whose wings all the winds are born” and further “From his name it appears he originally must have been a corpse-swallower, a corpse-eating demon”.¹⁴⁸ For this reason, they are othered from the now upheld structure of order and adopt a threatening demeanor to the anthropocentric perspective.¹⁴⁹ Even the gods defined this dichotomy as can be seen by the terms *Miðgarðr* and *Útgarðr*: “the place that is enclosed amidst fences” and “the place on the outside of the fences”.¹⁵⁰ Despite this, giants were revered in a similar fashion to the gods. There is some discussion of the

¹⁴⁷ Kroesen, Riti. “Ambiguity in the relationship between heroes and giants.” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 111 (1996): 59.

¹⁴⁸ Kroesen, Riti. “Ambiguity in the relationship between heroes and giants”, 61.

¹⁴⁹ Kroesen, Riti. “Ambiguity in the relationship between heroes and giants”, 59.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

existence of a cult of giants, due to their essence of divinity or “and older generation of gods”.¹⁵¹ Kroesen relates this to sacrificial ritual:

It has been known for a long time that there are two reasons for presenting a gift or sacrifice: *do ut des* (I give so that you shall give) and *do ut abeas* (I give so that you shall go away). The reason that people made offerings to the giants could in a great number of cases well be that people wanted to coax them into leaving without causing any (further) harm to them.¹⁵²

If a cult of giants did exist¹⁵³ they were given offerings in a similar fashion to divinity. This reveals their perceived nature as not only precursory but quintessential to the gods themselves. The evinced value then manifests by their treatment as if of ambrosial role and nature despite being inextricable from chaos and therefore, monstrous. Indeed,

Snorra-Edda gradually builds up its narrative of the long-standing antagonism between the gods and the giants, only to be intensified as the narrative of Gylfaginning [...]. But at the same time, the audience of Gylfaginning is from the outset made aware of the fact that these antagonists are also ancestors of the gods, specifically their grandfathers.¹⁵⁴

Such action and ideation (sacrifice to monstrosity) is one that will be further discussed in chapter 6. Monstrosity bears qualities typically attributed to divinity: creation of reality. Therefore, it is understandable to treat them as if iterations of such. We can see this in the very nature of *Hræsvelgr*, a giant who destroys (thus, of chaos yet initiating a return to primordial unity), but simultaneously creates (thus, of divine character). Of more obvious stature is that of *Ymir*. Like other forms of monstrosity in the heroic narrative, “the hero fights just because he wants to enhance

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Kroesen, Riti. “Ambiguity in the relationship between heroes and giants”, 61.

¹⁵³ Steinsland, G. 1986: “Giants as Recipients of Cults in the Viking Age?”, *Words and Objects, towards a Dialogue between Archeology and History of Religion*, Gro Steinsland (ed.), Norwegian University Press: The Institute of comparative research in human culture, Serie B XXI, Oslo: 212-22; Motz, L. 1980-81: “The Rulers of the Mountain: A Study of the Giants of the Old Icelandic Texts”, *Mankind Quarterly* 21: 393-417.

¹⁵⁴ Ármann Jakobsson *The Troll Inside You: Paranormal Activity in the Medieval North*. Punctum Books (2019): 146.

his own glory and gain the huge treasures hidden in the cave of the giant(s)".¹⁵⁵ The similarities between the giants and the dragons are apparent: dwelling in a cave (for revenants, this might be a mound or the mountains), yet bearing a tantalizing boon that serves as irresistible to the hero driven by the *draconitas*. Kroesen states this drive well: "a nice way of glorifying a deed that originally must have been both theft and sacrilege".¹⁵⁶ Kings were quick to claim giant ancestry and indeed many instances of fostership by giants impacted the course of royal and/or heroic lineages: the Völsungar, Öðlingr, Buðlungar, Niflungar and Bragningar.¹⁵⁷ Evidently, there was advantage to claiming such ancestry, perhaps in the association between the giants and the deities who descended from them. The wisdom and learning giants offered in their fostership was also impactful as seen with king Gramr who sent his son Hading to be fostered under the tutelage of the giant Vagnhofth and Dofri and Haraldr, son of king Hálfðan.¹⁵⁸ Mythologically,

Giants are united by bonds of blood and bonds of marriage with the gods. While giants act as the relentless enemies of the ordered cosmos and its inhabitants, the gods yet have received from them some of their most precious possessions. Saga giants, in their turn, may endanger a hero's life or endow him with priceless treasures.¹⁵⁹

In this way, the giants exhibit the mythic dichotomy previously identified: of chaotic nature yet bearing both association with divinity and supernatural boon. They bear direct relation to divinity in addition to entropy and monstrosity. Their bloodline with divinity provided utility to rulership - as kings sometimes claimed descent from deities as well as giants. They were on some level equal to each other, as shown by their use to the royalty of the time. The royal lines therefore wished to distinguish themselves as participating in the cosmological round and supernatural races to maintain and insinuate right to power. Giants could also have names that denoted royalty: "Valdi, Allvaldi, Þrivaldi; allvaldr".¹⁶⁰ The *jötunn* also bears some power over the weaving of fate and magic in a fashion symmetrical to Fáfñir and Glámr. This ability is shown in the "The Song of Grotti". Two giantesses weave the fate of their enslaver, the king Frodi who is ignorant of their

¹⁵⁵ Kroesen, Riti. "Ambiguity in the relationship between heroes and giants", 64.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Motz, Lotte. "Kingship and the Giants", *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* (1996): 79.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 81.

¹⁵⁹ Motz, Lotte. Old Icelandic Giants and their Names. *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 21 (1987): 1.

¹⁶⁰ Motz, Lotte. "Kingship and the Giants", 89.

supernatural lineage. Frodi forces the giantesses to move a magical grindstone called Grotti. Their prescience is identified from the poem's start:

*Nú er(o) komnar
til konungs húsa
framvísa tvær,
Fenia ok Menia;
Þær ro at Fróða,
Friðleifs sonar,
máttkar meyjjar,
at mani hafðar.¹⁶¹*

As their enslavement continues, they begin grinding the downfall of Frodi himself, therefore weaving his fate although he, like Sigurðr, ignores advice and foreboding from the giantesses:

*'Varattu, Fróði,
fullspakr of þik,
málvinr manna,
er þú man keyptir;
kaustu at afli
ok at álitom,
en at ætterni
ekki spurðir¹⁶²*

*Harðr var Hrungnir
ok hans faðir,
þó var Þiazi
þeim oflgari;*

¹⁶¹ *Grottasöngur*, in: Von See, Klaus et al. (eds.), *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda. Bd. 3 Götterlieder: Völundarkviða, Alvissmál, Baldrs draumar, Rígsþula, Hyndloloioð, Grottasöngur*, Heidelberg 2000: 868.

¹⁶² *Grottasöngur*, in: Von See, Klaus et al., 896.

*Iði ok Aurnir,
okrir niðjar,
bræðr bergrisa,
þeim erom bornar.¹⁶³*

As Fenia and Menia continue, they identify their agency in giving men the magical grindstone, Grotti. Already, therefore, they alter mens' fate:

*Vér vetr nío
vórom leikor,
qflgar, alnar
firir iqrð neðan; stóðo meyjjar
at meginverkom,
færðum siálfar
setberg ór stað.¹⁶⁴*

*Veltom grióti
of garð risa,
svá at fold firir
fór skiálfandi,
svá slongðom vit
snúðga steini,
hofga halli,
at halir tóko.¹⁶⁵*

Frodi ignores their warnings and remains ignorant, instead of recognizing the danger of falling prey to his *draconitas* which, in this case, is the desire to create wealth, happiness, and peace in

¹⁶³ *Grottasqng*, in: Von See, Klaus et al., 898.

