

## *Qgmundar þátr dytts ok Gunnars helmings:*

### Unity and Literary Relations

The story preserved in chapters 275–78 of *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta* in *Flateyjarbók* is a single þátr, “novella” or “short story,” about two heroes whose names form the traditional title: *Qgmundar þátr dytts ok Gunnars helmings*, or in short title: *Qgmundar þátr*.<sup>1</sup>

The story opens in Iceland with the family relations of the hero of the story’s first half, a handsome young man named Qgmundr Hrafnsson. Qgmundr bought a ship and sailed to Norway with an inexperienced crew of Icelanders; against the advice of the Norwegian pilots, Qgmundr refused to lay by and insisted on continuing his approach to shore, though night had fallen, with the result that they struck and sank a longship belonging to Hallvarðr, a powerful favorite of Jarl Hákon, then ruler of Norway. After negotiations for compensation failed, Hallvarðr took personal revenge in the form of a severe blow with the blunt side of his axe. Qgmundr, slowly recovering through the winter, acquired the mocking nickname *dyttr* (“dint”). His kinsman Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson, a retainer of Jarl Hákon’s, had tried to persuade Qgmundr to pay compensation; but now he eggs Qgmundr to violent revenge, but without success, and Vigfúss himself tries in vain to assault Hallvarðr.

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1. *Flateyjarbók* ..., ed. G. Vigfússon and C. R. Unger (Christiania, 1860–68), I, 332–39. The þátr is cited in the edition of Jónas Kristjánsson (below).

Ógmundr sails home next summer and consistently acts like a man whose voyage has enhanced his reputation though his relative Glúmr is increasingly angered at the dishonor Ógmundr has brought on the family and at last dismisses the young man from his home. Two years later, in the reign of Óláfr Tryggvason, Ógmundr voyages again to Norway, and this time he kills Hallvarðr, having first exchanged cloaks with a man named Gunnarr helmingr. When Ógmundr escapes and returns to Iceland, suspicion of the killing falls on Gunnarr who flees to Sweden where he obtains asylum at a temple of Freyr though it is the priestess, Freyr’s “wife,” and not the god-idol itself who finds Gunnarr pleasing. Tension rises between Freyr and Gunnarr, but when the time of the winter processions arrives, the Norwegian accompanies the god and his entourage. Gunnarr and Freyr finally come to blows, and with the help of thoughts of the True Faith and of King Óláfr, Gunnarr banishes the demon that had dwelt in the wooden idol. Gunnarr now dons Freyr’s clothing and plays his role hoodwinking the heathen Swedes.

When news of this newly vigorous “Freyr” comes to King Óláfr Tryggvason, he suspects that Gunnarr may be involved and sends Gunnarr’s brother Sigurðr to fetch him home with a promise of reconciliation. The brothers and the priestess escape with a large treasure and are welcomed home to Óláfr’s court where the woman is received into the Christian Church, and they kept the Faith ever after.

*Ógmundar þáttr* is in some ways one of the most interesting of the þáttir but is little known except as a document for the reconstruction of pagan Germanic religion. The typical treatment of the þáttr ignores Ógmundr and all events except Gunnarr’s dealings with Freyr and Freyr’s “wife” and uses the story to verify and flesh out the famous allusions of Tacitus and Adam of Bremen or other fragments of the reconstructed mosaic of Vanir worship.<sup>2</sup> Occasionally the point of view has been more specifically an attempt to show through Gunnarr’s

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2. Some examples among many: G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: the Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York, 1964), pp. 169, 170, 247; Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 2nd rev. ed. (Berlin, 1956–57), II, 473; Nils Lid, “Gudar og gudedyrking,” in *Religionshistorie*, ed. N. Lid, *Nordisk kultur* 24 (Oslo, 1942), p. 112; Peter Gelling and Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, *The Chariot of the Sun and other Rites and Symbols of the Northern Bronze Age* (New York and London, 1969), p. 162; Hilda R. Ellis Davidson, *Scandinavian Mythology* (New York and London, 1969), p. 83.

impersonation of Freyr that priests played the role of the peripatetic vegetation deities in Scandinavia or to support the hypothesis of a cult drama of sacred marriage.<sup>3</sup>

Mainly the property, then, of folklorists and historians of Germanic religion, *Ögmundar þátr* has been noticed by literary historians and critics only in the context of literary relations, and such notices have consistently treated the þátr as deeply divided, in fact as two separable stories. However, there are some notable differences of nuance among these uniformly patronizing judgments. Finnur Jónsson treated “Ögmundar þátr” and “Gunnars þátr” as two independent tales, the first dating from before Snorri’s time, while “to it is joined in *Flateyjarbók* the legendary, but amusing tale about ... Gunnarr ... which is certainly a later invention,” and Eugen Mogk roundly declared: “der Gunnars þátr helmings, den die Ftb. an ihn [i.e. to “Ögmundr þátr”] anknüpft, hat nichts mit ihm zu thun.”<sup>4</sup> Björn M. Ólsen agrees that “Gunnars þátr” has been joined to “Ögmundr þátr” with a “thin thread,” the incident of the exchange of cloaks, but doubts that the juncture occurred late. Because the story of Ögmundr would “cut too short” (*snubbóttur*) if that of Gunnarr did not follow, Ólsen concludes: “Doubtless ancient oral tradition lies at the base here, and there appears to be nothing to oppose the idea that the oral tradition put these two stories together from the beginning.”<sup>5</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson regards

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3. For example: Krappe (cited below); de Vries, *Religionsgeschichte*, II, 192 (with references); Lid, pp. 101–02; Karl Helm, “Die Entwicklung der germanischen Religion,” in *Germanische Wiedererstehung*, ed. Hermann Nollau (Heidelberg, 1926), p. 369 (repeated by Danckert, cited below, p. 164). Perhaps this is the place to remark that not only has the literary character of *Ögmundar þátr* been obscured by such partial treatments, but as a document of Germanic religion the story has been much mishandled through partial and erroneous summaries (notable in Lid, Krappe, Helm, and Danckert) and a tendency to mix analyses and hypotheses with the objective account of the text.

4. *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 2nd ed., II (Copenhagen, 1923), 543; *Geschichte der norwegisch-isländischen Literatur*, 2nd ed. (Strassburg, 1904), p. 217. Guðni Jónsson, *Íslendinga sögur* 8 (Reykjavík, 1947), p. viii agrees; similarly Jan de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 2nd rev. ed., II (Berlin, 1967), 430: “Der zweite Teil des þátr ist eine selbständige Geschichte ... Die Verbindung der beiden Teile ist sehr schwach ... Man muss wohl annehmen, dass erst der Verfasser des þátr diese beiden Geschichten miteinander verbunden hat.” Partial translations of the þátr have also contributed to the impression of disunity (e.g. *Scandinavian Folk-Lore*, selected and transl. William A. Craigie [London, 1896], pp. 26–32; Régis Boyer, *Trois sagas islandaises du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle et un “thátr”* [Paris, 1964], pp. 145–48).

5. “Um Íslendingasögur,” *Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta að fornu og nýju*, VI: 5 (Reykjavík, 1937–39), 413–14.

the þáttir as “in fact two stories” loosely linked together, “Gunnars þáttir” having been added to “Ógmundr þáttir” in the original *written* version, the work of the “author”; and he agrees with Ólsen’s critical analysis without agreeing with his conclusions about oral tradition: “On the edges of the *þættir* [i.e. the two parts of the story] the material is weakest, and it is unlikely that such a weak thread will have been sustained long in oral preservation.”<sup>6</sup>

Ólsen’s position contains the contradiction that while the two parts are recognized as distinct stories, they are supposed to have belonged together in oral tradition “from the beginning,” and Jónas Kristjánsson’s formulation is to be preferred, though speculations about what kind of story (or combination of stories) can persevere in oral tradition is unsupported. I think there can be no doubt that in *Ógmundar þáttir* we are dealing with two *originally*—in a strict sense—separate bodies of story material. Just to point out the obvious: if the materials can be considered to have a historical base, it is clear that no genealogical or other personal links are supplied or can easily be imagined to account for the fusion. However, the fictional element clearly dominates whatever traces of history may be present, and the materials of the two parts stem from different realms of fiction, the first half being composed of motifs and characters drawn from Icelandic life and, as will emerge from a discussion of the story’s literary relations, of typically Icelandic themes. No single source for the first half is known though it appears to have derived information from at least one extant saga.

