



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

**Monstrous Transformations in Old
Icelandic Sagas**

Ritgerð til M.A.-prófs

Astrid Jungmann

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Abstract

In medieval literature monstrous bodies form an integral part of the supernatural. Some are simply used as foils for the hero, some may trigger fear, others trigger a feeling of the uncanny. The latter ones most often appear in the shape of metamorphosing bodies, transformers, displaying the horror and wonder of unstable corporeal boundaries. Old Icelandic saga literature, with its high density of supernatural elements, provides numerous accounts of bodily transformation. This thesis discusses three somatically unstable figures, Fáfnir from *Völsunga saga*, Ögmundr from *Örvar-Odds saga*, and Glámr from *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*. They all are prone to change and to exceed common limits of the monstrous. Those transformers are no mere narrative tools, but they carry immense relevance for the course of action because they function as individuals deeply inter-woven with the heroes' destinies. By the interplay of corporeal transformation and the utterance of a curse or prophecy the sagas portray the medieval Icelandic preoccupation with the inevitability of change.

Líkamar sem hafa skipt um ham eru samofnir hinu yfirnáttúrulega í miðaldabókmenntum. Sumir eru notaðir til að blekkja hetjuna, aðrir geta hrætt eða fyllt óhugnaði. Hinir síðastnefndu birtast oftast í gervi líkama sem verða fyrir umbreytingum og sýna því hrylling og furður óstöðugra marka líkamans. Í fornsögunum er mikið af yfirnáttúrulegum fyrirbærum, þar á meðal margar frásagnir af líkamlegum umbreytingum eða hamskiptum. Í ritgerðinni er fjallað um þrjú dæmi um slíkar hamhleypur, Fáfnir í *Völsunga sögu*, Ögmundur í *Örvar-Odds sögu* og Glámr í *Grettis sögu*, sem allir taka breytingum og verða að skrímslum. Hamhleypurnar gegna mikilvægu hlutverki í frásögninni, því sem einstaklingur er tilvist þeirra samofin lífi hetjunnar. Með því að tvíanna saman hamskiptum og formælingu eða forspá, setja sögurnar á svið hversu Íslendingar á miðöldum voru uppteknir af óumflýjanleika breytinga.

Monstrous Transformations in Old Icelandic Sagas

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1. Introduction

„[...] the monsters are not an inexplicable blunder of taste; they are essential, fundamentally allied to the underlying ideas of the poem, which give it its lofty tone and high seriousness.“¹

– J. R. R. Tolkien

When it comes to the academic interpretation of supernatural ingredients in medieval literature, J. R. R. Tolkien formulated one of the most seminal approaches: In an article on *Beowulf* (1936), Tolkien argues forcefully against the literary criticism of the poem, which downplays the importance of supernatural occurrences in order to use *Beowulf* as a historical source. Instead, he pleads for the acceptance of supernatural motifs as key elements to the epic, and for the recognition of the poem as a work of art and not as a source text for historiography.² The 'lofty tone' and 'high seriousness' Tolkien attributes to *Beowulf* becomes more palpable if the abundance of supernatural elements is analysed in great depth. In this sense, it is the aim of this thesis to examine specific supernatural elements, monsters, in Old Icelandic saga literature. The word *saga* is etymologically derived from the Old Icelandic verb *segja*, meaning *to say* or *to speak*. It is this plain translation which suggests a core problem of saga research: Sagas are tales and narratives, they *speak* of things, but yet – what do they tell? It is the reader's difficult task to enter a dialogue with the past via the saga at hand, facing the problem of encountering another dialogue – of the saga author with his past.³ In this sense literature is always mirroring both author and reader, the communication between the two – author and reader as well as past and present – can function as a vehicle and bring forth fruitful insights into past mental landscapes.

In accordance with anthropological approaches of the last decades, which are concerned with reading medieval Icelandic society through its literature,⁴ this thesis examines a specific supernatural element in Old Icelandic literature, the monster. The focus is put on those beings prone to, and well-known for, physical change – beings which morph into something monstrous during the narrative, *monstrous transformers* as

1 Tolkien 1983, p. 19.

2 This article followed his lecture „Beowulf: the monster and the critics“ from 1936.

3 Cf. Vésteinn Ólason 1998. Vésteinn describes the dialogue between the saga author and his own past as a “conversation of two closely related old men”, while the modern readers are “like a distant relative or child listening to the conversation [...] and trying to understand its meaning by asking some questions”, Vésteinn Ólason 1998, p. 247.

4 Cf. e.g. Miller 1990; Meulengracht Sørensen 1995; Byock 1990; Fechner-Smarsly 1996; Hastrup 1985; Hastrup 1990.

I shall call them.⁵ This study examines several monstrous examples from Old Icelandic saga literature as case studies, and seeks to explain the process and the uncanniness of their corporeal transformations of substance, as well as the significance of these transformation episodes for the narratives. What factors lead to this monstrous metamorphosis, why do these monsters trigger a feeling of deeper significance and uncanniness while others simply fail to do so, and how can this visual act of transformation be interpreted in terms of change- and fate-concepts of a past medieval culture?

The primary theoretical model this study will employ is Caroline Walker Bynum's understanding of medieval concepts of change, and a specific, yet admittedly debatable, view of the *uncanny*. I believe that the transformers examined here convey uncanniness rather than mere fear – a condition that is concerned with the question of otherness and, most interestingly, that of likeness. Fundamental to this is the Freudian theory of the uncanny and the pleasure principle, although one must act with caution when applying modern ideas to medieval sagas.⁶ I believe that some of Freud's ideas prove fruitful to analyse the medieval concept of change, notably corporeal change, and monstrous functions. Surely, the elements of the transformation episodes, the nature of the particular monster, must be set into their respective medieval Icelandic contexts.

The episodes examined in the following will show that monsters that feature strongly in the saga always cross the limits of corporeality, as well as the border between otherness and humanity, instead of obeying a distinct separation. This thesis brings to light that it is imperative for those creatures to go through monstrous transformations, most often in connection with a curse or a prophecy, in order to convey concepts of change and fate.

2. Pre-conditions

The exploration of the Old Icelandic transformers can certainly not go without embedding them into the general context of monsters in the European medieval

5 In the course of this thesis I refer to the *transformer* as 'he' rather than 'it', as all three transformers I am working with are masculine and work as individuals with character and background.

6 As both Freud's articles I use in this thesis are taken from Freud's *Gesammelte Werke* edited by Anna Freud in the year 1947, I add the short titles „Das Unheimliche“ and „Jenseits des Lustprinzips“ to my short footnotes, to clarify which article I refer to.

tradition. Furthermore, the fundamental question of supernatural and fantastic elements in medieval thought and literature must be discussed beforehand, too. Given that literature works as a means of human expression, it is essential to understand the respective literary genre, and the ethnic and historical setting in which it was produced. All cultures define particular worlds and realities which exist and are (re-)generated by the process of social practice and experience.⁷ That means that particular norms, ideas or conceptions have to be analysed against their respective background.

2.1 *The fantastic Middle Ages*

For modern people the supernatural ultimately expresses a notion of unbridled power which engenders a sense of fear or awe.⁸ It is not to be assumed, however, that the occurrences in the sagas that seem supernatural to a modern reader would have been regarded as supernatural by the medieval Icelanders, too. Many scientific approaches to the fantastic, for example Tzvetan Todorov's, might lead to too modern interpretations when applied to medieval sagas without critical reflection. Todorov's definition of the fantastic requires hesitation or indecisiveness by the reader (and the protagonist) about the naturalness of events in combination with the reader's or protagonist's knowledge of natural sciences.⁹ The perception of something fabulous requires the awareness of the contrast between natural sciences and the supernatural event encountered in the text. Hence, it is problematic to apply this idea to medieval sagas as there were no natural sciences in the modern sense, and there rarely happens to be a hesitation about the naturalness of events.¹⁰ Yet, with some modification provided by Francis Dubost, hesitation can be detected in medieval literature comparable to the one outlined in Todorov's approach: Although medieval people did not doubt the possibility of

7 Cf. Hastrup 1990, pp. 14-15.

8 Cf. Mitchell 2008, p. 281.

9 Cf. Todorov 1970, p. 29: "Le fantastique, c'est l'hésitation éprouvée par un être qui ne connaît que les lois naturelles, face à un événement en apparence surnaturel".

10 Often supernatural occurrences or beings are met with a sense of normality: Beasts such as dragons, trolls, and giants are described as equally real as people and animals; prophetic dreams and visions are accepted, used for counsel, and valued as reliable predictions of the future; medieval saga characters might indeed be scared, wary or amazed by facing magic objects, cursed swords, witchcraft or revenants, but they usually do not wonder about their naturalness; rather, they accept these as rare but real parts of their world.

supernatural occurrences, they were uncertain of how to categorise them.¹¹ Hesitation arises when it is uncertain if the supernatural originates in God's workings or in the devil's. Hence the differentiation lies between *miracula*, *magica* and *mirabilia*. The first is the result of divine activity, while the second is ascribed to the devil. *Mirabilia*, on the other hand, is what clerics referred to as folk belief or relics of heathen times.¹²

Considering that medieval Icelanders could not use natural sciences to understand their world, it is also plausible that they might have regarded some supernatural elements as real as everything else.¹³ That the supernatural was a widespread feature of Old Icelandic culture can be seen in their contemporary texts in which supernatural creatures and happenings are very commonplace, although admittedly the relevance of fantastic elements differs from saga to saga.¹⁴ Nevertheless one can argue that the universe encountered in sagas, especially the *fornaldarsögur*, consists of two different realities. These are complementary and their inhabitants may interact, but at the same time, they are explicitly different from each other. The sagas present both an authentic Scandinavian world (reflecting the world of author and audience through in a legendary past) and a magic world.¹⁵ The border between them might blur,¹⁶ especially when people move further away from secured human space.¹⁷ The depiction of the supernatural also depends on genre: While it is only vaguely conveyed in *samtíðarsögur* through dreams and visions, it is representative of the legendary and adventurous *fornaldarsögur* to present direct (often physical) contact with the supernatural.¹⁸

The border between traditional belief and simple narrative folk-tale motifs is hard to identify; the gaps between social conditions and the different levels of education among medieval Icelanders further complicate this identification.¹⁹ Generally, one can roughly

11 Cf. Torfí Tulinius 1999, pp. 290-291.

12 Cf. Torfí Tulinius 1999, p. 291.

13 Cf. Vésteinn Ólason 2007, pp. 7-8.

14 Cf. Vésteinn Ólason 2007, p. 10.

15 Cf. Eremenko 2006, p. 217. See also Hastrup 1990, p. 15: Hastrup explains that worlds constituted by cultures generate unrealities, such as those of witchcraft, and as however unreal those unrealities might be (regarded from the outside), they always have their "own reality inside the Icelandic space, which also generated its own system of causation".

16 Cf. Eremenko 2006, p. 217.

17 Concerning the idea of the depiction of the worlds and the according realism cf. Lönnroth 1976, p. 57-58: Lönnroth explains the world picture of the sagas with concentric circles containing the heroes and heroines, neighbour, allies, kinsmen, enemies, the Althing, and further circles even contain the foreign royal courts (with emphasis on the Norwegian). He states that sagas make the impression of realism as long as the saga characters stay in circles close to the Icelandic familiar society. Yet, the further they travel (Miklagarðr, Holmgarðr) the more fantastic, adventurous and romantic they become.

18 Cf. Torfí Tulinius 2000, p. 254.

19 Cf. Ferrari 2006, p. 242.

subdivide supernatural manifestations in Old Icelandic literature into two categories, one comprising those phenomena most probably regarded as 'real', such as magical power within runes, weather witches, prophetic dreams, and the other containing those which can undoubtedly be regarded as 'unreal', such as fantastic monsters. These latter phenomena are fictional, because one can presume that neither authors nor audiences had encountered dragons, or *draugar* face to face.²⁰ However, there is no doubt that there must have been a vivid belief that supernatural beings empirically exist.²¹ For example, witchcraft was regarded to be an art mastered by the Saami people – a people racially different from the collective of Icelanders or the continental-Scandinavian Norsemen, but yet truly existing. Hence, in Norse tradition other ethnicities such as the Saami people, *skrælingar* or *blámenn*, are generally associated with secular evil.²²

Instead of a clear separation between real and unreal, natural and supernatural, there seems to be an emphasis on social groupings and identity – on the *Us* and the *Other*. What is always closely connected to the image of the monster is an idea of otherness: The monster looks different, and may have supernatural abilities and strange powers. Otherness as such is generally a more common topic in the fields of sociology or anthropology, not in saga research, but fruitful conclusions have been yielded by scholars such as John Lindow and John McKinnell, who both focus on ideas of otherness depicted in Old Icelandic literature.²³

However, no matter how fantastic the stories are they are always bound to a certain level of causality, meaning that there is always a certain set of rules about the diegesis which are never broken, and which bring about the inner causality governing the plot. The stories might not be plausible in a scientific sense, but in the reality constructed in the saga narrative they always are. This is constitutive even for scenarios from 'unreal realities'.²⁴

20 Cf. Hume 1980, p. 2.

21 Cf. Lindow 1995, p. 21.

22 Cf. Lindow 1995, p. 14.

23 Cf. Lindow 1995; McKinnell 2005. While McKinnell focusses on mythological issues with emphasis on legendary tales and the Norse pantheon, Lindow's approach is about the ascription or imputation of supernatural abilities by the cultural *Us* to ethnic *Others*, based on the prerogative of contact by travel and trade with other ethnicities, cf. Lindow 1995, p. 12.

24 Cf. Schmidt 2010, p. 21.

2.2 Medieval monsters

The abundance of monsters in medieval art and literature is a striking manifestation of their ubiquity in medieval thought. Whether their appearances are literary or visual, believed to be elements of local tales or imported motifs from classical ancient material, dogmatic tools of Christian teaching or remnants of archaic pre-Christian belief – monsters inhabit and adorn the medieval world. They expand into any kind of human space, be it antipodes on world maps, gargoyles in architecture or revenants in literature.²⁵

The best-known medieval Icelandic monsters are giants and trolls, which are associated with the mythological world of pagan Scandinavia.²⁶ The world of Norse mythology however, with its giants, trolls, shape-shifters and the undead, the eternal antagonism between gods and giants, is in its basic terms not very genuinely Norse. Comparable constellations can be found elsewhere too, for example in ancient Greek mythology. Here, too, the reader encounters gods facing their antagonists, the Titans, in binary structures of order and chaos. Those monsters of cosmic relevance can be identified as the personifications of unknown forces, and therefore can be found on a global scale in numerous human cultures. They represent the chaos of prehistory which, by the emergence of gods and men, is balanced with order.²⁷

There are two monstrous manifestations of the medieval fascination with admixture and different entities: first, composite monsters or hybrids, and second, monsters of bodily transformation. Although those bodies served specific cultural needs,²⁸ they were not only understood as something abstract and symbolic. There was also a clear tendency in the Middle Ages to concretise the metaphorical and figurative in order to produce the idea of real monstrous races populating distant locations of the world. The monster exists – not here, but in remote places instead.²⁹ Hence, the medieval comprehension of monsters required a specific *locus* for the monstrous. The archetypal

25 The preoccupation with the monstrous is not a new one. One of the earliest taxonomies of the Middle Ages, presenting influential ideas about the monstrous, was created in the beginning of the seventh century, and we owe it to no lesser medieval encyclopaedist than Isidore of Seville, cf. Williams 1996, p. 107.

26 For an extensive analysis of giants in the Eddas and sagas, see Schulz 2004.

27 Cf. Blumenberg 1979, p. 131-132.

28 Cf. Cohen 2003, p. XVIII.

29 Cf. Williams 1996, p. 11. Cf. also p. 14: “This displacement of the physical reality to remote and unreachable locations secured the theory of the real existence of the monsters by guaranteeing that it could not be empirically authenticated, while at the same time securing the symbolic reality as one corresponding to nothing that *is*“.

monster always lives outside of the human world, not within habitations or towns. It is not part of society, but dwells in the otherworld, in the wild landscape, which meant danger to medieval people. Most often the otherworld is separated from mankind by deep forests, oceans or mountains to support the difference between man and monster by geographical distance. This division of space can be seen in the mythological division of the worlds,³⁰ or by visual means when monsters are located at the edge of the world or in unknown territory, for example on *mappae mundi* (world maps). Things connected with familiar everyday life are usually not connected with the Other, so if monsters do exist, they have to dwell somewhere else; otherwise people would encounter them more often. Hence the *locus* of monstrous races was not only regarded to be extra-geographical, but it was also logically imperative that it be that way. In saga literature, monsters dwelling outside human habitations are mostly encountered when heroes travel to their lands, for example Ketill's encounter the man-eating Surtr in *Ketils saga hængs*, or Örvar-Oddr's journey to Risaland. One might well employ the post-medieval term *terra incognita* to that part of the world, namely the magical world, which is separate from the real Scandinavian geography and topography.³¹ This *terra incognita* could not be fully apprehended, and medieval people tended to overestimate its size.³² This geographical uncertainty, as well as the the uncertainty about what is out there in the wilderness beyond the homely yard, leave a lot of space for vivid imagination, guesswork and superstition. Ultimately, the multiplicity of monsters occupies a frontier zone where fantasies flourish.³³

However, as much as the monster is prone to dwell in marginal spaces, these do not have to be of complete geographical separation: Stories proliferated about monsters lingering at domestic borders, too, for example at the edge of villages or parishes or just right behind the farm wall.³⁴ By engraving monstrous creatures to e.g. monastic building or by inserting them into world maps or the margins of manuscript pages, monsters, alarmingly, exist at the margins of civilised space.³⁵ Consequently, the monster, constructed to be different, may appear even closer to human social spaces

30 Cf. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, ch. 8, p. 19: "Hvernig var jörðin háttuð? Þá svarar Hárr: 'Hon er kringlótt útan, ok þar útan um liggr inn djúpi sjár, ok með þeiri sjávarströndu gáfu þeir lönd til byggðar jötna ættum. En fyrir innan á jörðunni gerðu þeir borg umhverfis heim fyrir ófriði jötna, en til þeira borgar höfðu þeir brár Ymis jötuns ok kölluðu þá borg Miðgarð'".

31 Cf. Eremenko 2006, p. 221.

32 Cf. Eremenko 2006, p. 221.

33 Cf. Kearney 2003, p. 3.

34 Cf. Bildhauer / Mills 2003, p. 8.

35 Cf. Bildhauer / Mills 2003, p. 9.

than at first suspected. Moreover, what causes an uncanny feeling is not only its otherness. Most often the monster is endowed with familiar attributes, too; it behaves in a way that is not unlike human behaviour.

Turning to literature, there are numerous instances of medieval monster encounters, where the monsters serve, just as in the mythological context outlined above, as anti-poles. In these narratives, clear-cut binary structures are visible. When simplified, these encounters work in a versus-pattern: troll versus hero, dragon versus saint. The monster's greater task is to provide a foil for the hero. One can roughly divide the different usages of monsters into four categories: the victory over monsters identifies heroes as such, and proves their heroic status; by fighting monsters the hero serves as a protector of human society; by using monsters as comic tools, the narrative reduces or humanises larger-than-life heroes; finally, monsters comment on heroism, requiring not only excitement but also critical reflection by the audience.³⁶ However, there are also encounters with supernatural beings which do not function in that versus-pattern, and therefore serve a different narrative purpose.

In saga literature some supernatural occurrences work as forebodings of later events, in which case they appear as apparitions, for example the witch-ride in *Brennu-Njáls saga* before the burning of Bergþórshváll.³⁷ These additions add a notion of tragedy with a mythical atmosphere to what otherwise would be a realistic, matter-of-fact chronicle.³⁸ These encounters, like most of those which work in versus-patterns, are dedicated to the narrative itself. Yet, some supernatural beings that have found their way into saga texts do not only serve *narrative* purposes. They may also be witnesses to the vivid belief in supernatural Others which render their services on a *social* level: The creation, but also specifically the devoted maintenance of Others, prove the need of the respective human society for identification, group affiliation and to define the social group's collective identity.³⁹ So in this sense, it does not suffice to divide the medieval

36 Cf. Hume 1980, p. 3.

37 Cf. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ch. 125, pp. 320-321. Cf. Lönnroth 1999, pp. 117-118: The saga author is very careful with his expressions here. Everything that happens, the quivering earth and sky, the ring of fire with a man on a horse in its center, the rider hurling the firebrand east towards the mountains, is described from Hildiglumr's point of view: pp. 320-321: "þótti honum", "hann þóttisk", "honum sýndisk". These words leave way for speculation about the reality of those events and do not claim that supernatural beings really physically appeared – a typical way of describing otherworldly occurrences in 'realistic' sagas, where the supernatural is relatively distant and indistinct, cf. Torfi Tulinius 2000, p. 254.