¹⁶⁴ *Grottasqng*, in: Von See, Klaus et al., 907

¹⁶⁵ *Grottasqng*, in: Von See, Klaus et al., 910.

his kingdom causing the enslavement and overworking of the giantesses. This leads Fenia and Menia's change in sentiment to Frodi. The giantesses then grind an army and ultimately, the violent and bloody downfall of their enslaver and the destruction of everything he desired:

*Hendr skolo hǫ (ndl)a
harðar triónor,
vápn valdeyrug;
vaki þú, Fróði!
Vaki þú, Fróði,
ef þú hlýða vill
sǫngum okkrom
ok sǫgom fornóm!¹⁶⁶*

*Eld sé ek brenna
firir austan borg, vígspiöll vaka,
þat mun viti kallaðr;
mun herr koma
hinig af bragði
ok brenna bæ
firir buðlungi.¹⁶⁷*

*Munatþú halda
Hleiðrar stóli,
rauðum hringom
né regingrióti.
Tǫkom á mǫndli,
mær, skarpara; eroma val(n)ar*

¹⁶⁶ *Grottasǫngr*, in: Von See, Klaus et al., 933.

¹⁶⁷ *Grottasǫngr*, in: Von See, Klaus et al., 938.

*í valdreyra.*¹⁶⁸

This, as postulated, deals with foreknowledge, a sense of wisdom and therefore, capacity for magic and to alter fate. Giants, like other monsters, are carriers of wisdom which, as discussed, allows magical acumen and recognition/power over fortune. This combination (monstrosity and wisdom) appears to be unique to the Norse.¹⁶⁹ In the Eddas, giants are described as ‘all-wise’ (*Vaftrúdnismál* 1, 5, 34, 42), ‘wise’ (*Vaftrúdnismál* 20, 30, 33, 35), prophetic (*Grottasöngur*, 1), ‘very wise’ (*Skáldskaparmál*, 18, 26, *Hyndluljóð* 5).¹⁷⁰ This is something, like all monsters, they have in kinship with the gods. As stated by Motz,

Eddic giants often are like gods in character, qualities, and style of living. Thus, Odin is renowned for wisdom, and so are the giants, frequently described by epithets as ‘all-wise’ or ‘very wise;’ and Odin had received a magic wand from giants (*Hárbarðzliod* 20). Odin shows himself a master of magic chants (*Hávamál* 146-63), but he learned nine excellent chants from a giant (*Hávamál* 140); the giant Vafthrudnir speaks of himself as ‘an aged chanter’ (*Vaftrúdnismál* 9).¹⁷¹

They are beyond the limitations of people, even royalty such as Frodi. This theme repeats across narrative iterations, designating both the ignorance of the hero and his/her incapacity to take advice from the seemingly omniscient monster. This, of course, leads to his own demise.

Additionally, the *jötunn* relate directly to the monstrous tradition of bestiality as identified with Fafnir, trolls, and revenants. Bestiality is intimately connected with animals, and giants can appear in such natural forms. They, like other monsters, are of natural essence. Some examples:

Hraesvelg in the shape of an eagle creates winds (*Gylf* 18, *Vaftrúdnismál* 37); Suttung and Thjazi take the body of an eagle when pursuing enemies (*Skáldskaparmál* 6, 3); Fafnir, who is once called an ‘ancient giant’ (*Fáfnismál* 29), turned himself into a

¹⁶⁸ *Grottasöngur*, in: Von See, Klaus et al., 942.

¹⁶⁹ Motz, Lotte. “Giants in Folklore and Mythology: A New Approach.” *Folklore*, Vol. 93 No. 1. Taylore & Francis, LTD. (1982): 78.

¹⁷⁰ Motz, Lotte. “Giants in Folklore and Mythology”, 73.

¹⁷¹ Motz, Lotte. “Giants in Folklore and Mythology”, 75.

dragon; giants born to witches in Ironwood are in the shape of wolves (*Gylfaginning* 12); the offspring of Loki and a giantess are in the shape of wolf and serpent (*Gylfaginning* 34); the issue begotten on Gefion by a giant are in the form of oxen (*Gylfaginning* 1).¹⁷²

In these references, we have a relation between Fáfñir, the *jötunn*, but also a shape-shifting nature that we also see with the Norse deities. Loki, for example, transforms himself into a mare, a salmon, a falcon and a giantess. He is, as known, the son of the giant Fárbaúti. Óðinn, in order to steal the mead of poetry, transforms himself into an eagle and in another instance, a serpent. Heimdall shifts into the form of a seal in *Húsdrápa*; Frigg and Freyja adopt the ‘garment of a falcon’.¹⁷³ Adopting bestial qualities (also, evidently, that of shapeshifting, partaking in the liminal nature of monstrosity) appears to be both monstrous but also of divinity. To attain a boon, divinity must partake of entropic character, that whence it originated. In this manner, divinity and monstrosity oscillate between each other as if two sides of one coin, two edges of one blade. Regarding blood, there are multiple instances of marriage between giants and deities, evincing their close relations/ties. Frey married Gerd, the daughter of a giant, Óðinn married Jörd (their son is Þórr), Njord married Skadi, etc.¹⁷⁴ Furthermore, giants are known for their anger as in the case of Grettir (to be discussed in chapter 5). Although the term a ‘giants’ wrath’ is used in *Gylfaginning* 42, for example, the term ‘fury of the Aesir’ (*Skáldskaparmál* 25) reveals the gods have the same inclination of behavior.¹⁷⁵ This is not surprising considering the Aesir originated from this iteration of monstrosity and therefore bear the same nature. The relation between the nature of divinity and that of monstrosity is clearest in the monstrous race of giants. There is still tension between the dichotomous nature, as the gods consistently fight with giants as they do with other monsters who carry significant value to the balance of the worlds. Such kinship elicits the tradition previously identified with *terra incognita* (the proximity of divinity and monstrosity on the known edges of the world), *monstrare* (dichotomy between showing/revelation and warning), and the Christian tradition of the grotesque (moral allegory and hence, anagoge).

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Motz, Lotte. “Giants in Folklore and Mythology”, 76.

¹⁷⁴ Motz, Lotte. “Giants in Folklore and Mythology”, 75.

¹⁷⁵ Motz, Lotte. “Giants in Folklore and Mythology”, 76.