The second part has a very different kind of source which has been studied by Helga Reuschel in an article containing a number of valid insights into the basic nature of the story but mainly intended as a caveat against naive faith in the story of Gunnarr helmingr as a document of Germanic religion.<sup>7</sup> The core of Reuschel’s article is her argument that Gunnarr’s story is an analogue and ultimately a derivative of an international tale, the earliest extant version of which is told in antiquity of the circumstances leading to the birth of Alexander the Great—a story which remained popular in various forms through the Middle Ages and which Reuschel calls the “Trug des

6. *Eyfirðinga sögur*, Íslensk fornrit 9 (Reykjavík, 1956), pp. LV–LVI.

7. “Der Göttertrug im Gunnarsþáttir helmings,” *ZDA* 71 (1934), 155–56.

Nektanebos.” This dependence on international narrative material, it is asserted, partially invalidates the þátrr as a source of knowledge about Germanic religion.

It is well known that there is no accepted way to quantify “analogousness,” and where one man sees an analogy demanding genetic connections, another sees polygenesis. In fact, A. H. Krappe had previously drawn the conclusion from similar comparative material that both certain ancient Mediterranean stories and the Scandinavian tale were “myths” based on similar fertility rites.<sup>8</sup> Jónas Kristjánsson points out apropos of Reuschel’s analogues that “in one respect all those ancient stories . . . are distinct from ‘Gunnars þátrr’: there the woman herself is taken in; she thinks that she is having intercourse with the god and will bear him a child.”<sup>9</sup> This is a very basic difference, and in some ways the classical parallels cited by Krappe are closer than Reuschel’s. However, none of these parallels compels the assumption of a genetic connection, and Krappe’s explanation from a common ritual ought not to be entirely ruled out though I finally must agree again with Jónas Kristjánsson’s formulation of the literary-historical implications of Reuschel’s parallels: none of these tales could have been the pattern for Gunnarr’s adventures, but that pattern must have developed out of some now irretrievably lost southern tale similar to the “Trug des Nektanebos.”

Reuschel rightly qualifies the reliability of Gunnarr’s story as a religious document by showing that its Christian spirit places it among the typical conversion tales that clustered around the figure of Óláfr Tryggvason and that some of its motifs are very common. However, she also insists that the ironic and satirical *tone* of the story sets it off from other saga material, that the attitude manifested toward pagan religion is “sagafremd.” These pronouncements on the tone form an introduction to and support for the derivation of Gunnarr’s tale ultimately from southern tales of the “Nektanebos” type, and the implication is that the tone was borrowed along with the story material. Reuschel’s characterization of the satirical tone of the tale and her comparison to Enlightenment attitudes toward established

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8. La Légende de Gunnar Half,” *APS* 3 (1928–29), 226–33. Reuschel unaccountably ignores Krappe’s contribution.

9. *ÍF* 9: LXIII.

religion (a comparison also made by Krappe) are apt, but she is in error in seeing this þáttir as unique or “un-Scandinavian” in this respect.<sup>10</sup> *Völsa þáttir*, for example, is a masterpiece of Christian satire, like Gunnarr’s tale late and shot through with irony yet preserving genuine vestiges of pre-Christian cult; and at a lower literary level we find a somewhat similar attitude toward the gods in *Rögnvalds þáttir ok Rauðs*, *Sveins þáttir ok Finns*, and *Friðþjófs saga*.<sup>11</sup> Nor is a similar ironic and comic sense missing from *Gylfaginning*, *Ynglinga saga*, and Saxo, and wherever the Christian euhemeristic-demonistic attitude to pagan gods is found in secure possession of the field such a tone is to be expected—compare the treatment of the Moslem “gods” in the *chansons de geste*. It is true, as Reuschel asserts, that *Ögmundar þáttir* is light in tone relative to saga-length works and therefore comparable to fabliaux and other short European genres in their relation to romances, chronicles, and so on, but this is true of þættir in general and cannot be used to set *Ögmundar þáttir* apart.<sup>12</sup> Finally, literary history shows, I believe, that tone is a very mutable factor in borrowing, that form—in this case a story-pattern—is much more readily preserved in borrowing than spirit.

## Unity

Thus the sources and tones of the two parts of *Ögmundar þáttir* are obviously disparate. And while such heterogeneity is common in the saga literature—*Víga-Glúms saga* is a case in point—it is easy to see why scholars have, in the case of *Ögmundar þáttir*, spoken of two stories loosely joined rather than of a single saga or *þáttir* with interpolations. An important fact has been overlooked, however, in the persistent search for genesis of materials and discussion of the mode of earliest development: whatever the ultimate origins of its constituent materials and whenever the artistic combination of materials was made (and in whatever mode: oral, literary, or some mediating condition), the modern reader is presented with the fact of an artistically successful, coherent novella, indeed one of the most interesting of its

10. Esp. pp. 158–63.

11. *Flateyjarbók*, II, 331–36; I, 288–99; I, 387–93; *Die Friðþjófs saga ...*, ed. G. Wenz (Halle, 1914).

12. Cf. Anthony Faulkes, ed., *Two Icelandic Stories* (London, n.d. [1969]), pp. 3–4.

kind. At some point an “author” of skill and discernment composed the work as it has come down to us, and a literary critic is obliged to reconsider the þáttur in terms of “unity” and to counteract the divisive emphasis of a received opinion formulated by historians whose point of view was so firmly diachronic that they failed to notice the synchronic fact of the integral work of art before them.

Unity is a slippery concept, and in a recent article Arthur K. Moore has attacked as unrigorous many of the unity studies that litter the landscape of medieval studies.<sup>13</sup> Medieval works often seem to lack classical unity; consequently where literary quality is intuitively experienced as high, critics have attempted to discover underlying non-Aristotelian principles of unity. The search has, I believe, widened our knowledge even if “unity” has sometimes come to mean almost any literary excellence; some modes of unity in medieval works, for example, have been shown to depend more upon typological correspondences and other kinds of significant juxtapositions than on the primitive biographical patterns a modern reader may expect of “early” literature.

In the case of *Ögmundar þáttur*, I will try to demonstrate a unity at the level of plot, structure, and theme even though in some sense the story’s bipartite nature remains obvious—a trait it shares with diverse medieval works including most notably *Beowulf* and certain sagas to be discussed. Moore cites two principles for demonstrations of unity that should be mentioned here: the mode of existence of a work (orally composed, written for oral delivery, for silent reading, etc.) is relevant to standards of unity; and interpretations of the unity of a work draw strength from relevant parallels in literature and other cultural products. The former, while undoubtably true, is difficult or impossible to apply to *Ögmundar þáttur* in the face of so much uncertainty about the production and performance of the saga literature; however, I shall attempt to apply the latter principle in support of my reading of the þáttur.

It will be clear from the summary above that *Ögmundar þáttur* is plotted as a continuous causal sequence, each incident in the chain of events being derivable from those that precede even though the line of action does not follow a single man. The heroes of the two parts

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13. “Medieval English Literature and the Question of Unity,” *MP* 65 (1968), 285–300.

actually meet, however, and in the brilliant scene of the exchange of cloaks the “mantle of hero” is literally passed from *Ǫgmundr* to *Gunnarr*. *Ǫgmundr* is never formally declared “out of the saga,” and the action takes place in a temporal continuum though the author suspends narrative time as he finishes his account of the events of the first part, then turns back to the point of suspension, emphasizing the continuity of the main thread of action:

... en *Ǫgmundr* hjó hann þegar banahogg ... kómu apr til Íslands ok tóku *Eyjafjörð* ... Var *Ǫgmundr* þá með *Glúmi* um vetrinn í góðu yfirlæti. En nú er þar til at taka, at þá er monnum *Hallvarðar* þótti seinkask innkváma hans, gengu þeir út ok fundu hann liggja dauðan í blóði sínu (p. 111).

*Björn M. Ólsen* stated that “nowhere else [other than the exchange of cloaks] do they [the two parts of the story or the two stories] extend over into each other, but rather the one tale begins where the other ends.”<sup>14</sup> I must object that not only does the “second tale” begin before the first is ended (with the exchange of cloaks) or the first extend well into the second, but the author is at pains to resume the main action exactly where it was left. In fact no clear division between the parts can be drawn because of the artistic success of the joining, the perfectly fashioned narrative continuity.

Moreover, the author brings in *Ǫgmundr* again at the end of the þátrr in a reference which is so closely woven into the fabric of the narrative that it must be treated as “original” in an artistic sense:

[King *Óláfr* sends *Sigurðr* with a pardon for *Gunnarr*:] “... vil ek gefa honum upp reiði mína, ef hann vill auðveldliga koma á minn fund, því at ek veit nú, at *gmundr* dytrr hefir drepit *Hallvarð*, en eigi *Gunnarr*” (p. 115).

