

Space and Movement in Old Norse Myth

A thesis submitted to fulfill requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of space and movement in Old Norse myth. By the term ‘space,’ I refer to the various spatial realms of Old Norse myth and the geographic phenomena located within. Chapters one and two are surveys of the various mythological races: Æsir, Vanir, *Vǫlur*, the ‘Forces of chaos,’ Giants, Elves and Dwarfs. After defining my methodological framework in relation to developments in spatial theory, I examine each race in turn according to their spatial associations and the ways in which the medieval written sources present their kinetic or bodily abilities as well as their limitations. In these chapters I show that each race, and the individuals who belong to it, are all limited to some extent in terms of how they move through space and the kinds of spaces they can access. For example, even a god as powerful as Óðinn or Þórr can have certain restrictions imposed on him in certain myths, while in others they are represented as moving around freely. In chapters three and four, which incorporate a traditional philological method, I conduct close readings of two poems, *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna*, with a spatial lens. With regard to the former, I argue that Þórr here is presented in a rather unusual way in comparison to much other mythological material, not least because he is kinetically constrained. This presentation is at odds with the mostly positive impression of his abilities from other texts that present him as a powerful figure, though one who sometimes finds himself in difficulties that he can usually get his way out of, resulting in a swath of killing and destruction. In my close reading on *Lokasenna*, I examine the interpersonal relationships between Loki and the other gods in the highly symbolic drinking hall, which Loki proceeds to defile with his ‘words of malice.’ I observe that Loki brings a type of chaos into the hall from the forest to which he is banished in the framing prose introduction. Both of these poems are examples of *sennur* or flytings, a genre in which two or more figures partake in a verbal duel. However, they diverge in terms of the spaces in which they are set – a vast fiord in one, and a hall in the other. These spaces have a profound impact on various aspects of the poems and their characters. The final chapter examines six Viking Age picture stones from Gotland, Sweden, that purportedly display elements of Norse myth later documented in Old Norse-Icelandic written sources from the Middle Ages. I argue that by constructing a spatial typology and examining the spatial arrangement of the scenes, such as the placement of an individual scene ‘high’ or ‘low’ on the stone, we can confirm the nature of a myth without all the elements being present.

INTRODUCTION

Opening statement

This thesis is a study of Old Norse myth and art, with a focus on space and movement. It mainly concentrates on eddic poetry but many other important sources of myth are also taken into account. It argues that, to a significant extent, mythological beings can be characterised by the kinds of space they are associated with. Moreover, their ability to move (or not) can be correlated, chiefly, with their location in space as well as their role and status in society, among other things. Finally, I argue that many of the concepts from Old Norse mythological texts can also be found in images on Viking Age stone monuments from across the Nordic area, reflecting a general Norse worldview.

Sources

The history of scholarship in Iceland goes back at least to the account by Ari Þorgilsson (1067–1148) of the early Norse settlement of Iceland. His *Íslendingabók* ‘Book of Icelanders’ (circa 1130) is thought to be the earliest written text in Old Norse-Icelandic. Law codes (e.g., *Grágás* ‘Grey Goose [Laws]’) also seem to be some of the earliest texts composed in the vernacular. Other genres important to the history of early Icelandic scholarship, some of which may have their origins in pre-Christian times, include various kinds of genealogies, termed *áttvísir* ‘knowledge of genealogies.’

The majority of Old Norse mythological stories are preserved in two great medieval collections, known today as *The Poetic Edda*¹ and *The Prose Edda* (composed of a Prologue, *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál* ‘The art of poetry’ and *Háttatal* ‘List of verse forms’),² whose earliest manuscript witnesses date to considerably later (circa 1270 and 1225 respectively) than the presumed composition date of *Íslendingabók*. While both are independent works with different textual histories, the Icelandic *goði* ‘chieftain,’ mythographer and politician Snorri Sturluson, to whom *The Prose Edda* (also known as ‘Snorri’s *Edda*’ or ‘*Snorra Edda*’) is attributed, clearly knew versions of many of the poems from *The Poetic Edda*, and indeed quoted from them in his own *Edda*. Another major source of Norse myth is skaldic poetry, similar to eddic in many ways, but differentiated according to certain kinds of criteria (such

¹ The edition used is *Edda: Der Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* ed. Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1983). Unless indicated, all English translations are provided by Carolyne Larrington’s 2014 revised edition: *The Poetic Edda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

² Both edited in Old Norse and translated into Modern English by Anthony Faulkes in *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (London: Viking Society, 2005), *Edda: Skáldskaparmál* (London: Viking Society, 1998), and *Edda* (London: Everyman, 1987).

as metre and diction).³ Two further compendia of myths that I turn to in this thesis are *Heimskringla* ‘Disc of the World,’⁴ usually attributed to Snorri Sturluson, written circa 1230, and the *Gesta Danorum* ‘History of the Danes’ of Saxo Grammaticus (often given a *Terminus post quem* of 1216).⁵ There are also less overtly mythological sources that adopt mythical frames of reference, including several sagas, Christian skaldic poetry and learned and devotional works.⁶

The tales in Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* often represent so-called ‘fuller’ versions of myths, which are sometimes only alluded to or not mentioned at all in verse. Occasionally, Snorri also seems to omit material that he probably had access to or refashions it in order to fit it within a learned Judeo-Christian framework. It is probable that Snorri was emulating and was guided by the approaches to storytelling of Christian scholars that existed throughout medieval Europe, such as his use of frame narratives.⁷ In the *Edda* Snorri sets out his methodology in a prologue in which he justifies the myths as worthy of being recorded despite their pagan frame of reference.⁸ On the other hand, the anonymous eddic poems are generally thought to have existed in oral mode for some time, potentially several centuries, before being committed to writing.⁹ For the most part, they are highly allusive and required a degree of knowledge of the old mythology in order to be understood. In the Codex Regius (GKS 2365 4°), the most important extant manuscript of eddic poetry, the poems with mythological content native to Scandinavia appear before the much more numerous

³ I refer both to the long-standing edition of the corpus by Finnur Jónsson (ed.), *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* 4 vols. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1967-73) and the much newer and ongoing *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (2006-) series, edited by Margaret Clunies Ross, R. D. Fulk, Kari Ellen Gade, Guðrún Nordal, Edith Marold, Diana Whaley and Tarrin Wills. For an explanation of the artificiality of the terms ‘eddic’ and ‘skaldic’ see Margaret Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics* (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), 6-28.

⁴ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Heimskringla I-III Íslenzk fornrit XXVI- XXVIII* trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society, 2011).

⁵ Karsten Friis-Jensen (ed.), *Saxo Grammaticus. Gesta Danorum: History of the Danes* 2 vols. Oxford Medieval Texts trans. Peter Fisher (Oxford: Clarendon, 2015).

⁶ Margaret Clunies Ross, “The conservation and reinterpretation of myth in medieval Icelandic writings,” *Old Norse Literature and Society* ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 116–39.

⁷ See Clunies Ross, *A History of Old Norse Poetry and Poetics*, 182–3, and Margaret Clunies Ross, “The transmission and preservation of eddic poetry,” *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry* ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 21.

⁸ Snorri also frames the stories about the gods in terms of an approach we would now define as euhemerist: “the method of mythological interpretation which regards myths as traditional accounts of real incidents in human history” (“euhemerism, n.,” (*OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2022), available at Fisher Library (University of Sydney) under databases, accessed 15 December 2022).