Giants, therefore, partake in this reversal or rather, revaluing of chaotic/monstrous nature. We have seen that giants are representative of the unified chaos from which order originated; whence order fractured from unity via dismemberment. In this way, divinity itself is “Snakeborn” and directly related to primordial entropy. Giants, as with Fáfñir, bear levels of wisdom unattainable to the hero and consistently beget creation like Ymir. In this manner they function akin to the gods, evinced by their cultic worship as the origination of the gods. They were sought in royal lineage and tutelage, revealing the primacy of their nature to the Norse society despite being monstrous. They participate in the bestowal of boon to the hero as any other iteration of monstrosity, but also bear distinct relation to the discussed ontology (order out of entropy). We see repeating patterns such as that of influence over and recognition of fate, wisdom, prescience, and foreboding. The hero repeats the heroic patterns as do the giants for monstrosity. The hero is warned of the consequences of his actions, outwitted, and eventually experiences the aftermath of his *draconitas* and meets an unfortunate, but seemingly irreversible fate. The Norse deities exhibit monstrous characteristics but seem to maintain more control and awareness over their dualistic nature. They shapeshift into bestial forms in order to attain boons, show rage comparable to the giants’ wrath, and bear wisdom and magical acumen. We have a mixture of natures that aligns monstrosity with divinity and divinity with monstrosity in such a way that the divine would not exist without entropy. They reveal both the primacy of chaos for order, but also the reverence of giants worshiped and treated as having equivalent value to gods in Norse society. This yet again complicates the role monstrosity played. It was seen not simply in the boundary of evil, but as bearing ontological necessity and kinship with the highest levels of divinity and in society (royalty).

5. Revenants in Anagogic Revelation

One of the iterations of monstrosity most exemplary of this dual, perhaps liminal position occupied by the hero is that of revenants or *draugar*. Like Fáfñir, revenants were once human but their nature shifts to become monstrous. As these shifts are often within the context of the saga rather than contained to a remote past, we gain information of their actions when their nature (and role) is newly altered. Revenants insert a direct social dimension to their locale, agency and often,

their self-creation (into that of a monster). Other monsters tend to live beyond the confines of a settlement where the hero must venture to fulfill his role. The two modes of expression follow: 1) heroic entry into primordial chaos beyond a settlement/home, and 2) the transformation of a hero into his monstrous form that emerges, plays, and interferes within a familiar locus and order (settlement). The second aids in identification of the *draconitas* but is intricate with a broader society rather than limited to the hero him/herself. This quality is not limited to revenants, but can be applied to other forms such as berserkers and sorcerers. *Eyrbyggja saga* bears a good example of revenant characteristics.¹⁷⁶ Þórólfr bægifótr traverses the landscape as a viking incapable of living an ordered, peaceful life. This emerges in his behavior by duels, blackmail, cheating, and unnecessary conflict.¹⁷⁷ His demise is both initiated and completed by the ensuing frustration of his existence. Þórólfr returns as a revenant who influences others in his society: *Svá var ok mikill gangr at aprtgöngum hans, at hann deyddi suma menn, en sumir stukku undan; en allir menn, þeir er létusk, váru sénir í ferð með Þórólfi.*¹⁷⁸ William Sayers explores the relationship between revenants and the society whence the agent originated. The behavior that initiated their transformation is that which defines them in their monstrous state: “byproducts and residue persist, like carryover from life into *draugr* status.”¹⁷⁹ We glimpse this behavior that transgresses the role of hero to monster, but in these cases in more direct relation to their society. Sayers frames the aforementioned *draconitas* with different terminology: a spiritual contagion.¹⁸⁰ As implied by the usage of contagion, the entropic or interruptive behavior of revenants tends to spread amidst a society as if an illness. With monsters originating in a distant past (and outside of society), these traits are recognized but remain within an individualistic locus. In both, the emphasis on the psyche is inextricable from the narrative flux and ultimately, heroic journey. The familiar sentiment of ordered humanity and the chaotic beyond forms the basis on which these creatures fashion their role; “these monsters repeatedly inject strife and destruction into human society by transgressing this boundary between inner safety and outer danger”.¹⁸¹ More importantly, they ensure

¹⁷⁶ Merkelbach, Rebecca. “The Monster in Me”, 24.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Eyrbyggja saga, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson, Íslenzk fornrit 4 (Reykjavík, 1935): 93-94.

¹⁷⁹ Sayers, William. “The Alien and Alienated as Unquiet Dead in the Sagas of Icelanders.” *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. By Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, (1996): 247.

¹⁸⁰ Sayers, William. “The Alien and Alienated as Unquiet Dead”, 247; see also Jakobsson, Armann, and Miriam Mayburd. 2020. *Paranormal encounters in Iceland 1150-1400*. Kalamazoo: MIP / Medieval Institute Pubs: 75-80.

¹⁸¹ Tomaini, Thea. *Dealing with the Dead: Mortality and Community in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Leiden Boston Brill (2018): 180.

destruction of the economic health of the society they attack by killing animals, farmhands, driving residents insane, emptying farms, and preventing those that remain from performing mundane duties essential for economic survival.¹⁸² This includes the laws which govern society; The nexus of their role is therefore communal. The ensuing antagonistic traits (to a society) are identified by Matthias Teichert as “sociopsychiatric”: “aggressive, anti-social, and egomaniacal” with the “ability to recover physically from debilitation caused by a defective apotropaic”.¹⁸³ There are examples of more benign hauntings in which the revenants exist synchronically with the local population. These innocuous iterations are eliminated “by societal mechanisms (a court is held, and an exorcism performed) rather than by violence (beheading and/or burning of the corpse)”.¹⁸⁴ The impact hostile revenants have, however, holds primacy even after their second death. There are additional rituals done in order to prevent the monster from returning. These rituals often deal with both landscape and home, evincing the extent of incursion into the haven of society: “society’s leaders, men of physical strength or legal authority, must cleanse the landscape from its contagion in a careful process that often involved burning the corrupted corpse of a draugr and then distributing the ashes far away from human society”.¹⁸⁵ Rebecca Merkelbach explores this in a similar way: “In Grettis saga, it therefore seems that monstrosity is transmitted from monster to slayer”.¹⁸⁶ These locations are often natural (such as the ocean), but most importantly a distance from the afflicted community.¹⁸⁷ Another option includes decapitation of the remaining corpse. Its form of burial is specific to the type of monster: the head beside the buttocks (as seen by the burial of Kar hins Gamla).¹⁸⁸ Another interesting detail is that of *landhreinsun* (land-cleansing) which Grettir completes to exorcise the contagion from the landscape itself.¹⁸⁹ The revenant's dualistic nature is mirrored in both terms of permanent death (and cleansing) and its areas of agency (society and nature). Whereas other forms of monstrosity reside in natural areas and are sought, revenants

¹⁸² Merkelbach, Rebecca. “The Monster in Me”, 25.

¹⁸³ Teichert, Matthias. “Draugula: The *Draugr* in Old Norse-Icelandic Saga Literature and His Relationship to the Post-Medieval Vampire Myth.” *The Universal Vampire: Origins and Evolution of a Legend*, ed Barbara Brodman and James E Doan (Madison, NJ, 2013): 5.

¹⁸⁴ Teichert, Matthias. “Draugula”, 26.

¹⁸⁵ Tomaini, Thea. *Dealing with the Dead*, 186.

¹⁸⁶ Merkelbach, Rebecca. 2019. *Monsters in society: alterity, transgression, and the use of the past in medieval Iceland*: 75.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

exacerbate the homestead and economic livelihood inherent to a community¹⁹⁰. The method of their annihilation is that similar to the relevance of natures (monster, hero). As the *draugr* afflicts a community, so the same violence and/or antagonistic nature must be used to vanquish its existence.