Thus the hero of the first half is mentioned in a passage deeply organic to the narrative at the end of the story; similarly the king of the second half is invoked at the beginning of the whole þátrr: “Í þenna tíma váru margir menn ok gofgir á Íslandi, þeir er í frændsemistölu váru við *Óláf*

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14. Pp. 413–14.



konung Tryggvason. Einn af þeim var Víga-Glúmr ...” (p. 101). This opening, informal because adapted to its context in *Óláfs saga*, orients the þáttur to the spokesman for the ethically correct in the second part even though the story begins three years before he became king. Its significance is not as an anachronism but as an authorial device to unify the novella; in addition the opening reference to kinship with King Óláfr invests Glúmr with some of the king’s authority.

Structural unity is more difficult to demonstrate briefly; by this term I mean that there is a single canonical, genre-determined structural pattern underlying the plot of *Qgmundar þáttur*. I have argued elsewhere that this simple pattern, comprising six parts (Introduction, Journey In, Alienation, Reconciliation, Journey Out, Conclusion), can be distinguished more or less convincingly as a generic common denominator of some thirty other þættir.<sup>15</sup> A typical story of this type tells how an Icelander voyages to Norway, experiences some kind of estrangement from the king and is reconciled with him, often through the aid of mediators; his voyage home and a conclusion follow. In one subgroup, the generic structural pattern persists in spite of a shift in the persons who fill the “slots,” a shift of dramatis personae, and *Qgmundar þáttur* belongs to this subgroup. This can perhaps be visualized most compactly by comparing the outlines of three þættir:

	<i>Þorsteins þáttur forvitna</i>	<i>Þorgríms þáttur Hallasonar</i>	<i>Qgmundar þáttur</i>	
Introduction:	Þorsteinn	Þorgrímr (also Kolgrímr and others)	Qgmundr	
Journey In:	to Norway	to Norway	to Norway	
				PART
Alienation:	Haraldr harðráði/ Þorsteinn	Kálfr Árnason/ Þorgrímr	Jarl Hákon/ Qgmundr (mediator: Vigfúss)	I
Reconciliation:	Haraldr harðráði/ Þorsteinn	King Magnús/ Kolgrímr	King Óláfr/ Gunnarr (mediator: Sigurðr)	PART II
Journey Out:	to Iceland	to Iceland	[missing]	
Conclusion:	prosperity and fate	prosperity and fate	wedding and future	

15. “Genre and Narrative Structure in Some Íslendinga þættir,” *SS* 44 (1972), 1–27.

The structural variant found in *Qgmundar þáttr* is quite similar to that of *Þorgríms þáttr*; there the titular hero dies and is replaced as protagonist midway through the tale, and the hero is estranged from Kálfr Árnason, the usurping substitute king, but reconciled with the true king Magnús Ólafsson. The comparative outlines make it clear that the author of *Qgmundar þáttr* has managed to impose the generic structure on heterogeneous materials, or to take a more organic view, has selected constituent materials that were compatible with an overall schema that is genre-bound: the inherent logic of the bipartite Alienation/Reconciliation structure answered nicely to the original natural divisions of the *Stoff*, but these dichotomies have been subsumed in the larger unity. In addition the two parts of the plot bear some obvious similarities. In both a young man offends a Norwegian ruler and suffers for this in spite of the efforts of a kinsman: Qgmundr/Hákon/Vigfúss—Gunnarr/Óláfr/Sigurðr. Thus both parts have a cast of characters comparable to the generic pattern but have been integrated as one Alienation/Reconciliation structure.

The third and most significant level of unity, the thematic, will have emerged at least partially from my summary. Both heroes begin by violating ideals of right action; in both parts the older or more responsible relative acts as spokesman for a conventional ethic which is represented definitively in the person of the ruler.

Qgmundr begins to demonstrate his self-will from the time he decides to go abroad with the lukewarm support of Glúmr, and his rashness and blind arrogance are confirmed in the succeeding episodes. First he overrides experienced advice in sailing in to the coast by night; and when some of his men blame him for the resulting accident, Qgmundr returns the callous reply “that everyone must look out for himself.”<sup>16</sup> Jarl Hákon recognizes that only *snápar* (“bumpkins”) would have sailed so recklessly, but Vigfúss, who contrary to Qgmundr’s dictum will consistently try to guard the interests of his kinsman, raises the possibility of compensation. The Jarl agrees but implies that such fools will not be willing to meet the high penalty he will set for the insult, and as predicted Qgmundr returns an arrogant “no” to Vigfúss’ good advice that he settle with the Jarl.

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16. P. 103: “Qgmundr svaraði, at hvárir urðu sín at geyma.” Variant: “Qgmundr segir, at þar yrði hvárir at gæta sín, er komnir væri.”

Hallvarðr himself now comes to Qgmundr and offers a second chance at peaceful settlement, but Qgmundr's self-satisfied replies elicit the hammer blow, and there follow the long recovery, the disgrace, and the mocking nickname of *dyttr* "blow, dint."

The relationship between Vigfúss and Qgmundr is now shifted to a new key. Vigfúss had spoken for a respectable and peaceful settlement of what was, after all, an accident, while Qgmundr's proud overbearing showed how little he valued another's honor and how intoxicated was his estimation of his own strength; but after Hallvarðr's dishonor-dealing blow, Vigfúss whets Qgmundr to revenge, to wipe clean the blotched escutcheon of their family, and charges him with cowardice. Qgmundr now returns what appear to be temporizing and sophistical answers claiming his shame is no greater than Hallvarðr's and refusing to take action. Again Vigfúss has spoken for the prevailing ethic, and Qgmundr has again, though in a different way, demonstrated his false conception of honor. In addition there has been an ironic and apparently craven reversal of Qgmundr's dictum that everyone should look out for himself: the chief reason for forgoing revenge, he says in speeches to Vigfúss and Glúmr, is the danger to his kinsman Vigfúss.

Having returned to Iceland, Qgmundr retains his self-important personality, acting as if he had garnered honor and not dishonor by his voyage; Glúmr is increasingly dissatisfied with him and at last censures him directly for the disgrace he has brought on their house. With his second voyage and revenge, however, Qgmundr earns Glúmr's approval, and the long delay and even the temporizing speech to Vigfúss now appear in a new light.

Gunnarr also begins as an apparently frivolous character though his personality is sketched more briefly. As the result of the exchange of cloaks, he becomes deeply implicated in the slaying of Hallvarðr, first through the loan of his garment and then through his refusal to expose Qgmundr. His words clearly imply his support of Qgmundr,<sup>17</sup> and his refusal to divulge what he knows about the slaying, his outlawry and flight to the wilderness proceed from his gratitude to the Icelander—and all for a particolored cloak! King Óláfr's surprise

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17. P. 110: "‘Gef þú manna heilstr,’ segir Gunnarr, ‘ok vilda ek geta launat þér þessa gjöf; en hekl þessa skaltu fyrst hafa; má vera, at þér verði at henni gagn.’”

upon hearing of the slaying evidently implies that the king did not think Gunnarr had such a deed in him: “Konungr svarar: ‘Hann mynda ek eigi í heldra lagi til kjósa ...’” (p. 111); and his suspicion that Gunnarr is behind the vigorous Swedish “Freyr” bespeaks the king’s estimate of the lightness of his character: he would trust such a *Schwank* to Gunnarr but not a hard-minded killing.

Other characteristics shared by the two heroes are their nicknames and their taste in clothing. The þátrr had clearly explained Ögmundr’s nickname (p. 106), and when the heroes meet their nicknames are carefully juxtaposed to help create an association between the two:

Heklumaðrinn gekk ofan á bryggjurnar ok spurði, hvern fyrir bátinum réði. Ögmundr sagði til sín. Bøjarmaðrinn mælti: “Ert þú Ögmundr dytrr?” “Kalla svá sumir menn,” segir hann, “eða hvat heitir þú?” Hann svarar: “Ek heiti Gunnarr helmingr; en ek em því svá kallaðr, at mér þykkir gaman at hafa háflit klæði” (p. 109).

