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MONSTERS WITH HUMAN VOICES:
THE ANTHROPOMORPHIC ADVERSARY OF THE HERO
IN OLD ENGLISH AND OLD NORSE LITERATURE

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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James David Mason

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For Bettie

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In a work of this length and complexity, inevitably some errors will creep in; for these I must accept full responsibility.

ABSTRACT

In Bēowulf, the Eddas, and the Icelandic sagas, as in the literature of ancient Mesopotamia, the nature of the monstrous is best understood in terms of the interaction between monster and hero before and during combat. Some monsters, like Ti'âmat and the Miðgarðsormr, seem to have developed from personifications of primal chaos; others seem derived from the impersonations of beasts in ritual initiation combats. In literature, however, both types of monsters tend to merge because writers model their narratives on actual human confrontations. Literature is also conditioned by its verbal medium so that an adversary's taunts and challenges before battle often become more important than physical combat. Indeed, some characters associated with the monstrous, like Loki, fight almost exclusively with words.

Even while the mythological background which had persisted into the late pagan poetry gradually faded in the sagas, the human aspect of the monsters remained. Besides some rather fanciful monsters, the saga heroes combat two large classes of rivals who combine both human and monstrous traits. The first class, including berserkir and others descended from old warrior cults and traditions, consists of those who are living men but act like beasts and monsters. After death, a berserkr is likely to join the other class, which includes the draugar and aptrgǫngumenn, those who

walk after death.

A saga hero may himself, like Sigmundr, act as a berserk or werewolf. Werewolfish tendencies run not only in mythical families like the Vǫlsungs but are attributed to historical clans like that of the poet Egill Skallagrímsson. If a hero does not, like Sigmundr, change skins, he may, like Bǫðvarr Bjarki, have a fylgja in animal form. All too often a hero such as Sigmundr or Grettir becomes an outlaw, exile, or outcast, a stage which is but one step short of a monster: vargr is both "wolf" and "outlaw" in Old Norse; the monster Grendel is described as outlaw and exiled warrior.

The taunting adversary is often an ambiguous figure such as the trickster Loki who has connections with the world of monsters, chaos, and outer darkness as well as with the world of gods, heroes, and created order. Another peculiar character is Óðinn, who is both Loki's blood-brother and, as leader of the gods, the enemy of the trickster's monstrous offspring. Himself a trickster and shape-shifter, Óðinn is the patron of poets and warriors like Egill and Sigmundr who share his ambiguity of role and shape. Even an apparently normal man who does not shift shapes may play the monster's role, if he is like Unferð, who assumes the taunter's function for the unspeaking Grendel.

Though the monsters perhaps began as personifications of chaos, in being personified and gaining human traits, they became inextricably involved in the lives of the heroes who

subdue them. In some cases, the relationship is simple, as a hero like Þórr is himself simple. The great hero, though, one with understanding like Gilgameš, like David or even Saul, like Bēowulf, Hrōðgār, Óðinn, or Grettir, realizes the shortness of life and the uncertainty of fortune. He realizes how terribly thin the partition is which divides him from the monsters he opposes. The mortality of the old Germanic gods is perhaps an indication that their lives are inextricably linked to the chaos over which they maintain only a tenuous control won at the cost of everlasting struggle.

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INTRODUCTION

In the beginning there were monsters. In myth and literature from Sumer to Scandinavia the primal nature of monsters is constantly affirmed: some original monster or giant, Ti'âmat or Ymir, apparently a personification of chaos, comes first. The world of men becomes possible only when a god or hero, frequently of the progeny or kin of the chaos monster, slays that monster and makes the created order of the universe from the monster's body.

The chaos monster may originally be of beast or composite-beast form; it may be so depicted in art and described in literature. Yet the monster soon gains anthropomorphic traits. It is moved by human motivations: love, hatred, fear, revenge. The monster's descendants, including perhaps its slayer, are generally anthropomorphic.

Once the vanquishing of the primal chaos monster becomes a myth and is perpetuated verbally, the depiction begins to be shaped by the demands of narrative. The monster combat could be portrayed simply as physical confrontation. Such, in general, is the case in pictorial art. But literature, of whatever sort, is conditioned by its vehicle--words. Physical combat in verbally presented myth soon gains an accompanying verbal combat. Of course, human warriors, in real combat, are not likely to be silent: they cry out, threaten, and taunt. Recounters of myth, drawing on practical experience, could easily adapt their observa-

tions of the speech of warriors to the rendering of myth. Whatever the cause, the verbal challenge comes to be a common prelude to the combat of a monster and a hero. As a verbal exchange is by its very nature more easily represented in words than is a physical one, the tellers of myth, singers of songs, and, later, writers of poems might, unconsciously, be drawn to lay more and more emphasis on the challenge and taunt than on the blows. At an extreme, the verbal conflict might entirely replace the physical. Such, indeed, is the case in the Old Norse Lokasenna in which Loki, parens monstrorum who sometimes appears as a man, sometimes as a beast, confronts the gods entirely in words, with physical conflict only threatened, not enacted.

Such a being as a chaos monster is a product of a culture which finds it desirable to make explanations of origins and of natural phenomena through abstractions and then to represent such aetiological abstractions through art, either plastic or verbal, in individualized beings. As recent anthropologists, notably Claude Lévi-Strauss, have shown, such powers of abstraction and the resulting myths may be present even in the most primitive of societies.[1] In a comparatively advanced society--Sumer or even ancient Scandinavia--the portion of a literary monster which can be traced

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[1]See, in particular, Claude Lévi-Strauss, The Savage Mind (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1966).

back to an original chaos monster, though perhaps quite recognizable, no doubt has a long history of retelling and revision. Into that history other influences may easily enter and lose their identity. One such influence readily available in a tribal society derives from warrior cults. Being initiated at puberty into the adult male's occupation of fighting, the adolescent may fight a ritual battle against man, or beast, or both. Although there may be no need for this opponent to represent more than the quarry of the hunt or the enemy in battle, some cultures may well extend the identification of the opponent to a mythical ancestor spirit or chaos monster. In the Australian Bush, for example, the initiate is told that he is being taken back to the "Dream Time" of the first Ancestors. This process of extending the significance of actual combat in ritual context towards identification with the mythical vanquishing of a chaos monster is the converse of that process by which the artist, seeking expression for mythical combat, draws on human experience. However, in a long established artistic tradition, be it in Mesopotamia or Scandinavia, the results of these two processes may not be readily identifiable or separable.

In Sumer, a city culture with a regularly organized military, Gilgameš's combat with the wild man Enkidu has lost obvious connection with warrior initiation, though it retains many symbolic connotations. Gilgameš is already

king, general, and hero long before Enkidu appears. The later combats of Gilgameš and Enkidu against beasts and forest demons have similarly lost most of their ritual, though not their symbolic or psychological, significance. In such a culture, a true, recognizable combat myth would be more likely to appear only as it did in the Enuma Eliš at neighboring Babylon in the form of a text to be read at a great religious festival, at a commemoration of the divine hero and monster-fighter.

Among the ancient Germanic peoples, art of many types was, by the time of the Christian conversion, highly developed and indeed artificial. The Germanic peoples, unlike the Mesopotamians, however, did not pass through a long period of well-developed city culture between tribal culture and literary culture. To them the city culture of the Roman Empire and its Christian successors provided both the impetus and the materials for written literature. Although in England and on the Continent the Germanic peoples possessed, by the principal period of literary production, a well-organized society centered around monasteries and court towns, their literature began within the memory of tribal life. In Scandinavia, where large kingdoms were so slow to evolve and only a few large trading towns emerged, and even more significantly in the literary center, Iceland, where centralizing influences were strongly opposed, literary culture developed in a society which, if no longer precisely tribal,

was at least very strongly family-oriented and still had a strong warrior tradition.

Germanic, and particularly Scandinavian, literature reached a written state not only with numerous myths about primal chaos monsters like the great Wolf and Serpent, but, in such figures as the berserks, with remnants of late Bronze Age warrior initiation combats. That Óðinn, the patron of poets, was also the patron of warriors, particularly of the berserks, and was furthermore a mythical opponent of chaos monsters was a natural encouragement to writers for emphasizing combat. Óðinn's multiple roles also served to confuse what might have been separate traditions in the growth of a literary conception of the monstrous.

The closest parallel in the ancient world to the Germanic development is in Jewish culture. The Hebrews, like the Germans, were a tribal people who were influenced by and learned written literature from neighboring advanced city cultures. Their single God combined all roles: creating order out of chaos, patronizing warrior-leaders, and inspiring poets. One of the central figures in their literature and history, David, also combined roles as poet, warrior, and slayer of beast and giant. The Hebrews, however, did not produce major monster literature of the sort that the Germanic peoples did. The Hebrews, like the Icelanders, had a strong historical and antiquarian sense, but because their history was so closely bound up with the

development of their religion, they did not feel the freedom which the Germanic writers could, particularly when Christians like Snorri or the Bēowulf poet dealt with pagan myth. Although there are still many fantastic elements in the Old Testament, the writing is nearly demythologized. David is just coming to manhood when he slays Goliath, but the opponent is clearly recognizable as a man, not a chaos monster or even the symbolic monster of the initiation combat. Compared to the Germanic pattern, the Old Testament pattern is most interesting because it shows the monster-combat evolving towards an almost completely anthropomorphic opponent.

But what of the Germanic development? The late pagan poets and the Christian collectors who followed them could select their materials for vividness and interest without the need for fitting all into a preconceived theological framework as the Hebrews had done. The result is a wide and continuous range of monsters covering the entire field from the almost wholly beast-like to the completely human.

Norse poetry contains numerous episodes of conflict between the gods and the monsters of chaos and between heroes and either monsters or other men who play the monster's role. In almost every case, there is some anthropomorphic element evident in the adversary, most frequently his ability to taunt and goad the hero into action. The later Norse sagas draw on this same background of monster lore, but in the longer continuous narratives the saga

writers can develop their characters more fully. One result is that the sagas contain many monsters who are, or have been, human. Furthermore, in the sagas it becomes evident that even the heroes themselves have some tendencies towards the monstrous. The Old English poem Bēowulf, perhaps even more than the Norse poetry and sagas, makes clear that a monster must be considered in a human context and that the significance of the monster, as well as the relative humanity of the hero, can be ascertained only by judging the two together.

But further discussion of the Germanic view must wait. First the basic pattern of the interaction of the hero and the monster must be derived from the literature of the ancient world.

CHAPTER I

MONSTERS IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Myths about monsters are quite probably as old as organized society. Combats between men and strange beings can be found in the earliest of primitive art. But the rock carvings and cave paintings of early man, though tantalizing, are static and tell no whole stories. Continuous narrative, while it certainly must have existed around the campfires and in the caves of those earliest men, does not become accessible to later times until the rise of advanced cultures possessed of the art of writing.

For the western world, at least, the earliest recorded narratives of the combat of a man and a monster come from Mesopotamia, from Sumer in particular. There, tales of gods and heroes like Ninurta, Marduk, and Gilgameš were apparently in common and continuous circulation for many centuries--long enough to be written down and preserved in numerous versions still extant after several millenia.

Later, but still ancient, cultures also contributed to monster lore. The Hebrews evolved as a younger culture in contact with the older cultures of the ancient Near East, and even though their mythology has certain trends and biases unique to itself, it nonetheless shows influences of the earlier mythologies of its neighbors. Eventually power waned in the culture of Mesopotamia, and their empires

slipped into the hands of their northern neighbors, first in Greece and then at Rome. Although the Greeks and Romans were influenced by those civilizations they supplanted, they, like the Hebrews, kept largely to their own mythologies.

But what relevance do ancient mythologies have to those of the later Germanic peoples? Even without getting involved in the question of influence from ancient to later times, one can notice parallel developments in the presentation of monsters. In both ancient and later mythologies, monsters tend to become anthropomorphized, to gain voices and eventually to become personalized challengers of the heroes they fight. Thus, at the very least, the patterns which evolved in Mesopotamia, Palestine, and the classical civilizations, provide a kind of control or point of reference with which to compare the patterns presented by the literature of mediaeval England and Scandinavia.[1]

In Sumerian myth a good starting place for a discussion of the hero and his adversary is the combat of Ninurta and Asag, commonly known as Lugal-e ub me-lam-bi nir-gal.[2] Ninurta is the god of the stormy south wind,[3] perhaps a

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[1]See Appendix 1.

[2]Translated, with commentary, by P. Maurus Witzel in Der Drachenkämpfer Ninib (Fulda: privately printed, 1920).

[3]Samuel Noah Kramer, The Sumerians (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), p. 151.

personification of the forces of spring.[4] Asag is the demon of sickness and disease[5] whom Thorkild Jacobsen sees in naturalistic terms as the cold of winter or, more literally, as the enemies from the mountains surrounding the plain.[6] Whatever the antagonists represent, they show certain typological characteristics which appear in many other and later myths. Asag is closely associated with natural forces of the earth, even the underground: he is son of Ki, the earth, and Aru, the sky god; he may be the ruler of plants and stones; though he is not specifically described, he is probably anthropomorphic.[7] E. Douglas Van Buren, without ever calling Ninurta's opponent in the Lugal-e Asag, points to the name "Labbu," which he translates as "spawn of the river," by which Asag is also known.[8] Labbu, however, is not a personal name but a term applied to numerous monsters in this myth and others.[9]

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[4]Thorkild Jacobsen, Toward the Image of Tammuz (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1970), p. 125.

[5]Kramer, p. 151.

[6]Jacobsen, pp. 124-25.

[7]Jacobsen, p. 125.

[8]E. Douglas Van Buren, "The Dragon in Ancient Mesopotamia," Orientalia, NS 15 (1946), 23.

[9]Joseph Fontenrose, Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and Its Origins (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1959), pp. 147 ff; Witzel, pp. 87 ff.

The hostilities begin not from prior direct encounter of the characters but from an exhortation to Ninurta by his personified sword Sharur. In the midst of praising Ninib (an earlier rendering of Ninurta) as one whose "Wort wird nicht geändert," Sharur repeats what he has heard Asag say of Ninib:

> Du Junge, der bei der Amme nicht blieb, der die
> Kraft der Milch [verliess],
> Du, Herr' [als] Spross eines unbekannten Vaters!
> [Ich] der Totschläger im Gebirge,
> Ein starker Kämpe, in dessen Gesicht sich keine
> Scheu mehr befindet,
> Werde Ninib, den anmutigen [sic] Mann, an dessen
> Gestalt man sein Gefallen hat--
> [Ich] der Held--wie einen Stier auf die Seite
> werd' ich ihn schmeissen![10]

Here is the essence of many later taunts: the enemy calls the hero a mere unknown boy who should stay at home with the women rather than come out and injure himself by taking on an experienced warrior. After mocking Ninib's handsome appearance, Asag threatens to strike him down like a beast. The appellation "Stier" is ambiguous: though Asag implies that "Stier" means a beast to slaughter, the term is later applied to Ninib in another sense. Sharur says of Ninib that among his enemies "wie ein grosser Wildstier erhebt er seine Hörner."[11] Somewhat later, as Ninib advances on Asag, he is again compared to a "Wildstier, mit mächtigen Hörne [sic]."[12] In the

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[10]Witzel, p. 39.

[11]Witzel, p. 40.

[12]Witzel, p. 55.

Gilgameš epic, a bull is a wild and threatening beast, a fit challenge for great heroes.[13] The Psalmist, too, associates the beast with the hero: "But thou hast exalted my horn like that of the wild ox" (Ps 92: 10). Perhaps in such a label there is at least a suggestion of the ambiguous nature of the hero: he partakes, in his strength, of the beast-like nature of his opponents; he should, however, temper this strength with judgment.

Stirred by Sharur's praises of his heroism, Ninurta attacks Asag but first seems overmatched and "flees like a bird."[14] When, after Ninurta's second foray, Asag is destroyed, the waters of his home, the Kur (Kur normally means mountains, but here seems to be the underworld) rise and interrupt normal Mesopotamian irrigation until Ninurta dams them up.

Typologically, several elements can be noted. Since the monster opponent is associated with natural forces of the earth, his defeat may result in their rising in his place. Such avenging forces of nature appear again in Ti'âmat from the Babylonian Enuma Eliš. And Grendel's mother, in Bēowulf, is a sort of personification of the underground waters. In the Lugal-e the hero goes into

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[13]Alexander Heidel, tr., The Gilgamesh Epic and Old Testament Parallels, 2nd ed. (1949; rpt. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963).

[14]Kramer, p. 151.

battle only after interrogation and exhortation. His combat tends to be in several stages, perhaps involving even a temporary defeat from which he must be exhorted to return. His victory may not be permanent, as a new opponent may rise in the place of the old. However, this myth shows relatively little about the nature of the hero himself. In general a hero, even one of divine birth, may suffer fear and need encouragement and must come to an awareness of his own strength. Although the aetiology concerning irrigation sounds simplistic and like a later addition, it does reveal a social aspect of the myth.

A later myth which employs purely supernatural characters is the Enuma Eliš, the Babylonian Creation Epic.[15] Creation, however, is only incidental to the chief function of the poem, to praise Bel-Marduk and explain his rise to the rulership of the gods.[16] In the beginning Ti'âmat, the salt ocean, and her husband Apsû, the fresh water, give birth to the other gods. When, however, several generations of younger gods have arisen, Apsû becomes displeased with their clamor and determines to eliminate them. Discovering Apsû's plan, Ea-Enki-Nudimmud, the god of magic and underground sweet water, son of Anu, the sky god, surprises

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[15]Alexander Heidel, tr., The Babylonian Genesis, 2nd ed. (1951; rpt. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963). Hereinafter cited in the text by page number.

[16]Heidel, Genesis, p. 11.

Apsû, defeats him, and erects a dwelling over his carcass. Only then is Ti'âmat stirred to revenge and gathers to herself gods and monsters to destroy Ea, Anu, and their tribe. Her attendant monsters, Van Buren feels, were originally beneficent spirits, but now they have been corrupted by the power of her evil.[17] Facing her, Ea quails, and his cause seems lost until his son Marduk is persuaded to lead the attack. Marduk agrees and, after much boasting of his strength and receiving power over the gods and destinies, attacks Ti'âmat. Ti'âmat and her accompanying monsters are terrified, but she makes a last attempt to swallow Marduk. He distends her with winds, drives a shaft down her throat, and then as victor carves up her body to make the earth and the sky.

This tale repeats several themes from the Lugal-e. As Fontenrose notes, Marduk, like Ninurta and the later monster-slayers Zeus and Apollo, employs thunderbolt spears.[18] The two-stage fight has been separated into two attacking monsters and two generations of hero gods. Heidel believes the reduplication of the combat serves to emphasize the power of the heroism of Marduk and his supremacy over the former champion of the gods, his father Ea, the slayer of Apsû.[19] Fontenrose notices that in other

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[17]Van Buren, p. 17.

[18]Fontenrose, pp. 158-59.

[19]Heidel, Genesis, p. 11.

myths Marduk comes to the rescue of other gods in peril: he fights Labbu, one of Ti'âmat's monsters, after another god fails, and he must rescue the air-god Enlil, whose attributes of kingship have been stolen by the storm-bird Zu. Fontenrose speculates, however, that in Ti'âmat's attempts to swallow the god there may be a remnant of an earlier version of a temporary defeat of Marduk.[20] Being swallowed is a typical temporary defeat, not only with Jonah and the whale (Jonah 1-2), but also with Indra and the serpent Vritra[21] and with Baal and Mot, the spirit of death:

> an [sic] I encounter Baal Puissant,
> I place him like a lamb in my mouth,
> like a kid in the[22]. . . of my . . . is
> he crushed!

At any rate, the fear of Ea, Anu, and Anšar before Ti'âmat parallels that of Ninurta before Asag and of others before Labbu and Zu.[23]

The Enuma Eliš is a later work than the Lugal-e and is more developed, particularly as concerns characters. Ti'âmat is motivated by revenge for the defeat of Apsû; when some of

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[20]Fontenrose, pp. 147-48, 161.

[21]Fontenrose, p. 198.

[22]Theodore H. Gaster, Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East, rev. ed. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1961), p. 221.

[23]Fontenrose, p. 159.

the defeated god's followers come to urge her to attack Ea, "the word pleased her," and she replied, "let us make storm" (p. 23). Marduk is a rather stiff character, uniformly confident, unlike Ninurta; he tells his grandfather Anšar, "be glad and rejoice; / Soon thou shalt trample upon the neck of Ti'âmat" (p. 29). An important feature of the narrative is that the actual combat is preceded by the hurling of taunts between the two opponents. Ti'âmat shows "with her lips her meanness and rebellion," questioning Marduk's right to oppose her (p. 39). Marduk turns the taunts back upon her:

> Thine illegal authority thou hast set up in place of the authority of Anu.
> Against Anšar, the king of the gods, thou seekest evil,
> And hast proven thy wickedness against the gods my fathers. (p. 40)

At such taunts, Ti'âmat "[becomes] like one in a frenzy and [loses] her reason" (p. 40). She roars and casts spells; her attempt to swallow Marduk is but a continuation of her vocal acts.

This exchange of taunts seems an important element of ritual monster-combats, for it appears in all such encounters originating in Mesopotamia. Gaster, remarking upon the account of the exchanges between David and Goliath in I Samuel 17: 25 ff., gives a quick summary of the occurrence of such exchanges, starting with the Gilgameš Epic and proceeding down through modern Greenland, where <u>niδ</u> songs are

a type of verbal exercise.[24] Robert Elliott, in The Power of Satire, has much to say about the taunt before combat, particularly in the case of David and Goliath and of the hurlers of invective who accompanied Arab troops into battle and incited them to demonstrate that they were worthy warriors.[25] Elliott is also concerned with Old Irish taunters: Fergus, Finn, and the other Irish heroes generally could be stirred to combat only when a taunt had particularly irritated them. Fergus, for example, fears to attend a banquet hosted by the appropriately named Bricriu-poison-tongue because he knows Bricriu will start fighting among his guests.[26] Elliott's opinion is that satire, particularly in taunts of the sort practiced by the Celtic bards, begins as a type of magic but eventually degenerates into a kind of boasting in which the speaker exalts himself at the expense of his opponents.[27]

In Old English and Old Norse narratives the taunt is again an important element of, or even replacement for, the monster-combat. Loki and Unferð have often been noticed as hurlers of taunts.[28] What has not yet been remarked on

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[24]Gaster, p. 153.

[25]Robert C. Elliott, The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 16-17.

[26]Elliott, p. 131.

[27]Elliott, p. 16.

[28]Elliott, pp. 131-32; Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens (1944; rev. ed., rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pp. 142-43; Enid Welsford, The Fool (Murray Hill, N.Y.: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936), pp. 84-88.

in these later narratives is the connection between the taunting and the battle. At this point, however, it is sufficient to observe that the taunt seems very early to have been established in close relation to the actual combat. In the Lugal-e taunting is not done directly by the enemy, but Ninurta's sword must incite him to continue into battle. In the Enuma Eliš the taunt has not yet lost its magical connections, for Ti'âmat casts spells at the same time (p. 40).

There are several parallels between the Lugal-e and the Enuma Eliš which deserve mention. Both monsters are associated with water. Asag apparently controls the waters of the underworld, and his death allows them to flood. Ti'âmat, like her spouse Apsû, is a personified water spirit; Berossus, writing his version of the Marduk myths for a Greek audience, particularly emphasizes the gods' function as water spirits.[29] Just as the demise of Asag provides for the establishment of the controlled regular irrigation necessary for Mesopotamian life, so the defeat of Ti'âmat provides the raw material for the establishment of the world order.

Ti'âmat's appearance is hardly clearer than that of Asag, who nonetheless has some human characteristics. Ti'âmat, as ancestress of the more-or-less anthropomorphic gods, also would seem to be at least partially

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[29]Heidel, Genesis, pp. 75-77.

anthropomorphic herself. Indeed, Heidel argues that she is human in form.[30] Fontenrose and numerous others, however, have attacked that opinion, noting that she is also the parent of monsters and that her appearance is really irrelevant.[31] Here it matters chiefly that Ti'âmat, however she looks, is stirred by human emotions--hatred, fear, lust, desire for revenge--and that, except for attempting to swallow Marduk, she goes into battle in generally human form.

Some of the most significant examples of combat in Mesopotamian literature, at least in relation to understanding Bēowulf and other narratives in the Germanic tradition, appear in the cycle of tales surrounding the Sumerian hero Gilgameš. The fullest form of the hero's story is the longest of all extant Babylonian poems, now known as the Gilgameš Epic.[32] Like Bēowulf, this Babylonian epic is a late and very literary piece, a composite of earlier narratives gathered around a major hero. Gilgameš is unlike the mythical hero Bēowulf, however, as there is evidence for the historical existence of the man,[33] and some of the materials of his epic are extant in earlier forms, that is, as separate tales which share only the presence of the hero and his companion Enkidu.

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[30]Heidel, Genesis, pp. 83-88. [31]Fontenrose, p. 153.

[32]Heidel, Gilgamesh. Hereinafter cited in the text by page number.

[33]Kramer, pp. 45 ff.

The opening portion of the epic appears only in the full Babylonian version: Gilgameš is a haughty and somewhat tyrannical king of Uruk (Biblical Erech). In response to the prayers of Gilgameš's subjects, the gods cause Enkidu to appear in the wilderness. At first Enkidu is a wild man, living among the beasts somewhat after the fashion of John the Baptist. However, he is enticed by a courtesan, made aware of his humanity in a six-day and seven-night orgy, and lured to the city where he challenges Gilgameš. After the combat, the two become friends, and Gilgameš becomes a more just ruler. The chief exploit of the friends is a journey to kill a monster Humbaba / Huwawa; this episode appears with different emphasis in a Sumerian version which Kramer calls "Gilgameš and the Land of the Living."[34] After their return from this exploit, Gilgameš is propositioned by Inanna / Ištar. Irked by his refusal of her charms and his taunting her with the fates of Dumuzzi / Tammuz and her other previous lovers, she calls forth the "Bull of Heaven" to punish the heroes. They kill it, and the gods, feeling this act to be a sacrilege, cause Enkidu to die.[35] Horrified by his friend's death, Gilgameš sets out on his longest and most significant

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[34]Kramer, pp. 190-97.

[35]Appended to the epic is an extra tablet from another Sumerian source, not assimilated to the main narrative. This tale, which Kramer calls "Gilgameš, Enkidu, and the Nether World," gives another version of the death of Enkidu (pp. 197-205).

journey, hoping to find the secret of immortality from Ut-Napištim, survivor of the Flood. After a series of almost parable-like experiences while visiting this eldest man, Gilgameš comes to be reconciled to the mortality of all men and returns home.

For the study of monster-combat and its significance in characterizing the hero, the Babylonian opening sequence which introduces Enkidu is quite valuable. Although he has heroic antecedents--Enkidu is an offspring of the monster-fighter Ninurta (p. 19)--he is more like a monster himself. He is completely covered with hair: "With the gazelles he eats grass; / With the game he presses on to the watering place" (p. 19). The only sign of his humanity is his ability to recognize hunters' snares, which he helps his animal friends escape (p. 21), and even there he is allied with the beasts. His appearance is terrifying to the hunters themselves when they meet him (p. 19). Often associated with Enkidu, a common figure on cylinder seals has arms and legs and walks upright but is hairy above the waist and has a bull's head. If the identification is correct, then he must have been analogous to those half-man, half-bear figures in Germanic weapon ornamentation which are now thought to be related to initiations and to the cult of the berserkir.[36]

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[36]John Gray, Near Eastern Mythology (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1969), pp. 41-42. For the berserkir, see Chapters II and IV, below.

The temple prostitute who is sent out to entice Enkidu deliberately sets up a contrast between him and Gilgameš, "a joyful man, . . . comely is his manhood, endowed with vigor is he; / The whole of his body is adorned with pleasure" (p. 23). Besides the woman's attractions, which she has more than amply displayed for Enkidu, what finally drives him to town is her taunts: Gilgameš "has greater strength than thou . . . Enkidu, temper thine arrogance" (p. 23).

That the pairing of Enkidu and Gilgameš is deliberate is made evident again and again. Even before Enkidu is brought to the city, Gilgameš has dreams which he reports to his mother for interpretation:

> The host of heaven fell down toward me.
> I tried to lift it, but it was too heavy for me;
> I tried to move it, but I could not move it.
> The land of Uruk was gathered around it,
> While heroes kissed its feet. (p. 26)

Later he sees lying before him in the market place an axe which eventually he is able to lift and bind to his side (p. 27). His mother nightly interprets the dreams to presage the coming of the wild man of the steppes (p. 26) with whom Gilgameš will struggle and whom he will eventually make his brother, "Because I shall put him on a par with thee" (p. 27). Similarly, the courtesan tells Enkidu that he belongs "Where Gilgameš is, mighty in deeds" (p. 27), and that he will "love him like [himself]" (p. 28). At the same time she reminds him of the difference between the king

and himself who sucked "the milk of wild animals" (p. 28).

The actual encounter of the pair comes in the marketplace when Gilgameš arrives like a tyrant to exercise his right to the first night with new brides--one of the chief offenses which had provoked the people to pray that the gods send him a rival. Seeing Enkidu arrive as answer to their prayers, the people remark on the pairing of the two:

> He looks like Gilgameš.
> He is shorter in stature
> But stronger in bone.
> He is the strongest on the steppe;
> strength he has.
> The milk of the wild animals
> He used to suck.
> The men rejoiced:
> A mighty one has arisen as a match
> For the hero whose appearance
> is so handsome.
> For Gilgameš an equal
> Like a god has arisen. (p. 31)

Even while the two are compared as men, the beast-like wildness of Enkidu and the civilized quality of Gilgameš are emphasized and contrasted.

Yet there is no verbalized taunt before the battle, merely a defiant gesture by Enkidu. Talking is rather new to Enkidu anyway, and both men have been goaded to the confrontation, Enkidu by the courtesan and Gilgameš by his mother. The challenge is simple: Enkidu blocks Gilgameš's path to the gate and puts his foot out to stop the king. They wrestle like beasts:

> Yea, Gilgameš and Enkidu
> Grappled with each other,
> Snorting like bulls
> They shattered the doorpost
> That the wall shook. (p. 32)

The fight is a draw; Gilgameš recognizes Enkidu as his equal, and they plan their future adventures together.

Constantly throughout the sequence the narrator plays on the formulaic themes: Enkidu is a beast; Gilgameš is a polished man; the two are nonetheless equal. However, as Fontenrose observes, there is considerable ambiguity about the passage: it is a monster-combat, but just which is man and which is monster?[37]

The general structure of the epic implies that Gilgameš should be the hero, for he is king and defender of the city. Similarly Enkidu should be the monster, for he is hairy and is constantly associated with beasts. Enkidu stalks like an animal into the city; he feels alien there, and he knows only one purpose--to fight the king. The combat is like the taming of a beast. Enkidu seems almost an early example of natural man as hero. He dislikes the cruelty of the hunters' traps, and he does not know the corruption of the city, the women and the strong drink. Compared to him, Gilgameš is a <u>moral</u> monster. As in a portion of "Gilgameš, Enkidu and the Netherworld," he is a tyrant who rapes the young women and sends the young men off to die in battle. In the Babylonian epic, the arrival of Enkidu serves to temper Gilgameš; thereafter his energies are directed towards his eventual quest for immortality after the death of Enkidu.

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[37]Fontenrose, p. 174.

G.S. Kirk, following Lévi-Strauss's pattern, emphasizes the contrasts between wild and civilized in the myth: Gilgameš and Enkidu represent two ways of life and both men tend to live in extremes.[38] Their confrontation results in a kind of dialectal synthesis: Enkidu becomes civilized, and Gilgameš is purged of the corruption of town life. Kirk also remarks upon the death of Enkidu when he himself, contrasting his life in the wilderness with that after he comes to the city, curses those who made him change. The god Šamaš appears to him in a dream and points out to him the positive aspects of his change; he dies at least moderately reconciled. Kirk feels that the narrator's theme is the difference between the quick and relatively painless death of the wild beast and the slower death which Enkidu suffers in the city. Since he feels that the theme of the epic is the contrast between physical immortality and the immortality of a hero's reputation, Kirk sees the hero's death in the city as better than the anonymous death of the beast.[39]

This sequence points to one of the most significant characteristics of the hero: with his great powers he runs the risk of a life of excess. Before he fights Enkidu,

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[38]Geoffrey Stephen Kirk, Myth, Its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), pp. 146-47.

[39]Kirk, pp. 147-48.

Gilgameš seems not to know what to do with himself and becomes a moral monster. Since he is a man completely out of touch with nature, he needs Enkidu to show him his decadent excess. At the same time, Enkidu's beast-like life is not proper: it is just as extreme in violence as is Gilgameš's profligacy. Enkidu is not allowed to die without a reminder of the value of civilization. The hero's quest for fame which Kirk emphasizes is also a part of the social aspect of heroism. Like Bēowulf, Enkidu and Gilgameš should be in the end "most eager for fame." Šamaš reminds Enkidu that on his death Gilgameš and the people of Uruk will lament and let their hair grow long: "When Enkidu heard the words of the valiant Šamaš, his angry heart grew quiet" (p. 59). In the Babylonian epic, the first combat for both "monster" and "hero" transforms each of them. Thereafter their lives are directed towards the proper heroic goal of everlasting fame, and neither is any longer an animal merely surviving or a hedonist reveling in his antisocial actions.

The central episode of the Babylonian Gilgameš Epic is the expedition of Gilgameš and Enkidu to seek an apparently monstrous being, Huwawa (Humbaba) who guards a sacred cedar forest (pp. 33-49). This episode is derived from a shorter but better preserved Sumerian version, which Kramer calls "Gilgameš and the Land of the Living."[40] In both versions, Gilgameš's chief motivation is to increase

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[40]Kramer, pp. 192-97.

his reputation so that after his death he will be remembered for mighty deeds.

Huwawa's precise nature is not clear. In both versions his roar is like that of a storm, and he is given such attributes as a lion's face and dragon's teeth, but he is also called a "warrior" (p. 35). On one hand he is Enlil's appointed guardian of a sacred cedar forest, and in the Sumerian version the god punishes Gilgameš and Enkidu for killing him.[41] On the other hand, he seems to represent some evil which Šamaš, another god, abhors (p. 41) and which Gilgameš wishes to destroy (p. 34).

In setting out to fight Huwawa, Gilgameš has no illusions about the danger, for he counts danger as a value:

> If I fall, I will establish a name for myself!
> "Gilgameš is fallen!" [they will say] "[In combat]
> With terrible Huwawa! (p. 36)

In selecting companions he chooses fifty young men who are ready for danger and have no home or family ties to restrain them.[42] The fight which gains a hero most glory after his death is evidently the one which most clearly puts him in danger of that death.

The elders in Uruk, like those at Hygelac's court, at first fear for the hero, since he is dear to them, but they agree to his need to cover himself with glory in a monster

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[41]Kramer, p. 197.

[42]Kramer, p. 193.

combat; they give him their blessings and advice before he departs (pp. 37-39). When, after a journey of many "double hours," Gilgameš and Enkidu arrive at Huwawa's cedar forest, they arouse the monster by felling some of his precious trees. Though he is the aggressor, Gilgameš, like other Sumerian heroes, experiences fear. Heidel interprets a rather fragmentary passage in the Assyrian version as indicating Gilgameš's terror on seeing Huwawa's gatekeeper (p. 44). Enkidu's hand is paralyzed when he pushes open the gate; he, too, is terrified. In the Sumerian poem, Gilgameš recites a little litany to himself to dispel fear:

> If when we go forward
> There be fear, there be fear, turn it back!
> There be terror, there be terror, turn it back![43]

Huwawa, seeing Gilgameš, lifts his "guilt covered head" and lets out a terrifying cry. Though the hero's sinews and feet tremble and he is afraid, he continues his attack.

In both versions the description of the actual combat is short. In the later Babylonian epic Gilgameš as much as panics on his first encounter with Huwawa. Indeed, his cause would have been lost had not Šamaš answered his prayer for aid by blinding the monster with a windstorm. In the earlier Sumerian poem Gilgameš has an easier time: he warms up by cutting the trees that surround Huwawa's dewlling; after that, capturing the monster is almost child's play,

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[43]Kramer, p. 195.

for he is able to put a nose ring on Huwawa as though the monster were "a caught ox."[44] Captured, in both poems Huwawa grovels before Gilgameš. In both poems, furthermore, it is Enkidu who becomes the aggressor, lest his master merely keep the monster as a prisoner.[45] The situation is clearer in the earlier poem: Gilgameš feels pity for the captive and asks riddling advice of his companion. Enkidu replies somewhat more bluntly that, if Huwawa is left at large, his leader will not survive the trip home. Huwawa, guessing the subject of the discussion, curtly turns on Enkidu: "Hired man, hungry, thirsty, and obsequious, / Why do you speak ill of me to him!" Enkidu's reply is a quick and angry decapitation of the prisoner.

The episode ends quickly. Although the texts of the epic are defective, Gilgameš and Enkidu apparently return to Uruk as conquering heroes. In the Sumerian poem, however, they have displeased Enlil by killing his forest keeper, and the god condemns them to perpetual exile. Nonetheless, he gives them seven melams, which appear to be divine rays of protection.

In the Huwawa episode, the monster is again identified with the forces of nature. Huwawa is not only a forest guardian, but, in his own words, the offspring of

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[44]Kramer, p. 196.

[45]Heidel, Gilgamesh, p. 49; Kramer, pp. 196-97.

the "land" itself (Kramer, p. 196). A shadowy figure, nearly blended into his cedar forest, he is apparently not anthropomorphic but a combination of storm, lion, and dragon. Yet, as a "warrior" (p. 35), he has that human trait which distinguishes so many monsters--the ability to threaten and taunt.

Gilgameš and Enkidu first encountered each other as complementary personalities, representatives of the civilized and natural worlds. Seeking Huwawa, they function as a single, composite personality, jointly representing the civilized world against the untamed world of the forest monster. But the pair cannot be completely civilized, for they, like Bēowulf pursuing Grendel's mother, must eventually face the monster in his own realm. Meeting a monster in his own territory, however, requires an understanding of that environment, so that Enkidu's previous experience in the wilderness is an asset to the expedition. Throughout the journey, Enkidu's _fortitudo_ balances Gilgameš's _sapientia_ as each alternately encourages and cautions the other.[46] Neither hero could complete such a quest without the other.

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[46] _Cf._ Robert E. Kaske, "_Sapientia et Fortitudo_ as the Controlling Theme of Beowulf," _SP_, 55 (July 1958), rpt. in Lewis E. Nicholson, ed., _An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism_ (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1963), pp. 269-310.

In the composite personality of the expedition's joint leadership, Gilgameš seems to be the aspiring, idealistic element; Enkidu the more practical, though sometimes impulsive element. Without Gilgameš's heroic idealism, the expedition would never have been attempted, but this same idealism distracts him to thought instead of action once Huwawa is captured. Enkidu, lacking the aspiration to fame which motivates Gilgameš to undertake the quest, nonetheless has the perseverance to see it through to the end. When Huwawa's taunts touch on the practical matters of hunger and thirst, Enkidu is stirred to action and dispatches the monster to insure his own safe return home. Since in the pair Gilgameš and Enkidu the thirst for glory and the practical sense are evenly matched, the expedition is a success. Had either half of the balanced pair, either sapientia or fortitudo, become completely dominant, the composite would have run the danger of becoming less than wholly human; indeed, it would have fallen prey to Huwawa and would itself have been somewhat monstrous.

Although the punishment of the heroic pair for having killed Enlil's forest guardian is quick in the Sumerian heroic episode, in the Babylonian epic it is deferred. The immediate result in the epic is the one hoped for by the warriors: they return to Uruk in glory, where Gilgameš attracts the attention of Ištar (pp. 49-56). She not only offers him the role of her consort but promises the fertility

which she controls. Gilgameš's reply is abrupt and harsh. He reminds her of her past lovers, notably Tammuz, whom she has betrayed and, in effect, converted to lesser beings. Gilgameš's rebuke is striking in its animal imagery: the goddess has taken the lion and the horse and reduced them to the wolf and the mole. Ištar is, naturally, offended; she withdraws to the home of the gods and threatens to raise the dead to overwhelm the living if the other gods will not send the "Bull of Heaven" to punish the upstart hero. Eventually the gods acquiesce, but though the Bull terrifies and slays many men, Gilgameš and Enkidu quickly overcome it. Because Enkidu cuts off the hindquarters of the Bull and flings them in Ištar's face, she demands his death of the gods, and eventually it is granted.

This episode is on the surface quite different from the preceding ones, but certain elements are common to them all. The taunt is a major component; the swapping of insults by both sides occupies much of the tablet. Though Ištar's proposition to Gilgameš seems at first to be sincere and though the Bull is at first apparently only her reaction to the hero's challenge, by the end of the sequence Ištar becomes the female avenger of the slaying of a male monster--Huwawa. In demanding that Gilgameš and Enkidu be punished, she links the slaying of the forest monster to the slaying of the Bull as double sacrileges. As an avenging spirit she is not unlike Ti'âmat and Grendel's mother.

Of course, Ištar, as goddess of love, is hardly a hideous monster. But the Bull which slays three hundred men with a single snort is, in a sense, Ištar in another form--an outward and physical sign of an inward and spiritual state of wrath and frustration. She becomes the Terrible Mother, the devouring aspect of the Eternal Feminine. She is also a moral monster: that is the charge Gilgameš makes in return to her proposition. She is a goddess of excess whose very language tends to be hyperbolic: in propositioning Gilgameš, she says that all his goats will bear triplets; threatening the gods, she says that the dead will outnumber the living and will deprive them of sustenance.

Gilgameš's rejoinder to Ištar's proposition shows another aspect of the relationship of the heroic and the monstrous. It is easy for heroes to go from one excess to another. Falling into excess, a man becomes a beast: as Gilgameš remarks, Ištar turned a shepherd-lover into a wolf who is now driven away from his own flocks; a gardener-lover to a mole, now driven from the garden. And in trading taunts with her, Gilgameš is himself already beginning to take on the role of a monster. Enkidu's rude gesture with the Bull's hindquarters is obviously a step towards the monstrous. In so far as Enkidu acts like a monster, he perhaps deserves his death. However, that death needs to be seen in the larger context of his whole

career. Certainly his dying thoughts are on his overall progress from beast to hero and not on a single rash act.