38 Cf. Lönnroth 1999, p. 118.

39 Cf. Lindow 1995, p. 22.

world into binary structures of inside and outside, with the outside being a location of real dimension. Neither is the *locus* for monstrous activity understood as a plainly outside place from what humanity regards as the world of order. Instead, the place where otherness dwells resembles a frontier zone, with an edge defining not simply the outside but a threshold. This edge puts emphasis not on the otherworld, but on the familiar world, defining and containing it like a frame, structuring it and providing it with its specific order.⁴⁰

The Old Icelandic monsters explored in this thesis are purely literary creations. The question is not primarily what purpose they serve for the narrative, but why do those monsters appear in the tale in this particular way, why are they depicted the way they are depicted, namely more often than not grotesque and fearsome? Fundamentally, the monster is connoted with repulsiveness. Hans Blumenberg conjoins the composition of stories with the need of coping with fears.⁴¹ Literature is a means of expressing fears or anxieties, be they physical, political or religious. It is essential to name the unknown and the terrifying. In order to tell stories about fear, this nameless something has to get a name, otherwise it would not be possible to make it apprehensible.⁴² Monsters reveal humanity's craving to provide phobia with a concrete face.⁴³ Only by granting it a name, a face or shape, people are able to put fearsome forces and phenomena of incomprehensible worlds in order. Hence, these phenomena were anthropomorphised, as forces of nature were associated with e.g. gods.⁴⁴ Thus, besides performing narrative roles, a well-composed monster can also work on an extra-narrative level, and address the audience. It triggers a sentiment of insecurity, and works as a reminder for people, demonstrating that the ego can never be entirely sovereign.⁴⁵ In this case the monster transgresses the limited borders of being a technical device for the hero's characterisation by antagonism, and enters the sphere of human sentiments. Otherness suddenly makes its entrance into the human world.

Often, this transgression in the sagas appears when monsters step from the realm of otherness into the realm of human civilisation, for example when the revenants, who

40 Cf. Williams 1996, p. 17.

41 Cf. Blumenberg 2003, p. 194.

42 Regarding the naming of the unknown as a prerogative to tell tales about it, see Blumenberg 2003, p. 194: "Als Unbekanntes ist es namenlos [...]. Dann ist es die früheste und nicht unsolideste Form der Vertrautheit mit der Welt, Namen für das Unbestimmte zu finden. Erst dann und daraufhin läßt sich von ihm eine Geschichte erzählen".

43 Cf. Kearney 2003, p. 121.

44 Cf. Blumenberg 1979, pp. 40-41.

45 Cf. Kearney 2003, p. 3.

clearly belong to the otherworld, return. They do not only haunt the living, but even more distinctively they enter spaces which usually are exclusively reserved for human activity, such as the fire-place inside the house.⁴⁶ This extreme border-crossing brings the Other into the very core of human familiarity. These episodes depict a mixing of elements which, for the order and well-being of human society, should better not be mingled.

3. The Uncanny: Another stranger me

As can be seen from the chapters above, there are monsters that do not fulfil a role of distinct otherness in order to establish a collective feeling of shared identity. Instead of causing mere fear of the unknown, these monsters trigger a feeling of intriguing uncanniness. Why is the otherness from human beings important,⁴⁷ yet it is undermined by familiarity? To answer this question one should focus on the meaning of the word *monster* itself. It derives from the Latin verb *monstrare*, meaning *to reveal something, to hint or point at something, to show*. In his article on monster culture Jeffrey Jerome Cohen offers seven theses about how to read a monster with regard to the society that contains it. He states that a monster “exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically 'that which reveals,' 'that which warns,' [...] it is always a displacement”.⁴⁸ The question at hand is: What does it reveal?

Sigmund Freud explains the connection between monsters and the connected uncanny feeling with the etymology of *unheimlich*, meaning 'un-homelike' or 'un-homey'.⁴⁹ On the one hand it is something alien, non-transparent and obscure to human

46 Cf. *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 54.

47 Studies in psychoanalysis have brought forth numerous approaches to the Other and the ego's perception of it, using Freud's early ideas as a starting point. On her essay on abjection, Julia Kristeva argues that the subject experiences the abject when finding “the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its *very* being, that it *is* none other than the abject”, Kristeva 1982, p. 5. The abject creates horror, so *abjection* for Kristeva is the “experience of unmatched primordial horror, putting the subject in the most devastating kind of crisis imaginable”, Becker-Leckrone 2005. However, Kristeva's abject is different from Freud's uncanny as it fails to “recognize its kin; nothing is familiar, not even the shadow of a memory”, Kristeva 1982, p. 5. The Freudian idea of recognising the Other as being inherent in the subject is a trait most important for the uncanniness of our transformers, as is shown in this thesis.

48 Cohen 1996, p. 4.

49 Although Freud's reading of the uncanny will be often referred to, and is used as a premise for the following discussion of uncanny monsters, the use of this view on uncanniness should not imply acceptance or usage of other Freudian ideas, as psychoanalysis as such does not exist anymore today,

perception, and consequently it evokes the suspicion of lurking danger. This is a commonplace and short definition of what frightens a human being, a definition in the sense of Ernst Jentsch, who sees the formation of uncanniness as a result of intellectual insecurity.⁵⁰ It is exactly this view which Sigmund Freud tags as not being exhaustive in his article on the uncanny.⁵¹ He states that one has to go beyond the equation of *uncanny = not familiar*.⁵² What Freud finds beside the fear of the unknown is that “das Unheimliche sei jene Art des Schreckhaften, welche auf das Altbekannte, Längstvertraute zurückgeht”.⁵³ If *unheimlich* is the negation of *heimlich*, it can have two meanings: The first one is the above-mentioned definition of something that is unfamiliar, as *heim-lich* means 'home-like'. The other meaning of *heimlich* is 'secret'. In this sense, the negation of *heimlich* indicates something that is *not secret*. *Unheimlich* is thus everything secret that actually should have stayed hidden, but which has emerged to the surface.⁵⁴ So there are features connected to the perception of uncanniness working as reminders of something that has been inherent in the human individual. Freud localises this in the subconscious mind. According to Freud there is an anankastic drive of repetition, which is so inherent in the nature of human drives that it is strong enough even to exceed the pleasure principle,⁵⁵ and which “gewissen Seiten des Seelenlebens den dämonischen Charakter verleiht”.⁵⁶ So what is perceived as uncanny, is in fact a reminder of of inborn and repressed drives, and of non-manipulable repetition.⁵⁷

Consequently, a subject's uncanny feeling towards a monster is not simply due to alienating impressions that create fear out of insecurity towards the unknown. It is the fear of the repressed and therefore estranged drives which the human subconscious fears to repeat themselves and thus identifies them as being familiar. Through the

but has developed into a coexistence of a large plurality of theory fields which differ in certain convictions about for example the nature of human beings or the relation between conscious and unconscious processes, cf. Mertens 2008, p. 15. Additionally, even though I see a validity of Freud's view of the uncanny for some saga episodes I would not claim general validity and applicability of his theory in context with Old Icelandic saga texts. It shall be outlined here that when I speak of fear of the Other and use Freud's idea of uncanniness, I do not imply acceptance of other fear-related Freudian theory, e.g. of infant sexuality.

50 Cf. Freud 1947, Das Unheimliche, p. 231.

51 Cf. Freud 1947, Das Unheimliche, p. 231.

52 Cf. Freud 1947, Das Unheimliche, p. 231.

53 Freud 1947, Das Unheimliche, p. 231.

54 Cf. Freud 1947, Das Unheimliche, p. 236.

55 Cf. Freud 1947, Jenseits des Lustprinzips: Freud explains the superior intensity of the drive of repetition, p. 22: “[...] dieser [the drive, my comment] erscheint uns ursprünglicher, elementarer, triebhafter als das von ihm zur Seite geschobene Lustprinzip”.

56 Freud 1947, Das Unheimliche, p. 251.

57 Cf. Freud 1947, Das Unheimliche, p. 251.

encounter with a monster that personifies these drives, the drives are confirmed by the monster's existence and behaviour. Thus the *monstrum* conveys uncanniness by blurring the division between otherness and familiarity, between Us and Them. It dwells at the margins of human space, but this margin, this threshold, is an undefined grey area. Simultaneously, monsters operate through prohibition. That means that by their existence they demarcate clearly where borders are – borders which human beings should better not cross, if they do not want to leave the system of our human culture and the collective identity. Monsters are allowed to enter realms of social taboo, while humans cannot, or do not dare to – they demarcate the borders of the possible.⁵⁸ They can break free from human norms, while humans regard these norms as safer to stick to.

Thus, as much as monsters stand for the fear of one's own repressed drives they also symbolise the desire to live them out.⁵⁹ They are linked to forbidden practices, but at the same time this is the reason why they attract. They can simultaneously terrify and evoke escapist fantasies. So what is feared most in the face of demonised Others is not their alien culture as much as it is the projection of oneself, our *othered self*,⁶⁰ it serves as an alter ego.⁶¹ The monstrous is situated somewhere in between fear and attraction.

There are of course simple monsters which are technically used as foils for the hero, the encounters are trivialised occurrences. Such an opponent “who pops up in a hero's path as if pulled from a hat cannot intrigue us or win our attention. He can only fulfill his technical function of confirming the hero's status”.⁶² More complex monsters, on the other hand, function as individuals, and the audience's concern is enhanced by greater knowledge of the figures' pasts and motivations.⁶³ The monsters' uncanniness in the Freudian reading cannot be achieved by a trivialised encounter because it lacks the depth of meaning except being a narrative tool. Yet, episodes conveying fearfulness are not a rare element in Old Icelandic sagas.⁶⁴

58 Cf. Cohen 1996, pp. 12-16.

59 Cf. Cohen 1996, pp. 16-20.

60 Cf. Kearney 2003, p. 75.

61 Cf. Cohen 1996, p. 17.

62 Hume 1980, p. 8. A trivialised occurrence is for example the giant fight in *Ketils saga haengs*, ch. 2, p. 156, which Hume 1980, p. 7 calls “a flat job”.

63 Hume 1980, p. 8.

64 See e.g. the nocturnal eeriness in *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 53, where undefined noises from a fish storage keeps people wondering. Another example for exist notions of eeriness is a scene in *Ketils saga haengs*, when Ketill finds the larder of Surtr, with salted human flesh on the bottom. It turns out that Surtr is an ogre and regards human beings as prey for food supply: ch. 2, pp. 155-156: “Hann fann þar í af hvölum ok hvítbjörnum, selum ok rostungum ok alls konar dýrum, en á botninum í hverri gröf fann hann mannakjöt saltat”. With the picture of salted *mannakjöt*, 'human flesh', *Menschenfleisch*, cf. Baetke 2006, p. 400, the whole scene of finding the ogre's larder is turned into a terror vision of people being eviscerated and used as food, cf. Mitchell 2008, p. 289.

The projection of unconscious fears onto others, and thus turning the other into something monstrous, is achieved by different evasive strategies, such as *scapegoating*.⁶⁵ It is a mechanism to simplify our own existence and to forward unsettling features onto others, marking them as alien.⁶⁶ These forwarded features however, are those which the human subconscious remembers exist somewhere within the self, too, repressed but present. Monsters display the dark elements of human thought: People could not accuse other beings of ill characteristics, if they did not know them themselves, and were aware that they exist. So consequently, the unease triggered by the monstrous is accompanied with the confirming horror that those characteristics can de facto rise, and govern a being's behaviour.

4. Textual analysis

To build the bridge to my main focus of interest, monstrous transformers in Old Icelandic sagas, I will examine specific saga passages in the light of the preceding chapters. The monsters in question will be placed into their respective historical contexts and analysed in their appearance, behaviour and their influence on the later events of the saga. To explore the uncanniness of saga monsters it is essential for my approach to focus on those which go through a corporeal change, a transformation from one being to another. In the following, I will analyse three main transformers: Fáfnir from *Völsunga saga*, Ögmundr from *Örvar-Odds saga* and Glámr from *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*.

4.1 The sources

While exploring the meaning of a literal monster, one must be aware that the monster is at first always perceived as the Other, that means in contrast to the collective Us.⁶⁷ In

65 Cf. Kearney 2003, p. 5.

66 Cf. Kearney 2003, p. 5.

67 For further reading on otherness in specific Old Icelandic literature cf. e.g. Aalto 2006. Aalto

the case of this thesis, the Us is the medieval Icelandic society that produced the sagas – a society of high literary productivity in contrast to rest of medieval Scandinavia. When it comes to *Völsunga saga* and *Örvar-Odds saga* the reader faces the problem that they carry legendary and ancient, not originally Icelandic, material, whose style and shape differs through time and space.⁶⁸ Highly prone to alteration by oral tradition, it is most probable that the textual witnesses of this mythological heritage do not mirror the ancient structures. In societies without written texts or orthodoxy through a central organisation, one must assume constant changes in Indo-European cultures and cannot reconstruct ancient myths.⁶⁹ Hence, when analysing saga texts with components that are older than their written records (such as the dragon), the interpreter nevertheless must rely on the narratives at hand. With the attempt to reconstruct an ancient myth, which is not this thesis' task, one would run the risk of speculation.

So there is no other choice but to concentrate on textual witnesses, bearing in mind that the medieval audience of the sagas cannot remember events from 700-800 years ago, so that “aus früherer Geschichtsdichtung und -deutung ist im Laufe der Enthistorisierung des Stoffes poetische Existenzdeutung geworden.”⁷⁰ Thus, the textual witnesses of this orally transported myth tell us more about the high-medieval society than they do about the Migration Period - if they tell us anything reliable about the latter at all. Given the plurality of textual witnesses of the Nibelungen-material, I limit the analysis of the lindworm to a single written record, *Völsunga saga*, because otherwise comparative analyses would be required, which would go far beyond the scope of this thesis.⁷¹ The same applies to *Örvar-Odds saga*, where I focus on the youngest redaction and exclude comparisons with the earlier ones in order to keep a narrow framework.⁷²

emphasises that one has to specify who it is who perceives otherness, as the cultural contexts and viewpoints shapes the contents of the literature and the way of expressing otherness.

68 E.g. the Middle High German and pre-eminently courtly *Nibelungenlied* with all its emphasis on themes such as royal hierarchy, dress-codes, courtliness, chivalry, etc., displays the life at court in the German High Middle Ages, while the later Icelandic counterpart, *Völsunga saga*, drifts more into the sphere of legends and fairy tales.

69 McKinnell 2005, p. 19.

70 Uecker 2004, p. 220.

71 For further reading on the relation between single texts which touch on the *Nibelungen* material see e.g. Kramarz-Bein 1996; Kramarz-Bein 2002; Reichert 2003.

72 Besides, the figure of Ögmundr experiences heavy enhancement and alteration in the longer redaction, while in the shorter redaction he is a minor character. Therefore the older S redaction is not of primary interest for the examination of Ögmundr as an elusive and unstable monster as the younger and longer redaction of the manuscripts A/B.

Völsunga saga is the Old Icelandic late-thirteenth-century record of the Nibelungen-material, originating in continental Europe, which was transported to, and adapted in Scandinavia. The ancient core of Nibelungen-motifs such as the dragon is long lost, as the foundation of the dragon-slayer myth reaches back to a time long before its first written record, whether on vellum or carved in stone.⁷³ Generally, the Nibelungen-cycle is said to have its historical roots in the Migration Period. The saga largely corresponds to the events portrayed in the respective lays of the Poetic Edda, and is therefore often used to fill the lacuna in the Codex Regius. The saga portrays pagan times and people, although it is composed by an anonymous Christian writer.

Comparable to the case of *Völsunga saga*, *Örvar-Odds saga* is not primarily a high-medieval, Icelandic invention but a reworking of older material.⁷⁴ The manuscripts do not show a homogeneous picture of the saga. There are several versions varying in style and content, composed at different times in the medieval period.⁷⁵ The difference between the shorter and longer versions is significant. The author of the younger (probably fifteenth-century) and longer redaction A/B undertook radical modifications of the saga. These are achieved not only by additional episodes but also by an alteration most interesting for this thesis. The composer shifted saga's centre: the relevance of Ögmundr is increased, as he is turned into Oddr's main antagonist.

The saga presents itself in a set of numerous adventurous episodes, such as combats with Vikings, conversion, journeys to strange lands, marriage, etc., which are loosely connected by a narrative frame.⁷⁶ The narrative's mixing of pagan and Christian

73 One might of course try to trace and reconstruct Indo-European ingredients, but first, this is not the aim of this thesis, and second, the ingredients probably would have varied widely through time and space and thus would have been prone to changes. Thus the reconstruction would be limited to speculation.

74 Cf. Simek / Pálsson 2007, p. 287: Knowledge of tales about the hero of *Örvar-Odds saga* before the Icelandic composition is visible from the mention of a certain Arvar-Odd in Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (V, 166). The many lays which are preserved in the saga are for example the verses on the battle of Sámsey, Hjálmar's death-song, the many *lausavísur*, or Oddr's death-song. For further reading, see Boer 1892, pp. XI-XIV.

75 The different versions of *Örvar-Odds saga* divide into several manuscripts of different age. Chronologically, S (Stock. Perg. 7, 4to) is the oldest, from the early fourteenth century, M (AM 344 a, 4to) follows in the second half of that century. A (AM 343, 4^o membr.) and B (AM 471, 4^o membr.) are dated to the fifteenth century, cf. Torfi Tulinius 1995, p. 26; Bandle 1990, p. 51. Thus there is a wide span of 100-150 years between S and A/B in which the saga has been altered, cf. Bandle 1990, p. 60. The existence of many different saga versions shows the “hæfileika fornaldarsagna til að fylgjast með tíma og smekk sem breytist”, Bandle 1990, p. 66. The only critical edition of the early redaction S is by Boer from the end of the nineteenth century. All references and quotes from the saga in my thesis are taken from Guðni Jónsson edition of A/B, as Ögmundr, who is of importance to this thesis, is not as detailed and of so much relevance for the narrative in S as he is in A/B.

76 Cf. Kroesen 1985, p. 645: The loosely connected structure might be witness to the saga material being comprised of different episodes of different age, an explanation favoured by Boer in the only critical

elements also contributes to the pattern of loose boundaries: narrative initiation patterns are typically connected with the picture of the Viking warrior, yet Örvar-Oddr is granted two of them later in the saga and *after* his conversion to Christianity.

As one of the most popular *Íslendingasögur*, *Grettis saga* provides a considerable range of themes as well as statements on social conditions. It also tells us about literacy and fourteenth-century learned culture in Iceland as it shows a large amount of intertextual references.⁷⁷ The saga was composed around 1320-30 if not later,⁷⁸ so the literary genre of the *Íslendingasögur* was well-established by then, enabling a thematic focus – not on social mechanisms in favour of the feud-based Icelandic Freestate as in ‘classical’ *Íslendingasögur*, but on individual crisis. Outlaw sagas display, albeit under literary and therefore historically unreliable circumstances, the otherwise poorly documented world of medieval Icelandic social grey zones, such as the lives of outcast people. The saga's tragic elements lie within the figure of the eponymous hero Grettir, who becomes an outlaw and is eventually killed. The course of later events is irrevocably initiated by a key sequence of great importance for this thesis: when he meets the revenant Glámr, the latter puts a spell on Grettir. As a result Grettir is not able to stay alone in the dark.

4.2 The monsters' backgrounds

Before entering the textual analysis to examine how the monsters of the three sagas violate borders of corporeality, one should focus on general definitions first. In order not to interrupt the discussion of later chapters, I would like to define the respective monstrous contexts – the way it is presented to the reader in medieval literature – beforehand. As two of the three monsters, Fáfnir and Glámr, are exemplars of precise monstrous classes, the dragon or lindworm and the *draugr*, the framework within which they are embedded should be specified.

edition of the saga first published in 1888, cf. also Boer's edition from 1892.