There is more than accidental affinity between these two men whose nicknames apparently convey a sense of their low esteem by society at large, for nicknames bear a considerable burden of characterization in the saga literature, and the names here as so frequently are *sannnofn* or “true names.”<sup>18</sup>

Both parts of the story, then, may be said to deal with the theme of identity and to portray developing characters whose allegiance to ethical norms is vindicated in the end. Ögmundr’s divided ancestry includes his father Hrafn, a former slave of Glúmr’s family, and a free-

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18. The nickname *dytrr* is found elsewhere and clearly means “blow” (OE *dynt*, NE *dint*). E. H. Lind, *Norsk-isländska personbinamn från medeltiden* (Uppsala, 1921), s.v. *dytrr* connects it also with New Norwegian *dynt* “conceited, lazy, affected person” and suggests it may have some of these overtones; *helmingr* is attested only here as a nickname. But E. H. Lind, *Norsk-isländska dopnamn ock fingerade namn från medeltiden* (Uppsala, 1905–15), s.v. *Helmingr* instances it once as an Icelandic proper name (in one attestation perhaps taken for a nickname: “Thorstanus helming”). The derogatory sense of *helmingr* is obviously less secure than that of *dytrr*, depending on the parallel with *dytrr*, the whole context as here interpreted, the generally unflattering associations of the idea “half,” and especially the fact that very many nicknames are derogatory (e.g. *brúga*); but see further *tvískiptingr*, etc. in n. 21 below. Nicknames are one of the most common characterizing devices in the saga literature and in this, of course, reflected real life; cf. Finnur Jónsson, *Tilnavne i den islandske oldlitteratur* (Copenhagen, 1908) or in *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie*, 1907, pp. 162–369. Some passages which parallel the quoted exchange of Ögmundr and Gunnarr are:

born mother related to Glúmr; thus the identity crisis in Ögmundur's case is formulated as the question whether he belongs to the noble or the ignoble line. Glúmr, whose judgments reflect the conservative ethos of the first part of the þáttur, cautions Ögmundur before his first voyage to seek honor above wealth:

“... nú þætti mér miklu skipta, at þú fengir heldr af þorinni sœmð ok mannvirðing en mikit fé, ef eigi er hvárstveggja kostur” (p. 102).

But the result of the voyage is Ögmundur's *dishonor* with *increase* of wealth (“he had made great profits on this trip”), and this mean ability to make money links Ögmundur to his freedman father, a “rich man” (p. 101). When Glúmr finally banishes Ögmundur from his sight,

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... Grettir gekk fyrir konunginn ok kvaddi hann vel. Konungr leit við honum ok mælti: “Ertu Grettir inn sterki?” Hann svarar: “Kallaðr hefi ek svá verit ...” (*Grettis saga*, ch. 39; *ÍF* 7: 132).

Konungr svaraði: “Ertu kallaðr Gjafa-Refr?” Hann svaraði: “Þegit hefi ek gjafir at mönnum ok þó enn gefit stundum” (*Gautreks saga*, ch. 10; ed. Wilhelm Ranisch, Palaestra XI [Berlin, 1900]).

Especially interesting is *Hróa þáttur* (*Flat.* II, 73–80) where the hero's changing fortunes are mirrored in his nicknames (spelling altered):

“Hverr ertu?” “Hrói heitir ek,” segir hann. Konungr spurði, “Ertu ófara-Hrói?” Hann svarar, “Annars væri mér meir þörf af yðr at þiggja en slík skjótyrði” ... Var hann þá kallaðr Hrói hinn auðgi eðr Hrói hinn þrúði ... “Hverr ertu?” “Ek heiti Hrói,” segir hann. “Ertu Hrói hinn heimski?” segir hon. Hann svarar, “Ek ætla þat nú vera ærit mikit sann-nefni, en átt hefi ek æðri nöfn fyrr; eðr hvert er þitt nafn?” ... ok var hann nú kallaðr Hrói hinn spaki.

In this connection note that *dyttr* and *helmingr* also have a possible *in bono* interpretation: a “dint” is received but later also given; “half” is unflattering, but in poetry the word can mean “a host, an army.” Hallvarðr also has a nickname, and the þáttur characterizes him as a formidable opponent partly by explaining it:

“Hann er nú kallaðr Hallvarðr háls, því at hann var í Jómsvíkingabardaga í fyrra vetr með Hákonni jarli ok fekk þar sár mikit á hálsinn fyrir aptan eyrat, ok berr hann síðan hallt hofuðit” (p. 111).

(A closely comparable nickname is attached to the historical Erlingr Kyrpinga-Ormsson in *Orkneyinga saga* [*ÍF* 34: 225]:

Erlingr fekk þar sár mikit á hálsinn við herðarnar, er hann hljóp upp í drómundinn. Þat greri svá illa, at hann bar jafnan hallt hofuðit síðan; var hann skakkr kallaðr.

Erlingr skakkr had a brother *Ögmundur drengr*, and there are narrative similarities with the motifs of the feud in *Orkneyinga saga*, ch. 61 involving Hávarðr, Brynjólfur, and *Hallvarðr*. Presumably accident and a shared stylistic grammar account for these similarities.)

the young man moves in with his father—an action with obvious symbolic significance.<sup>19</sup>

In his reproaches to Ögmundur, Vigfúss clearly articulates the dangerous ambiguity of Ögmundur’s heritage:

“... ætla ek þér heldr ganga til þess hugleysi en varhygð, ok er illt at fylgja þeim manni, er hera hjarta hefir í brjósti; er þat ok líkast, at þér bregði meir í þræla ættina en Þveræinga” (p. 107).<sup>20</sup>

Later Glúmr echoes Vigfúss’ speech almost point for point, and his peroration, resembling that of Vigfúss and similarly reinforced with a proverb, sets out clearly the ambiguity and therewith Ögmundur’s choice:

“Nú er þat annathvært, at þú ert frá því þróttigr ok þolinn sem flestir menn aðrir, ok muntu sýna af þér karlmennsku, þó at síðar sé, því at í annan stað værir þú eigi svá bleyðimannligr í bragði; ella ert þú með öllu ónýtr, ok verðr þat þá ríkara, sem verr gegnir, at opt verðr ódrjúg til drengskaparins in ófrjálsa ættin; en ekki vil ek þik lengr hafa með mér” (p. 108).

This speech, however, contains a new possibility beyond what Vigfúss had recognized: that Ögmundur is biding his time and that though

19. Relatively little social value was placed on a freedman, and in the literature they tend to have the unaristocratic traits of wealth through money saved (rather than inherited) and lack of courage; freedmen were often presented as trying to marry into the established families, and if they were successful the woman was said to be *gipt til penninga* “married for money” like Ögmundur’s mother in the *Vatnshyrna* text. For example, in *Valla-Ljóts saga*, ch. 1 (ÍF 9: 234–36), Torfi, a rich man of undistinguished family asks for the hand of a widowed aristocrat, promising to make up for the social difference with money. Two of her sons agree, but the third objects: “... mjök horfir til lítillar mannvirðingar; slík maðr er ósýnn til fullræðis. Vil ek ekki samþykki þar til gefa at gefa móður mína gofga lausingjanum eptir gofugt gjaford.” The affair ends in the death of the social climber. On the other hand, the freedman Skíði in *Svarfæla saga* (ÍF 9) successfully marries nobly and proves himself respectable by avenging an old injury—a development anticipated from the time we learn near the beginning of Skíði’s story that “Skíði bar þræls nafn; eigi bar hann þat nafn af því, at hann hefði til þess ætt eðr eðli; hann var manna mestr ok friðastr” (p. 163).

20. The theme of being true or untrue to one’s family is often found expressed in similar words; cf. *Porgils saga ok Hafliða*, ed. Ursula Brown (Oxford, 1952), p. 5 (l. 12): “ór sini ætt,” p. 9 (l. 14): “segjask ór sini ætt,” and notes pp. 58 and 63; *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 65 (ÍF 5: 193–94): “kváðu hann meir hafa sagzk í ætt Þorbjarnar skrjúps en Mýrkjartans Írakonungs”; *Odds þáttur Ófeigssonar* (ÍF 7: 372, with n. 3): “segisk í ætt”; *Víga-Glúms saga* (ÍF 9: 19): “vilda ek þess at bíða, er þú færðir þik með skörungsskap í þína ætt”; “ok þœtti mér þú nú eiga at vera brjóst fyrir oss ok segjask svá í góða ætt” (p. 21).

tardy he will prove to be a Þveræingr after all—something we may have suspected already from Ögmundr’s unshaken self-confidence in the face of disgrace.

Ögmundr’s revenge is as circumspect as his patience has led us to expect it would be. He carefully arranges his escape and even endures the jeers of his crew in order to carry out his mission perfectly; though not executed with heroic abandon, his revenge reclaims his honor and Glúmr’s respect and shows Ögmundr’s true colors:

För Ögmundr á fund Víga-Glúms ok sagði honum sína ferð, kvað þá hefndina komna fram, þó at frestin væri löng. Glúmr lét þá vel yfir, kallaði þat ok verit hafa sitt hugboð, at hann myndi verða nýtr maðr um síðir. Var Ögmundr þá með Glúmi um vetrinn í góðu yfirlæti (p. 111).