Upon the death of Enkidu, Gilgameš, despondent, goes into mourning and wanders like a beast in the wilderness. Eventually, however, he is struck with the inspiration for his last exploit: to visit Ut-Napištim, survivor of the Flood, and inquire whether the eldest man has the key to everlasting life. This journey which Gilgameš undertakes, and Ut-Napištim's inserted account of the Flood, first gained the epic its reputation. Though it contains no monster-combats, the sequence involves two confrontations for the hero which recall the taunts before combat. Gilgameš first encounters a scorpion man and a scorpion woman who guard the way to Ut-Napištim's dwelling, and then he meets Siduri, the divine barmaid who runs an inn on the border between this world and the other. In both cases he is questioned, though more thoroughly by Siduri; perhaps the encounters are a doublet.[47] Siduri, seeing Gilgameš coming dressed in skins and looking wild--the hero has, in a sense, become the old Enkidu--locks her door and treats him like an escaped criminal. After he identifies himself, she mockingly asks why such a famous hero should look so wild and disreputable. Only after he has told his story a second time and explained his mission does she

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[47] Fontenrose, p. 171.

open the door and instruct him on how to cross the sea to Ut-Napištim.

The questioning is this case is not followed by a major monster-combat. After Gilgameš has arrived at the dwelling of Ut-Napištim and heard the old man's account of the Flood, he is set several tasks which remind him of his mortality. Though the old man offers him no hope of immortality, he does tell Gilgameš how to find a plant which will renew his youth. Gilgameš dives to the bottom of the sea for the plant, only to lose it to a serpent, which thereby gains the ability to shed its skin. Chastened and wiser, Gilgameš returns home. At last aware that he can restore neither Enkidu to life nor himself to youth, he contents himself with improving and strengthening the city of his people.

This last episode of the epic, though it contains no conventional monster-combats, has some vestiges of them. The questioning by Siduri--as well as by the scorpion pair--is reminiscent of the taunts of the adversary. The hero is also constantly placed on the defensive, for he must recall his past glory and at the same time rouse himself to further adventure. Although the serpent which steals the youth-renewing plant is not involved in direct conflict with the hero, in competing with him for the plant it serves to remind him that he has no easy route to immortality and that his earthly reputation can be maintained only by constant striving.

The monster in Mesopotamian literature is, above all, developed to be an opponent for the hero. A god or hero, like Ninurta, Marduk, or Gilgameš, proves himself and establishes his authority chiefly by conquering monsters. The monsters themselves are not particularly well developed, as they have little function beyond serving as opponents for the heroes. The appearance is never clearly detailed in the literature--though perhaps one could guess what they look like, considering the numerous representations of them in sculpture and the beast imagery which dominates their descriptions. Nonetheless monsters always seem closely associated with natural forces, like flood waters. Furthermore, they seem to be anthropomorphized, as most of them speak and feel human emotions like hatred and fear. Indeed, one of the chief monsters, Ti'âmat, is an ancestress of her chief opponent, the more or less anthropomorphic god Marduk. Bridging the gap between monster and man is the strange figure of Enkidu, who begins as a beast, an opponent of men, and ends as a hero, a monster-slayer. When a monster faces a hero, it first taunts him, challenging his maturity, virility, and general sense of security. Though he may at first quail before the monster's attack, the hero always wins and is thereafter known as the monster's slayer. Indeed, the monster becomes one of his iconographic attributes.[48]

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[48]For examples of dragons and monsters as parts of the customary symbolic accouterments of a god, see Van Buren and

Even when there is no such blood tie as between Ti'âmat and Marduk and no such conversion as Enkidu's, the hero and the monster are closely related. Both possess strength and the will to use it, for the hero's strength is defined in terms of the monster's. Not only does the monster become a kind of heraldic symbol of the hero, but the two are frequently described with the same kind of imagery, particularly that of storms and bulls.

There is rarely an ethical dimension to the combat beyond the hero's duty to protect mankind from the ravages of the monster. The chief exceptions in Mesopotamian monster-literature, the Gilgameš poems, provide not only the most human characters but also the most philosophical themes. These poems show, too, how the very characteristics which enable a hero to subdue a beast-like monster --his strength of will and body--if not restrained, may make him into a moral monster. In this concept of the moral--as well as physical--monster, the Gilgameš cycle, unlike the Enuma Eliš and the Lugal-e, looks ahead to the concept of the monstrous as it appears in much later literature.

The sort of monster-combat as a whole sequence which appears in early Mesopotamian literature reappears in

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also Emil Ploss, Siegfried-Sigurd, der Drachenkämpfer (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 1966), pp. 53-55.

later writings. That is, the hero first confronts his adversary in verbal exchange and later in physical conflict. The monster, though generally differentiated from the hero--and other men--by immorality or by great size or by distortion of form, is still conceived of in basically human terms. Nor is the hero so essentially different from the monster that he could not become like his adversary.

In terms of the ancient pattern, one of the most nearly typical combats is that of David and Goliath in I Samuel 17. Goliath is distinguished by his great size --six cubits and a span in height. However, his size is but an external feature serving to intimidate weak challengers; what makes Goliath monstrous is his blasphemous challenge to the army of Israel. Although the usual pre-combat taunt is generalized and flung in the face of all opponents, this one is directed especially at the Lord God Himself. Goliath is, of course, also a Philistine --a member of a race with a generally bad reputation. Goliath's blasphemy and idolatry thus make him a moral as well as a physical monster.

David, hearing the taunt by accident, immediately realizes its implication: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (v. 26). When David confronts the enemy, Goliath's first reaction is apparently scorn of a youthful

opponent (v. 42);[49] as in Asag's taunt of Ninurta's youth, however, the monster is reacting to an obvious, but deceptive, truth. Goliath then accuses David of cowardly tactics and curses him by Philistine gods (v. 43). David replies that Goliath's taunts are an affront to God and that he himself is God's champion (vv. 45-47). As in Mesopotamian combats, the actual fighting is quickly over once the verbal exchange has been completed.

There is more to this battle, however, than just the confrontation between the hero and the monster. Saul's presence on the sidelines is significant. Saul is another example of the aging champion no longer able to confront the monster directly. Earlier in the book of Samuel, he had been a great warrior, but now he is, like his army, "greatly afraid" (v. 11). Saul becomes like Ea-Enki in the Enuma Eliš; he is also of the type of Hrôðgâr. But Saul is more than a retired hero: he exemplifies the hero's tendency to become a monster. When first introduced, Saul is described as a tall man, heroic in both size and performance. By the time David appears, however, he has fallen from favor with God and is tormented by an evil spirit (I Sam. 16: 14 ff.). From then on, most of I Samuel is devoted to Saul's growing jealousy of the young hero and his attempts to destroy one who he realizes will replace him as king.

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[49] Elliott, p. 16.

The phenomenon that one generation's monster-slayer not only has to yield place to a younger hero but may in the process himself become monstrous has already been noticed in relation to Greek myth:[50] Zeus is much like Typhon who wishes to supplant him and whom he eventually defeats, but Zeus is himself a supplanter. Most significant in I Samuel is that Saul, once God's champion, becomes the persecutor of God's next champion. However, David has tendencies towards moral depravity, too, since he later engages in his share of treachery and evil, not only becoming vassal of the Philistines (I Sam. 27) but reaching a low point in his betrayal of Uriah (II Sam. 11). But David, unlike Saul, learns restraint. He bears the taunting of Shimei (II Sam. 16: 5-14), which might otherwise have been the prelude to a combat. Yet as an old man David is still remembered primarily as a monster-fighter (II Sam. 21: 22).

The Old Testament offers other evidence on the relationship of hero and monster. Certainly the best known fighter after David is Samson (Judges 14-16). Like Hercules--and Enkidu at the beginning of his career--Samson is an ambiguous figure. On the one hand, he suffers the constant taunts of the Philistines and rarely fails to pay them back. On the other hand, he is a destructive

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[50]Fontenrose, pp. 469-73.

prankster, and that is more the role of the monster. Samson suffers most at the hands of Delilah, who questioned him the most. Delilah, like Ištar in the Gilgameš Epic, is a betraying female, seeking revenge, a representative of that pattern sometimes called the "Venusberg or Siren theme."[51]

Otto Eissfeldt observes that the Old Testament lacks the kind of conflict among gods which appears in Mesopotamian mythology, since the Hebrew belief that theirs is the only God precludes recognition of such conflicts.[52] Only the few hints of a revolt of the angels remain, and these because they can be made to serve as an affirmation of Yahweh's omnipotence.[53] One other possible remnant is the book of Esther, which could be read as a triumph of Ištar-Esther and Marduk-Mordecai over Chaos, personified by Haman.[54] Certainly Haman is a moral monster, and he does taunt the Jewish community. Even if the Old Testament confrontations and monster-combats, from David's through Esther's, do not reflect a continuation of Mesopotamian tradition, they do show similar attitudes towards the monster, as well as towards the hero who defeats him.

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[51]Fontenrose, pp. 304, 309, 352-56.

[52]Otto Eissfeldt, The Old Testament: An Introduction, tr. P.R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 35.

[53]Eissfeldt, p. 36.

[54]Eissfeldt, pp. 507-08.

From Greece and Rome of the classical period an even greater quantity of literature remains than from the ancient Near East, and in that literature is a wide variety of monsters of all sorts. In the Near East many monsters are of composite-beast type--for example, the "Labbu," whose name means lion, but who has ophidian traits. Others, like Goliath, are human in form, being distinguished from common men chiefly by an excess of bulk, strength, cruelty, and depravity. Still others, like Ti'âmat and Huwawa, seem to partake of both human and bestial traits. The Greek and Roman monsters show similar variety. Python and dragons, such as the one slain by Kadmos, are, for the most part, beast-like;[55] the Titans and other giants such as the Cyclops and the Lestrygonians have human forms, though magnified and distorted. Phorbas and Kyknos are noted mainly as brigands who beset travellers,[56] although some of these human forms may belong to the tradition of Euhemerus.[57] Composite beings are also common in classical literature. Some, like fauns, satyrs, and centaurs, are not necessarily evil, but others, notably Typhon,[58] are clearly to be considered monstrous. Typhon and many of the other composite monsters, such as the Gorgon Medusa, have at least some ophidian characteristics.

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[55]Fontenrose, pp. 17-19.

[56]Fontenrose, pp. 24-34.

[57]Fontenrose, p. 19.

[58]Fontenrose, p. 71.

Out of the bewildering array of classical monsters, Joseph Fontenrose has attempted to find a common pattern.[59] His entire typological system is quite comprehensive and complex,[60] but certain elements of it are particularly relevant here. In his conclusion, Fontenrose observes that the hero generally fights not one monster but a pair of monsters, one male and one female, the latter usually the mother or consort of the former and also more terrifying than her offspring or spouse. The monster pair generally arises from, or represents, or rules the sea, the underworld, or both, and their dwelling is both the primal chaos and the land of the dead. The hero is frequently intimidated and sometimes temporarily killed by the monsters; his eventual victory involves taming chaos and making nature useful for mankind. Fontenrose is most successful in showing that this pattern applies to certain monsters like Python and Typhon. Offspring of Hera or Ge, the monsters seem doublets of each other, and the events concerning them seem transferrable from one hero / god to another. Zeus, Apollo, and Hercules seem almost interchangeable; a myth involving one will frequently mention

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[59]Fontenrose spends considerable time on Mesopotamia, India, and Egypt, but his principal concern is with Greece and Rome. While not maintaining that the Python-Apollo combat is the archetype of the monster-combat, he uses it as a point of reference in forming his typology.

[60]Fontenrose, pp. 9-11.

another in a secondary role. Fontenrose observes that this reduplication of combat may extend over several generations, not only of the monsters but of the heroes as well.

The details of the monster-combat in both ancient Near Eastern and classical Greek and Roman literature rarely concern themselves with the fight itself. That is quickly ended, once it has begun. The exceptions generally are those in which the hero uses an unusual weapon--David's sling--or a trick or deception--Marduk's inflating of Ti'âmat with a sudden wind to prevent her swallowing him. Two ancient Greek combats deserve to be mentioned, not only because they appear in an epic narrative but because of their unusual emphasis on the hero as trickster: that between Menelaus and Proteus in Book IV of the Odyssey and that between Odysseus and Polyphemus in Book IX.[61]

Proteus shares with most monsters his role as a natural spirit, particularly a sea spirit (pp. 52-62). In changing forms he acts out in one person the frequently multiple opponents of the hero. The forms themselves reflect his role as a nature spirit: lion, snake, and boar --all traditionally associated with monsters--and then tree and stream. The individual form the hero's adversary takes is not so significant as his being a representative of the

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[61]Homer, The Odyssey, tr. S.H. Butcher and A. Lang (New York: Modern Library, 1967). Hereinafter cited in the text by page number.

natural world. The importance of the hero's interaction with nature is reinforced by the ruse Menelaus and his companions employ to approach Proteus: they cover themselves with sealskins to appear part of Proteus' familiar environment. The combat, of course, is not intended to kill Proteus but to hold him for questioning. Accordingly, there are no taunts by the monster which raise the hero's ire before he strikes. This lack of taunts, however, reinforces the special emphasis of the encounter: the hero confronts the monster and even enters into the monster's natural world in order to gain knowledge.

Such seeking of knowledge is frequently subordinated in combat narratives. David slays Goliath in sheer exercise of power--though the act has spiritual and moral implications as well as military ones. Gilgameš encounters first Enkidu, then Huwawa, Ištar and the Bull of Heaven in an exercise of strength and a quest for reputation. But the theme of the epic, particularly as Gilgameš's earlier exploits result in his quest to seek Ut-Napištim, is his quest for knowledge. Here the point is made directly. That Menelaus is merely seeking sailing directions and news from home is not so important as the fact that he enters the adversary's world and confronts him in order to gain that knowledge.

The encounter of Odysseus with the Cyclops is similarly unusual because it does not end with the destruction of the monster (pp. 129-43). Indeed, at first glance it seems

to lack a number of the traditional attributes of the combat, notably the monster's taunts to the hero before battle. Homer makes it quite clear that physically Odysseus is powerless against the monster. Yet there are familiar features in the narrative. Polyphemus is closely associated with nature, since he is a child of Poseidon; Odysseus describes the monster's great size as being that of "a wooded peak of the towering hills, which stands out apart and alone from others" (p. 131). Polyphemus' chief trait, besides his size and strength, is his "lawlessness of mind" (p. 131). The giant himself observes that "the Cyclopes pay no heed to Zeus . . . nor to the blessed gods, for verily we are better than they" (p. 134). Thus, like Goliath, he is a natural force of chaos; rising against divine power, he deserves punishment. The formulaic statement of lawlessness also suggests a force opposed to the society of men; certainly Polyphemus is an antisocial being.

Odysseus cannot himself destroy Polyphemus, but he intoxicates, blinds, and tricks him to effect an escape. In so doing he demonstrates that the hero must depend on understanding as well as on strength, sapientia as well as fortitudo. Although Odysseus is never so obviously intellectualized as Gilgameš eventually becomes, his encounter with the Cyclopes shares the theme of sapientia with Gilgameš's quest. The strength of the hero, even of the

divinely born hero, cannot finally overcome that power in nature which brings death; whatever terms the hero comes to with that power depend at least partially on his using his understanding or wit against it.

As he departs, Odysseus cannot resist the urge to taunt the now pitiful Polyphemus. Here Homer has moved the traditional taunt from before to after the confrontation, and in the process it is transferred from the monster to the hero. The change becomes, as it were, a reminder that the hero has latent in him the traits of the monster, and these traits may lead to his downfall. This danger is forcefully emphasized to Odysseus when his taunt stirs Polyphemus to boulder-throwing.

The long-term consequences of Odysseus' blinding and taunting of Polyphemus are that they rouse the enmity of Poseidon and cause the reduction of Odysseus to a beggar on his home shore. The monster-fighter, the hero, must depend, finally, on his own personal sapientia and fortitudo. The confrontation with the monster is, here in particular, a first step in stripping off extrinsic things like ships and crews until the hero stands alone and depends on his own native ability.

Even if he did not feel a foreshadowing of future difficulties in Polyphemus' prayer to Poseidon for vengeance, the hero is himself aware of the significance of the confrontation in defining himself and his fate.

His last taunt to the Cyclops is revealing his name--"Odysseus . . . son of Laertes" (p. 141)--with all the implications of slyness borne by such a revelation. Nor is the revelation an isolated slip of caution. Only shortly before telling of the Cyclops, Odysseus had begun his narration to Alcinous and the Phaeacians by announcing his name and, in so doing, defining his character and his role as hero: "I am Odysseus, son of Laertes, who am in men's minds for all manner of wiles, and my fame reaches unto heaven" (p. 126). Long afterwards the great deceiver Óðinn typically ended confrontations by revealing his name.

One other confrontation from Greek literature is famous for its role in defining the hero, that of Oedipus and the Sphinx. The Sphinx belongs to the complex which is Fontenrose's central concern; she is the female counterpart of Kadmos' dragon; she is the offspring of Typhon; she was sent by Hera (or Ares) in revenge for the slaying of the dragon.[62] Thus Oedipus is, like Marduk, a second-generation fighter; like Marduk, Gilgameš, and Bēowulf, he must oppose an avenging female. The confrontation itself is simple--the asking of a riddle. It is thus a test of Oedipus' sapientia--his fortitudo has already been tested in the defeat of Laios. The answer to the riddle is

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[62]Fontenrose, p. 308.

significant for the role of the hero; it is, as Richmond Lattimore says, the answer to all the other questions Oedipus pursues.[63] The hero, whatever he confronts, must come to recognize himself for what he is--a man.

In answering the riddle of the Sphinx, Oedipus has a rare opportunity, for in heroic legend the hero most often defines his role by deeds of strength. Although the monster-combat tends to evolve in literature towards a verbal confrontation such as Oedipus', it apparently begins as a demonstration of brute force. The narrative form of the fight is no doubt derived from many sources, including a young warrior's initiation combat and a god's defeat of a chaos monster.

In ancient Mesopotamian literature, with its emphasis on beginnings, the most common extant form of the combat is that in which a young god overcomes chaos--portrayed as a great monster--and then carves the universe out of the monster's body. The defeat of the chaos monster does not, however, have an intrinsic narrative form. That form is more likely derived from actual human combat, most particularly the often-repeated, ritualized action of an initiation combat. Though probably originating as a test of physical skill and endurance, the initiation combat becomes transformed in myth and literature. Since literature is a

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[63]Richmond Lattimore, The Poetry of Greek Tragedy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1958), p. 91.

verbal rather than a physical medium, it tends to emphasize those aspects of the confrontation to which it is best adapted, notably the taunt and challenge before battle.

Once the initiation combat becomes assimilated to the mythical one as a symbolic reenactment, the two patterns can influence each other in several ways. On the one hand, the initiation combat can supply even more material for developing the mythic narrative. On the other, the myth can reinforce and emphasize the archetypal and symbolic elements in the initiation, and the resulting composite narrative can develop even further. An extreme case is that in which the mythic combatants become almost wholly anthropomorphic; such is the case with David and Goliath. Another possibility involves an almost wholly anthropomorphic hero fighting a partially anthropomorphic adversary who still retains some traits of the chaos monster. To this pattern belong Gilgameš's combats with Enkidu and Huwawa as well as Odysseus' with Polyphemus.

Yet another possible development, not so evident in the ancient world as in later Germanic narratives, may result from initiation combats in which the initiate's adversary has assumed the role of the chaos monster. Since the warrior taking the monster's role has himself been initiated, and since the new initiate will someday assume the adversary's role, most members of a warrior society may at one time or another have assumed the roles

of both hero and monster. When such warriors meet in combat, the result may appear as the conflict of two warriors, of a warrior and a monster, or even of two monsters.

The most interesting possibility, however, involves replacing the actual fight itself with a purely verbal combat. Oedipus' meeting with the Sphinx is a highly condensed version of such a confrontation, which, in the Germanic world, becomes a major genre in and of itself.

CHAPTER II

MONSTERS IN EARLY NORSE POETRY

The confrontation between a monster and a hero or god plays a large role in the ancient Germanic tradition. Besides Bēowulf's uniquely recorded appearance as a slayer of monsters, the tradition, particularly in the Norse-speaking countries, has many heroes, warriors, and gods who appear on numerous occasions juxtaposed with a whole menagerie of monsters. Sigurðr is of course the best known monster-fighting hero, and among the gods Þórr's chief attribute seems to be his constant strife with the giants in the east and north. Together the human (or semi-human) heroes and the gods have their ultimate appearance as combatants against a considerable assortment of monsters in the great battle at ragnarǫk. Along with the gods and the great heroes of mythological tradition who appear again and again in the poetry coming from the earliest times, however, there is another, later, tradition of monster-combats in the fornaldar sǫgur or sagas of ancient times. Although these sagas are of late origin--perhaps 1250-1400[1] --they deal mainly with pagans and vikings as well as the mythological heroes (there are some Christians in the background, though, like King Óláfr Tryggvason), and they show

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[1]Stefán Einarsson, A History of Icelandic Literature (New York: American Scandinavian Foundation, 1957), p. 157.

at the very least the popularity with the Icelandic audiences of good, lively combats with a variety of monstrous beings.

But to look at the fornaldar sogur, even at the Volsunga saga version of the mythical Sigurðr cycle, is to jump far ahead. Looking at any work of Old Norse literature, indeed, for the undiluted primitive tradition of monster-combats is complicated by the fact that Old Norse, like Old English, came to be written down only in Christian times. There is, nonetheless, evidence paralleling that of written literature but dating from pagan times: stone carvings and metal-work. The tradition of the plastic arts furthermore seems to indicate what one might suspect from the written sources--that monster-combats have an origin in pre-Christian times.

Among the themes most easily identifiable in pictorial representations are Sigurðr's slaying of Fáfnir and þórr's fishing for the Miðgarðsormr. These scenes appear on stones, particularly on memorials dating throughout the later pagan period. The island of Gotland in the Baltic has a particularly good collection of stones dating from perhaps as early as A.D. 500 on down into the eleventh-century viking period,[2]

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[2]Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, Pagan Scandinavia (New York: Praeger, 1967), p. 101.

but chiefly from the eighth and ninth centuries.[3] In addition to Sigurðr and Þórr, the Gotland stones show Loki bound to the rock, Vǫlundr the smith, and Óðinn on his horse Sleipnir. Elsewhere in Scandinavia Þórr is found, for example, at Hørdum Ty in Denmark and Altuna in Sweden.[4] Sigurðr is most common, however, appearing at Rasmund and Gök in Sweden.[5] These motifs continue well into the Christian period, appearing in church architecture as well as on monuments, and the tradition is fairly uniform not only in Scandinavia but in England, too. Sigurðr's roasting of Fáfnir's heart appears on three crosses from the Isle of Man and on Halton Cross from Lancashire.[6] A cross at Gosforth in Cumberland seems to present a number of scenes related to the monster-combats at ragnarǫk, particularly that of Óðinn and the Wolf.[7] Although there is still much to be explained about these representations, not all

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[3]Gwyn Jones, A History of the Vikings (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 342.

[4]Ellis Davidson, (1967), p. 132.

[5]Ellis Davidson, (1967), p. 126.

[6]Ellis Davidson, (1967), pp. 126-27; _____, "Gods and Heroes in Stone," in The Early Cultures of North-West Europe (H.M. Chadwick Memorial Studies), ed. Sir Cyril Fox and Bruce Dickins (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1950), pp. 124-26.

[7]Ellis Davidson, (1967), pp. 130-37; John Stanley Martin, Ragnarok: An Investigation into Old Norse Concepts of the Fate of the Gods, Melbourne Monographs in Germanic Studies, Vol. 3 (Assen: Von Gorcum, 1972), p. 73.

is questionable. In some cases the pictures are accompanied by runic inscriptions identifying the characters who are portrayed or to whom the stones are dedicated.[8] Indeed, some of the best known skaldic poems--the Haustlǫng of Þjóðólfr of Hvinn, the Þórsdrápa of Eilífr Guðrúnarson, and the Húsdrápa of Úlfr Uggason--are descriptions of plastic representations in murals and on shields of combats between gods and giants or monsters.[9]

But these are not the only conflicts pictured; there are many which defy identification.[10] One stone from Hangvar Austers, for example, shows a many-legged beast pursuing a naked man.[11] Nor is stonework the only surviving source for men juxtaposed with beasts: groupings appear on a number of artifacts, such as helmets from Vendel, Valsgärde, and Sutton Hoo and the now destroyed drinking horns from Gallehus. Although early commentators, Stjerna, for example, attempted to identify these figures with individual heroes such as Bēowulf,[12] the trend is now

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[8]Ellis Davidson, (1967), pp. 134-35, 127; (1950), pp. 128-29.

[9]Finnur Jónsson, ed. Carmina Scaldica (København: G.E.C. Gads, 1929), Þjóðólfr, pp. 10-12; Úlfr, pp. 29-30. Gudbrand Vigfusson and F. York Powell, ed. Corpus Poeticum Boreale (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1883), Þjóðólfr, pp. 14-17; Eilífr, pp. 19-22; Úlfr, pp. 23-24.

[10]Ellis Davidson, (1950).

[11]Ellis Davidson, (1967), pp. 102-03.

[12]Knut Stjerna, Essays on Questions Connected with the Old English Poem Beowulf, tr. and ed. John R. Clark Hall, Viking Club Publications, Extra Series, Vol 3 (Coventry: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1912), pp. 44-47.

to connect them with various ritual practices.[13]

In all of these pictorial representations the monstrous antagonist is of strange-beast form: serpents on the stones and horns; half-man and half-wolf or half-bear on the helmets and horns (Appendix 3, Plates I-VI). Without further information one might tend to dismiss the serpents as mere serpents: that is, not knowing that the semi-human figures dated from pre-Christian, pre-literate times, one might simply associate them with the learned fantasies of St. Isidore and other collectors of marvels. However, the serpents can be traced to human or at least anthropomorphic origins through later literature, and they in turn testify to the antiquity of the traditions behind that literature. Because the semi-human monsters cannot be associated with individual characters in later literature, recent attempts to interpret them have been anthropological in nature: Margaret Arent discusses them at some length as initiation-symbols,[14] and G.V. Smithers summarizes a number of arguments for seeing them as Heilsbilder or apotropaic figures related to warrior cults and initiation.[15] Indeed, both Smithers[16] and

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[13]A. Margaret Arent, "The Heroic Pattern: Old Germanic Helmets, Beowulf, and Grettis saga," in Old Norse Literature and Mythology, ed. Edgar C. Polomé (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1969), pp. 134-45; Ellis Davidson, (1967), pp. 87-100.

[14]Arent, "The Heroic Pattern."

[15]G.V. Smithers, "The Geats of Beowulf," Durham University Journal, 63, No. 2 (March 1971), 102-03.

[16]Smithers, pp. 87-91.

Margaret Goldsmith[17] issue strong rebukes against Jane Leake and others who would see such beings in the northern tradition merely as an outgrowth of the learned southern *mirabilia* associated with Alexander and the East.[18]

The semi-human representations are now thought to be related to the phenomenon which in Germanic lands produced such tribal names as the Wylfingas of *Bēowulf* and the Hundingas of *Widsiþ*, and which is also reflected in the Norse warrior tradition of the *berserkir* and *úlfheðnar*. The practice was that of wearing animal skins, particularly of wolf or bear or of the tribal totem animal, into battle and of the warrior's apparently employing some sort of autosuggestion in an attempt to convince himself that he was, and could accordingly fight like, not a man but a ferocious beast or mythological being, somewhat as in the fashion of the Germans in the days of Tacitus.[19] Although Paulus Diaconus might say of the Langobards that in battle they "simulant . . . cynocephalos,"[20] the practice is but simulation and not actual conversion into animals after the manner of Herodotus' *Neuroi* and such beasts of the later *mirabilia* tradition.[21] Arent suggests that the representations

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[17]Margaret Goldsmith, *The Mode and Meaning of 'Beowulf'* (London: Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 98-101.

[18]Jane A. Leake, *The Geats of Beowulf* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1967).

[19]Smithers, p. 94.

[20]Smithers, p. 91.

[21]Smithers, p. 90.

of half-human beasts which appeared on a warrior's helmet hearkened back to the warrior's own initiation, when he either had to overcome a warrior in such a costume or was himself invested in one.[22] In fact, Benjamin Blaney feels he finds reminiscences of just such practices in the combats of the fornaldar sǫgur.[23] That the opponent is not just a beast can be concluded from the appearance of some of the designs in which, except for the animal head, the character is that of a warrior in armor and carrying a spear.[24] (See Plate III.) Even when, as on the Sutton Hoo purse lid, a man appears between two beasts which lack human characteristics, the adversaries are humans impersonating beasts. One of the Torslunda metal-workers' dies shows a pose similar to that at Sutton Hoo, but the warrior wears a cap made of skin like that on the bears' heads; on another die the warrior wears skin trousers.[25] (See Plates I, II, V, VI.) One might say that corresponding to those representations of a warrior who is beast above the waist and human below, there are others which show him as human above and beast below.

The archaeological evidence would seem to imply not only that the pagan Germanic peoples had a tradition of

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[22]Arent, p. 137.

[23]Benjamin Blaney, "The Berserkr," Diss. Colorado, 1972.

[24]Arent, Plates 15-18. [25]Arent, Plates 2 and 1.

monster-lore, but that monsters were associated with men, with fighting men in particular. The warrior wishes to have beast-like, even monstrous, strength in combat. In his initiation he is associated with or fights with beasts or beasts impersonated by men. Thereafter he wears armor decorated with designs which recall, probably for magical effect, the events and associations of his initiation. In battle, though, he will encounter others who have no doubt gone through a similar process or, if battle is itself the testing process for initiation, are going through it. Such combats might easily become in literature the combat of man and monster. Indeed, as will be seen shortly, in the early poetry warriors going into battle address each other with references to their other, apparently earlier, monstrous states. In Christian times, when memory of the ancient cultic and magical practices had been lost, these references to monstrous states then become but stock topoi, and that seems to be the case in the later fornaldar sogur.

Besides the representations of half-beast warriors which must submit to the tools of the anthropologist for interpretation, there are other designs which can be interpreted from literary parallels. These are the monsters of Germanic mythology, creatures with their own individual histories and personalities. As they are represented in art, these monsters appear simply as serpent, dragon, or wolf, without particularly human traits; they appear

further removed from human origins than are the semi-human forms of weapon ornamentation. However, these beings, whose identification is frequently certain either because of texts included with the pictures or because of clear parallels to literary scenes, have in literature origins even more clearly anthropomorphic than those which anthropologists have postulated for the weapon ornaments.

Such monsters date from pagan times, and their nature is apparently so well established that their representations in both art and literature remain constant well into the Christian era. Here, while patterns associated with pagan myth came to be used as decoration on Christian memorials--even on churches--they still retained their pagan forms. By analogy it is generally assumed that pagan literature, though written down in Christian times, still holds to the essential forms of the earlier myths.

The literature which corresponds to and explains the decorative motifs and which also appears to retain the pagan tradition best is the eddic poetry. Although the principal collection of this poetry in the Codex Regius 2365 dates probably from the mid-thirteenth century,[26]

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[26] Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius, ed. Gustav Neckel, rev. Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1962). Hereinafter the poetry will be cited by title and stanza from this collection.

a little later than the composition of Snorri Sturluson's Prose Edda,[27] it is from such poetic material that Snorri's manual of mythology and poetics as well as some of the principal sagas dealing with monsters, notably the Volsunga saga, are derived.

The dating of the eddic poetry is greatly debated,[28] and although some of the poems, the Voluspá in particular, may show slight Christian influence, few critics argue against the essential and original paganism of the poems. Stefán Einarsson, following Jan de Vries, feels that most of the great mythological poems date from before 1000 A.D., when Christianity was officially adopted in Iceland,[29] and John Martin, following Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, argues that the poems are heathen and composed in a heathen community.[30] Even the Voluspá, which may at the end ambiguously refer to Christ, must date from before 1065, as it is alluded to in a poem of that year.[31] The heroic poems, too, if not themselves early in origin, depend on sources which may have been in poetics forms, perhaps not unlike the ones in which they now appear, as early as the fifth century A.D.[32]

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[27]Snorri Sturluson, Die Prosaische Edda, ed. Ernst Wilken, Bibliothek der ältesten Litteratur-Denkmäler, Vol 11 (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1877). Hereinafter cited in this edition by section and chapter.

[28]Einarsson summarizes most of the arguments, pp. 15, 18-26.

[29]Einarsson, p. 29.

[30]Martin, pp. 21-23.

[31]Martin, p. 24.

[32]Einarsson, p. 33.

Although the Codex Regius contains some of the best eddic poetry, it occasionally needs supplement from elsewhere. One additional source is a poem in eddic style, Vǫluspá in skamma, or Short Vǫluspá, a twelfth-century imitation of the earlier poem now extant only as a fragment included in another poem, the Hyndluljóð.[33] Several of the skaldic poems mentioned earlier, notably Þjóðólfr's Haustlǫng, Eilífr's Þórsdrápa, and Úlfr's Húsdrápa, also supply reinforcing information relevant to mythical combats. The skalds, at least in the instances cited here, are pagan poets, but at least one Christian writer must be mentioned: Snorri Sturluson. In the Prose Edda Snorri compiles, and expands upon, the mythological information from these earlier pagan sources, and, except for the Christian euhemeriam of his introduction, he seems to treat his sources reliably.[34]

The principal combat in the eddic poetry, and the one to which all the others seem to lead, is that recounted in the Vǫluspá which brings both the gods and the monsters to their ends. The Vǫluspá, or Vision of the Vǫlva (seeress), is a complex poem, looking at both the beginning and ending of time. About midway through the vision, the vǫlva begins

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[33]Martin, p. 26.

[34]Georges Dumézil, Loki, tr. Inge Köck (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftlische Buchgesellschaft, 1959), includes a recent defense of Snorri, especially Ch. 2, "Rehabilitierung Snorri," pp. 53-75.

to see wide abroad the portents of the coming destruction; monsters and evil men gather together. She sees

> . . . þar vaða þunga strauma
> menn meinsvara oc morðvarga,
> oc þannz annars glepr eyrarúno;
> þar saug Níðhǫggr nái framgengna,
> sleit vargr vera--
> (St. 39)

> [There oathbreakers and murderers and men who seduced others' wives wade difficult streams; there Níðhǫggr sucks corpses of those who walk after death; the Wolf tears corpses.]

These evil men are those who deserve outlawry, and in later literature they come to be even more closely connected with monsters. They are also a class of men including some of those who walk after death--and some of the best known monsters of later Norse literature are the draugar and aptrgǫngumenn like Glámr in the Grettis saga. Here, however, they are merely the food of Níðhǫggr, one of the chief dragons of Norse myth. Wolves, of course, are typical beasts of battle and, by way of the úlfheðnar, are associated with men in monster form.

Vargr in the last line of the stanza is translated "wolf"--probably Fenrir himself--but the word suggests more than that, for it can also mean "outlaw," as in morðvarga in the second line of the stanza. Since outlaws sometimes develop wolfish tendencies towards violently predatory activity, they are ironically appropriate food for the Wolf.

The next stanza continues the same sort of imagery:

Austr sat in aldna í Iárnviði
oc fœddu þar Fenris kindir;
verðr af þeim ǫllom einna noccorr
tungls tiúgari í trollz hami.
(St. 40)

[In the east sat an old woman in Ironwood and there fostered the children of Fenrir; one of them will be the moon's destroyer in the shape (or skin) of a troll.]

In this stanza wolves are again associated with humans--and these wolves are the offspring of Fenrir, the great Wolf who himself has an anthropomorphic origin as a child of Loki. The suggestion that one wolf will wear a troll's skin leads once more back to the úlfheðnar. Hamr [skin, shape] is the principal element in the phrase "hann var eigi einhamr" [he was not single-skinned], which may imply werewolfism[35] and which may in its implications be interchangeable with úlfheðinn and berserkr.[36]

Similar imagery of gathering doom dominates the next few stanzas, and there are more suggestions that in strife men become beasts. Such a time, when brothers fight brothers and commit incest with their sisters, is characterized as a vargǫld, an age of wolves (St. 45). The brother-sister incest becomes of great significance in the

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[35]Richard Cleasby and Guðbrandr Vigfusson, An Icelandic-English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1874), "ein-hamr," p. 121; "hamr," pp. 236-37. Geir T. Zoëga, A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic (1910; rpt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), "hamr," p. 107.

[36]Blaney, pp. 47 ff.

Vǫlsunga saga, where Sinfjǫtli, son of Sigmundr and Signý, has, like his father-uncle, werewolf traits.

As the battle comes closer, the World Serpent rises "í iǫtunmóði" [in a giant's anger] (St. 50), and Loki himself leads on his followers: "fara fífls megir með freca allir" [monster-kin go with all the wolves] (St. 51). Fífls megir are the same as the fífelcynne of Bēowulf (l. 104), among whom Grendel dwells.

The actual battle is quickly over as Óðinn falls prey to the Wolf and is avenged by his son Víðarr, Freyr battles Surtr, and Þórr and the Miðgarðsormr slay each other:

Þá kømr Hlínar harmr annarr fram
er Óðinn ferr við úlf vega,
enn bani Belia, biartr, at Surti;
þá mun Friggiar falla angan.

Þá kømr inn micli mǫgr Sigfǫðr,
Víðarr, vega at valdýri;
lætr hann megi Hveðrungs mund um standa
hiǫr til hiarta, þá er hefnt fǫður.

Gínn lopt yfir lindi iarðar,
gapa ýgs kiaptar orms í hæðom;
mun Óðins sonr ormi mœta,
vargs at dauða Víðars niðia.

Þá kømr inn mœri mǫgr Hlóðyniar,
gengr Óðins sonr við úlf vega;
drepr hann af móði miðgarðz véor,
muno hallir allir heimstǫð ryðia;
gengr fet nío Fiǫrgyniar burr
neppr frá naðri, níðs óqvíðnom.
(St. 53-56)

[Another sorrow comes to Hlín (Frigg) when Óðinn goes to fight the Wolf and Beli's bane (Freyr) goes shining to fight Sutr; then Frigg's love may fall. Then Víðarr, great son of the father of victories, comes to fight the corpse-beast (Fenrir). With his hand he stands a sword in the ear of Hveðrungr's (Loki's) son (Fenrir), and so

he avenges his father. The world-girdling
Serpent opens his jaws in the air; the terrible
jaws gape on high until Óðinn's son (Þórr)
faces the worm, Víðarr's brother dies from
the Wolf. Then the famous son of Hlóðyn comes,
Óðinn's son goes to fight the Wolf; in a rage
he kills the surrounder (?) of Middle-Earth.
Now all men will flee their homesteads and
Fjǫrgyn's (Óðinn's) son, weary from slaying
the Serpent, walks nine feet, fearing no
reproach.]

Most obvious from this short description is that the gods, like Bēowulf in his last battle, gain a pyrrhic victory in which both sides are virtually destroyed. In the case of Óðinn and Víðarr it is another of those battles such as that in the Enuma Eliš in which the young warrior succeeds where the old one fails. Once more there is a reminder that Fenrir is Loki's offspring, as is the Miðgarðsormr, here called a wolf as well as a serpent.

A few more points from other sources can be added to the description. The fight of Óðinn and Víðarr with Fenrir is mentioned in the Vafþrúðnismál and Grímnismál among the other eddic poems and in the Gylfaginning of Snorri's Edda; Þórr's battle is mentioned in the first and last of these as well as in the Lokasenna among the poems.

In the Vafþrúðnismál, Vafþrúðnir, a giant, replies to Óðinn's question about his own fate:

Úlfr gleypa mun Aldafǫðr
þess mun Víðarr vreka;
kalda kiapta hann klyfia mun
vitnis vígi at.
(St. 53)

[The Wolf will gulp down the father of men, Víðarr will avenge this; he will cleave the death-cold jaws of the Wolf in combat.]

Snorri goes even farther in describing how Víðarr will reach down the throat of the Wolf and tear out his entrails; he will have made a special shoe with which he will hold down the lower jaw while he props the other with his spare hand (Gylf., Ch. 51). The gaping jaws, here actually swallowing the first opponent, parallel those of Ti'âmat in the Enuma Eliš; Víðarr's propping them open is similar to Marduk's inflating his adversary to incapacitate her.

The Lokasenna implies that Þórr will fight the Wolf before it swallows Óðinn (St. 58). The Vafþrúðnismál adds that his sons Móði and Magni, "Courage" and "Strength," will possess his hammer (St. 51), and Snorri confirms that they will (Gylf., Ch. 53). By implication, then, they inherit their father's functions and join the company of second-generation monster-fighters. The motif of the enemy's gaping mouth is repeated again; the Serpent also shares with Ti'âmat the breathing of poison, and it is this poison that overcomes Þórr after his nine proud steps. Such a motif is also seen in Béowulf, when the wounded and poisoned hero can walk a short distance, supported by his avenger, and think proudly that he has at least slain the great worm.

There is little more to be said of the fight itself. There is, however, much more to be said of the participants.

The chief enemies of the gods here appear as the two great beasts, the Wolf and Serpent. Their most noticeable

characteristics seem to be their raging, thrashing about, breathing fire, and devouring corpses. If mere destructive force were all that they represented, they would not deserve much more attention. But they cannot be separated from their origin: Loki. As the poems frequently reiterate, the beasts are Loki's offspring, and he appears at the battle steering the ship Naglfar on which Múspell and other destructive powers arrive (Vsp., St. 50-51). Though the Vǫluspá does not say anything about this combat, Snorri says that Loki and Heimdallr, the gods' watchman, will kill each other (Gylf., Ch. 50).

Behind the brief mention of Loki in the Vǫluspá and the references to his being parent of the monsters lies a complex, and often confusing, series of stories which are necessary to an understanding of the Norse concept of the adversary of gods and heroes.[37] Snorri's introduction of Loki plays on his ambiguous nature:

> Sá er enn talðr með ásum, er sumir kalla rógbera ásanna ok frumkveða flærðanna ok vǫmm allra guða ok manna; sá er nefndr Loki eða Loptr, son Fárbauta jǫtuns; móðir hans heitr Laufey eða Nál, bræðr hans eru þeir: Býleistr ok Helblindi. Loki er friðr ok fagr sýnum, illr í skaplyndi, mjǫk fjǫlbreytinn at háttum; hann hafði þá speki umfram aðra menn er slœgð heitr, ok vélar til allra hluta; hann kom ásum jafnan í fullt vandræði, ok opt leysti hann þá með vélræðum.
>
> (Gylf., Ch. 33)

> [There another among the gods of whom some call the slanderer of the gods, the first speaker of lies and the blemish of all gods and men; he is called Loki or

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[37] See Appendix 2.

> Loptr, the son of the giant Fárbauti; his mother is called Laufey or Nál, his brothers are Býleistr and Helblindi. Loki is handsome and comely to look at, but evil in spirit and very fickle in mood. He surpassed all men in that wit which is called slyness, and he deceives in everything. Many times he got the gods into trouble, but then often rescued them by his tricks.]

Loki's chief attribute is his tongue, with which he causes trouble for the gods who tolerate him only because they can use the same faculty against their enemies. His slippery tongue has an outward manifestation in his ability to change shape. This latter ability is involved in some of the tales of his begetting beasts and in some of the tales of his tricks; as noticed above, his offspring may also have the ability to change shape (hamr) and in the fourth chapter this trait will be seen again in many adversaries of the heroes of the fornaldar sogur.