⁹ Joseph Harris, “Traditions of eddic scholarship,” *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry* ed. Carolyne Larrington, Judy Quinn and Brittany Schorn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 37.

collection of poems that relate largely to Continental heroic traditions. About half of the former are non-narrative works and were perhaps imagined to be the actual words of the gods themselves.¹⁰ Skaldic poetry, from which a good deal of mythological material can be extracted, is more accurately dated since we often know the poets' names and something of their careers. The foremost aim of much, though by no means all, skaldic poetry is to praise a living Scandinavian ruler, often by making reference to mythological figures or well-known myths.¹¹

The other major source for Old Norse myth after prose and poetry, and the only truly 'primary' one (from a source-critical point of view), is the range of images that decorate wood, metal and stone artifacts, which can be found all over the Viking world. Some of the most outstanding examples come from the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea (discussed below), but many more can be adduced, particularly on the Swedish mainland. A popular subject on several of the Swedish stones from Södermanland, Gästrikland and Uppland is the famous dragon-slayer Sigurðr, who is often depicted stabbing Fáfnir from below with a sword. Other well-known picture stones include a depiction of Þórr hunting the Miðsgarðsormr from Hørdum, Denmark, and the Gosforth cross from Cumbria, northern England, which supposedly depicts a number of scenes from Norse myth, notably Ragnarøk. The picture stones are unique, I argue, in that they express a sense of directionality, movement and concern with space only indirectly conveyed in the written sources. As will become evident throughout this thesis, text and object can be conceived of as arising out of the same general 'Norse worldview,' which frees up the need, sometimes felt by scholars, to establish any causal linkages between them.

Thesis Aims and Theoretical Framework

This thesis is concerned with the notions of 'space' and 'movement' and their meanings in Old Norse mythological literature. Space, especially, is a broad term, which has a variety of different meanings, depending on context. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* defines one usage of space as "denoting area or extension, physical extent or area."¹² In the present

¹⁰ Anthony Faulkes, *Snorri Sturluson: Edda* (London: Everyman, 1987), 21.

¹¹ For example, *Húsdrápa* 'House-drápa' by Úlfr Uggason (lived circa 1000) describes the richly decorated wall-panels on display in a hall owned by the Icelandic chieftain Óláfr pái 'Peacock' Høskuldsson. In this poem, preserved in *Skáldskaparmál*, Úlfr alludes to several Norse myths, often by using circumlocutions or kennings, such as *gjof Grímnis* 'gift of Grímnir [Óðinn]' in st. 1 – in this case, to refer to the poem he is reciting.

¹² "Space, n.1. I & 7 c," *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2022), available at Fisher Library (University of Sydney) under databases, accessed 29 August 2022.

discussion the concept of space is generally restricted to its physical representation in the landscape: earth, water, sky, etc. Descriptions of space, so-defined, abound in the corpus of Old Norse literature. For example, *Vǫluspá* ‘The sybil’s prophecy,’ perhaps the most famous text of any kind, presents a holistic account of the cosmos from its primordial inception to a cataclysmic epilogue. In the first ten stanzas alone, the *vǫlva* (‘sorceress, seeress, sybil’) outlines the creation of the earth (*ex nihilo* in Snorri’s version) and mentions two realms (*Miðgarðr* ‘the home of men’ and *Jǫtunheimar* ‘Giantland’) as well as several geographical features and institutions. We learn that the Æsir in fact ‘shaped’ *Miðgarðr* as well as other types of religious/cultural institutions, such as altars and temples.¹³ Occasionally throughout this thesis, I discuss these named mythological spaces, examples of what eco-critics distinguish as ‘places,’ that is locations associated with human habitation or with an emotional attachment, perhaps due to an experience or performance.¹⁴

According to the *OED*, movement is defined as “a change of place or position; a progress, change, development, etc.”¹⁵ Movement can therefore be understood as a complex action, with the potential for social, cultural and economic consequences. In this thesis, much of the movement I examine involves Norse gods and giants, who are represented as moving through space resulting in a ‘change’ of some kind. Movement is manifested in several ways: for example, certain Æsir are thought to be able to fly, but arguably the most powerful among them, Þórr, is restricted to travelling on foot or driving his chariot across the landscape. Reduced movement, or lack of it, can also be considered significant, as it usually signals a loss of autonomy or power, which has a negative association in Norse culture.¹⁶ Moreover, the kinds of movement examined in this thesis are not limited to adventure-seeking

¹³ It is an overwhelmingly positive depiction of the gods, as shall be explained. On the other hand, the giantesses, and by extension the realm whence they came, are described in st. 8/4 as *ámátcar mioc*, rendered by Larrington and Ursula Dronke in terms of preternatural strength (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 5 ‘all-powerful’; Ursula Dronke (ed.), *The Poetic Edda. Volume II: Mythological Poems*, 9 ‘of redoubtable strength’). The Cleasby and Vigfusson *Icelandic-English Dictionary* notes the adjective’s specific discourse as an epithet pertaining to giants and witches (also documented in Old High German as *amahtig*), with the meaning ‘loathsome, piteous’: Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957, 43. *Lexicon Poeticum* (p. 29) relates *ámattigr* specifically to the powers of evil in the Bible: *LP* accessed through the Dictionary of Old Norse Prose website, accessed 9 September 2022. All senses of the word can apply to the giant race.

¹⁴ See, for example, Bertrand Westphal, *The Plausible World: A Geocritical Approach to Space, Place, and Maps* translated by Amy D. Wells (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

¹⁵ “Movement, n. I,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, June 2022), available at Fisher Library (University of Sydney) under databases, accessed 29 August 2022.

¹⁶ See examples in Chapter five, n. 720.

expeditions typical of many Old Norse myths. It also examines the intricate interpersonal relations that take place in locations of varying social, cultural and political significance.

I make use of certain theoretical terms that need to be defined here. Some of these have been developed within the field of Old Norse studies; others are from unrelated disciplines. Firstly, I refer to the concept of binary pairs, including such well-known binaries as nature:culture, inside:outside, centre:periphery, sky:earth, up:down, man:woman, honour:shame, and so on. Binary opposition theories were developed by structuralist scholars, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, in the mid-twentieth century as a way of understanding a society through its key/fundamental interrelationships. The theory reduces complex ideas to two fundamental opposing entities to reveal how they are organised within a system or structure. Although mine is not a structuralist thesis *per se*, I have found it useful to refer to these binary pairs on occasion to assist in understanding the underlying worldview driving the myths.

This leads to the next term I use in my analysis: the horizontal and vertical axes. The horizontal and vertical axes are part of a spatial subsystem recognised by many scholars of Old Norse myth and religion.¹⁷ Various locations can be plotted on these axes, each with a concentric spatial opposite.¹⁸ For example, Miðgarðr/Ásgarðr is generally thought to exist in the centre of the horizontal axis, with its ‘opposite,’ Giantland, located on the periphery, or ‘away from centre.’ The vertical axis represents a ‘cosmic’ model. It is embodied by the world tree Yggdrasill, which spans the heavens at the top and the underworld down below. Movement between spaces along each axis is available to certain mythological beings but not to others. At the same time, movement does not (usually) take place in a vacuum or for its own sake, but is led by the tacit values and motivations of the various mythological communities. Norse mythological sources present the gods and giants as part of an unequal hierarchical relationship in which the former exploit the latter’s economic and social resources. Thus many of the journeys described in those same sources are framed in a way that perpetuates this relationship, often with the use of, to us, overly punitive or authoritarian

¹⁷ For a fuller discussion of this term, see the following publications by Eleazar Meletinskij, “Scandinavian Mythology as a System,” *The Journal of Structural Anthropology* vol. 1 (1973), 43–57, “Scandinavian Mythology as a System,” *The Journal of Structural Anthropology* vol. 2 (1974), 57–78, and “Scandinavian Mythology as a System of Oppositions,” *Patterns in Oral Literature* ed. Jason Heda and Dimitri Segal (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter Mouton, 1977), 251–60.

¹⁸ See Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society, I: The Myths* The Viking Collection 7 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), 50–6.

force. For example, Óðinn's expedition to recover the mead of poetry from the giantess Gunnlǫð secures the gods' most valuable cultural product at the expense of the giants, who receive nothing by way of compensation.