⁷⁷ The numerous intertextual references with *Beowulf* are particularly noticeable and have enjoyed considerable scholarly attention. *Grettis saga*'s Icelandic sources are for example *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Laxdæla saga* and *Heiðarvíga saga*. For further reading on the Icelandic sources, see Guðni Jónsson's foreword in his Íslenzk Fornrit edition of *Grettis saga*, 1936, pp. XVII-XXXI.

⁷⁸ Cf. Simek / Pálsson 2007, p. 126.

The dragon in the Middle Ages:

In high-medieval thought the dragon⁷⁹ is most often connected with a powerful evil, sometimes the devil, and typically it is the antagonist of Christian heroes or saints. Of course, this picture appears in medieval Scandinavian literature, too.⁸⁰ The dragon leaves quite a mark when it comes to the attributes linked to it. The thirteenth-century encyclopaedist Thomas of Canterbury describes a dragon as having a dangerous gaze by which people might die if they look in its eyes.⁸¹ The dragon's monstrosity and evil aura is visualised by the outward appearance and is difficult to categorise; he is without boundaries, a masterpiece of negating borders and transgressing the natural status quo: The dragon, with wings, legs, fish-like (or serpentine) scales and fire-breath, combines the four elements in one being.⁸² An especially monstrous feature is the fire-breathing or venom-breathing. The typical dragon is a serpentine creature and is defined quite easily by taking a look at earlier works on Germanic folklore. In his *Deutsche Mythologie*, Jacob Grimm not only collects German history of religion and myth lore, he also provides the reader with details and definition concerning single elements, such as the properties of the dragon. Among these are that dragon breathe fire and wear golden crowns; dragon-blood and dragon-hearts carry special importance; dragons sometimes originate from a human transformation into dragons; often hoard treasures which may spell doom on those possessing it.⁸³

Admittedly, Fáfnir is rarely referred to as a dragon but more often as a worm, *ormr*,⁸⁴

79 Cf. Simek 2006, p. 77: Latin: *draco*, Old English: *draca*, Old High German: *traccho*, Old Icelandic: *dreki*. The innate word *linnr* or *linnormr* has only survived in the German *Lindwurm*.

80 The idea that dragons are by natural law figures of devilish evil, is exemplified by episodes such as one in *Yngvars saga víðförla*, where a dragon attacks ships captained by clerics. For further reading on this episode see Glazyrina 2006, p. 289-291. Yet the total amount of dragons in Old Icelandic literature is relatively low, and most often the dragon itself is not much more than a narrative tool to prove either the hero's heroism or the saint's sainthood. Out of the sum of dragons in northern literature, Tolkien 1983, p. 12 detects "only two that are significant. If we omit from consideration the vast and vague Encircler of the World, Miðgarðsormr, the doom of the great gods and no matter for heroes, we have but the dragon of the Völsungs, Fáfnir, and Beowulf's bane".

81 This is to be found in Thomas' *Liber de natura rerum*, VIII, 16, cf. Glazyrina 2006, p. 290.

82 Cf. Williams 1996, pp. 204-205: Williams illustrates that it is "especially the fire vomited forth from its insides that fulfills its monstrosity in completing the totality of its transgression. Confounding the identity of the four natural elements by combining earth, air, water, and fire, the dragon also negates the specificity of locus by mingling land, sea, and sky. Heaven and hell, suggested by the presence of its wings and of its fiery mouth, are both contained in this monstrous form; indeed, the dragon was used in the Middle Ages as a symbol both of Satan and of Christ in a dynamic of oppositions characteristic of mediaeval iconography".

83 Cf. Evans, 2005, p. 215.

84 Cf. e.g. *Völsunga saga*, ch. 13, p. 142, Sigurðr mentions "Kann ek kyn þessa orms, þótt vér séum ungir, ok hefi ek spurt, at engi þorir at koma á mót honum fyrir vaxtar sakir ok illsku". Reginn tries to talk the matter down: "Þat er ekki. Sá vöxtr er eftir hætti lyngorma, ok er gert af miklu meira en er, ok svá mundi þótt hafa inum fyrrum frændum þínum". Later however, it is implied that Fáfnir, though

but still Grimm's definition of the dragon matches Fáfnir in the essential ingredients: He guards a gold-hoard, he transformed from human into dragon, and the treasure which he guards is cursed. Yet, the idea of the dragon as a being of chaos and disharmony is older than those images from Germanic tradition. The figure of Cadmus in Greek mythology for example likewise presents the image of the dragon-slayer who pierces a dragon to death and pins it to a tree trunk. At this very place the city of Thebes is founded. This foundation myth is highly charged with the image of the evil dragon: "Thebes is a monument to fratricide and bloodshed, and the dragon is its origin and emblem".⁸⁵ The dragon-piercing or -stabbing is pre-eminent in the Middle Ages too, not only represented by St George, but also by Siegfried-figures.

The *draugr* in Old Icelandic literature:

The second monstrous class that needs to be set into context is the *draugr*, the revenant, rooting linguistically in the Indo-Germanic *dreugh-, meaning something like *harmful ghost*.⁸⁶ The belief in revenants is quite often referred to in Old Icelandic literature, and the sagas frequently mention supernatural activities by the undead. Fundamentally, the *draugr* is associated with the dead who resides in his burial mound. Yet, sometimes he may wake up, and intervene actively in the lives of the living.⁸⁷

The activities of the undead can roughly be divided into two different categories, depending on two criteria: *locus*, and action or *reaction*. One category, the *haugbúi*, defines itself by restriction to his burial site. Like the body, the actions of the *haugbúi* are bound to that place, too: he can sit inside his mound, he can be visited, wakened, consulted or interrogated.⁸⁸ In most cases, the *haugbúi* does not act but *react* on disturbances. He may guard a treasure or a valuable weapon which arouses the visitor's

worm-like in appearance, is much bigger than a *lyngormr*, ch. 18, p. 150: "Þá mælti Sigurðr: 'Þat sagðir þú, Reginn, at dreki sjá væri eigi meiri en einn lyngormr, en mér sýnast vegar hans ævar miklir.'" Sigurðr calls Fáfnir dragon not worm, but he is rather referring to his viciousness and size, not shape, ch.14, p. 145: "[...] ek drepa þenna inn mikla dreka". That Fáfnir is much bigger than a *lyngormr* is confirmed when he crawls to the water and the ground is shaken by his movements: ch.18, p. 151: "Ok er ormrinn skreið til vatns, varð mikill landskjálfti, svá at öll jörð skalf í nánd".

85 Williams 1996, pp. 204.

86 Cf. Simek 2006, p. 78.

87 Cf. Solheim 1958, column 298.

88 Cf. Gunnarr sits inside his mound and is cheerful, cf. *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ch. 78, pp. 192-193; Óðinn wakes a dead seeress in her mound and interrogates her, cf. *Baldurs draumar*, pp. 465-469; Hervör wakes her dead father in his mound to request her sword, cf. *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 4, pp. 10-23.

interest, he may be of help or he is threatening the visitor. Yet, all those actions would be limited to the geographical site of his burial place. If there is a transgression of the real world and the otherworld, the direction of movement is from the real world to the otherworld.⁸⁹

The second category is more significant for the discussion of uncanny monstrous transformations: in this category, the transgression is conducted by the *draugr*: He is active, not *reactive*. In contrast to the *haugbúi*, he leaves the burial site in order to return to human spaces, and to exert influence on the respective human collective; the movement is from the otherworld to the real world.⁹⁰ These actively malevolent *draugar* are infamous for terrorising people, killing members of the household or livestock. They are also known to ride rooftrees, obviously trying to tear down the houses.⁹¹

Yet in general, *draugar* are not necessarily and explicitly malevolent or actively harmful. The sagas report of calm and cheerful undead too, for example Gunnar of Hlíðarendi. Others might not be specifically benevolent, but not actually harmful either. Those *draugar* tend to threaten their visitors, although ultimately they give answers to their questions or hand over the requested object.⁹² Others might transgress borders and enter human space simply for cooking.⁹³ Yet, there is a preponderant vindictiveness in those *draugar* who actively affect human individuals or villages against which they personally bear a grudge.⁹⁴ Those *draugar* mirror the dark side of human society reduced to its ruthless elements only, as they are avaricious, bloodthirsty and self-centred.⁹⁵ The *draugr* is always killed in order to end the haunting, often decapitated or burned to ensure bodily incompleteness as hindrance for new undead activity.⁹⁶

89 With the revenants Kárr and Glámr, *Grettis saga* presents two aggressive *draugar* of both categories: Glámr enters human space and is the active aggressor, while Kárr is a *haugbúi* who is geographically tied to his burial site, and who simply reacts aggressively to the visitor. Kárr appears in ch. 18, and represents the typical features of a *haugbúi*. Grettir seeks him out and desires to acquire his gold. The fight between Grettir and Kárr avails itself of simple structures of battle scenes between hero and monster: The *haugbúi* is sought out by the hero and reacts aggressively on this disturbance, a fight ensues and the monster is killed, the hero decapitates the monster to ensure bodily incompleteness and to prevent the undead from rising again.

90 Cf. the *draugr* Þórólfr bægifótr in *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 34.

91 Cf. Sayers 1996, p. 243.

92 Cf. Hervör and Angantyr in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, ch. 4, pp. 10-23.

93 Cf. Þorgunna in *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 51.

94 Cf. Sayers 1996, p. 254-255.

95 Cf. Hume 1980, p. 13.

96 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 18, p. 58. Similar actions against the return of a *draugr* can be seen in e.g. *Laxdæla saga*, where Ólafr pái exhumes the body of the *draugr* Víga-Hrappur at daytime, burns it and scatters the ashes. Víga-Hrappur never appears again, cf. *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 24. The beheading of a *draugr* occurs also in *Flóamanna saga*, ch. 13, p. 255. The sagas however do not only tell of actions against active *draugar*, but often report of physical actions against newly deceased people too who

Sometimes the head is placed between the legs, away from neck and shoulders “för att hindra det från att åter växa fast vid kroppen”.⁹⁷ This treatment of bodies suggests a “skönjbar kroppslig uppfattning”⁹⁸ of the dead. The physical deconstruction of the body was the necessary destruction of the vehicle through which a renascent being could act.

4.2 *Boundless monsters*

With these previous chapters as background information the focus can now be drawn to the peculiarities of the respective saga monsters. In fact, Fáfñir, Ögmundr and Glámr all share special features but they surely fulfil the very typical functions of monstrous activity in literature, too. There are for example initiation patterns, which can often be found in medieval literature, where the encounters between the monster and the hero may be constructed, as stated above, to legitimate our protagonist's heroic status. In the case of *Völsunga saga*, a young Sigurðr is incited by his foster-father Reginn to find Fáfñir and kill him in revenge for his (Fáfñir's) unjust acquisition of the shared inheritance. Sigurðr needs to leave the place of his fosterage and to travel away from his familiar social space, to Gnitahiði, where the monster dwells. The quests for the fight with monsters, apart from society, are used to introduce and betoken the hero's heroism.⁹⁹ Another typical purpose fulfilled by our monsters is the provision of an antagonist for the hero, a foil against which the hero can be measured and by which the narrative can provide a commentary on the hero. Fáfñir, Ögmundr and Glámr, are all well-designed antagonists and interwoven with the hero's fate.¹⁰⁰

However, I will not dwell on typical monster-functions within a narrative but instead focus on those elements where monsters breach given categories or exceed them. The

were suspected of a probable undead return: Some bodies are burned and the ashes then scattered (at sea / seashore). Others are dismembered, with special attention paid to beheadings. cf. *Flóamanna saga* ch. 13, p. 256. Nevertheless, be it actions against the bodies of *draugar* or against bodies of the deceased who were only suspected of future revenant activity, the objective was the same: The physical deconstruction of the body to hinder undead activity, cf. Sayers 1996, p. 244.

97 Ström 1958, column 433.

98 Ström 1958, column 433.

99 In *fornaldarsögur* the movement is most commonly that of the hero towards the monstrous, not vice versa. The hero moves towards the other, away from the familiar.

100 It has been argued that Ögmundr is Oddr's alter ego. Ferrari 2006, p. 246 refers for example to Edwards / Hermann Pálsson 1970, pp. XVII-XVIII. Likewise it has often been argued that Grettir and the *draugr* Glámr share many traits, such as strength and social incompatibility. Hume 1980, p. 10 interprets Glámr as Grettir's “symbolic double, or his shadow, perhaps as the temptation of strength”.

emphasis is placed on the violation of boundaries of corporeality: Fáfnir, Ögmundr and Glámr not only transgress the boundaries between the outside (the supernatural, the otherworld) and the inside (human social spaces), they do it by drawing the monstrous close to humanity through the act of transformation.

4.2.1 Somatic instability

The main focus of this study is transformation, and transformation requires physical – or *somatic*, to be more precise – instability, the monsters' disposition and proneness to corporeal change. Fáfnir's transformation is, compared with Ögmundr's and Glámr's, the shortest and easiest, as it is referred to in only a few words.¹⁰¹ Moreover it is a singular transformation and non-recurring. Yet, in its brevity it depicts clearly the body's affinity to change. Sigurðr and the audience learn of Fáfnir's background and transformation from man to lindworm through Reginn. Admittedly, this information may therefore give a biased characterisation, coloured by Reginn's own interests. Furthermore, the information is very succinct. Yet, his few words are the only source in *Völsunga saga* about Fáfnir's human condition before the transformation: “Fáfnir var miklu mestr ok grimmastr ok vildi sitt eitt kalla láta allt þat, er var”.¹⁰² His body is not limited by physical boundaries, but changes in that very moment when Fáfnir greedily lies on his gold-hoard: “[...] hann lagðist út ok unni engum at njóta fjárins nema sér ok varð síðan at inum versta ormi ok liggur nú á því fé”.¹⁰³ The shape Fáfnir acquires is interesting as he does not morph into a dragon by definition. Instead, he transforms into a lindworm, an *ormr*, which resembles the dragon through serpentine characteristics. The typical attributes which shape a dragon's appearance do not count for Fáfnir, who lacks a few features, among them legs and wings. He is known to crawl – not to walk – towards the water source.¹⁰⁴

A very special feature of Fáfnir's transformation which neither Glámr nor Ögmundr share is that he changes into animal form. This simple animalistic transformation was often used in the Middle Ages to visualise inner depravity or inhumanity, implying the

101 The transformation per se is described in ch. 14 only, p. 145.

102 *Völsunga saga*, ch. 14, p. 143.

103 *Völsunga saga*, ch. 14, p. 145.

104 Cf. *Völsunga saga*, ch. 18, p. 150: “Nú ríða þeir Sigurðr ok Reginn upp á heiðina á þann farveg, er Fáfnir var vanr at skriða, er hann fór til vatns”; p. 151: “Ok er ormrinn skreið til vatns”.

loss (or total lack) of human attributes, or the degeneration of them, as well as the simultaneous shift towards the non-human, the bestial. This speciality can be witnessed not only in the figure of Fáfñir, but also in a transformational monster from *Stjörnu-Odda draumr*. Hléguðr is a warrior maiden, and a marginal character for large parts of the *þátrr*. When eventually a battle ensues, the saga states that she has partially transformed, and appears troll-like with a lupine head, biting the warriors' heads off.¹⁰⁵ The replacement of the human head with an animal one is of importance as a degenerative transformation, since the loss of the human head implicates the loss of human rationality, of the centre of human thinking.¹⁰⁶ Thus, it is not surprising at all to find transformers, whose transformations are triggered by morally reprehensible attributes, being endowed with animal-like traits.¹⁰⁷

With an animalistic and non-recurring metamorphosis *Völsunga saga* proves to be very simple in its portrayal of monstrous transformation. It is reduced to its bare necessities. Yet, there are transformers of different, more complex style, too. Regarding the issue of somatic instability, the focus should now be drawn to another well-known antagonist from the *fornaldarsögur*, Ögmundr, in *Örvar-Odds saga*. Ögmundr's corporeal properties are not at all as distinct as Fáfñir's. The younger redaction of *Örvar-Odds saga* presents a more enhanced picture of the extraordinary and unfathomable Ögmundr, Oddr's uncanny antagonist who cannot be overwhelmed.¹⁰⁸ He is actually supposed to be a human as he is the son of a Permian king, yet it is also known that his mother was an ogress. This alone would already suffice to explain his malignity and otherworldliness.¹⁰⁹ The maternal connection with the supernatural supports the fact that Ögmundr seems to prefer group affiliations with the giants.¹¹⁰ The

105 Cf. *Stjörnu-Odda draumr*, ch. 8, p. 474: “ok sá hann þá Hlégunni, ok var þá komin á konungsskipit, ok var þá orðin skipun mikil á hennar hag. Honum sýndist á henni ylgiarhöfuð geysimikit ok tröllsligt, ok biti með því höfuðin af konungsmönnum”.

106 Cf. Williams 1996, p. 127: “The head is the most symbolic part of the body for the Middle Ages and for Western culture generally. It is thought that the human head is placed above the rest of the body in order to reflect its superiority as the seat of reason and thus the superiority of the intellectual over the physical. [...] As the locus of intellect, the human head signifies not only mind, but human nature itself, for intellect and soul are closely identified. [...] It is not surprising, then, that of all the body parts, the head is most often deformed in order to represent monstrous concepts.” The image of human figures with canine heads is widely distributed in the Middle Ages in the form of the *cynocephali*, the dog-heads, cf. e.g. Williams 1996, pp. 138-140.

107 Cf. also Rauðgrani's description of Ögmundr's mother in ch. 19, the *finngálkn*. She is said to be a killer and is endowed with a human head but an animal body with talons and a huge tail: ch. 19, pp. 281-283: “Er hún maðr at sjá upp til höfuðsins, en dýr niðr ok hefir furðuliga stórar klær ok geysiligan hala, svá at þar með drepr hún bæði menn ok fénað, dýr ok dreka”.

108 His invincibility contrasts the usual outcomes of Oddr's previous battles, in which he either defeats his opponent or befriends him, e.g. Hjálmar in ch. 9, p. 234.

109 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 19, p. 281-282.

110 He marries the giantess Geirríðr, and thus becomes the son-in-law of Geirröðr, a well-known *jötunn*

first episodes with and about Ögmundr are used to establish a demonic atmosphere around him. Then Oddr and the audience learn that he is a king's son, trained in the art of black magic and raised to avenge Oddr's attack on Bjarmaland.¹¹¹ This is comparable with Fáfnir who is first titled *ormr* (Sigurðr) and *lyngormr* (Reginn) in chapter 13, before it is revealed that he originally was a human being. Again, this pattern is simplified in *Völsunga saga*, while in *Örvar-Odds saga* it ranges over several chapters and several encounters between hero and antagonist. In their first meeting Oddr already doubts that Ögmundr is a purely human Viking: “[...] ek hefí ávallt áðr við menn barizt, en nú þykkjumst ek eiga við fjáendr”.¹¹² Yet, although this demonic atmosphere and disturbing appearance are described, Ögmundr seems to have a human body. Special attention is paid to his head. He has black, felted hair over his face revealing nothing but eyes and teeth.¹¹³ It is the face which accounts for a partial transformation (limited to the head) in a later chapter. Oddr tears off Ögmundr's face:

“Oddr greip þá báðum höndum í skegg honum með svá miklu afli, at hann reif þat allt af honum ok skeggstaðinn niðr at beini ok þar með alla ásjonuna með báðum vangafillunum, ok svá gekk upp um ennit ok aftr á miðjan haus, ok þar skildi með því, at svörðrinn slitnaði, en Oddr hafði þat, er hann helt.”¹¹⁴

Tearing off a man's face down to the bone should generally suffice to kill the opponent, but it is not Ögmundr's nature to be killed by Oddr. This incident is the beginning of Ögmundr's interesting development. Instead of dying, Ögmundr heals, the flesh in his face grows back without any facial hair, morphing into a bald and fleshy face deformed

in Old Icelandic literature, cf. Ferrari 2006, p. 244. Cf. Simek 2006, pp. 131-132: The name Geirröðr is most commonly associated with the giant occurring in the tale of Þórr's journey to Geirröðgarðr, Saxo Grammaticus mentions a giant named Geruthus, obviously the same.