The þáttur expends less detail on a thematically similar problem in the second half. Gunnarr is established as a rash and impulsive character, apparently a fop, and his unflattering nickname “half,” along with the symbolism of his two-toned clothing, suggests a potential ambiguity of character.<sup>21</sup> As the story draws to a close the question of identity is clarified in terms of Christianity: Is Gunnarr an irresponsible rascal

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21. That clothing frequently serves as a signal to the saga reader is commonplace; for example, the social implications of red or green clothing (especially proud and aristocratic persons who have traveled) or the more usual blue cloak (leaders dressed for a special occasion such as a journey or a killing) are well known. Many examples are collected in Valtýr Guðmundsson, “Litklæði,” *ANF* 9 (1893), 171–98. Also see Karl Weinhold, *Altnordisches Leben* (Berlin, 1856), pp. 161–62 and G. I. Hughes, “A Possible Saga Convention,” *ESA* 12 (1969), 167–73. Instances of less conventional and more subtly symbolic dress occur in *Hreiðars þáttur heimiska* (*ÍF* 10: 248–60), where Hreiðarr’s rough and common Icelandic clothing objectifies aspects of the hero’s integrity and shy simplicity, and in *Svarfðœla saga* (*ÍF* 9: 131–32), where the ex-coalbiter and strongman Þorsteinn Þorgnýsson refuses an elaborate mantle of scarlet cloth and fur and a sword (the weapon of a cavalier) for a plain *loðkápa* and *bolox*; Grímr in *Gull-Þóris saga* (ed. Kr. Kálund [Copenhagen, 1898], p. 21) is a similar character in similar clothing, and Gunnlaugr ormstunga’s appearance before the Norwegian king in homespun is an “objective correlative” of his obstinate provincial pride (*ÍF* 3: 68). Two-toned clothing is mentioned fairly often; see the general treatment and references in Weinhold, p. 162, Guðmundsson, pp. 173–74, Hjalmar Falk, *Altwestnordische Kleiderkunde* (Kristiania, 1919), pp. 81–83 and 155, and Cleasby-Vigfússon, s.v. *tví-* and *hálfskiptr*, *tví-* and *háflitr* (*litaðr*). In general particolored clothing seems to be presented as distinctive, often grand, and the symbolic implications in *Ögmundar þáttur* are not as conventional as the opposition between Icelandic homespun and royal purple. But cf. the derogatory meanings of *hálftr* and its many compounds, the meanings and especially extended meanings of *tví-* (e.g., *tvídrægr* “ambiguous,” *tvíræði* “ambiguity,” *tvískipta*

and a renegade Christian? King Óláfr’s main concern, having solved the killing of Hallvarðr, is the state of Gunnarr’s soul:

“Nú vil ek senda þik [Sigurð] austr þangat eptir honum, því at þat er herfiligt at vita, ef kristins manns sála skal svá sárliga fyrirfarask” (p. 115).

Like Ógmundur, Gunnarr returned home with gold; but as with Glúmr’s heroic code in the first part, allegiance to the Christian ethic of Óláfr is far more important, and the þátrr’s last sentence puts Gunnarr’s adventures in the proper perspective: “Tók hann Gunnarr aþr í sætt við sik, en lét skíra konu hans, ok heldu þau síðan rétta trú” (p. 115).

The central episodes of Gunnarr’s part of the þátrr, his dealings with Freyr and the Freyr worshipers, also deal with the question of identity, but I do not believe with Helga Reuschel that, in the context of the story as a whole, it is a question of who is Freyr?<sup>22</sup> Rather it is Gunnarr’s ambiguous relation to Christianity (especially in the person of Óláfr) and paganism that is at issue—a question of who is Gunnarr?

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“to divide into two parts, to waver,” *tvískiptiligr*, *tvískiptr* “divided, uncertain,” *tvíslægr* “ambiguous,” *tvísýni* “uncertainty, doubt”) and *tvískiptingr* “a changeling, idiot,” used at least once as a nickname. External evidence to support the interpretation in *Ógmundar þátrr* may be seen in the Icelandic episcopal bans of the years 1269 and 1345 against priests wearing particolored clothing (“prestar skulu eigi bera rauð klæði, gul eða grøn eða hálfskipt eða rend útan í vási,” *DI*, II, 25.31; Falk, p. 82) and in the fact that among the forbidden garments are “klæði *helmingaskipt*, klæði í *helmingum*” (*DI*, II, 25.31; Falk, p. 81; my italics); cf. the similar Norwegian prohibitions of 1299 and 1319 addressed to the general public (*NgL*, III, 110 and 116; Falk, p. 82) and to the clergy (*NgL*, III, 303; Falk, p. 82) and the Danish statute of 1283: “statutum est, ut nullus portet vestes in minutas partes incisas, sed integras *vel saltem bipartitas* (in the ODan translation “eller tweskiffæ”; Falk, p. 82). Cf. further the symbolism of particolored women’s clothing as explained by Werner Danckert, *Unehrlíche Leute: Die verfehten Berufe* (Bern and Munich, 1963), pp. 159–61 and on the whole subject Vincent Lunin, *Kleid und Verkleidung*, *Studiorum Romanicorum Collectio Turicensis*, VII (Bern, 1954).

22. Contrary to Reuschel’s analysis, Gunnarr’s adventures (still less the þátrr as a whole) are not concerned with the question “Ist der Teufel Freyr? Wer ist der Gott? Oder, auf die kürzeste Formel gebracht: Wer ist Wer?” Reuschel puzzles over the fact that this question is not answered by the story: “Auf die Frage, die hier gestellt wird, gibt allerdings die ... Geschichte keine innerlich notwendige, wirklich lösende Antwort ... Die Lösung ist also ganz anders, als man von der Frage her erwarten konnte” (p. 161). But it is clear from the Christian demonistic-euhemeristic point of view that real evil powers are behind the pagan gods; there was never any question of denying the existence of the gods, and Freyr, like Vǫlsi, is absurd but real. Thus the question of identity is not asked in the form Reuschel puts it, and the lack of an answer in the þátrr comes as no surprise.



The strongly marked peripeteia comes when Gunnarr, almost beaten by the devil-animated idol and at his nadir, thinks on Christianity and King Óláfr:

“... hugsar hann þá fyrir sér, ef hann getr yfirkomit þenna fjánda ok verði honum auðit at koma aptr til Nóregs, at hann skal hverfa aptr til réttar trúar ok sættask við Óláf konung, ef hann vill við honum taka. Ok þegar eptir þessa hugsan tekr Freyr at hrata fyrir honum... (pp. 113–14).

Gunnarr is not conceived of as a pagan, as Krappe has it,<sup>23</sup> but as an insecure or even lapsed Christian; in this moment he begins the defeat and ridicule of paganism that ends with his complete return to the fold, proven a loyal Christian and true subject of Óláfr.

The sharply realized scenes of the exchange of cloaks on the deserted docks of Niðarholm and the early morning killing and escape seem invested with a superliteral quality, and far from being the “weak thread” of the story these scenes are its strong central knot. The author brings together in an adventitious meeting two men in particolored cloaks; after that meeting and exchange, Ögmundr kills Hallvarðr and, as he is escaping, weights the borrowed hood with a stone and sinks it in the bay. Hasty readers may experience this as a blind motif like the ruse of the overturned boat in *Fóstbræðra saga* or *Arons saga Hjörleifssonar*, but its realistic purpose is to make more plausible the killer’s escape by disposing of the incriminating disguise. However, in context it seems also to be a symbolic action. Ögmundr has just attained his revenge and thus proven himself a true kinsman of Glúmr; his casting off the particolored cloak suggests a determination to have done with his earlier ambivalent status and put on the new man—a burying of the past comparable to the killing of Freyfaxi in *Hrafnkels saga*.