Frequently throughout this thesis the reader will encounter the term 'chthonic' (derived from Greek *khthon* 'dirt, soil') meaning 'dwelling in or beneath the surface of the earth.' I use this term to describe physical characteristics relating to various locations on the vertical axis, notably the underworld. Additionally, certain supernatural beings may be described as being chthonic in some way, such as the Vanir gods, who are directly associated with the vertical axis and the space below the earth via their roles as fertility deities. Finally, I refer to the concept of a 'Norse worldview,' particularly prevalent in the last chapter, but relevant to the thesis as a whole. This term denotes a shared cultural understanding of the world specific to Scandinavia during the late Iron Age (500–800) to the beginning of the Nordic Middle Ages (c. 1100). I argue that we can see aspects of this worldview in operation in the sources that stem from this period, foremost among them stone and wood monuments, but also orally-transmitted sources such as skaldic and eddic poetry. I have found that it is particularly the allusions to space and/or movement of the gods, i.e. incidental aspects of the poems that perhaps did not require an explanation or emendation, that exhibit a general compatibility with the earlier picture stones and likewise the mindset of a pre-Christian world.

Studies on Space and Old Norse myth/society

The investigation of space has become a popular subject among Old Norse scholars in recent times. It is now acknowledged that the study of space is an effective way of gazing, albeit through an imperfect lens, at the worldview of Viking Age people in Scandinavia. However, to my knowledge space and movement have not yet been studied together. A number of scholarly works discuss space and/or movement in relation to certain beings from Old Norse mythology in a more or less limited way, such as, two articles by Eleazar Meletinskij (1973/74),¹⁹ Kirsten Hastrup's *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland* (1985),²⁰ and John Lindow's *Murder and Vengeance among the Gods* (1997).²¹ The 'overview' that goes into

¹⁹ "Scandinavian Mythology as a System" (1973), 43-57, and "Scandinavian Mythology as a System" (1974), 57-78.

²⁰ *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: an Anthropological Analysis of Structure and Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 50-69, and 136-54.

²¹ *Murder and Vengeance among the Gods: Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology* (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1997), 42-50, 115-30, and 157-63.

the most detail in this regard is Margaret Clunies Ross's *Prolonged Echoes* in which she uses the concept of location in space to categorise the different mythological races.²² Jens Peter Schjødt's *Initiation Between Two Worlds* adopts a narrower focus, concentrating on certain 'journey-tales' from Old Norse literature that contain elements of initiation rituals/*rites de passage* originally identified in the anthropological literature.²³ In many of the tales Schjødt examines, he references an 'other world,' such as the world of the dead, where special abilities and/or resources are acquired, which is a concept incorporated into this thesis. Recent publications, such as *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia* (2016) and the *Pre-Christian Religions of the North* (2018-) series, have helped to clarify my arguments without fundamentally altering them. Finally, although not necessarily an analytic work, the *Kommentar* series (1997-2009) led by Klaus von See and others has proved an invaluable source of insight into eddic poetry.

Thesis Structure

In Chapter one, I focus on the Æsir and their spatial associations as presented in both eddic and skaldic poetry and in prose sources such as Snorri's *Edda*. Most of the analysis is focussed on Óðinn, Loki and Þórr, a circumstance predetermined by the amount of extant primary literature on these figures. While all three can often be found travelling through various spatial realms, there are clear differences between them in terms of their kinetic abilities. Óðinn is particularly associated with two contrasting realms, Valhøll 'Carrion hall' and the ambiguous territory of the underworld, conceptualised as the space beneath Yggdrasill's roots. One of the main reasons he travels to the latter is to consult with *vǫlur*, an ambiguous class of beings associated with magic (discussed in Chapter two, 62–8). Óðinn is also said to possess magical powers, which has led many scholars to question the nature of his gender, as magic is presented in Old Norse literature as largely a woman's preserve. Óðinn is equally ambiguous in relation to space: he travels along both 'axes' and can change his shape in order to bypass solid obstacles. Óðinn is sometimes compared to Loki; in fact, the two are blood brothers and one supposedly does not drink unless the other is present.²⁴ Loki also travels rather freely and is a shapeshifter, though he often ends up getting into

²² Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society, I: The Myths* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994), 50–6, and 74–9.

²³ Jens Peter Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds. Structure and Symbolism in pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion* trans. Victor Hansen (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2008), §5, 6, and 7, pp. 108–270, and §8, pp. 379–440.

²⁴ *Lokasenna* st. 9: 'Do you remember, Odin, when in bygone days | we blended our blood together? | You said you'd never imbibe beer | unless it were brought to both of us' (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 82).

scrapes that he must bargain his way out of. Conversely, one of the most notorious mishaps of Old Norse myth leads to him being punished in gruesome fashion. Instead of being killed, he is chained with his son's guts to a rock while being tortured with snake venom until Ragnarök. Based on this and other examples discussed in Chapter one, Loki is characterised as a being who appears to roam with impunity, but in fact is frequently constrained by the complexities of Old Norse myth. Þórr is perhaps the least dynamic figure discussed in this chapter. His journeys usually take him to Giantland or a similarly liminal space where he demonstrates his strength and rage.²⁵ Nevertheless, a number of stories seem to break this trend. For example, one of Þórr's threats to the giant Hrungrnir, delivered by Þjálfi, is that he will come at his opponent 'from below,' causing Hrungrnir to stand on his shield. While this avenue of attack never eventuates, it hints at access to a part of the landscape not normally associated with Þórr (thus underlining Hrungrnir's stupidity in not understanding the 'rules' of play in mythological society). The remaining gods I discuss are Týr, Heimdallr, Baldr, Hermóðr and Víðarr, who all play a small but significant role, particularly when framed in terms of space, that has not previously been touched on by other scholars.

The focus of Chapter two, otherwise methodologically identical to Chapter one, shifts to the considerable array of beings that make up the rest of the mythological community. They are: the Vanir, *vǫlur* (usually equated with the Greek *sybllai* 'sybils'), giants (sg. *jǫtunn*, pl. *jǫtnar*), the 'forces of chaos,' elves (sg. *álfr*, pl. *álfar*) and dwarfs (sg. *dvergr*, pl. *dvergar*). Common to these beings is a close relationship with the earth, liminality and chthonic spaces in a way that differs markedly from that of the Æsir. I begin with the Vanir, a group within which we can identify three figures, the siblings Freyr and Freyja, and their father Njǫrðr. The Vanir may have existed in proto-Germanic cults or religion since the early Iron Age as the name Nerthus, thought to be an *interpretatio romana* of a deity whom scholars identify as the Old Norse Njǫrðr, is mentioned by the Roman historian Tacitus in ch. 40 of his *Germania* (circa 98 CE).²⁶ This Nerthus is identified as *terra mater*, which has led scholars to identify him - or her, as *mater* is feminine - as an early fertility deity (thus, we

²⁵ *Jǫtunheimar* 'homes of the giants' is always a plural noun (though usually translated into English in the singular), which perhaps suggests that this area was too vast to be properly 'measured,' as well as the possibility of there being several realms belonging to the giants. As I explain elsewhere in this thesis (see Chapter one, 26), Giantland is a liminal space, studded with sharp peaks and surrounded by a huge ocean. Despite its size and importance, it is often referred to somewhat vaguely by the cardinal location *east*. In contrast, there is relatively precise information regarding aspects of the gods' abodes, such as the specific number of doors in Valhǫll.

²⁶ Tacitus, *Germania* ed. J. B. Rives (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 93; Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* trans. Angela Hall (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 230.

must accept that there has been a gender shift between Tacitus and the Old Norse myths as recorded in Iceland). More than a thousand years later, Njǫrðr and his descendants were all associated with the harvest and ‘lowness’ (in relation to the earth) to some extent. Freyja is probably the most mobile of them as she is able to travel to the underworld; moreover, together with Óðinn she receives half of those slain in battle, whom she presumably brings to her home Fólkvangr (‘field of the people’ or ‘field of the army’). Njǫrðr and Freyr are associated with the giant race from which they take wives, something that involves journeys to liminal spaces.