Loki's most heinous deed, his part in the slaying of Baldr, as Snorri tells it, involved both his slippery tongue and his ability to change shape, for he employed both to get from Frigg the information that Baldr was not proof against mistletoe. In the actual slaying of Baldr, however, Loki appears as a bystander, not participating in the games of the gods, and he acts out of spite and envy for Baldr (Gylf., Ch. 49).

But not all of Loki's tricks start from spite, however. The oldest datable source to mention him is the Haustlong of Þjóðólfr of Hvinn (pre-945); the tale is retold by Snorri (Skald., Ch. 1). Loki is travelling with Óðinn and

Hœnir, and gets into his adventure when he attempts to recover the gods' food, which has been stolen by a giant, þjazi, who had taken the shape of an eagle. Trapped by the giant, Loki typically betrays the gods in order to save himself, giving his captor Iðunn, keeper of the apples which preserve the gods' youth. But then, just as typically, he retrieves Iðunn and prepares the destruction of the giant. þjóðólfr's tale shows that Loki is accepted by the gods as a companion but that they have good reason for not trusting him. His similarity to the giant, a member of the enemy party (Snorri says that Loki himself is the son of a giant), is shown not only by his conciliating the giant but by his taking a falcon's form as the giant had taken that of an eagle.

Other skaldic poetry shows Loki in similar circumstances. The Þórsdrápa of Eilífr Guðrúnarson shows Loki on one hand as a friend of Þórr, and on the other, as tricking him into a visit to the giant Geirrøðr, who nearly overcomes him. (A later version of this story, from Þórsteins þáttr Bæjarmagns, will appear in the fourth chapter.) Úlfr Uggason's Húsdrápa describes a mural scene of a combat between Loki and Heimdallr, his opponent in the great last battle, over an object which Snorri thinks is the Brising necklace.[38] Snorri's version shows another aspect

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[38] E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Myth and Religion of the North (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 129.

of Loki's relation with the gods whom he opposes, for both Loki and Heimdallr had changed shape and become seals (Sk., Ch. 8). That is, even in changing to beast form, Loki is not unlike his opponents. Óðinn himself, as will appear shortly, though the leader of the gods, the supposedly "right" side, is not the least of the shape-shifters. The possibility that both attacking enemy or monster and defending god or hero may have beast-characteristics has, however, already been pointed out earlier in the examination of archaeological evidence which indicates that man and beast may exchange roles.

Ambiguous in both shape and loyalty, Loki is most notorious for having begotten the monsters of the opposing side in the last battle. His parenthood has been mentioned in the passage from the Vǫluspá quoted above; it is also mentioned in Þjóðólfr's Haustlǫng and Ynglinga tal, Eilífr's Þórsdrápa, and in the late poem Vǫluspá in skamma. Snorri says Loki is the father of Fenrir, the Miðgarðsormr, and Hel, the ruler of the dead; the two skalds concur.

The Vǫluspá in skamma is probably the work of a Christian; all that remains of it are seventeen stanzas inserted in the Hyndluljóð, but Snorri seems to accept it as containing genuine material.[39] It has several stanzas on the birth of the monsters:

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[39]Turville-Petre, p. 129; Gylf., Ch. 5.

Ól úlf Loki við Angrboðo,
enn Sleipni gat við Svaðilfara;
eitt þótti scass allra feicnast,
þat var bróður frá Býleistz komit.

Loki át af hiarta lindi brendo
fann hann hálfsviðinn hugstein kono;
varð Loptr qviðugr af kono illri,
þaðan er á foldo flagð hvert komit.
(St. 40-41)

[Loki begot the Wolf with Angrboða, "Bringer of ill news," and begot Sleipnir with Svaðilfari, "Unlucky journey," "Disaster" (a horse's name); one seemed most terrible of all which came from Býleistr's brother (Loki). Loki ate a heart burned with linden--he found a half-cooked heart of a woman--then he was pregnant from the evil woman, and thence came all evil (or monster) women on earth.]

The first stanza refers to Loki's begetting the Wolf and Sleipnir and a third unnamed monster, probably, Lee Hollander thinks, the great Serpent.[40] Angrboða is not known elsewhere, unless she is the old woman of the Vǫluspá, St. 39. At any rate, the Wolf seems to have human parentage. The birth of Sleipnir is explained by Snorri (Gylf., Ch. 42): a giant hired by the gods to build their fortifications will claim Freyja in recompense if he completes his work by a deadline; to prevent the loss of Freyja, Loki changes himself into a mare and entices away the giant's stallion, by which he gives birth to Óðinn's eight-footed steed as a by-product. This story of Loki's pregnancy parallels the implication of the second stanza

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[40] Lee M. Hollander, tr., The Poetic Edda (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1928), p. 161, n. 14.

quoted above: Loki is ambivalent not only in loyalty and shape but in sex as well. As Turville-Petre says, homosexuality is a serious offense among the Norse, punishable in Iceland as severely as murder.[41] Loki's bisexuality is in a sense the climax of the monstrousness of his nature, both physically and morally. Nonetheless, Sleipnir, whose birth is in this stanza syntactically parallel with that of Fenrir and, by implication, is, like that of the "monster women," the result of sexual perversion, is a beast on the "right" side, for he is Óðinn's steed. That is, Loki not only joins forces with both sides but also begets monsters for both sides.

Loki's longest single appearance and one which gives considerable insight into his character is in the eddic poem Lokasenna or Flyting of Loki. The flyting or verbal duel is one of the most significant patterns in the eddic poetry. Four of the mythological poems--the Vafþrúðnismál, Hábarðsljóð, Alvíssmál, and Lokasenna--are in the dialogue-challenge form. The For Skírnis has a dialogue-challenge section; the Grímnismál is a monologue, but its content is lore similar to that in the Vafþrúðnismál and Alvíssmál, and it involves an implied challenge to a present but non-speaking adversary. Though in these poems the attack is

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[41] Turville-Petre, p. 131; see also Folke Ström, Níð, ergi and Old Norse moral attitudes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1974).

verbal, not physical, there is still an implication of combat: a mortal opponent to a god, as in the Grímnismál, Vafþrúðnismál, and Alvissmál, loses his life along with the disputation.[42] In the Fǫr Skírnis there is a threat of death if the confrontation continues; in the Hárbarðsljóð, Þórr and Óðinn come close to blows, and in the Lokasenna Loki delays his eventual violent fate only by turning tail before Þórr. In the heroic poetry the flyting is the prelude to actual combat; as Dame Bertha Phillpotts says, the flyting must have been an expected component of the old heroic poetry.[43] Here, then, is another parallel to the challenges before combat in ancient myth.

The occasion of the Lokasenna is given in a prose introduction in the manuscript; the situation seems similar to that in which Grendel first attacks Heorot. Ægir, the sea god, brewed beer for the gods and elves in the great cauldron won by Þórr (as is told in the Hymiskviða). After listing some of those present, the prose explains,

> Ægir átti tvá þiónustomenn, Fimafengr oc Eldir. Þar var lýsigull haft fyrir eldzliós. Siálft barsc þar ql. Þar var griðastaðr mikill. Menn lofoðo miǫc, hverso góðir þiónustomenn Ægis vǿro. Loki mátti eigi heyra þat, oc drap hann Fimafeng.

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[42] Dame Bertha S. Phillpotts, Edda and Saga (London: Butterworth, 1931), p. 120.

[43] Phillpotts, p. 80.

> [AEgir had two servants, Handy and Firemaker. There was bright gold in place of firelight. Beer poured itself. That was a place of great peace. Men said much in praise of how good AEgir's servants were. Loki couldn't stand that, and he slew Handy.]

The gods drove Loki out to the woods, but he crawled back and asked Eldir what the gods were discussing. On being told that they had much to say of their own bravery but nothing good of him, Loki decided to go back in and "mix evil in their mead" (St. 3). What follows is a rapid-fire exchange of insults between Loki and every target which presents itself in the gathering. The similarity between Loki's actions and those of Bricriu-poison-tongue in the Ulster Cycle have often been observed.[44] Indeed, Loki has often been considered as belonging to the long tradition of taunters which runs from Goliath through Unferð.

The sources of some of Loki's taunts cannot be traced, but then many are the kind of accusations which cannot be refuted, or whose refutations would be as unpleasant as the accusations themselves.[45] It is enough that he make accusations and that the accusations infuriate the gods and goddesses.

Loki systematically accuses the goddesses present--Iðunn, Gefjun, Frigg, Freyja, Skaði, Sif, and Beyla--of

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[44]Turville-Petre, p. 145; Elliott, p. 131.

[45]Hollander, p. 104.

promiscuity. Frigg and Freyja he accuses of incest. Iðunn he accuses of sleeping with her brother's slayer. Most such insults the gods shrug off; Njǫrðr says cuckolding one's husband isn't much compared to Loki's perversion (St. 33), and Týr says Freyr is one of the finest gods even if Njǫrðr did beget him incestuously (St. 37).

But throughout all the poem runs an undercurrent of Loki's own past misdeeds and his pride in them. Some of the deeds Loki claims for himself; some he is accused of. Some of his deeds belong to the realm of bawdy suggestion--to Njǫrðr's excusing other gods' being cuckolded, Loki eventually replies that even Njǫrðr has horns, courtesy of Loki. In spite of Loki's having devised the death of Þjazi, her father, Skaði has slept with the trickster (St. 52). Loki has also lain with Sif, Þórr's wife (St. 54).

Others of Loki's deeds, however, are more serious, and he accordingly seems more proud of them. When Frigg wishes she had Baldr present to drive off the obnoxious Loki, he delightedly replies that Baldr's death was by his plotting (St. 27-28). Loki's talent for begetting monsters is repeatedly alluded to. When Loki first returns to the hall, Óðinn asks Víðarr to make room for the "úlfs fǫður" [the Wolf's father], lest Loki's spleen be excited too much (St. 10). Loki does not deign to reply, perhaps because he knows the Wolf will be Óðinn's bane;

ironically though, Víðarr, who makes room for the Wolf's father, will be the Wolf's bane. The Wolf is the subject of Loki's altercation with Týr, as he is glad his offspring cost Týr a hand (St. 38). In returning the taunt that the loss of a hand is matched by Loki's loss of the Wolf, Týr provokes a scurrilous reply from the Wolf's father.

Loki's parenthood naturally suggests his bisexuality, of which both Njǫrðr (St. 33) and Óðinn (St. 23) remind him. Óðinn says,

> átta vetr vartu fyr iǫrð neðan
> kýr mólcandi oc kona,
> oc hefir þú þar born borit,
> oc hugða ec þat args aðal.
> (St. 23)

> [For eight winters you were below on earth
> milking cows as a woman, and you have given
> birth, and I think that is an effeminate way.]

Loki's reply is interesting; although to what he alludes is unclear, the implication that his chief adversary is of the same nature is obvious:

> Enn þic síða kóðo Sámseyo í
> oc draptu á vétt sem vǫlor;
> vitca líki fórtu verþióð yfir,
> oc hugða ec þat args aðal.
> (St. 24)

> [But you, they say, worked spells on Sámsey
> and killed by magic like a witch; you went
> like a sorcerer among men, and I think that
> is an effeminate way.]

Loki's close relation to Óðinn is the subject of an earlier stanza:

Mantu þat, Óðinn, er við í árdaga
blendom blóði saman;
ǫlvi bergia léztu eigi mundo,
nema ocr væri báðom borit.
(St. 9)

[Remember, Óðinn, that when in days of old we mixed our blood together you would not have it that ale be poured unless it were poured for both of us.]

Although no other extant source mentions the blood-brotherhood of Óðinn and Loki, Óðinn here not only does not deny it, but even has Víðarr make room for Loki.

Throughout the Lokasenna, battling is verbal, not physical. Still, as there is constant allusion to Loki's evil deeds, there is also frequent allusion to physical force past and future. In the ancient past are the slaying of þjazi and Baldr and the binding of the Wolf. Týr and Freyr both threaten Loki with bondage and predict that he will remain bound until the ragnarǫk (St. 39, 41). Although they do not actively prophesy, Gefjun and Frigg are both said to have knowledge of future doom (St. 21, 25, 29). Frigg perhaps has in mind Baldr's resurrection after the final defeat of Loki. When Loki enters, Bragi, god of poetry, does not wish to grant him a place, and threatens him until Loki reminds him that the patron of poets is a man of words, not actions. Most other threats of force Loki similarly evades by distracting his opponent, until Þórr arrives from one of his usual giant-slaying missions. Þórr, in typically thick-headed manner, is impervious to Loki's jibes and simply repeats his threats to apply

Mjǫllnir to Loki's head until the pest flees.

The whole confrontation between Loki and the gods is relatively unmotivated beyond the account in the prose introduction of Loki's jealousy of Ægir's servants. Loki may be drunk ("ǫlr," St. 47), crazy ("œrr," St. 29), or crazy and witless ("œrr . . . oc ørviti," St. 21) when he does these things, and so may be others, such as Bragi, who offers the first insult (Bragi is called "biórreifan" [over-glad with beer], St. 18). Loki's taunting probably arises not simply from drink or from a single case of envy, however, but from his essential character. Gefjun says of him,

> Lopzci þat veit, at hann leikinn er
> oc hann fiǫrgvall friá.
> (St. 19)

This passage is unclear,[46] and as it stands implies that Loki likes to play and loves (?) the gods. However, the passage might be emended to "fiǫrg ǫll fiá," which might be interpreted "for Loki knoweth what nag he bears: he loathes all living things,"[47] or ". . . he loathes all beings and mocks in his madness of soul."[48] Although any reading of Gefjun's statement is on shaky grounds, the conjectured loathing of all living things would fit well

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[46] Hollander, p. 110; Hans Kuhn, Kurzes Wörterbuch for Neckel and Kuhn (1968), pp. 62, 55, 54.

[47] Hollander, p. 110.

[48] Olive Bray, ed. and tr., The Elder Edda (London: Society for Northern Research, 1908), p. 253.

with Loki's having begotten those beasts which will in the last days destroy the created world of gods and men.

Perhaps the most remarkable statement Loki makes in the Lokasenna is that Óðinn is his blood-brother. Óðinn, as leader of the gods, would seem to represent the antithesis of Loki, begetter of the monsters which will eventually fight the gods. Óðinn himself will fight Loki's prize offspring, Fenrir the great Wolf. Yet in Loki and Óðinn is found the best example of the actual proximity of the opposing sides.

Óðinn is a strange god. He is god not only of knowledge and poetry but also of warriors and the dead. He inspires poets but receives human sacrifices. Like Christ he offers himself as the supreme sacrifice to himself, but in triumphing over death he gains not eternal life but a whole arsenal of spells and sorcery. He is, like Loki, a very ambiguous character.

In the Lokasenna, Loki calls him blood-brother, and Óðinn does not deny it. Loki also accuses him of the most effeminate kinds of sorcery, which he calls args aðal, the same term which Óðinn had applied to Loki's bisexuality, and Óðinn does not deny that either. Loki makes another charge against Óðinn:

> opt þú gaft, þeim er þú gefa scyldira,
> inom slævorom, sigr.
> (St. 22)

[often you gave, what you should not have given,
to weaker men, victory.]

Óðinn freely admits this charge (the Sigdrífumál and Helreið Brynhildar among the heroic poems mention Óðinn's practice), for he has taken the better warriors to himself in preparation for the final battle. Loki's chief external attribute is Fenrir, but Óðinn, as a god of battle, is associated with the traditional beasts of battle--wolf, eagle, and raven. Wolf and raven decorate the gates of Valhǫll (Grím., St. 10), and Óðinn's pets are two wolves, Geri and Freki, both of which names mean "greedy"; in the Vǫluspá, however, freki is used as a synonym for Fenrir and his kin (St. 44, 51, 58).

Óðinn's shifty nature can be seen in some of the names by which he calls himself in the Grímnismál. In that poem, Óðinn visits his foster son, Geirrøðr, to test him, and speaks much lore (very much, after the poem has become a storehouse of interpolations[49]) to Geirrøðr's son Agnarr. In the poem Óðinn calls himself Grímnir, "Masked," which is both a literal description of his disguised state and also a token of his variable nature. He is, like Loki, a shape-shifter. Óðinn's names are a full reflection of his ambiguous character. Some allude to extant myths--Helblindi, "Blind as Hel (Death)" (St. 46), to his loss of an eye (Loki, according to Snorri, also has a brother named Helblindi, Gylf., Ch. 33); Hárbarðr, "Hoary-beard" (St. 49),

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[49]Hollander, p. 61.

from such poems as the Hárbarðsljóð; Grímr and Gangleri, "Masked" and "Wanderer" (St. 46), from his frequent disguising of himself to wander about the world. Some are appropriate to his high status: Hár, "High," though it may mean "One-eyed" (St. 46); Jafnhár, "Just as High" (St. 49); and þriði, "Third" (St. 46), are the names of the tripartite manifestation of Óðinn in Snorri's Gylfaginning. Fjǫlnir and Fjǫlsviðr, "Very wise" and "Very experienced," refer to his role as a god of wisdom; Sanngetall, "Truth-teller," to his ability in lore-matches (St. 47). Others, often juxtaposed in the same lines with these, suggest his evil nature: with Sanngetall is Svipall, "Changeable," and two lines later, with Fjǫlnir is Bǫlverkr, "Evil-doer." Óðinn is also þrór þingom at (St. 49), one who incites strife at þings.[50]

Óðinn's nature as a shape-shifter is confirmed by some of these names. Ófnir and Sváfnir, "Entangler" (in riddles?) and "One who puts to sleep" (St. 54), are also the names of serpents which gnaw the roots of Yggdrasill (St. 34).[51] Óðinn's shape-changing appears in numerous myths. One good example is his theft of the mead of poetry: Snorri says the god became an eagle to escape with the mead (Sk., Ch. 1), but in the Hávamál Óðinn

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[50]Hollander, p. 73.

[51]Turville-Petre, p. 63; Hollander, p. 74.

claims to have used or become an inanimate object, apparently a drill or gimlet,[52] to dig through the giant's castle and escape with the mead:

> Rata munn lętomc rúms um fá
> oc um griốt gnaga.
> (Hár., St. 106)

> [With Rati's (or the drill's) mouth I made myself room and gnawed the rock.]

On this thieving journey Óðinn had made one of his appearances under the rather obvious name of Bǫlverkr, "Evil-doer" (St. 109). As the god of poetry Óðinn is a thief, though, as Snorri tells the myth, Óðinn steals from giants, themselves thieves. Indeed, the mead of poetry had passed through the hands of murderers as well as thieves before Evil-doer gained it.[53]

Even as the god of wisdom Óðinn is connected with the world of evil and monsters. The story of Óðinn's gaining his mighty wisdom he tells in the Rúnatal (rune-poem) section of the Hávamál (St. 138-45). This passage begins with the famous description of Óðinn's self-sacrifice:

> Veit ec, at ec hecc vindgameiði á
> nætr allar nío
> geiri undaðr oc gefinn Óðni,
> siálfr siálfom mér,
> á þeim meiði, er mangi veit,
> hvers hann af rótom renn.

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[52]Turville-Petre, p. 36.

[53]Turville-Petre, pp. 35-36.

> [I know that I hung on the windy tree (gallows)
> nine whole nights, wounded with a spear and
> given to Óðinn, myself to myself, on that tree
> of which few know where its roots run.]

Few would deny at least a remote possibility of Christian influence here,[54] but the passage is also characteristic of what is known of Óðinn. He is the god of death, particularly of death by hanging, and to him human sacrifices were made by hanging.[55]

For his sacrifice Óðinn gained the runes of lore and nine mighty songs or spells from a son of Bǫlþorn (St. 140). Bǫlþorn is, according to Snorri (Gylf., Ch. 6), an ancestor of Óðinn's, but he is also a giant, of the race of the traditional enemies of the gods. Óðinn thus shares with Loki a mixed ancestry. Giants are often wise,[56] and in the Vafþrúðnismál Óðinn's opponent in a lore-match is a giant. They are also like the dead in that they live inside rocks and hills; Turville-Petre even suggests that giants are demons of death.[57] Indeed, as will appear from the later sagas, the draugar, the living dead in the barrows who sometimes walk abroad with evil intent, like the

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[54]Turville-Petre, pp. 42-43; Hollander, p. 74.

[55]Turville-Petre, pp. 48-49.

[56]Turville-Petre, p. 49. The ambiguous nature of Óðinn's relationship with the giants has been commented on by M. Ciklamini, "Óðinn and the Giants," Neophilologus, 46 (1962), 145-58.

[57]Turville-Petre, p. 49.

framgengnir of the Vǫluspá, St. 39, are the most frequent monstrous adversaries of the heroes.[58]

The wisdom which Óðinn gains from his ordeal and which he explains in the Ljóðatal following the Rúnatal (St. 146-64), is of a mixed sort. Some is useful knowledge--curing sickness (St. 146-47), stopping arrows and spears (St. 150), putting out fire (St. 152), and settling strife (St. 153). But Óðinn also uses spells to seduce girls (St. 161-62). A spell like the tenth is ambiguous:

> Þat kann ec iþ tíunda, ef ec sé túnriðor
> leica lopti á
> ec svá vinnc, at þeir villir fara
> sinna heim hama,
> sinna heim huga.
> (St. 155)

[I know a tenth: if I see witches sport in the air, I work it so that they go astray from their own skins, from their own thoughts.]

Though destroying witches might be a good deed, knowing their ways well enough to distract them is dangerous knowledge. The spell is incidentally a reminder that shape-shifting is often associated with evil. The sixth spell shows similarly the bi-directional effect of Óðinn's magical knowledge:

> Þat kann ec it sétta, ef mic særir þegn
> á rótom rás viðar:
> oc þann hal, er mic heipta qveðr,
> þann eta mein heldr enn mic.
> (St. 151)

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[58]These aptrgǫngumenn--Glámr of the Grettis saga is the best known--are generally giant or troll-like, but description of these monsters must wait for consideration with the later literature.

> [I know a sixth: if a man would wound me by writing runes on a moist root, then the man who made the evil charm against me will get the evil rather than me.]

What evil others attempt Óðinn will appropriate to himself. The twelfth spell involves necromancy; Óðinn, himself once hanged, can make other hanged men come down to walk with him and give him their knowledge. It is this kind of knowledge, dabbling in witchcraft and necromancy, that elicits Loki's taunt of *args aðal*.[59]

Óðinn is much like Dryden's Achitophel: of great wit, but near to madness. *Óðr* as a noun can mean "mind" or "poetry," but as an adjective it means "mad" or "frantic."[60] One of Óðinn's poetic names, Yggr (as in *Yggdrasill*, "the horse of Yggr," the world ash tree), means "terrifier."[61] Óðinn's knowledge is dangerous from the very beginning. In the *Rúnatal* he sees in his suffering the runes he seeks, and

> nam ec upp rúnar, œpandi nam,
> fell ec aptr þaðan.
> (St. 139)

> [I took up the runes, took them up shrieking, then I fell back down.]

The passage is obscure, but it could be interpreted as implying further pain or else raging madness.

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[59] Turville-Petre, p. 64.

[60] Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2nd ed., rev. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1962), "óðr," p. 416; Zoëga, "óðr," p. 323; Cleasby-Vigfusson, "óðr," p. 471.

[61] de Vries, (1962), "yggr," p. 677; Turville-Petre, p. 48.

Magic, madness, monsters, and Óðinn's role as god of battle and of the dead come together in the berserkr, who is Óðinn's man. Though most examples of the berserkir, per se, are relevant more to the later discussion of the sagas, one passage from Snorri's Ynglinga saga, the opening, most mythological portion of his Heimskringla, helps to define Óðinn's role with the berserkir. While Snorri's euhemerism is evident in the Heimskringla--Óðinn is a mortal king of the Ynglings (Swedes) who dies in his bed[62]--Óðinn's old role as sorcerer still shows through:

> Óðinn kunni svá gera, at í orrostu urðu óvinir hans blindir eða daufir eða óttafullir, en vápn þeira bitu eigi heldr en vendir, en hans menn fóru brynjulausir ok váru galnir sem hundar eða vargar, bitu skjǫldu sína, váru sterkir sem birnir eða griðungar. Þeir drápu mannfólkit, en hvártki eldr ne járn orti á þá. Þat er kallaðr berserksgangr.[63]
>
> [Óðinn could so work it that in battle his enemies became blind or deaf or terrified, and their weapons did not bite any more than wands, but his men went without byrnies and yelped like dogs or wolves, bit their shields, and were stronger than bears or bulls. They killed men, and neither fire nor iron injured them. That is called going berserk.]

Óðinn drives men mad and makes beasts of them. He weakens and destroys his enemies. Like Grendel he charms his enemies' weapons. But Óðinn is treacherous. A lover of strife, even strife of kin, he sometimes openly promotes it.

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[62]Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København: S.L. Møller, 1900), Ynglinga saga, Ch. 9, p. 21.

[63]Ynglinga saga, Ch. 6, pp. 17-18.

In the Hárbarðsljóð, for example, he boasts of his role as inciter of strife and as sponsor of troublemakers. In skaldic poetry he is called illuðigr, "malicious."[64]

Promoting strife and betrayal is his role in the sagas, too. An Óðinn-hero is almost always involved in conflict and is frequently plagued with the ill luck to be the cause of conflict. One of the most nearly typical of the god's men is Starkaðr, who appears in one of the eddic Helgi-poems as well as in Gautreks saga and is probably the eald æscwiga of Bēowulf (l. 2042), for he is usually credited with being the inciter to vengeance at Ingeld's court.[65] Óðinn's favor is dangerous: Starkaðr was notorious for betraying his leaders (cf. Gautreks saga). Sigmundr, one of the most famous of Óðinn's warriors, was himself ultimately betrayed by the god. There is justice in Loki's accusation that he sometimes takes the stronger man to himself and lets the weaker win. Óðinn always betrays in the end.[66] The other side of Sigfǫðr, the father of victories, is Valfǫðr, the father of corpses.

Another trait which the father of gods and men shares with the father of the Wolf is the predilection for

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[64]Turville-Petre, p. 54.

[65]Axel Olrik, The Heroic Legends of Denmark, tr. and rev. Lee M. Hollander (New York: American Scandinavian Foundation, 1919), pp. 15 ff.; Beowulf, ed. Fr. Klaeber, 3rd ed. (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath, 1950), pp. 202-04.

[66]Turville-Petre, p. 53.

engaging in disputations. Although Óðinn's flytings tend to concern themselves more with myth and lore than with insults, they still involve challenges and often end violently. The Grímnismál, Vafþrúðnismal, and Hábarðsljóð, all flytings, are also significantly related to combat.

The Grímnismál is Óðinn's challenge to Geirrøðr, who has not recognized him and is tormenting him. Geirrøðr is Óðinn's foster-son and, true to his upbringing, is his brother's betrayer. In the poem, betrayed in turn by a wrathful Óðinn, he fails his test and dies on his own sword.

The copious lore which Óðinn speaks while tormented by his foster-son is an extension of that which he produces in the Hávamál. Jere Fleck has suggested that both poems deal with the god's self-initiation into the numinous knowledge necessary for Germanic kingship.[67] But this knowledge of which Óðinn is so proud involves very ambiguous powers of casting spells, shifting shapes, and working deception. The Grímnismál operates on several levels. It may preserve the knowledge gained by Óðinn in a ritual trance, and in the ordeal of his sitting between two fires it may suggest the form of his initiation.[68]

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[67]Jere Fleck, "The 'Knowledge-Criterion' in the Grímnismál: the Case against 'shamanism,'" Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi, 86 (1971), 61-62.

[68]Fleck, p. 63.

The knowledge revealed is of his own nature, and since it concerns methods of self-preservation and advancement, it is knowledge of use to the berserkir and others of the god's disciples. Finally, the poem, with its frame narrative of Geirrøðr's treachery and Óðinn's revenge, is itself an application of that knowledge.

In the Vafþrúðnismál, Óðinn enters a hall uninvited to challenge the inhabitant, as Loki does in Ægir's hall in the Lokasenna and Grendel does at Heorot in Beowulf. Vafþrúðnir, the hall-dweller, is a giant, a traditional anthropomorphic opponent for a god. His name, "Strong in entanglements," applies most immediately to his ability in riddles, but it could be extended to other more serious forms of trickery. Fjǫlnir and Sanngetall, two of Óðinn's many names, could similarly suggest ability in riddle-games. Vafþrúðnir loses the riddle-match with Óðinn, and with the match his head, but he is tricked. Óðinn's last question, with which he characteristically reveals his identity, is one which only he can answer: "What did Óðinn whisper in Baldr's ear when Baldr's body lay on the funeral pyre?" Even as a god of wisdom Óðinn seems something of a malicious destroyer.

The other god most associated with the monster-combat is Þórr. Þórr's reputation as a fighter of giants was sufficiently proverbial that the compiler of the prose introduction to the Lokasenna could explain the god's

absence at the first of Ægir's feast by saying that he was on one of his frequent excursions to the giants' lands in the east.

Þórr is an entirely different type of figure from Óðinn. Although Þórr is said to be Óðinn's son, about all that he shares with that formidable but shadowy figure is great honor, an occasional journey, and the pyrrhic victory against the monsters in the final battle. Most significantly, Þórr is not noted for lore or wisdom; of the two flyting-poems to which he is a principal--the Alvíssmál and the Hárbarðsljóð--only the former is a lore-poem, but even there Þórr is merely a questioner, not a source of information. In the Hárbarðsljóð he is the butt of Óðinn's sarcasm and comes off a clumsy second. Óðinn, though a god of warriors, personally avoids combat, preferring to gain his ends through stealth or the labors of his chosen heroes. Þórr, however, goes about matters directly, with his own brute strength. Although Óðinn has a spear, Gungnir, his chief attributes in the poetry are his wolves, eagles, and ravens, the mead of poetry, the runes and spells of his magic lore, and the disguises in which he wanders. He is an observer more than a participant. On the one hand, Þórr is almost always associated with the hammer Mjǫllnir, though he also has a belt of strength and a goat-drawn chariot. He is clearly a man of action, not contemplation. Óðinn's Gungnir is named in only one of the eddic poems;

Þórr's Mjǫllnir appears in five. In those poems, Þórr's position in relation to that of Óðinn is not unlike Moloch's beside that of Satan in Book II of Paradise Lost: brute, unthinking strength beside cunning deception.

Þórr's most famous battle before the final one is also with the Miðgarðsormr; the subject of the eddic Hymiskviða, it is also recounted in Bragi Boddason's Ragnarsdrápa and Snorri's Edda (Gylf., Ch. 48). In all the versions Þórr is visiting the giant Hymir, who challenges him to a fishing match. Using an oxhead for bait, Þórr manages to hook the Serpent and haul it up. Bragi and Snorri say that Hymir panicked and cut Þórr's line, but the Hymiskviða has Þórr haul the Serpent into the boat and strike its head with the hammer before it falls back into the water. The actual combat is short; the Serpent is not extensively characterized. Though Snorri and Bragi have it raging and spitting poison, the eddic poem says nothing of the Serpent's mood, except that when Þórr struck it,

> Hreingálcn hlumðo enn hǫlcn þuto
> fǫr in forna fold ǫll saman.
> (St. 24)

> [The Wolf screamed and the rocks shook; the whole earth moved.]

The Serpent, in other words, appears as it does in other poems, violent and angry, and it seems to represent a number of destructive forces in nature. The Hymiskviða has a composite plot, with a frame narrative of Þórr's seeking from Hymir the great cauldron in which Ægir

brewed the gods' beer. In this context Hymir emerges as the taunting adversary of the hero. Said to be the father of Týr, Þórr's companion, Hymir is notoriously stingy with guests (St. 9), and when he enters, his glare breaks the post behind which the gods are standing (St. 12). Displeased at Þórr's having consumed two of the three oxen cooked for supper, he mocks the god's eating habits and challenges Þórr to the fishing match. Throughout the passage Þórr's reputation is frequently referred to; he is Hymir's andskoti [adversary] (St. 13) and þurs ráðbani [one who counsels the death of giants] (St. 19) (Ráðbani is usually a term for Loki, who is Baldrs ráðbani), and the giant himself calls Þórr bjórtr berg-Dana [destroyer of rock-Danes, i.e., of giants] (St. 17). Having lost the fishing match, Hymir challenges Þórr to carry their boat to the house. After he loses that bet, he defies Þórr to break an adamantine goblet, only to have the god crack it over his skull. Upon winning the kettle, Þórr leaves, but seeing the giants pursuing him, he turns back and exterminates them. The tone of this tale is largely that of lighthearted boasting and mockery, but the presence of the Serpent and Þórr's eventual slaying of the giants signify a more serious background. Hymir, as a giant, is like the Serpent a threat to the stability of the world. Fishing, he is móðugr [angry], as is the Serpent, which, when hooked, shakes the earth. Hymir's irritation is sufficient

to make him wish to pursue Þórr after the god triumphantly leaves with his prize. The contests of brute strength--Þórr's raising the Serpent, carrying the kettle which Týr could not lift, cracking the goblet, and finally slaying the giants--are reminders that Þórr maintains the world order by his magn, his main strength. Magni, "the Strong One," it should be remembered, is one of his sons, who the Vǫluspá says will survive to reestablish the world order after the great battle when Þórr and the destructive Serpent slay each other.

Throwing the goblet is part of a motif associated with several of Þórr's other conflicts. Þjóðólfr's Haustlǫng tells a story, repeated by Snorri (Sk., Ch. 17), of Þórr's fight with Hrungnir in which Þórr slays the giant by throwing Mjǫllnir but is himself wounded by a whetstone thrown by the giant. This tale contains one of Þórr's rare involvements in trickery: Þórr's servant Þjálti convinces Hrungnir to stand on his shield rather than hold it in front of him, lest Þórr burrow under his feet. Eilífr Guðrúnarson's Þórsdrápa tells another tale which Snorri also recounts (Sk., Ch. 18), in which Geirrøðr loses to Þórr a throwing match involving a red-hot piece of iron. Saxo has a barely recognizable version of the tale (Bk. 8), and it becomes a central episode in Þórsteins þáttr Bæjarmagns some centuries later. Geirrøðr, a giant in the Þórsdrápa, appears in several of the fornaldar sǫgur

as an often monstrous king in what may be the land of the dead[69]--but that must wait until a later chapter.

Of Þórr's flytings the Alvíssmál tells the least about the god's personality as a monster-fighter. Þórr's role is almost entirely as the asker of very formulaic lore-questions. The last stanza explains why Þórr has prolonged the catechism: in a ruse worthy of Óðinn he has caused his dwarfish adversary to stay past sunrise and so be changed to stone.[70]

Against Óðinn himself, in the Hárbarðsljóð, however, Þórr shows little talent. He tries to convince Hárbarðr, really Óðinn in disguise, to ferry him across a stream. Like Hagen's adversary in the Nibelungenlied (Ch. 25), the ferryman is unwilling and insulting. Finally, the Hárbarðsljóð becomes a shouting match of insults which barely maintains verse form.[71]

The tone of the poem is epitomized by one of Hárbarðr's taunts--speaking of those who die in battle, he says,

> Óðinn á iarla, þá er í val falla,
> enn Þórr á þræla kyn.
> (St. 24)

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[69]Turville-Petre, p. 80; Saxo Grammaticus, The First Nine Books of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus, tr. Oliver Elton (London: D. Nutt, 1894).

[70]Fleck, p. 63, considers the Alvíssmál a "knowledge-confrontation" akin to the Grímnismál, but transferred to Þórr. He also sees the Þrymskviða and Hymiskviða as involving similar, but not so overt, "knowledge-confrontations."

[71]Hollander, p. 85.

[Óðinn has the earls who fall in battle, but
Þórr has the race of thralls.]

Þórr is a slow, purely physical type; Óðinn is witty and quick. The distance between the two gods is also the closeness between Óðinn and Loki, the father of the monsters. In the Lokasenna Loki's taunts do not have the same effect on Þórr as they do on the other gods, for, as Pope says, "No creature smarts so little as a fool." Unlike the others, Þórr does not try to match words but gives each of Loki's jibes the same sort of formulaic response:

Þegi þú, rǫg vættr! Þér scal min þrúðhamarr,
Miǫllnir, mál fyrnema.
(St. 57, 59, 61, 63)

[Shut up, you effeminate wretch! you'll hear
the voice of my heroic hammer, Mjǫllnir.]

In the Hárbarðsljóð, Óðinn is not so easily intimidated, however, and taunts Þórr all the more for his threats. In fact, Óðinn here uses taunts somewhat in the fashion of Loki, as when he sneeringly refers to the time when Þórr got lost in the finger of a giant's glove (Hrbl., St. 26; Ls., St. 60; the whole episode is told by Snorri in Gylf., Ch. 45). Óðinn, again like Loki, claims that Þórr's wife, Sif, has been unfaithful (Hrbl., St. 48; Ls., St. 54).

Much of the Hárbarðsljóð consists of the two opponents' trying to top each other's deeds; the dialogue runs mostly to the form "In those days I did such-and-such deeds, but what were you doing then?" Þórr usually talks of slaying giants. He mentions Hrungnir (St. 14) and

þjazi (St. 19) as well as miscellaneous battles (St. 23, 29) which he evaluates:

> mikil myndi ætt iǫtna, ef allir lifði,
> vætr myndi manna undir miðgarði.
> (St. 23)

[Mighty would have been the giants' race, if all had lived, weak would have been men on Middle-Earth.]

Against such valuable but monotonous work Óðinn brags chiefly of the women he has seduced (St. 16, 18, 20, 30) and the great battles he has provoked (St. 16, 24, 40). Typically Óðinn's deeds are doubly dubious, for the women he seduces from their husbands are witches:

> Miclar manvélar ec hafða við myrcriðor,
> þá er ec vélta þær frá verom.
> (St. 20)

[I had great fun with witches when I charmed them away from their men.]

His only combat with a giant suits his own style as he charms Hlébarð out of his wits and a sorcerer's wand:

> harðan iǫtun ec hugða Hlébarð vera,
> gaf hann mér gambantein,
> enn ec vélta hann ór viti.
> (St. 20)

[I thought Hlébarðra hard giant, but he gave me his magic wand when I charmed him out of his wits.]

Þórr's only encounter with women is against witches, <u>vargynior</u> [wolf-women] (St. 39) when, unlike Óðinn, he is interested not in seducing but in destroying:

> Brúðir berserkia barðac í Hléseyio;
> þær hǫfðo verst unnit vélta þióð alla.
> (St. 37)

[The brides of berserks I fought on Hlésey; they had desired to do the worst to all men.]

Here again evil, witches, vargar, and shape-shifting are associated. Óðinn, who as patron of berserks would no doubt favor the witches, refuses to let Þórr boast of his accomplishment:

> Klæki vanntu þá, Þórr, er þú á konom barðir.
> (St. 38)
>
> [You were a coward then, Þórr, when you fought with women.]

Indeed, Óðinn learns his repertoire of taunts from his necromancy:

> Nam ec at mǫnnom þeim inom aldrœnom, er búa í heimis scógom.
> (St. 44)
>
> [I get it from ancient men who live in the woods of home.]

Heimis scógom, the woods of home, Þórr glosses as dysiom, stone barrows (St. 45).

Óðinn's evil has, apparently, been turned against Þórr in the past; though the stanza involved is unclear in the principal manuscript, other manuscripts have Þórr say Óðinn once met him oliyfá (or óliúfan or ólyfian) at bióða, that is, to invite or challenge him to hatred or poison (St. 41).[72]

The Hárbarðsljóð never describes actual combat, for Hárbarðr never rows his boat across the river, and Þórr must go home the long way. If anyone wins, it is Óðinn-Hárbarðr, who has frustrated and outtalked Þórr.

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[72] Neckel, note to St. 41; Kuhn, Wörterbuch, p. 158.

While Þórr is proud of bringing peace to men by slaying giants, Óðinn boasts that among men he has never made peace--aldri sættac (St. 24). Óðinn has here assumed Loki's role as satiric adversary. Þórr, the slayer of giants and protector of men, is confounded by one who, out of disguise, should be recognizable as his father (St. 9) and who should be fighting the enemy himself rather than dabbling in magic. Although Óðinn has the long-term defense that what he does is in preparation for an heroic last stand, his immediate appearance is not heroic. From his speech, the father of men and gods could be the father of the Wolf and mouthpiece of the enemy. His admitted deeds, in fact, place him among those who serve as monsters for later literature--the skin-changers and the talking dead--and his sharp tongue links him to the sarcastic monstrous challengers.

In his complexity, then, Óðinn, the patron of heroes and monster-fighters, becomes both morally and physically like the monsters he should fight. His son Þórr, however, shows few monstrous traits. Almost guileless and not adept at shape-changing, Þórr generally shares with his opponents only great physical strength. Against a witty or deceitful monster like Geirrøðr, Loki, Útgarða-Loki, or even Óðinn in a malicious mood, he is almost helpless unless he gets a chance to overwhelm by force. In the rest of Norse monster-lore, in both the heroic poems and the sagas,

the heroes who challenge monsters are more frequently Óðinn's men than Þórr's. Perhaps, except in those cases in which sheer strength will suffice, the hero must have something in common with his adversary before he can overcome it.

The heroic poems in the eddic collection show that men, or at least the heroes among men, act like the gods they worship. The behavior of the heroes in the heroic poems is then in turn reflected in the sagas, not only in the fantastic sagas derived from the poems, such as the Vǫlsunga saga, but in the more prosaic setting of the family sagas as well. In the heroic poems the taunt is again a necessary prelude to battle. As in the Hárbarðsljóð, the insults exchanged typically involve the combatants' ancestry, upbringing, sexual tendencies, and ability in battle. Not a few times it is suggested that one or both of the warriors engaging in a flyting have a history as a beast or monster. As the suggestions are often hurled equally by both sides, it is again apparent that hero and monster may be more like than unlike. Furthermore, as in the case of Óðinn, whether an individual appears as hero or monster may depend more on the sympathy of the narrator than on the intrinsic personality of the character.

The best known monster-combat in Germanic literature is Sigurðr's attack on Fáfnir. The account among the eddic

poems is fragmentary, much patched with prose, and sometimes contains obvious mixtures of different verse forms: the portions most significant for the account of the combat are those conventionally called the Reginsmál and the Fáfnismál (other poems such as the Grípisspá mention the combat, but in less detail). The Reginsmál is particularly fragmentary in giving the background of the Niflung hoard and tells how Fáfnir (the Strangler?) seized the gold and went to live as a dragon, protecting himself with the AEgishjálmr, "Helm of Terror." Reginn, hating his brother for having taken all the hoard, fosters Sigurðr and makes for him the sword Gramr, "Wrath," "Enmity," or "Troll,"[73] to kill Fáfnir. Significantly, Sigurðr first goes, with Óðinn's aid, to silence the taunts of the sons of Hundingr, Sigmundr's slayer. Although the actual combat of Sigurðr and Fáfnir is lost from the poems, it is supplied by a prose link before the first stanza of the Fáfnismál. Sigurðr is Óðinn's man, but he is a bit slow starting; he must depend on Reginn to supply the ruse by which he overcomes the dragon and avoids being drowned in its blood. Reginn, as both brother of the monster and foster father of the hero, supplies a special connection between the two as well as the particular knowledge needed for success in the combat. Reginn is a structural mediator in the myth:

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[73]Kuhn, Wörterbuch, p. 80; Hollander, p. 257; Cleasby-Vigfusson gives both "wrath" and "fiend, demon," p. 211.

one of the monster's kin who supplies what is lacking in the hero.