In the case of Gunnarr, particolored clothing helps to establish his personality and association with Ögmundr at the beginning of the second section. But the imagery of disguise continues to cling to Gunnarr; he travels to Sweden “allt hulðu höfði” or incognito. He hides his true identity at Freyr’s shrine by claiming to be “a lone wayfarer, of low station

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23. Krappe, p. 226.

and a foreigner,” though the priestess partially sees through this pose: “... þú ert maðr félauss, ok kann þó vera, at þú sér góðra manna ...” (p. 112). Later he dons the idol’s attire, beginning his masquerade as the god, and here the þátrr consistently speaks of Gunnarr as “Freyr”; his mumming enjoys great success: the crops flourish, offerings of gold and silver to the god (i.e. to Gunnarr) increase, the priestess becomes pregnant, even the weather improves. No symbolic casting off of Freyr’s attire comparable to Ogmundr’s disposal of the hooded capelet is made explicit, but Gunnarr and his party escape secretly by night to King Óláfr and the True Faith, presumably not still clothed as Freyr. Clothes do not make the man, but with Teufelsdröckhian logic they both reveal and conceal character.

### Literary Relations

Despite the judgment of an earlier editor that the influence of *Víga-Glúms saga* on later writing cannot be demonstrated,<sup>24</sup> it is Jónas Kristjánsson’s opinion that such influence is present in *Ogmundar þátrr* (as well as in *Porvalds þátrr tasalda*) though he instances as borrowings only “the names of Glúmr’s relatives at the þátrr’s opening.”<sup>25</sup> A more detailed comparison between the saga and the þátrr will support Jónas Kristjánsson’s general contention. The author of *Ogmundar þátrr* places the otherwise unattested characters of the first part of his tale, Ogmundr and his father Hrafn, against the background of the well-known family of Glúmr, mentioning Eyjólfur hrúga and Ástríðr, father and mother of Glúmr, Vigfúss hersir, the Norwegian nobleman who was Glúmr’s maternal grandfather, and Vigfúss Glúmsson—a genealogy that was widely known and need not have come from a written *Víga-Glúms saga*.<sup>26</sup> However, the main text of the þátrr also gives some non-functional information about other relatives of Glúmr:

Helga hét systir Víga-Glúms; hon var gipt Steingrími í Siglúvík.  
Porvaldr hét sonr þeira, er kallaðr var tasaldi (p. 101).

24. G. Turville-Petre, ed., *Víga-Glúms saga*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1960), pp. XIX–XX.

25. P. LVI.

26. However, cf. *ÍF* 9: 8, n. 2 on the distribution of the nickname *hrúga* with its clear reference to events told in *Glúma*.

These extraneous facts—whether original or interpolated—can most plausibly be explained as derived from *Víga-Glúms saga* where Helga, Steingrímur, and Þorvaldr are introduced to the saga twice in very similar words.<sup>27</sup>

Most of the placenames associated with the historical characters were well known; but *Pverbrekka*, Glúmr's home in old age, is not mentioned in *Landnámabók*, and again it seems likely that the þátrr drew this information from the saga. The residence of Hrafn, Qgmundur's father, in *Skagafjörður* (variant: *vestr í Heraði*) seems to be fictional or to depend on traditions not recorded elsewhere, and the þátrr plausibly has him married to an unnamed woman of the *Guðdœlaætt*, a well-known family of early settlers named for a district in upper Skagafjörður. All this information is without foundation in *Glúma* or elsewhere, and Glúmr's relationship to the Guðdœlaætt seems to be an invention of the author of the þátrr.

The þátrr opens with a reference to Glúmr's kinship with Óláfr Tryggvason—information which might have been drawn from *Glúma* (p. 13) but which is also in *Landnámabók* and elsewhere, including the *Óláfs saga* in which *Qgmundar þátrr* is preserved. The story is set carefully in the period just before and after Óláfr came to the throne and fits well into the time scheme of Glúmr's life after his removal to Pverbrekka about 989. The association of Vigfúss Glúmsson with Jarl Hákon, not mentioned in *Landnámabók*, is brought into the saga<sup>28</sup> but was also available in *Óláfs saga*; Vigfúss' role and character in the þátrr answer very well to this information and to the general picture of him in the saga. The genealogical evidence, then, is not conclusive but does include items of information that could only derive from *Glúma* or some similar lost oral or written tradition. I believe that a further consideration of the literary relationship between *Qgmundar þátrr* and *Glúma* will support the idea of direct influence though it can never be proven conclusively.

The early parts of *Glúma*, like those of the þátrr, concern initiation and family pride. The parallel adventures of Eyjólfur and Glúmr in

27. "Glúmr hét inn yngsti sonr þeira, en Helga dóttir. Hon var gípt Steingrími í Sigluvík. Þeira sonr var Þorvaldr tasaldi ..." (p. 14); "Helga, systir Glúms, er átt hafði Steingrímur í Sigluvík ... Hon var móðir Þorvalds tasalda ..." (p. 72).

28. P. 57, *Vatnsbýrna* text: "Nú gerisk Vigfúss farmaðr ok var hirðmaðr Hákonar jarls ok Eiríks, sonar hans, ok inn kærsti vinr"; *Möðruvallabók* text: "En Vigfúss var farmaðr mikill."

Norway are rites of passage into manhood; and Eyjólfur’s nickname *hrúga* (“heap” or “lump”) is initially given, like Ógmundur’s sobriquet and probably Gunnarr’s, in scorn. Eyjólfur and Glúmr, and at last also Ógmundur, prove themselves through deeds in Norway; and Eyjólfur, Glúmr, and in the end also Ógmundur return from their Norwegian adventures with both honor and wealth (cf. Glúmr’s warning quoted above to get honor above wealth—if not both). Both Eyjólfur and Glúmr are distinguished for their patience, but this parallel between Glúmr and Ógmundur is especially close since both of them delayed revenge so long that they incurred the reproach of a relative—a reproach that reflects on the hero’s relation to his family (with some distant verbal parallels in notes 19–20 above). Like Ógmundur, Glúmr—another “slow developer”—has to prove he is worthy of his family, and in both cases the more immediately noble family link is traced through the mother: Vigfúss hersir, the maternal grandfather, withholds approval, then accepts Glúmr; Glúmr the patriarch, a relative on the mother’s side, disapproves, then accepts Ógmundur. *Glúma* itself arranges these events in a slightly jarring way since Glúmr’s return to Iceland with honor and familial approval from Norway only leads to another period of lassitude until at last the tardy hero asserts himself a second time, and of course the parallel with *Ógmundar þáttur* is not a minute one.

A number of specific motifs in *Ógmundar þáttur* might have been inspired by *Glúma*. Vigfúss hersir gives the young Glúmr a sword, a spear, and a cloak, and these become psychological symbols, the outward signs of his *gæfa* or “luck.” The cloaks in *Ógmundar þáttur* also seem to have a symbolic dimension though here the signification is, roughly speaking, reversed. Glúmr’s cloak is prominent in his first killing in Iceland (p. 28) where Glúmr disguises his motives with a request that his mantle be mended, and Vigfúss Glúmsson comes disguised in a *skinnkufl* (hooded leather cape) to Glúmr’s aid in chapter 23. In chapter 16, Víga-Skúta makes his appearance in a “vesl ... tvískipt, svart ok hvítt” (two-toned cloak of black and white), and he uses this cloak reversed as a disguise when Glúmr comes searching for him with reinforcements. This cloak seems to correspond to Skúta’s tricky nature and thus resembles both sartorially and symbolically Ógmundur’s “feld ... vel litan er tvískiptur er” (mantle with good coloring since it is two-toned) and the “háflit klæði” (particolored clothing) beloved of Gunnarr. Again in the

“Víga-Skútu þátrr,” Glúmr made his escape in part by throwing his cape into a river; if this incident gave a hint for the connection of Qgmundr’s escape with his sinking the borrowed cape, it has undergone a complete seachange.<sup>29</sup>

Finally, *Glúma* portrays two slayings in which blame first falls upon innocent men but which at last are revealed as the work of Glúmr. The slaying of Þorvaldr krókr is foisted off upon the young Guðbrandr Þorvarðsson, and after he is declared an outlaw, Glúmr helps him flee the country (ch. 23). And in chapter 14, Ingólfr flees with Glúmr’s aid bearing the blame for the killing of Hlǫðu-Kálfr; however, Glúmr admits the truth, and Ingólfr returns from exile to marry his Icelandic sweetheart (ch. 15). Both of these episodes of displaced responsibility and ultimate revelation resemble the events of the second part of *Qgmundar þátrr*, though the parallels with the Ingólfr incident are the more extensive (secret slaying—shifted responsibility—flight into exile—revelation of the truth—return from exile—wedding).<sup>30</sup>

Thus the “hard” evidence of the genealogies and the Pveræingr background of *Qgmundar þátrr* suggests (if it does not prove) that the author knew *Víga-Glúms saga*, and a consideration of parts of the respective plots and of certain motifs and literary devices deepens the impression of the saga’s influence on the þátrr. If we step back and view the overall contours of the two works, another kind of similarity, not manifested in details, appears. The events of *Víga-Glúmr’s saga* generally fall into two parts associated with the hero’s youth and rise to power and his maturity, fall from power, and old age. Moreover, both parts seem to be marked by a peripeteia which is psychological

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29. The events of ch. 16, the “Víga-Skútu þátrr,” are also present in ch. 26 of *Reykðæla saga* (ÍF 10: 231–36). Both Skúta and Qgmundr employ a *tvískipt*r cloak as a disguise, but a peculiarity of the passage in “Skútu þátrr” is that *tvískipt*r seems to mean “having two different colors, one inside and one out” rather than “divided into two differently colored parts,” that is reversible instead of particolored (cf. ÍF 10: 233, n. 1). Skúta’s ploy resembles more closely the device whereby Þormóðr Kolbrúnarskáld escapes after a killing in ch. 23 of *Fóstbræðra saga* (ÍF 6: 231–34): wearing a *feld tvíloðinn* (not a cloak of doubly thick fur, as Cleasby-Vigfússon have it, but a reversible fur cloak) with the black side out, he approached and killed Þorgrímr, then made his escape by reversing it to the white side and pretending to be searching for the killer.