111 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 19, p. 281. There are also other episodes which provide proof of Ögmundr's monstrosity – not through somatic instability but through behaviour: E.g. in the second meeting between hero and antagonist, Ögmundr's behaviour is completely bestial. It is after Oddr met his son Vignir and took him with him. A battle ensues, in which Ögmundr kills Vignir. This scene of the killing carries a visual effect essential to the growing monstrosity of Ögmundr, ch. 22, p. 291: “Ok í því brá Ögmundr Vigni, svá at hann fell, ok þegar jafnskjótt greyfðist hann niðr at honum ok beit sundr í honum barkann. Lét Vignir svá líf sitt”. This vivid image provides the audience with the horrid performance of inhuman monstrosity (not unlike that of Hléguðr who rips off heads on the battlefield with her lupine head, but here it is without the transformation of the head.) With full memory of what Rauðgrani told Oddr before, the audience can witness how Ögmundr now proves his ogreish nature.

112 *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 13, p. 248.

113 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 13, p. 247: “Svá var sagt frá yfirlitum þessa manns, at hann var svartr á hárlit, ok hekk flóki ofan yfir andlitit, þar sem topprinn skyldi vera, en alls ekki var at sjá til andlitsins nema tennr ok augu”. When Oddr meets the odinic figure of Rauðgrani, the latter describes Ögmundr's looks with similar words, cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 19, p. 281: “[...] hann var þá bæði svartr ok blár en hárlit sítt ok svart ok hekk flóki ofan fyrir augun þat er topprinn skyldi heita.” Both descriptions of Ögmundr's outward appearance (on page 247 and 281) emphasise the colour black, a colour which is generally associated with Satan, cf. Lindow 1995, p. 16.

114 *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 23, p. 296. In a later chapter of this thesis this tearing-off of Ögmundr's face is discussed in more detail.

by the clearly visible marks of the injuries.¹¹⁵ From then on he wears a mask. This somatic instability is surely not as distinct as Fáfñir's, but Ögmundr's body clearly does not behave as one would expect. His body is able to transgress the law of death, and presents Ögmundr as not being physically bound to the natural course of things. When Oddr and the audience learn of this facial change, Ögmundr is the king of Novgorod, and goes by the name Kvillánus. 'Kvillánus' must have been an exotic name for the medieval Icelandic audience,¹¹⁶ and it is easy to assume that this change of a common Icelandic name (Ögmundr) must have had a further estranging effect around this already elusive figure.

Another very interesting case of somatic instability is the figure of Glámr in *Grettis saga*. Just like Fáfñir, who turns into a dragon, Glámr transforms into a well-defined and popular monster. The *draugr*'s properties are well-established in Old Icelandic literature, and leave no place for speculation about his otherworldly nature. As a *draugr* Glámr terrorises the people at the farm he had worked on as a human before. Like Fáfñir and Ögmundr, Glámr works as an individual endowed with a well-defined background, specific character traits, and patterns of behaviour. People who turn into malevolent *draugar* are often those who, already in their lifetime, seem to be of “vrángt och fránstötande sinnelag”¹¹⁷, and who show peculiar or even demonic character traits.¹¹⁸ Glámr is no exception there. He is a Swede and comes as a stranger to Þórhallsstaðir to work there. He is described as aggressive and hostile towards the local customs, and soon proves to be a troublemaker.¹¹⁹ The saga portrays him as a good shepherd but also as asocial and highly unpopular: “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 hvímlíðr”.¹²⁰ This characterisation already makes him suspicious – not necessarily to become a monster but at least to be a negative figure who poses a potential hazard. Only a few sentences later he argues with the farmer's wife, and demands his food, although she, as a Christian, wants her household to fast during Yuletide. He threatens her, and gets his food. The saga

115 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 30, p. 335: “Oddr kenndi þá gerla Ögmund bónda Eyþjófsbana, því at öll merki sá þau á honum, sem Oddr hafði af honum rifit skegg ok ásjónu ok aftr á miðjan haus. Var þetta allt beingróit ok ekki hár á vaxit”.

116 Cf. Ferrarri 2006, p. 244.

117 Ström 1958, column 433.

118 Cf. Ström 1958, column 433.

119 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 32, pp. 107-111.

120 *Grettis saga*, ch. 32, pp. 110-111.

comments: “[...] ok er hann var mettr, gekk hann út ok var heldr gustillr”.¹²¹ His outward appearance is a relevant feature for his later monstrosity, and his looks are already described in the first scene when he is introduced: “Þessi maðr var mikill vexti ok undarligr í yfirbragði, gráeygr ok opineygr, úlfgrár á hárslið”.¹²² The saga author places special focus on his eyes. Glámr's gaze is his most arresting feature and forges, together with his hostile nature and his foreign origin, a most awkward and eerie figure.

Glámr's first somatic instability occurs after he is mysteriously killed, and his corpse is found. The body works as an augury of his future *draugr* status. It is dark and swollen, *digr sem naut*,¹²³ his body is heavy, hard to be moved, and impossible to be brought to the church-yard.¹²⁴ Glámr's dead body refuses not only contact with sacred grounds: when people realise that the dead shepherd also avoids contact with the priest, they accept this, and bury him under stones right where he is.¹²⁵ The expected transformation takes place, and the undead Glámr returns to haunt the place. Even though the living man has already been described as being large,¹²⁶ and his dead body was swollen, he is described as even larger when he enters the farmhouse in Grettir's presence.¹²⁷ In this sense, Glámr's (un-)dead body is prone to visual somatic instability concerning colour and growth.

This monstrous transformation is not exactly out of the ordinary. It fits the general idea of malevolent *draugar* who haunt places, ride roofs and kill people. However, the most curious development of monstrous impact on a human occurs after Glámr has been killed. It is an incorporeal development which pushes the figure of Glámr into the realm of impalpability and elusive monstrosity.

121 *Grettis saga*, ch. 32, p. 111. Cf. also Sayers 1996, p. 252: Sayers exposes the stinking of the body as a *draugr* feature and presumes a trait uttered in intentional contradiction to the perfumed corpses of saints.

122 *Grettis saga*, ch. 32, p. 110.

123 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 32, p. 112. The saga says 'blár' to indicate dark complexion, cf. also *blámenn*. Again, as seen before with Ögmundur's black hair, dark colours are frequently used for visualising a demonic nature, (predominantly after the Crusades, cf. also Cohen 2003, p. XXVIII).

124 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 32, p. 112: “[...] en þó leituðu þeir við at færa hann til kirkju ok gátu ekki komit honum nema á einn gilsþrom þar skammt ofan frá sér ok fóru heim við svá búit ok sǫgðu bónda þenna atburð. [...] Annan dag jóla var farit at leita við enn at færa Glám til kirkju; váru eykir fyrir beittir, ok gátu þeir hvergi fært hann, þegar sléttlendit var ok eigi var forbrekkis at fara; gengu nú frá við svá búit”.

125 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 28, pp. 112-113. “Inn þriðja dag fór prestur með þeim, ok leituðu allan daginn, ok Glámr fannsk eigi. Eigi vildi prestur optar til fara, en sauðamaðr fannsk, þegar prestur var eigi í ferð. Létu þeir þá fyrir vinnask at færa hann til kirkju ok dysjuðu hann þar, sem þá var hann kominn. Litlu síðar urðu menn varir við þat, at Glámr lá eigi kyr”.

126 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 32, p. 110.

127 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 35, p. 119: “[...] ok er upp var lokit hurðunni, sá Grettir, at þrællinn rétti inn höfuðit, ok sýndisk honum afskræmiliga mikit ok undarlíga stórskorit. [...] hann gnæfði ofarlíga við rjáfrinu”.

4.2.2 Elusive monstrosity

Some transformers are not just remarkable for their adoption of nasty looks which they carry as a token of monstrosity. They may transgress borders in other ways, too, which imply how unbound they are to the spatial and corporeal rules of their world. These monsters are capable of escaping geographical as well as somatic limitations, and thereby demonstrate their impalpability; they emphatically convey their superiority beyond human understanding, let alone control.

Glámr, as described above, passes through a *draugr* transformation before he meets Grettir. The scene of Grettir's and Glámr's wrestling is the key scene after which Grettir's luck will decline – a scene that underpins the hero's lack of good fortune.¹²⁸ This moment is crucial for the analysis of the uncanniness and elusiveness of Glámr's *second* phase of transformation. After Grettir and Glámr have been engaged in combat for a while they fall through the door out of the house and into the yard. This is the moment when Glámr utters his curse on Grettir:

“[...] Þú munt verða útlægr gorr 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.”¹²⁹

The focus in the context of elusive monstrosity is put on Glámr's eyes. Grettir is cursed to always see Glámr's huge eyes, illuminated by the moonlight, in front of him. Out of fear Grettir will seek for company as soon as darkness falls – a condition most dangerous for an outlaw. Like he did with Kárr, Grettir beheads Glámr, what suffices to cause sudden and ultimate death, even for a *draugr*. Glámr does not appear in the saga again, nor is his name uttered in context with Grettir's fear. Nor does the saga ever mention scenes where his eyes *really* glow in the dark when Grettir is alone. However, the killing does not vanquish all of Glámr's identity: The body is destroyed, but the fear of seeing his huge pale eyes staring at him through the darkness stays with Grettir.¹³⁰

128 Instead of other monsters, which are frequently used as simple tools to comically or ironically reduce a larger-than-life hero, cf. Hume 1980, p. 3, the encounter with Glámr has far-reaching consequences and a completely different tone. There is nothing comic or ironic about Glámr. Instead, the encounter between him and Grettir provides the key for Grettir's downfall. As the scene is of huge relevance for the rest of the saga, it is carefully prepared: The audience is hooked by the saga's introduction of Glámr as an ambiguous figure, the suspense is raised when the saga avoids direct contact with the revenant until Grettir comes to fight, causing a high level of tension shortly before it comes to the crucial key moment, cf. Torfi Tulinius 2000, p. 255.

129 *Grettis saga*, ch. 35, p. 121.

130 In a later chapter this fear of the dark will be discussed in more detail.

The uttered curse and Grettir's nyctophobia generate doubts about Glámr's definite extinction. Glámr is ontologically obscure and indistinct.¹³¹

The eyes are of central importance for this development. The saga emphasises his extraordinarily large eyes, even when Glámr is still alive.¹³² The gaze of eyes, especially that of dead people, proves to be charged by some degree with fearfulness and severe unease in Old Icelandic literature.¹³³ These saga scenes suggest an idea of the Evil Eye.¹³⁴ Moreover, in learned circles Glámr's shining eyes might have been associated with biblical evil: shining eyes reveal monsters as the offspring of fallen angels who mated with the Daughters of Cain.¹³⁵ In *Beowulf*, for instance, Grendel is declared descendant of Cain, and he, too, is known for his eyes from which a flamy, most dreadful light is shining: “[...] him of éagum stód / ligge gelícost léoht unfaéger [...]”¹³⁶. Monsters sharing this shiny ocular attribute are likely to have been associated with the fall of angels.¹³⁷

Demonic nature is a trait shared by many monsters in medieval literature. The same applies to Ögmundr who is known to be of black magical upbringing and ogreish maternal parentage. Half man, half monster, he enjoys the advantages of both worlds. His monstrous half enables him to be superior in battle. While Oddr needs a magical shirt to be safe from harm,¹³⁸ it seems that Ögmundr is protected by his monstrous nature or his own magical abilities which shield him.¹³⁹ Oddr stands puzzled when no weapon can injure Ögmundr. Within the rules of a fantastical world Oddr's own invincibility is logical and comprehensible, and all the more is it physically concrete: Oddr owes his somatic invulnerability to a magical object.¹⁴⁰ If he forfeited the shirt, his body would be exposed to physical injury, just like any other man's. Ögmundr's invulnerability in their first encounter is not bound to any kind of armour but is in fact

131 For a discussion on ontological uncertainty in saga literature cf. Torfi Tulinius 2000, pp. 253-256.

132 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 32, p. 110.

133 Cf. *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 33 mentions how the body of the deceased Þórólfr bægifótr is not touched until the eyes have been well closed. Arnkell even warns the people to take care not to pass in front of the corpse until the eyes had been closed. Cf. also the scene of Skalla-Grímr's death in *Egils saga*: Egill avoids his father's gaze, approaching him from behind to shut his eyes, cf. *Egils saga*, ch. 58, p. 174.

134 Cf. Poole 2004, p. 6: The fact that Grettir fears Glámr's stare draws his gaze closer to the idea of evil eye, which is mostly imposed on people by gypsies, wayfaring men or other dubious people, cf. Poole 2004, p. 6. Cf. also Williams 1996, p. 151.

135 Cf. Williams 1996, pp. 149-150.

136 *Beowulf* 726-727.

137 Cf. Williams 1996, p. 150.

138 Oddr receives the shirt in ch. 12, shortly before his first encounter with Ögmundr in ch. 13.

139 Cf. the battle sequence in ch. 13, p. 248.

140 The focus here is emphatically on *invulnerability*, not *invincibility*, as the latter is secured not just by a protective shirt but by the *völva*'s prophecy in ch. 2.

due to his demonic nature. However, this invulnerability is not thoroughly omnipresent. In a later saga-chapter the narrative sacrifices this advantage in favour of Ögmundr's facial transformation: The face needs to get torn off in order to grow back monstrously.

However, physical invulnerability and invincibility are not the only properties which hamper a full comprehension of Ögmundr's nature and abilities. Particularly noteworthy is also Ögmundr's artistry in untraceability and his prowess to vanish at will.¹⁴¹ Often, Ögmundr leaves the scene by unusual means. The first encounter introduces a pattern that will be stuck to in following battle scenes: They talk, they fight, and then they part on unsettled terms. When Oddr and his men return to their ships they find Þórðr killed, and Oddr angrily searches the grounds to avenge his friend. However, the saga states that Ögmundr did not simply leave the place but that he vanished without leaving any trace.¹⁴² Similar reactions by Ögmundr to escape the situation can be seen in chapter 22 at the end of their second fight. Ögmundr kills Oddr's son in battle, causing the enraged Oddr to jump over the cliff towards him to avenge his son. Yet: “Ögmundr brá þá skjótt við ok steypiti sér ofan fyrir hamrana í sjóinn at höfðinu, svá at hvítfyssti upp á móti. Ekki kom Ögmundr upp síðan, svá at Oddr gæti þat sét”.¹⁴³ This scene shows somatic dissolution (probably enabled by Ögmundr's magical abilities) where the subject merges with the sea, disintegrates in water or uses water magically to vanish. Ögmundr conflates with an element – an interesting property which is preferably applied to visualise monstrosity in the Middle Ages.¹⁴⁴ The same applies to chapter 23, after Oddr has ripped off Ögmundr's face. Grievously wounded, Ögmundr again manages to escape by auxiliary service of the elements. This time the earth opens up, and swallows him, closing again above his head.¹⁴⁵ Keeping in mind that the mechanisms and the forces of nature were largely beyond human comprehension in the Middle Ages, this bond, or maybe even complicity, between the monstrous and the elemental must have pushed an already elusive figure like Ögmundr into ontological grey-zones.

141 The battle scenes all follow a similar pattern: Oddr cannot kill Ögmundr, but neither can he befriend him – a condition which marks Ögmundr as different, and which pushes him even further into elusiveness as he does not obey the rules of the narrative's battle scenes which were established in previous fights with other opponents (defeating or befriending opponents).

142 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 13, p. 250.

143 *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 22, p. 292.

144 As outlined in the discussion on dragon monstrosity: cf. Williams 1996, pp. 204-205. Cf. also Williams 1996, pp. 183-207 for a detailed overview on monstrosity combined with elements, such as dragons, Melusine, Leviathan, the sirens, Pegasus, or harpies. There are also monstrous figures with vegetal and mineral combinations, cf. Williams 1996, pp. 207-215.

145 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 23, p. 296: “Jörðinn luktist saman fyrir ofan höfuðit á Ögmundi, ok skildi svá með þeim”.

5. Metamorphosis : A medieval concept of change

In the case of monstrous creatures, the readers face the issue that they often embody discourses which are hard to express by a narrative's language. They need to read the monster – consciously or unconsciously – in order to understand the underlying concept of its existence. What is essential to the monsters of this thesis is the fact that they all are humans who transform into monsters. In the case of Fáfnir and Glámr the narratives benefit from the traditional characteristic that the race of dragon or lindworm is known to provide human transformers on occasion, and that a *draugr* in any case originates from a human being. In the case of Ögmundr the transformation is not as distinct, but he constantly changes his appearance, and over a large span of his presence in the saga his monstrosity is steadily augmented. In the end it does not matter so much how these monsters differ in their way of transformation, whether the bodily change is singular or multiple, clearly defined (lindworm, *draugr*) or non-specific and obscure (steady changes / projected into fear). What matters more is the fact that these monsters *do* transform, and do not appear as offspring of monstrous races who were born like this. What happens to our monsters is the process of metamorphosis. Hence, the next sub-chapters are concerned with the question of what the image of metamorphosis meant to a medieval audience.

5.1 Hybridity and metamorphosis

Why could the monsters examined in this thesis not exist as offspring of independent races, or as hybrids? The difference between hybridity and metamorphosis makes it obvious why the hybrid would never work in our transformers' cases, and why metamorphosis is imperative. What is metamorphosis? It derives from the Greek word *μεταμόρφωσις*, and its most usual definition would be “transformation of substance”.¹⁴⁶ The question at hand is what the concept of metamorphosis is about. Caroline Walker Bynum answers this question in her book about metamorphosis and identity. She relates medieval monstrosity to concepts of change, and distinguishes between two basic modes of change: the first one would be replacement-change which she exemplifies by

¹⁴⁶ Bynum 2005, p. 85.

the image of exchanging sneakers for high heels; the second one is the change of one entity into another, the alteration of modes of being, appearance or qualities.¹⁴⁷ For the following discussion the focus will first be put on examining the difference between hybridity and metamorphosis, and why our monsters need to transform.

Bynum states that in the Middle Ages there are two major ideas of the monstrous, the hybrid and metamorphosis. The hybrid is formed of several bodies or concepts, a mixed being, an entity of at least two parts. Thereby it rejects the idea of total change, combining characteristics into one body. It exists in an inherently physical and visual form, displaying “two-ness, and the simultaneity of two-ness”.¹⁴⁸ The idea of the conflation of human and animal traits does not appear solely in medieval Europe but is distributed all over the world.¹⁴⁹ The hybrid does not offer a concept of change, but presents a world of simultaneity and multiplicity. It conveys its monstrosity by what it looks like, by combining contradictory elements, thus creating a notion of the abnormal. The very basic elements of hybridity are therefore two-ness *and* paradox. Metamorphosis on the other hand is the image of a “labile world of flux and transformation”¹⁵⁰, and therefore can be understood as the conceptualizing of process, *mutatio*, while the hybrid cannot. One entity changes into another, and the change cannot be seen in the resulting body, which shows no marks of the former entity anymore.

Yet, Bynum explains that they are not totally unlike. Both can fulfil a function of destabilisation and revelation of the world as both suggest that our world is disordered.¹⁵¹ She also states that they differ in what their revelation is about: As the hybrid forces incompatible categories into coexistence it thereby reveals a world of difference and contradiction, yet also multiplicity, concomitance and fusion. The world it reveals is multiple.¹⁵² However, hybrids exist without any temporal dynamics. Coexisting categories comment on each other. Metamorphosis, on the other hand, is highly temporal and evolutionary, and does not *combine* categories but *breaches* them. In contrast to the hybrid, the transformer basically runs along a temporary axis. That means transformation implies a development according to a certain time-line, while the hybrid on the other hand simply exists without any evolution. The hybrid is a being that

147 Cf. Bynum 2005, p. 19.

148 Bynum 2005, p. 30.

149 Cf. Blumberg 2003, p. 201.

150 Bynum 2005, p. 30.

151 Cf. Bynum 2005, p. 30-31.

152 Cf. Bynum 2005, p. 31.

is, while the transformer is a being that *evolves*. Hence, transformers require narratives, while the hybrid can exist by visual means alone. Metamorphosis reveals an ever-changing world, displaying things under way, a world of constant alteration, where nothing stands still but all is flux.¹⁵³

Some monsters, such as trolls and giants, form a whole race other from humanity.¹⁵⁴ However, there is also monstrosity, connected with the animalistic, in humans. The most famous is the shape-shifter.¹⁵⁵ The difference between Old Icelandic shape-shifters and the monstrous transformers explored in this thesis is that the transformers morph into something else without the prospect of a reversion to their original (human) shape, while shape-shifters can consciously switch back and forth, for example Loki or King Siggeir's mother.¹⁵⁶ This ability includes a widely distributed trait of the shape-shifter in medieval literature: it *usually* contains human rationality beneath the monstrosity. Both Loki and Siggeir's mother act consciously and with a purpose. The medieval werewolf is often a victim of evil women, and condemned to live a certain time of his life in the lupine shape with the torment of retained human nature beneath the animal body.¹⁵⁷ There are also instances of humans with werewolf or lupine nature in Old Icelandic saga literature where rationality disappears while animalistic rage takes over, for example in the scene when Kveld-Úlfr attacks his own son Egill and kills his nurse. Still, even though these outbreaks of monstrosity are uncontrolled, they are temporary, and the original human shape is regained completely.