The giants themselves are entities that live in disharmony with their counterparts, the Æsir. Their abodes are in many ways distorted versions of the gods’ (cf. the ostentatious collars the poet says Þrymr’s dogs are wearing when Loki arrives at his home in *Þrymskviða* ‘Þrymr’s poem’) or occasionally they are said to live in caves. Some giants, such as Hrungrnir, are in fact made of what is normally considered inanimate material like stone or clay, so the link between giants and the earth is strong. They are able to travel along the horizontal axis, sometimes into Ásgarðr, for which they are severely punished by the gods. I then discuss *vǫlur*, who do not represent a ‘race’ *per se* but seem to share some characteristics with both gods and giants. Unlike the former, however, they mostly dwell underground in the mythological sources and are usually represented as somehow ‘dead’ prior to being awakened. They therefore also have a strong connection to liminal and chthonic spaces, like the giants to whom they may be related. Their underground abodes, which they may access by ‘sinking’ themselves down through the earth, align them with the vertical axis. The next group I discuss are in fact agnatic relations of the god Loki: the so-called ‘forces of chaos’ – Hel, the Miðgarðsormr or Jǫrmungandr and Fenrir or Fenrisúlfr. These figures experience banishment to a liminal space or being restricted in some way. Hel is sent to the part of the underworld, also called Hel, reserved for criminals and those killed by disease; the Miðgarðsormr is forced to dwell at the margins of the sea, far from civilization; Fenrir is lured into having a magical fetter put on him, which induces stasis. The ‘forces of chaos’ remain in their immobile states until the onset of Ragnarǫk, when their bonds are cut leading to wholesale destruction.

The final two groups I examine survived into early modern folklore and appear regularly in modern fantasy novels, most notably J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*

trilogy²⁷ and *The Hobbit*.²⁸ The elves are shrouded in mystery in Old Norse myth – there are several allusions in poetry as well as some substantial passages, but the majority of what we know comes from medieval prose sources, including Snorri’s *Edda* and Icelandic sagas. Snorri splits them into two kinds, *ljósálfar* and *dökkálfar*, ‘light elves’ and ‘dark elves,’ likely not a reference to their complexions but possibly a reflection of their spatial positioning in relation to the sun. He may also have been influenced by the narrative of fallen angels from Christian tradition. Elves may have also been thought to be invisible or to be able to pass through solid objects unimpeded.²⁹ Finally, dwarfs were known first and foremost for their prodigious talent in smithing. Despite being told in *Völuspá* 10 that the dwarfs are made *mannlíkan* ‘in human shape,’ conceptually they have as much in common with giants, particularly in regard to their dwelling places. There are also post-medieval descriptions of dwarfs running into or living in stones, which further associates them with giants and Giantland. Like the elves, dwarfs are also shadowy figures, with the power to create things the gods need or greatly desire; they are also clever and possess knowledge comparable to that of the gods, which aligns them with other beings who can travel vertically, like *völur*.

In the third and fourth chapters, I perform critical readings of two eddic poems, *Hárbarðsljóð* ‘Hárbarðr’s song’ and *Lokasenna* ‘Loki’s quarrel,’ with a spatial lens, items that sit sixth and eighth in the order of material in the Codex Regius. *Hárbarðsljóð* is a poem of sixty lines thought to have been composed, in its current form, no later than circa 1225.³⁰ It is introduced by a short prose header which explains that Þórr had been travelling in the east until he came to *sundi eino* ‘a certain sound.’ What follows is a dialogue between Þórr and Hárbarðr, described as a *feriokarl* ‘ferryman’ but really, so scholars think, Óðinn in disguise. *Hárbarðsljóð* presents physical space in various ways, none more clearly than the geographical setting, which frames and influences the speech of the characters. It is a particular challenge for Þórr, who is explicitly trying to get across the water in order to reach *Oðins landa*. In contrast to how Þórr is sometimes presented in other sources, in *Hárbarðsljóð* he is made immobile, without hope of any recourse. The sound, to put it another way, imposes a limit on Þórr’s conventional behaviour in a way that strikes one as

²⁷ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1954–5).

²⁸ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1937).

²⁹ *Norna-Gests þáttur* ch. 1 *Þá þótti konung einn álfr eðr andi nokkur koma inn í húsit ok þó at luktum dyrum öllum*: Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda I* (Reykjavík: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1959), 307.

³⁰ Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge, Eve Picard, Ilone Priebe, and Katja Schultz (eds.), *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda/Band 2* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter verlag, 1997), 169.

unusual. The poem is usually classified as being comprised of a *senna* ‘quarrel’ and a *mannjafnaðr* ‘comparison of men,’ poetic genres whose main vehicle of expression relies on the exchange of boasts and insults between two parties, many of which relate to ideas of space and movement. I have identified three such types of boast or insult in *Hárbarðsljóð*: (a) Þórr and Hárbarðr directly mention actual or imaginary places in which one or the other has performed brave or dastardly deeds, (b) they connect the outcome of war to swift movement or their presence in a particular space, and (c) they draw attention to the contrast between mobility and immobility, which seems to have a wider significance in Old Norse myth due to the latter’s connection with *ergi* ‘unmanliness, sexual perversion.’

The examination of *Lokasenna* in Chapter four takes a similar approach. It also has a hypothesized *Terminus ante quem* of 1225,³¹ comprises sixty-five lines, as well as a prose frame and numerous interruptions. Most of the action takes place inside Ægir’s hall, where the gods are having a banquet. According to the prose introduction, Loki could not bear to hear the gods praise Ægir’s servants, so he killed one of them, Fimafengr, for which he is banished to the forest. The prose is thus very important for our knowledge of the story, not least because it frequently signals movement of a certain character. In the first section on movement, I analyse these prose interruptions in greater detail, which have not been systematically discussed by scholars: see Chapter three, n. 572, for one exception. I then examine the binary pair inside:outside, particularly in relation to Loki who straddles the border between different extremes. In *Lokasenna*, he moves back and forth between the forest and Ægir’s hall, which represent the embodied forms of chaos and civilisation respectively. Kirsten Hastrup’s study of space in Commonwealth Iceland (circa 870-1264) has shown that the *bú* ‘settlement’ was at the centre of a concentric arrangement of space,³² with areas that fell away from the centre having increasingly less inherent value.³³ Finally, I examine the imaginary spaces that shape much of the speech of *Lokasenna*’s characters, a good deal of which is allusive, so must be studied alongside related prose sources.

Art in Scandinavia unsurprisingly has a much older recorded history than literature, with some petroglyphs dating back to the Scandinavian Bronze Age (1700-500 BCE). By the

³¹ von See, *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 384.

³² Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland*, 142–5.

³³ There is also a linguistic bias: in the word *skógr* is used in the phrase *stefna e-m til skógar* ‘to cite a person to stand trial for outlawry,’ so the forest was analogous to criminal activity.

Viking Age (circa 790-1100), however, we begin to see the emergence of unique native artforms that can ultimately be traced back to the Nydam style in the fifth century: these are the so-called ‘styles’ of Broa/Oseberg, Borre, Jellinge, Mammen, Ringerike and Urnes. Throughout this period, quadrupedal animals tend to be the most popular figural subjects, with several notable exceptions, one of which I explore in Chapter five – the picture stones of Gotland. Sweden’s largest island, roughly ninety kilometres from the mainland, Gotland has been inhabited continuously for several thousand years. Its size and location have made it a target for invasion by neighbouring countries but probably also contributed to its development as a trading town of the Hanseatic League. There are several hundred picture stones on Gotland that date to a five-hundred-year period between 700 and 1200 CE. Picture stones (Swedish *bildstenar*) are arguably memorial stones similar in form and function to runestones, differing only in that they are decorated with zoomorphic or figural images instead of, or in addition to, the runic inscriptions.