30. However, the motif of transferred blame is found together with a cloak-reversal trick in *Fóstbræðra saga* (where Fífl-Egill temporarily diverts suspicion from Þormóðr; cf. n. 29 above); cf. also *Gísla saga* (the death of Þórðr inn huglausi).

though chiefly reflected in external events: the early part concerning a crisis of long-delayed revenge and family pride has already been discussed; the latter part seems to have as its underlying plot another “conversion,” a conversion from Freyr worship to the aristocratic, “atheistic” Óðinn cult and the resulting loss of the hero’s land.<sup>31</sup>

Anne Holtsmark’s theory that the historical Glúmr became an Óðinn worshiper (though this is only imperfectly communicated by the extant saga) seems likely enough, but the saga-writer himself may rather have viewed the religious conflict in the light of that frequent saga figure, the atheistic “might and main man.” Already in middle life Glúmr lists his three *fulltrúar* (things in which one trusts) as his purse, his axe, and his blockhouse, and his “conversion” is perhaps as aptly compared with that of Hrafnkell Freysgoði, who ceased to believe in gods, as with that of Egill Skalla-Grímsson, who evidently became an Óðinn worshiper. The godlessmen are connected both with Odinism and with the virtuous pagan or proto-Christian and were often converted to Christianity in literary sources; in the end, of course, Glúmr became a Christian and died in white.<sup>32</sup> In any case, the second half of *Qgmundar þáttr* also (and much more explicitly) features a religious conflict in which the hero turns against Freyr and cynically makes a mockery of an aspect of Freyr worship, as Glúmr apparently does with his equivocal oath. Gunnarr’s situation was, of course, very different from Glúmr’s, but both works portray Freyr as personally inimical to the hero (*ÍF* 9: 88 and 112–13). In *Glúma* the underlying religious conflict is thought to be between the Freyr worship of Glúmr’s *father’s* family and the cynical Odinism of his *mother’s* side; perhaps it is worth repeating that the first part of *Qgmundar þáttr* contrasts the father’s with the mother’s family (though in ethical, not religious terms) and that the hero decides for the maternal tradition.

*Glúma*, then, seems to be a direct source of the þáttr though the qualities that have led literary historians to comment on the duality rather than the unity of *Qgmundar þáttr* distinguish it clearly from the

31. Turville-Petre, *Víga-Glúms saga*, pp. xii–xv, cf. p. xxxi; “The Cult of Freyr in the Evening of Paganism,” *Proceedings of the Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society*, Lit. & Hist. Sect., III: 6 (1935), 330–33; Anne Holtsmark, “Vitazgjafi,” *MM*, 1933, pp. 111–33; Magnus Olsen, “Þundarbenda,” *MM*, 1934, pp. 92–97.

32. G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, pp. 263–68 and references at p. 328. Lars Lönnroth, “The Noble Heathen: A Theme in the Sagas,” *SS* 41 (1969), 16–17 remarks on similarities between the pagan atheist and the proto-Christian in the sagas.

simpler biographical pattern of *Glúma*. However, significant literary relations need not all be genetic, and from the point of view of its “bipartite unity” *Ögmundar þáttur* resembles more closely two other þættir and a saga. *Svaða þáttur ok Arnórs kerlinganefs* is a single short story composed of two distinct episodes which are held together by a thematic unity and ordered by the rhetoric of parallelism and contrast.<sup>33</sup> In the first episode, Svaði, a heathen, reacts to the great famine of 975 by forcing a group of paupers to dig their own grave; he fully intends to kill them off but is thwarted by Þorvarðr the Christian, who frees the beggars, and by an act of God: Svaði is killed in a fall from his horse and buried in the grave he had meant for the beggars. (Cf. Eccl. 10: 8: He who digs a pit will fall into it.) In the second episode, Arnórr kerlinganef reacts to the hard times by bravely opposing a decision of his district council to expose and refuse to feed the old and the lame during the famine. Arnórr, though a heathen, has intuitions of the coming Christianity, and his sermon to the farmers’ assembly persuades them to reverse their inhuman decision. The þáttur as a whole is a balanced contrast of a “bad” and a “good” heathen, Svaði and Arnórr, showing their contrasting reactions in similar situations and leaving no doubt of the ethical superiority of the latter. In addition, within both episodes Christian or proto-Christian conduct is contrasted with that of unreconstructed heathens, and in both the heathens’ action (Svaði’s and the farmers’) is corrected by a Christian or proto-Christian (Þorvarðr and Arnórr). The first episode shows, further, the reward that an arch-heathen like Svaði can expect, and in the second is implicit the Christian mirror image of this reward.

*Svaða þáttur ok Arnórs kerlinganefs* is thus a unified short story though its titular heroes are related only by contrast and are never expressly compared. In addition the story has a certain unity of place and time, and one character, Þorvarðr the Christian, appears in both episodes. More important though is the unity the þáttur draws from the treatment of one theme in a bipartite narrative structured by parallelism and contrast.

*Þórhalls þáttur knapps* is organized in the same fashion.<sup>34</sup> In the first part, Þórhallr, who suffers from leprosy and is a heathen of good

33. *Flat.*, I, 435–39.

34. *Flat.*, I, 439–41.

will, has a dream vision in which a bright rider (Óláfr Tryggvason) appears to instruct him to demolish the local heathen temple, build a church with its wood, and accept the new faith when it is preached in Iceland. In the second part, Þórhildr, a heathen woman versed in black arts, has a dream in which she learns of Þórhallr’s plan to tear down the temple. When she awakens, she commands her men to bring in all the livestock since any living thing in the fields will be killed by the enraged gods as they leave the district to seek a new home.

*Þórhalls þáttr* possesses more natural unity than *Svaða þáttr* since Þórhildr is a close neighbor of Þórhallr and is placed in direct connection with his dream and his actions; and the þáttr closes with a short account of how Þórhallr did, in fact, become a good Christian. Nevertheless, the similarity of organization between *Þórhalls þáttr* and *Svaða þáttr* is clear; both comprise two parallel episodes in which proto-Christian conduct is contrasted with heathen conduct; in both the good are rewarded (Þórhallr is healed and prospers) and the evil punished (Þórhildr loses a horse in the exodus of the gods); in both stories the events of the Christian part are the mirror image of those in the heathen part (Svaði wants to exterminate paupers while Arnórr wants to preserve the old and the weak; Þórhallr dreams of the advent of Christ, Þórhildr of the departure of the gods). The organization of *Þórhalls þáttr* is not purely thematic, but the treatment of its didactic theme in terms of parallels and contrasts makes it structurally very similar to *Svaða þáttr*.

Though it may seem an unlikely leap from these humble þættir to *Njáls saga*, we find there a similar kind of symmetry; and as with *Qgmundar þáttr*, the early scholarship tended to insist upon the discrete origins and early independent existence of a “Gunnars saga” and a “Njáls saga.” It is no longer necessary to argue the unity of *Njála*; but it is worth repeating that when outlined according to its narrative structure, the saga clearly emerges as a bipartite construction, two feud sagas in sequence.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the narrative connections between parts are, *mutatis mutandis* and given the

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35. T. M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), pp. 291–307. See also Richard F. Allen, *Fire and Iron: Critical Approaches to Njáls Saga* (Pittsburgh, 1971), pp. 26, 76–77, 116–17, 120, etc.; it should be clear that I agree on many points with Allen’s admirable interpretation of *Njála*.



different scale of the works, hardly greater than bind the parts of the three þættir.