Though any pre-combat flyting between the hero and the dragon is lost, the dialogue between them after Fáfnir has received his death-wound has some of the flyting style. Fáfnir, as a shape-shifter and ex-giant, naturally has the power of human speech, while Sigurðr, hiding his name at first, in effect makes himself also a beast: Gofuct dýr ec heiti [I am called noble beast] (St. 2).[74] When Sigurðr admits to being an exile, fatherless, and brought up by others (St. 2, 4), Fáfnir turns the admission into a typical taunt:

> Veit ec, ef þú vaxa næðir fyr þinna vina briósti
> sæi maðr þic vreiðan vega;
> nú ertu haptr oc hernuminn,
> æ qveða bandingia bifaz.
>
> (St. 7)

> [I know that if you grew up nearer to your friends' breasts men would see you fight more strongly. Now you are fettered and a prisoner; bound men always are said to tremble.]

But Sigurðr turns the taunt back on Fáfnir:

> því bregðr þú nú mér, Fáfnir, at til fiarri siác
> mínom feðrmunom;
> eigi em ec haptr, þótt ec væra hernumi,
> þú fannt, at ec lauss lifi.
>
> (St. 8)

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[74] Otto Höfler, Siegfried, Arminius und die Symbolik (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1961), pp. 52-59, makes this passage central to the conclusion of his argument that Siegfried is a hart-figure.

[You mock me now, Fáfnir, because you see me far from my father's people; but I am no captive, though long ago I was taken from a battlefield; you've just felt how free I am.]

Unfortunately, little more left of the exchange of taunts is extant. Fáfnir talks of the hoard and of how he terrorized others, while Sigurðr implies that Fáfnir has been a coward, terrorizing others more cowardly:

ÆgishiálmrbergrEinugi,
hvars scolo vreiðir vega.
(St. 17)

[A helm of terror protects no one if he must fight a truly brave man.]

Although the account of the combat is largely lost, its implications are not, and they may be followed in the sagas. Even in the poem Fáfnir's threats and warnings about the hoard suggest that Sigurðr may become what his victim had been. Sigurðr has already been, by his own admission, an exile, and the dragon with his hoard and helm is dying an exile's death on Gnitaheiðr. Though he does not take on a dragon form, by killing the monster and eating his heart Sigurðr in good mythic form does become Fáfnir, for he gains the giant's magic powers and, bird-like, understands the speech of birds. With the hoard comes the curse, however, and like Fáfnir, Sigurðr must either slay or be slain to retain his winnings. His next deed is to slay Fáfnir's brother Reginn, and while that is an act of self-defense, it is another mark of blood on the treasure, and not the last. The treasure is like Gullveig,

the golden witch of the Vǫluspá for whom war first was fought after she had been slain and burned in Óðinn's hall, only to rise again (St. 21). Gold is kept red by a steady flow of blood. If, as Bray suggested long ago, Gullveig has some connection with the half-burned heart of a woman which Loki ate to become pregnant[75] (and, granted, there may be no connection; as Turville-Petre suggests, Gullveig is probably an avatar of Freyja[76]), strife over gold is intrinsically linked to the begetting of monsters. Loki, father of monsters, for example, is inextricably linked to the Niflung hoard, since it gained the curse when he stole it to be the wergild of Otr, brother of Reginn and Fáfnir, whom he had accidentally slain.

While there are no other monster-slayings of major consequence in the heroic poems, there are numerous other combats, and with them more flytings. In particular, the three Helgi poems--Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar, Helgakviða Hundingsbana in fyrri, and Helgakviða Hundingsbana ǫnnor--have warrior flytings like that of the Hárbarðsljóð. The confrontation in the Helgakviða Hjǫrvarðssonar is between a warrior, Atli, and a giantess, Hrímgerðr, who, like Alvíss in the Alvíssmál, is tricked into destruction at sunrise. This flyting, unlike that in the Alvíssmál,

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[75]Bray, p. 221.

[76]Turville-Petre, pp. 158-59.

however, is belligerent and not riddling; it is a monster-slaying accomplished entirely by the harsh words of the challenger and not by deeds of strength at all. Helgi Hjǫrvarðsson appears to be a doublet of Helgi Hundingsbani, for each man loves a valkyrja, and each couple is said to be reincarnated. Helgi Hundingsbani is son of Sigmundr and half-brother of Sinfjǫtli and Sigurðr. In these poems he is credited with avenging his father on Hundingr and his sons (in the Reginsmál, however, Sigurðr is said to be the avenger of his father and slayer of Hundingr's sons).

The flyting in the first poem about this Vǫlsungr Helgi seems to be the inspiration for that in the second poem; the first is also the more interesting for the study of monsters. The flyting is between Sinfjǫtli and Guðmundr, brother of Hǫðbroddr who has set himself up as a rival to Helgi for the affections of the valkyrja Sigrún. Sinfjǫtli, who has the narrator's favor, is like his father a character with werewolf tendencies (so they appear in the Vǫlsunga saga); this trait is alluded to in the poem (St. 36). Most of the insults exchanged by Sinfjǫtli and Guðmundr involve charges either of shape-shifting and animal tendencies or of sorcery and sexual inversion. Helgi starts the argument off with the suggestion that Guðmundr's job at home is slopping hogs (St. 34) while he and Helgi feed eagles with the spoils of battle (St. 35). In these stanzas there is only a suggested parallel of men and beasts. Guðmundr's reply is more explicit, however:

þú hefir etnar úlfa krásir
oc brœðr þínom at bana orðit,
opt sár sogin með svǫlom munni,
hefr í hreysi hvarleiðr scriðit.
(St. 36)

[You have eaten wolf's food and have been your brothers' slayer and sucked sores with a cold (beast's) nose; you have crept, hated by all, into a beast's den.]

The charges seem true, if the Vǫlsunga saga's testimony is accepted. Sinfjǫtli has been a wolf which browsed among bodies and ate raw corpse-flesh. In Qrvar-Odds saga, the viking Hjálmarr bans the eating of raw meat by his men, saying such food is more fit for wolves ("vǫrgum") than for men (Ch. 9). Sinfjǫtli has suffered that state of exile which the Germanic heroic tradition despised, and that exile has made a skulking beast of him. Connected, though, with his werewolf and exile activities is yet another deed which parallels him to such outcasts as Cain and Unferð; he is the slayer of his half-brothers.

In replying to these charges, Sinfjǫtli suggests that Guðmundr has in the past undergone the Loki-like perversion counterpart to becoming a beast: he has become a woman. Sinfjǫtli's assertions are all the more damaging since he adds the suggestion that as a woman Guðmundr was not only evil but subservient to himself:

þú vart vǫlva í Varinseyio,
scollvís kona, bartu scrǫc saman;
qvaztu engi mann eiga vilia,
segg bryniaðan, nema Sinfiǫtla.

þú vart in scœða, scass, valkyria,
ǫtul, ámátlig, at Alfǫður;
mundo einheriar allir beriaz
svévís kona, um sacar þínar.

Nío átto við á nesi Ságo
úlfa alna, ec var einn faðir þeira.
(St. 37-39)

[You were the witch on Varins-isle, a woman wise in deceit, you bore lies altogether: you said you would not have any man, armed warrior, except Sinfjǫtli. You were the hateful one, witch, valkyrja--terrible, destructive, before the All-Father; the warriors there fought each other, single-minded woman, on your account. Together we had on Sago-ness nine wolves, and I was their only father.]

Sinfjǫtli, far from denying werewolfism, turns the charge to his own advantage. But by claiming to have fathered wolves, he puts himself in Loki's place. In making Guðmundr a witch-valkyrja among Óðinn's followers, Sinfjǫtli must be depending not only on the dark side of Óðinn's reputation for shameful use of magic, but also on the bad implications of sexual inversion. The sexual inversion charge, of course, makes Guðmundr Loki-like also, and the witch fought over by Óðinn's hall-warriors seems another allusion to Gullveig, the golden witch of the Vǫluspá.

Guðmundr seems unable to top his opponent's assertions directly, and the bulk of his reply is to repeat his already conceded charge that Sinfjǫtli has been an exile and a werewolf (St. 41). In denying that Sinfjǫtli has begotten wolves on him, he nonetheless recognizes the allusion, for he says, "Faðir varattu fenrisúlfa" (you were father of no Fenris wolf) (St. 40). Sinfjǫtli could not have begotten

wolves, he insists, for he was gelded by giant maidens (St. 40). This charge, however, associates Sinfjǫtli with Óðinn, one of whose names is Jálkr, "Gelding" (Grím., St. 49; Gylf., Ch. 2). Guðmundr, in claiming that Sinfjǫtli was his mare (St. 42), is apparently trying to establish him as a Loki type. After these accusations, the opponents are beginning to weary, and when they call each other swineherds Helgi breaks in to say they should stop talking and start fighting.

This flyting of warriors is rather confusing and resolves nothing between the opponents in the poem. However, it confirms what has been consistently implied up to this point: that the duel of words before physical combat is the key to the combat of warrior and monster, that it is possible that each combatant sees his opponent as a monster of some sort and may even admit to being one himself.[77] The flyting in the Helgakviða Hundingsbana I has an advantage for analysis in that neither participant is a principal character in the poem but merely a kinsman and representative. In such a case the poet is not in so great a need of taking sides as he would be if, for example, Helgi himself were party to the flyting. Although the poet's sympathies are with Helgi's man--Sinfjǫtli does seem to have a

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[77]Jan de Vries, Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1956), I, 256, discusses the phenomenon in which a "second-sighted" person, viewing two men in combat, might instead see two beasts in strife.

slight advantage--the opponents are fairly evenly matched.

In this flyting each hero accuses the other of shape-shifting and sexual perversion, and each is associated with both Óðinn and Loki. In so far as Sinfjǫtli is Helgi's man and both are, as sons of Sigmundr, Óðinn's own, Sinfjǫtli is more significant than Guðmundr, who appears only in this one scene. All of Sinfjǫtli's monstrous traits have counterparts in the character of his patron god. Those traits which he shares with Loki also correspond to traits of Óðinn. Sinfjǫtli, like Loki and Hárbarðr-Óðinn, turns a satiric tongue on his opponent. Guðmundr comes off like a monster because,on the one hand,an Óðinn-hero should fight monsters and because, on the other, in the pre-Christian, pre-literary warrior tradition a fighter's rival should, like the fighter himself, be possessed of monstrous traits.

The dual tradition, first of pictorial art and later of literature, shows that the Germanic peoples, particularly the Norse, had an abiding fascination with monsters which lasted from pagan times down to the end of saga writing in the later mediaeval period. Pictorial art shows, and literature confirms extensively, that this tradition has two branches. One branch lacks individual personalities and appears as the combat of a generalized warrior with an equally generalized monster who is part human warrior and part wolf or bear. The other branch is highly individualized

and involves the combat of specific gods with correspondingly specific monsters; in earliest times only one human, the semi-divine hero Sigurðr, participates in such an engagement.

The two types of combat share a bipartite structure: a preliminary verbal challenge followed by physical confrontation. As the plastic arts favor the representation of physical acts, the decorations on helmets and carvings in stone and wood tend to emphasize the physical combat. Poetry, however, being an art of words, tends, even when material has not been lost, to emphasize the preliminary challenge rather than the details of physical struggle.

How the challenge arises and how it becomes a regular aspect of the monster-combat needs little complex speculation to explain. A pair of warriors meets: each wishes superhuman strength to overcome his opponent; each wishes to demoralize his opponent. Men boast, their boasts in time are ritualized into magic, and in later times magic is codified on the written page. Such a process is, of course, not limited to the Norse. The American frontier had its version in Davy Crockett and other "half-alligator," "half-mountain-lion," or "half-rattlesnake" braggart-warriors.

The monsters which the gods fight are not so easily explained. The great Wolf and Serpent and the giants seem to have been begotten in the no-time of the mythical past, and their chief action will come in the no-time of the last battle at the end of time. These monsters seem

to be, in origin, typical chaos-monsters like the Babylonian Ti'âmat. The binding of the Wolf by the gods or the placing of the Serpent as a border to Middle-Earth is part of the gods' action in establishing the order of creation. In the last battle the monsters function in an eschatological manner.[78] Such monsters of beginnings and ends seem to have little in common with the wolf- and bear-skin adversaries in daily combat here on Middle-Earth. Yet in the Norse vision, the monsters which the gods fight can be seen as extensions of the berserkir and úlfheðnar of human life.

The chief key is Loki, not a god but the trickster of the gods. Loki is, in structuralist terms, a mediator between extremes.[79] Loki is both male and female and so both begets and gives birth to monsters. Born among the giants, he lives among the gods, supplying monsters not only to the gods but to their enemies. He is the instigator of many of Þórr's expeditions to fight monsters, but in the end he will lead the forces of the enemy against Þórr and the gods. Loki, then, is the connection between the strife in the superhuman world of gods and giants

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[78] Martin, Ragnarok.

[79] Loki's function as a mediating figure in Norse myth has been noticed by Einar Haugen, "The Mythical Structure of the Ancient Scandinavians: Some Thoughts on Reading Dumézil," in To Honor Roman Jakobson, Janua Linguarum, Series Major 32 (The Hague: Mouton, 1967), II, 862-63.

and the strife in the world of men, for it is on one of his journeys with the gods that he sets in motion the events which lay the curse on the Niflung hoard and so bring about the deaths of Sigurðr and many men who come after him.

Loki's function is like that of another mediating figure, the squirrel Ratatǫskr (Gylf., Ch. 16). Ratatǫskr runs up and down the world ash Yggdrasill, communicating between the eagle in the top of the tree and Níðhǫggr the dragon at the bottom and promoting strife between them. The contrast between the eagle--which is one of Óðinn's attributes--and the dragon is a structural parallel to other contrasts--the gods above and men below, the begetting of monsters before the world was formed and the defeating of them at its end. Loki is, like the squirrel, both a means of communication and a promoter of strife.

Between the acts of begetting the monsters and leading them into final battle, Loki appears mostly as a voice, for his offspring, as generally inarticulate beasts, have no other voices. The voice which can communicate for both good and ill becomes Loki's chief attribute in the middle time between the no-time of beginning and end. Loki's voice among the gods is the counterpart to the warrior's boast among men. He is the satirist and enchanter who strengthens his position before the final battle by deflating his adversaries with his stinging tongue.

Loki is the Norse manifestation of the problem of the function of evil in the world. As a mediating figure he is a personification of the Miltonic concept of knowing good by evil. As a voice he is that which makes evil known in the world. As a begetter of monsters, he produces physical counterparts to his vocal issue. As he associates himself with the gods, he shows their limitations, but as he aids them and even begets beasts like Sleipnir on their behalf, he shows the potential for shaping and ordering chaos out of the path of evil into the path of good.

As Loki appears chiefly through his voice, he is naturally assimilated to Óðinn, who as god of poetry has an interest in the use of language. But as language is an ambiguous tool, Óðinn as its wielder and patron is an ambiguous personality. For Óðinn, as for Loki, the ambiguity of language is incarnate in ambiguity of shape. The sharp tongue, in Loki the abstraction from and personification of the warrior's boast and magical autosuggestion, easily becomes an attribute of the god of warriors. Óðinn as shape-shifter in word and body is joint god of poet and <u>berserkr</u>.

Finally, in the hands of the poets, the pattern comes full circle, and Óðinn's warrior becomes triply satirist, sorcerer, and monster. What may have begun as the ritual incantation of warrior cults is carried to the world of gods and there is mixed, through Loki, with the monsters

of chaos. Through Óðinn, then, it returns to the mouth of the warrior.

In poetry and saga, characters like Sinfjotli and Starkaðr may be berserkir in action, but as they speak they employ imagery favored by the gods. Thus the warrior belongs to the group cult with generalized boast traits, but he speaks and throws his taunts in terms of the individualized monsters and combats of Þórr, Óðinn, Loki, and their fellows. This dual nature is most peculiarly synthesized in a great hero like Sigurðr or Bēowulf. The great hero is still chiefly human, with the generalized warrior background, but his combat is particularized. He does not fight merely another generalized warrior but an individual with an individual personality.

CHAPTER III

MONSTERS IN BÉOWULF

Although Béowulf[1] shares with the Old Norse eddic and skaldic poetry the common background of Germanic culture and alliterative versification, it is a quite different kind of poem from them in its narrative technique. To be sure, most of the eddic poetry and related skaldic poetry is narrative. Even the relatively static flytings and lore-poems like the Lokasenna and the Vafþrúðnismál have narrative contexts, and the gnomic Hávamál itself has narrative sequences. The heroic poems are, of course, almost entirely narrative. However, in both mythological and heroic poems, the narration tends to be concentrated in individual episodes. Though many of the poems, such as the Reginsmál--Fáfnismál complex, are fragmentary, the tendency towards isolated scenes is still noticeable. Indeed, it may be more noticeable, since what has been preserved are those separable incidents of confrontation, flyting, and dialogue. In Béowulf there are, on the other hand, still many individual scenes--banquets, combats, discussions--but they have been hammered into a single long narrative. In the eddic poems there are still only individual segments, sometimes overlapping or even contradicting each other, and the synthesis into a single

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[1] Beowulf, ed. Klaeber. Hereinafter cited by line number.

long narrative apparently is not made until such prose works as the Vǫlsunga saga or Snorri's Edda. Bēowulf, as an assembled narrative, is closer to these later works.

One consequence of the extended narrative technique of Bēowulf is that the characters, including the monsters, are better developed into personalities. Another consequence is that such individual scenes as there are can be juxtaposed and compared with each other. In the eddic poetry, the monsters per se, the Wolf and Serpent, are rather shadowy background characters, frequently alluded to but rarely present in propria persona. The man-become-dragon, Fáfnir, is on the scene for a good portion of one poem, but his dialogue, being filled out with conventional lore-questions, reveals little of his personality. The most extended examples of the monstrous in that poetry involve Loki and Óðinn, who partake of the monstrous by association because of their immoral conduct, changeable shape, and distorting and sarcastic rhetoric. In Bēowulf, Grendel, his mother, and the dragon have clearly monstrous shapes, do specific deeds of violence, and are slain after extended combats. Any one of them is, on the surface, a more obvious and well-rounded monster than any which appears in the eddic poetry. Nonetheless, these monsters show a development and extension of traits less clearly defined in the monsters of Norse poetry, for they have certain traits in common with those semi-monsters like

Loki and Óðinn. In addition, there is one character, Unferð, who, though clearly a man, belongs to the monsters' camp and with them completes a full pattern of the monstrous such as is found in the Norse lore.

Taken as a group, Grendel, his mother, and the dragon seem to belong to that ancient order of monsters which are physical incarnations of primal chaos. Joseph Fontenrose's typological analysis of the monsters' role in Bēowulf as a version of the conquering of chaos by a divine hero[2] seems to be widely accepted.[3] In Fontenrose's system, Grendel and his mother belong to the same class of chaos monsters as the Miðgarðsormr, as they seem to represent those forces of chaos which constantly threaten the created order. Fontenrose's system, however, emphasizes ancient myth, and Bēowulf's combats, treated in an appendix, he parallels to those of Marduk. In the Enuma Eliš, chaos, personified by Apsû, a primeval giant or monster and begetter of the gods, oppresses his offspring and is slain by Enki, his grandson. Ti'âmat, Apsû's consort, later attempts revenge and is slain by Marduk, Enki's son, since Enki feels too old and feeble to withstand Ti'âmat.

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[2]Fontenrose, pp. 524-34.

[3]Cf. Irving, pp. 85-86. A number of dissertations, such as Nicolas Kiessling, "New Aspects of the Monsters in Beowulf" (Wisconsin, 1967), have also followed Fontenrose. Kiessling, who is very dependent on Fontenrose, nonetheless quite misunderstands the typological system in Python when he accuses the author of calling Grendel and his mother dragons, p. 75.

The parallel to Bēowulf which Fontenrose suggests is not exact, but those like Kiessling who criticize him look at apparent surface differences, not at typological and functional similarities. Even though Grendel and his avenger may be chaos monsters, the avenger is a mother, not a spouse. And Hrōðgār is not Bēowulf's father.

What is more important, however, to such a scheme as Fontenrose's is the typological similarity of the sets of monsters. Grendel and his mother, like Ti'âmat and Apsû, belong to chaos and outer darkness. Grendel's mother, like Ti'âmat, is associated with the all-devouring waters; as Edward Irving says, "Grendel's mother is the mere."[4] Grendel, as son of the mere, is similar to another anthropophagous outlaw giant, Polyphemus, son of Poseidon, the sea. Now, though Heorot and the local mere are hardly the whole cosmos portrayed in the Babylonian poem, or even the Mediterranean world of the Odyssey, the monsters function similarly, and the poets, separated by several millenia, portray watery chaos as human. This personified chaos reacts in opposition to men's (or gods') rejoicing in the order which they have created for themselves. Raw nature threatens to shatter the thin veneer of civilization, which has been carved out of the wilderness. Since the veneer is made from the lumber of chaos, both can easily be conceived

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[4]Irving, p. 114.

as the same order, differing only in degree, not in essence.

As Ti'âmat's sphere of operation is more vast, she is herself apparently more physically monstrous than Grendel's mother. The lesser chaos is more easily represented in human terms. But Ti'âmat is of the same race as Marduk, her slayer, just as Bēowulf and the race of Cain must both be descended from Adam. The Babylonian monsters, like the later English ones, feel human emotions--joy, expectation, hatred, fear, envy, desire for revenge. The Babylonian manifestations of chaos possess one human trait which the more human-appearing Grendel clan does not: speech. However, the later monsters seem not incapable of comprehending human discourse, for Grendel's first attack is apparently his reaction to hearing the song of Creation (ll. 90-98). Grendel is like the earlier Apsû who desired to destroy the younger gods because his peace was disturbed by their singing and games. Though acting as avenger identifies both Ti'âmat and Grendel's mother as at least partially human, it is more significant for the latter, since early Germanic society depends much more on such actions as taking vengeance in maintaining the social order than the Mesopotamians did. The significance which the poet gives to the act of Grendel's mother is an important element in making Bēowulf a far more human poem than the Enuma Eliš. In general, however, both Ti'âmat and Grendel's mother appear much more human than the Norse Wolf and Serpent.

Though Hrōðgār is neither Bēowulf's father nor a famous monster-slayer, he is a noted warrior, able to gather a great following:

> þā wæs Hrōðgāre herespēd gyfen,
> . . . . . .
> . . . . . oð þæt sēo geogoð gewēox,
> magodriht micel.
> (ll. 64-68)

> [Then Hrōðgār was given success in battle. . .
> until his company grew, a great band of retainers.]

and he does adopt Bēowulf:

> Nū ic, Bēowulf, þec,
> secg besta, mē for sunu wylle
> frēogan on ferhþe.
> (ll. 946-48)

> [Now, Bēowulf, best of warriors, I will cherish
> you in my breast as a son.]

In view of the significance attached to foster parents in Germanic, particularly Norse, culture, Hrōðgār's act does place him functionally in the same relationship to Bēowulf as Enki is to Marduk: an old warrior who must depend on a young son to fight a monster.

A more obvious difference between the Enuma Eliš and Bēowulf is that in the latter poem the two monsters are slain by the same hero. However, if, as Heidel suggests, the reduplication of the combat in the Enuma Eliš serves to make Marduk's acts seem greater,[5] transferring both combats to the later hero would further his reputation even more. This is not to suggest that there might have

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[5]Heidel, Genesis, p. 11.

been an "earlier version" in which Hrōðgār slew Grendel but had to call in Bēowulf for the mother: Bēowulf's slaying of both monsters must be accepted because it is what the poem says. The structure of the poem does, nonetheless, place more emphasis on Bēowulf than is placed on Marduk in the Babylonian poem.

Fontenrose's typological comparison is interesting because it suggests that the combats in Bēowulf can be analyzed reasonably in terms of the conclusions already drawn here about ancient myth. Though there are significant differences between Bēowulf and those ancient myths, some of the differences can be minimized by consideration of the relevant social structure.[6] Taking a cue from Fontenrose and remembering the general importance of the verbal challenge in ancient combats leads one to search for someone to fulfill the role of challenger for the speechless Gren clan. That character, not surprisingly, is Unferð. Fontenrose's conclusions that monsters, and monster-fighters, often come in families, and that one generation's hero may become the next generation's monster, lead to another examination of Hrōðgār and then of Bēowulf for monstrous traits.

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[6]Fontenrose makes only a suggestion in this direction, but such matters as family relationships are not so significant to him as they would be to the school of Lēvi-Strauss.

Looking for anthropomorphic tendencies in the chaos monsters in Bēowulf, one naturally turns to the most powerful enemy of order and yet at the same time the most human of the monsters, Grendel. Indeed, there is little ground for not thinking that Grendel is human, albeit distorted; Grendel's essential humanity is generally assumed by critics, whether of pagan or Christian bias. The poem, after all, grants him human form; he is an "earmsceapen / on weres wæstmum"[pitiful shape in man's form] (ll. 1351-52). If one analyzes Grendel's humanity, one finds that it is displayed both in action and in thought.

In Germanic, as opposed to ancient, myth, the principal representative of the anthropomorphically monstrous is the parens monstrorum, Loki. But although Loki, unlike Grendel, is above all a vocal monster, he and Grendel have much in common. Most significantly, Grendel's entrance into Bēowulf is parallel to Loki's entrance into the Lokasenna. In the Lokasenna, AEgir holds a feast to dedicate a new brewing cauldron for the gods. To the feast comes Loki, but after killing one of AEgir's servants, he is evicted, only to force his way back in. Although in Bēowulf it is not said that Grendel's first attack occurred upon the dedication of Heorot, his arrival in the poem follows immediately on the account of the construction and naming of the hall. Grendel must have waited some short interval, since he

þráge geþolode, ...
þæt hé dógora gehwám dréam gehýrde
hlúdne in healle.
(ll. 87-89)

[suffered torment that each day he heard loud
joy in the hall.]

At any rate, both Loki and Grendel are motivated by envy and hatred of those who are enjoying themselves in a bright hall. AEgir's hall needs no light beyond the gleam of gold and weapons; Hróðgár's hall is for the giving of gold (l. 180), and it seems to have its own kind of glow: "líxta se léoma/ ofer landa fela" [that light shone over many lands] (l. 311). Loki murders AEgir's servant because he cannot bear to hear the man praised; he crawls back from the outer darkness of the forest to "mix evil" in the gods' mead and spoil their pleasure. Grendel comes out of the darkness in reaction to others' pleasure, and, if the song of Creation (ll. 90-98) is to be taken as typical of the warriors' pleasure, Grendel, like Loki, cannot stand to hear the praise of fine works.

When Loki attacks AEgir's company, he attacks the creators and maintainers of the ordered universe, and his tormenting the hall-dwellers continues until þórr, whose special function is subduing monsters, arrives. Hróðgár and his thanes are not gods, but the presence of the AElmihtiga is felt in the hall through the account of the creation. Hróðgár's building the hall has been seen as parallel to God's original act of creation,[7] but it has

[7]Irving, p. 18.

also been suggested that Hrôðgâr's company lives--at least as they are described in the poem--in a sort of "pastoral" simplicity, into which evil comes only with the arrival of Grendel; they are, though out of Eden, poetically suggested to be in a state analogous to that of Eden.[8] The Lokasenna, like most of the other eddic poems, is set in a mythical no-time. Even though Ægir's beer cauldron is, in fact, a stolen one, the poem makes no mention of evil: the gods are present, they are happy, and the setting is idyllic. In each poem, however, the mood is broken by a harsh, specific act of killing. Particularly in Bēowulf the killing introduces "real" time into the poem, for the description of Grendel's attack continues with the statement that the siege lasted twelve winters (l. 147). That torment is ended only by the arrival of the outsider Bēowulf, who corresponds to Þórr.

In both Bēowulf and the Norse myths, there is a contrast in settings. Kenneth Florey suggests that the setting at Heorot is in deliberate contrast to Grendel's gloomy mere.[9] In the Lokasenna Loki is not assigned a dwelling other than the dark woods to which he retreats, although in the other eddic poems he is associated with the dwelling of his

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[8]Kenneth Florey, "Stability, Chaos, and Dramatic Design in Beowulf," Diss. Syracuse, 1971, pp. 59-60. See also Alvin Lee, "Heorot and the 'Guest-Hall' of Eden," Mediaeval Scandinavia, 2 (1969), 79-91, for a similar treatment.

[9]Florey, p. 57.

daughter Hel, and that place is a conventional antithesis to Ásgarðr, the home of the gods. Grendel's home is the *fífelcynnes eard* [dwelling of the race of monsters] (l. 104). These *fífelcynne* companions of Grendel are the *fífls megir* [monsters' kin] which Loki will lead from Hel or Muspellheim in the final battle (*Vǫluspá*, St. 51).

Grendel shares certain other traits with Loki, particularly the love of eating. Indeed, Grendel's chief occupation among the Danes seems to be eating, and if it were not for the audience's awareness of *what* Grendel eats, they could consider him a typical Germanic feaster.[10] Loki's most notable meal is consumed in a contest on his journey with Þórr to visit Útgarða-Loki. As Snorri tells of the challenge (*Gylf.*, Ch. 46-47), Loki loses to a deceptive opponent Logi. When the deception is revealed, Logi appears as what his name means, the fire which consumes all.

Although there has been much argument about whether Logi, Útgarða-Loki, and Loki are the same character,[11] Snorri's description of Loki's shining appearance seems to suggest fire. Grendel partakes of the same *líg* [flame] when he arrives to consume his last feast:

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[10]James L. Rosier, "The Uses of Association: Hands and Feasts in *Beowulf*," *PMLA*, 78 (1963), 9.

[11]Turville-Petre, p. 138.

. . . . . him of ēagum stōd
licge gelīcost lēoht unfæger.
(ll. 726-27)

[in his eyes stood a light unfair, most like fire.]

Līg and its compounds in Bēowulf all seem to involve fire in a hostile or destructive sense. Most of the occurrences of the word[12] are associated with the dragon, itself called a līgdraca (ll. 2333, 3040). The two allusions to the burning of Heorot involve līges (ll. 83, 781). Fire also suggests funeral pyres, such as the lāðbite līces [hostile bite of fire] (l. 1122), in the Finnsburg digression or the two references (ll. 3115, 3145) in the preparations for Bēowulf's own pyre. Thus, though Grendel has no competition in devouring Hrōðgār's thanes, he is associated with the same hostile fire which seems a part of Loki's nature.

As Grendel has these functional similarities to Loki, he may also possess the great trickster's ambiguity. He belongs to the world of men, but he inhabits only the boundary lands, the fens and misty hills which surround civilization, never to be truly accepted, never to stand before the gift-stool (l. 168), though he dwells in the hall twelve years. His human response to the world which rejects him is to become agent and embodiment of the world of chaos and destruction which the institutions, arts, and halls of men attempt to check, control, and exclude.

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[12]Lines 2305, 2321, 2333, 2341, 2549, 2672, 2780, 3040.

Such a view assumes the basic humanity of the monsters who in the frustration of their natural human desires ally themselves with chaos. That assumption differs from Fontenrose's typology, which assumes the prior existence of chaos and then attributes human features to it. Fontenrose's approach, however, is, designedly, concerned with the origins of the monsters first and only secondarily with what becomes of them in representations. But Loki and Grendel, are, as they appear, quite literary monsters: their pre-literary histories, whatever they may have been, are lost. Loki and Grendel, then, must be viewed as they are represented, rather than as they may have originated.

Loki shares with his opponents Óðinn and þórr a supernatural nature, but the gods of myth in their greater strength can turn Loki's talents to their own uses. Since Bēowulf, like Grendel, is but a natural human, his resources for taming his opponent are more limited. The hero can but turn Grendel's destructive force back upon his opponent. Grendel has few supernatural powers beyond stopping swords; he has been only a slayer, and he in turn is slain.

Loki's more ambiguous nature, presented as it is in numerous and often fragmentary sources, leaves him in the end a puzzling character whose function can be evaluated only in terms of each individual situation in which he appears. Unlike Loki, Grendel is a uniform character. What irony the poet derives from giving Grendel human traits

contributes to a single pattern which is central to Grendel's thematic function in the poem, that is, to define, by contrast, the role of the warrior, particularly that of Bēowulf himself.

Grendel's arrival at Heorot is thus not only parallel to Loki's invasion of AEgir's beer party: it is in more general terms an inversion of a thane's visit to a lord's hall. In the passage describing Grendel's first raid on Heorot, the poet twice uses the verb nēosian (ll. 115, 125), which means primarily "visit" and only secondarily "attack." Again, when Grendel comes for his last visit, he is called rinc [warrior]:

> Cōm þā tō recede rinc sīðian
> drēamum bedǣled.
> (ll. 720-21)

The first line of the passage--"then came to the hall the warrior journeying"--could be any ordinary homecoming, and not until the next line does the narrator indicate that the warrior's journeys are "deprived of joy."

In the default of the Danes, Grendel eardode [occupied] (l. 166) Heorot: in fact, he becomes the real ruler of the hall. It has also been suggested that the structure of Grendel's approach scenes is similar to that of other scenes in Judith and Hrafnkels saga involving

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[13]Irving, p. 18.

the arrival of human challengers to battle.[14]

Though some of the terms describing Grendel do not have particularly human connotations--ǽglæca, meaning generally "monster" (ll. 159, 433, 592, 816, etc.), is a notable case--most have human associations. Besides being given human form (l. 1352), Grendel is most particularly called a healðegn [hall-thane] (l. 142). This term is, of course, one of the poet's first indicators of ironic intent in his presentation of the monster.[15] Having called Grendel a hall-thane, the poet proceeds to demonstrate just what a miserable excuse for one his monster is. Though Irving may be extreme in saying that Grendel's social ineptitude has "a distinctly comic quality,"[16] no doubt the original audience would have noticed the incongruity between the "hall-thane's" hopes and his achievements. A man comes to a hall as a thane to participate in the rituals of the hall, and of those rituals Grendel makes as great a wreck as he does of the physical structure of the hall itself. Not only does he break down the doors (ll. 721-22), but he partakes of meat and drink other than the customary ones, and he continues to spurn his host's hospitality for years on end. However one interprets

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[14]Fredric Jo Heinemann, "Approach-to-Battle Type-Scenes in Judith, Beowulf, and Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða," Diss. SUNY-Stony Brook, 1971.

[15]Cf. Irving, p. 18. [16]Irving, p. 103.

the reason for Grendel's not receiving gifts (ll. 168-69), it is obvious that he is excluded from that ritual also.

As a distorted hall-thane, Grendel is best characterized as an exile or outlaw, one who has been deliberately cut off from the rituals of society--in Mary Gerstein's words, the "true prototype of the Germanic outlaw."[17] Even before he presents Grendel's visitation to Heorot, the poet establishes the exile theme in the first Cain's-kin passage, the one which also gives Grendel his name:

> wæs se grimma gæst Grendel háten,
> mǽre mearcstapa, sé þe móras héold,
> fen ond fæsten; fífelcynnes eard
> wonsǽlí wer weardode hwíle,
> siþðan him Scyppend forscrifen hæfde
> in Cáines cynne-- þone cwealm gewræc
> éce Drihten, þæs þe hé Ábel slóg;
> ne gefeah hé þǽre fæhðe, ac hé hine feor forwræc,
> Metod for þý máne mancynne fram.
>
> (ll. 102-10)

> [The grim spirit was called Grendel, a notorious walker of the borderlands, he who held the moors, the fens and fastnesses. The unhappy man dwelled a while in the home of the monsters' kin, since the Lord had condemned him among Cain's kin. The Eternal Lord avenged the killing because he slew Abel. Cain did not rejoice in that feud because He banished him, the Lord for the crime, far from mankind.]

Though Grendel has lived among monsters of an unspecified nature, he is himself called <u>wonsǽlí wer</u> [unhappy man].

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[17] Mary P. Gerstein, "Germanic <u>Warg</u>: The Outlaw as Werwolf," in <u>Myth in Indo-European Antiquity</u>, ed. Gerald James Larson (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1974), p. 145.

Cain's kin, including

> eotenas ond ylfe ond orcnêas,
> swylce gígantas, þá wið Gode wunnon
> (ll. 112-13)

[giants and elves and orcneas, such giants as fought with God]

must be nominally human, as Cain himself was human, but they, like Loki's offspring, might externally bear closer resemblance to beast than to man. Whatever their appearance, Cain's kin are children of men, but, like the Wolf and Serpent, they are dwellers in outer darkness, banished from the realms of light. In dwelling among them, Grendel is twice an exile: in his own separation from men and in his unpleasant company, that dêofla gedræg [company of devils] among whom he suffers and dies (l. 756).

This passage attracts critics primarily because it includes an identifiable biblical allusion. However, the passage is also significant because of its emphasis on exile. Grendel lives in the unpleasant and wild borderlands which are useless to honest men; Cain and his kin have also been sent far away. The key verbs in the passage are the related gewræc [punish, avenge] and forwræc [exile, drive out], as both involve the idea that the most severe punishment short of death is expulsion from society. Another term of outlawry with similar connotations is wearh. Gerstein notes that in Genesis II Cain's kin are called wergum folk (l. 1250), even as Grendel is called wergan gâst [accursed, exiled spirit] (l. 133); both of

these latter terms depend on the Germanic concept of the warg, which includes both (were)wolf and outlaw.[18]

After this passage, one can hardly forget that this "thane" Grendel comes to the hall not from victory in battle but from a wræclást [path of exile] (l. 1352). Grendel will walk to a similarly solitary death. As Bēowulf observes after the great battle, Grendel has gone to await death as a fēasceaft guma [destitute or wretched man] (l. 973). The monster has gone where he

> . . . . . ábídan sceal
> maga mánе fáh miclan dómes
> Hú him scír Metod scrífan wille.
> (ll. 977-79)

[like a man stained with crimes, will await the great doom, what the shining Lord will decree for him.]

Even in death the monster is described in basically human terms. Féasceaft has wider connotations than merely "destitute," as it implies exclusion from the entire financial system, from gifts, on the one hand, and from the ability to pay wergild fines, on the other.

The ángenga [solitary walker] (l. 165) of Bēowulf, like the án-haga [solitary one] of "The Wanderer,"[19] finds deprivation from hall rituals the most distressing part of exile. Ángenga, Stanley Wiersma feels, belongs to the same complex

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[18] Gerstein, p. 145.

[19] "The Wanderer," in Seven Old English Poems, ed. John C. Pope (Indianapolis: Bobbs Merrill, 1966), p. 28.

of ideas as mearcstapa and earmsceapen, terms which imply removal from human society.[20] Mearcstapa obviously implies remote country. Earmsceapen means primarily a poor creature, but earm seems to imply exile as well as general pitifulness.[21] As Grendel is a thinking monster, he no doubt feels a pain similar to that which the án-haga feels on contemplating the normal relation of gift-giver and thane (Wanderer, ll. 40-44, 92 ff.). Grendel is probably no more satisfied with his company of devils than the wanderer is with the sea-beasts and birds which are his only companions.

Another outward indication that the poet and his characters within the poem consider Grendel in terms of human relationships are the terms which ironically suggest that the unsociable and inarticulate Grendel could be brought to parley. These terms, like those suggesting Grendel is a thane in exile, appear early in the poem. Implying that Grendel refuses to honor the wergild convention,[22] the poet says that the wretch will not féa þingian [negotiate a payment] (as at a þing) (l. 156). Grendel, of course, is féasceaft (l. 973). In his boast to Hrōðgār, Bēowulf says that he knows of Grendels þing [the affair of Grendel] (l. 409)

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[20]Stanley M. Wiersma, "A Linguistic Analysis of Words Referring to Monsters in Beowulf," Diss. Wisconsin, 1961, p. 123.

[21]Wiersma, p. 98.

[22]Irving, p. 96.

and that he has come "ána gehégan/ ðing wið þyrse" [to hold a þing alone with the giant] (ll. 425-26). The use of such terms relative to Grendel is ironic because no one actually expects him to respond in a socially acceptable way. Grendel, like Polyphemus, cares nothing for the laws of gods and men. But the men's confidence in their irony is shaken when, after Grendel's death, his mother actually does react in the "human" manner.

Even in ironically suggesting a þing with Grendel, however, the characters imply that he possesses some rational faculties. In that recognition of rationality, they are correct, for, unspeaking as he is, Grendel is all too human in his thoughts. He is, above all, a thinking monster; his thoughts are, in fact, chiefly what set him apart from the monster-tradition of the encyclopedists and travel writers. The writers of that tradition might make their creatures like Grendel áglæcean or even grim ond grǽdig; they might invest their monsters with moral significance, but their concern is almost wholly for what the reader thinks of the monster, not what the monster thinks of himself. The original chaos monsters, too, must not have been significant as personalities but only as manifestations of natural forces. Certainly some of these gain voices and personalities--Ti'âmat engages in a little domestic drama with her spouse Apsû; the Fenris Wolf argues with the gods--but the audience does not see deep into their minds for any extended time.

Most Old Norse monsters, even the most fascinating, are seen only externally. Glámr, in the Grettis saga, for example, is a thoroughly unlikable person in life and even less attractive in death. But even though he talks and places a curse on Grettir as that outlaw finishes him off, the audience learns little of what goes on behind his great, rolling eyes. Grettir's subduing of Glámr is, so far as the man's wait for the monster and the subsequent wrestling match are concerned, one of the closest analogues to Béowulf's combat with Grendel, but the narrator's emphasis is different. The aptrgǫngumaðr's approach is recounted entirely from the point of view of the waiting man. Only in the brief suggestions of Glámr's puzzlement and then of his fear and desire to escape once he encounters Grettir does the narrative technique of the saga writer resemble that of the English poet, and even so the development is far briefer.

Most of the other walkers-after-death in Norse sagas were men of action in life and do not turn to introspection after death. Those characters who do reveal their thoughts are rather living men and anthropomorphic gods. The poet Egill Skallagrímsson, much given to moody displeasure with those around him, displays upon provocation the wolfish traits he inherits from his father and grandfather. Loki, as has been noted earlier, like Grendel not only takes perverse delight in destroying other men's pleasure, but

occasionally even discusses his spite with others, notably in the Lokasenna. Yet the closest to Grendel for sheer pettiness and greed is the seducer and thief, the master of shape-shifters and half-monsters, Óðinn, as he appears in the Hávamál. In fact, Grendel could no doubt profit from some of the High One's advice on how to enter a hostile hall and how to protect oneself after gaining entry.