Revenants have been compared to Icelandic outlaws, a characteristic unique to these iterations. The similarity is evident: cultural destruction and interference by an individual who are often extremely temperamental. This temperament can serve as the boundary between a hero and monstrosity, as these qualities threaten society by transforming man into beast. Bestial qualities, as previously discussed, are attributed to monstrosity. Bestial behavior reveals an individual to be beyond the confines of societal laws, regulations, etc. In this way they are akin to nature rather than society itself, hence the descriptor “beast.” Outlaws, like *draugar*, linger on the edges of a society but will to return. They share the same metaphorical space, but nevertheless challenge societal integrity expounded by communal law.¹⁹¹ According to Justin T. Noetzel,

outlaws who remain living defy the same cultural rules regarding life and death as the *draugar*, because both groups adamantly refuse to rest in piece; instead they long for and revisit the day-to-day existence of the living. As the actions of Hrappr, Glámr, and many other monsters reveal, this unnatural longing often turns destructive for both the exiled individual and his or her former home.¹⁹²

Indeed, the term utilized for full outlawry under Icelandic law was *skóggangr* or forest-going.¹⁹³ The wilderness served as the location where the hero left the familiar and ventured into entropic existence, that of monstrosity. By assuming this state, an outlaw metaphorically assumed this nature. His role became akin to creatures such as Fafnir, as those who killed and hunted outlaws were placed in high societal stature similar to heroes.

When abroad due to *fjörbaugsgarðr* (lesser outlawry),¹⁹⁴ Grettir fights with a variety of both monsters and antagonistic foes, crafting his character on such feats and thus adopting a

¹⁹⁰ Merkelbach, Rebecca. *Monsters in society: 77-79*.

¹⁹¹ Tomaini, Thea. *Dealing with the Dead*, 188.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Tomaini, Thea. *Dealing with the Dead*, 189.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

warrior role. Nevertheless, his *draconitas* manifests itself in a variety of murders, feuds, and leads to his condemnation in society and assumption of *skóggangr* despite his growing fame. Not only this, but Grettir is sentenced to death, and thus these traits push him into full adoption of a revenant character, as “these same traits also force him to spend the last years of his life trying to outlast his own execution” and even more potent, “as a result of his full outlawry, Grettir begins moving from farm to farm and stealing for sustenance, [...] and journeys to a secluded cave on a mountain called Fagraskógafjall”.¹⁹⁵ *Draugar*, like other forms of monstrosity, reside in the wilderness beyond the boundaries of a community, and even see it as a source of their power.¹⁹⁶ Differentiation between the two realms (society vs wilderness) establishes boundaries to commentate on role, and complicate the “order” that defines them. They enact liminality seen in the context of monstrosity, referred to as the “arc of estrangement” by Laurence de Looze.¹⁹⁷ The heroic identity, although bearing attributes of monstrosity in initiatory stages, transforms into a liminal, dualistic state. Interrogation of role follows, as this “hybridized essence as fluid category between man and monster means that he must be driven out and hunted down so that society as a whole can continue to survive”,¹⁹⁸ creating further symmetry between narrative functions. One replaces the other as the narrative unfolds, attaining the qualities of the monster he/she hunted as an unintended consequence.

Grettis Saga, although part of the *Íslendingasögur* rather than the *Fornaldarsögur*, bears similar attributes and commentaries regarding the relationship between the hero and monster. Grettir is a unique “hero” as he is condemned to lesser outlawry from the onset of the narrative due to first degree murder and remains in outlawry for an extended time, *Þá hafði hann fimmtán vetr eða sextán í sekð verit, at því sem Sturla Þórðarson hefir sagt*.¹⁹⁹ From a young age, he exhibits qualities antithetical to the society in which he grows up and designates himself as “other” via action. As aforementioned, tumultuous characteristics of sociopsychiatric nature such as aggression, anti-social and egomaniacal behavior can serve as destructive to the order of a community. The definition of monstrous behavior is, as expected, defined similarly in other cultures as well. Hesoid, for example, identifies these qualities as furious, inhuman/subhuman,

¹⁹⁵ Tomaini, Thea. *Dealing with the Dead*, 190.

¹⁹⁶ Tomaini, Thea. *Dealing with the Dead*, 183.

¹⁹⁷ Laurence de Looze, “The Outlaw Poet, The Poetic Outlaw. Self-Consciousness in Grettis saga Asmundarsonar”, *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 106 (1991): 86.

¹⁹⁸ Tomaini, Thea. *Dealing with the Dead*, 193.

¹⁹⁹ *Grettis saga*, pp. 226.

cruel, lawless, violent, unmanageable, savage, terrible, voracious, etc.²⁰⁰ These traits are very similar, if not the same within the Norse context, particularly in that of the outlaw. Emphatic, of course, is the theme of society vs individual. The lawlessness, cruelty, violence and unmanageability broadly seen as sociopsychiatric are those attributed to outlaws and monsters alike. Further use of this tradition is Echidna, who bears monstrous children with the “lawless and violent” Typhoeus.²⁰¹ More often, however, these characteristics are emphasized within the human element (exiles) due to their impact on the heroic role. In other words, there is greater relevance that a hero may bear these attributes and become an outlaw than it is to expect them from a monster predetermined to hold them. It does, however, lead the hero to his monstrous “other” such as with Grettir and Glámr. Grettir, although the hero, exhibits these qualities and is capable (like a monster) to uproot and directly threaten the stability of society (hence, society v.s. individual) which leads to his early exile. He is described with “*óðæll* [rough], *níðskældinn* [libellous], *þykkjumikill* [bad-tempered], *óstýrilátr* [unmanageable] and a *lítill skpdeildarmaðr* [little in control of his own temper]”.²⁰² Already he mirrors monstrosity from a young age, particularly those traits revenants utilize to attack society. Academics distinguish Grettir as a hybrid and/or mixture of categories.²⁰³ Qualities of monstrosity are inherent to his character which both direct and impact his life, ultimately bringing him into contact with the revenant Glámr. In this way, his *draconitas* serves as a form of fate. It directs him in a manner that one may argue makes his encounter and conflict with Glámr inevitable.

Grettir is referred to as a troll multiple times in the saga, furthering and emphasizing the monstrosity incipient in his nature although he is first seen in the context of a hero. One example is when Grettir unexpectedly rushes into a nearby household while the residents inside mistake him for a troll. Revenants like Glámr “delight in destroying properties and leaving dead bodies in their wake, and they accomplish these feats with their hideously strong and gigantic bodies”.²⁰⁴ Grettir’s strength, size, and lineage²⁰⁵ also distinguish him as both fitting to destroy monsters such

²⁰⁰ Simonsen, Kenneth H. “The Monstrous and the Bestial: Animals in Greek Myths”, *Between the Species* 2 (1986): 62.

²⁰¹ Simonsen, Kenneth H. “The Monstrous and the Bestial”, 61.

²⁰² Hawes, Jane. “The Monstrosity of Heroism: Grettir Ásmundarson as an Outsider.” *Scandinavian Studies* 80 (2008): 37.

²⁰³ Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, “Monster Culture”, 6-7.