Hence, with the shape-shifter's change of corporeal properties it is *not* implied that the human underneath truly becomes a monster. Humanity is either always present, for example when the shape-shifter keeps rationality, or is regained. Shape-shifting is temporarily limited and utterly transitory. The transformer on the other hand has no control over his alteration, and there is no prospect of returning to the original state: Fáfnir, Ögmundr and Glámr either stay the way they are after their transformation, or they keep on morphing into other shapes. The original shape is lost to them. Additionally, even though both ideas – shape-shifting and metamorphosis – show some

153 Cf. Bynum 2005, p. 31.

154 Cf. Schulz's detailed discussion on giants from 2004.

155 The best-known shape-shifting form would probably be the werewolf, cf. Williams 1996, p. 121, of whom there are accounts in Old Icelandic sources.

156 Loki for example can turn into a bird by robing himself with plumage, cf. e.g. *Drymskviða*, st. 5, p.

164, or Signý's malevolent mother-in-law is presumed to shape-shift into a she-wolf at night to devour Signý's brothers, and switches back to being a woman again by day, cf. *Völsunga saga*, chapter 5, pp. 118-119.

157 Cf. Williams 1996, p. 121.

sort of alteration process, they differ in direction: The shape-shifter becomes a beast or animal by changing appearance, our transformers on the contrary change their appearance as a result of their monstrosity. Still, the idea of shape-shifting connects with the concept of metamorphosis and transformation, as all forms of bodily change suggest that the boundaries which design our shape are unstable.¹⁵⁸ The use of bodily change in literature is but the medieval literary testimony of the general medical view on the body. The body was regarded as something porous and, in its contours, colouring and functioning, highly malleable.¹⁵⁹

5.2 The medieval concept of change and the imperative of transformation

Bynum detects an interesting development within the medieval understanding of change. Generally, people in the mid-twelfth century were concerned with the idea of development. Yet, not with physical development, but with the character's growth to the fullest, psychological development in order to grow to the ideal version of the self which fulfils the standards of a particular social role.¹⁶⁰ With the turn of the century however, this idea died down, giving way to the idea of radical change, which implies the change of one entity into another. This modification paved the way for the renewed proliferation of metamorphosis stories, which had been popular in Antiquity but not during the early Middle Ages.¹⁶¹ Bynum states that the proliferation of tales about vampires, fairies, or werewolves testifies to a certain enthusiasm for alterity and escapism – but “also to a fascination with, and horror at, the possibility that persons might, actually or symbolically, become beasts or angels, suddenly possessed by demons or inspired to prophecy”.¹⁶² This describes a general European development which also fits the Icelandic production of literature, which has accounts of werewolf stories or other transformational processes. If one compares kings' sagas or 'classical' family sagas with late *fornaldarsögur* or *lygisögur*, it becomes obvious that the medieval Icelandic literature enhanced the density of fantastic and escapist elements. Some of the *fornaldarsögur* resemble the genre of *Märchen*, fairy-tales, more than they

158 Cf. Williams 1996, pp. 123-124.

159 Cf. Cohen 2003, p. XXVIII.

160 Cf. Bynum 2005, p. 23.

161 Cf. Bynum 2005, p. 25.

162 Bynum 2005, p. 25-26.

resemble earlier sagas, which used hagiography as a model. This modification towards more fantastic story-writing allows change to be illustrated in a more radical way. Change is not limited to the development of character anymore, but it can also be physical. Hence, the Icelandic preoccupation with more fantastic and escapist elements conforms to the overall European proliferation with them after 1200.

Bynum locates the roots of this alteration in the conception of change in the context of changing social conditions throughout the medieval Christian Occident, coming about by agricultural, economic, and urban advancements.¹⁶³ These developments changed people's limitations, admittedly primarily for the members of the privileged social strata. However, they enabled people to gain a sense of choosing their own social and cultural position.¹⁶⁴ Granted, medieval Iceland witnessed no fundamental economic or urban changes in the Middle Ages, but people nevertheless experienced changing social conditions. These range from the establishment of a new society in the age of settlement, over the religious change in 999/1000, to the social insecurity of the Sturlung Age, and the submission to Norwegian overlordship. These changes proceeded within a few centuries only, and they all offered new possibilities but also formulated a new set of rules. Change happened radically, especially after the Christianisation and in the years after the Sturlung Age had ended.¹⁶⁵

5.2.1 *The human monster*

After examining their monstrosity and elusiveness in earlier chapters, the centre of this chapter lies in the examination of the monsters' closeness to humanity. The bridging back to the Freudian understanding of the uncanny can help to explain the imperative of such transformations, while Bynum's idea of metamorphosis can help to build the bridge from uncanniness to the perception of inevitable change.

The important thing which characterises the concept of bodily transformation is that there is the simultaneous idea of retaining identity; the self may be transformed but it is

163 Cf. Bynum 2005, p. 26.

164 Cf. Bynum 2005, p. 26-27.

165 For further reading on the development of the Icelandic social strata, the flexibility of social or political relations, the limits of power acquisition, and the change through Christianisation cf. Byock, 1990.

not lost.¹⁶⁶ This enables the audience to understand change as a change of substance, but not of identity. This conforms to the medieval discussion that went on about rejecting the idea of complete change of being, and retaining the identity of things, their “*unitas*, as well as their spatiotemporal continuity, despite physical or spiritual transformation”.¹⁶⁷ To detect the imperative of transformation within our monsters, and in order to clarify the monsters' connection with humanity one needs to approach the texts again. Taking a look at the events in *Völsunga saga* with Fáfnir and his specific case of metamorphosis, the spatiotemporal continuity Bynum talks about can be traced. The process in Fáfnir's case is the adjustment of the body to the soul. Here we come to the question of identity, and even though metamorphosis is about physical change, in Fáfnir's case it simultaneously demonstrates the continuity of character. Reginn describes his brother as grim and greedy when he was still a human being.¹⁶⁸ Fáfnir's monstrosity surely can be seen visually by his later serpentine appearance, but it most severely relates to his avaricious nature he already had when he was still a human. It is when he commits patricide, and seizes the cursed treasure for himself, that he transforms: “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 [...]”¹⁶⁹

His monstrous transformation is consequential and logically consistent, yet it does not personify Fáfnir's changed character, simply because it has not change. Instead Fáfnir's metamorphosis personifies the continuity of his avarice. It can be witnessed here that change through metamorphosis enables the audience to understand change as a transformation of substance, but not of identity. Fáfnir's case is indicative of the above-noted medieval discussion about rejecting the idea of complete change of achieving and retaining *unitas*. It portrays spatiotemporal continuity, which means that despite his transformation he still is the same person he was a moment ago. Instead of having a hybrid symbolising two-ness, mutability and admixture, the transformer expresses the idea of bodily susceptibility to change and at the same time the idea of identity connoted to one-ness and continuity. The transformation is an adjustment of the body to the inner depravity.

Glámr's first transformation from man to *draugr* is not surprising, as he was described as asocial and hostile before. What is different to Fáfnir's corporeal change is

166 Cf. Bynum 2005, p. 28.

167 Bynum 2005, p. 28.

168 Cf. *Völsunga saga*, ch. 14. p. 143; p. 145.

169 *Völsunga saga*, ch. 14. p. 145.

that Glámr's is channelled through the passage of death. Death proves to be the channel of Glámr's second transformation, too: Only after Glámr has been beheaded, Grettir is haunted by the fear to see Glámr's eyes in the dark. This suggests, terrifyingly, that the physical mantle incorporating our being or soul is no definite frame – a suggestion which fits well into the Christian (and originally Aristotelian) idea of the detachedness of the soul from the body.¹⁷⁰ In Glámr's case, too, the continuity of identity is depicted by metamorphosis, assimilating the body to the figure's character. He transforms physically but stays the same asocial being he was before as a human.

Glámr's horror is projected into Grettir's fear. He stays alive in Grettir's nycto- and (nocturnal) monophobia which are universal fears of mankind. Horrifyingly, Glámr's final state of being is detached from all physicalness. The intensity of this status is achieved by the obscurity of missing corporeality and a simultaneous lurking in the dark. From this moment Glámr transcends all borders of physical presence, and is irreversibly interwoven with the hero's psyche. This is why the saga needs to present a certain transformation. If Glámr was exclusively a *draugr*, he could be faced and killed, just like the *draugr* Kárr. The typical *draugr* is, after his living human body has died, a member of the otherworld, a threat to the society. Glámr, however, is more than that. After being killed, he cannot be fought anymore as he does no longer palpably exist, he is physically inaccessible. Yet in turn, as soon as it begins to darken, the fear of the dark is omnipresent in Grettir's mind, and Glámr still poses an ubiquitous psychological threat. To embody this *human* fear, Glámr has to go beyond that form of monstrosity, escape the boundaries of otherness and step into the shadows of the human psyche.

Being half man, half monster, Ögmundr enjoys the advantages of both worlds. As outlined in a previous chapter, he even transgresses spatial borders by vanishing or by conflating with the elements. He cannot die by Oddr's hand but can have his face grow back. Simultaneously however, he can live and work as a human, he is a successful and well-known Viking, son of a king, and king himself in later years over the famous realm of Novgorod. As well as witnessing him going berserk, the audience can see him negotiating and offering settlements.

An interesting passage bearing witness to this mixture is found in Oddr's conversation with the odinic Rauðgrani. This scene surely functions to establish

¹⁷⁰ This mentality portrays the medieval conviction of the antagonism between body and soul, which found its apex in high- and late medieval religious movements such as repentance, culminating in anti-carnal acts of flagellants in the hope of equalising with Christ (*imitatio*), cf. Dinzelbacher / Sprandel 2008.

Ögmundr's unquestionable monstrosity, and the fact that he was arguably *produced* to avenge Oddr's raid of Bjarmaland provides an eerie and sinister background deeply woven into Oddr's own deeds. Besides that, it also forges a picture of Ögmundr that is very crucial for this discussion of monstrosity: It tells of how Ögmundr kills his friend and foster-father to-be while he is asleep in his bed.¹⁷¹ This is not the depiction of a fire-breathing dragon or a venom-spraying serpent, nor that of a roof-riding *draugr* or a man-eating troll – it is the depiction of a man amongst men who commits a human crime. To emphasise the severity of his deed, the text states that it is not just a killing but a murder,¹⁷² which had a deeper meaning of atrocity and infamy in Old Icelandic society.¹⁷³ This is not the act of a monster, but of a man behaving monstrously. The saga makes the effort not just to present his otherworldly monstrosity, but it is also denouncing him in a human social frame, branding him a terrible and iniquitous *níðingr*.¹⁷⁴

The same applies to the much shorter description of the killing of Hreiðmarr by Fáfnir.¹⁷⁵ Driven by avarice, Fáfnir commits not just a killing but even worse he is disloyal to his blood-kin and commits patricide. Scenes such as these draw the monsters closer to the human realm of crime. Fantastic monstrosity is linked with realistic depravity via the human ability to commit a felony. The unease one might feel by the presence of a human monster is nourished by the monster's willingness to atrocious murder coupled with the verification of his supernatural status.

The mingling of the otherworld and the human world takes a noteworthy course in *Örvar-Odds saga* in particular. Ögmundr's ability to function in both worlds saves him from meeting the archetypal fate of a monster: neither is he killed by Oddr, nor does any other man gain the honour of killing an extraordinary demonic Viking. After Oddr's and Ögmundr's inconclusive last battle, the latter leaves the scene with the saga author's comment that he then ruled over Novgorod for a long time.¹⁷⁶ Both the chapter and their whole dealings with each other end with a quite peculiar tone: Ögmundr sends gifts with words of reconciliation, and Oddr accepts.¹⁷⁷ This is the final word about

171 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 19, p. 282.

172 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 19, p. 282: “[...] hann drap hann sofanda í sæng sinni ok myrði hann síðan”.

173 There are saga scenes which mirror this. *Egils saga*, ch. 60, comments on the shameful of secret killings at night, which is even worse as the night covers the deed too: “Eigi mun konungr láta at eggjask um öll níðingsverk þín; eigi mun hann láta Egil drepa í nótt, því at náttvíg eru morðvíg”.

174 Cf. Kroesen 1985, p. 655.

175 Cf. *Völsunga saga*, ch. 14, p. 145.

176 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 30, p. 336.

177 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 30, p. 337.

Ögmundr, a strikingly anti-climatic ending. Over long stretches of the saga, Ögmundr is depicted as the ultimate evil creature. He even prophesies ill fortune for himself through Oddr's revenge.¹⁷⁸ Yet, he is not killed by the hero which would have been a common fate for a monster. Instead, Oddr seems to grow tired of their enmity, and accepts Ögmundr's strongly emphasised insuperability. After all their exceptional fights the reconciliation appears rather like a side note.¹⁷⁹

Yet, if the figure of Ögmundr is analysed as above, this ending illuminates Ögmundr's monstrosity. It is not about filling lines and telling the story, but it is a narrative tool for providing a final stroke contributing to (and simultaneously explaining) Ögmundr's elusiveness. Comparing the reconciliation episode to everything we learned about him before, it surely does not neutralise his monstrosity. However, this atypical ending is essential for the figure; the evil nature of the transformer is drawn closer to a simple human being, showing that Ögmundr is, in all his evil, magic and monstrosity, at least partially human, and can function within human society. There is no binary divide between good and evil. Ögmundr does not work in anti-structures, but as outlined above, he straddles two worlds, he is somatically unstable, and elusive. Additionally, unlike Oddr's encounters with the giants, which takes place in unequivocally supernatural places, such as Risaland, this last encounter with Ögmundr seems to emphasise the realism of *locus*.¹⁸⁰ In its entirety, the saga presents an abstruseness about Ögmundr's affiliation, hampering a simple interpretation of this figure.¹⁸¹ He is abnormally boundless. His actions as a man amongst men within the real world show that he does not belong exclusively to the otherworld.¹⁸² Instead of Ögmundr's death, reconciliation comes about like after a common feud. It is a small-scale humanisation to reduce his absolute supernatural and almost devilish evil nature. It makes the terrifying proposal that he is not a monster per se but a human monster or a monstrous human – the prerogative of bodily transformation as an act of adjustment, and the prerogative of the uncanny feeling that such evil does not lurk in monsters but in people too.

178 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 22, p. 292.

179 Ögmundr offers reconciliation in numerous instances, but Oddr always refuses.

180 There is a detailed description of the political geography of this part of the world precluding Oddr's and Ögmundr's last encounter, cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 30, pp. 333-334.

181 Cf. Ferrari 2009, p. 375.

182 Cf. Ferrari 2006, p. 245-246.

5.2.2 Facial masking

After this examination of the connection between the transformers and humanity, I will focus on the *disconnection*, a visualising or supportive tool for human transformation practices: the practice of masking. The analysis of the transformers shows that there is, especially in the case of Glámr and Ögmundr, particular focus on the face. In Glámr's case it is the eyes which are of special interest; in the case of Ögmundr the focus is repeatedly drawn to his face, e.g. when it is described how his face, apart for the eyes and the teeth, is hidden by felted hair. These transformers obviously tend to have their faces, in any fashion whatsoever, strikingly accentuated. Even though there is not as much focus on Fáfñir's face it is known that he wears a helmet which he refers to as *ægishjálmr* 'helm of terror'.¹⁸³ There is no further information about it besides its name and that everyone is afraid of it.¹⁸⁴ Nevertheless, as the same image of the helm-wearing lindworm is also preserved in eddic poetry and in Snorri's *Prose Edda*, one may assume that Fáfñir's masking was a recurrent feature.¹⁸⁵ Likewise does the German image of the *Tarnkappe*, the cloak of invisibility, suggest some relationship to the helm, as both are associated with visual transformation and instability. As there are unfortunately no descriptions of what the *ægishjálmr* looks like, it is debatable if it is meant to be a helm per se or if the word describes something symbolic. But it is doubtless that the helm is associated with Fáfñir's transformation, as he did not wear it before.

Ögmundr's mask is similarly imprecise in description. Although it seems more obvious that the mask is a real one, there is no information about its appearance, either. The only information is that it is referred to as *gríma*, the indigenous Norse term often used for masking devices.¹⁸⁶ Interestingly however, the saga does not only fail to describe the mask's appearance, it also never mentions what Ögmundr's real face looks like underneath his hair. All descriptions of his face include some sort of masking.¹⁸⁷

183 This translation is borrowed from Byock's translation of *Völsunga saga*, cf. Byock, *Saga of the Volsungs*, 1990 ch. 18, p. 64.

184 Cf. *Völsunga saga*, ch. 18, p. 152: "Hafðir þú eigi frétt þat, hversu allt fólk er hrætt við mik ok við minn ægishjálm?"

185 This conversational scene where the helm is mentioned is one of the scenes in which the intertextual links with eddic poetry is clearly visible. The cryptic conversation between Sigurðr and Fáfñir in *Völsunga saga* is very close to the eddic text. The choice of words, *ægishjálmr*, is the same as in *Fáfñismál*, st. 16, p. 293, (also in the prose text following the last st. 44, p. 302). The same word appears in *Reginismál*, in the prose sequence after st. 14, p. 284: "Hann átti ægishjálm, er öll kvikendi hræddust við". Snorri uses the word in his *Edda* too, cf. *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, Skáldskaparmál, passage 47: Frá Fáfni, Regin ok Sigurði, p. 157.

186 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 30, p. 333; p. 335.

187 Cf. e.g. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 13, p. 247.

Even when he takes off the mask, Oddr does not see Ögmundr's *original* face, but a bald, fleshy one deformed by the marks of violence. There is also a case of full-body masking in chapter 22, as a mask as such does not imply facial masking only.¹⁸⁸ Ögmundr's already hairy appearance is extended in this chapter: he makes himself a cloak of beards and moustaches of subjugated kings,¹⁸⁹ which, along with his felted hair hiding his face, forges the strange figure of a hairy beast.

It is interesting to witness these transformers show affinity to masking practices, especially in transitional context: Fáfñir wears a helm after his transformation, Ögmundr wears a mask after his face has transgressed natural borders and has grown back. Instances such as these beg the question of what masking practices signify, and why they occur in transitional context?

Masking practices are not originally medieval but root in ancient times. There is archaeological evidence for the tradition of facial masks during the Iron Age, a tradition which becomes common in the Migration Period throughout Scandinavia.¹⁹⁰ Scandinavia is especially known for mask-like depiction on gold-foil figures and rune stones, but there are also real masks preserved (e.g. bronze mask from Helgö,¹⁹¹ or felt masks from the Viking settlement of Haithabu in Germany¹⁹²). Based on archaeological findings compiled in Back Danielsson's dissertation, she assumes that masking and ceremonial acts of transformation were prominent practices in the Scandinavian (late) Iron Age. The most interesting point in her argument is that the occurrence of (facial) masks is not random at all, but “instead they are found on borders, seemingly as binding elements between two materials or states. They are literally bridges for transformations”.¹⁹³ The use of masks occurs in moments of birth and death, or other transitions, such as the symbolic passage into adulthood or kingship succession.¹⁹⁴ These are (late) Iron Age ideas of transitional phases which may have survived fragmentarily until the Middle Ages.

As Back Danielsson illuminates, masking contexts in transitional phases are often connoted with death. This conforms to the saga scenes of Ögmundr and Fáfñir. The audience learns about the helm of terror only when Fáfñir is wounded and about to die.

188 Cf. Back Danielsson 2007, pp. 168-169.

189 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 23, p. 293.