The Bēowulf poet, unlike most of the Norse and ancient writers, takes full advantage of narrational omniscience to present his monster and, as a by-product, makes his monster in some aspects even more human than those like Glámr who had once been men. Arthur Brodeur suggested some years ago that the tension in Bēowulf results from the poet's "design for terror," his attention to Grendel as he comes from the mere to Heorot: the approach on both Grendel's first attack and his last is emphasized as essential background for his actual raid.[23] Alain Renoir has since modified Brodeur's view, proposing that it is not merely the relentless tread of the solitary walker but the frequent examination of the monster's mental state that excites terror in the audience.[24]

In considering the psychological traits of his principal monster, the poet begins at the most fundamental level.

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[23]Arthur G. Brodeur, The Art of Beowulf (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1959), pp. 88- 106.

[24]Alain Renoir, "Point of View and Design for Terror in Beowulf," NM, 63 (1962), 154-67.

The term with psychological connotations which is most frequently used in the poem is mōd, which in its various inflected and combined forms appears nearly eighty times. This mōd, which encompasses a wide range of meanings, is, Douglas Butturff thinks, basically a capacity for becoming emotionally aroused,[25] a capacity Grendel shares, on the one hand, with beasts (l. 549) and, on the other, with Bēowulf (l. 1785), Hrōðgār (l. 1418), and other men.

The poet endows Grendel with more than this elementary and passive faculty, however. Before the narrator observes that Grendel's mōd is aroused by the sight of Bēowulf's sleeping thanes (l. 730), he has already been following the monster's thoughts as well as his footsteps when Grendel comes stalking from the moor. As Richard N. Ringler has suggested, Grendel's journey is full of expectations.[26] Grendel has hardly appeared on his last journey when the narrator observes that he mynte [intended, meant] (l. 712) to capture some men. Once he entered the hall and his mōd had been aroused (ll. 726, 730), Grendel again intended something: he

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[25]Douglas R. Butturff, "The Meaning of Mōd and the Psychology of Beowulf," mimeographed essay.

[26]Richard N. Ringler, "Him Seo Wen Geleah: The Design for Irony in Grendel's Last Visit to Heorot," Speculum, 41 (1966), 46-67.

mynte þæt hé gedǽlde ǽr þon dǽg cwóme,
atol á́glæca, á́nra gehwylces
líf wið líce.
(ll. 731-33)

[terrible monster, he meant before day came to separate the life and body of each of the men.]

As Ringler notices, mynte, which makes its only other appearance in the poem later in the same passage (l. 762), is but one of several such terms which show Grendel's intentions. The sleeping men arouse in him wistfylle wén [expectation of feasting] (l. 734). Such terms of expectation had been used earlier, notably wéneþ [expects] (l. 600) and wonhýdum [heedless expectation] (l. 434).[27] These are particularly significant because Bé́owulf himself applies them to his future adversary. The hero recognizes that Grendel must live on these expectations, for he "secce ne wéneþ/ tó Gár-Denum" [does not expect resistance from the Spear-Danes] (ll. 600-01). Indeed, Bé́owulf knows Grendel's expectations are reckless to the point that "for his wonhýdun wǽpna ne recceð" [in his careless thought he does not count on weapons] (l. 434).

Bé́owulf is not the only character concerned with Grendel's state of mind. Hróðgár, too, concerns himself with the monster's thought, for as he departs to rest, the narrator observes that the king "wiste þǽm á́hlǽcan / tó þǽm hé́ahsele hilde geþinged" [knew that the monster planned strife with the high hall] (ll. 646-47).

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[27]Ringler, pp. 52-53.

In the battle between the hero and monster, the narrator, until the last, seems almost more concerned with Grendel's mental state than with his physical one. Grendel reaches the door at line 721. Bēowulf seizes him at line 748, and he receives his death-wound after line 815. In these nearly hundred lines there is obviously great violence which wakes the Danes and Geats alike, but the narrator does not represent it directly as violence between the two combatants. Except for a few phrases like fingras burston [fingers burst] (l. 760), the violence is represented mostly by the wrecking of the interior of the hall (ll. 770-82). Instead of giving a blow-by-blow description, the narrator gives a thought-by-thought narration.

As both Renoir[28] and Ringler[29] have observed, the narrator is concentrating on Grendel's thoughts when this passage begins: the monster is bealohȳdig [thinking on evil] and gebolgen [enraged] (l. 723) when he smashes the door. When Grendel enters, his mōd is already stirred to yrra [wrath] (l. 726), and it is soon aroused more (l. 730). His expectation is ready to act upon that mōd: mynte (l. 731), wolde (l. 738), þōhte (l. 739), are the verbs which characterize him. When the poet turns to Bēowulf, it is for his awareness of inwitþancum [hostile thoughts] (l. 749).

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[28]Renoir, p. 163.

[29]Ringler, p. 54.

When, in the next line, the poet returns to Grendel, he notices that the monster has onfunde [perceived] (l. 750) Bēowulf's hostility, and his mōd turns to fear (ll. 753-54) as he scours his memory for the recollection of where he has gotten such a handshake before. The poet shifts back to Bēowulf, but for thought--he gemunde [remembered] (l. 758) his boast of the evening--before action. When Bēowulf crunches Grendel's fingers (l. 760), the poet turns back to the monster's thoughts, as he mynte [meant] (l. 762) to flee when he wiste [recognized] (l. 764) his fingers were in the hostile grasp. After this, the poet moves his attention away from the actual participants to the awakened warriors within and without the hall. Even when the struggle comes to its gory end with torn sinews and dislocated joints, Grendel's thoughts are emphasized: just before the loss of his arm he onfunde [perceived] (l. 809) that he would no longer torment men's thoughts, and on his wounded departure he wiste [recognized] (l. 821) that his life had come to an end.

Bēowulf's last action relative to Grendel, sometime later in the cave, is by itself puzzling: beheading the monster seems a rather grotesque piece of souvenir hunting. However, in the context of Norse monster tales it is a reasonable act if the monster is to be assumed essentially human. The typical saga draugr is a man, usually an evil one, who is more than unquiet in his grave. He may walk

abroad after death to terrorize or even slay those whom he disliked in life. He can often be quieted, however, if some hardy hero will enter his grave mound and subdue him, re-killing the animated corpse, usually by beheading it. The cave under the mere is itself quite grave-like. Though the poet is probably thinking in Christian terms when he says of Grendel's return to the cave "þǽr him hel onfĕng" [there Hell received him] (l. 852), it is not impossible that some of the original sense of hel--in a word, the grave--lingers on. At any rate, Bēowulf's beheading of the monster itself seems to retain some of the old method of laying an aptrgongumaðr.[30]

Grendel must be no merely physical, beast-like monster if the poet presents him, from his first revulsion at men's songs of joy through his final agony, as a creature of feelings, perceptions, and thoughts. The great irony which Ringler notices between what Grendel first mynte and wiste and what he later mynte and wiste[31] is wholly dependent on the poet's having made Grendel a thinking monster and then having chosen to emphasize Grendel's thoughts, however elementary, above the physical actions which a less ambitious poet might have chosen to visualize for his audience.

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[30]For a similar argument, see G.V. Smithers, The Making of Beowulf (Durham: Univ. of Durham, 1961), p. 9.

[31]Ringler, p. 58.

Grendel's mother, receiving far less attention from the poet than her son, is accordingly a more shadowy figure. She is, according to Hrōðgār's description, like her son, in human form: idese onlícnes [with the appearance of a woman] (l. 1351) just as Grendel is on weres wæstmum [in the shape of a man] (l. 1352). At her first appearance she had been called ides áglæcwíf [woman, terrible female] (l. 1259). The term ides has clearly human connotations, as the other six occurrences in the poem all involve Wealhþéow or some other human.[32] Wíf, similarly, is employed mostly for humans. However, unlike Grendel, she is frequently associated with beasts. Twice, for example, she is called brimwylf [sea-wolf] (ll. 1506, 1599). As she pulls Bēowulf down through the mere, she is hardly distinguishable from the sǽdēor [sea-beasts] (l. 1510) which also attack him.

Like Grendel, his mother is an exile. Her situation, like his, is established quickly: she suffered lange þráge [long affliction] (l. 1257) as he þráge gebolode [suffered affliction] (l. 87); she lives in wæteregesan . . . / cealde stréamas [terrible water . . . cold currents] (ll. 1260-61); and, like the rest of her tribe, she must mandréam flēon [flee men's joys] as she wēsten warode [dwelled in the wastelands] (ll. 1264-65). For both

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[32]Lines 620, 1075, 1117, 1168, 1649, 1941.

monsters the torment of exile is not merely physical: the deprivation of dréam [pleasure] (ll. 88, 1264) is primarily mental.

The poet does not probe the merewíf's mind as he does Grendel's, since her appearances in the story do not lend themselves to such a technique. Her attack on Heorot is sudden, after the manner of Grendel's first raid many years before; the poet wishes to emphasize the surprise of the attack. Grendel's last attack is but one of a series, and the poet can analyze the monster in his habitual rumination over his evening's activities. After her sole visit to Heorot, Grendel's mother is not a premeditating attacker: she is instead herself the victim or a wholly unexpected visitation. There is no opportunity to show her contemplating projects. The battle with Bēowulf, too, is different, as the narrator concentrates on physical events rather than on the monster's fears. Grendel's mother, of course, seems to have little reason to fear until the hero suddenly finds the giants' sword. Nonetheless, the áglǽcwíf is not a subrational creature. In her þrâge, she yrmþe gemunde [thought on her misery] (l. 1259), and her thoughts result in action. Her psyche involves at least mōd, for she becomes galgmōd [morbidly moody, filled with gallows-thoughts] (l. 1277). In her wrath she becomes gífre [greedy for revenge]. Later she becomes again grim ond grǽdig [grim and greedy], a formula also applied to Grendel (ll. 121, 1499).

In discussing Grendel before his final visit, Bēowulf and others talk ironically about the monster's failure to comply with socially ordained practices such as wergild. His mother unexpectedly shows that, wretched as she it in her exile, she can still wreak vengeance as though she possessed some awareness of human customs.

Grendel's mother, however, is in other ways far less human than her lawless son. Irving observes, "Clawing at Beowulf with her sharp nails or crouched on top of his chest, she behaves much more like an animal than Grendel ever does."[33] Not only does she act the way animals do; she is associated with them. In the water outside her cave she is accompanied by beasts when she captures Bēowulf. Grendel must have been familiar with the same beasts, since he lived in the mere, but the poet shows him in action only by himself at Hrōðgār's hall.

At the hidden mere the brimwylf occupies the wulfhleoþu [wolf-slopes] (l. 1358). Wolf-compounds are actually quite rare in the poem, outside of personal names. The wolf himself appears only once (l. 3027), sharing battle corpses with the eagle. Most of the other wolf-words occur in the passage dealing with Grendel's mother.

Two other words with wolfish associations appear in this section: heorowearh [sword-wearh] (l. 1267) and grundwyrgenne [ground-wearh] (l. 1518). The principal root

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[33]Irving, p. 114.

of both terms is cognate with ON vargr [wolf] (cf. Voluspá, St. 39). Wiersma, following Richard Jordan, takes wearh to mean chiefly "transgressor"[34] (geächteter Verbrecher).[35] Gerstein, however, feels that the word means principally "(were)wolf" and that "transgressor" is a derivative meaning.[36] The outlaw, by his crime, makes a werewolf of himself, as his crime makes him something less than human. Robert Fowkes had earlier come to a similar conclusion and had proposed "wolf" as the original meaning.[37] Grendel is called wergan gást [accursed spirit] (l. 133) once early in the poem when the hearer should still have Cain's name echoing in his ears. Related terms are not used again among the many epithets for Grendel until he is called heorowearh (l. 1267) in the passage dealing with his mother, herself both wyrgen (l. 1518) and wylf (l. 1506). Perhaps her beast-like tendencies make even her son less human than ordinarily.

Certainly, however, the term wearh well sums up the general sense of the monstrous in the poem: the monster, though of human kind, is an outlaw and exile; in being

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[34]Wiersma, p. 54.

[35]Richard Jordan, Die altenglischen Säugetiernamen (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1903), p. 65.

[36]Gerstein, p. 155.

[37]Robert A. Fowkes, "On the Association of Wolf and Outlaw in Germanic," General Linguistics, 1 (1955), 89-91.

expelled from society he loses part of his humanity. Grendel perhaps retains more of his humanity simply by his habit of occupying Heorot. His mother, remaining more isolated at the mere, becomes more and more bestial until all that she retains of her humanity is the ability to wield a knife and the desire for revenge.

When Hrōðgār tells Bēowulf about Grendel and his mother, he observes that the peasants know of no father for the monster (l. 1355). There is one character in the poem, however, who would metaphorically serve well as Grendel's father: Unferð. Unferð has been much discussed and certain similarities between him and Grendel have been pointed out before, but his complete role in a system of monsters has not been developed.

Once monsters, even the earliest ones, are humanized to the point of gaining voices, they tend as adversaries to become more verbal than physical. Grendel, for all his mental activity, however, is a rather quiet monster. Except for the gyreléoð [terrible song] (l. 786) which he sings in his final agony, Grendel is as silent as the shadows through which he glides. Even his laughter is inward (l. 730). His mother makes even less noise. But their deficiency is more than compensated for by Unferð, who seems to have absorbed completely the function of hurling pre-battle taunts.

A verbal presence, Unferð makes his first appearance challenging Bēowulf about his ability as a monster-fighter (ll. 499-528). Indeed, Unferð's later appearances in the poem are dependent on how Hrōðgār's þyle acts on this occasion. The poet's most immediate function in introducing Unferð into the poem seems to be that of providing Bēowulf with an excuse to talk: boasting of his swimming match with Breca, the hero establishes himself as a monster-slayer. The poet, however, must have something more in mind than prompting Bēowulf to speak, for he keeps mentioning Unferð. (Although Wulfgar, too, serves as a prompter, he does not, like Unferð, return again and again.) Unferð's initial bellicose verbosity and later implied cowardice suggested to Henry Bosley Woolf long ago that Unferð's function was as a foil to Bēowulf.[38] Foil he is, but his effectiveness as a foil depends on his relationship to Grendel and his mother.

Unferð's voice first establishes him as monsters' kin; even if he said no more than his first speech, one might suspect him. He is not a courtly challenger like Wulfgar, and even his drunkenness hardly excuses him. His tauntingly adverse comparisons and slanted recounting of the Breca episode have led numerous readers to associate him with the arch-taunter of Germanic monster-lore, Loki.[39]

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[38]Henry Bosley Woolf, "Unferð," MLQ, 10 (1949), 152.

[39]See Ch. I, n. 28.

Unferð is, in fact, one of the primary examples cited in Elliott's study of the literary taunt. Unferð's challenge, like Loki's venom in the Lokasenna, comes at a feast, when all others expect to be glad. Just as none of the Æsir seems up to quieting Loki, no one at Hrôðgâr's court seems ready to venture silencing Unferð. Only the outsider, newly arrived--þórr, Bêowulf--dares stop the taunts. Indeed, Bêowulf's verbal defense of himself against Unferð is a deliberate parallel to his physical defense against Grendel.[40]

Unferð's spiritual kinship with Grendel is well known. Since Grendel is twice linked with the kin of Cain, the first fratricide, and Bêowulf calls Unferð a fratricide (l. 587), the poet reiterating the charge (ll. 1167-68), Unferð is thus parallel, if not to Grendel himself, then to the founder of his tribe. Unferð's apparent role in Hrôðgâr's court is as þyle (ll. 1165, 1456). Although the meaning of the title is debatable,[41] James Rosier observes that it is applied to Reginn in the Fâfnismâl just after Reginn has incited the death of his brother Fâfnir at Sigurðr's hands.[42] Moreover, since Bêowulf is implicitly

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[40]Woolf, p. 148.

[41]Morton Bloomfield, "Beowulf and Christian Allegory: An Interpretation of Unferth," Traditio, 7 (1949-51), rpt. in An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1963), p. 163.

[42]Rosier, p. 3.

compared to a Vǫlsungr dragon-slayer (ll. 875 ff.), one might see a pair of structurally parallel groupings of three each: Fáfnir: Reginn: Sigurðr; and Grendel: Unferð: Bēowulf. In structuralist critics' terms, Reginn and Unferð are both mediators between the world of monsters and the world of men. The mediating figure, a sort of dialectical synthesis of extremes in each group, challenges the human to slay the monster. Even though the mediating figure is more human than the monster, he is less fully human than the hero. However, as both Grendel and Fáfnir have a good share of human traits--indeed Fáfnir is Reginn's brother and a man in dragon's shape--the distances separating the members of the groups are not great.

Rosier notices another parallel between the Fáfnismál and Bēowulf: a bird suggests that Sigurðr make Reginn fara til heljar [go to Hel] (Reginsmál, St. 34); Bēowulf ends his reply to Unferð's challenge by predicting that his opponent "in helle scealt/ werhðo drēogan" [shall suffer torment in Hell] (ll. 588-89).[43] Wishing one's enemies in the bonds of Hell is probably not unusual, but one of Bēowulf's terms is. Though werhðo means generally "damnation" or "punishment," it is another form of wearh and wyrgen, the werewolf-outlaw terms applied to Grendel and his mother. Bēowulf thus implies more than damnation for Unferð: the fratricide belongs to the same class of outcasts and

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[43]Rosier, p. 3.

semi-human monsters as Grendel. In becoming a fratricide, Unferð loses part of his humanity; if he it not a rǫg vættr--what Þórr calls Loki to silence him--Bēowulf's word does imply that Unferð has exiled himself from normal human relations.[44]

Unferð's taunts are made before Bēowulf's fight with Grendel; thereafter he seems considerably subdued and even offers Bēowulf his prized sword before the fight with Grendel's mother (ll. 1455 ff.). Though the narrator then expounds on the sword's virtues, and Bēowulf later goes out of his way to praise it (ll. 1660, 1810-12), the narrator cannot resist a backhanded allusion to Unferð's earlier actions:

> Hūru ne gemunde mago Ecglāfes
> eafoþes cræftig, þæt hē ǣr gespræc
> wīne druncen, þā hē þæs wǣpnes onlāh
> sēlran sweordfrecan.
>
> (ll. 1465-68)

> [Indeed Ecglaf's strong kinsman did not remember what, drunk with wine, he had spoken earlier, when he lent the weapon to the better warrior.]

But what effect can this passage have other than to remind the audience of what a sober Unferð is supposed to have forgotten? Unferð seems chastened and reformed, a generous man--yet the poet is nonetheless able to suggest, indirectly, a challenge before battle. Whatever Unferð intends in the loan of a sword, the audience should not

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[44] Gerstein, pp. 150-55, makes the peculiar suggestion that ON rǫrg, from argr, "effeminate," is distantly related to vargr.

forget that he once played the monster's role as taunter.

The poet's negative suggestion in this passage operates like his subordinate clause in the passage describing Unferð sitting at Hróðgár's feet at the banquet:

> . . . . . Swylce þǽr Unferþ þyle
> æt fótum sæt fréan Scyldinga; gehwylc hiora
> his ferhþe tréowde,
> þæt hé hæfde mód micel, þéah þe his mágum nære
> árfæst æt ecga gelácum.
>
> (ll. 1165-68)

> [So then Unferð the þyle sat at the feet of the Scyldings' lord; each of them trusted his spirit, that he had much courage, though he had not been honorable in sword-play with his kinsmen.]

Even at the feet of a king, Unferð is an outlaw and fratricide. Similarly, though he makes a generous loan, he is a man known for treachery. Perhaps Unferð is like the Loki of Þjóðólfr's Haustlǫng--a treacherous fellow but one useful to the side of the good when that side threatens to use superior force in subduing him.

Axel Olrik and many later critics such as Bloomfield, Brodeur, Chambers, and Rosier, have suggested that Unferð is to be involved in later treachery at the Danish court.[45] No one, however, has established anything certain, as the poem only hints at future treachery and does not positively connect Unferð with it. Rosier, following the great mass of critical opinion, suggests that there are parallel

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[45] Olrik, p. 156; Bloomfield, p. 158; Rosier, "Design for Terror: The Unferth Intrigue," PMLA, 76 (1962), 1-7; R.W. Chambers, Beowulf: An Introduction, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1967), p. 29.

sets of threats to the court: Grendel and his mother without, Hrōðulf and Unferð within.[46] If this is the case, then Unferð has good reason to stare in silence at Grendel's hand nailed over the door (ll. 980-84). Perhaps he recognizes a sort of kinship between himself and the monster, and he is thereafter wise enough to restrain himself in the presence of Bēowulf.

Although Unferð is a man who drinks at his king's table, there are all too many circumstances connecting him with the monsters for him to be considered just a man. Like Loki he is also a partially domesticated monster looking for occasions to make trouble. Having characterized him as such, the poet can use him to perform those functions as foil to the hero which the other monsters cannot perform. By his taunts he stirs the hero to a formal condemnation of his adversaries, and later, by his cowardice (ll. 1468-72), he serves explicitly to contrast with the hero in his strength. At the end of his reply to the þyle's sarcasm about his abilities as a monster-fighter, Bēowulf taunts Unferð for not having rid Heorot of Grendel himself (ll. 590-94). The immediate reason--that Unferð is weak and a coward--is only a partial answer. A more complete one may be that Unferð recognizes too much of himself in the monster to fight against him.

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[46] Rosier, (1962), p. 7.

Associating Unferð with monsters must be done from internal evidence in the poem. There is, however, one other man in the poem with a certified pedigree as a monster in a work external to the poem: Hygelac, Bēowulf's own king. Hygelac appears as the second example in the first section, de Monstris, of the Liber Monstrorum.[47] In a brief paragraph the Liber Monstrorum emphasizes Hygelac's great size--that he was too large to ride a horse and that his bones were exhibited as a marvel--without passing further judgment on him. Butturff, however, feels that the guiding principle of the Liber Monstrorum, and the one for which Hygelac was actually included, is a deformity not so much physical as moral. Giants and the like are monsters not merely because they look different--for looks are but a matter of degree--but because they are sinful. As the poem says, they "wið Gode wunnon/ lange þráge" [strove against God a long time] (ll. 113-14). Hygelac preferred the treasures of this world: he sought dominion rather than salvation.[48] A man of force and violence, Hygelac is, according to Robert Kaske, an exponent of fortitudo without sapientia; the same, he feels, applies to Grendel.[49]

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[47]Douglas R. Butturff, "The Monsters and the Scholar: An Edition and Critical Study of the Liber Monstrorum," Diss. Illinois, 1968.

[48]Butturff, (1968), pp. 27, 29.

[49]Kaske, "Sapientia," p. 20.

Hygelac falls into a group of men of violence mentioned from time to time in the poem, men distinguished by pride and lack of concern for others. These men die far from home, exiles, as it were. Significantly, they seem to meet their fate among the Frisians.

Kaske, and later Stephen C. Bandy, have suggested that eoten be uniformly read as "giant" in all of its occurrences in Bēowulf; Kaske also suggests that the Frisians have a reputation for gigantism.[50] Thus Hygelac dies on a self-serving pirate raid, apparently at the hands of Dæghrefn, who must, like Grendel, be wrestled to the ground (ll. 2501-09).[51] The multiple treachery of the Finn episode comes to its violent end among eotenas / Frisians.[52] Heremōd, the poem's chief example of a king gone wrong, dies "mid Eotenum . . . on fēonda geweald" [with the giants . . . in his enemies' power] (ll. 902-03), though Kaske calls Heremōd himself "a 'giant' through fatal pride and treacherous enmity to his people."[53] Ringler says that Heremōd's symptoms of dissolution are "perfectly descriptive of the monster."[54] The formula on fēonda geweald is also applied

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[50]Kaske, "The Eotenas in Beowulf," in Old English Poetry, ed. Robert P. Creed (Providence, R.I.: Brown Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 285-310; Stephen C. Bandy, "Cain, Grendel, and the Giants of Beowulf," Papers in Language and Literature, 9 (Winter 1973), 235-49.

[51]Klaeber, p. 215.

[52]Kaske, "Eotenas," p. 299.

[53]Kaske, "Eotenas," p. 298.

[54]Ringler, p. 64.

to the wounded Grendel (l. 808). Later, in speaking of Heremōd, the ruler whose pride has destroyed his moral watchfulness, Hrōðgār says that such a man falls under the spell of the wergan gāstes [the evil spirit] (l. 1747). But wergan gāst is also applied to Grendel in the passage which names him and places him among Cain's kin (l. 133), and werg is the same outlaw-term applied elsewhere only to Grendel, his mother, and Unferð. Thus it is implied that Heremōd, and all others who like Hygelac become slaves to pride, become monstrous, wolfish; they die either of their own monstrousness or at the hands of slayers as monstrous as themselves.

In the long run, hardly anyone in the poem escapes some associations with the monstrous. Heremōd, when first mentioned, is contrasted with Sigemund (ll. 875-97), the slayer of the sort of eotena cynnes (l. 883) to whom Heremōd falls prey. Yet Sigemend himself is an exile, fighting alone (l. 889), and the later Vǫlsunga saga tells of his werewolfism.

Even Hrōðgār, the poem's great moralist, the preacher against pride, is himself touched by the sin, as he is aware. Grendel, however, has tempered him by depriving him of the hall which was the external symbol of his power (ll. 1769 ff.). To the Christian critics, Heorot may seem the earthly city, the image of pride,[55] "the work of Cain's

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[55]Goldsmith, pp. 85-89.

heirs," a fit dwelling for Grendel.[56] And Goldsmith later implies that Grendel and Hrōðgār should be paired, as they are joint tenants of the hall.[57]

In biblical terms, Hrōðgār is typologically similar to Saul: a great leader, he has assembled for himself a kingdom, but in his old age he can no longer maintain it against a monstrous challenger. Bēowulf, like David with a few beasts to his credit, comes to drive away the monster. One generation's leader, however, often become the next's monster.[58] Such is the case in the Enuma Eliš and with Saturn, Chronos, and Zeus; such is also the case with Saul; and such is also sometimes the case with aging (or dead) Norse saga heroes. Though in Bēowulf Hrōðgār shows no immediately violent monstrous tendencies (he has enough monsters against him, anyway), he recognizes in his sermon that he, like other kings, could easily have let his pride and hunger for power make another Heremōd of him.

Kaske feels that Hrōðgār maintains his sapientia after the loss of his fortitudo.[59] Hrōðgār is thus, though not a monster, something less than a whole man. In his weakness, tormented by Grendel, he has become a sort of exile on ēþle [in his own land] (l. 1774). He knows,

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[56]Bandy, p. 241.

[57]Goldsmith, p. 109.

[58]See Ch. I, pp. 13-15, 39-40; see also Fontenrose, pp. 469-73.

[59]Kaske, "Sapientia," p. 279.

accordingly, some of the pain felt by Grendel, Heremōd, and others who are deprived of normal pleasure. The theme of his sermon to Bēowulf is twofold: the hero must guard himself against the pride that can make him a monster; even if he preserves himself from a fate like that of Heremōd, he must still brace himself to feel the pains of exile or of age which can cut him off from others as surely as distance can.

If Bēowulf's sapientia is fully active, he should heed Hrōðgār's advice carefully, since he himself has the very dangerous potential of becoming a monster in his turn. For Bēowulf has that strength which monsters and monstrous men need: like the outlaw Grettir, he is the strongest man around. And though Bēowulf's intent to face Grendel unarmed shows on the surface both his chivalry and his self-confidence, it also contains an admission that he can fight like a monster. Furthermore, he seems to think he knows the monster's mind:

> Nō ic mē an herewæsmun hnágran talige
> gūþgeweorca, þonne Grendel hine.
> (ll. 677-78)

> [I count myself no less in martial stature, in deeds of war, than Grendel (counts) himself.]

Even if Bēowulf does not wish to take unfair advantage of Grendel, there seems no reason for him to forego weapons when he fights Dæghrefn, the apparent slayer of Hygelac, unless he has a bit of the monster in himself:

. . . ic for dugeðum Dæghrefne wearð
tó handbonan, Húga cempan;--
. . . . . .
. . . . . ne wæs ecg bona,
ac him hildegráp heortan wylmas,
bánhús gebræc.
(ll. 2501-02, 06-08)

[I was before the troops the hand-slayer of Dæghrefn; the sword was not his slayer but a battle-grip burst his ribs, his heart's glow.]

Such bear-hug wrestling is characteristic of some of the Norse saga-heroes, many of whom have werewolfish tendencies. Although a discussion of the sagas is to come later, Chapter 65 of Egils saga can supply one example now. When Egill comes back from exile and challenges Atli to return some land he had wrongfully appropriated from the poet, the two go at each other with weapons for a while,

Þá lét Egill laust sverðit ok skjǫldinn ok hljóp at Atla ok greip hann hǫndum. Kendi þá aflsmunar, ok fell Atli á bak aptr, en Egill greyfðiz at niðr, ok beit í sundr í honum barkann; lét Atli þar líf sitt.[60]

[Then Egill let loose of sword and shield and ran at Atli and seized him in his hands. The the difference in strength became evident and Atli fell down backwards, but Egill came over on him and bit his windpipe in two; Atli died then.]

Egill comes from a family noted for werewolf traits, but this outburst of animal violence could just as easily have come from Grettir or from numerous other heroes of his type.

Bēowulf describes his crushing of Dæghrefn as handbonan. The word appears two other times in the poem, once in reference

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[60] Egils saga Skallagrímssonar, ed. Finnur Jónsson, ASB, 3, p. 220.

to Grendel's mother's slaying of AEschere (l. 1330) and once in reference to Ecgþéow's feud, which Hrôðgár had settled (l. 460).[61] The word is rare in Old English; in Béowulf it seems to suggest a particularly violent death. What Grendel's mother did is obviously gory. Just what Ecgþéow did is not clear, but is was enough to force him into exile and put him in need of a powerful mediator. In view of the rarity of the word, much conjecture is useless, but the repetition perhaps implies that Béowulf inherits, like Egill, a tendency to animal-like fighting.

Whether he was being ironic or whether he was partially conditioned by his formulaic system, the Béowulf poet does make some suggestions of monstrousness when he presents his hero's invasion of the lair of Grendel's mother. Béowulf, as it were, assumes the role Grendel had played at Heorot.[62] As Grendel had been a healþegn [hall-thane] (l. 142), so Béowulf becomes a gist [visitor] (l. 1522) and selegyst [hall-guest] (l. 1545). The cave itself is sometimes a níðsele [hostile hall] (l. 1513), but sometimes simply a hrôfsele [roofed hall] (l. 1515). Furthermore, if one accepts Rosier's reading, Béowulf

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[61] In ON the term handbani is used particularly of Hǫðr, who threw the missile which killed Baldr (Hyndluljóð, St. 29); it contrasts with ráðbani, one who counsels slaying, i.e. Loki himself.

[62] Rosier, "Hands and Feasts," p. 12; Brodeur, p. 232.

becomes <u>ǽglæca</u> (l. 1512)[63] as he takes on the monster's role. A man may be called an <u>ǽglæca</u> if he becomes monstrously ferocious: the poet applies the term to Sigemund (l. 893) and to the dragon and Bēowulf collectively (l. 2592). Nonetheless, the word almost always indicates Grendel or his mother: when the poet applies <u>ǽglæca</u> to a man, he must have special intent.

To a structuralist it is not surprising that Bēowulf should appear as a monster in the cave, since his natural element is above ground. Likewise, above ground, the <u>merewīf</u> appears monstrous. Below the mere, however, she is in her natural place: she can see, and Bēowulf cannot, at first, see her. In the cave, she makes one of her most human gestures, one her son never makes--she pulls a knife. Structurally, if there have been in the situation inversions of those features related to the <u>merewīf</u>, there should also be counterbalancing changes in the hero. That he becomes an <u>ǽglæca</u> but is at the same time in <u>aldres orwēna</u> [fear for his life] (l. 1565) is accordingly appropriate, since <u>aldres orwēna</u> has been applied much earlier to Grendel (l. 1002) as a final indication of his defeated expectations.

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[63] Rosier, "Hands and Feasts," p. 13. Klaeber reads the noun both as a genitive singular (as Rosier does) and as a nominative plural in the glossary: "[they] persecuted the terrible one" or "the terrible one persecuted [him]." In the notes, p. 215, Klaeber leans towards the n.p.

This transformation of the hero into a hostile invader is but momentary, however. When the grundwyrgenne is slain, the hall is no longer her own, and the fire blazes up (l. 1570) as though in recognition of the change of possessor. With the removal of the monstrous owner, the counterbalancing monstrous aspect of the hero is no longer needed, and he is himself again.

Bēowulf has one other trait which he shares with the monsters: though he is a hero, welcomed by kings and followed by warriors, he seems to be in a kind of wandering exile throughout the poem. Of course, the viking adventurers of the Norse sagas sometimes wandered for years on end in their search for adventure, but Bēowulf seems particularly restless. He rules "fifty winters" (l. 2209), but he never appears to be at home. At the beginning of the poem he is off to seek the court where his father had once suffered exile. There, in taunting Bēowulf about Breca, Unferð concludes with emphasis on Breca's having arrived at "swæsne ēþel,/. . . þǣr hē folc ahte,/ burh ond bēagas" [his own homeland, where he had people, city and rings] (ll. 520-23), but he significantly says nothing about Bēowulf's having arrived at a home. Nor, in otherwise correcting the þyle, does Bēowulf dispute that one matter. Of course, Bēowulf does return, loaded with honor and treasure, to Hygelac's court, and Hygelac's name is constantly on his tongue. But except for the scene

in which he reports his adventures to his king, he is nearly always in the field. Furthermore, in the latter half of the poem, his memories are for the most part of wars with the Swedes and of Hygelac's fatal journey to a death far away from home. In the end, Bēowulf's own house is burned, and he becomes, though a king, like a homeless exile.

As both a narrative of heroic adventure and a contemplative poem, Bēowulf deals with the character of the hero. The end of the poem, though filled with foreboding about the fate of his now leaderless people, turns in the last lines to Bēowulf's own character: he was the mildest and most gentle of men, and most eager to earn praise. In such a poem monsters have a dual function: they are worthy opponents for the hero to vanquish in his pursuit of praise, but they are also constant reminders of certain dangerous self-potentials which he must subdue. A strong man like Hygelac or Heremōd can all too easily become a monster rather than a monster-fighter. Surely J.R.R. Tolkien was correct in saying that the monsters are at the center of things in the poem.[64] They represent not only violence and evil in the abstract, but that particular form of violence and evil which is most dangerous for the hero.

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[64] J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," Proceedings of the British Academy, 22 (1936), 245-95; rpt. in An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1963), pp. 51-103.

Bēowulf, Sigemund, and Hrōðgār--like David, and Saul before him--precisely because they are physically strong and have the ability to lead men, run the risk of cutting themselves off from other men. The tales of Heremōd and Hygelac clearly illustrate that danger. The main narrative of Bēowulf and his adversaries presents the full development of what is only suggested in the digressions. Heremōd and Hygelac, with their greed and pride, are relatively simple characters. But the assembled forces of Grendel, his mother, and Unferð present a complex of threats which Bēowulf must subdue internally as well as externally. In overcoming each adversary, on its own ground, he overcomes the dangerous potentials within himself.

CHAPTER IV

MONSTERS IN THE NORSE SAGAS

For monsters one could hardly ask a better hunting ground than the Norse sagas. Although they do not provide precisely a "wilderness of dragons,"[1] what they lack in dragons they make up in a variety of other kinds of monsters. The sagas themselves come in many types--heroic legend, fantasy, and romance; biography, history, and pseudo-history; regional legend and local lore--but the variety of narratives does not alone account for the variety of monsters, as some types, such as the draugar, appear not only in the fantastic fornaldar sǫgur but in family sagas like the ostensible biography of the outlaw Grettir. The sagas are late literature, when compared to Bēowulf. Furthermore, they are sometimes influenced by southern literature. Grettis saga, for example, which may date from the fourteenth century,[2] contains an episode obviously borrowed from the Tristram and Iseult legends.[3] Nonetheless, the sagas deal with earlier times, and their conception of

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[1] R.W. Chambers, ed., Widsith (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1912), p. 80.

[2] Denton Fox and Herman Pálsson, tr., Grettir's Saga (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1974), p. vii.

[3] Paul Schach, "Some Observations on the Influence of Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar on Old Icelandic Literature," in Polomé, pp. 115-21.

the monstrous seems intended to appear that of the time they portray.[4]

Most obviously of interest for the study of monsters are the fornaldar sǫgur, or sagas of ancient times. Although historical characters appear in them, these sagas are primarily works of fiction and fantasy. The fornaldar sǫgur frequently take the Scandinavian mainland, particularly the west coast of Norway, as their home base, but their heroes wander far--to Lappland and farther north, to England, to Russia, and even to the Byzantine Empire and the Near East. While many of the sagas partake of myth and its sense of timelessness, the recognizable historical events occupy the period roughly from the fifth through the tenth centuries, from the fall of the Burgundians in the Vǫlsunga saga to the age of King Óláfr Tryggvason in several of the sagas. These sagas are frequently fantasy-adventure; some, like Ǫrvar-Odds saga, involve almost picaresque wanderings of a viking-hero. Above all, however, the sagas emphasize combats: they are liberally spiced with beheadings, maimings, disembowelings, and corpses by the dozens. As there is much magic and sorcery in the fantasy, the hero does not have to be satisfied with merely human adversaries. He fights strange and monstrous beasts, trolls,

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[4]For a survey of saga-types and their subject matter, see Kurt Schier, Sagaliteratur, Sammlung Metzler, 78 (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 1970).

giants, and a whole assortment of walking dead; even his human opponents are frequently shape-shifters or possessors of strange powers.

The family sagas represent the opposite extreme from the fornaldar sogur, as they seem to arise from the genealogical fascination of the leading Icelandic families for tracing their histories back to the settlement of the island and sometimes even before that to the previous few generations on the Continent. The family sagas, then, take place almost entirely in Iceland, except for occasional visits to Norway or England or viking raids by the principal characters. Although some of the sagas set in Iceland, notably Hrafnkels saga, are probably fictional and most of the narrative no doubt contains authorial inventions and embellishments, these sagas give an impression of realism because, among other things, of the presence of historical characters and authentic locations. Under such conditions, there is little room for some of the more fantastic monsters of the fornaldar sogur. However, those associated with individual humans--the living dead and the berserks and shape-shifters who function as monsters--are common.

As the range of monsters in the Norse sagas is so wide, the general classes need to be defined. In the sagas there are more beast-like monsters than in the Eddas or in Bēowulf. Some, but by no means all, of these monsters do not show particularly human traits and belong almost exclusively to

the fornaldar sǫgur. At the other extreme, the saga heroes, who are unquestionably human and are often historical, do not escape association with the monstrous. Indeed, saying that a man is as big, strong, ugly, or violent as a troll becomes almost a stock formula in the sagas.[5]

In the fornaldar sǫgur there are a good number of monsters which lack human form. Some of these, indeed, seem to be but glorified beasts, such as the ferocious cattle in Ragnars saga and Bǫsa saga or the boars in Hrólfs saga. These creatures nonetheless take on human roles in leading combat troops. Also in beast form, but lacking magical powers, is the great bear slain by Grettir in his saga. In this category perhaps also belong dragons. At the simplest they may be like the worm hatched from the gammr's [vulture's] egg in Bǫsa saga and later slain by Ragnar Loðbrókar in his saga. The grandest dragon is Fáfnir in Vǫlsunga saga--but he, of course, once had human form and still retains human traits. Most problematical are those cases in which the beast form belongs to the hero. Bǫðvarr Bjarki takes after his father in being a part-time bear. Ívarr, eldest son of Ragnar Loðbrókar, appears to be some sort of great serpent.

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[5]See George Clark, "Beowulf and Njálssaga," in Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference: University of Edinburgh, 1971, ed. Peter Foote, Herman Pálsson, and

Perhaps the beasts which appear as adversaries in the sagas have, like the Miðgarðsormr and Fenrisúlfr, an origin in ancient conceptions of chaos. Perhaps some of them are the residue of initiation combats. But in the sagas they appear mostly just as themselves, without connection to any system of belief. The typical saga hero fights one battle and is done with it. Then he fights another battle, and, unless it is part of some continuing feud, it has little connection with any previous battle. Occasionally a beast is attached to someone's system of belief--but that someone is always the enemy, like King Hárekr of Bjarmaland who keeps the gammr in his temple.

Most frequently, the hero fights opponents in human form. Many of them are, naturally, men, for not even in the fornaldar sogur can the hero expect to have fantastic adversaries all the time. Human form, however, is no guarantee that an opponent will be merely human. The simplest class of these human adversaries is that of the berserkir. Although these warriors are supposed to have been the protegés of Óðinn and probably at one time had real functions not only in combat but in initiation rituals as well, in the sagas few have significance in relation to

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Desmond Slay (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1973), pp. 80-83; Paul Schach, "The Use of Simile in the Old Norse Family Sagas," Scandinavian Studies, 24 (1952), 150.

any system of beliefs. At the most they are ferocious fighters like Angantýr and his brother in Hervarar saga and Qrvar-Odds saga. The berserkir show, however, a tendency to degenerate into stock characters[6] such as those whom Grettir defeats. Even though the berserkir are not generally shown as changing shape, occasionally one is alleged to have the ability to do so. Some characters actually do change skins, but these--Sigmundr, Bǫðvarr's father Bjǫrn, and a few others--are much more individualized than is the common berserkr.

Among the most serious adversaries of the saga heroes are the living dead, the aptrgǫngumenn, draugar, and haugbúar to whom Nora Kershaw Chadwick has devoted so much attention.[7] These characteristically Old Norse monsters are not always precisely differentiated, but an aptrgǫngumaðr [one who walks after death] generally walks abroad, while a haugbúi [howe-dweller] or draugr may be satisfied to dwell on in his barrow, guarding treasure like a dragon. These undead generally retain human shape, although it may be greatly enlarged or distorted, as in the case of Glámr, whom Grettir slays. Others develop ghoulish appetites, such as the

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[6]Blaney, pp. 142, 151.