²⁰⁴ Bernard Scudder, trans., *The Saga of Grettir the Strong* (New York, 2005): 83

²⁰⁵ Tomaini, Thea. *Dealing with the Dead*, 190.

as revenants, but also causes him to be the mirror image of the monster itself. This refers us back to the Greco-Roman tradition: in order to fight the *drakon*, the best advantage would be to bear the attributes or nature of the *drakon* oneself.²⁰⁶ An example of this, as previously identified, were the coteries of Ophiogenies who were the best slayers of snakes due to their partially serpentine nature.²⁰⁷ Grettir partook in this narrational tradition even before he encountered Glámr, an “other” form of the heroic self. Grettir himself was an outlaw, already beyond the confines of society due to the monstrous nascent in his behavior: aggression, egomaniacal, superhuman strength and size, etc. The narrative identifies the societal perception of him, *Tekr bóndi við honum vel, en öllum öðrum gazk ekki at honum, en húsfreyju þó minnst. [...] hann var ósöngvinn ok trúlauss, stírfinn ok viðskotailr; öllum var hann hvimleiðr.*²⁰⁸ He was, in essence, ‘Snakeborn’.²⁰⁹ It is notable that Grettir holds monstrous ancestry, particularly that of giants. As stated by Marlene Ciklamini:

There is one distant strand of giant-kinship in his ancestry. The paternal kin of Grettir’s mother, the Vatnsdoelir, is descended from the giant Jötunbjörn and her maternal family from Ketill hængr. Not much is known about the Vatnsdoelir’s progenitor whose name, “Giant-Bear” connotes giant-descent. *Hversu Noregr byggðist* [How Norway Was Settled] remarks that he is the son of Bergdis, the daughter of the giant Þrymr of Vermá and the grand-son of Nórr, a giant by descent.²¹⁰

Furthermore, Ciklamini points out a verbal allusion to such monstrous lineage during an argument between Grettir and his uncle, Jökull Barðason. During the conflict, both men predict ill fortune for the other, and exhibit extreme tempers.²¹¹ Grettir and his uncle are similar to each other in character, especially in the description used in the saga itself. Grettir’s uncle is described as “mikill,” “sterkr,” and “mjök ódæll” while Grettir is *mjök ódæll í uppvexti sínum, fátalaðr ok óþýðr, bellinn bæði í orðum ok tiltekðum.*²¹² Ciklamini identifies that “it is hardly fortuitous that Grettir is shown in conflict with Jökull [...] Jökull bears a giant-name, and his flashing anger at

²⁰⁶ Ogden, Daniel. *Drakōn*, 215.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ *Grettis saga*, ch. 32, pp.107-111.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Ciklamini, Marlene. "Grettir and Ketill Haengr, the Giant-Killers." *Arv* 22 (1966): 137.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ciklamini, Marlene. "Grettir and Ketill Haengr": 117.

Grettir's disregard of his advice evokes instantaneously the popular notion of *Jötunmóð*, 'the violent anger of giants'".²¹³ Examples of Grettir's unruly temper can be seen by his maiming of geese that belonged to his father. Additionally, he becomes violent when assigned to look after horses. The animals grazed an elongated time, causing Grettir to remain in freezing conditions longer than he desired. In retribution and a fit of anger, Grettir cuts the mare's skin down to her loins.²¹⁴ Scholarly discussion regards whether Grettir saw such tasks as beneath him and ultimately derogatory, hence acting out in anger. Despite this, Grettir is warned of the consequences to such rash fits by Thorvald. Thorvald tells him this behavior, if not controlled, will lead to *slysgjarni*.²¹⁵ Misfortune, in other words, is an inevitable consequence of the *draconitas* that Grettir exhibits, even in his youth. It is a director, an agent of his fate that makes him both monstrous and an "other" to his society, but also an "other" to the monster Glámr (his mirror image but in a different narrational role). Indeed, as explored by Merckelbach, the "other" interacts both within society and within the psyche of the character himself, disrupting both himself and his community.²¹⁶ The contempt that Grettir stirs in his society (and others beyond Iceland) after such behavior is revelatory to the entropic effect it had on the otherwise maintained order.

Grettir mimics the behavior of a troll in multiple scenes, identifying nascent monstrosity. One such instance is when Grímr intends to kill Grettir while he's asleep. Grímr takes Grettir's own sword from over his bed and attempts to use this as the murder weapon. This motif of killing with the victim's own weapon is one "reserved for cases where an unnatural being is dealt with".²¹⁷ I.M. Boberg cites 11 such cases when a giant is destroyed with its own weapon, and indeed, this is the only manner to do so with lasting, conclusive impact.²¹⁸ As previously mentioned, Grettir is also mistaken and accused of being troll-like. Thorir of Gard, after a failed attempt to murder Grettir, accuses him of sorcery: *Pat vissa ek aldri, at hann væri svá fjölkunnigr,... nú sé ek, at hér er við troll at eiga, en ekki við menn*.²¹⁹ Of further interest is this comparison after a noble act, when Grettir carries Steinvor of Sandhaugar, who states her ignorance in *hvaárt hana hefði yfir*

²¹³ Ciklamini, Marlene. "Grettir and Ketill Haegr": 141-2.

²¹⁴ Hawes, Jane. "The Monstrosity of Heroism": 38.

²¹⁵ Hawes, Jane. "The Monstrosity of Heroism": 40; see also Ciklamini, Marlene. "Grettir and Ketill Haegr": 122.

²¹⁶ Merckelbach, Rebecca. *Monsters in society: alterity, transgression, and the use of the past in medieval Iceland*: 12-15.

²¹⁷ Harris, Richard, "The Deaths of Grettir and Grendel: A New Parallel." *Scripta islandica* 24 (1973): 38.

²¹⁸ Cited by Harris, Richard, "The Deaths of Grettir and Grendel": 38; see also Hawes, Jane. "The Monstrosity of Heroism": 36.

²¹⁹ *Grettis saga*, 184.

*flutt maðr eða troll.*²²⁰ This comparison even after a deed of heroism and nobility, is revealing to the qualities of the supposed hero. Grettir even refers to himself as a “hamartroll” or cliff-troll after his murder of an otherwise benign farmhand.²²¹ Both exemplary of Grettir’s anger but also the effect such anger has on his narrational role is his legal ordeal in Norway. Grettir plans on pleading innocent to murder before the king, yet is challenged before entering the court by a younger man, who says *Hér er nú einn ódádamaðrinn, er sannreyndr er at illvirkjum ok hefir brennt inni saklausa menn, ok skal hann þó enn ná undanfoerslu, ok er þetta allmikill ósiðr.*²²² The same man refers to Grettir as a “margýgjuson,” or the son of a sea troll²²³ which spurs Grettir’s violent tendencies. After these comments, Grettir strikes the man so hard that *sumir segja, at hann væri dauðr þá þegar.*²²⁴ At the end of the trial, the king’s words echo both the sentiment of the earlier occurrence but also as prescient to the relationship between Grettir and Glámr: *hlýtr jafnan illt af athugaleysinu ok ef nökkurum manni hefir verit fyrirmælt þá mun ér hótí helzt.*²²⁵ Multiple instances foreshadow the consequences of Grettir’s behavior while maintaining a sense of suspense and mystery for the narrative itself. There is an awareness of the impact the *draconitas* will have on Grettir’s life and indeed, in determining his fate. Despite this, Grettir lumbers forward unaware and therefore consistently falls prey to these monstrous tendencies, bringing him closer to Glámr. Indeed, the curse Glámr casts on Grettir is seen as a statement of Grettir’s inherent flaws:

Glámr can be interpreted as the hypostasis of forces that operate within Grettir and his primary group [...] Glámr’s role [...] could be formulated as overdetermining characteristics of Grettir that he manifested themselves in the hero’s heritage.²²⁶

Glámr, in the same fashion as Fáfñir, recognizes flaws in the hero that are unknown to the hero himself and vocalizes this in varying forms. Glámr’s eyes are emphasized in *Grettis saga* in a manner akin to Fáfñir:

²²⁰ *Grettis saga*, 211.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² *Grettis saga*, 133.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ *Grettis saga*, 134.