190 Cf. Back Danielsson 2007, p. 139.

191 Cf. Back Danielsson 2007, p. 141.

192 Cf. Back Danielsson 2007, p. 136.

193 Back Danielsson 2007, p. 147.

194 Cf. Back Danielsson 2007, p. 104.

When Ögmundr is wounded by losing his face, he arrives at a grey zone of human understanding. Physically, this injury pushes him towards the threshold between life and death. However, as Ögmundr is fundamentally prone to physical instability, his mask could be examined against the idea of transformation. As outlined previously, the partial transformation appears after his face has been ripped off. He does not die, but instead his somatic instability and inborn supernaturalness cause his face to heal and transform (from his old face into the bald and deformed, fleshy head). Brought about either by death, be it literally or symbolically, or by other radical (bodily or social) changes, the transitional moment imperatively expresses a gap in continuity.¹⁹⁵ Hence, the mask is the visual marker, a transitional object of something bodily new which assists in bridging this gap.

Masks and helmets do not display realistic human faces, but they show typical characteristics, e.g. suggested eyes, noses or mouths, and therewith give a definition of what is regarded to be a normal face. Yet, they may also play with abbreviations, exaggerations and intensifications of those characteristics. Thus, they distort elements of normal faces into something that is very different and opposed to a common human face.¹⁹⁶ Viewed from this angle, the mask follows the same patterns as the somatic changes of transformers do: they create visibly another entity, another body than it was before.¹⁹⁷ Masks do not hide, neither do they obscure, but they are revelatory devices instead.¹⁹⁸ Just like transformers, just like any *monster*, a mask reveals (*monstrare*). It reveals the openness to transition, the openness to display something else than before; the appearance changes. A mask channels transformation in a visual manner, just as bodily change does; it is an objective passage through which human perception is enabled to recognise transformation. The human face behind the mask retreats to insignificant hinterlands, while the face of the mask is given stage to reveal its matter. The mask enables the wearer to perform or to display properties he could not have displayed before. Bodily transformation is expressed via an object. Simultaneously while witnessing the visualisation of transformation, of a new being, the process of dehumanisation can also be detected. Fáfnir for example, in his human shape, was not

195 Cf. Back Danielsson 2007, p. 104.

196 Cf. Back Danielsson 2007, p. 112; p. 283. Although Glámr wears no mask, this idea suits him too, as his face is reduced to one striking attribute in the crucial scene of cursing Grettir, his eyes.

Comparable to a mask which does not depict a real face, but rather facial, pronounced attributes, this literary focus, or zoom into the eye area, blanks everything else out and creates a new facial impression largely unlike ordinary human faces.

197 Cf. Back Danielsson 2007, p. 283.

198 Cf. Back Danielsson 2007, p. 283.

able to visualise his inner monstrosity. He needed to transform bodily to express that. The mask functions in the same way. It displays monstrosity while humanness is not *hidden* but rather *left behind*. It visualises the loss, not the concealment, of the human face. The mask can be understood as bringing out the other within, that part of the human self which is unstable and paradoxical.

5.2.3 *Freud and the saga monsters*

The paradox of monstrosity and closeness to humanity forges a medieval image of the (transformational) monstrous which is quite close to the Freudian idea of the uncanny. With all their corporeal differences from humanity, the view these transformers offer is largely anthropocentric. Transitional moments demarcate change from one entity to another. Form does change, visualised by somatic instability or by transitional objects aiding through the process. Yet, identity does not change, as while the transformer runs through transitional phases he still is the same person he was a moment ago. There is spatiotemporal continuity even though there is corporeal change.

The imperative of transformation lies within the function of the monster for the saga as a whole. The transformer carries depth and relevance for later events. By its closeness to humanity it reminds us, in the Freudian sense, of lurking danger from our own inside, of inborn drives and fears. Its transformation chills the reader because it suggests that change comes with alteration of substance, be it real or symbolical, be it the body which changes and dies, or social circumstances which affect our own life. Our transformers have to transform in order to trigger the feeling of the uncanny, and the uncanny in turn has to be triggered to remind people of their own fragile being or surroundings.

Fear of the monster per se would not induce the same atmosphere as the uncanny. How could the troll suggest the unease of instability if it is always the troll? How could the elf or the manticore? Fear is of course connected with transformers, too, as it can be seen in the scenes of Glámr's hauntings. The feeling of fear, however, is a sudden sensation which can be actually brought about by any monster. Not all scenes which scare are automatically uncanny. Uncanniness is triggered, according to Freud, by the unconscious knowledge of our own closeness to the monster's properties – a knowledge

that is surely present in transformation tales. So it happens that monstrous uncanniness is reserved for transformers who, by their transformation, are relevant for the saga's course of events or for its underlying tone – transformers who are indicators of change, instability or insecurity.

5.2.4 Summary

What the previous two chapters have shown is that remnants of ancient ideas of transitional moments manifest themselves in visual effects of dehumanisation coupled paradoxically with closeness to humanity. The sagas make the effort to establish a credible link to humanity, human backgrounds and character traits, especially sagas that centre around the relationship between hero and antagonist, such as *Grettis saga* and *Örvar-Odds saga*.¹⁹⁹ Transformational acts are imperative to secure three things: first, to visualise the certainty of bodily instability and of change, second, to emphasise simultaneously the continuity of identity. Third, they establish proximity to humanity, which causes, according to Freud's theoretical framework, a feeling of the uncanny rather than simple fear. Masking devices do not hide; their main purpose is instead to assist in, and to visualise, transformational processes.

6. Nexus: Curse and prophecy and the Old Icelandic concept of fate

What is remarkable about transformers-episodes is their relevance for the hero or for the saga itself. Change is inevitably brought on by certain conditions or inner properties. Secondly, the transformation, or the transformed being, entails inevitable events. As our monsters are humans, they suggest, terrifyingly, that these violated corporeal boundaries are principally open to all people. There is a nexus between these uncanny transformers and the medieval concept of change by metamorphosis. It is the inevitable outcome of things that lingers with these transformers, a sense of

¹⁹⁹ The difference between Glámr and Ögmundr is that the first is introduced as being a human who transforms, while the latter is right from the start depicted to be an ambiguous character prone to somatic instability who is able to transgress spatial borders.

uncontrollable predestination. Hence, all three transformers not only personify a human proneness to change but moreover they are all associated with the idea of predestination through the utterance of a curse or a prophecy to which the heroes must sooner or later submit.

Now in order to build a bridge between the medieval concept of change visualised through transformation and the Old Icelandic idea of fate, the following chapters focus on curses and prophecies, and on the idea of unavoidable events and predestination.

6.1 Uncanniness, repetition and fate

The feeling of uncanniness is predominant in those sagas which tie transformers to important events. To intensify the inevitability of future events, the author added the utterance of a curse or a prophecy. Yet, it is not solely the transformers' attribute of being human and simultaneously somatically unstable which adds to the feeling of the uncanny. Uncanniness is also nourished by patterns of repetition, and those with interlink with the monstrous are of special interest for this discussion. Before dealing with that very link however, the properties of repetition shall be specified first.

As outlined in a previous chapter about the idea of Freudian uncanniness, the drive of repetition belongs to the human subconscious. In the display of repetitive patterns Freud detects the subject's strife for maintenance and standstill. Anankastic repetition can be seen in ritualised performances or in obsessive-compulsive neuroses. This compulsion to repeat is what Freud declares to be a typical characteristic through which the death-drive can be expressed.²⁰⁰ According to Freud, the *Todestrieb*, the death-drive, refers to those drives striving for the end of their existence.²⁰¹ These drives are “Partialtriebe, dazu bestimmt, den eigenen Todesweg des Organismus zu sichern”.²⁰² Thus, it is often manifested in aggressive or provocative behaviour, and in a willingness to die.²⁰³ These principles of Freud's death-drive, also referred to as *thanatos*, can arguably be found in Icelandic sagas. To clarify my standpoint here, I do not claim that modern psychological ideas are smoothly applicable to medieval literature. There surely

200 Cf. Freud 1947, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*.

201 Cf. Torfi Tulinius 2009, p. 949. Cf. Freud 1947, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, p. 40: “Das Ziel alles Lebens ist der Tod”.

202 Freud 1947, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips*, p. 41.

203 Cf. Torfi Tulinius 2009, pp. 949-950.

were no psychoanalysts in medieval Iceland who formulated approaches to the human psyche comparable to the Freudian death-drive. Yet, it is interesting to see that within the sagas discussed in this dissertation there are not only repetitive patterns, but these repetitions are also connected with aggression or willingness to die.²⁰⁴

A narrative allows several options to express anankastic repetition, for example depicting a realistic phobia which then causes repetitive patterns in individuals' behaviour, as in the case of Grettir. There is also the possibility of having negative events repeated (the killings in *Völsunga saga*), but it is also possible to display recurring patterns of different nature, e.g. repetition of incomplete battles (Ögmundr and Oddr) or repeating mechanisms of escape (Ögmundr's vanishing-scenes). As briefly mentioned above, these expressions of repetition always contain either aggression or the willingness to die or acceptance of one's downfall to come. The sagas display more scenes of counter-productive, (self-)destructive or conflict-pushing behaviour, instead of, like in the sense of *eros*, a strive for survival, coherence and reproduction; interestingly, those scenes of negative behaviour can be found in close context with our transformers.

Völsunga saga for example, provides information about the existence of a curse: What happened in Reginn's and Fáfnir's past is that their brother Otr's killing committed by Óðinn, Loki and Hœnir was compensated by a treasure which the gods themselves seized from the dwarf Andvari, who in his anger “gekk í steininn ok mælti, at hverjum skyldi at bana verða, er þann gullhring ætti ok svá allt gullit”.²⁰⁵ Consequently, this statement induces a chain of killings: Hreiðmarr receives the gold first, as compensation for Otr, but is then murdered by Fáfnir, who wants to keep the treasure all for himself and retreats with it to Gnitahaiði. This is the starting point from which young Sigurðr is incited by Reginn to kill Fáfnir for him. The gold's curse is fulfilled – Fáfnir is killed. However, before Reginn can kill Sigurðr, the latter beheads his foster-father, and takes possession of the gold. Sigurðr's behaviour is at times (self-)destructive: When he is warned by the dying lindworm that the gold hoard will bring about Sigurðr's death. Entirely unimpressed, Sigurðr replies: “Heim munda ek ríða, þótt ek missta þessa ins mikla fjár, ef ek vissa, at ek skylda aldri deyja, en hverr frækn maðr vill fé ráða allt til ins eina dags”.²⁰⁶ A willingness to meet his (deadly) fate is embedded into a repetitive

204 For a detailed discussion of the death-drive in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, see Torfi Tulinius 2009.

205 *Völsunga saga*, ch. 14, p. 144. The image of death and killing is predominant: It is not just the curse which entails death, even the curse itself is only brought about by a killing: The gods only deprive Andvari of his gold because they have to compensate for their killing of Hreiðmarr's son Otr.

206 *Völsunga saga*, ch. 18, p. 154.

context: Against the background of several committed killings (Otr, Hreiðmarr, Reginn), Sigurðr accepts – unaffected by the lindworm's warnings – the prospect of death. Then the repetitive patterns prove to be present as Reginn plans to kill Sigurðr, but Sigurðr in turn kills Reginn – and is himself killed, years later, by his brothers-in-law, who meet a violent death too.

Similar patterns of (self-)destructive (or conflict-driving) behaviour can be witnessed in *Örvar-Odds saga*: Although Ögmundr fears that Oddr will deal him his deathblow (which does not happen), he faces him again and again. When his offers of settlement fall on deaf ears, he engages in conflict-pushing actions against Oddr and his companions. He kills people who Oddr holds most dear, and provides enough reasons for Oddr to take revenge.²⁰⁷ In a similar way, it is Oddr who shows characteristics of the death-drive. He acts in a primarily aggressive way in his encounters with Ögmundr, displaying destructive behaviour.²⁰⁸ These scenes all proceed in the same repetitive cycles: They meet, they talk, Ögmundr offers reconciliation, Oddr refuses, they clash, they cannot kill each other, they part, and Ögmundr vanishes.

Grettis saga shows another mechanism of expressing uncanny repetition. The hero is ruled by an obsessive-compulsive neurosis: First, Grettir's inability to endure darkness is mentioned over and over again.²⁰⁹ Second, the reader repeatedly catches Grettir making the dangerous mistake of seeking company as soon as darkness falls. Even the remarks on Grettir's nyctophobia are verbally quite similar and show little variation in the choice of words.²¹⁰ Grettir's willingness to accommodate men who might be hired murderers is ascribed to his intense fear.²¹¹ After Grettir has killed the assassin Grímr the narrator remarks: “En nú þóttisk Grettir sjá, hvat þat var, at taka við skógarmönnum”.²¹² Yet, the realisation of this danger does not protect him against the continued mistakes of taking strangers in.²¹³ He houses another skógarmaðr, Þórir, who

207 Cf. *Örvar-odds saga*, ch. 22, p. 292.

208 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, e.g. ch. 22, p. 290: “Hitt er ráð, 'sagði Ögmundr, 'at vit sættumst heilum sáttum.' 'Nei,' sagði Oddr, 'þat skal verða aldri [...]’”.

209 Cf. e.g. *Grettis saga*, ch. 51, p. 163 or ch. 54, p. 178.

210 Cf. statements such as: *Grettis saga*, ch. 35, p. 122-123: “[...] hann var orðinn maðr svá myrkfælinn, at hann þorði hvergi at fara einn saman þegar myrkva tók”; ch. 51, p. 163: “[...] en Grettir er svá myrkfælinn, at hann þorir hvergi at fara, þegar at myrkva tekr”; ch. 54, p. 178: “Grettir kvazk þat gjarna vildu, en sagði þó, at hann þóttisk varla einn saman vera mega fyrir myrkfælni”; ch. 55, pp. 178-179: “Honum þótti daufligt mjök á fjallinu, því at hann var mjök myrkfælinn”.

211 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 55, p. 178: “[...] eru þér ok vansénir, skógarmenninir, en illt þætti mér einum saman at vera, ef annars væri kostur”.

212 *Grettis saga*, ch. 55, p. 180.

213 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 56, p. 183: “Eptir þat vildi Grettir aldri við skógarmönnum taka, en þó mátti hann varla einn saman vera”.

is a hired assassin, too, and betrays Grettir.²¹⁴ However, he cannot but seek company as he is too afraid of the dark, and he knows that this repetitive compulsive behaviour may eventually lead to his death.²¹⁵ Grettir is limited in his social mobility, and in his conduct he seems to be paralysed: He sticks to behavioural patterns proven to cause life-threatening situations, and he is unable to change them. The first account of immovability is described in the scene of the curse as a nocturnal fight beneath a scattered cloud cover, when the clouds draw back and the moon illuminates Glámr's huge eyes. Grettir is paralysed long enough for Glámr to speak his curse. In accordance to his later inability to move freely from Glámr's curse this is the first indicator of later neurosis. His behaviour conforms to the phenomenon that through phobias or in dreams the subject is immobilised when facing a threat.²¹⁶

These patterns of repetition and the figures' willingness to act according to them (and according to other death-drive characteristics such as destructive behaviour, aggression or a willingness to die) bring to light one thing: Events will unfold according to their predicted course, whose direction cannot be changed by people's actions. Hence, repetition reveals the course of future events, e.g. Grettir's repeating statements of his inability to be alone foreshadows that this will lead to his destruction, just as the series of killings in *Völsunga saga* foreshadows later deaths.

In this sense, repetition-episodes are the agents of continuity, they stick uncompromisingly to the agenda of a previously uttered curse or prophecy. Another example is the *völva* in *Örvar-Odds saga* who predicts a long life for Oddr and that he will die at the place where he spent his youth.²¹⁷ Oddr tries to thwart the prophecy, by killing his horse for example, as she told him that his death will be caused by it. But even though he tries to avoid his fate and repeatedly engages in battle, it is impossible

214 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 56.

215 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 69 p. 222: “Þá gerðist svá mikit bragð at myrkfælni hans, at hann þorði hvergi at fara, þegar er rökkva tók. [...] 'en eigi mun ek þat lengr til lífs mér vinna,' segir hann, 'at vera einn saman.'”.

216 Cf. Poole 2000, p. 399. The fear of the dark is not only associated with phobic people but also largely with children. Indeed Grettir shows child-like attachment to his mother, and she “remains essential to his adult welfare, indeed to his very survival”, Poole 2000, p. 404.

217 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 2, pp. 207-208: “Þá varð henni ljóð á munni: 'Ægðu eigi mér, / Oddr á Jaðri, / elda skíðum, / þótt ýmist geipum / Saga mun sannast, / sú er segir völva. / Öll veit hún manna / örlög fyrir. / Ferr eigi þú svá / fjörðu breiða / né líðr yfir / láð ok vága, / þótt sjór yfir þik / sægjum drífi, – / hér skaltu brenna / á Berurjóðri. / Skal þér ormr granda / eitrblandinn, / fránn ór fornum / Faxe hausi. / Naðr mun þik höggva / neðan á fæti, / þá ertu fullgamall / fylkir orðinn”. It follows in prose, p. 208: “Þat er þér at segja, Oddr,' sagði hún, 'sem þér má gott þykkja at vita, at þér er ætlaðr aldr miklu meiri ein öðrum mönnum. Þú skalt lifa þrjú hundruð vetra ok fara land af landi ok þykkja þér ávallt mestr, er þá kemr þú, því at vegr þinn mun fara um heim allan, en aldri ferr þú svá víða, at hér skaltu deyja á Berurjóðri. Hestr stendr hér við stall, föxótr ok grár at lit. Hauss hans Faxe skal þér at bana verða.”.

that he falls. There is even a second 'prophecy', or a foresighted warning, uttered by the figure of Rauðgrani, who advises against seeking confrontation with Ögmundr because Oddr would “fá af honum miklu verra en fyrr”.²¹⁸ Comparable instances of prophecy or foreshadowing warnings occur in *Grettis saga* too, shortly before Grettir engages in combat with Glámr. Before he goes to Þórhallsstaðir Jökull tells him: “[...] illt mun af illum hlóta, þar sem Glámr er; er ok miklu betra at fásk við mennska menn en við óvættir slíkar”.²¹⁹ Hence, the narrative introduces the prospective encounter between Glámr and Grettir, foreshadowing the dramatic relevance. Such warnings by Rauðgrani or Jökull about matters to be avoided, formulate in reversal those events which *will* unfold. As Rauðgrani predicts, Oddr gets *af honum miklu verra en fyrr* – his son Vignir is killed. Jökull proves to be right, too, when he says that there is only evil to come from evil such as Glámr.

In the prophecy-episode in *Örvar-Odds saga* the reader meets a typical phrasing before poetic prophecies: “Þá varð henni ljóð á munni”.²²⁰ It is a device to introduce the narrative moment of recitation, but with the implication of involuntary utterance. The *völva* is taken by an intense impulse to speak in verse.²²¹ By this phrasing intentional composition is ruled out while it is implied that the speaker has access to forces beyond common human understanding and the speaker's own thoughts. The voice of the *völva* is the device through which unalterable or natural truth is channelled,²²² thus the verse receives a powerful, otherworldly aura.²²³ A prophecy like this establishes the perfect framework an adventurous narrative.²²⁴

Oddr refuses to acquiesce to his foster-father's request to invite the *völva*, and when she comes all the same to foresee people's future he reacts violently to her prophecy.²²⁵

218 *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 19, pp. 280.

219 *Grettis saga*, ch. 34, p. 117.

220 *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 2, p. 207.

221 Cf. Quinn 1998, p. 29.

222 Cf. Quinn 1998, p. 42, McKinnell 2005, p. 98.

223 This otherworldly aura is also brought about by the use of the *fornyrðislag* metre, the metre of pre-historical, mythological or legendary contexts, cf. Yelena Helgadóttir 2006, p. 1092. Yelena also points out that 'forn-' does not only refer to ancient matters, but it can also mean 'strange'. Oddr is by the way the only one who receives his prophecy in the eddic metre. As the poetic form is a more arresting, memorable and mysterious form of foreshadowing than prose, it highlights Oddr's prophecy. Additionally, Quinn hints at intertextual references between the saga narrative and *Völuspá*, established by the *völva*'s name Heiðr, which in *Völuspá* refers to the seeress who was burned by the *Æsir*. (*Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 2, p. 205: “Kona er nefnd Heiðr. Hún var völva ok seiðkona ok vissi fyrir óorðna hluti af fróðleik sínum”; *Völuspá*, st. 22, p. 8: “Heiði hana hétu, / hvars til húsa kom, / völu velspáa, / vitti hon ganda;”) A reference which, if intentionally added to *Örvar-Odds saga*, also strengthens the idea of the mythological and the prophetic, cf. Quinn 1998, p. 34.