[7]Nora Kershaw Chadwick, "Norse Ghosts," Folk-Lore, 57 (1948), 50-65, 106-27; "Þorgerðr Hölgabrúðr and the tröllabing: a note on sources," in Fox and Dickins, pp. 395-417; "The Monsters and Beowulf," in The Anglo-Saxons: Studies . . . Presented to Bruce Dickins, ed. Peter Clemoes (London: Bowes and Bowes, 1959), pp. 171-203.

horse-eating Árán in Egils saga einhenda. However, as Chadwick observes, one need not be dead to become a haugbuí: the sagas tell of several who enter a barrow, perhaps taking others with them, while still alive.[8]

Those who enter barrows alive, like Jarl Agði in Þórsteins þáttr bæjarmagns, are frequently associated with pagan beliefs and may be sorcerers. In the sagas, sorcery and many monsters are products of the lands to the east. While these lands, particularly Bjarmaland, Glæsisvǫllr, Geirrøðsstaðir, may correspond to real places like modern Permia, they may also be the land of the dead. The inhabitants of these lands, notably their rulers, Hárekr, Guðmundr, and Geirrøðr, appear in several sagas, where they are almost always made giants and usually seem to be associated with danger and treachery. Hárekr's family is full of draugar, trolls, and dragons, particularly Ǫgmundr, Ǫrvar-Oddr's personal demon. Guðmundr is himself sometimes a neutral character, but most often he seems to be carrying on a long-distance rivalry with Óláfr Tryggvason.

In the sagas, both legendary and semi-historical, the role of monster sometimes falls to an otherwise relatively normal man, if he chances to be outlawed. As outlaw, he becomes a vargr, and vargr, as has been noted, means both "wolf" and "outlaw" in Old Norse. The outlawed man may not

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[8]Chadwick, "Ghosts," pp. 51, 53.

himself be a berserkr; he may not even show any tendencies to shape-shifting. But he nonetheless fills the monster's role. The peculiarities of the Icelandic social and legal systems in particular tend to cut the outlaw off from other men. As another man could be penalized for harboring or aiding an outlaw, unless the outlaw has friends strong enough to flaunt the law and defend him, he will have to support himself by predation. Like a wolf, the outlaw steals cattle and sheep as well as any other supplies he needs. Already a marked man, he cannot suffer any worse penalty, so he may not scruple (any more than Grendel would) at killing anyone who crosses him. Cut off from society, he may take on the old role of monster as challenger. Grettir is certainly a man of great gall, openly seeking confrontations even in cases when he is not seeking provisions. Similarly, just as a hero in myth might make his reputation by slaying monsters, in the more realistic world of the sagas he might seek to make it by slaying a great outlaw.

Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar

Among the sagas in which monsters play an important role, perhaps the most interesting for a number of reasons is Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar.[9] Grettir Ásmundarson is

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[9]Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar, ed. R.C. Boer, ASB, 8 (1900). Hereinafter cited in the text by chapter and page.

an historical character who died in 1051, a member of a well-known family, and his saga contains many notable characters, like Snorri Goði and Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappa, who are known from other sagas. In spite of its historical basis, Grettir's story seems to have attracted accretions until it came to have an example of almost every type of monster-combat common in Old Norse except for dragon-slaying. Among the most celebrated combats in Old Norse are those with the aptrgǫngumaðr Glámr and with the Sandhaugartrolls, long recognized as analogues to Bēowulf's combats.[10] Besides these combats, Grettir slays a great bear, a draugr, and several berserkir as well as numerous ordinary human challengers. Most interesting, however, is his own role as predatory outlaw.

The parallels between Bēowulf's fight with Grendel and Grettir's with Glámr are well-known and clear enough. Before finally being quieted, Glámr, like Grendel, has been making raids for several years, has killed numerous people, and has damaged the hall. Grettir, like Bēowulf, waits for his opponent to enter through a broken door. Seized by the monster, the hero wrestles until the monster attempts to flee and in his struggle virtually wrecks the hall. Glámr, like Grendel, has great, staring eyes. The combats differ, since Glámr does succeed in getting outside, where his stare

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[10]Chadwick, "Monsters," pp. 189-90; Chambers, Beowulf, p. 48.

temporarily enchants Grettir. Furthermore, Grettir kills Glámr by decapitation on the spot; Bēowulf maims Grendel in combat but does not decapitate him until after the monster's death.

The saga writer is not so interested in Glámr's psychology as the poet is in Grendel's. There is no description of Glámr's approach. However, there is a parallel between Glámr's puzzlement at meeting resistance--he "undraðiz mjǫk, hverr svá fast mundi togaz við hann" [wondered greatly who could have pulled so hard against him] (p. 135)--and Grendel's amazement at finding a grip such as he had never met before (ll. 751-54). Glámr's desire to flee, "vildi Glámr leita út" [Glámr wanted to get out] also parallels Grendel's fear (ll. 761-64).

This seeming lack of interest in Glámr's attitude before the fight, however, is more than made up for by the writer's earlier preparation for his character. Unlike Grendel, Glámr can speak. He is "stirfinn ok viðskotaillr" [peevish and malicious] (p. 124), and his speech shows it. Though he is a <u>þræll</u>, he orders people around, even to the point of demanding meat from his master's wife on a day when the Christians fast. His master's new faith he considers <u>hindrvitni</u> [superstition] as he would rather be a heathen. He tells Þórhallr, his master, that he wishes to be <u>sjálfráðr</u> [independent, self-ruling] because "ek em skapstyggr, ef mér líkar eigi vel" [I am irritable if things don't please me] (p. 123). He issues no challenge to Grettir,

and his approach is as silent as Grendel's. However, his most obnoxious outburst, his refusal to fast, occurred on the day of his death, two years before, and that may be seen as a general challenge to all who cross him. When Grettir does get him down, Glámr issues his famous curse, which is, in effect, an ex post facto challenge:

> „Mikit kapp hefir þú á lagit, Grettir!" sagði hann, „at finna mik. En þat mun eigi undarligt þykkja, þóat þú hljótir ekki mikit happ af mér. En þat má ek segja þér, at þú hefir nú fengit helming afls þess ok þroska, er þér var ætlaðr, ef þú hefðir mik ekki fundit. Nú fæ ek þat afl eigi af þér tekit, er þú hefir áðr hrept; en því má ek ráða, at þú verðr aldri sterkari en nú ertu, ok ertu þó nógu sterkr, ok at því mun mǫrgum verða. Þú hefir frægr orðit hér til af verkum þínum; en héðan af munu falla til þín sekðir ok vígaferli, en flest ǫll verk þín snúaz þér til ógæfu ok hamingjuleysis. Þú munt verða útlægr gǫrr 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 erfitt þykkja, einum at vera, ok þat mun þér til dauða draga."
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> (pp. 136-37)

> ["You've shown a lot of spirit in meeting me, Grettir," he said, "but you shouldn't wonder if you don't get much good luck from me. I can tell you that you now have only half the strength and power which were destined to you if you had not met me. Now, I cannot take from you the strength which you have already gained, but I can see to it that you will not become stronger than you are now, and you are strong enough, as many will find, to their sorrow. You have become famous for your deeds, but from now on outlawry and manslaughter will befall you, and most of your works will turn to misfortune and luckless-ness. You will be made an outlaw and will always have to live by yourself. Now I lay this curse on you, that you will always see before your sight these eyes which I bear in death, and you will find it an ordeal to be alone, and that will drag you to your death.]

Although Glámr's curse lacks the element of personal insult which most challenges have, it is an accurate prediction of Grettir's fate. The typical challenge coming down from the age of heroic poetry attempts to disgrace the challenged by recalling supposedly shameful events from his past, in the hope that he will be too unnerved to reply--or to fight well. Glámr has, by the time he fianlly speaks, been all but defeated; he utters his curse while Grettir is drawing a sword to decapitate him. Under such conditions, it would hardly be of use of him to taunt Grettir about his past, even though Grettir's reputation already has a few stains on it. Instead, he suggests that the future will be both shameful and uncomfortable. The structuralist, observing this confrontation, might suggest that transferring the opponent's verbal reproach from before to after physical combat would require a compensatory alteration of the time perspective with which the challenge deals.

Glámr's pronouncement is prefaced with the observation that there was "meiri ófagnaðarkraptr með Glámi en flestum qðrum aptrgqngumqnnum" [more power for evil in Glámr than in most other walkers-after-death] (p. 136). Although there is nothing in his prediction of outlawry which might not have happened simply as a consequence of Grettir's personality as it has already been revealed in the saga, still he is made to seem some sort of sorcerer as well as a monster. Grettir's growing fear of the dark, which he

mentions repeatedly later in the saga (cf. Ch. 54, 55, 56, 69), may indeed stem from this encounter. At the very least, the encounter seems to have a psychological effect on Grettir. Returning home afterwards, Grettir says that he feels worse tempered and more irritable, as well as being prone to hallucination (pp. 138-39).

Whatever powers Glámr may have, he seems, even more than Grendel, to be essentially human. His name may originally have meant "moonlight,"[11] and he may originally have been "eine personificierung des winterlichen mondlichtes, . . . welches gleichfalls abwechselnd den weg zeigt und irre führt,"[12] but he is nonetheless described in basically human terms. Grendel, similarly, may have a mythic origin as a personification of chaos, but in Beowulf he is presented as a walking "earmsceapen / on weres wæstmum" (ll. 1350-51): in the poem, as a poem, rather than as a transmogrified myth, he has become a man, albeit a distorted one. Likewise Glámr.

When Glámr makes his first appearance (Ch. 32), he is twice called a maðr [man] (p. 122). Þórhallr, who is looking for a shepherd, finds that Glámr is, as he had been warned, "mikill vexti ok undarligr í yfirbragði" [of great stature and extraordinary in appearance]. Glámr

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[11] Cf. de Vries, Wörterbuch, "glámr," p. 172.

[12] Boer, Grettis saga, p. xiii.

talks and makes arrangements to take the job with Þórhallr as other men might. Perhaps he is presumptuous for a <u>þræll</u>, but in the sagas big men do not hesitate to show self-confidence. Told that the farm is haunted, he replied, "Ekki hræðumz ek flykur þær, ok þykkir mér at ódaufliga" [Ghosts don't frighten me, and I think they make things less dull] (p. 123). Glámr's replacement Þorgautr replies almost the same way: "Eigi þykkjumz ek upp gefinn, þóat ek sjá smáváfur; man þá eigi qðrum dælt, ef ek hræðumz, ok ekki bregð ek vist minni fyrir þat" [I don't think I'd give up just because I saw a little ghost; it wouldn't be easy for anyone else, if I got frightened, and I'm not going to break my word for that] (Ch. 33, p. 127). Furthermore, Glámr eats food like any normal man, and his presence does not disturb the flocks, which come when he calls (Ch. 32, p. 124).

Glámr, however, is more than merely human. His having been slain by whatever it is that haunts Þórhallsstaðr before him is not enough to explain his return after death. Þorgautr rightly predicts that he, Þorgautr, will not come back to haunt the farm if his predecessor on the job slays him (Ch. 33, p. 128). To say that Þorgautr will not return merely because he is a Christian and that Glámr, a quite blasphemous heathen, will walk after death, would be to oversimplify. Glámr shows peculiarities from the very beginning. His appearance as well as his attitude marks

him as unusual. Not only is he very large, he is "gráeygðr . . . , úlfgrár í hárslit" [grey-eyed . . . , wolf-grey of hair] (p. 122). Grey is the color often associated with gespenstische wesen.[13] Although the author does not return to wolf-images in describing Glámr, this one in the initial description of the shepherd is enough to suggest shape-shifters and semi-human monsters. On the other hand, one need not go so far as Boer, who thinks Glámr an unhold which from the beginning wishes to insinuate itself into Þórhallr's household to lead the family to destruction.[14]

One key to Glámr's nature is that he is an alien. He is a Swede, just come to Iceland. As he emphasizes, he prefers to be sjálfráðr [self-ruling, independent] (p. 123), and he keeps his way of life quite distinct from everyone else's. When Þórhallr asks him what work he is suited for, he responds without hesitation, "keeping flocks in winter" (Ch. 32). Perhaps Skapti, who has already met Glámr, has told him that Þórhallr needs a shepherd, but Glámr obviously prefers such a position in which he can be alone. It is, of course, impossible to separate out completely the effects of certain features of Glámr's personality. His heathenism and antagonism towards Christian practices make his death at the hands of the local ghost seem deserved. At the same

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[13]Boer, Grettis saga, p. 122 n.

[14]Boer, Grettis saga, p. xii.

time they also contribute largely to his alienation.

Once he is dead, Glámr acts not unlike other unquiet Icelandic dead, although he does put on a spectacular performance. His similarity to Þórólfr bægifótr in the Eyrbyggja saga is unmistakable.[15] It is not unlikely that the author of the Grettis saga knew Eyrbyggja,[16] and even if he did not, some of the descriptions seem almost stock items. One phrase applied to Glámr (Ch. 32) is actually used of Þórólfr (Eyrbyggja, Ch. 63, p. 222): the corpse is "blár sem Hel en digr sem naut" [black as Hel and big as an ox] (p. 125).[17] Most of the other things said of Glámr (Ch. 32, 33, 35) are also said of Þórólfr (Ch. 34, 63). Because his corpse is so large, a team of oxen can move it only with difficulty. He will not stay under his rock-pile but comes out frightening people and livestock, and later he seems to want to depopulate the area. When he kills a shepherd he is not satisfied with breaking the man's back but goes on to smash every bone in the body. He is compared to a troll. His favorite sport seems to be climbing the housetop and riding the ridgepole like a horse. Although most of these traits seem reasonable as continuations of the difficult and unpleasant personality

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[15]Boer, Grettis saga, p. 125 n., p. 127 n.

[16]Fox and Pálsson, Grettir's Saga, p. vii.

[17]According to Schach, (1952), such similes are more rare in the family sagas than in the fornaldar sogur.

which Glámr exhibited in life, they are certainly not individualized for him alone.

Among the few personalized traits of Glámr as aptrgongumaðr is the continuation of his hatred of Christians. His corpse grows too heavy to move if it is pulled towards a church; it cannot even be found if a priest is among the searchers. Glámr seems, in short, to conform to a common expectation of how a violent and unpleasant man should act after death. Glámr's actions after death are not sufficient to lead one to believe that, however unpleasant he was before death, he was essentially other than a man. Socially, there may have been a great distance between a þræll like Glámr and a wealthy member of a leading family like Þórólfr, but the two share tendencies toward argumentativeness and violence in life which qualify them for their later appearances as monsters.

Glámr shows himself most individual in his last appearance, just before he is killed the second time. Although he is quite Grendel-like as he towers among the rafters, looking over the crossbeam into Þórhallr's central room, he distinguishes himself in pronouncing his curse, but then he is immediately brought down to the level of a common draugr when Grettir gives him the treatment--beheading and cremation--usually accorded such types. Yet that curse, more obviously a curse than what Fáfnir says to Sigurðr, is of greatest importance. It shows above all Glámr's own awareness of the monster's role

as an isolated character: it is his own condition which he wishes onto Grettir.

Before Grettir faces his own decapitation, however, he puts down a number of other monsters. Glámr was neither the first nor the last.

Grettir's next-best-known adventure with monsters is the slaying of the Sandhaugar trolls (Ch. 64-67). Like the Glámr episode, this one has long been considered an analogue of Bēowulf's defense of Heorot. In each case the hero defends a hall against a female monster who dwells beneath a waterfall; when the hero later invades her treasure-filled cave, he is abandoned by someone who has been told to wait for him above ground. Unfortunately the episode does not offer much evidence about the nature of monsters. The trǫllkona knows the use of tools--she carries a knife and trencher--but she does not talk, and she shows little personality outside of her desire to catch a man to eat. As in the Glámr episode the fight itself consists mostly of violent wrestling which breaks up the house.[18] Grettir and the trǫllkona both employ a bear-hug technique familiar not only from his earlier fights but from Bēowulf as well. Afterwards Grettir is "þrútinn ok blár" [swollen and black (with bruises)], which, as Boer notes, is similar to the condition of Glámr's corpse.[19] When Grettir invades the

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[18]Boer, Grettis saga, p. 233 n.

[19]Boer, Grettis saga, p. 237 n.

trǫllkona's lair, he finds and destroys her mate. That combat also is of no great interest, being of the sort common to the fornaldar sǫgur in which the hero disembowels his enemy and then waits for the enemy to slow down in fighting enough to be dispatched.[20]

A more significant combat, though it, too, is presented in a conventional manner,[21] is that with the draugr Kárr inn gamli, "Kárr the old," early in Grettir's career (Ch. 18). Kárr is the father of Þorfinnr, who is host to Grettir after having rescued him from a shipwreck. Grettir discovers Kárr's barrow after seeing fire rising from it at night. Told that Kárr has so often "aptr gengit" [walked after death] (p. 63) that he has driven out most of the local farmers, Grettir becomes curious and raids the barrow. There he finds much treasure and also discovers Kárr, sitting in a chair. Attacked by Kárr as he tries to leave with the treasure, he fights and beheads the haugbúi, leaving the head beside the thigh of the corpse (p. 65). Since Grettir dispatches Glámr in the same way, the formula seems to be the usual one for quieting a draugr.[22]

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[20]Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana, in Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Bókáutgáfan Forni, 1943), III, Ch. 16, p. 185, has an episode in which Ásmundr, one of the heroes, splits a giant down the front, but his adversary keeps on coming until he trips in his own entrails and so finishes himself off. This edition hereinafter will be abbreviated FSN.

[21]Boer, Grettis saga, p. 64 n.

[22]Chadwick, "Ghosts," pp. 55, 58-59.

Kárr is generally representative of the haugbúi or draugr (he is called both) as presented by the sagas. He is a man whose greed extends beyond the grave. Not satisfied with gathering treasure or even with taking it with him to the grave, he also tries to exercise a kind of post mortem authority over the territory in which he lives. Glámr, too, tries to depopulate his neighborhood, but he seems motivated more by spite and general hatred of all living things. He is, after all, a þræll who had no property rights in life and should not expect them after death. Kárr is more like Þórólfr in the Eyrbyggja saga in that he is a bóndi [landowner], unwilling to part with any of his territory and ever greedy for more. Nothing is said of Kárr's doings before his death, but he might well have been like Þórólfr, who died of a stroke brought on by his reluctance to relinquish timber rights on a piece of land he had already sold.

Kárr is certainly greedy for material possessions. After beheading the draugr, Grettir wrests from it a precious short sword. Þorfinnr later observes that he himself was never able to get the sword from Kárr "meðan hann lifði" [while he was still alive] (p. 67). Þorfinnr is not angry with Grettir for robbing Kárr's barrow, as he says money left in the earth "er illa komit" [it comes to no good], i.e., it helps no one (p. 67). While it would be dangerous to lay too much stress on Þorfinnr's remarks, they could

be construed to imply that while still alive Kárr took the sword and treasure into the barrow and had himself sealed in. Certainly that is not an unheard of practice among those who became draugar.[23] (After Þorfinnr's remarks on the treasure, it is not difficult to see similar implications in the unnyt gold (l. 3168) buried with Bēowulf.)

Kárr is not a vocal monster, merely a violently possessive one. He is, however, an important challenge for Grettir, as he sets the pattern for Grettir's later monster-slayings. Most immediately, his quieting is the prelude to Grettir's capture and destruction of a band of berserkir who attack Þorfinnr's farm during the farmer's absence. The slaying of Kárr is one of the first events to establish Grettir's reputation. It is also one of the last of his early deeds to be mentioned before his death, and he himself is beheaded after death with the sword which he had taken from Kárr. Since he is no more willing to give up the sword than Kárr had been, the slayers must chop off his hand to get the sword from him (Ch. 82). The same sword avenges Grettir, though it splits his killer's head rather than removing it (Ch. 86).

Before Þorfinnr will give Grettir Kárr's sword for his own, he insists that Grettir perform some other deed worthy of renown. That deed Grettir performs shortly thereafter in the capture and destruction of a band of berserkir who invade Þorfinnr's estate in his absence (Ch. 19).

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[23]Chadwick, "Ghosts," p. 51.

The berserkir, led by the brothers Þórir þomb and Ǫgmundr illr, "Þórir paunch" and "Ǫgmundr the evil," have a grudge against Þorfinnr because he had singled them out in counsel with Eirík jarl for particular outlawry when the Earl was attempting to rid Norway of their sort. They arrive at Yule, while Þorfinnr has gone to visit estates and friends on the mainland, leaving only Grettir and a few servants to guard his wife and a sick daughter at their island home. On the arrival of Þórir and his crew, Grettir startles his hostess by seeming to offer the berserkir full hospitality, including the use of the women. The housewife is not reassured until Grettir, having gotten the invaders drunk, weaponless, and off their guard, locks them in Þorfinnr's storehouse and comes looking for weapons and assistance in dispatching them. When the crew breaks out through a privy attached to the storehouse, he impales Þórir and Ǫgmundr with a single thrust of Kárr's old spear, then hunts down the crew or lets them freeze in a blizzard.

Þórir and Ogmundr seem to be typical of their class, as they were

> meiri ok starkari en aðrir menn. Þeir genga berserksgang ok eirðu engu, þegar þeir reidduz. Þeir tóku á brott konur manna ok hǫfðu við hǫnd sér viku eða hálfan mánuð ok færðu síðan aptr þeim sem áttu. Þeir ræntu, hvar sem þeir kómu, eða gerðu aðrar óspekðir.
>
> (p. 69)

> [bigger and stronger than other men. They went berserking and spared no one when they were angry. They took away men's wives and kept them with them a week or half a month and sent them back to their families. They robbed wherever they went and caused other disturbances.]

The saga writer in this description makes the men seem difficult and dangerous, but not particularly monstrous. However, he is depending on his reader's understanding of the implications of berserksgangr, that is, a kind of mindless fury in which men act like beasts, howling like wolves and raging about, going without armor and considering themselves invulnerable. Indeed, this is how þórir and his men behave when they realize they have been tricked: "Kemr á þá berserksgangr, ok grenja sem hundar" [the berserksgangr came on them then, and they howled like dogs] (p. 76). Their feeling of invulnerability helps them no more than their drunkenness, and Grettir is able to kill the leaders while they try to come down the stairs from the building; the others, weaponless, try unsuccessfully to defend themselves with logs.

The author balances between the serious and the comic in presenting the berserkir. Obviously, since they are dangerous men who rob, kill, and rape, they would no doubt have devastated Þorfinnr's home had they not been tricked. However, being bullies who attack farms ill-prepared to withstand them, they congratulate themselves on their good luck at finding Þorfinnr's island apparently undefended (p. 71). Grettir's manner furthers the ambiguous treatment. His display of friendliness to the invaders is realistic enough to disarm them and send the women running in terror. Yet there must be some touch of sarcasm in his

calling Þórir "bóndi" [master] (pp. 72, 74). Certainly, the berserkir's breaking out through a privy does not increase their stature as warriors.

Nonetheless, the invaders have a touch of the monstrous. They arrive at Yule--the same season when Glámr was slain and later made his worst visitations, the season when the Sandhaugar trolls appeared, and the season when in Hrólfs saga the flying monster attacked Hrólfr's court. Qgmundr is a monster's name; in particular it is that of the great half-troll who pursues Qrvar-Oddr. While Þórir's nickname, "paunch," may merely suggest that the warrior is hardly a magnificent physical specimen, it may also indicate something hideous and repulsive, swollen like a troll.

Whatever their physical appearance, the berserkir at the least take the monster's role. Living outside of normal society, they prey on it. Coming at the favorite season for monsters, they intend to rape and destroy. Grettir, their opponent, is like Béowulf. He protects a hall, slays the invaders, gains fame, and wins a sword.

Absent, or rather strangely transformed in this instance, is the monsters' challenge. Grettir's presence and his method of dealing with Þórir and Qgmundr upset the routine pattern. No doubt, Þórir and his troops would have issued a challenge if they had not been diverted from their plans. They have arrived and taken over Þorfinnr's boat shed and are on their way to do likewise at the house when

they meet Grettir. Expecting to approach the house unannounced and then declare their presence, they find themselves met, questioned, and greeted. Grettir, the defender, then takes on the function of announcing the invaders of the house:

> Þat er ráð, húsfreyja! at taka vel við gestum. Hér er komina Þórir bǫndi Þǫmb ok þeir tólf sama ok ætla hér at sitja um jólin. (p. 72)

> [It is good, housewife, to welcome the guests! Here have come Master Þórir paunch, one of twelve all together, planning to spend Yule here.]

Grettir is acting sensible for once. Knowing he cannot allow himself to be put in the position of being challenged by the whole troop, he forestalls the challenge and indeed gets himself invited to join with the invading party. Thus prevented, Þórir and his men do not get to make a challenge until they howl on the way out of the privy. Then it is too late, and they have lost their offensive advantage to Grettir. In this episode, with its confusion of roles, Grettir plays the trickster. Like Loki in some of his adventures, Grettir seems to join with the enemy in order to destroy it. In the process, the usual order of events is upset and what would have been a disaster becomes even a bit comic.

Some time later, after the fight with Glámr, Grettir meets another man like Þórir, the <u>mikill berserkr</u> Snækollr, at another farm in Norway. The author observes that

> Þat var þá víða í Nóregi, at markamenn ok illvirkjar hlupu ofan af mǫrkum ok skoruðu á menn til kvenna eðr tóku á brott fé manna með ofríki, þar sem eigi var liðsfjǫlði fyrir. (p. 151)
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> [It was then widespread in Norway that bordermen (i.e., outlaws) and evildoers jumped out of the woods and challenged men for their women or took their property by force, if there was no company around for protection.]

Since Einarr, Grettir's host, has an attractive daughter, Snækollr rides out of the forest to challenge Einarr to hand her over, "eða verja hana ef hann þœttiz maðr til" [or to protect her, if he thought he was man enough] (p. 151). Called a "mikill hrottinn" [big lout], Grettir again seems passive, saying that neither he nor Einarr is eager for trouble. Grettir's obstinance provokes Snækollr into a show of typical berserksgangr:

> Tók hann þá at grenja hátt ok beit í skjaldarrǫndina ok setti skjǫldinn upp í munu sér ok gein yfir hornit skjaldarins ok lét allólmliga. (pp. 152-53)
>
> [He began to howl loudly and bit the rim of his shield and pushed the shield up into his mouth and gaped over the horn of his shield and behaved furiously.]

Having caused his challenger to lose self-control, Grettir kicks the bottom edge of the shield, driving it up into Snækollr's mouth and splitting his head open. Then he pulls the berserkr down from his horse and beheads him. Snækollr's cowardly friends watch this happen, then ride off in terror.

Living like wolves in the forest, Snækollr and his companions are indicative of how low the berserkir sank, at least as represented in popular literature. Like wolves, they live by sudden forays to raid the farms near the forest. Though they can talk, bear arms, and ride horses, when they are excited they become inarticulate and can only howl like beasts.

Against Snækollr, as against Þórir, Grettir acts strangely, seeming almost to avoid confrontation. Of course, his technique is deception, the necessity for which arises from the difficulty of an unarmed man's facing an armed troop. Nonetheless, in Grettir's interchange with his challengers there is an indication that he considers them too low for direct confrontation.

The winter after slaying Þórir þǫmb, Grettir finds himself spending the season with a merchant, Þorkell, with whom he had taken passage after leaving Þorfinnr (Ch. 21). This Yule's haunting is in the form of a great bear which raids the countryside, apparently having been awakened from hibernation by the carousing of Þorkell's braggart kinsman Bjǫrn. Bjǫrn thinks little of Grettir but makes much of his own planning to face his namesake. Even though he narrowly escapes being mauled by the bear, he continues to mock Grettir. When Grettir accompanies Þorkell and his men to visit the bear's den, Bjǫrn throws Grettir's fur cloak into the den. Grettir later finds an excuse to separate himself

from the group and return to the den to slay the bear and retrieve his now shredded cloak. Returning to the house, he makes a sarcastic verse about Bjǫrn's cowardice but thereafter holds his peace for Þorkell's sake in spite of Bjǫrn's continued obnoxiousness and refusal to compensate him for the ruined garment. The next summer, however, Grettir meets Bjǫrn on a voyage and finally goads the coward into a mortal combat (Ch. 22).

Grettir's combat with this pair of adversaries is similar to Bēowulf's with the pair Unferð and Grendel, but with polarity made more extreme. Grendel, while an inarticulate destroyer, has human form; the bear is merely a large beast. Unferð seems to have no existence in the poem beyond sitting at the king's feet and talking to Bēowulf; Bjǫrn acts on his own, visiting the bear's cave; he has already made a bad reputation because he "afflutti mjǫk fyrir þeim mǫnnum" [was very sarcastic about the men] who lived with Þorkell (p. 82). However, Bjǫrn has the same functional relationship to the bear as Unferð to Grendel. The beast or monster simply raids and goes back to its cave. The man lives at the hall being raided and faces the hero, attempting to discredit his ability. He, in effect, takes on the adversary's role of challenging the hero before combat. In Bēowulf the challenger and monster are linked through the allusions to past fratricides. Bjǫrn himself makes the association with the bear, first

remarking on their name (bjǫrn = bear) and later actually going to visit it (p. 84). Furthermore, the local people think Bjǫrn responsible for arousing the bear. The most important link, however, so far as the pair's joint role as opponent is concerned, is provided when Bjǫrn throws Grettir's loðkápa into the den so that Grettir must fight the bear if he wants his cloak back. Once Unferð has been quelled by Bēowulf and has had a night to sober up, he causes no more difficulty for the hero. However, Bjǫrn's refusal to make peace so infuriates Grettir that he is not satisfied until his antagonist is dead. Had Grettir merely slain a great bear, he would have done a deed of strength and little more. Having a man so closely linked to the beast, however, makes for a more complex situation. As in Bēowulf, the result is almost as if the hero had faced a single, vocal, partially human adversary.

A few other characters Grettir encounters shed some light on the relationship of man and monster, the most interesting of whom is the big man in black Grettir tries to rob near Kjǫl (Ch. 54). This man, who in their first encounter calls himself "Loptr" is one of the few in the saga strong enough to overpower Grettir, snatching the reins of his horse from the outlaw's hands. "Loptr" is one of the variant names of Loki (Lokasenna, St. 6), of whom this sarcastic fellow is reminiscent. The great hat which conceals his face (p. 196), however, is more like a sign of Óðinn.

Whoever he is, he is quite peculiar: he is strong; he knows who Grettir is, though Grettir does not know him; and he lives in an unlikely place, on Balljǫkull, "Ball Glacier," where one might expect a troll but not a human. "Loptr" rides off, inviting Grettir to visit him. Grettir does visit a strange big fellow named Hallmundr, who lives on Balljǫkull and claims to have been his adversary at Kjǫl (Ch. 57). Hallmundr appears mysteriously while Grettir is being besieged by Þórir ór Garði and holds off those who would attack from behind. Þórir gives up his attack because he is convinced he is dealing _við tröll_ (p. 205) and not with a man. Both wounded, Grettir and Hallmundr go to the latter's cave at Balljǫkull, where they are cared for by his daughter, who is "gilda vexti ok skǫrugliga" [very large and impressive] (p. 206). Surely a doublet of Hallmundr and his daughter are the _þurs_ [giant] Þórir and his daughter with whom Grettir claimed to have stayed in a valley of pastureland Hallmundr had mentioned above Geitlandsjǫkull (Ch. 61).

Although Hallmundr and Þórir are friendly giants, they are nonetheless out of the ordinary (Boer calls the Hallmundr sequence one of the _unwahrscheinliche geschichten_ which have become attached to the saga[24]) and avoid the society of men. What has apparently happened involves either humanizing a

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[24]Boer, _Grettis saga_, p. 204 n.

troll or making a troll out of some other outlaw living on the border of society.[25] That Grettir is accepted and aided by such beings is perhaps a sign that he, too, has become not only an outlaw but something of a troll himself.

By the time Grettir visits Hallmundr, he has been an outlaw about five years; the encounter with Glámr had been about two years before that.[26] Grettir's life has become difficult for him, as he is plagued by his fear of the dark but has learned he cannot risk permitting other outlaws to live with him. It is hardly surprising if he becomes somewhat peculiar himself. In his early life, he has made his reputation by killing beasts and outlaws; now he is himself an outlaw, living in a mountain cave like a bear. But Grettir has never been an ordinary person. Although his life as a predator-outlaw has been forced upon him, the traits which show up in his personality during these outlaw years were already present in his youth and contributed to his becoming what he is. Grettir is, in a sense, a man born to become a monster.

An unruly child, Grettir is hardly a comfort to his father. When he is fifteen, he kills his first man and is banished for three years. The remaining twenty years of his life are filled with constant strife, as he never hesitates to fight over the slightest injury.

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[25]Boer, Grettis saga, p. 225 n.

[26]Boer, Grettis saga, pp. iv-vi.

Grettir is not unaware of what he is or may become. When the húskarl Skeggi, his first victim, is missed, Grettir reports in a verse that a bloodthirsty troll woman jumped from behind a rock and bit the servant's skull open (Ch. 16, pp. 51-52). Certainly others sees trollishness in him later. Þórir ór Garði, as just mentioned above, feared that Grettir was both fjǫlkunnigr [skilled in magic] and a troll (p. 205). At Sandhaugar he carries the housewife across a flooded stream before going back to await the trǫllkona attacking the house; when the woman gets to church, she tells the priest she does not know whether her benefactor is "maðr eða trǫll" [man or troll] (p. 235).[27]

Grettir has other traits which identify him with the side of the adversary. At Sandhaugar he calls himself Gestr, "guest," which is one of Óðinn's aliases. Throughout the saga he produces numerous mocking verses. On his first voyage to Norway, after killing Skeggi, he refuses to work and further infuriates the crew because he "lét þá fjúka í kviðlinga" [let fly with satiric verses] until they want to make him pay for "níð sitt ok lǫgleysu" [his spite and lawlessness] (Ch. 17, pp. 56-57). Grettir's friend, the captain Hafliði, keeps peace among the men only by getting Grettir to compose a níðvísa [mocking verse] against himself.

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[27] One of the three similes involving trolls in the family sagas applies to Grettir, who was "mikill tilsýndar, sem troll væri" [big in appearance as a troll was] (Ch. 38, p. 146), as Schach (1952) observes, p. 150.

When the ship nearly founders in a storm, Grettir finally redeems himself by matching eight men's bailing, but up to that time his verses have all but caused him to be thrown overboard.

Throughout much of the saga Grettir hurls mocking verses at his rivals, such as Bjǫrn. He trades verses with Sveinn, from whom he steals a horse when he returns to Iceland (Ch. 47). The braggart Gísli Þorsteinsson is lucky to get away with no more injury than the loss of his goods and clothing, many bruises, and a verse following him (Ch. 59). The last period in Grettir's life, his stay on Drangey, is often punctuated with the hurling of challenges. Grettir sits on the cliffs and abuses the farmers who had used the island for pasture and who now wish he would leave. When the farmers sell their shares in the island to Þorbjǫrn Ǫngull, Grettir continues the confrontation with the new claimant.

Grettir is not only a mocking challenger, but a trickster as well. Early in his career he employed trickery in capturing the berserkir , and near the end of his life he is still playing tricks. While he is living on Drangey he takes up the name Gestr again and goes out in disguise to visit the Hergraness þing just to find some sport and hear what the men whose cattle he has been eating are saying about him. He even persuades the farmers at the þing to make a truce with him so he can participate in the games there. When he reveals his true identity, they are mortified,

but they are good sports and abide with the temporary truce (Ch. 72).

In the roughly twenty years of his career as adventurer and outlaw, Grettir is almost always always involved in conflicts except for a few periods when he is in hiding, and even then he is under constant strain to protect himself and provide food and supplies for himself. Grettir is never one to run from a fight; indeed, he is quite ready to seek out old enemies and give vent to his old grudges. Most of his opponents are ordinary men whom he overwhelms by his superior strength and endurance, those same qualities that enable him to survive so long as an outlaw.

The encounters on which Grettir's reputation is based, however, are those with the troll pair, the draugr and the aptrgǫngumaðr, the berserkir, and the man-beast pair. In each of these cases the opponent is supernatural or else aspires to superhuman strength. Nonetheless, each adversary appears primarily anthropomorphic. Of these, the troll pair is most supernatural and least significant, as they do very little in the saga. Grettir's most significant opponents, Kárr inn gamli and Glámr, both have been men. Having apparently been dissatisfied in life, they stir after death, to the great discomfort of those still living. The berserkir are merely human, although they may like to be thought superhuman. In them legend has been turned to shoddy reality: these men wish to emulate Óðinn's invulnerable

men-turned-bears, but ironically the grossness of their actions makes them different beasts, mere parodies of their intent. In Bjǫrn and the bear the reduction of the monster from mythical status is carried a step farther, as the human and bestial components have been made discrete entities. Although the supernatural is entirely lost from the episode, the old legendary pattern shows through in Bjorn's taunts to Grettir and in Grettir's wrestling with the beast.

These opponents of Grettir's seem at first glance not to fit into any unified pattern. The apparent lack of pattern may result from the saga's not espousing any single philosophical approach to monsters, unlike Bēowulf, which sets monsters in a framework of Christian theology and Germanic heroic ideals.[28] Saga style, however, as much as lack of philosophy, conditions the presentation of monsters. Bēowulf, the Gilgameš Epic, and such works that combine the reflective with the heroic tend to present events from a mythical past, with little concern for mere chronology. The sagas, like these epics, may gather an accretion of materials, but without the softening mythical distance. Events are attached to a framework of all-too-real people, places, and historical chronology. Grettir's combats appear mostly as separate events in a life filled with constant strife.

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[28]Arent, pp. 195, 199.

Nonetheless there is a unity among the many combats, a unity supplied by the presence of the hero to whom they have become attached. Grettir is the measure of his opponents, and they are a constant test of his strength and resourcefulness. In adapting his method of combat to each opponent in turn, Grettir shows his understanding of the nature of his adversaries. The adaptation, however, makes Grettir somewhat like his adversaries. Moreover, when he faces merely human opponents, Grettir's predatory way of life, taunting challenges, and love of playing tricks place him in the monster's role. But Grettir never really becomes a monster. Although his role as predator upon the farmers is partially a consequence of his character, it is also forced upon him from without. He makes no pretense to supernatural or even superhuman powers. When he is slain, he does not haunt the neighborhood. The saga, even though it provides Grettir with occasional fantastic opponents, eventually must deal with its hero in naturalistic terms and, accordingly, leaves him but a man.

Hrólfs saga kraka

Among the sagas dealing with monsters one of the best known is the fornaldar saga, Hrólfs saga kraka.[29] Like Grettis saga, Hrólfs saga has become famous in

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[29]Hrólfs saga kraka, FSN, II, 3-93. Hereinafter cited in the text by chapter and page.

English-speaking countries as an analogue to Bēowulf. The most celebrated of the monster-combats in the saga is that with which the great warrior Bǫðvarr Bjarki earns his place at the court of King Hrólfr (Ch. 34-36). Because Hrólfr's court at Hleiðargarðr has been equated with Hróðgár's at Heorot,[30] this episode has been studied mostly as an analogue. But because it also seems to involve an initiation ritual for Hǫttr, it has also attracted anthropological interest.[31]

Bǫðvarr's combat with the monster is actually simple. The monster is itself not clearly defined. Hǫttr first says it "hefir vængi á bakinu, ok flýgr þat jafnan" [has wings on its back and is always flying] (Ch. 35, p. 59); when Bǫðvarr threatens to fight it, he says that it "er ekki dýr, heldr er þat mesta tröll" [is no beast but rather it is the biggest troll] (p. 60). Except for his sword's sticking in its sheath, Bǫðvarr has no trouble in quickly dispatching the beast. Hǫttr, having cowered by the side of the road, becomes a mighty hero after drinking the monster's blood.

The saga writer is actually much more interested in the events surrounding the combat than in the combat itself. The mythic sense is accordingly much stronger than in

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[30]Chambers, Beowulf, p. 55; Klaeber, ed., Beowulf, p. xxxvii.

[31]Blaney, pp. 102-03.

Grettir's combats; Grettir goes from one combat to another relatively unchanged, but the cowardly, comic Hǫttr comes out from under the bone pile to become Hjalti, one of Hrólfr's twelve chosen warriors. Even though Bǫðvarr, not Hǫttr, slays the monster, the story is still Hǫttr's initiation, from his ordeal at the hands of Hrólfr's bone-throwing warriors, through his drinking the blood of the monster and wrestling Bǫðvarr, to his symbolic re-killing of the monster. Except for the Gilgameš Epic, the role of combat in initiation is clearer in Hrólfs saga than in almost any of the other works considered here.

In the overall structure of the episode, the bone-throwing retainers function as the pre-combat challengers. Chambers long ago noted that they have Unferð's role and that Bǫðvarr, like Bēowulf, repays the challenge in kind.[32] But since the retainers throw bones and not words, they are closer to beast-like, merely physical challengers than is Unferð. And their actions, particularly since Bǫðvarr actually kills one of them, come close to being combat rather than challenge. Perhaps, however, their function has been shifted away from challenge and towards combat in compensation for the monster's being of such an indefinite sort.

The monster is nonetheless intimately linked to Hǫttr. Like Sigurðr, he gains new powers by drinking the dead

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[32]Chambers, Beowulf, p. 55.

monster's blood. His re-killing of the monster does not fool Hrólfr (Ch. 36), but the king understands that Hqttr has been transformed. While the second killing of the monster may be but a symbolic gesture, left over from more ancient initiation combats,[33] it is also not unlike the traditional quelling of a draugr, who must be re-slain after death. Hqttr's initiation does provide him not only with new strength and admission to the ranks of Hrólfr's champions, but also with the new name, Hjalti, "hilt," by which he is known for the rest of his life.

Bqðvarr, the actual slayer of the monster, is himself not much changed by the deed, which merely reinforces the position he has claimed at Hrólfr's court. Bqðvarr, however, is a strange character from beginning to end of the saga, for he is a shape-shifter and comes from a family of shape-shifters. His actual name, Bjarki, means "little bear,"[34] and he, like his father before him, is a true berserkr: unlike the stock berserkir of the sagas, these men actually change shape. Particularly in the case of Bjqrn, the father, it is clear that beast form, even that of a great predator, does not mark one as belonging to the "wrong" side.

Rejected by the virtuous prince, Hvít, Bjqrn's Phaedra-like Lappish stepmother, strikes him with an úlfhanzka

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[33] Blaney, p. 103.

[34] de Vries, Wörterbuch, "bjarki," p. 39.

[wolf-skin glove] (Ch. 25, p. 42) and transforms him into a "híðbirni ólmum ok grimmum" [savage and ferocious den-bear]. Thus changed, he preys on his own father's cattle and is not recognized by anyone except Bera, "she-bear," his former mistress who sees his eyes and follows him to the cave where he spends his nights in his natural shape. After Bjǫrn's father, King Hringr, returns from an expedition, a great hunt is mounted for the strange bear, and he senses his days are at an end. On the last morning, before "stypist síðan bjarnarhamrinn yfir hann" [the bear-skin finally threw itself on him] (Ch. 36, p. 44), Bjǫrn warns Bera against Hvít, saying that the queen is "it mesta tröll" [the worst troll] (Ch. 26, p. 43) and will try to force her to eat some of the bear's flesh in an attempt to harm their unborn sons. All comes to pass as Bjǫrn predicts, and Bera, tortured into eating, gives birth to three sons, of whom only Bǫðvarr Bjarki is not physically marked. Elg-Fróði is an elk from the waist down, and becomes a robber in a mountain pass (Ch. 28). Þórir hundsfótr has dog's feet, but gets himself elected king of the Gautar because he is big enough to occupy their high seat (Ch. 29). Bǫðvarr eventually avenges his father on the stepmother, and then, following his brothers' advice, goes to Hrólfr's court to seek his fortune (Ch. 30-33).