The six picture stones I examine in Chapter five are thought to be from the later end of this time period: Klinte Hunninge I, Lärbro Stora Hammars I and III, Ardre VIII, Alskog Tjängvide I and Lillbjärs. I have chosen these picture stones because their iconography is widely, though not unanimously, considered to depict scenes from Old Norse myth and legend. For example, five of the picture stones under examination show a building together with a rider and/or a woman carrying a horn that can be interpreted as a death realm analogous to Valhöll. This kind of interpretation has been made on the basis that the images have a perceived resemblance to Icelandic written sources from the Middle Ages, as outlined above, although there is nothing that actually proves such an identification (and alternative, non-mythological, interpretations have been offered). In this chapter, I attempt to override this lack of empirical proof by examining each stone, thereby constructing a spatial typology which demonstrates that certain fundamental ideas regarding space are probably shared by both the written and the visual material. While this methodology cannot prove the identity of a particular myth’s depiction beyond any doubt, it does confirm the existence of the nature of a myth, which is something that has not been noticed by scholars before.

CHAPTER ONE: THE ÆSIR

Introduction

This chapter surveys the spatial associations of the major gods of the pre-Christian Scandinavian pantheon. It also analyses aspects of movement within space and how this has been represented in the surviving mythological corpus. The gods Óðinn, Þórr and Loki receive the most attention, both because of the frequency of reference to them in the primary sources, and on account of their cosmic significance.³⁴ I begin by discussing the Æsir (sg. *áss*) generally and the organisation of the mythological poems in our main source, the Codex Regius. The first god discussed is Óðinn, also known by several other names, and among the oldest beings in the Norse mythological world. Many of the well-known myths about Óðinn involve a journey of some kind and Óðinn's powers of movement appear to be limitless. He is able to travel along both the horizontal and vertical 'axes' (see Introduction, 4–5) and his knowledge of the magical art known as *seiðr* '[performing of] sorcery, spell, incantation,' means he can adopt the likeness of other humanoid and animal figures, typically a bird, allowing him temporary mastery over the sky.

The next god examined in detail is Loki, whose precise status among the Æsir is unclear. In many respects, he appears to have more in common with the giants, most notably as he is the son of the giant Fárbaúti (though he is sometimes referred to as 'Loki Laufeyjarsón,' by a matronymic that identifies him with his divine mother). On the other hand, he does occasionally help the gods, albeit in a way that ultimately serves his own duplicitous intentions. Loki is comparable to Óðinn in terms of his powers of movement. He is also able to transform into a bird, among other animals, in order to access the domain of the sky. In more than one myth, however, his movement is severely restricted. The concept of fettering and binding is strongly associated with him and his offspring, the 'forces of chaos' (see Chapter two, 68–77).³⁵

In contrast to the previous two gods, Þórr is restricted to travel along the horizontal axis, usually to (or from) a place we can identify as Giantland. Almost all the myths about him involve giant slayings, supposedly designed to protect humankind in some way (hence,

³⁴ Such criteria would then have to include the god Baldr whose death reveals the mortality of the gods.

³⁵ Marlene Ciklamini also points out that Óðinn himself is associated with a bond he cannot get out of in *Skáldskaparmál* 39 until he supplies Hreiðmarr with enough treasure to fill a *belgr* 'skin-bag': "Óðinn and the giants," *Neophilologist* vol. 46 (1962), 156.

his epithet *véorr* ‘protector [of men]’ from *Hymiskviða* ‘Hymir’s Poem’). This protective role governs his kinetic abilities to some extent. Þórr is particularly associated with river crossings, notably in the tenth-century skaldic poem *Þórsdrápa* ‘*Drápa* about Þórr’ by Eilífr Goðrúnarson, which I examine below (though see Chapter three for a contrasting portrayal). The final section of this first chapter deals with spatial potential and representation of some additional ‘minor’ gods about whom less is known, including Týr, Heimdallr, Baldr, Hermóðr and Víðarr. I have chosen to address these gods briefly for, despite the limited evidence, their powers of movement and spatial associations constitute an important aspect of their characterisation.

The Æsir, Space and Movement

The Æsir are the main class of beings that inhabit Ásgarðr and it is from their perspective that the majority of Old Norse myths are told. In the *Gylfaginning* section of his *Edda*, Snorri refers to an *Ása ætt* ‘a lineage, family or race of the Æsir.’ Following Gangleri’s question *Hverir eru Æsir þeir er mǫnnum er skylt at trúa á* ‘Which are the Æsir that men ought to believe in?’, fourteen figures supposedly connected to the *Ása ætt* are introduced: Óðinn, Þórr, Baldr, Freyr, Freyja, Týr, Bragi, Heimdallr, Høðr, Víðarr, Áli or Váli, Ullr, Forseti and Loki. However, the exact number of Æsir does not appear to be fixed, leaving space for several other figures to be added to or removed from this list.³⁶ As I explain in the next chapter, a separate *ætt* called the Vanir (sg. *vanr*), whose members include Njǫrðr, Freyja and Freyr, assimilate into Æsir society but differ in terms of their spatial associations and kinetic abilities, so they are analysed separately.

Many of the myths I examine in this chapter, indeed the whole corpus of Old Norse mythological literature, have the Æsir gods Óðinn or Þórr as their primary subject. This scenario, in which Óðinn or Þórr are the main characters, has led some scholars to propose that, prior to the myths being written down, Óðinn and Þórr must have been worshipped as the major gods, possibly throughout all of Scandinavia.³⁷ That this was the predominating view of learned Icelanders, like Snorri Sturluson, in the thirteenth century is reflected in the

³⁶ For example, there are several female Æsir (*ásynjur*) Sif, Frigg, Iðunn, Nanna, Gefion, and so forth, many of whom are named by Snorri in this part of *Gylfaginning* but not explicitly as Æsir: see Britt-Mari Näsström, *Freyja, the great goddess of the North* Lund Studies in history of religions (Lund: University of Lund Press, 1995), 98.

³⁷ Though other types of evidence (i.e., archaeological) suggest that Týr may have been the most important deity in early Iron Age Scandinavia (500–100 BCE).

organisation of the Codex Regius manuscript (CR). This document, widely considered the most significant single source of mythological information, presents eleven mythological eddic poems in deliberate order (see Introduction, 2), three of which can be broadly defined as poems about Óðinn (*Hávamál* ‘Sayings of the High One,’ *Vafþrúðnismál* ‘Vafþrúðnir’s Sayings,’ *Grímnismál* ‘Grímnir’s Sayings’), while three more (*Hymiskviða*, *Þrymskviða*, *Alvíssmál* ‘All-wise’s Sayings’) have Þórr as their main character. This sequence of six poems is separated by one (*Scírnismál* ‘Scírnir’s Journey’) about the Vanir deity Freyr followed by *Hárbarðsljóð*, which presents a quarrel between Óðinn and Þórr, perhaps representing the transfer of power between the two (see Chapter three).³⁸ In addition, Óðinn and Þórr perform roles of some importance in the other mythological poems of CR: Óðinn in *Völuspá* and Þórr in *Lokasenna* (see Chapter four).

The Æsir, and presumably the Vanir as well, are thought to live in or have some association with Ásgarðr, one of the so-called ‘nine worlds.’³⁹ Here the gods build their homes; for example, Heimdallr is said to live on the edge of the world, which is in keeping with his role as a sentry god (see Chapter one, 42–4). Some gods are said to have lofty abodes in the sky or very beautiful ones.⁴⁰ Despite this idyllic impression, on several occasions the giants manage to find a way through Ásgarðr’s defences: in *Völuspá* 8 three giant-maidens come from Giantland, causing the gods to go to their *roçstólar* ‘thrones of fate/judgment.’ Ásgarðr’s walls are also destroyed in *Völuspá* 25, presumably in the war with the Vanir. Subsequently, a giant offers to rebuild them (according to a narrative recorded in Snorri’s *Edda* sometimes known as the ‘Myth of the master builder’), which again forces the gods into drastic action. Like its counterpart Giantland,⁴¹ Ásgarðr can be situated

³⁸ However, Georges Dumézil, *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, trans. Einar Haugen *et al.* (Berkeley: University of California, 1973), 71, does not agree that *Hárbarðsljóð* represents a “rival of cults”; rather he asserts that the dialogue frame is intended to make evident the diverse natures and services of the two gods; Annette Lassen, “The Medieval Reception of Eddic Poetry with Mythological Subjects,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. Research and Reception, Volume I: From the Middle Ages to c. 1830* ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 144.