²²⁶ Poole, Russel. “Myth, Psychology, and Society in *Grettis saga*.” *Alvíssmál* II (2004): 3-16.

There was bright moonlight outside and gaps in the heavy cloud. Sometimes it clouded over and sometimes it cleared away. At the moment Glam fell, the cloud cleared from the moon and Glam glared up at it and Grettir himself has said that this was the only sight he ever saw that took him aback. Then he felt so weakened by everything, his weariness and seeing Glam squint at him fiercely, that he was unable to draw his cutlass and lay just about between life and death.²²⁷

Interestingly, when Grettir is first introduced his eyes have unique emphasis, *Þessi maðr var mikill vexti ok undarligr í yfirbragði, gráeygr ok opineygr, úlfgrár á hárslið.*²²⁸ Glámr's moonlit gaze is the only thing that gives Grettir pause, and indeed this moment throws him into a liminal state: that between life and death. He is bound momentarily between action and inaction by eye contact with his monstrous other. During this moment of clarity, Glámr curses Grettir:

*En þat má ek segja þér, at þú hefir nú fengit helmin afls þess ok þroska, er þér var ætlaðr, ef þú hefðir mik ekki fundit; nú fæ ek þat afl eigi af þér tekit, er þú hefir áðr hreppt, en því má ek ráða, at þú verðr aldri sterkari en nú ertu, ok ertu þó nógu sterkr... þú hefir frægr orðit hér til af verkum þínum, en heðan af munu falla til þín sekðir ok vígafarli, en flest öll verk þín snúask þér til ógæfu ok hamingjuleysis. Þú munt verða útlægr görr ok hljóta jafnan úti at búa einn samt. Þá legg ek þat á við þik, at þessi augu sé þér jafnan fyrir sjónum, sem ek ber eptir, ok mun þér þá erfitt þykkja einum at vera, ok þat mun þér til dauða draga.*²²⁹

Multiple themes emerge in Glámr's curse. The first is the mention of eyes and sight, the very (and only) element which cast Grettir into a liminal state in the saga. The eyes are now a remnant of Glámr that will serve as the initiator/completor of his fate and death. This refers us back to *derkomai*, or the primacy of monstrous gaze. Glámr, as monster and therefore beyond the realm of order, alters Grettir's fate by his words in addition to his gaze.²³⁰ As seen before with trolls,

²²⁷ Faulkes, Anthony, and George Johnston. *Three Icelandic Outlaw Sagas: The Saga of Gisli, the Saga of Grettir, the Saga of Hord*. London: Everyman, (2001): 152.

²²⁸ *Grettis saga*, 110.

²²⁹ *Grettis saga*, 121.

²³⁰ In *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 33 emphasis on eyes plays a part through Þórólfr bægifótr, whose eyes must be closed before his corpse is touched. Additionally, a warning is given by Arnkell not to walk before the open gaze of the

monstrosity is often affiliated with magical acumen. Magical prowess is reliant, or at least related to the attainment of knowledge and/or wisdom, which we find in iterations of monstrosity. Fate in this sense, is something outside of the control of the hero himself, but something monsters (as beings outside of the order limiting the hero, hence, entropic) recognize, advise, and have the capacity to change. We see this with Fáfnir's prophetic advice to Sigurðr, and here with Glámr's curse. Glámr's curse is rather the solidification and recognition of Grettir's *draconitas* in a similar way to Fáfnir's comment on Sigurðr's eyes flashing. In both instances, the monsters identify the monstrosity in the hero, and correctly diagnose the consequence if this *draconitas* is not controlled. There is a sense, in the case of Fáfnir, that this fate is not sealed. Fáfnir warns and attempts to redirect, rather than stating the future as with Glámr. In both, there is an intriguing sense of replacement. As the hero kills the monster, the monster's dying words prophesize the hero's life and the remainder of the saga serves to elucidate how the actions of the unsacrificed heroic ego, or unrecognized *draconitas* bring about this downfall. The same actions that lead the hero to the monster, direct him to the fate the monster recognizes from an external (of the primordial unlimited, unified nature of chaos) perspective and opens potential for transformation. This leads us to the concept of sacrifice, the concluding inquiry regarding interaction between cosmology, narrative, and hero/monster dichotomy.

6. Sacrifice: An Open Inquiry

Influence from ritual processes, beliefs, and demarcation is proliferant throughout the Norse corpus. The intermingling of text and tradition is one fraught with complexity. This cultural basis (heathen theology) is often referred to as *forn siðr*, or 'old custom'.²³¹ To extricate the relationship between *forn siðr*, ritual and monstrosity in narrational context, identification of meaning is necessary. What meaning might be deduced from the remnants of rituals at sacrificial sites? Sacrifice, in this context, means nothing other than assumed reciprocal exchange with a theological basis. Several sites are exemplary of religious premises. We may assume certain

deceased. Furthermore, Egils saga describes Egill's avoidance of his deceased father's open gaze (Egils saga, ch. 58, p. 174).

²³¹ Andréén, Anders. "Behind 'Heathendom': Archaeological Studies of Old Norse Religion." *Scottish Archaeological Journal* 27, no. 2 (2005): 106.

locations were associated with specific gods/goddesses; “The many sacral place-names from the late Iron Age show that rituals could be clearly directed towards certain powers. The place-names reveal sites where rituals associated with the most important gods and the goddesses were performed, for example Torsvi (Thor's sacred place) and Närlunda (Närd's sacrificial grove)”.²³² Ritual deposits contain objects including (but not limited to): tools/weapons, pots, food, people and animals.²³³ Mimicry of myth can be seen at sites like Jämtland, where bear, elk, deer and livestock are cast around a large birch tree.²³⁴ This tree is an apt example of the bridge between cosmology, its narrative, and its performance in ritual. The large birch tree at Jämtlandan represents “the world-tree at the centre of the world” and the ritual sacrifice around it is participation in the cosmological structure.²³⁵ Another example, *Blót*, or “sacrificial ritual”²³⁶ held further significance to *blóta*, or “to sacrifice” and “to worship”.²³⁷ Within the Norse corpus, *Heimskringla* holds the most specific account of such sacrifice:

It was ancient custom, then when there should be a sacrifice, that all the farmer should come there, where the temple was, and bring thither their provisions, those which they should use, while the feast lasted. At the feast, all men should have ale. There also were killed all kinds of cattle and also horses, and all the blood, which came therefrom, then was called *hlaut* (sacrificial blood) and *hlaut*-bowls those, in which the blood stood, and *hlaut* twigs, that were made like sprinklers, with this they should redden the entire altar and also the walls of the temple inside and out.²³⁸

Spirits were not excluded from these practices, as sacrifices were made for entities such as *álfar*, *vættir* and *dísir*.²³⁹ Generally, however, we see assumed reciprocity: in the sacrifice of an object of value, one might receive a “boon” in exchange. Such reciprocity can be seen in *Landnámabók*

²³² Andrén, Anders. “Behind ‘Heathendom’”, 108.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Bray, Daniel. “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Ideology in Old Norse Religion.” In *The dark side. Proceedings of the Seventh Australian and International Religion, Literature and the Arts Conference*, ed. Christopher Hartney and Andrew McGarrity. Sydney: RLA Press (2004): 123.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Bray, Daniel. “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Ideology”, 125.