The villainess of this episode, Hvít, enters the saga as a princess rescued from an undesirable suitor. But she

is a Lapp, and in the sagas Bjarmaland and Lappland are the homes of all sorts of sorcery and monsters. The úlfhanzka with which she strikes Bjǫrn perhaps should have made him an úlfheðinn rather than a berserkr, except that his name suggests the bear. However, the sagas are not always clear about distinguishing between wolf- and bear-men; Grettir's berserkir howl like dogs. This magic glove is reminiscent of Grendel's, made of dracan fell, into which he put his victims (Bēowulf, ll. 2085-89). Bjǫrn calls Hvít "it mesta tröll"; Hǫttr later uses the same term for the flying monster at Hrólfr's court. Bǫðvarr calls her first "blauða flagði" [bitch ogress][35] and later "skessa" [witch, ogress] (Ch. 30, p. 50). Hvít's human form is deceptive. Her dabbling in witchcraft not only enables her to make monsters of others but effectively reduces her to monstrous condition herself. The wolf-skin glove which she uses on Bjǫrn is but an outward and visible symbol of her inward condition.

Bjǫrn, the prince bewitched by his evil stepmother, becomes fully what his name implies. In these more fantastic fornaldar sǫgur there is no need for the separation of man and beast such as appears in the Bjǫrn episode of Grettis saga. Transformed, Bjǫrn is simply a ravaging beast which slays his father's cattle and shows by day no human traits except the eyes by which Bera recognizes him.

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[35] de Vries, Wörterbuch, fladð = hexe, troll, p. 128.

At night he is himself, except for that added sensitivity which often tells doomed men in the sagas when their death day has come.

Bjǫrn, coming to his monstrous state unwillingly, is different from the berserkir who apparently choose their way of combat. However, the berserkr, once the fit comes on him, is unable to control himself until it passes, and then he is often left in a weakened condition. The typical saga berserkir, like those in Grettis saga, may suffer uncontrollable fits on even slight provocations. Bjǫrn's condition, while it could be seen as a product of the myth about Óðinn's shape-shifting warriors, could also be understood as an extension of the portrait of the berserkir in the sagas. Certainly his position, outside of society but preying upon it, is closer to that of the outlaw-berserkir as they came to be portrayed.

Yet Bjǫrn is not an outlaw but a virtuous man who has been wronged and who is finally avenged. His monstrous physical state is as deceptive as Hvít's human one. Bjǫrn's first and second sons are further evidence that physical form alone is not of immediate significance. While Elg-Fróði and þórir hundsfótr are both semi-human prodigies, one is an outlaw and one a king. That the half-elk Fróði should wind up living alone is not startling, and that a loner should make his living as a bandit is not uncommon in Norse society. The saga writer, however, further confuses

matters because he seems unwilling to have his hero's brother a mere thief: Fróði becomes a sort of adviser to his brothers, telling them where they can go to further their fortunes. The writer also minimizes þórir's peculiarities, making him so like Bǫðvarr in appearance that his subjects cannot tell them apart (Ch. 32). He can hardly have been ordinary, however, if he were large enough to fill the two-men-wide high seat of the Gautar (Ch. 29). Hygelac, in Bēowulf, must also have filled the high seat of the Gēatas, and his size earned him a place in the Liber Monstrorum.

This tale of three bears, an elk, and a hound can hardly be taken as serious evidence of a unified view towards monsters, shape-shifters, or anything else. It is obviously made up of miscellaneous fairytale motifs and bits of old myths. But it does show that the saga writers did not feel that it was necessary to make a clear distinction between man and beast, that terms associated with the monstrous, like troll, were used very loosely, and that physical form, even the most bizarre, was no touchstone. It must be realized, however, that Hrólfs saga as it stands today is a late version, and that most of the principal manuscripts date from the seventeenth century.[36]

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[36]Desmond Slay, ed., Hrólfs saga kraka, Editiones Arnamagnæanæ, Series B, Vol. 1 (Hafnia: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1960), pp. vii-xiv.

By this time one might expect that all sorts of influences, such as the southern mirabilia tradition, might have made themselves felt in the saga, with confusing results.

One episode of apparently genuine antiquity, as it is known in several ancient versions, is the fall of Hrólfr's champions at Hleiðargarðr. More complete in Hrólfs saga than in Saxo, the narrative centers on Bǫðvarr's strange apparent absence from the battle against Skuld and Hjǫrvarðr, and on Hjalti's attempts to rouse him from his apparent slumbers. What the saga adds is an implied explanation for the hero's absence:

> Þat sjá þeir Hjörvarðr ok menn hans, at björn einn mikill ferr fyrir Hrólfs konungs mönnum ok jafnan þar næst sem konungrinn var. Hann drepr fleiri menn með sínum hrammi en fimm aðrir kappar konungs. Hrjóta af honum högg ok skotvápn, en hann brýtr undir sik bæði menn ok hesta af liði Hjörvarðs konungs, ok allt þat, sem í nánd er, mylr hann með sínum tönnum, svá at illr kurr kemr í lið Hjörvarðs konungs.
>
> (Ch. 50, pp. 87-88)

> [Then Hjǫrvarðr and his men saw a great bear going before King Hrólfr's men and always nearest where the king was. He killed more men with his paws than five others of the king's champions. Blows and missiles fell off him, and he crushed under him both men and horses of Hjǫrvarðr's host, and he ground with his teeth everything near him, so that horrid cries rose from Hjǫrvarðr's host.]

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[37] Olrik, p. 89, thinks that Bǫðvarr's sleep perhaps results from his being enchanted by Skuld. However, Hrólfr's comment about Boðvarr's being where he should be, Bǫðvarr's own comment to Hjalti that he should not have been disturbed, and the matter of the bear all seem to indicate that Bǫðvarr's trance is self-induced.

The bear is apparently Bǫðvarr Bjarki's spirit, moving without his body, for when Hjalti returns to Hrólfr's hall he finds his friend where "hann sitr ok hefst ekki at" [he sat and didn't move himself] (p. 88). Hjalti eventually rouses Bǫðvarr, who tells him,

> ekki hefir þú konunginum verit svá hagfelldr í þessu tilbragði sem þér þykkir, . . . nú má ek mörgum hlutum minna lið veita konunginum en aðr þú kallaðir mik upp heðan.
>
> (p. 89)

> [you have not done so suitably for your king in this affair as you think, . . . now I can give much less assistance to the king than before you aroused me.]

Hrólfr had himself warned Hjalti not to seek Bǫðvarr, since

> þar nokkurs staða mun hann vera, sem oss bezt gegnir, ef hann er sjálfráðr.
>
> (p. 88)

> [he has set himself where he can best help us if he acts independently.]

Hrólfr has suspected rightly that the bear is Bǫðvarr's fylgja [fetch], for, when Hjalti forces Bǫðvarr into battle, the bear departs, and the tide goes against Hrólfr's forces (Ch. 51). Bǫðvarr's bear-form is unlike his father's, for he can apparently produce it at will and it is separate from his body. The fylgja is not an uncommon phenomenon in the sagas, and heroes often have bear-fetches.[38]

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[38]Turville-Petre, pp. 227-230; Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, The Road to Hel (1943; rpt. New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), pp. 127-28. Turville-Petre's note on this matter (p. 315, n. 9) cites the wrong page in Boer's edition; it should be p. 13 for the fylgja, as pp. 32-33 deal with Oddr's stuffed bear skin.

This phenomenon is, however, not mentioned earlier in Bǫðvarr's career.

What brings Bǫðvarr to send forth his fylgja is perhaps his expectation that the enemy will use a similar technique, and in that expectation he is apparently correct. In sending out his great bear he forestalls the enemy. When Bjarki is interrupted, Skuld, Hrólfr's sorceress-sister and Hjǫrvarðr's wife sees her chance to bring her talent into the fight:

> Hafði Skuld drottning engum brögðum við komit, á meðan björninn var í liði Hrólfs konungs, þar sem hún sat í sínu svarta tjaldi á seiðhjalli sínum. . . . Sjá nú menn Hrólfs konungs, hvar kemr fram úr liði Hjörvarðs konungs einn ógurligr galti. Hann var eigi minni tilsýndar en þrévett naut ok var úlfgrár at lit, ok flýgr or af hverju hans burstarhári, ok drepr hann hirðmenn Hrólfs konungs hrönnum niðr með fádæmum.
>
> (Ch. 51, pp. 89-90)

> [Queen Skuld had not brought forth any cunning from where she sat in her black tent on her sorceress' scaffold while the bear had been in King Hrólfr's troops. . . . (But) now Hrólfr's men saw that a terrible boar came out from King Hjǫrvarðr's company. He was no smaller in appearance than a three-winters' ox and was wolf-grey in color, and he killed Hrólfr's retainers in heaps in an unparalled manner.]

Apparently Skuld's magic is not so strong as Bjarki's, but Hjalti's mistaken errand gives her a chance. Skuld here acts like a typical vǫlva, practicing her art in a trance on a seiðhjalli [platform for magic]. (There is a description of a vǫlva in a trance on a seiðhjalli earlier in the saga: Ch. 3, pp. 9-10.) Seiðr is that mixture of

magic and prophecy generally practiced by the _vǫlur_[39] and of which Loki accuses Óðinn, calling it unmanly (_Lokasenna_, St. 24). Loki's particular accusation against Óðinn is that the god used _seiðr_ to kill enemies. As Óðinn is a shape-shifter and prompts Loki's comment by referring to that character's own shape-shifting (_Lokasenna_, St. 23), perhaps he has used a technique like Skuld's. When Bjarki arrives in battle, he observes that he does not yet see Óðinn (Ch. 51, p. 91): he obviously expects the god on the side of the enemy. Óðinn has been against Hrólfr since he offended the disguised god on the return from the Uppsala expedition (Ch. 46, pp. 80-81); Saxo and Arngrímur Jónsson's versions of the _Skjǫldinga saga_ actually place Óðinn among Hjǫrvarðr's troops.[40]

Perhaps no particular stain comes to the woman Skuld for practicing _seiðr_, except that witchcraft is an extension of her general treachery and the violation of her brother's hospitality. However, Bjarki must have been practicing something of the same sort as he sat in a trance, sending forth the great bear. But, in spite of the general feeling that _seiðr_ was unmanly, the saga does not blame him, except for Hjalti's unfortunate reproaches.

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[39] Ström, pp. 8-9.

[40] Saxo, Ch. 66, p. 80; the passage from Arngrímur appears in _Beowulf and its Analogues_, tr. G.N. Garmonsway and J. Simpson (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1969), p. 163.

The boar which Skuld sends forth has some familiar features. The comparison to an ox is used of other monsters, notably Glámr, and úlfgrár, "wolfgrey," is a typical color for monsters. The arrows shooting porcupine-like from its bristles are a motif elsewhere connected with priestesses shooting from every finger, such as the one in Orvar-Odds saga (Ch. 29, p. 382), and with þorgerðr Hǫlgabrúðr in the Jómsvikinga saga.[41] The boar itself is an echo of the great one earlier in Hrólfs saga to which Aðils makes sacrifices and which he sends to attack Hrólfr and his men (Ch. 42-43, pp. 74-75). That boar is also apparently the product of sorcery, as it is described as a "tröll í galtar líki" [troll in boar's likeness] and it sinks down into the ground when Hrólfr's dog tears its ears off.

There is more magic than the boar used against Hrólfr in the last battle. Most significantly, Skuld can apparently bring off another of Óðinn's favorite tricks, raising the dead, when she sends forth an army of draugar. After Boðvarr gets into the battle, he observes,

> Drjúgt er liðit Skuldar, ok grunar mik nú, at þeir dauðu sveimi hér ok rísi upp aptr ok berist í móti oss, ok munn þat verða torsótt at berjast við drauga.
>
> (Ch. 51, p. 90)

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[41] See Chadwick, "þorgerðr."

> [Skuld's company is vast, and I suspect that the dead roam about here and rise up again to battle us, and it will be difficult to fight against draugar.]

Bǫðvarr observes, first of the enemy in general, and then of Hjǫrvarðr, whom he had fought himself, that a man split down the middle, with his hands and feet chopped off, might rise up and fight again as if unharmed. This reanimation of already mutilated dead goes beyond the basic concept of the draugr as he appears in the Grettis saga. Kárr inn gamli is simply an animated corpse, propelled by his own energy, and when Grettir beheads the corpse, it is quieted. Glámr, although he seems more formidable, is nevertheless of the same sort.

An army of draugar is, however, not unheard of in the sagas: Ǫrvar-Oddr tells his followers to throw all the dead from a rival force in Bjarmaland into a river lest they reanimate and resume fighting (Ch. 5, p. 297). In Hrólfs saga it is quite obviously Skuld who is to be understood as the animating power behind the draugar. Animating draugar is apparently an extension of the power which she also exercises to send forth the boar.

The last portion of the saga presents a much more unified concept of the monstrous than the Bǫðvars þáttr, which appears to have become a collage of themes as it attempts to provide the hero with a fantastic ancestry. The last section, though, needs only a single technique, one which is adapted for combat: the ability of an individual

in a trance to produce at a distance a corporeal emanation capable of fighting. Perhaps these willfully produced fylgjar are a fantasized rendering of that ecstatic frenzy which came to be thought of as berserksgangr. Since those who called themselves berserkir have come to be represented as bullies by the time of saga-writing, the true shape-shifting frenzy comes to be associated instead with sorcery. The transfer of the shape-shifting function from warrior to sorcerer may also be influenced by knowledge of Lappish shamans, who sit on platforms to let their spirits wander abroad.

This last combat reaffirms what has been suggested several times earlier in relation to the warrior and his opponent: if each is able to work himself into a state of battle frenzy, then each will enter combat thinking himself a monster of one sort and may see his opponent as a monster of another sort. In Hrólfs saga, Bǫðvarr Bjarki sends into battle a bear-emanation and his enemy Skuld sends a boar. The saga's sympathy being with Bǫðvarr, the bear is presented favorably, the boar as something like a troll.

The army of draugar can perhaps also be seen as a fantasized outgrowth of the practice of warrior cults. If a young warrior at his initiation is symbolically slain or symbolically slays an older warrior, the ritually slain combatant will rise, hopefully to fight again. Certainly, there is a considerable distance between an army of

resurrected initiates and an army of *draugar*, but might not the latter be the result of a process that produces a bear-emanation out of the bear-skin-clothed participant in a ritual combat? Enough of speculation, however. Perhaps it is sufficient to say that a *vǫlva* with power to produce a giant porcupine out of thin air might also have the arts to recollect the scattered parts of cloven corpses and send them forth again.

There is a brief incident early in the saga (Ch. 2) which deserves mention because it presents a kind of naive analogue to Sigmundr's stay in a cave as a werewolf and outlaw before he gains revenge on his father's slayer. Hrôarr and Helgi, the generation of Scyldings before Hrólfr, as boys must hide from their uncle Frôði after he has slain their father Hálfdanr. An old *karl*, Vífill, loyal to their side of the family, takes them in at his island farm. When Frôði comes searching for the boys, Vífill's sign that they should hide in an underground chamber is to call his dogs Hoppr and Hô. The boys, unlike Sigmundr, do not actually become beasts (although Frôði calls their mother a *vargr* when he suspects she is plotting to save her sons (Ch. 3, p. 9)) and do not lead a predatory life such as the great hero had led. Eventually "Hoppr" and "Hô" come out of hiding and slay their uncle. In the boys' hiding under dogs' names there is at least a suggestion of the pattern which will be discussed shortly with the *Vǫlsunga saga*.

Hrólfs saga, like Grettis saga, has a wide range of monsters and semi-monsters. At one extreme, there is the flying, cattle-stealing tröll which Bǫðvarr slays. At the other, there is Hvít, at first a princess in distress, but later, as sorceress, also it mesta tröll. In between, there are Bjǫrn, enchanted into a bear, Bǫðvarr, with a bear-fylgja, two princes hiding behind dogs' names, two troll-like boars, the sorcerer-king Aðils, the völva-queen Skuld, and an army of draugar. Some of these, seen as individual cases, do not at first seem monstrous, while others obviously are and traditionally have been treated as such. However, seen as a group, they form a kind of spectrum of the monstrous. The saga writers had no single concept which could be labeled simply "monster," but rather they dealt with a whole range of materials which they found at their disposal. Since the saga writers were less interested in categories and concepts than in collecting interesting episodes which they could arrange in continuous narrative around a few central characters, it is not surprising that of two semi-human brothers one should become an outlaw and one a king, that a great hero and his treacherous adversary should employ similar techniques in combat, or that the concealment of two young princes should echo the werewolf-outlaw phase of a great hero's life. Indeed, it is a wonder that the saga writer could make a reasonably coherent narrative out of these materials at all.

In spite of the seeming lack of an overall pattern, some traditional and ancient patterns do show through. Latent in some of the phenomena in Hrólfs saga is the disguised, skin-clad warrior of ritual combat. Not so latent--indeed quite obvious in the Hqttr sequence--is the monster's role in the testing at an initiation. Although Hrólfr and his champions who journey to Uppsala are already celebrated warriors, the ordeals to which Aðils subjects them also seem to reflect initiation practices.

The traditional taunt before battle is sometimes present, as when Bqðvarr and Hjqrvarðr "kastaði hvárrgi okkar lǫstum á aðra" [threw out faults at each other] (Ch. 51, p. 91). Unfortunately, Bqðvarr does not tell what what he said to Hjqrvarðr. The replacement of verbal exchange of taunts by physical gestures on Boðvarr's arrival at Hleiðargarðr has been mentioned above, and the ordeals prepared by Aðils at Uppsala could similarly be a replacement for verbal confrontations.

The saga does have some actual verbal confrontations, such as that between Bjqrn and Hvít which comes to blows and ends with her making him a bear. Hrólfr himself seems given to sarcasm, although it is usually ex post facto, as in the case of his parting sneer at Aðils or of the jibe at Hjqrvarðr's unwittingly making himself Hrólfr's subject. The taunt to Hjqrvarðr can actually be seen as a pre-combat one, for it is the cause of his and Skuld's final treachery.

The episode which seems most to have impressed those who first dealt with this body of material, as it is widely recorded, is centered around taunts. This is the exhortation of Hjalti to Hrólfr's man and then to Bǫðvarr, which appears in the form of a poem called the Bjarkamál. Although Hjalti's speeches are an exhortation to his friends to come and fight Hjǫrvarðr, they are made of the material of taunts. Hjalti first calls his friends to go to arms, as that is more fitting than lying with women.[42] Sinfjǫtli, in the Helgakviða Hundingsbana I, taunts Guðmundr for flirting rather than fighting (St. 35). And Hjalti's address to Bǫðvarr when he breaks the hero's trance is more like a challenge than an exhortation: he will burn the house, with the hero in it, if Bǫðvarr will not join the battle (Ch. 50, p. 88). As exhortation, Hjalti's speeches are similar to Wíglâf's in Bêowulf.[43] They are meant to shame his fellows into fighting: he reminds them of their past heitstrenging [boasting] (Ch. 49, p. 85) and of their duty to their lord. But since his speeches are also taunts, he has almost taken the enemy's role. This apparent reversal of roles might reflect two conditions: Hjalti speaks for a side that is doomed, and he is himself confused, as is shown when against his king's advice he interrupts Bǫðvarr's strategy. Thus the

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[42]Chapter 49, p. 85; Olrik, p. 90, St. 1.

[43]Olrik, p. 107.

strange nature of parts of his exhortation is a product of the situation in which he finds himself.[44] Furthermore, Hjalti's taunt has a peculiar result, since it leads to the loss of an allied monster, the great bear, and indirectly aids the victory of Skuld and her monster.

Hrólfs saga, as a late compilation, is a sometimes confusing work, but as it is based on earlier sources it provides glimpses of the Norse attitudes towards monsters. Throughout the saga monsters are inseparable from human contexts. With the exception of the flying troll which Bǫðvarr kills, all are either human in origin or are induced by human actions. The great troll itself is significant only as it figures in the initiation sequence. Elsewhere in the saga even a good man like Bjǫrn can be reduced to a beast. However, a hero like Bǫðvarr Bjarki may have monstrous states for certain purposes. And the tendency to become a monster may run in a family, as it does in Bjǫrn's. The saga, being a tale of adventure and fantasy, does not emphasize psychological conditions; perhaps as a corollary,

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[44]The taunt in the mouth of an ally may also be a product of the general confusion of the saga in this episode. Earlier Bǫðvarr actually seems to be present, adding his voice to the exhortations (Ch. 49). However, this later reproach to Hjalti for taunting him does contain some hints that he feels he has delayed too long. In Saxo's version the sense that Bǫðvarr feels he has been delayed is stronger than in the saga (Ch. 66, p. 79), and Olrik tends to emphasize such an interpretation in his reconstruction of the Bjarkamál. But both Saxo and Olrik still leave some parts of the sequence in a confused state.

the role of the pre-combat taunt is deemphasized or confused, or the taunt is replaced by physical gestures and ordeals. Overall, Hrólfs saga gives the impression that those beings which function as monsters are very common and that their thematic or moral significance is dependent not so much on their physical form as it is on their relationship to the humans who make and fight them.

Vǫlsunga saga

The best known of all the fornaldar sǫgur is the Vǫlsunga saga,[45] which is Scandinavia's most widely read prose contribution to the Sigurðr narratives. The saga, however, seems based on older poetry, some of which has been lost. In particular, those chapters which concern Sigurðr's youth and his slaying of Fáfnir are heavily dependent on the poems which are known, in their present fragmentary state, as the Reginsmál and Fáfnismál, although the prose links which supply the information missing in the poems seem themselves based on the saga. The actual slaying of Fáfnir and Sigurðr's conversation with him (Ch. 18-20) are almost wholly a paraphrase of the Fáfnismál, and accordingly they supply no useful information beyond that discussed earlier in the second chapter.

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[45] Volsunga saga, ed. and tr. R.G. Finch (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965). Hereinafter cited in the text by chapter and page.

One other very significant episode, for which there are no extant poetic analogues, is Sigmundr's stay in the wilderness while he waits to avenge his father Vǫlsungr on his brother-in-law Siggeirr. Sigmundr is not the first of his family to suffer exile--his great-grandfather Sigi was condemned as a vargr for slaying a þræll (Ch. 1, p. 1). Sigmundr, however, has done no wrong: rather his whole family suffers Siggeirr's jealousy of Sigmundr's own superior ability.

Siggeirr's wrath has been aroused because only Sigmundr could pull out the sword which an old man--no doubt Óðinn--had planted in Vǫlsungr's roof-tree at the wedding feast of Signý and Siggeirr and because furthermore Sigmundr would not sell him the sword (Ch. 3-4). Having slain Vǫlsungr, who was making a return visit, Siggeirr takes Sigmundr and his nine brothers prisoner. Because Signý does not want all her brothers slain instantly, Siggeirr places them in stocks in the wilderness, where every night an "ylgr gǫmul" [old she-wolf] comes at midnight and devours one of the survivors. When only Sigmundr is left, Signý has a trusted servant smear his face with honey and put some in his mouth. The wolf, curious about the sweet stuff, puts her tongue in Sigmundr's mouth, where he bites it so that she, thrashing about to free herself, smashes the stocks, pulls out her tongue, and so dies (Ch. 5).

When the ylgr first appears, she seems simply a voracious beast. But she is not: the chapter ends,

> En þat er sǫgn sumra manna at sú in sama ylgr væri móðir Siggeirs konungs ok hafi han brugðit á sik þessu líki fyrir trollskapar sakir ok fjǫlkyngi.
>
> (p. 8)

> [But some men say that this same wolf was the mother of King Siggeirr and that she brought this shape on herself from sorcery and magic.]

Here is the shape-shifter as adversary. Trǫllskapr is that form of magic generally associated with overwhelming beasts which become objects of worship and leaders in battle; the ferocious cattle in Ragnars saga are typical beasts full of trǫllskapr. As trǫllskapr basically means "the shape, or nature, of a troll," its use here to indicate the black art practiced by Siggeirr's mother reflects how much monsters came to be associated with certain kinds of magic. Fjǫlkyngi, a noun, and the corresponding adjective, fjǫlkunnigr, have acquired connotations of magic from another direction, as they originally must have indicated "great knowledge." In their more restricted sense, though, they, too, have come to be associated with monsters and shape-shifting. While Þórir ór Garði wonders if Grettir has become a troll when the hero and Hallmundr are holding him off at the pass, he also says he did not know Grettir had become so fjǫlkunnigr (Ch. 57, p. 205). Similarly the seiðkona who changes shapes with Signý so the latter can lie with her brother Sigmundr and beget Sinfjǫtli is said to be fjǫlkunnigr (Ch. 7, p. 9).

In a later episode Brynhildr accuses Grimhildr, Gunnar's mother, who had taught him and Sigurðr how to change shapes, of being fjǫlkunninga as she blames her fate and Sigurðr's on her mother-in-law's scheming (Ch. 32, p. 60).

So far as setting is concerned, Sigmundr's encounter with the she-wolf has little in common with either Bēowulf's encounter with Grendel or Grettir's with Glámr, but the struggle itself follows the same pattern in miniature. The monster enters and, curiosity aroused, makes the mistake of getting close enough for the hero to get a firm grip on it. The monster's subsequent struggle destroys everything in sight, and in Bēowulf and the Vǫlsunga saga its eagerness to escape at any cost results in its giving itself its own death-wound. The Vǫlsunga saga adds to the pattern the ironic twist that the monster indirectly winds up rescuing the hero she meant to eat. The anthropomorphic nature of the monster is here quite clear: she is not only a shape-shifter but the mother of Sigmundr's apparently quite human adversary Siggeirr.

The encounter with the she-wolf is but the preparation for a longer and much more significant episode, Sigmundr's long stay in a jarðhús in the wilderness while he plots his revenge on Siggeirr. What the jarðhús [earth-house] is is never completely made clear, but it must have been some sort of animal den or cave-like underground dwelling. Sigmundr obviously stays there for a long time, as Signý

bears two sons to Siggeirr, rears them a decade, and, when Siggeirr's sons have proved useless to Sigmundr, gives birth to Sinfjǫtli by Sigmundr and rears the boy a decade. Even after Sinfjǫtli joins Sigmundr, some years elapse before they finally avenge their sufferings by burning Siggeirr in his hall.

The early decades of Sigmundr's story in the wilderness provide little information about monsters, although Sigmundr is certainly a violent man who does not hesitate to kill Signý's first two sons when they seem too cowardly to participate in his scheme of vengeance. There is perhaps some remnant of beast-ordeals from old initiations in the test of a serpent-filled meal-bag from which Sigmundr expects bread to be made by each boy whom Signý sends him. The two boys who are afraid to make bread are unfit to be trained as warriors and so are killed; Sinfjǫtli, who kneads the serpent into his loaf, has the daring to be a Vǫlsungr.

The other early event of significance is Signý's preparation for the begetting of Sinfjǫtli. In order to trick Sigmundr into incest, she meets with a "seiðkona fjǫlkunnig harðla mjǫk" [sorceress very skilled in magic] to whom she suggests that "vit skiptum hǫmum" [we change shapes] (Ch. 7, p. 9). Thus there is precedent in Sinfjǫtli's own background for the shape-shifting which he does in the next chapter.

Between Sinfjǫtli's arrival and Sigmundr's final decision to destroy Siggeirr, several years pass and the father

and son have a most significant adventure in which the heroes take on the werewolf role more often associated with the enemy. Although Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli are not officially condemned as vargar, they have been leading outlaw lives, plundering and killing among Siggeirr's subjects before they take wolfskins. Once in the skins, they understand vargsrǫddu [wolf's speech] (p. 11); later, in a taunt, a rival accuses Sinfjǫtli of having eaten vargamatr [wolf-food] and having lived "á mǫrkum utí með vǫrgum" [out in the woods with wolves] (Ch. 9, p. 16). These taunts of Granmarr's correspond to those of Guðmundr in the Helgakviða Hundingsbana I (St. 36, 41) discussed earlier.

Unlike their ancestor Sigi, actually condemned as a vargr, and indeed unlike most outlaws, Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli physically do become wolves. In the woods one day, looking for someone to rob, the pair come upon a house with two sleeping men inside.

> Þeir hǫfðu ordit fyrir óskǫpum því at úlfahamir hengu í húsinu yfir þeim. It tíunda hvert dœgr máttu þeir komask ór hǫmunum. . . . Þeir Sigmundr fóru í hamina ok máttu eigi ór komask, ok fylgði sú náttúra sem áðr var, lętu ok vargsrǫddu.
> (Ch. 8, p. 11)

> [An evil fate had befallen them, as wolfskins hung above them in the house. Every tenth day they could come out of the skins. . . . Sigmundr and Sinfjotli went in the skins and could not get back out and the properties remained which were already there, howling and wolf-speech.]

These skins, like Bjǫrn's in Hrólfs saga, are separate things, which when put on, however, become an almost inseparable part

of the body rather than mere clothing, and whose nature dominates the wearer. Although the passage unfortunately does not mention what kind of magic is involved with the skins, it seems that the magic is more in the skins themselves than in the persons wearing them, since the Vǫlsungs are affected just as the princes had been.

Once in the skins, Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli continue their predation on Siggeirr's subjects. When Sinfjǫtli starts taking excessive risks, fighting eleven men unaided, Sigmundr reacts wolf-like, biting his throat. (As mentioned in the previous chapter, the poet Egill Skallagrímsson attacks an enemy in the same way (Ch. 65).) After nursing Sinfjǫtli back to health, Sigmundr waits until they can next shed their skins, then burns them to prevent future trouble.

Within the immediate context, the werewolf episode is an initiation sequence. Sinfjǫtli must suffer deprivation in the wilderness, must learn moderation, and must, like Hǫttr, fight with the older warrior who is his sponsor. After the wolf episode, Sigmundr decides Sinfjǫtli is ready for a vengeance expedition against Siggeirr, and this, after some difficulty, they finally accomplish.

In a larger context, the shape-shifting appears as the result of some unspecified but obviously hostile magic. Although the spell is not immediately directed at the Vǫlsungs, its effect is the same as if it had been. Sigmundr and his

son find themselves in the same role as Bjǫrn in Hrólfs saga. Exiles from a hostile and corrupt court, they appear in beast form and make predatory raids against the court. Unlike Bjǫrn, they fortunately are able to escape the enchantment and take their final revenge in their own natural forms. But throughout the episode Siggeirr, the principal enemy, is never anything but a man, although his mother may have been a shape-shifter. Nonetheless, in this episode the Vǫlsungs, who are supposedly the heroes seeking to overcome treachery, are both by shape and by action more monstrous than their rivals.

The Vǫlsungs are not a notably intellectual clan, and it is not surprising that in this early feud challenges do not play a significant role. Of course, Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli as wolves are hardly in a position to offer verbal taunts to men. The only really significant statement Sigmundr makes is the reply to Siggeirr that those burning his hall are Sigmundr and Sinfjǫtli . . . come to let him know that not all the Vǫlsungs are dead (Ch. 8, p. 13). Even though the werewolf episode does provide some of Sinfjǫtli's later adversaries with material for taunts, he is unshaken by them.

The Vǫlsunga saga lacks some of the more fantastic elements of Hrólfs saga, but it goes farther in one sense, as it actually presents two of its principal heroes in beast form. Sigmundr's case is of great significance, as he is

not only a hero himself but the father of three celebrated heroes. Although they do not take beast form, Signý and Sigurðr are shape-shifters. Their shape-shifting is probably a result of the family's close connection to Óðinn, for not only is that god said to be the father of Sigi, founder of the clan, but he appears at the wedding of Signý and Siggeirr to plant the sword which Sigmundr wins and Siggeirr covets. When Sigmundr bites Sinfjǫtli, a raven, probably one of Óðinn's birds, brings him a medicinal leaf which cures the wound. And when Sinfjǫtli is poisoned by his stepmother, the ferryman who disappears with the body is no doubt Óðinn.

As a composite work, the Vǫlsunga saga is sometimes confusing, and it is often inferior to those poems still extant on which it is based. However, it tries with considerable success to present a reasonable family history for the most celebrated monster-slayer of Germanic Antiquity. The Sigurðr Fáfnisbani whom the saga presents is not simply a paragon of warriors but a shape-shifter and the product of a family of shape-shifters. Indeed, his bloodthirsty kinsmen seem more ferocious than the dragon Fáfnir. Seen as a whole, the Vǫlsunga saga shows, perhaps even more clearly than Hrólfs saga, that even the greatest heroes cannot be separated completely from some aspects of the monstrous.

Egils saga Skallagrímssonar

Shifting from the fantastic fornaldar sǫgur back to the more realistic Íslendinga sǫgur will not mean a significant difference in the relationship between man and what functions as monster. Egils saga Skallagrímssonar,[46] possibly written by Egill's descendant Snorri Sturluson,[47] and one of the finest family sagas, is primarily the biography of the poet, but is pays great attention to his family and the feuds in Norway which prompted their removal to Iceland. Egill is himself as historical a character as Grettir, to whom he is distantly related, but he has in him a very wolfish streak which he inherits from his father's family. This werewolf tendency has long been recognized,[48] but it deserves to be connected with the patterns being considered here.

Egill's family comes from the district of Hrafnista in Hálogaland on the northwest coast of Norway. The early names in the family show beast and monster tendencies: Úlfr inn óargi, "Wolf the un-cowardly," had a daughter, Hallbera, "Half-she-bear," and a son, Hallbjǫrn Hálftrǫll, "Half bear

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[46] Egils saga Skallagrímssonar, ed. Finnur Jónnson, ASB, 3 (1894). Hereinafter cited in the text by chapter and page.

[47] Einarsson, p. 139.

[48] Anne Holtsmark, "On the Werewolf Motif in Egil's saga Skallagrímssonar," Scientia Islandica / Science in Iceland, 1 (1968), 7-9.

Half-troll." Hallbjǫrn's son is Ketill Hængr, "Kettle Salmon," from whom both Grettir and Qrvar-Oddr are descended. Hallbera married Bjálfi, "Hide," and had a son Úlfr, who was the poet's grandfather.

Úlfr came to be known as Kveldúlfr, "Evening-wolf," because he was mjǫk hamrammr [very powerful with shapes] and tended to be moody and growl like a wolf in the evening (Ch. 1). Úlfr's son, Grímr, known as Skallagrímr because of his bald head (skalli), was similarly cantankerous in the evening: once when Egill and a young friend were playing ball with him, he dashed the friend's head on a stone and then turned on his son (Ch. 40). When Skallagrímr dies, Egill takes the body out through a hole in the wall (Ch. 58), as Arnkell does with his father þórólfr bægifótr in the Eyrbyggja saga; unlike þórólfr, however, Skallagrímr does not apparently become a draugr. Egill himself was bald like his father, but what hair he had was úlfgrátt [wolf-grey] (Ch. 55, p. 160), and he tended to scowl most hideously if angered.

Egill's family tend to be large like beasts or trolls. When his father and some companions seek Haraldr hárfagri about a grievance, the king's doorkeeper announces that some men have come who seem big as þursar [giants] (Ch. 25, p. 77). When Egill visits his friend Arinbjǫrn þórisson of York, a servant is afraid to ask him into the house, as he

is mikill sem tǫll [big as a troll] (Ch. 59, p. 196).[49] When Egill meets Rǫgnvaldr, son of Eirík blóðøx Haraldsson, and the boy does not know him, he tells Rǫgnvaldr there is a great bear in the woods, so the boy's guardians will come out seeking it. The "bear" is, of course, Egill, who picks off the guardians singly and then takes his time about eliminating the son of his enemy Eirík. Already mentioned in the previous chapter is Egill's slaying of Atli, whom he overwhelmed by brute force and whose throat he bit, wolf-style (Ch. 65).

The term usually applied to these beast-like tendencies of Egill and his family is hamrammr [shape-strong]. These men tend to collect friends with similar traits. Skallagrímr, going to plead with King Haraldr, takes a company of margir hamrammir (Ch. 25, p. 76). Going on a visit to Arinbjǫrn, Egill is accompanied by Ǫnundr sjóni, another hamrammr. When Skallagrímr attacks the young Egill and his friend, a servant woman exclaims "hamaz þú!" [do you change shape? (i.e. to attack)] at him, distracting him from the boy (Ch. 40, p. 118). In his last battle, when he avenges his son þórólfr, Kveldúlfr hamaðiz [changed his shape, went berserk], and so did many of his men, including Skallagrímr (Ch. 27). The saga explains that when the berserksgangr passed from hamrammir they

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[49] According to Schach, (1952), another of the three tǫll similes.

were left in a weakened condition; as Kveldúlfr is an old man, the fury has been too much for him, and he dies not long afterwards on the voyage to Iceland.

These hamrammir, however, do not actually become beasts, for they retain their natural shapes. The most extreme change reported is Egill's raising one eyebrow up to his hairline and bringing the other down to his cheek when he is angry (Ch. 55). The berserksgangr, for the principal characters, at least, is an uncontrollably violent combat frenzy, in which even an old man like Kveldúlfr can clear the decks of a startled enemy's boat. Egill's animal-like attack on Atli comes during a frenzy, but he keeps his human form and does not even do his eyebrow trick.

It has been suggested that as there are no wolves in Iceland, there should be no werewolves, either.[50] But probably the well-travelled Snorri had seen wolves in Norway. More likely his rationalistic spirit hesitates at rendering a shape-shifter, and usually he protects himself with a formula like that he uses of Kveldúlfr: "þat var mál manna, at hann væri mjǫk hamrammr" [men said he was very shape strong] (Ch. 1, p. 3).

The saga does have a wolf-outlaw, Eyvindr, Gunnhildr's brother. At Gunnhildr's urging, Eyvindr slays one of

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[50]Holtsmark, p. 8.

Egill's brother's men during a feast and is, like Sigmundr's ancestor Sigi, declared vargr í véum [wolf in a holy place] and exiled (Ch. 49). But he does not change shape. There is also a conventional berserkr in the saga, Ljótr, who is slain by Egill. Like Snækollr in Grettis saga, he challenges peaceful farmers to duels. As in Snækollr's case, the berserkr's chief attributes seem to be howling and biting the rim of his shield. Ljótr is merely berserkr, not hamrammr, and he does not even provoke Egill to frenzy. The poet is at most impatient to get the fight over; like Grettir he is almost disgusted that he must soil his sword on such a low man.

There is, however, one episode which does include a brief report of shape-shifting: Egill's voyage to England and the composition of the Hǫfuðlausn. After Eirík blóðøx was driven out of Norway and took up residence at York in Northumberland, Gunnhildr, his wife, "lét seið efla" [pronounced a spell] that Egill would not rest until he came to her presence again (Ch. 59, p. 194). Going to visit his friend Aðalsteinn (Athelstan), king of England, Egill finds himself shipwrecked near York and must trust to the influence of his closest friend Arinbjǫrn, who is at Eirík's court, to save his head. The price for a truce being agreed on eventually as a poem in Eirík's honor, Egill sets to a night of composition. His concentration is broken by the constant chattering of a swallow outside his

window until Arinbjǫrn goes outside and frightens away hamhleypa nǫkkur [some shape-shifter] which is no doubt Eirík's spiteful wife. If Gunnhildr can practice seiðr to bring Egill into her grasp, she probably would have little difficulty in employing seiðr to change shapes. The swallow's chattering is an interesting variant on the vocal challenge; it is also not unrelated to the berserkr's howling. Of course, Gunnhildr has issued an abundance of vocal challenges to Egill in the past, and Eirík seems almost henpecked when his wife nags him to put an end to the poet. Because Arinbjǫrn thwarts the last plot, Gunnhildr is not finally successful. When Egill stands before her again, his poem pleases Eirík and saves his head.

Before he had to combat Gunnhildr's seiðr, Egill had practiced his own magic against her in a way which is interesting because it employs a sort of artificial monster in working the spell. Immediately after slaying Eirík's and Gunnhildr's son Rǫgnvaldr, he erected a níðstǫng against them. This "pole of scorn" consisted of a horse's head mounted on a hazel pole carved with a runic charm to upset the spirits of the land and drive the royal pair out of Norway (Ch. 57, pp. 188-89). The níðstǫng is a form of tréníð [wooden, i.e. carved, níð], the physical analogue of that tungunníð [spoken níð][51] which Grettir practiced.

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[51] F. Jónsson, Egils saga, p. 188 n.

Although trénið apparently was more often in the form of obscene sculpture which implied sodomy or other perversion on the part of those scorned,[52] the beast form was also known, as in the case of the rather elaborate bear which Qrvar-Oddr uses against the giants. The type of níðstong which Egill and Oddr employ serves as a substitute for a monster--it has beast-form. The níð verse carved on Egill's pole serves as a replacement for the challenge before battle. (Such challenges as those of Sinfjǫtli and Guðmundr in Helgakviða Hundingsbana I are essentially níð verses.[53])

What Egill is doing against the sorceress Gunnhildr is for this saga analogous to Bǫðvarr's working spells against Skuld in Hrólfs saga. After all, Egill, like Bǫðvarr, is the type that Óðinn favored. Although Egill's poem Sonatorrek begins as a challenge to the god for having taken the poet's sons, it ends with his admission that he is nonetheless proud that Óðinn has favored him with the gift of poetry (St. 23-25, p. 307). Egill's allusions in that passage to Óðinn are, however, not to his function as god of poetry but to his role as god of battle and enemy of the Wolf. Egill sees his own gift in similar terms, as it has enabled him to make for himself "vísa fjandr / af vélǫndom" [open enemies from hidden schemers] (St. 24).

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[52]Ström, pp. 2, 10-14.

[53]Ström, pp. 15-16.

Egill's surviving major poems are laudatory (Hǫfuðlausn, Arinbjarnarkviða) or elegiac (Sonatorrek), but the saga is liberally sprinkled with individual sarcastic stanzas, such as those with which he taunts the berserkr Ljótr as his adversary tires in their duel (Ch. 64). Like Grettir, Egill rarely dispatches a foe without a verse at the defeated man's expense.

Egill, like Grettir, and even more like Óðinn himself, occasionally goes seeking trouble. Almost at the end of his life, when he is feeble and blind, the poet threatens to go to the Alþingi and toss his treasure to the crowd just for the fun of hearing them squabble over it (Ch. 85). Egill's master Óðinn is, of course, þrór þingum at [inciter to strife at þings] (Grímnismál, St. 49).