These four works of different magnitude share a kind of unity that depends in part on theme or the structure of ideas, and it is noticeable that all these bipartite works contrast the pagan or “heroic” ethic with the Christian. *Svaða þáttr* and *Þórhalls þáttr* present the contrast in sharp chiaroscuro though the sheer symmetry of their conception is likely to satisfy esthetically in spite of their lack of subtlety. But *Ögmundar þáttr* resembles *Njála* more closely in its more complex and sympathetic portrayal of the pre-Christian ethic. Ögmundr’s story, set in preconversion times and partly in the realm of the last great pagan ruler of Norway, seems at first sight an ideal fable of a shame-honor (or “heroic”) society dominated by family pride and the revenge ethic. Gunnarr helmingr’s adventures, though taking place only three years after the beginning of the þáttr, seem to move through another world. Kinship, shame, and honor are here reinterpreted in a Christian sense; King Óláfr and Christianity come to constitute the absolute good which the hero must prove worthy of, and salvation replaces reputation as the supreme value. The first part shows the testing, apparent failure, and final success of a young man in pre-Christian “heroic” times, the second part, in the post-conversion period; yet the work as a whole, coming from the thirteenth century, must reflect its view of the values of the “heroic” and early Christian periods.

A similar pattern manifests itself in *Njála*. Gunnarr’s life, set in pre-Christian times, is worked out in terms of a heroic ethic: Gunnarr is a martial man of honor who, through fate, the envy of lesser men, and a certain strain of hubris, loses his life fighting against odds. To some extent the structure of Njáll’s story is a replication of that of Gunnarr (as, to some extent, the second part of *Ögmundar þáttr* replicates the first), but Njáll’s fall takes place in Christian times with the attendant deeper meaning of action. Not fate but providence and not the comforts of earthly honor but a larger hope attend on the martyrdom at Bergþórshváll. Adopting Northrop Frye’s simple and satisfying definitions, we may contrast the saga and the þáttr in terms of tragedy and comedy: as Ögmundr’s and Gunnarr helmingr’s stories confirm the heroic and the Christian codes through comedy, the integration of the hero into society, so

*Njála* ratifies them through tragedy, the isolation of the hero in death.<sup>36</sup>

J. R. R. Tolkien's brilliant judgment of the structure of *Beowulf* was that "it is essentially a balance, an opposition of ends and beginnings. In its simplest terms it is a contrasted description of two moments in a great life, rising and setting; an elaboration of the ancient and intensely moving contrast between youth and age, first achievement and final death."<sup>37</sup> This conception of narrative structure, mirroring a Coleridgean "balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities," is admirably suggestive but perhaps overly static for the dynamic work it is intended to describe. In the case of *Qgmundar þáttr* and *Njála* the two parts seem to stand in a dialectical relationship, with the Christian comedy of *Qgmundar þáttr* and the Christian tragedy of *Njála* not contradicting or invalidating but superseding the non-Christian parts by virtue of their position in Christian history and the greater burden of meaning attached to their actions.

### Unity Again

Of the three aspects of unity I have discussed in *Qgmundar þáttr*—the unity of narrative continuity, the unity of generic structure, and thematic unity—the second is relatively unexplored and perhaps will prove controversial.<sup>38</sup> The first, the "persuasion of continuity, the power that keeps us turning the pages of a novel and that holds us in our seats at the theatre," is a relatively fragile experience; in "Myth, Fiction, and Displacement," Frye observes:

In our direct experience of fiction we feel how central is the importance of the steady progression of events that holds and guides our

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36. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, 1957; rpt. New York, 1970), p. 35.

37. J. R. R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," *PBA* 22 (1936), 245–95; cited from *An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism*, ed. L. Nicholson (Notre Dame, Ind., 1963), p. 81.

38. Lars Lönnroth's paper "The Concept of Genre in the Saga Literature," read before the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Studies at Minneapolis, May 4, 1973 was an answer to some points in my article cited above. But see Børge Hansen, *Folkeeventyr: Struktur og Genre* (Copenhagen, 1971).

attention. Yet afterwards, when we try to remember or think about what we have seen, this sense of continuity is one of the most difficult things to recapture. What stands out in our minds is a vivid characterization, a great speech or striking image, a detached scene, bits and pieces of unusually convincing realism ... in the direct experience of fiction, continuity is the center of our attention; our later memory, or what I call the possession of it, tends to become discontinuous.<sup>39</sup>

In applying this thought to *Ögmundar þáttur* it is necessary again to concede the heterogeneous *origins* of the constituents while affirming again the narrative unity of the finished work.

Frye continues the passage quoted:

Our attention shifts from the sequence of incidents to another focus: a sense of what the work of fiction was all *about*, or what criticism usually calls its theme.

(This is a leap that has only recently been made in saga criticism.) Theme or *dianoia* is the “*mythos* or plot as a simultaneous unity, when the entire shape is clear in our minds”:

The theme, so considered, differs appreciably from the moving plot: it is the same in substance, but we are now concerned with the details in relation to a unity, not in relation to suspense and linear progression. The unifying factors assume a new and increased importance, and the smaller details of imagery, which may escape conscious notice in direct experience, take on their proper significance.

As Frye observes, a good reader of literature continually, if unconsciously, attempts to construct a “larger pattern of simultaneous significance” as he reads, but it is on *rereading*, especially, that we consciously relate the parts to a thematic whole.

The thematic structure of *Ögmundar þáttur* emerges clearly, I think, from such a second reading though good critics might differ over the

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39. In *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York, 1963); the relevant pages, from which all the quotations are drawn, are 21–26.

integration of details. For example, opinions could differ over what I view as symbolic clothing or over the thematic function, if any, of other details (such as *Qgmundr*’s casting off the particolored cape). For me, those details are natural manifestations of what Frye calls *anagnorisis* or recognition, an important aspect of fiction generally and surely of *Qgmundar þáttur*:

Recognition, and the unity of theme which it manifests, is often symbolized by some kind of emblematic object ... fans, rings, chains.... In any case, the point of recognition seems to be also a point of identification, where a hidden truth about something or somebody emerges into view.

Thus *Qgmundr* and *Gunnarr helmingr* are at last “recognized,” their identities established, and the *anagnoriseis* are, I believe, bound up with the “emblematic object,” symbolic clothing.

However, Frye’s description and our usual literary expectations imply a single major recognition, and the dual recognitions of *Qgmundar þáttur* pose an interesting final problem for a theory of unity, a problem that can perhaps be freshly approached by appeal to the linguistic notion of equivalence classes. In *Qgmundar þáttur* the two recognitions belong together by both the criteria used by linguists in establishing equivalence classes: they show structural equivalence because they occur in similar narrative sequences and semantic equivalence by dissecting the “thought-mass” in a similar way, in other words by belonging to a single semantic class. (The class can be regarded as considerably smaller than the class of all recognitions as I hope my discussion of theme has shown.) Thus *Qgmundr*’s recognition and *Gunnarr helmingr*’s are equivalents (not identical but “equi-valent,” sharing some of the same valences), probably of separate origins but now joined in a single artistic structure because of their potential equivalence. This seems to be a structural parallel to the kind of linking of equivalence classes or “coupling” that S. R. Levin has analyzed at the level of style and which he argues is the source of the heightened unity of poetic language in general and a little recognized source of unity

in particular poems.<sup>40</sup> At the thematic level *Ögmundar þáttur* may be seen as a “coupling” of equivalent themes, and so it will not seem purely intuitive, I hope, to speak of *the* theme of the story or to argue (on the analogy of Levin’s work) that this “coupling” lends a form of literary unity.

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40. *Linguistic Structures in Poetry*, *Janua Linguarum* 23 (The Hague, 1962). My usage extends Levin’s theory from “poetry” to “literature,” but such an extension is obviously warranted since coupling and the special unity it brings are characteristic of what Roman Jakobson calls “the poetic function,” more or less present in all literature (“Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics,” in *Style in Language*, ed. T. Sebeok [Cambridge, Mass., 1960], pp. 350–77), rather than of “verse” as metered language (cf. Frye, *Anatomy*, p. 71); extension of the concepts of equivalence class and coupling from style to a higher level of literary organization (anticipated by Levin, p. 51) is further justified by the analogy between syntagmatic or paradigmatic aspects of language at the sentence level and at the level of narrative, and in general cf. Jakobson’s article elaborating his famous thesis that “The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination” (p. 358).