224 Cf. Quinn 1998, p. 39.

225 McKinnell distinguishes between five different types of *völur* episodes according to the nature of those affected by her: 1. the unjust patriarch, 2. the hostile young man, 3. the young protégé of the

She uses the first and third person to talk about herself and declares to be a reliable source when she claims: “Öll veit hún manna / örlög fyrir.”²²⁶ Thus, she dispels any doubts about the truthfulness of her words as she portrays herself to be just the mouthpiece of already definite destinies.

Repetition is a characteristic of the Freudian death-drive to strive for continuity, *and* a characteristic of the Freudian uncanny, as *thanatos* is one of the inborn drives, whose depiction triggers an uncanny feeling inside. This continuity, conveyed by the existence of curses and prophecies, is coupled through the existence of a transformer with the medieval concept of instability and change. Chronologically, the utterance of the curse or prophecy precedes the transformation, so that the audience is aware of the hero's destiny, which always suggests a fatal change: In Oddr's and Sigurðr's case it is death, in Grettir's case it is nycto- and monophobia which then eventually builds the groundwork for his death. Of course, Grettir's death is technically brought about by a fatal wound caused by the witch Þuríðr's blood-magic. Yet, it is Grettir's need for company which enables the curse to unleash its power on him: Grettir himself is cautious, and avoids the wood she has sent to him with her ill wishings. It is only the condition of him living together with others, having a farmhand, that he is exposed to the curse. The farmhand is the one who brings the wood to Grettir's camp, after Grettir himself forbade his brothers to use that piece of wood as it carries evil.²²⁷

By combining these ideas, inevitable fate (through curse or prophecy) and real change (corporeal instability and transformation), the change of circumstances becomes preassigned and permanently validated. Moreover, the audience can foresee the fatality of the curse or prophecy with solid certainty. This coupling of predestination and fatal change suggests rather predestination *of* fatal change. Sagas containing this alliance provide fruitful insight into contemporary conceptions, which explain, or verify, the prominence of the belief in fate and predestination in medieval Iceland, which is so predominantly featured in Old Icelandic literature.

völva, 4. the female opponent, 5. the new-born infant. The prophecy episode in *Örvar-Odds saga* with Oddr's aggressiveness integrates smoothly into the category of the hostile young man, cf. McKinnell 2000, pp. 245-248, McKinnell 2005, pp. 104-106.

²²⁶ *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 2, p. 207.

²²⁷ Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 79.

6.2 *Collective fate*

The biggest difference between the three sagas, examined against the idea of fate, lies in the question of who is affected by this fate? In *Grettis saga* it is obvious that the narrative is individual-based and centres around the life of Grettir. Similarly, the curse by Glámr directed to Grettir alone. The same applies to *Örvar-Odds saga*, a saga which tells first and foremost of the adventures of the eponymous hero. The prophecy is about the hero's life and death only. These sagas and their respective predestination centre on the individual. In contrast, *Völsunga saga* focuses not on individual fate but on the doom of a collective.

The question at hand is who is affected by the curse of the gold in *Völsunga saga*? When the readers encounter Fáfñir, they already know about the committed killings (Otr, Hreiðmarr), and feel the reliable certainty that further killings for the gold will follow, as this continuity was established by Andvari's curse. So the uncanniness of encountering Fáfñir is due to the audience's identification of the certain repetition of killings, driven by the drive of human egoism, causing grudge and greed, properties commonly attributed to dragons.²²⁸ Read in the Freudian sense, Fáfñir appears as uncanny because he is the reminder of this repressed drive of egoism which is inherent in all people, and the reminder of inevitable repetition which suggests the impossibility of avoiding continuity. This is why in the diegesis Sigurðr has no reason to be afraid of Fáfñir nor does he feel any kind of uncanniness, while others, e.g. Reginn, do not dare to face him,²²⁹ or consider it a great accomplishment that Sigurðr killed him, like Brynhildr.²³⁰ Sigurðr does not need to fear Fáfñir and can eliminate him because he has no intention of seizing the gold in the first place. He is *not* led by avarice and does not use violence to achieve the drive's satisfaction. He only fulfils the vow he has made to Reginn. His initial reluctance to kill Fáfñir is more due to disinterest than to fear.²³¹

228 Cf. Glazyrina 2006, 292: Even in relatively late sagas which make use of traditional mythological motifs, the serpentine monster often connected to the idea of greed and avarice, see for example the dragon episodes in *Yngvars saga víðförla*. Interestingly, and in accordance to Grimm's mentioning of transformation in his enumeration of dragon characteristics, there is also an indication of transformation from man to dragon in *Yngvars saga víðförla*. For further reading on this cf. Glazyrina 2006.

229 Cf. *Völsunga saga*, ch. 13, p. 142: “[...] ok hefi ek spurt, at engi þorir at koma á mót honum fyrir vaxtar sakir ok illsku.”; ch. 18, p. 151: “Nú ríðr Sigurðr á heiðina, en Reginn hverfr í brott yfrit hræddr”.

230 Cf. *Völsunga saga*, ch. 28, p. 180: “Sigurðr vá at Fáfni, ok er þat meira vert en allt ríki Gunnars konungs”. At this point there is even a verse recited about this: “Sigurðr vá at ormi, / en þat síðan mun / engum fyrnast, / meðan öld lifir”.

231 Cf. Ármann Jakobsson, 2010.

The fact that Fáfnir's monstrosity does not originate in the monstrous form itself but in the ill nature of his human heart, puts the fear of the monster to another level. The awareness rises that the monster is not ultimately a being you encounter on a heath or in a cave, but instead it is most probably encountered within the human mind. The comprehension that Fáfnir's monstrosity is only the physical result of his greedy self, draws the danger of monstrous transformation closer to oneself. Consequently, Fáfnir verifies what has been mentioned in previous chapters about Freudian uncanniness and Bynum's perception of transformation: the image offered by the monster is fundamentally anthropocentric.²³² This anthropocentric view in *Völsunga saga* is not spotlighting the individual as much as the collective. It depicts the large-scale destruction of a ruling class or family, as *Völsunga saga* is the Icelandic counterpart to the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied* about the doom and downfall of the Burgundian dynasty. Consequently, this downfall portrays that Andvari's curse addresses everybody who owns the gold.²³³

By the existence of so much more textual evidence of the Nibelungen-material one can assume that the entirety of the plot about greed, betrayal, downfall and extinction of a whole family was known to the audience of *Völsunga saga* beforehand. When the audience meets Fáfnir, it is most probable that they can foresee at least the rough outline of coming events. Fáfnir personifies those human properties and future events which will happen to all those possessing the gold. His transformation visualises the horror of bodily adjustment to inner depravity. What is interesting is that his transformation is from man to lindworm, and not to dragon. The serpentine allusion and the venom-breathing makes monstrosity apparent. It is a worm-like appearance of the transformed man, who is deprived of legs and arms and forced to crawl and wriggle instead of walking upright, as a consequence of a transformation caused by his own character. Fáfnir is not the typical dragon, an ultimate, powerful being, able to walk and to fly. He is reduced to his core, and this core is ill. He “approaches *draconitas* rather than *draco*: a personification of malice, greed, destruction”.²³⁴ The serpentine monster as such brings chaos and destruction, it is lawlessness and disorder and defines the necessities for humanity to create order instead.²³⁵ In the case of *Völsunga saga* however, there is no order created: the figures' concept of revenge leads to destruction

232 Cf. Riches, 2003, p. 199.

233 Cf. *Völsunga saga*, ch. 14, p. 144: “[...]hverjum skyldi at bana verða, er þann gullhring ætti ok svá allt gullit”.

234 Tolkien 1983, p. 17.

235 Cf. Williams 1996, p. 206.

instead. So keeping in mind that the *monstrum* reveals, then what does it reveal? What is the displacement? The fear of repetition and continuity of drives, as well as the awareness of our own likeliness to metamorphose ourselves, are nothing but the “symbolic mirror of the transformation wrought upon the human personality through the effects of avarice”.²³⁶ This does not just highlight the human personality as an individual: Fáfnir brings to light those forces which endanger society. By his transformation he illuminates that these forces are not brought about via an Other but via the Us – the Us being a collective.

The cursed gold does not bring chaos in the first place, at least not as long as it is hoarded by Fáfnir. As much as he is a harbinger of social disorder, he also works as an agent of preserving the given social order by preventing the curse from circulating further.²³⁷ As long as he guards the treasure, the world of the protagonists enjoys social order – but Fáfnir's preserving function cannot be sustained, because of the repetition of drives. It is merely a matter of time until the curse spreads due to the effect of avarice. Myths “take place in a timeless present (or a past which exists to explain the present, or a predetermined future whose 'fate' is part of present consciousness)”.²³⁸ Hence, the encounter of a monstrous alter ego policing social borders, offers a literary platform to experience present consciousnesses through this alternate timeless past of myth, and to explore one's own human nature.²³⁹ The monster serves a didactic purpose and offers the possibility to philosophise on human nature through the medium of a narrative. Regarding the tragic development resulting from the cursed gold one can conclude that Fáfnir, who is introduced *before* the steady downfall of the main protagonists, is already a harbinger of the social disorder brought about by moral distortion from the inside.²⁴⁰

6.3 *Individual fate*

In contrast to the collective doom of a group, the following chapter highlights the literary expressions of individual fate. As already mentioned, *Grettis saga* as well as *Örvar-Odds saga* are about eponymous individuals. Grettir is a socially liminal figure

236 Evans 2005, p. 209.

237 Cf. Evans 2005, p. 239.

238 McKinnell 2005, p. 26.

239 Cf. Riches 2003, p. 199.

240 Cf. Evans 2005, p. 239.

himself: after growing to a relatively promising hero-figure at first, his luck declines more and more. He is condemned to outlawry and becomes an *útilegumaðr*, a man 'lying out', who lives at the margins of human space, not unlike monsters.²⁴¹ Oddr on the other hand is a typical Viking hero of adventure tales, travelling across the world, endowed with magical objects, a prophecy and exceptional age.²⁴²

Both cases of individual fate offer insights into the workings of society, and into certain convictions, such as the idea of inevitable change. Even though *Völsunga saga* and *Örvar-Odds saga* differ in who is affected by the prophecy or curse (collective, individual), inevitability lies at the core of each. It is a noteworthy element of prophecies or curses that they need to be heard: Andvari does not secretly murmur a curse against the thieves, but curses them openly into their faces.²⁴³ Glámr talks to Grettir and burdens him with doom in an intimate half-moment face to face. These examples illustrate the belief in the power of the spoken word, and *Örvar-Odds saga* is no exception there.²⁴⁴ Oddr is primarily infuriated by the *völva's* spoken words.²⁴⁵

This scene's focus in saga research has largely been on the impact of the Icelandic conversion to Christianity. As an representative of the *fornaldarsögur*, *Örvar-Odds saga* broaches the issue of pre-Christian Scandinavia although it was committed to vellum by Christian Icelanders, centuries after the conversion. Knowing that the heroes had to be pagans, saga writers had to bypass this anachronism by compromising and recreating heathen times without lessening the hero's heroism. In doing so, they forged the image of the *noble heathen*.²⁴⁶ He is a hero who, by inner supremacy and wisdom, can see beyond the false idols of heathendom, and rejects pagan practices without

241 Cf. chapter 'Preconditions: Medieval monsters', above.

242 Helgi Þorláksson examines in an article from 2006 where the images of exceptionally tall or old men come from. The idea of an abnormally old hero is not original for Icelandic sagas. Helgi states that this idea comes from the continent and was quite known among learned people. He also points out that these ideas were indeed believed by those who wrote them down because there was no reason to contradict these theories about huge and old men: the common belief was, that through the centuries people grew smaller and weaker, so of course it would not have been unlogical to assume some ancestors might have been bigger and stronger than contemporary men – and even the Bible and well-respected authorities of erudition substantiated these ideas. For further reading on this see Helgi Þorláksson 2006.

243 Cf. *Völsunga saga*, ch. 14, pp. 144.

244 For further reading on the power and possibilities of the spoken word see Austin's theory on speech acts. Austin refrains from claiming truth-values for every utterance. With his idea of performative utterances he suggests that the phrasing of a sentence does not automatically imply a status quo but might be used to enforce people to actually act according to it, cf. Austin 1962.

245 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 2, p. 208.

246 This term of the *noble heathen* was coined by Lönnroth in 1969. Lönnroth 1969, p. 28 argues that “there were certain things in the pagan tradition which embarrassed at least some Christian saga writers to the extent that they felt a need to justify the past and to bring it into concordance with [sic!] the values of their own time”.

actually being Christian – but with being generally amenable to Christian teachings and morality.²⁴⁷ This is a compelling interpretation which has been widely accepted in saga research. However, in the light of the previous discussion of fate and prophecy, the scene of Oddr's reluctance to, and violent reaction against, the prophecy might not be solely intended to hint at his future Christianisation. It might also bear witness to the fear of the spoken word as fate-*forging* rather than its *telling*.²⁴⁸

The prophetess is even referred to as not only *seiðkona* but also *völva*.²⁴⁹ This confirms the mythical truth of her wisdom.²⁵⁰ Channelled through the true utterance the prophecy becomes real and unalterable.²⁵¹ By rendering this service, *völur* influence the actions of the recipient, paving the way for future events. It remains doubtful whether the saga's events would have taken place at all, if those words had not been channelled through the *völva*'s mouth.²⁵²

In general it is debatable whether or not the saga openly follows a Christian agenda, even though Oddr refuses prophecy and is baptised. Oddr's semi-euphoria in the face of baptism in Aquitaine may be one example for this.²⁵³ Although it is repeatedly stated that Oddr refuses to worship pagan gods, the saga does not promote hostility against the *völva*'s practice *per se*.²⁵⁴ Oddr does not react aggressively to the prophecies. He tolerates Heiðr's fortune-telling for others as long as he can hide, and avoid listening to

247 Cf. Lönnroth 1969. In the research history of *Örvar-Odds saga* there were many approaches to the prophecy and Oddr's refusal examined in the light of the noble heathen, as well as there were many references to this issue, see Kroesen 1985 (e.g. p. 647), McKinnell 2005, p. 106, Ferrari 2006, p. 242, Tulinius 1995, p. 144.

248 For further reading on the existence of the prophecy as the fundamental reason for Oddr's life and journeys see Torfi Tulinius 1995, p. 143.

249 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 2, p. 205.

250 It is doubtful that the *völva* was still social phenomenon in the Middle Ages, and it is even more doubtful for later times when the younger manuscripts of *Örvar-Odds saga* were written, cf. McKinnell 2005, p. 99. However, even if not credibly applicable to contemporary medieval times, the idea of the active *völva* in pre-historic, *fornöld* times was largely acceptable in the Middle Ages – and coherent to the picture of the legendary past, cf. Ferrari 2006, p. 242.

251 Cf. McKinnell 2005, p. 98, 106.

252 The prophecy is actually what makes the saga start in the first place. Without the prophecy there would be no adventure, and no saga to tell of, cf. Torfi Tulinius 1995, p. 143: “Sans la prédiction, ses aventures n'auraient pas eu lieu et la saga n'aurait pas existé. On peut donc dire que la prédiction crée la saga”.

253 Cf. Power 1985, p. 848. Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 17.

254 In accordance with the idea of the noble heathen there are also scholarly interpretations of an invincible Ögmundr as the immortal ultimate evil, the Christian devil, cf. e.g. Kroesen 1985, p. 655: “Oddr can never vanquish him [Ögmundr, as the devil, the “eternal enemy of mankind”, Kroesen 1985, p. 655, my comment] completely, but can still do considerable damage to him, and in making the monster afraid of him he achieves the highest possible honour imaginable for a human being.” In the light of my own preceding analysis I find myself having difficulties to agree with that. It may be an interesting interpretation, but Ögmundr's invincibility must not derive from the devil as the eternal enemy. It might just be due to the fact that Ögmundr is foretold to not be beaten by Oddr – a vagary in fate, which affects the figures dealings with each other and which results in Oddr inability to kill him. Furthermore, *Örvar-Odds saga* is not exactly rich in religious language, cf. McKinnell 2005, p. 106.

his own. He reacts aggressively only when a prophecy about himself is uttered against his will. He even swears at her – not for the practice as such, but because she really uttered a prophecy about him.²⁵⁵ This reaction portrays a man angry at being forced to listen to his death-sentence, rather than being innately rejecting heathen practice.²⁵⁶ In his death-song he even acknowledges that she spoke true words, and confesses that he was the one lacking wisdom.²⁵⁷ If it was the saga's intention to stigmatise the *völva* and her prophecy as a heathen practice to be rejected, it is questionable how to reconcile this with Oddr's approval in his death song. So his refusal against the prophecy might not only be understood in the light of the *noble heathen*, but could also work as an indicator of contemporary convictions about fate and the power of the spoken word.²⁵⁸

This interpretation of the prophecy's relevance for the saga conforms to the role of the unstable Ögmundr. The repetitive encounters all lead to losses but not to an end. They demonstrate the prophecy's validity that Oddr will not meet his death anywhere but at home. Ögmundr's somatic instability and the bodily transformation of his face coherently point towards inevitable change: Oddr's fatal change by death; Oddr changes from rejection to *acceptance*. Ögmundr becomes the hypostasis of the invincibility of spoken fate – as shows the episode of their last dealings with each other. It seems that Oddr's acceptance to meet his fate goes hand in hand with the reconciliation with Ögmundr. Only when Oddr accepts that he cannot defeat Ögmundr their relation can end. Only then he returns home in the full awareness of the possibility of death. His never-seizing aggression against Ögmundr resembles his aggression against the *völva*,

255 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 2, p. 208: “Spá þú allra kerlinga örmust um mitt ráð”.

256 Cf. McKinnell 2005, p. 106. McKinnell associates the idea of anger about Oddr's fate being told and therefore being told about his own finitude with child-like behaviour: The childish illusion of immortality must give way to growing up and realizing the unavoidable approaching of one's own end. In this sense Oddr's whole travelling adventures seem like the escapist attempt of avoiding to grow up, trying to preserve an unchanging present.

257 Cf. *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 32, p. 341: “Sagði mér völva / sannar rúnir, / en ek vætki því / vildak hlýða”; cf. also the prose text after his death-song, ch. 32, p. 362: “Nú skalt þat allt sannast, er hún sagði mér völvan”.

258 I do *not*, however, exclude the possibility of the *noble heathen* image in *Örvar-Odds saga*, as Oddr obviously promotes (Christian) virtues even before he learns about Christianity: For example when Hjálmar dictates a certain code of conduct during their Viking expeditions. Oddr admits “Góð þykkja mér lög þín”, *Örvar-Odds saga*, ch. 9, p. 234. For further reading on Hjálmar's set of rules and Oddr's acceptance, see Larrington 2009. Larrington illuminates how these patterns of moral conduct actually are paradoxical to the raiding Viking, but they conform to the Icelandic adoption of chivalric motifs from continental literature. This tendency can also be seen in Icelandic translated *riddararsögur* like *Parcevals saga* or *Tristrams saga*.

Although he does not seem to be enthusiastic about being baptised and dictates the terms for his conversion like in a negotiation, (which is fundamentally quite comparable to the Icelandic negotiations about conversion in 999/1000) he certainly fulfils the image of a good Christian, especially when he goes on a pilgrimage. It is debatable though if his journey to Jerusalem (and therewith a charge of Christian pilgrimage motifs) is a late addition to the saga, cf. Boer 1892, p. XII.

and his rejection of the curse and, simultaneously, the rejection of the certainty of dying.²⁵⁹ The haunting stranger which Ögmundr is, and which cannot be defeated, is really Oddr's own fear of the curse fulfilling. Combined with the prophecy, his destined death at home becomes unavoidable. This idea is comparable to *Völsunga saga*, but *Örvar-Odds saga* clearly emphasizes on the individual. The statement remains the same, however, that change is inevitable.