The author of Egils saga, unlike the compiler of Grettis saga, clearly establishes his man's reputation on Egill's deeds in human situations. Egill is a poet and human warrior, not a fighter of monsters. Despite the small role of the fantastic in the narrative, the implications of some of its sources show through. The families descended from Úlfr inn óargi of Hrafnista produce big, troll-like men, aften with animal names, who become fighters such as those Óðinn sponsors. Even if they do not become monster-fighters, their lives are filled with conflict. If not fighting monsters, these men tend to act like them. Egill also shows his heritage. His family has a reputation for shape-shifting,

even if they do not do so. He is quarrelsome and sarcastic, seeking fights and ridiculing his enemies. He is not above working spells against his opponents. Egill is constant to the type until his death. When his family will not let him cause trouble at the Alþingi, he, like Skallagrímr before him, hides his treasure. Although both father and son rest quietly after death, in their hiding the treasure there is not a little of the draugr.

Some Other Íslendinga sǫgur

The other family sagas, though based on history, give much more evidence that, for the Norse writer, monsters were inseparable from men. Of the troll-like heroes, Skarpheðinn in Njáls saga is a notable example.[54] Eyrbyggja saga[55] traces the life of several families in Northwest Iceland, including some of the ancestors of Snorri Sturluson, but is filled with fantastic episodes and numerous aptrgǫngumenn. Some of these episodes border on the comic, such as when Þorgunna gets out of her coffin to cook breakfast for her pallbearers (Ch. 51), or when a whole troop of aptrgǫngumenn must be served with eviction proceedings to prevent them from taking up all the best seats by the fire (Ch. 54-55).

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[54] Clark, pp. 79-83.

[55] Eyrbyggja saga, ed. Hugo Gering, ASB, 6 (1897). Hereinafter cited in the text by chapter and page.

Others, however, are truly horrible, such as the Glámr-like house-rider þórólfr bægifótr.

þórólfr's original haunting is much like Glámr's. His, however, does not end when his ox-sized, swollen corpse is burned, and the events which happen later are further evidence of how a beast-like monster can have a human origin (Ch. 63). A stray cow licks the rocks where the burning took place and then, after mating with a mysterious grey bull (p. 223), gives birth to a dappled-grey calf (p. 224). The calf grows rapidly until it has the voice and size of an ox. An old woman, hearing it, remarks that it has the voice of a troll and later calls it a troll (pp. 223-23). Finally it goes on a rampage, killing the man who had quieted þórólfr, and then drowning itself in a swamp (p. 229). The grey calf is perhaps þórólfr's fylgja, which takes a kind of vengeance for him. Although this calf appears in an Íslendinga saga, in its bellowing and running amok it is like the army-leading cattle of the fornaldar sogur. þórólfr is not the only character in the saga with a vindictive animal-fylgja: þorgunna apparently returns as a seal which eats the provisions of those who have misappropriated her estate (Ch. 53).

Some Lesser *fornaldar sǫgur*

The lesser *fornaldar sǫgur* provide some episodes more fantastic than even *Hrólfs saga*. *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*,[56] a rather short saga of viking adventurers, has an episode filled with monsters and *trǫllskapr*. Herrauðr, a prince of the Gautar, goes on an expedition with his friend Bósi which the latter is taking to redeem himself from outlawry. Bósi is allowed by Herrauðr's father to clear himself of the unjust charge only after his foster mother Busla, an old woman skilled in *galdr* [magic], has threatened the king with a mighty curse (Ch. 5). Bósi and Herrauðr are searching for the gold-encrusted egg of a *gammr*, which is apparently a giant vulture. The *gammr*, they learn, lives in a temple belonging to Hárekr, king of Bjarmaland, which is tended by Hárekr's troll-like mother (Ch. 8). The mother eats two whole cows at each meal. She has a mad bull which mates with the cows, poisoning their flesh so that whoever eats of it will become as troll-like as herself. The priestess has kidnapped Hleiðr, sister of King Goðmundr of Glæsisvǫllr, with the intent of making the girl her successor.

The two sworn brothers of course invade the temple, kill the priestess, bull and *gammr*, claim the egg, and

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[56] *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, *FSN*, II, 465-97. Hereinafter cited in the text by chapter and page.

rescue the maiden in distress. The monsters do not have much character other than great strength, but they are associated with Hárekr's mother, who is a human magnified into a trǫllkona. She fights like Grendel's mother, scratching at her adversaries with her claws. The men kill her, as Bēowulf killed Grendel, by tearing off an arm. The priestess is just what the adventurers should have expected, for Bjarmaland, and particularly Hárekr's family, have a reputation for strange practices, such as the worship of beasts so filled with trǫllskapr that they become great monsters. Indeed, some of Hárekr's family follow such practices to the extent that they become monsters themselves.

After delivering the gammr's egg, Bósi and Herrauðr go to fight at Brávǫllr, and while they are gone, Hárekr's sons take Hleiðr back to Goðmundr's court at Glæsisvollr, where one of them intends to marry her. The heroes then go to reclaim her and get into the wedding party by doing some rather grotesque shape-shifting: they kill and flay two of Goðmundr's men and make disguises of the skins (Ch. 12). Thereafter they take the trickster's role, getting the wedding guests drunk and setting them dancing to magical tunes while they abscond with the bride, the presents, and the table service.

Herrauðr marries Hleiðr, while Bósi abducts and marries Hárekr's daughter Edda. Hárekr and his sons thereafter

attack the sworn brothers but are slain after a typically ferocious viking battle (Ch. 14-15). Hárekr shows himself a great shape-shifter: wounded by Bósi's brother Smiðr, he turns into a flugdreki [flying dragon], and swallows his assailant, much as Ti'âmat attempts to do with Marduk in the Enuma Eliš. He has no sooner ingested Smiðr than he is attacked by a great bird, a skergipr, which is apparently Busla coming to protect her foster sons. They fall down to the decks of the ships where the battle is going on, and Hárekr becomes a boar which bites Herrauðr. Busla becomes a voracious dog which bites Hárekr in the groin, disemboweling him before she jumps overboard. He resumes his natural shape before jumping after her; neither is seen again (p. 495).

This fantastic tale shows above all a love of fighting. The heroes are men of quite unrestrained violence who kill anyone who gets in their way; the violence is relieved only by Bósi's nights with farmers' daughters and the conversations he has with them while seeking "to water his horse" at their "wells." The heroes have something of the monstrous about them, and Bósi's brother and foster mother have a good bit more. Considerably more monstrous are their principal enemies, Hárekr and his family. Bósa saga, like Hrólfs saga, shows that both sides in battle may turn to the same tricks and shape-shifting. Among characters like these, distinguishing between hero and monster depends partially on which side the narrator favors.

Hárekr and his family come up again and again in the fornaldar sǫgur. In Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar[57] a king named Agnar married Hildigunna, one of Hárekr's sisters. Their sons and grandsons fought Hálfdanr and his brothers, and when on the verge of defeat, some of them jumped into a valley, taking their treasure into a cave under a waterfall, where they "lǫgðust á gullit ok urðu at flugdrekum" [lay on the gold and became flying dragons] like their uncle Hárekr (p. 318). Agnar becomes a spellvirki [evil-doer, bandit] in Hálogaland until he builds himself a barrow and goes in while still living, taking his crew and money, as his father had before him. Hárekr's clan thus includes not only flying dragons but draugar who trylldist [made themselves into trolls] (p. 318). Another member of the family is Hárekr's son, the half-troll Qgmundr, begotten on a gýgr [ogress] to torment Qrvar-Oddr.

Goðmundr, the king of Glæsisvollr, comes up frequently. In Bósa saga he is not a major figure but in other sagas he is. Þórsteins þáttr bæjarmagns[58] shows him as a pagan giant and friend of the hero, but Helga þáttr Þórissonar[59] makes him a trickster who tries to poison Óláfr Tryggvason

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[57] Hálfdanar saga Eysteinssonar, FSN, III, 285-319. Hereinafter cited in the text by chapter and page.

[58] Þórsteins þáttr bæjarmagns, FSN, III, 397-417. Hereinafter cited in the text by chapter and page.

[59] Helga þáttr Þórissonar, FSN, III, 421-26. Hereinafter cited in the text by chapter and page.

and whose daughter kidnaps Helgi, later blinding him so he cannot look at other women.

Þórsteinn bæjarmagn's visit with Goðmundr to Geirrøðr is a miniature of Þórr's visit to a giant by the same name. This Geirrøðr is in Qrvar-Odds saga father-in-law of Qgmundr. In Þórsteins þáttr he is a tyrant whose closest ally is Agði, a fjolkunnigr earl who fights crookedly. Þórsteinn makes a Christian of Agði's daughter and marries her. Agði, who would have spoiled the marriage had not Óláfr protected Þórsteinn, then "lét gera sér haug, . . . ok gekk þar í með mikit fé" [had himself a barrow built and went into it with a lot of money] (p. 416). Later he haunts Þórsteinn, draugr-like, until the hero puts a cross on the door of the barrow (p. 417).

These lesser fornaldar sqgur, Nora Chadwick has suggested, are analogues to Béówulf in that each involves families or groups of monsters taken on by the hero or heroes. She is particularly fascinated because some of the heroes, like Herrauðr, are from the Gautar, Béowulf's tribe.[60] But these sagas, by themselves, are further evidence that monsters have human origins. Hárekr and his kin, Agði, Geirrøðr, and the inhabitants of Glæsisvqllr are shape-shifters, draugar, giants, sorcerers, or a mixture of such types. In the sagas they are associated with the lands to

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[60]Chadwick, "Monsters," p. 186.

the north and east--conveniently remote from everyday Iceland and Norway. These characters are also still pagan --Agði gets in a _jǫtunmóðr_ [giant rage] because Goðmundr allows the Christian þórsteinn to come to Geirrøðr's court. Through the improbable and fantastic tales one sees not only a romanticized longing for the past but perhaps also bits of the earlier beliefs about Óðinn's _berserkir_ and fragments of initiation combats against men disguised as beasts.

Ragnars saga loðbrókar ok sona hans[61] serves as a kind of continuation of both _Bósa saga_ and _Vǫlsunga saga_ as Ragnarr marries first þóra, daughter of Herrauðr and Hleiðr, and then Aslaug, daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr. The _gammr_'s egg which Bósi and Herrauðr find hatches into a serpent. At first it is a pet for þóra, but when she puts it in a chest of gold it grows until it can surround her house and keep away all suitors (Ch. 2). Ragnarr earns his name from the _loðbrœkr_ [shaggy (fur) pants] and _loðkápa_ [shaggy cloak] (Ch. 3, p. 100) he has made for himself as protection from the worm's poison when he goes to slay it and win a wife. Dressed in his furs, he must have looked not unlike the warriors on the Torslunda helmet-dies or the ancient participants in initiation combats. Grettir is another monster-slayer who features a _loðkápa_--he loses his

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[61] _Ragnars saga loðbrókar ok sona hans_, _FSN_, I, 95-148. Hereinafter cited in the text by chapter and page.

when Bjǫrn tosses it into the bear's den.

Ragnarr himself is huge; when Þóra first sees him she thinks he is more "sem óvættum" [like the monsters] in old stories than a "mennskr maðr" [human man](Ch. 3, p. 102). Although he does not seem a shape-shifter, he describes himself and his sons in beast terms as he lies dying:

> Gnyðja mundu grísir,
> ef galtar hag vissi.
> (Ch. 15, p. 135)
>
> [The piglets would complain if they knew the boar's plight.]

Ragnarr's life seems surrounded by serpents. He wins his first wife by slaying one, and he dies in the ormgarðr [snake pit] (Ch. 15, p. 134) of King Ella of Northumberland. His first son, by Kráka / Aslaug, whom he met after the death of Þóra, is Ívarr beinlauss, "Ívarr the boneless," who had brjósk [cartilage] where he should have had bones (Ch. 7, p. 110).[62] The youngest son of Ragnarr and Aslaug is Sigurðr ormr í auga, "Sigurðr snake in the eyes," because the boy looks "sem ormr liggi um auga sveininum" [as if there is a snake around the boy's eyes] (Ch. 9, p. 115). The mark on Sigurðr ormr í auga is, says his mother, a sign that he is of the race of the great dragon-slayer Sigurðr Fáfnisbani.

Ívarr is the most remarkable of Ragnarr's sons. In spite of having to be carried into battle on a shield, he

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[62] See Chadwick, "Monsters," p. 187, for several other "boneless" monsters.

is a great bowman. His specialty as a warrior seems to be monster-slayings. Ragnars saga has not one but two episodes of mad cattle which are filled with trǫllskapr, receive sacrifices, and lead their owners' troops, scattering their enemies with bellǫwing (Ch. 8; Ch. 9, 10,12). Ívarr shoots the two oxen at Whitby and both shoots and crushes the cow Sívilja at Uppsala. He must be a sorcerer as well as a serpent, for he can increase or decrease his weight instantly and can make his voice so loud that it replaces Sívilja's in being heard over the battlefield. Ívarr is adviser to his brothers, and a trickster also, as he accomplishes by long-planned treachery the avenging of Ragnarr on Ella which his brothers had been unable to complete by mere force. After death he seems like a beneficent draugr, protecting his territory in Northumberland from invasion until Vilhjálmr bastarðr opens the barrow and burns the undecomposed body.

Qrvar-Odds saga

Qrvar-Odds saga[63] tells the story of Oddr, grandson of the dragon-slayer Ketill Hængr, through an adventure-filled life of some three hundred years. The saga must have been popular, as it gathered accretions and interpolations; more

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[63] Qrvar-Odds saga, ed. R.C. Boer, ASB, 2 (1892); Örvar-Odds saga, FSN, I, 283-399. Hereinafter cited in the text by chapter and page. Unless otherwise indicated, the text is that of FSN.

than one version is extant.[64] Apparently the audience liked the monsters in the saga, for the additions in the longer version deal mostly with giants and monsters, particularly Oddr's long-time enemy, the troll-like Qgmundr.

Oddr, like many other heroes, is a big as a troll (Ch. 4, p. 295), but unlike many of the other fornaldar sqgur heroes, he does not go in for magic or shape-shifting. The closest he comes to changing skins is to make himself a birch-bark suit and go by the name of Næframaðr, "bark-man" (Ch. 24). In the shorter, older version, he is Viðfqrull, "far-traveller" (Ch. 36). His cousin Sigurðr is also no doubt correct in interpreting the immense hvítabjqrn [white bear], which Oddr's brother Guðmundr sees threatening his ship in a dream, as Oddr's fylgja, and its threatening attitude as his úlfhugr [wolf's mind] against them for not wanting to take him on an expedition (Ch. 4, p. 292). As Oddr's fylgja is a bear, it is natural that he choose a bear's skin to make the artificial monster he uses against the giants on his voyage to Bjarmaland.

Although Oddr is a Christian, self-baptized in the Jordan (Ch. 17), he seems to be under Óðinn's protection. The old farmer Jólfr who takes in Næframaðr / Viðfqrull/ Oddr and gives him magical arrows made of stone (Ch. 24) is almost certainly Óðinn.[65] The saga itself suggests that Rauðgrani,

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[64]Boer, Qrvar-Odds saga, pp. x-xi.

[65]Boer, Qrvar-Odds saga, pp. xv, 68 n.

the red-bearded fellow who advises Oddr about his battles but who is never present when the fighting starts (Ch. 19-23), is Óðinn (Ch. 23, p. 359). Hauðgrani plays the god's usual saga role, keeping the fighting going without exposing himself to danger.

As one of Óðinn's men, Oddr is a poet as well as a fighter, composing a long poem on his adventures as he lies dying. Like Grettir and Egill, he is a master of sarcastic, insulting verse. After meeting Jólfr, Oddr goes, still incognito, to the court of a King Herrauðr, where he is talked into competitions in shooting, in swimming, and finally in drinking and making verses, with two of the king's champions. The early twelfth-century verses[66] which appear as the poetic competition must have been considered quite significant, as they appear almost identically in the otherwise quite different long and short versions of the saga (Jónsson, Ch. 27, pp. 370-76; Boer, Ch. 40, pp. 78-84). The exchanges are generally after the manner of the Hárbarðsljóð, as they imply that the adversary was involved in worthless activities while the speaker was winning battles. As in the Helgakviða Hundingsbana I,[67] the verses often suggest that the opponent is not only cowardly but lives in the kitchen with the servant girls rather than in the warriors' hall. Like Óðinn, Far-traveller/ Bark-man waits

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[66]Boer, Qrvar-Odds saga, p. xiii.

[67]Boer, Qrvar-Odds saga, p. 79 n.

until he has thoroughly bested his rivals in both drinking and making verses before he puts off his disguise and reveals his true identity.

Oddr gains his reputation from a viking expedition to Bjarmaland and Finnmǫrk.[68] Returning to Norway after gaining much treasure, Oddr and his kinsmen set up camp on an island, only to find that the nearby mainland is populated by giants. Oddr kills a bear and sets its hide up facing the mainland. When a giantess walks out toward the island, he sets fire in the bear's mouth and shoots arrows through its eye-holes. Although Oddr's method is somewhat more direct and less magical than Egill's níðstǫng, it nonetheless does stop the giantess. Perhaps the saga writers did not understand the operation of a níðstǫng--nothing is said about magic verses--but perhaps they were trying to combine it with an arrow-shooting beast like the boar in Hrólfs saga. They did, at least, produce in an otherwise fantastic saga a quite non-fantastic monster constructed and manipulated by the hero.

The expedition to Bjarmaland earns Oddr a reputation which follows him throughout the saga. It also eventually

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[68] Surprisingly, Oddr and his companions do not encounter any fantastic monsters while in the northern lands. However, there is plenty of magic around. Oddr has his men dispose of enemies' bodies by throwing them in a river to prevent their returning as draugar. Later, he quiets a storm by throwing overboard that portion of the loot taken from the Finns.

results in his gaining a life-long enemy, the troll Ǫgmundr. Begotten by the Bjarmalanders for the sole purpose of punishing the man who violated their sanctuary and carried off its treasure, Ǫgmundr is Oddr's personal monster. To Ǫgmundr the hero loses his half-giant son, several sworn brothers, and innumerable companions before he and the monster finally decide to avoid each other. Much of Ǫgmundr's story, particularly the narrative of his birth, appears only in the expanded version of the saga. Rauðgrani tells Oddr that the natives of Bjarmaland, eager for revenge, found a "gýgi undan forsi stórum, galdra fulla ok gerninga" [an ogress under a great waterfall, full of magic and witchcraft] and mated her with their king, the notorious Hárekr (Ch. 19, p. 345). With a mother like Grendel's and a father who is a dragon, Ǫgmundr is good material for an education in Finnmork where he, too, is filled with galdr ok gerningar. Finally, after making many sacrifices, his sponsors "trylldu han svá, at hann var engum mennskum maðr líkr" [made a troll out of him so that he was not like any human man] (p. 346). He is not susceptible to weapons and he is so unmanageable that his first deed is to kill the berserkr Eyþjófr who fostered him. His mother becomes a finngalkinn, a flying dragon with human head, which Oddr kills (Ch. 20). When Ǫgmundr marries Geirríðr, daughter of Geirrøðr, the evil giant of Þórsteins þáttr bæjarmagns, Oddr follows them and slays all except Ǫgmundr himself, who, though mutilated,

sinks down into the ground like an earth spirit, to rise again some years later. Qgmundr is, according to both Rauðgrani and himself, more andi [spirit] than man (Ch. 19, p. 347).

This fantastic character follows Oddr, and is followed by him, and they challenge and taunt each other all over the north and down into Russia. In the extended version of the saga, he becomes a sort of Doppelgänger who both horrifies and fascinates Oddr. Although he never wounds Oddr personally, and Oddr never damages him permanently, his slaying of Oddr's kin and friends makes him an inescapable memento mori.

There is more than a little truth to Qgmundr's comment after his first encounter with Oddr: "þat mun mæla mega hvárr okkar við tröll en menn" [Each of us can say of the other that he seems no less troll than man] (Ch. 13, p. 321). In spite of obvious differences, they are a kind of matched pair. Each is charmed against weapons, so that neither ever seriously wounds the other. The saga is a bit clumsy in disposing of Qgmundr--when Oddr's fatal curiosity leads him back to Norway and the fate prophesied for him three centuries earlier, Qgmundr is simply allowed to fade out of the picture down in Russia--but if he were not removed from the action, he and Oddr could have gone on fighting forever. Each time Oddr loses men to Qgmundr, he is temporarily despondent. But soon his thoughts turn to

revenge, and he goes once more seeking Qgmundr, who is usually seeking him in turn. When they fight, the result is always the same: Oddr, wearing his magical shirt, cannot be wounded, and Qgmundr, being more spirit than flesh, cannot be killed.

As a pair, Oddr and Qgmundr are one sort of logical development from the pairings of combatants in the sagas. Several times earlier it has been suggested that as the ancient warrior cults probably taught their initiates to see themselves as monsters of a sort, battles between initiates might appear as battles between monsters. What is strange about Oddr and Qgmundr is that the rivals actually admit that each can be seen as a monster. Coming to that conclusion at the end of their first encounter, however, does not lessen their urge to fight: they continue to meet for the better part of three centuries.

In spite of having produced a situation in which mere physical combat will not lead to a conclusion, the saga writer needs to bring his hero to a satisfactory end by himself. When Qgmundr and Oddr last meet (Ch. 30), they fight for some time with neither gaining an advantage. Qgmundr, who has been fighting in disguise, offers a truce on the basis of physical equality. Before he will agree, Oddr demands to know his opponent's identity and, learning it, swears never to make peace. Their resumed combat is ended only by nightfall, and rather than be caught in an

endless struggle, Oddr simply leaves to go wandering again. Finally Oddr's curiosity leads him back to Norway and to the farm where he had been born and where it had been prophesied that he would die.

Oddr does, however, win a victory over Qgmundr, but it is a moral victory, not a physical one. All through the saga Oddr obviously has been morally superior to his treacherous adversary. Nonetheless, in spite of advice to the contrary from everyone, including Rauðgrani/ Óðinn, he has continued to fight the specter, always seeking revenge for what had happened in the previous encounter. But Qgmundr, born for the sole purpose of revenge, is himself the spirit of revenge personified. So long as Oddr fights back at his rival, he is caught by the same spirit and is, in effect, a second Qgmundr.

Accepting physical equality with Qgmundr, on Qgmundr's terms, would mean accepting moral equality with him. And since Qgmundr is always treacherous, accepting physical equality with him would not bring an end to the fighting. Thus, when Oddr simply leaves the last battle, it is not from lack of courage or strength, both of which he has given ample evidence of possessing. The significance of his gesture is that he simply removes himself from the endless cycle of killing and revenge.

There are other sagas of more profound significance and greater literary value than Oddr's, but the theme of

the continued rivalry gives this saga a peculiar quality. In sagas monsters exist so that heroes may fight them; men become heroes by fighting monsters. But the very monsters that make men heroes are extensions of themselves and their mortality; in fighting them, men are fighting their own limitations. Giving Oddr a personal monster, begotten for him alone, serves to emphasize the relationship between hero and monster. So long as Oddr fights Qgmundr, he is fighting a spirit which kills and kills and never stops. Accepting that he cannot destroy Qgmundr means for Oddr accepting the role of death in the world. When he recognizes that force for what it is, Oddr prepares the way for his own peaceful death. Oddr is in a way like Gilgameš: much fighting and much wandering eventually bring him home to himself and to an understanding of his human mortality.

Recapitulation

The Old Norse sagas are full of monsters of all sorts, so many, in fact, that it is impossible to consider more than a few of them in a limited space. The fornaldar sqgur, such as the earlier sagas in the cycle to which Qrvar-Odds saga as well as those of his grandfather Ketill Hængr and his father Grímr Loðkinna belong, involve expeditions to Lappland, magic, and monster-slayings. The more realistic Íslendinga sqgur provide, nonetheless, many fylgjur, berserkir, and hauntings, along with the expected challenges

and conflicts. The konunga sǫgur, or kings' sagas, have hardly been mentioned here, yet they, too, include monsters: the Ynglinga saga, which opens Snorri's great collection, the Heimskringla, traces the kings of Norway back to Óðinn, who, though euhemerized, is nevertheless a shape-shifter and patron of berserkir.

The sagas examined here, however, give a reasonable sampling of monster lore. Monsters in the sagas are most frequently associated with magic and shape-shifting. In the fantastic sagas, men actually do change shape, sometimes willfully, sometimes as the result of curses. In the more realistic family sagas, men do not often literally change shapes, although many are said to have the ability to do so. In these sagas transformed shapes are chiefly characteristic of ghosts. At the lowest level are the berserkir, who try to play the monster's role as challenger and shape-shifter but succeed only in being cowards and bullies.

The sagas, unlike Béowulf, do not generally make moral emblems out of their monsters. However, the frequent association of monsters with heathens, faraway places, and magic reflects, on the part of the saga writers and their expected audience, at least some distrust of the unfamiliar. A treacherous and exotic character like Ǫgmundr is certainly to be despised the more for being an outsider. And the common sorts of berserkir, useless to society, deserve the treatment they receive from the heroes.

Yet, strangely enough, the most interesting feature of the sagas is that so many of the heroes--notably Grettir, Egill, Bǫðvarr, Sigmundr, and Oddr--have some monstrous traits themselves. Sarcastic, unruly heroes are, at the very least, associated with shape-shifting; although they are usually wronged more than they do wrong, they are not the most morally admirable of characters. But those very traits which the hero shares with his adversary are essential to his characterization. Because he encompasses, but subdues, the monstrous within him, he is more fully human--as well as more interesting.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In the very earliest extant literature, monsters already play a large role. Although Mesopotamian monsters seem to have originated as personifications of chaos, those which appear in literature have gained anthropomorphic characteristics. Myths which at first must have emphasized the creation of the world out of chaos are transformed in literary works like the Enuma Eliš so that the chaos monster is less important for what it might originally have represented than for its function as a fitting opponent for the hero who combats it. In literature the ability of a monster to threaten and taunt the hero becomes almost as important as its ability to oppose him physically. Even if the myths and legends of the ancient Germanic peoples developed independently from those of the Mesopotamians, in those Northern myths a similar evolution seems to have taken place.

The ancient Germanic peoples can hardly be said to have possessed a single, simple concept of the monstrous. However, in their prehistoric artwork and in their later literature certain trends can be distinguished. From the earliest times serpent-monsters, beasts, and half-beasts mingle with men in pictorial art. Although most of these figures defy positive identification, some seem to indicate the initiation combat of one man with another who impersonates

a beast. By the period from which the antiquarian writers drew, the age of the earliest pagan poets to be recorded in writing, the various Germanic peoples possessed a well-developed, though not entirely consistent, mythology. By this time also, pictorial representations begin to include identifiable individual combats of men and gods with a variety of antagonists.

The god most favored by the poets at the end of the pagan period and by their antiquarian Christian successors was Óðinn, patron of warriors and poets. As a wielder of words, Óðinn easily assimilates to himself the verbal virtuosity needed by the monster-fighting hero to reply to his adversary's challenge. Though as a patron of warriors Óðinn might be expected to side with the hero, he often seems to side with the challenger. Óðinn's warrior-followers, particularly the berserks and the like, are, certainly, essentially human, yet they, and he, no doubt are related to the adversary of initiation combat, and to the beast or monster therein represented. The god's very verbal skills, because he uses them ironically, become eventually the sign not so much of his anthropomorphic nature as of his kinship to the monsters.

The other focal character for understanding the pagan Germanic monsters is Loki. An even more ambiguous figure than Óðinn, he seems almost the personification of the monstrous adversary's challenges and taunts. That in

Germanic myth the monsters, even those which seem least human, are conceived of as essentially anthropomorphic is evident from the fact that the principal chaos monsters, the Wolf and Serpent, are not the ancestors of this more-or-less human being but instead are his own offspring. For Loki, as for Óðinn, speech serves as another tie between man and monster: though what Loki says often aligns him with the monsters, the voice which he employs to say it is a human attribute.

Because the southern culture with its writing and its new religion established itself in the Norse-speaking lands some centuries after it had a sure foundation in the other Germanic lands, the eddic and skaldic poetry share a mythological view of monsters with south-Germanic poetry which is much earlier. The principal example of such older southern literature in so far as concentration on monsters is concerned is, of course, Bēowulf. Like Snorri's Edda, it is the product of Christian antiquarianism. However, unlike that later Icelandic work, it is not a compilation of old myth but a unified single narrative written in the old spirit and including much old lore. Bēowulf thus is not so much a direct presentation of ancient heroes and monsters as it is a narrative involving a hero and several monsters presented as the poet believes the ancients might have done.

Most significantly, the Bēowulf poet employs that ancient technique of attributing to monsters, no matter

how non-human their appearance, essentially human perceptions, sensitivities, and emotions. Even the dragon feels greed and is capable of deliberated revenge. Grendel and his mother, monsters of explicitly stated human form, not only possess human psychology, but are constantly presented against a background of human institutions and customs. All that these monsters are wanting to place them in the tradition of anthropomorphically presented adversaries is the taunting voice, and that deficiency is more than compensated for by the presence of the man Unferð. Paralleled to Grendel by suggestions of past fratricides and future punishments in Hell, Unferð, like Loki, appears as taunting spite personified.

In the Norse literature which descends most directly from pagan belief, the relationship between anthropomorphic monsters and initiation of warriors is not presented in a unified whole. The great chaos monsters have man-like kin; they will be combatted, but not in initiation situations. The speaking function of monsters is chiefly transferred to such figures as Óðinn and Loki, but these are such ambiguous characters that they are hard to pin down between men and monsters. In the heroic poems, there are few actual monsters beside the man-turned-dragon Fáfnir, but warriors, Óðinn's men like Helgi, show through their challenges that they view themselves and their opponents as having monstrous states. Since Béowulf has the advantage of greater length

than the surviving Norse poems, it is able to present a more complete picture. In Bēowulf two of the monsters have human form and all three have human thoughts. If Unferð is accepted as an extension of the monster-system, then the monsters taunt the hero before the combat. Significantly, the combat with the two man-like monsters serves as an initiation of sorts. Though Bēowulf has fought before and has even been a monster-slayer, what establishes his reputation within the context of the poem and what prepares for his eventual kingship and final fight with the dragon is the slaying of Grendel and his mother.

Norse literature developed continuous narrative of the length of Bēowulf not in verse but in the prose sagas which originated in Christian times. In the sagas, however, there is frequently even less unity of narrative than in the English poem; many sagas, being held together chiefly by the presence of a single hero (and indeed some lack that), are far more episodic than the Edda. The saga literature most interesting for the study of monsters includes both family sagas and fornaldar sǫgur, or sagas of ancient times. Though both classes arise from the antiquarian fascinations of the Icelanders, they generally differ greatly in emphasis. The family sagas, set mostly in Iceland and concerned for the most part with historical families and individuals, give at least the appearance of history and biography. The

fornaldar sǫgur, set mostly in continental Europe and concerned with legendary and fictional heroes except for occasional historical personages who appear on the periphery, are, like Bēowulf, attempts to reconstruct pagan antiquity, but, unlike the English poem, have the spirit of travel tales and picaresque romance. Nonetheless, both classes of sagas reflect much the same concept of the monstrous.

With the exception of some glorified reptiles and birds of prey in the fornaldar sǫgur, Norse saga-monsters share an overwhelmingly human background. The old chaos monsters are notably diminished or even absent from the saga view. Unlike the Old Testament demythologizing tendency which purged most of the monsters and made a mere blaspheming giant of Goliath, the saga pattern arises from a lack of belief. There are, to be sure, obvious survivals of pagan belief and practice in such passages as Starkaðr's sacrifice of his king in Gautreks saga, but in most sagas monsters have degenerated into literary conventions with a folklore-like appearance but without systematic mythical background. Bēowulf, on the one hand, in spite of its Christian philosophy, gives a convincing illusion of ancient pagan life. On the other hand, in the lesser fornaldar sǫgur the mythological world has become, at best, fantasy, at worst, window dressing.

Even while the mythological background which had persisted into the late pagan poetry gradually faded in the

sagas, the human aspect of monsters remained. Besides the fanciful monsters which might as well have (and sometimes perhaps did) come from French romances, the sagas have two large native classes which involve both human and monstrous traits. The first class, including berserkir and others descended from old warrior cults and traditions, consists of those who are living men but act like beasts and monsters. After death, a berserkr is likely to join the other class, which includes the draugar and aptrgǫngumenn, those who walk after death.

A saga hero may himself, like Sigmundr, act as a berserk or werewolf. Werewolfish tendencies run not only in mythical families like Sigmundr's but are attributed to historical clans like that of the poet Egill Skallagrímsson. If a hero does not, like Sigmundr, change skins, he may, like Bǫðvarr Bjarki, have a fylgja in animal form. He may also, like Grettir, apply beast and monster metaphors to himself. All too often such a hero as Sigmundr or Grettir becomes an outlaw, exile, or outcast, a stage which is but one step short of a monster: vargr is both "wolf" and "outlaw" in Old Norse; Grendel is again and again described as an exiled outlaw.

More often, though, the hero fights berserkir, who appear as easily defeated and often comic stock characters, biting their shields and howling like dogs. Those, however, who had been violent, ruthless, and ill-tempered in life

frequently become draugar after death, and these draugar and their associates are frequent and dangerous opponents of the saga heroes. Hrólfr kraki and his champions fall to an army of animated corpses. Grettir finds his greatest challenge in the aptrgǫngumaðr Glámr. The close connection between man and monster is perhaps more evident in the draugar than anywhere else in monster literature. Just how significant the connection is can be seen in Qrvar-Odds saga, one of the better viking picaresques in the fornaldar sǫgur. There the hero discovers that his constant antagonist, the part-draugr, part-Lappish shaman Qgmundr, was bred up by his enemies to be Oddr's personally individualized foil.

Though the monsters perhaps began as representations of chaos, in being personified and gaining human traits and human rivals they became inextricably involved with the lives of the heroes who subdue them. In some cases, the relationship is simple, as a hero like þórr is himself simple. The great hero, though, one with understanding like Gilgameš, like David or even Saul, like Bēowulf, Hróðgár, Óðinn, or Grettir, realizes the shortness of life and the uncertainty of fortune. He realizes how terribly thin the partition is which divides him from the monsters he opposes. The mortality of the old Germanic gods is perhaps an indication that their lives are inextricably linked to the chaos over which they maintain only a tenuous control won at the cost of everlasting struggle.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

For one wishing to pursue connections between the myths of the ancient world and those of Scandinavia further, there are several possible approaches. At one extreme, one might assume that material in the Northern myths which seems similar to that in ancient narratives is the result of borrowing; some of the more Christian-oriented commentators indeed allow hardly any originality or historicity to the Northern stories. At the other extreme, there is no absolute need to make any connection beyond the psychoanalytic assumption that the phenomena represented by the heroes and their adversaries are archetypes derived from universal elements of the human psyche.

Among those who assume that the Northern materials are derived from Classical and ancient sources, one of the most extreme is Jane Leake, whose The Geats of Beowulf[1] attempts to demonstrate that the whole basis of the Old English poem is derived, by way of Isidore and other clerical writers, from Greek and Jewish legend. The Gēatas, according to Leake, have no connection to the Scandinavian Gautar but are a misunderstood rendition of the Getae, a Greek tribe; likewise, the monsters come from legends about Gog and Magog, and even Hygelac, who is usually considered the one certainly historical character in the poem, is a

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[1]Jane Leake, The Geats of Beowulf (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1967).

misplaced Greek. Anna Birgitta Rooth's Loki in Scandinavian Mythology[2] would similarly derive most of the myths associated with the Norse trickster either from Irish sources or from Isidore and his school. Nicolas Kiessling's dissertation, "New Aspects of the Monsters in Beowulf,"[3] makes an elaborate attempt to derive the Beowulf dragon, through St. Jerome's Old Testament and its Hebrew original, from Ti'âmat in the Babylonian Enuma Eliš.

A much better balanced study is Joseph Fontenrose's Python: A Study of the Delphic Myth and its Origins,[4] which works out a complex typology of the combat of the hero and his monstrous adversaries. Fontenrose seems basically to believe in a primeval diffusion of myths, but since he is chiefly interested in typology and the overall pattern of the monster-combat, he does not generally concern himself with the means by which myths spread. Fontenrose's thesis that monsters originate as personifications of chaos and his application of the thesis to Bēowulf and to Scandinavian myths are generally accepted by such specialists as Edward B. Irving.[5]

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[2]Anna Birgitta Rooth, Loki in Scandinavian Mythology, tr. Gordon Elliott (Lund: Gleerup, 1961).

[3]Nicolas Kiessling, "New Aspects of the Monsters in Beowulf," Diss. Wisconsin, 1967.

[4]Joseph Fontenrose, Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1959).

[5]Edward Irving, A Reading of Bēowulf (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 85-86.

Another work which makes a different typological approach to myth is Hamlet's Mill by Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend.[6] A historian of science, de Santillana attempts to demonstrate that similar myths arise in widely separated cultures because certain natural phenomena, such as the precession of the equinoxes, are universally observed. In making connections between the Gilgameš Epic and the eddic poetry, de Santillana implies that diffusion of mythic themes has been reinforced and conditioned by the presence of universally observed astronomical phenomena.

Although Joseph Campbell, in The Hero with a Thousand Faces and The Masks of God,[7] also takes a modified diffusionist position, he stresses internal, rather than external, conditioning factors. A disciple of Carl Jung, Campbell sees the patterns of myth as reflections of the structures of the human psyche. The Jungian theory of archetypes, of course, does not need to assume diffusion: myths arise simply because human phenomena themselves are universal.[8]

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[6]Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, Hamlet's Mill (Boston: Gambit, 1969).

[7]Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1956); The Masks of God (New York: Viking, 1959-68).

[8]Carl G. Jung and M.-L. von Franz, ed., Man and his Symbols (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964).

Accordingly, for a Jungian scholar, a monster need not represent any chaos other than that of the individual unconscious. In particular, that portion of the psyche known to psychoanalysts as the "Shadow" often manifests itself in myths and dreams as a monster or taunting adversary.[9]

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[9]Jung, pp. 120-28.

APPENDIX 2

Anna Birgitta Rooth, in Loki in Scandinavian Mythology,[1] takes the extreme stand that any trait attributed to Loki but also found in an earlier literary analogue may result from borrowing and, accordingly, may not be absolutely authentic to Loki. As a result, she attributes Loki's role as parens monstrorum to Isidore and the clerical tradition[2] and eliminates most of what is usually considered characteristic of the god. She will allow, at most, that he is Óðinn's blood brother, that he occasionally accompanies Þórr, and that he is able to change his shape to horse, fly, and fish.[3] She also admits that Loki is a trickster figure.[4] However, she doubts that he was originally an evil character.[5]

In her attempt to achieve methodological purity for her analysis, Rooth is no doubt partially justified. But one consequence of her approach is that she neglects the literature as it stands now. Certainly the myths of Loki as they appear in the Eddas may be the result of accretion,

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[1]Anna Birgitta Rooth, Loki in Scandinavian Mythology, tr. Gordon Elliott (Lund: Gleerup, 1961).

[2]pp. 162-65.

[3]pp. 186-88.

[4]pp. 189-210.

[5]pp. 211-12.

but then so are the myths of Óðinn, Þórr, and Sigurðr. Bēowulf is a composite work, and so is the much more ancient Gilgameš Epic. For the study of these works as literature, however, one cannot follow Rooth's method strictly, for he must accept the texts as they stand. And, after all, even if a trait attributed to Loki, or to some other character, is not originally proper to him, would it have become assimilated to him if it had not been somehow appropriate?

Rooth is, nonetheless, probably correct in her assumption that tricksters become ambiguous and complex characters by accretion of myths: if the trickster's role is to be provider for gods and men, as many different kinds of myths will become attached to him as there are gifts for him to bestow on those whom he assists.[6]

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[6] pp. 190-93.

APPENDIX 3



Plate I. Torslunda: Metalworker's die, man fighting two beasts.



Plate II. Torslunda: Metalworker's die, man with captive beast.



Plate III. Torslunda: Metalworker's die, two warriors, one impersonating a beast.



Plate IV. Vendel: Helmet design detail, man with stylized beast.

Source: A. Margaret Arent, "The Heroic Pattern: Old Germanic Helmets, Beowulf, and Grettis saga," in Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Symposium, ed. Edgar C. Polomé (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1969), Plates 2, 1, 15, 5.

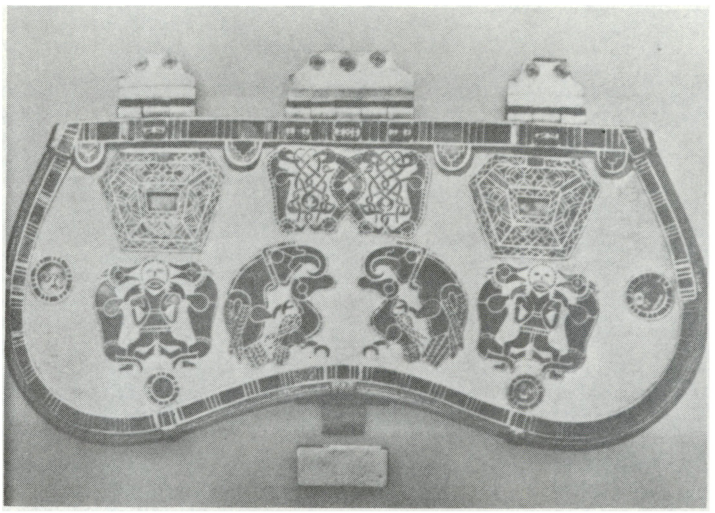


Plate V. Sutton Hoo: Purse lid.



Plate VI. Sutton Hoo:
Purse lid detail, man
with two beasts.

Source: A. Margaret Arent, "The Heroic Pattern: Old Germanic Helmets, Beowulf, and Grettis saga," in Old Norse Literature and Mythology: A Symposium, ed. Edgar C. Polomé (Austin: Univ. of Texas Press, 1969), Plates 4, 3.

VITA

James David Mason was born in Jonesboro, Arkansas, on September 25, 1944. He attended elementary school there and later in Birmingham, Alabama. After completing his freshman year at Indian Springs School, he moved to Terre Haute, Indiana, where he was graduated from Wiley High School in 1962. Holding the J.M. Williams Scholarship and a University Scholarship at Vanderbilt University, he completed the B.A. in 1965, with a major in mathematics and a minor in physics. He attended Indiana State University as a special student while still in high school and during the summers of 1962-65. In the fall of 1965 he entered the Vanderbilt Graduate School as a University Scholar in English and received the M.A. in 1967. His thesis, "The Word of God: A Comparative Study of the Poetry of Christopher Smart and William Blake," was directed by Professor Edgar H. Duncan. From 1966 to 1971 he was Instructor of English at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville.

Awarded a Non-Service Fellowship, he entered the Graduate School of the University of Tennessee in the fall of 1971 and received the Ph.D. with a major in English and a minor in German in June 1976. He was a Teaching Assistant from 1973 to 1976 and held a John C. Hodges Dissertation Year Fellowship. He is a member of the Modern Language Association, the South Atlantic and South Central Modern Language Associations, the Southeastern American Society

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