³⁹ Though not listed or systematically described by Snorri, the nine worlds presumably refer to Ásgarðr, Miðgarðr, Vanaheim(a)r, Álfheimr, Jötunheim(a)r, Niflheimr or Niflhel and Muspellsheimr, but also possibly Svartálfaheimr, Gimlé and Útgarðr: see Anthony Faulkes (ed.), *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 105. Per Vikstrand argues that the idea of Ásgarðr as a place is based on Miðgarðr, which unlike the former appears in all the Germanic languages: “Ásgarðr, Miðgarðr, and Útgarðr. A linguistic approach to a classical problem,” *Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives* Vágar til Midgård 8 ed. Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), 354.

⁴⁰ Anthony Faulkes, *Snorri Sturluson: Edda* (London: Everyman, 1987), 23: *Hann býr þar sem heitir Breiðablik. Þat er á himni. Í þeim stað má ekki vera óhreint* ‘He lives there in a place called Breiðablik. It is in heaven. In that place there can be nothing impure.’

⁴¹ Sometimes called Útgarðr, but not in the oldest written sources, e.g. poetry – it is mainly used by modern scholars.

conceptually on the horizontal axis, and movement to or from it is usually indicated as occurring ‘across’ space rather than in an ‘up’ or ‘down’ direction; on Loki’s scouting mission after Þórr’s hammer has been stolen in *Brymskviða*, there is inferred horizontal movement to Giantland given the latter’s conventional location in the cardinal direction ‘east.’

Óðinn, Space and Movement

One can arguably identify Óðinn as the ‘leader’ of the Norse gods.⁴² As above, the positioning of three poems with Óðinn as their main character within the CR (items two, three and four) indicates that a sizeable proportion of thirteenth-century Scandinavians regarded him as the most important deity.⁴³ According to Snorri, Óðinn is one of the oldest creatures in existence (*elztr Ásanna*),⁴⁴ and has giant ancestry through his mother Bestla,⁴⁵ the daughter of the giant Bǫlþorn.⁴⁶ A connection to the giants/giant ancestry is, I argue in Chapter two, associated with extreme old age, and is also associated with spatial liminality. In terms of his appearance, Óðinn is often portrayed as an old one-eyed wanderer - a stereotyped image representing his considerable powers of movement.

In addition to the eddic poems mentioned earlier, Óðinn also figures prominently in many of the stories related in Snorri’s *Edda*, some of which, such as the myth of the mead of poetry, can be said to help establish mythical society by giving the gods precious cultural resources.⁴⁷ Many of these myths involve a journey to a remote place, often somewhere liminal (and therefore on the horizontal axis) or to the chthonic land of the dead (and therefore on the vertical axis). Óðinn’s power to travel along both axes distinguishes him

⁴² But probably not the *konungr* ‘king,’ as Snorri very rarely bestows this term on him in his *Edda*: see Richard Cole, “Æsirism: The Impossibility of Ideological Neutrality in *Snorra Edda*,” *Old Norse Myths as Political Ideologies. Critical Studies in the Appropriation of Medieval Narratives Acta Scandinavica* 9 ed. Nicolas Meylan and Lukas Rösli (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 30.

⁴³ Though perhaps not Icelanders, hence the absence of Óðinn-derived placenames in Iceland where the social organisation was based on kinship and independence from kings; see Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 65–70, and Edgar Polomé, *Essays on Germanic Religion* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of Man, 1989), 103.

⁴⁴ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 21.

⁴⁵ Though Ciklamini, “Óðinn and the giants,” 145, calls him a ‘newcomer.’

⁴⁶ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 11: *Hann fekk þeirar konu er Bestla hét, dóttir Bǫlþorns jötuns, ok fengu þau þrjá sonu.*

⁴⁷ In the ‘Prologue’ of the Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol.), the euhemerised Óðinn is described in the framework of *translatio imperii* as an institutor of a new culture and order of society and is compared with the Roman deity Saturn, who supposedly brings knowledge of viticulture and building when he emigrates from Troy to Italy: Finnur Jónsson, *Edda Snorra: Codex Wormianus AM 242, fol.* (Copenhagen and Kristiania (Oslo): Gyldendal, 1924), 6. Also see Annette Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament. En texthistorisk studie* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2011), 291.

from the other gods; it also accords with his association with wisdom and numinous knowledge, which can only be acquired by a journey – typically, to a remote space - and/or some sort of initiation involving a sacrifice or the (symbolic) death of the initiate.⁴⁸ His familiarity with various kinds of journeys is indicated by one of his *heiti* ‘poetic names,’ *Vegtamr*, meaning ‘Accustomed to the road,’ which appears in *Baldrs Draumar* ‘Baldr’s Dreams’ 6 and 13, discussed below.⁴⁹

Far-seeing and Shapeshifting

In both Snorri’s *Edda* and the eddic poem *Grímnismál*, we are told that from where Óðinn sits in his high-seat *Hliðskjálf* he is able to see out over all ‘worlds’ (*heimar*).⁵⁰ In Chapter two, I discuss a stanza in *Scírnismál* (Snorri was also aware of this information) in which

⁴⁸ A number of *Fornaldarsögur* (there are further examples in the fragment *Brot af Sigurðakviðu* ‘Fragment of a Poem about Sigurðr’ 17 and *Gesta Danorum*) describe the pagan rite known as *jarðarmen* (lit. ‘earth necklace’), allegedly undertaken by certain characters, which involves the swearing of an oath, mixing of blood (cf. *Kvasir*) and walking beneath a strip of turf. The object of such a rite is not unproblematic and varying readings have been advanced, notably by M. Pappenheim, L. Hellmuth, Margaret Clunies Ross and Jens Peter Schjødt. Certain details of the rite itself, as it is described in *Gísla saga Súrsonnar*, *Fostbræðra saga* and *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* (according to Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion* trans. Victor Hansen (Odense: Odense University Press, 2008), 357), despite their relatively late composition the *jarðarmen* rite can be regarded as a genuine pagan phenomenon simply because of its incompatibility with Christian thinking), disagree with each other, but it is possible, in Schjødt’s view, to reconstruct the basic elements. The view expressed by Pappenheim, de Vries and Hellmuth, is that the *jarðarmen* rite represents an initiation into a blood-brother relationship. The idea is that by walking under the strip of turf one has undergone a transformation of sorts, with the result that the two individuals involved attain a new status. On the other hand, Clunies Ross argues for an interpretation of the *jarðarmen* as a disgraceful act (based on the idea that the turf symbolises the anus: Clunies Ross, “Hildir’s ring: a problem in the *Ragnarsdrápa*, strophes 8–12,” 80–1), but in Schjødt’s view “there can hardly be any doubt” that either reading is plausible if one accepts the truly pagan nature of the material (Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 370). The turf itself represents a liminal space; in other words, an ‘other world’ (*das Ganz Andere*) to borrow Schjødt’s term. There are various Norse myths that contain similar motifs, such as the *Kvasir* myth, Óðinn’s quest for the mead of poetry and Sigmundur and Sinfjötli, among others. In a sense the ‘other world’ is indistinguishable from the underworld and many of the myths already mentioned involve a journey there and back. However, we cannot always be sure that the underworld is the sole liminal space initiands are supposed to traverse; for example, the mountain that Óðinn spends three nights in with Gunnlōð in order to obtain the mead of poetry is clearly liminal, not to mention chthonic, but it is equally clear that he is not in the land of the dead. Here it is where the horizontal axis upon which the journey takes place. In the case of the *jarðarmen*, however, we can be fairly certain that the underworld is being symbolically represented and is thus an example of the oppositional pair upper-world:underworld in action. The function of oppositional pairs in myth is to put the various narratives into an explainable system so that connections between them can be established (see Introduction, pp. 4–5).