Inevitable change for an individual is a theme in *Grettis saga*, too. *Draugar*-episodes generally provide insights into contemporary popular beliefs regarding death. They form a test-bench and define certain parameters by which the hero is judged, and moreover they provide a stage for thematic matters.²⁶⁰ As highlighted in previous chapters, Grettir's phobia eventually causes his downfall. Interestingly, the saga associates this certainty of death with a transformer who himself is connected to the idea of death, the *revenant*, like a physical harbinger. This phase of Glámr's bodiless omnipresence enables a rare architecture in saga literature: through monstrous transformation the audience is offered access to the hero's mental landscape.²⁶¹

To examine what Glámr's curse means for Grettir's individual fate one needs to pay special attention to the *night*, as darkness turns into a psychological threat in *Grettis saga*. Old Icelandic literature breaks with the literary tradition that the day is reserved for crucial action while the night functions as a time of caesura.²⁶² Studies about classical writings (and medieval literature that is heavily influenced by them) revealed that:

“nighttime means the suspension of action and a lull in the sequence of events. [...] There is no adaptation to the peculiarities of night, no apparent awareness of changes in colour, sound, or perspective, no impairment of vision, and very little attempt to create a special nighttime atmosphere. [...] The Middle Ages were slow to alter this pattern. As long as the classical epic dominates, night remains unexploited.”²⁶³

259 This theme of unavoidable and invincible death is primarily present in the late redaction of the saga, from the fifteenth century, and is consistent with the general preoccupation with death that spread throughout Europe after the plagues, cf. Torfi Tulinius 1995, p. 147.

260 Sayers 1996, p. 245. A statement which is consistent with Hume's monster category of critical reflection by the audience.

261 It is of course always problematic to apply modern ideas of psychology to medieval fictive literature, with no truth claim for the historical figure. Yet Old Icelandic literature is rich in spooks of all kind, all linked with nocturnal fearfulness. Hence one may assume proliferating stories like these had their respective resonance in the audience, providing people with a fictive stage for their own pressures and fears.

262 For a detailed discussion on this cf. Andersson 1974.

263 Andersson 1974, p. 1-2. He also clarifies that with the readings of Ovid and vernacular love lyric the hours of nighttime get reserved for lovers' tryst, while the time of great deeds and happenings is still reserved for daytime, cf. Andersson 1974, p. 2. Yet, Andersson also grants early studies of the nighttime hours certain excuses, as for example Thomas Rymer in 1674 had not the plurality of Old

However, Old Icelandic saga literature displays a clear shift of relevance concerning nighttime activities.²⁶⁴ There is often human nighttime action, such as Gísli Súrsson's nocturnal killing of Þorgrímr,²⁶⁵ but the night is similarly the time of hauntings and supernatural occurrences, noises from the larder caused by the phantom-seal.²⁶⁶ The night has something ominous in store as Grettir is haunted by nocturnal hallucinations.²⁶⁷ It opens up a plurality of undesirable and fearsome dangers.

As outlined in a previous chapter Glámr slides from the outer reality of a physically real *draugr* into the mental landscape of Grettir's psyche and distorts his perception; this portrays how intensely *Grettis saga* is concerned with individual fate.²⁶⁸ The threat which the *draugr* posed to the farm has become a psychological threat for the individual. Ever since Grettir has been cursed, he alone is exposed to illusions which can be attributed to Glámr.²⁶⁹ Similarly, there is linguistic evidence for the doubtfulness of the reality of Glámr's second transformation: The saga states that “sýndist honum þá hvers kyns skrípi”²⁷⁰, indicating with the word *skrípi* that, although it associates with monsters, it connotes more to *phantoms* or the like; it carries a notion of unreality and illusions.²⁷¹ Grettir experiences things differently than they really are. His perception is entirely interior, bound to his mind and unalterable by logical convictions of others.

Icelandic prose and poetry at his disposal to examine this difference between medieval Scandinavian literature and classical writings, cf. Andersson 1974, pp. 2-3.

264 Cf. Andersson 1974, p. 2.

265 In *Gísla saga*, ch.16, pp. 52-54, the night is Gísli's accomplice in the killing of his brother-in-law.

The night is not only the time in which the killing is committed, it is also the reason why no one finds out who the culprit was: everyone is (drunk and) asleep, and the darkness of the night conceals Gísli when his sister wakes up in terror.

266 Cf. *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 53. *Laxdæla saga* also reports on the difference between the power of *draugar* depending on day and night: Ólafur pái battles the *draugr* Víga-Hrappur at night and cannot defeat him – at daytime he simply exhumes his body and burns it, thus ending Víga-Hrappur's spook, cf. *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 24, p. 69.

267 The figure of Glámr is even linguistically linked with the liminality of twilight, cf. Poole 2000, p. 400: the linguistic associations with Glámr's name billow in between the poles of light and dark, additionally does the Old English vocabulary support this idea of twilight (OE *glom*, *glomung* meaning twilight or dusk, hinting at the dim light at dawn). This pushes Glámr into the greyzone of twilight – “a feared borderland between the safety of day and the danger of night”, Poole 2000, p. 400, suggesting even linguistically that he might work as the hypostasis of anxieties towards the night.

268 I do not, of course, claim to apply modern ideas of psychology to this saga figure as if to a real person. These ideas of interpretation are merely intended to illustrate the critical reflection by the saga writer and the audience and their obvious awareness of general anxieties, especially when connected with insecure societal circumstances.

269 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 35, pp. 122-123: “Á því fann hann mikla muni, at hann var orðinn maðr svá myrkfælinn, at hann þorði hvergi at fara einn saman, þegar myrkva tók; sýndisk honum þá hvers kyns skrípi”. The relation between Glámr and the occurrence of hallucinations and mental delusion is so undisputed that it even found its way in idiomatic expressions, cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 35, p. 123: “[...] ok þat er haft síðan fyrir orðtæki, at þeim ljái Glámr augna eða gefi glámsýni, er mjök sýnisk annan veg en er”.

270 *Grettis saga*, ch. 35, p. 123.

271 Cf. Poole 2000, p. 402.

When people render useful (and uttered by a man with a clear mind surely *logical*) council, Grettir himself is inflicted by nothing else than his fear and pessimism. For example in chapter 67, Guðmundr inn ríki advises Grettir to hide where he need not to fear for his life, while Grettir responds that he does not know such a place.²⁷² Even when Guðmundr names a place to support the helpless Grettir, the latter is far from being optimistic.²⁷³

Sentenced to outlawry, Grettir himself is not part of the society but is pushed to the outer rim of human space.²⁷⁴ He lingers somewhere in an unspecified realm between people and monsters, between Us and the Other, while sharing traits of both parts.²⁷⁵ The crux of outlawry coupled with nyctophobia ultimately forges a double-pressure with one making the other worse. Humans (as social beings) generally require aid and communication with others. For the satisfaction of the basic need of 'staying alive' people are largely oriented towards others.²⁷⁶ Consequently, Grettir's need for company is not to be understood as the characterisation of a historical personage, but as a social statement: it displays human behaviour according to norms and patterns which promise orientation and social security. This may account for many outlaws seeking the patronage of a chieftain.²⁷⁷ Social security is a basic need of humanity whose satisfaction manifests itself in the integration within societal contexts. It is immensely relevant to be assured of one's own integration into a, for the subject wholly

272 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 67, p. 218: “[...] beiddi hann þá Guðmundr ásjá, en hann kvað sér ekki hent við honum at taka, – 'en sá einn er þér,' sagði Guðmundr, 'at koma þér þar niðr, sem þú mættir vera óhræddr um líf þitt.' Grettir kvazk eigi vita, hvar þat væri”.

273 Cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 67, p. 218: “Reynt skal þetta vera,' segir Grettir, 'en svá gerumk ek myrkfælinn, at þat má ek ekki til lífs vinna mér, at vera einn saman.”.

274 Additionally, with the course of the saga Grettir experiences more and more fundamental difficulties in forming homosocial bonds and in functioning within society, cf. Poole 2000, p. 406.

275 That Grettir does not belong to one or the otherworld, neither to the society of people nor exactly to the otherworld, is shown by the attack of the trollwoman, cf. *Grettis saga*, ch. 65, pp. 212-213. She can attack because there is no single mentioning of a farm fence which would separate human space from the outside wild space. The worlds can easily mingle here. In the safe specified human space of the hall the trollwoman cannot overwhelm Grettir, because she left her common grounds, so she tries to drag him out into the open. The separation between the safe familiar world of a fenced farm and the outside is called *innangarðs* and *útangarðs*, cf. Hastrup 1985, p. 143.

276 Cf. Schroeter 1994, p. 80. As Frederic Amory 1992, p. 189 states most preceding scholarly attention on the Icelandic outlaw was oriented around three main categories, being “the legal, the literary, and the folkloric”, while he himself offers in this article a social viewpoint. In this context the dissertation of Klaus Schroeter provides fruitful and detailed anthropological insight into the formation and mechanisms of Old Icelandic society. Schroeter offers a convincing discussion on the premises which constituted the OI world with regard to the cultural-anthropological idea of the human being as being led by needs, (in this context his chapter on the need for social security and assuredness of order is of special interest).

277 For further reading on chieftain patronage and the relation between chieftain and outlaw cf. Amory 1992.

meaningful, social context.²⁷⁸ The state of being deprived of integration, forced to live “a hole-and-corner existence”²⁷⁹, induces fragility within the individual because the need for social security is not satisfied. Hence, Glámr visualises the forces of fear and insecurity operating within Grettir.

However, as a transformer he also visualises the bodily, or bodiless, demonstration of change – the implication of *fatal* change is given by the utterance of the curse. Double somatic instability (first: transformation into a *draugr*, second: projection into Grettir's mind) provides a literary visualisation of the impact of outlawry on the human mind. Although all this is exclusively centred on Grettir, it tells much about the respective culture around and after the composition of *Grettis saga*. It proves to be a fruitful approach to the figure of Glámr to interpret him as the device of an authorial voice: Through his speech about Grettir's life Glámr functions as a *ventriloquist's dummy* commenting on destiny and outlawry.²⁸⁰

6.4 Summary

Comparing the three sagas, this chapter shows a congruency in the narratives' structure. Against the background of the question of fate they all resort to the same triangular pattern with three fix points: hero – transformer – fate:

Sigurðr – Fáfnir – collective fate / curse

Oddr – Ögmundr – individual fate / prophecy

Grettir – Glámr – individual fate / curse.

The course of events and the choice of actions seem to be bound to the utterance of the curse or prophecy, spoken aloud. The heroes' reactions vary from unimpressed acceptance, to hostile actions and efforts to avoid the prophecy, or to helpless submission to compulsive neuroses. Uncanniness arises not just through the monsters' properties but also through patterns of compulsive repetition. Those are themselves

278 Cf. Schroeter 1994, p. 85; cf. also Kluth 1957. Kluth explains that the need for security, but also for acceptance and appreciation belong to the major basic needs of mankind, cf. Kluth 1957, p. 58. The need for social status and function is a cultural need of thoroughly primary character. The term *social security*, “soziale Sicherheit”, p. 59, is, fundamentally not to be understood as plainly material, but also highly concerned with the assuredness of one's own position within society – meaning, *emotional security* might eventually be the more matched term here, cf. Kluth 1957, p. 59.

279 Amory 1992, p. 192.

280 Cf. Sayers 1996, p. 253.

manifestations of the validity of the respective curse or prophecy (and of the futility of trying to thwart it).

Darkness is a vehicle allowing monstrous activity as well as enabling characters in Old Icelandic literature to act covertly. Thus, it becomes a device to express fear and uncertainties.

The analysis of transformer-episodes in connection with fate can additionally support anthropological views on Old Icelandic anxiety, social pressure, or particular contemporary convictions about change towards an unalterable fate. In the case of Fáfnir (collective fate) the somatic instability of the antagonist results from inner properties; the warning about inner properties stems from the monster itself. In the cases of individual fate, the transformation is linked to the heroes' own anxieties. Glámr's relevance for the saga is technically achieved by his *second* transformation into Grettir's nyctophobia (causing also nocturnal monophobia).

The analyses of transformational episodes linked with the heroes' lives illuminate the sagas' conviction that the world may be ever-changing, but its events develop towards an unalterable and definite destiny.

7. Conclusion – The cultural hybrid

This discussion has shown that monstrous transformation and somatic instability is not voluntary but the consequent result of something else: In Fáfnir's case it is his own soul's illness, in Ögmundr's case it is on the one hand his demonic nature but his invincibility is due to Oddr's negative attitude towards the prophecy. In Glámr's case the first transformation is the consequence of his asocial human character and that he died under mysterious circumstances. The second transformation though, i.e. the bodiless psychological impact manifesting in Grettir's nyctophobia, results from the hero's circumstances. This monstrosity is free from all physical rules, and irreversibly woven into character or mental landscapes. Hence, transformers exceed the common limits of monstrosity. They are, in their entirety, totally boundless figures, providing a stage for critical reflection by the audience.

A monster could therefore never be regarded as well-composed without this deeper significance for the hero or the narrative as such. Through the utterance of curses and

prophecies addressed to the recipients, their destinies receive an unalterable continuity curving the events in time by its own rules: Events have to submit to the given prophecy. The monster is in turn the harbinger of fate, its corporeal hypostasis, whatever shape the respective fate has in store. Transformers can physically adjust to the particular destiny awaiting, or to the particular hero's state of mind. Through transformation (indicating ultimate, *true* change) and through the utterance of a curse or prophecy (indicating fatality and inevitability), the monsters of the three sagas become “the shadow of our own finitude”.²⁸¹ Transformers remind the reader of the inner awareness that nothing stands still, which is necessary for a living world. Yet, change is feared, because it is unknown what it will bring. Monsters transform, but they do it within an atmosphere of predestination. This submission to forces beyond your own influence is often referred to in Old Icelandic literature.²⁸²

This discussion has also illuminated how Freud's idea of the uncanny can add to the understanding of well-composed medieval transformers. People feel uncanniness when they are reminded of their own inner drives, such as *thanatos*, and egoism, which can manifest themselves in greed or violence. If the *monstrum* reveals, then the transformer reveals the horror of uncontrollable mutability due to human conditions. He incorporates fluidity, instability, steady change. He is physically porous, functions along a temporal axis, describes process and *mutatio*. He suggests open boundaries not just for the supernatural but, terrifyingly, for humanity, too. This closeness to ourselves is what makes the transformer so uncanny. By triggering reminiscence of inherent attributes and therefore anxiety of change, the transformer demarcates a threshold not to be crossed. Hence the recipients are told that their self, which is so likely to change, is endangered by its very own fragility.²⁸³

It is the fear of, and fascination with, “the horror and wonder of uncontrolled potency or violated boundaries”²⁸⁴, the fragility of our own world or status which makes the transformer so very powerful and fearsome. It fascinates through somatic instability,

281 Kearney 2003, p. 76.

282 For example in the prologue of *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, an original *riddarasaga*, an authorial voice defends unrealistic-appearing events, for example speedy travels, with the words that nothing would be impossible for a man favoured by fortune in contrast to those men who are determined to fail, cf. *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs*, ch. 1, p. 4: “[...] enn þott nockut þicki a mót likindum sumt þat er til ber um frækneik manna edur flyti ferdanna þeirra manna sem sagan gengur fra ma þat eigi undrazt þuiat þann sem hamingian vill hefia honum ma ecki ofært verda. suo og þann sem hun vill nidra þa takazt honum flester hluter toruelliga. enn hamingiunni er vant at trua þuiat hun uelltur ymsa uega.” Some sort of force beyond human influence decides on events and the turn-out of people's actions.

283 Cf. Cohen 2006, p. 7.

284 Bynum, 2005, p. 31.

transformation, and acts of masking in transitional moments are visual evidence for these human perceptions. Interpretations of the figure of Ögmundr such as those of Paul Edwards and Hermann Pálsson, suggesting that he portrays Oddr's dark alter ego with whom he has come to terms, have been ruled out by some scholars as being too modern.²⁸⁵ I cannot agree with Ferrari that ontological questions of the stranger inside appear too modern. Not after experiencing Bynum's ideas of corporeal transformation as being applicable to Old Icelandic saga examples. And surely not after witnessing saga authors interlinking monstrous bodies with the a figure's psychological pressures and anxieties within the diegesis.

Through transformers the medieval fascination with the uncanniness of somatic instability materialises in a literary context. Moreover, the modern reader can learn a lot about the Old Icelandic approach to change by understanding the horror and the uncanniness of those literary creatures which are prone to alteration, as they can be understood as expression specific to the discourses of a certain time and/or generation. These sagas provide the literary game-board for critical contemporary discourses – not just on ontological ones but also social ones such as mechanisms of outlawry and its very impact on the outlaw as an individual.

So conclusively, what can the entirety of transformers represent? For answering this, let us bring back to mind the difference between metamorphosing monsters and hybrids. Transformation episodes tell of process, of *mutatio*, of change and things under way, they portray a world of instability where all is flux. Hybrids on the other hand display simultaneity, and by so doing, they force incompatible categories into coexistence, into combination. They portray difference and paradox, yet also multiplicity, concomitance and fusion. The world they reveal is steady and multiple.²⁸⁶ In contrast to the transformer, the hybrid lacks temporal axes, in its existence it is timeless without any evolutionary dynamics. However, it is now helpful to forge a more decentralised understanding of the hybrid. Although the single monster itself has to be a transformer in order to convey concepts of change, the whole body of uncanny transformers as a literary phenomenon works well as a hybrid: their uncanniness feeds on different levels of social and psychological impacts. Our cultural hybrid feeds on revelation, just like any monstrous body does,²⁸⁷ and what it reveals is the integrated net

285 Cf. e.g. Ferrari 2006, p. 246.

286 Cf. Bynum 2005, p. 31.

287 Cf. Cohen 1996, p. 4.

of several fragments of cultural torques, such as human drives (greed, repetition, socialising, etc.), fear, insecurity, anxiety, uncanniness, identity, change, continuity, and so forth. Each component is an input and adds to the whole phenomenon of transformers. The modern reader can learn more about the medieval Icelandic world and their perceptions and convictions – which turns the plurality of transformers into a composite body, the cultural hybrid. The transformer depicts instability and the law of change, showing that all is prone to changes, while the hybrid personifies steadiness and continuity. In this sense it is only logical, that the entirety of uncanny transformers is regarded as a cultural hybrid as their ingredients have a long tradition. At the core they form a continuity without which they would have been long lost through the unstable process of oral tradition. Those transformation-tales coupling medieval concepts of the monstrous with general ontological questions and emotional states can be understood as anthropological constellations. These enable the modern reader to read a medieval culture through literary expressions, and to pose questions about concepts of the supernatural, social mechanisms or failures. The single elements of our cultural hybrid forge, if carefully arranged, not really the exact reconstruction of the historical reality, but yet they help constructing auxiliary scaffolds and anchor-points when analysing literature against an anthropological background.

I agree with Preben Meulengracht Sørensen who calls the cooperation of literary and historical sciences a “gamle lykkelige ægteskab”²⁸⁸, and believe that it can reward us with valuable insights, however limited, into past worlds. As the image of transformation is so intensely linked with the idea of change, it might be a profitable examination for the future to take a look at particular changing Icelandic circumstances in the Middle Ages, and to analyse monstrous transformations against the background of specific social or cultural breaks. The most obvious breaks in medieval Icelandic history are Christianisation, and the political change from the Freestate into Norwegian overlordship. That the latter had its traceable impact on Icelanders' perception of their own identity, and on the style of their saga production, is convincingly illustrated by Vésteinn Ólason.²⁸⁹ It cannot be ruled out that this loss of independence might have affected the portrayal of transformation- and prophecy-tales too. Another possible outlook may be the examination of suggested transformation in more realistic sagas, e.g. *Njáls saga*, where humans are perceived as monstrous, or feared to transform, but

288 Meulengracht Sørensen 1993, p. 17.

289 Cf. Vésteinn Ólason 1998.

they do not submit to corporeal change, in accordance with the respective sagas' realism. However, these analyses would go beyond the scope of this thesis and rather suggest a possibility for future research.

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9. Declaration in lieu of oath

I herewith declare in lieu of oath that I have composed this thesis without any inadmissible help of a third party, and without the use of aids other than those listed. The data and concepts that have been taken directly or indirectly from other sources have been acknowledged and referenced.

Astrid Jungmann

Münster (Germany), 09.09.2011