²³⁹ Bray, Daniel. “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Ideology”, 127.

in which Flóki Vilgerðarson prepared a sacrifice of three ravens to show him the way forward when sailing. Daniel Bray describes the relationship between the sacrifice and divinity: “although it is stated that it is the ravens that are the object of Flóki’s worship, it can be understood that the ravens are merely the receptacles for the holy power that allows them to lead him to his destination. That is, the power for Flóki to achieve his goal is derived from his act of sacrifice, not from the ravens themselves”.²⁴⁰ The variations of both sacrifice and boon are seemingly infinite in their form, but nevertheless rely on this structural basis. This, of course, is not unique to Norse literature but rather partakes in traditions from the Romans and Celts.²⁴¹ Furthermore, Bruce Lincoln and Jaan Puhvel extrapolated the relationship between sacrifice and theology/myth in a broader Indo-European context.²⁴² Sacrifice was understood within a cosmogonic perspective, enabling the agents to participate in the formation and regeneration of the cosmos as well as societal balance and natural order.²⁴³ Indeed,

in each sacrifice, the victim’s body was dismembered and distributed to the cosmos, just as were the bodies of *Yemo and the primordial ox. Without the matter drawn from their bodies, all the items of the material world – sun, earth, water, air – would become exhausted, depleted, dead; it is only through their replenishment via sacrifice that continued existence is secured.²⁴⁴

This mimicked the primordial sacrifice that created the world, the most evident of which is described in Snorri’s Edda:

Bor’s sons [Óðinn, Vili, and Vé] killed the giant Ymir... took Ymir and transported him to the middle of Ginnungagap, and out of him made the world, out of his blood the sea and the lakes. The earth was made of the flesh and the rocks of the bones, stone and scree they made out of the teeth and molars and of the bones that had been

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Bray, Daniel. “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Ideology”, 128.

²⁴² Lincoln, Bruce. *Death, War, and Sacrifice: Studies in Ideology and Practice*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (1991): 167-70.

²⁴³ Bray, Daniel. “Sacrifice and Sacrificial Ideology”, 134.

²⁴⁴ Lincoln, Bruce. *Death, War, and Sacrifice*, 15.

broken... They also took his skull and made out of it the sky and set it up over the earth with four points.²⁴⁵

Another example of such cosmogonic perspectives in sacrifice/ritual, is that described by Adam and Bremen. As described in *The Poetic Edda*,²⁴⁶ a cosmological structure of nine worlds is upheld by the world tree. Adam writes:

It is the practice, every nine years, to hold a communal festival in Ubsola [Uppsala] for all the provinces of Sueonia [Sweden]. No exemption from this festival is allowed. [...] The sacrifice is performed thus: nine heads of every living male creature are offered, and it is the custom to placate the gods with the blood of these. The bodies are hung in a grove which stands beside the temple. This grove is so holy for the heathens that each of the separate trees is believed to be divine because of the death and gore of the objects sacrificed there; there dogs and horses hang together with men.²⁴⁷

Sacrificial ritual was an interpolation of humanity into primordial processes and ontological structure. Adam's description emphasizes 9 repetitions which regard time (9 years) and 9 sacrifices (heads). This could be referential to the mythological bases preserved in the *Poetic Edda*:

I remember nine worlds, I remember nine giant women;
The mighty Measuring-Tree below the earth.²⁴⁸

Additionally, the locus of the Measuring-Tree mimics Óðinn's self-sacrifice. A comparison can also be made regarding such:

²⁴⁵ Sturluson, Snorri, and Anthony Faulkes. *Edda*. London: Dent, (1987): 11-13.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ Adam of Bremen, cited in E. O. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, (London, 1964): 244.

²⁴⁸ Larrington, Carolyne. *The Poetic Edda*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Pr, (2019): 107.

myself to myself,
on that tree of which no man knows
From where its roots run.²⁴⁹

As Óðinn hung from the tree, so the bodies of men, dogs and horses are hung in a grove where each tree is considered to be divine. In the same manner posited by Bruce Lincoln and Jaan Puhvel, the encasement of myth within ritual is one of transformation. It enabled engagement in destruction and creation essential to the balance of the world from an individual and societal standpoint and transformed the latter into the former. The divine process became accessible to the mundane, an intriguing exchange of roles inherent to the defined realms. These exemplify a recurrent theme: the unification of two ontological realms (human and divinity) via action, specifically sacrifice on the part of order (society) to that beyond (entropy, primordial and unified chaos) in order to participate in the maintenance of mythic order.

In this way, ritualistic sacrifice participates in the mythic primordium and transformative cycle. We return to the symbol of a stag (previously discussed regarding *Fáfnismál*), or alternatively inspect *Völuspá*. The poem bears imagery which participates in this mythic cycle. We begin with apocalyptic scenery:

The sun turns black, land sinks into the sea,
The bright stars banish from the sky;
Steam rises up in the conflagration,
Hot flame plays high against heaven itself.

Now Garm bays loudly before Gnipa-cave,
The fetter will break and the ravener run free,
Much wisdom she knows, I see further ahead
To the mighty Doom of Gods, of the victory-gods.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Larrington, Carolyne. *The Poetic Edda*, 197.

²⁵⁰ Larrington, Carolyne. *The Poetic Edda*, 131.

Following the destruction, we see rebirth and regeneration similar to the remnant of pagan symbolism (stag), often attributed the values “prosperity, rebirth and rejuvenation, with regeneration and fertility.”²⁵¹ The cycle is then identified for not only worlds, but divinity itself.

She sees, coming up a second time,
Earth from the ocean, eternally green;
The waterfalls plunge, an eagle soars above them,
Over the mountain hunting fish.²⁵²

Conflict and destruction act as catalyst for creation, echoing Ymir, whose dismembered body formed the world. Ontologically, formation occurred from entropy, or order out of disorder. We see, however, that monstrosity is inseparable from renewal in imagery of the stags eating the world tree:

There comes the shadow-dark dragon flying,
The gleaming serpent, up from Dark-of-moon Hills;
Nidhogg flies over the plain, in his pinions
He carries corpses; now she will sink down.²⁵³

There is an inextricable relationship between the balance of the world with the elements whence it originated, and which will return it to a unified state after its existence as ordered form. In other words, the original chaos was fractured to manufacture order and hence, existence. Monstrosity and its affiliations are necessary for the destruction, but also rejuvenation of the state of reality. Monsters oscillate between these natures throughout cosmological myth and in the smaller iteration(s) of narrative/saga. When we study the narrational context of heroism and monstrosity, sacrifice deals with the recognition of limited order; an incorporation of the wisdom bestowed by monstrosity to alter fate. The hero/monster conflict familiar to these texts is the incorporation of cosmological ideation of chaos versus order/deities versus monsters. If approached from this light,

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Larrington, Carolyne. *The Poetic Edda*, 133.