⁴⁹ The *heiti* *Farmognuðr* ‘Travel-furtherer’ from the skaldic poem *Háleygjatal* ‘Enumeration of the Háleygir (people of Hálogaland)’ is an additional example: Russell Poole, “(Introduction to) Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson, *Háleygjatal*,” *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035* Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages I ed. Diana Whaley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 195.

⁵⁰ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 13: *Þar er einn staðr er Hliðskjálf heitir, ok þá er Óðinn settisk þar í háseti þá sá hann of alla heima ok hvers manns athæfi ok vissi alla hluti þá er hann sá* ‘In the city there is a seat called *Hliðskjálf*, and when Óðinn sat in that throne he saw over all worlds and every man’s activity and understood everything he saw.’

Freyr uses Hliðskjálf to look into Giantland, which is how he sees Gerðr.⁵¹ Óðinn is even able to see where Loki is hiding after the latter flees to the mountains following Baldr's death (*hafði Óðinn sét ór Hliðskjálfinni hvar hann var*).⁵² In general, however, the ability to see in this way is highly exceptional in Norse myth.⁵³ It gives Óðinn an extraordinary command over various spaces, mediating the binary between near and far. This appears to be analogous to certain other aspects of his character, including his apparent sexual ambiguity and ability to shapeshift, both of which similarly mediate binaries.⁵⁴ Óðinn's knowledge of all the realms and their inhabitants, which he acquires from sitting in Hliðskjálf, is therefore a distinct aspect of his command of space.⁵⁵

We also know from *Ynglinga saga* 'The saga of the Yngling family,' probably written by Snorri, that Óðinn is able to change his appearance at will according to his need or situation. For example, we read in ch. 7:

Óðinn skipti hómum; lá þá búkrinn sem sofinn eða dauðr, en hann var þá fugl eða dýr, fiskr eða ormr, ok fór á einni svipstund á fjarlæg lǫnd, at sínum erendum eða annarra

⁵¹ This particular motif is, in my opinion, reminiscent of the ritual described by Ibn Fadlan wherein a slave girl who is soon to be sacrificed is "lifted up" so that she can see her father and mother in the 'other world' before she can join her new husband, the dead chieftain. Cf. Óðinn and Freyr raising themselves up to see into realms near and far; see Jens Peter Schjødt, "Ibn Fadlan's Account of a Rus Funeral: To What Degree Does It Reflect Nordic Myths?" *Reflections on Old Norse Myths* ed. Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjødt, and Rasmus Tranum Kristensen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 142.

⁵² Faulkes, *Edda*, 48: 'Óðinn saw from Hliðskjálf where he [Loki] was.'

⁵³ The concept of 'seeing' and therefore 'knowing,' as it can often mean in the Germanic languages, can be compared with *Grímnismál* 7 where Óðinn and Sága *drekka um alla daga glöð ór gullnom kerom* 'drink everyday joyfully out of golden tumblers': see Näsström, *Freyja*, 147. The name of the goddess Sága is etymologically connected to the root of the verb *sjá* 'to see' which has led some scholars to regard her as a prophetess or even Frigg (Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* vol. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1956), 350). For Óðinn, to see is to possess wisdom or numinous knowledge about the fate of the world. On the concept of seeing and knowing, cf. Carolyne Larrington and Judy Quinn, "'I remember giants': Mythological Remembering through *Völuspá*," *Myth, Magic and Memory in Early Scandinavian Narrative Culture. Studies in Honour of Stephen A. Mitchell* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 54–5.

⁵⁴ A quality that would be valued negatively in the context of a subordinate social group: Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes: Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society* vol. 1 (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark 1994, 70. Óðinn's sexual ambiguity is indicated by certain statements in a few different mythological sources. For example, in *Lokasenna* 24 it is alleged that he cross-dresses as a woman on the island of Sámsey (Samsø). Óðinn also demonstrates reproductive abilities associated with females, or what Clunies Ross, "Pseudo-Procreation Myths in Old Norse: an Anthropological Perspective, *Australian Journal of Anthropology* vol. 1 (1990), 150, terms 'male pseudo-procreation,' by 'giving birth' to the mead of poetry, making the "previously inert mead marvellously fruitful in intellectual terms."

⁵⁵ Cf. Dumézil's comments on Víðarr as a god who similarly encompasses all space in John Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance Among the Gods: Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology* (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1997), 146.

*manna. Þat kunnir hann enn at gera með orðum einum, at slökkva eld ok kyrra sjá, ok snúa vindum hverja leið er hann vildi.*⁵⁶ (Emphasis added.)

Óðinn's ability to transform into other creatures or humans is not limited to purely mythological texts. It is also how he is depicted in certain *Fornaldarsögur* 'Sagas of ancient times,' such as *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* (thirteenth century) in which he assumes the likeness of an old man called Gestumblindi in order to play a riddle game with Heiðrekr.⁵⁷ The motif of extraordinary vision also appears in the eighth-century *Historia Langobardum* 'History of the Lombards' by Paul the Deacon, who writes that Óðinn looks down onto the earth 'through a window' (*per fenestram*), which echoes the way he looks out onto the earth from Hliðskjálf.⁵⁸ Óðinn is also a practitioner of *seiðr*, a form of magic usually associated with the Vanir goddess Freyja and the female sphere in general, supporting the idea that Óðinn's sexuality is not clear-cut.⁵⁹ Jens Peter Schjødt points out the connection between certain strands of Óðinn's behaviour as belonging to the same meaning complex that has *seiðr* as one of its elements.⁶⁰ On this basis, I assert that Óðinn's sexual and corporeal ambiguity align within the same theoretical framework as his spatial characteristics; that is, he is not limited to being able to see in one direction alone in the same way that he is not limited by his own bodily form or the movement of his body.

The mead of poetry

As has been said, Óðinn travels along both the horizontal and vertical axes to acquire numinous knowledge or a precious resource.⁶¹ This type of quest forms the subject of several

⁵⁶ Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* translated by Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London: University College London, 2011), 10: 'Óðinn changed shapes. Then his body lay as if it was asleep or dead, while he was a bird or an animal, a fish or a snake, and travelled in an instant to distant lands, on his own or other people's business. He also knew how to put out fire or calm the sea or turn the winds in any direction he wished.'

⁵⁷ The identification of these figures, common throughout the *Fornaldarsögur*, with Óðinn is largely inferred but seldom made explicit: John Lindow and Jens Peter Schjødt, "The Divine, The Human, And In Between," *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume II: Social, Geographical and Historical Contexts, and Communication between Worlds* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 981.

⁵⁸ Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 72.

⁵⁹ This is an interesting element of Óðinn's character given the general attitude towards homosexuality (cf. the term *ergi*) in Old Norse society, where an accusation of homosexual behaviour was considered the worst form of slander for a man.

⁶⁰ Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 212.

⁶¹ Annette Lassen, "Hǫðr's Blindness and the Pledging of Óðinn's Eye: A Study of the Symbolic Value of the eyes of Hǫðr, Óðinn and Þórr," *Old Norse Myths, Literature & Society* ed. Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Medieval & Early Modern Centre University of Sydney, 2000), 227, analyses Óðinn in terms of ocular handicap and comes to the conclusion that it enables him to transcend the female and male realms; it shows his ability in "crossing the limits" – in this chapter it will be shown that he is also able to cross the limits of different spatial realms as a result of various 'transformations' that he undergoes.

myths, one of which is about the mead of poetry, known from ch. 57 of the *Skáldskaparmál* section of Snorri's *Edda* (see n. 62 for a summary of the story).⁶² While not explicitly named, we can infer that Hnitbjörg ('Beating-rock'), the name of the mountain in which the mead is being stored, is located in Giantland. This is due to the fact that mountains have liminal associations, contrasting them with 'civilised' or central spaces, but also because the giantess Gunnlǫð is located inside the mountain itself. Giants have strong associations with the earth and inanimate material, which is semantically and dialectically 'dead.' Óðinn's journey to Hnitbjörg can therefore be imagined as taking place on the horizontal axis, as Giantland is generally thought to be located in the east, thus 'across' space. The vast distance from Ásgarðr to Hnitbjörg is indicated by the fact that on the return leg Óðinn transforms into a bird, echoing Loki's journey to the home of Þrymr and back in *Þrymskviða*. As has been mentioned, only a handful of gods are able to undertake such a journey. Óðinn's free ability to travel along the horizontal axis is thus prominent in this myth, and associated with his ability to change bodily form.