²⁵³ Larrington, Carolyne. *The Poetic Edda*, 136.

we might see clearer how the hero enacts monstrous behavior and inverts the roles between a bestower of order (hero) and of chaos (monster). We have already seen how the hero interacts with the monster: in dialogue and action. These reveal much about the awareness of both creatures. The hero sees the monster simply as an obstacle to his desired boon (often gold/wealth, fame, honor, etc). The boon, therefore, relates directly to his sense of heroic or societal ego. The monster can both anticipate and potentially redirect the hero from his fate should this course be followed. In many cases, the monster has uncanny resemblance to the hero who seeks him. This is shown by Fáfnir and Sigurðr, as well as Glámr and Grettir. The heroic *draconitas* are the characteristics of the monster he seeks and hence, a mirror between them. Even though his “other” stands before him, the hero is oblivious. The “other,” however, is designated with wisdom. Through this the monster attempts to both reveal the hero’s flaws (see previously discussed *Inn fráneygi sveinn, Heiftyrði tekr þú hvetvetna því, er ek mæli*, You have become renowned up to now for your deeds, but from now on you will become guilty of crimes and deeds of violence, and nearly everything you do will lead to your misfortune and failure, etc). The narrative then comes to a pivotal crossroad: what will the hero do with this information? This is the open inquiry dealing with sacrifice and its implications for the dichotomous roles.

In every example shown, the heroic ego (and its desires) are *not* sacrificed. The hero does not see the monster as the origination of the cosmological round, as the bearers of wisdom and the close kin of the gods, but rather as an obstacle and nothing else. Hence, the warnings and wisdom of the monster are lost and the hero does nothing but complete his fate, remain unaware of his *draconitas*, and hence, bring chaos, conflict, and bloodshed to his society upon his return. As warned by Fáfnir, the gold brings death and ill-fortune to many more than just Sigurðr. Frodi’s desire for wealth and happiness in his kingdom brings war as he enslaves Fenja and Menja, who proclaim: “We’re not frozen stiff in slaughtered men’s blood.” Grettir’s obsession with zeal and strength lead him to Glámr, who curses him to eternal misfortune, his deeds of which bring crime and violence yet mixed with the yearning of an exile to return to society. The heroic ego is not sacrificed and hence, the hero assumes a monstrous nature. The hero no longer serves his/her society, but becomes an agent of chaos within ordered space (rather than an entity of order within entropy). An interesting flux is then created: order without sacrifice for its mother, chaos, fashions imbalance and brings havoc to itself. From the perspective of ritual sacrifice, “all the items of the material world – sun, earth, water, air – would become exhausted, depleted, dead; it is only through

their replenishment via sacrifice that continued existence is secured.”²⁵⁴ The hero, although in the structure of the mythic primordium and transformative cycle in narrational reflection of ritual sacrifice itself, interrupts the cycle for his own purposes (often superficial). Hence, there is no ritualistic *rejuvenation* but unnecessary and proliferant *disintegration* upon his return to society. Conflicts, feuds, murder and violence follow him and tear societal bonds apart. This is the defining feature, the boundary, the action which may turn a hero into the archetype of the monster, although his *draconitas* is present from the beginning of the narrative. The nexus of role, therefore, lies in the action taken (or not taken) by the hero on his encounter with the monster, bestower of wisdom, kin of the gods, and other to the hero.

7. Conclusion

We have seen multiple iterations of the true nature of monstrosity. Although instinctive relevance often occurs in the dichotomous perception, we might see better how the roles are inverted by action, impact, and therefore, fate and narrative course. Unlike the typical antagonism attributed, monsters both uphold and reorient structure in the sagas, and beyond, the broader Norse mythos. The structure itself is revealed via an interlocking, living web of narrative connotations. Words, abilities (magic), visual motifs, and dialogue elicit the true nature of this “other.” In such a way monstrosity holds depth often unseen and unexplored. Indeed, monstrosity is liminal, a paradox and thus, elusive to definition. It does, however, interact with the aforementioned web and so establishes itself. Its proper relevance is in its relation to divinity, wisdom, and origination of all order. The hero, as limited being, is ignorant of this relevance yet encounters his own limitation with a non-limited being. His response to such primordial entities and their invitation to anagoge (recognition of his own potential for monstrosity) determines whether he/she crosses from a hero to that of monstrous heroism.

We’ve discussed how, in other cultures such as in the Graeco-Roman context, the monster and slayer were of similar nature. To fight the monster, one had to hold some aspect of that monster in his own character. We see this in both the monstrous lineage of heroes, but also the *drakonitas* which they carry throughout the saga. The monster as guardian of great, often divine wealth in the

²⁵⁴ Lincoln, Bruce. *Death, War, and Sacrifice*, 15.

Graeco-Roman narrative revolved around the sanctum of a temple (*adyta*), whose sanctity was often limited in availability to high priests/priestesses. In the Norse context, this divine wealth is wisdom and by association, prophecy, and magic. Great beings such as giants are the monstrous race from which reality was fashioned and still carry such connotation in smaller forms. They function and elicit a primordial nature anterior to divinity, but also partake in divinity. The recognition of this nature is shown via cult, sacrifice, fostership, royalty, magical acumen (fate-altering, if they so wish), and wisdom. In this way the monsters were perhaps more deified than the gods themselves, for it was from this original chaos that the gods existed. Grettir is probably the most overt example of the mirrored relationship between the hero and his/her monster. Monstrous lineage influences his action and cause some strife even while he walks among society as a supposed “hero.” After his encounter with Glámr, however, he assumes almost fully the disintegrative role normally associated with monstrosity. This is due to his lack of sacrifice, disrupting the normative sacrificial, primordial process. Óðinn is a good example of proper sacrificial reciprocity:

Under the root that goes to the frost giants the Well of Mimir. Wisdom and intelligence are hidden there, and Mimir is the name of the well’s owner. He is full of wisdom because he drinks of the well from the Gjallarhorn. All-Father went there and asked for one drink from the well, but he did not get this until he gave one of his eyes as a pledge.²⁵⁵

And further in his boasting:

And dedicated to Odin
myself to myself,
on that tree of which no man knows
From where its roots run.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Sturluson, Snorri and Jesse L. Byock. “The prose Edda : Norse mythology.” (2005): 112.

²⁵⁶ Larrington, Carolyne. *The Poetic Edda*, 197.

An absence of sacrifice (for wisdom) begets a transformation of the hero into monstrosity. The *draconitas* initiates such sacrifice if recognized. This interaction is anagogic, inviting the hero to become aware of his own limitations. Possession of a singular, ordered nature therefore contains the seeds of destruction. It is the necessary but non-literal death of the hero to attain the wisdom of the monster (entropy, beyond limitation/scope of order). If we take Óðinn's sacrifice as an example, the narrative would end very differently if Óðinn destroyed Mimir's well, seeing it as simply an obstacle rather than the pathway itself and of divine nature. Yet, this is what the heroes do in such stories in which they assume monstrous heroism. The absence of recognition regarding heroic limitation and flaws causes an imbalance of strength, wisdom, intelligence, etc. and hence, enters the category of destruction and has ramifications upon their own nature as well as that of their society. Multiple elements therefore question the role of the monster as antagonist in the narrative. The monster is in fact, a great determinant to the heroic nature. It is a crossroads which the hero either leaves as an agent of ritualistic rejuvenation or of disintegration, ultimately functioning as an actor in a broader mythic structure.

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