There are also some overtones here of a ritual activity involving Óðinn and Gunnlǫð, which is usually associated with a journey to the underworld. As such, some elements of a journey along the vertical axis seem to be present. By entering into the mountain, it could be argued that Óðinn is stepping into an 'other world' on a comparable semantic level with the underworld.⁶³ According to Schjødt, the mountain functions as a kind of *axis mundi* (in the sense that it creates a nexus between the various realms or levels of the cosmos), a role normally performed by Yggdrasill.⁶⁴ Some kind of religious or ritual importance is also suggested by his meeting with Gunnlǫð, whom he lies with for three nights. A similar motif is in operation in the tenth-century account of a Viking funeral on the Volga by Ahmad Ibn Fadlan. In his text the *Risala* 'Report,' Fadlan states that a slave girl has sexual relations with

⁶² The main ideas of the story are as follows: the being Kvasir, born from the spittle of the Vanir and the Æsir, roams the world but is killed by two dwarfs called Fjalarr and Galarr who mix his blood with honey, the ideal mediator to the oppositional pair 'nature:culture,' to make the mead of poetry; the dwarfs then invite the giant Gillingr to row out to sea with them, but when the boat capsizes Gillingr is killed; Gillingr's wife, stricken with grief, wants to see where her husband died, but Galarr grows tired of her wailing and lets a whetstone fall on her head; when Gillingr's son Suttungr hears of this, he demands compensation for his father's death and takes the dwarfs to a skerry/reef (*flæðarsker*); the dwarfs grow afraid and offer the mead as *foðurgjöld* 'wergild for his father'; Suttungr then stores the mead in a mountain called Hnitbjörg where his daughter Gunnlǫð guards over it: see Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 159.

⁶³ This seems to resemble the common shamanistic notion that the entrance to the underworld lies in a 'cleft,' such as that in a tree in Nganasan shamanic tradition from Central Asia; see Clive Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic* vol. 1 (Helsinki: FF Communications, 2009), 85.

⁶⁴ Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 164.

the dead chieftain’s closest men before being ritually killed and burnt with him (I return to this subject below).⁶⁵ Like Óðinn’s rendezvous with Gunnlōð, the girl and the dead warrior are thought to be passing into an ‘other world’ for which the sexual relations are a necessary precondition. This myth therefore has aspects of journey along both axes, distinguishing it from other myths.

Mimir’s well

Another myth that has Óðinn travel along the vertical axis in order to acquire numinous knowledge involves the figure of Mimir. The story of how Mimir is killed and turned into a repository of wisdom is alluded to in the eddic poems *Völuspá* and *Sigrdrífumál* ‘Sigrdrífa’s Lay,’ as well as Snorri’s *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga*. Mimir is one of the hostages exchanged with the Vanir. He is described as ‘the wisest man’ (*hinn vitrasti maðr*),⁶⁶ and through his execution there is a connection between physical death and intellectual life.⁶⁷ However, when Hœnir did not have Mimir by his side (*var eigi nær*) in difficult matters (*vandamál*), he would always answer with the phrase *ráði aðrir* ‘let others decide.’⁶⁸ Because they thought they were being cheated, the Vanir cut off Mimir’s head and sent it to Óðinn, who smeared the head with herbs to preserve it.⁶⁹ Mimir’s head is kept in *Mimisbrunnr* (‘Mimir’s well’), which is located under the third root of Yggdrasill, wherefrom knowledge and wisdom emanate.⁷⁰ According to Snorri, Óðinn drinks from the well (*drekkur ór brunninum*), which is borrowed from st. 28 of *Völuspá*:

*‘Alt veit ec, Óðinn, hvar þú auga falt:
í inom mæra Mimis brunni.’
Dreccr mioð Mimir morgin hverian
af veði Valföðrs - vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?’⁷¹*

⁶⁵ Schjødt, “Ibn Fadlan’s Account of a Rus Funeral,” 139, considers this aspect as part of a rite that constitutes a ritual in Ibn Fadlan’s description of the death of a chieftain in Old Rus. According to Schjødt, the dead slave-girl’s sexual relations with the “Genossen der Verstorbenen” (A. Z. V. Togan, *Ibn Fadlan’s Reisebericht* Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes XXIV, 3 (Leipzig: FA Brockhaus, 1939), 93) is known from other Norse myths such as the relationship between Sigmundur and Signý in *Völsunga saga* and Freyja and Óttarr in *Hyndluljóð* where sacred information in combination with sex is at stake.

⁶⁶ Finlay and Faulkes, *Heimskringla*, 7.

⁶⁷ Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 129.

⁶⁸ Finlay and Faulkes, *Heimskringla*, 8.

⁶⁹ According to Näsström, *Freyja*, 64, the Vanir, as gods of “voluptuousness and wealth,” would not have understood the value of Mimir and so they keep the beautiful but silent Hœnir.

⁷⁰ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 17: *En undir þeiri rót er til hrímþursa horfir, flar er Mimis brunnr, er spekð ok mannvit er í fölgit, ok heitir sá Mimir er á brunninn.*

⁷¹ Gustav Neckel & Hans Kuhn (eds.), *Edda. Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983), 7.

‘‘I know all about it, Odin, where you hid your eye
in Mimir’s famous well.’
Mimir drinks mead every morning
from Father of the Slain’s pledge – do you want to know more:
and what?’⁷²

Some scholars argue that when Óðinn drinks from Mímir’s well, he must undertake a journey along the vertical axis in a downward direction, possibly to the land of the dead. This is reminiscent of the frame narrative to *Hyndluljóð* ‘The Song of Hyndla’ that tells of Freyja’s journey to the underworld to visit the *vǫlva* Hyndla.⁷³ It is also consistent with the interpretation of Yggdrasill as ‘Óðinn’s steed’ (*Yggr* ‘the terrifying one’ + *drasill* ‘horse’). Therefore, we can say that in order to reach Mímir’s well, Óðinn must ‘ride’ Yggdrasill, which implies vigorous movement of some kind; Yggdrasill thus functions as a gateway to the ‘other world’ in a comparable way to Hnitbjörg, examined above.⁷⁴ Moreover, Óðinn’s hiding of his eye suggests that some sort of initiatory rite is taking place in which he exchanges a physical part of himself for entry into a new condition, namely that of having greater wisdom. A similar kind of downward movement is also implied in st. 138 of *Hávamál* in which Óðinn hangs himself on Yggdrasill,⁷⁵ as a sacrifice to himself (*siálfir siálfom mér*) to acquire the runes.⁷⁶ It has been suggested that he hung by his feet and stretched down to pick up the runes, furthering the association between Óðinn’s physical attributes and downward movement along the vertical axis.

Interactions with vǫlur

Like his Vanir counterpart Freyja, Óðinn has a notable affinity with the race of beings known as *vǫlur* (see Chapter two, 63–8) from whom he attempts to extract information about future events. *Vǫlur* tend to live in underground spaces and move along the vertical axis. In the eddic poem *Vǫluspá* the encounter between Óðinn and the *vǫlva*, who remains nameless throughout, is developed as the frame of the poem. The purpose of Óðinn’s interrogation of

⁷² Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 7.

⁷³ Elsewhere (see Chapter two, 60–1) I argue for the closeness between Freyja and Óðinn particularly regarding themes of death.

⁷⁴ Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 178.

⁷⁵ The hanging motif is significant in Norse myth: in *Gesta Danorum*, for example, when the osier is placed around Víkarr’s neck it tightens and strangles him (Karsten Friis-Jensen (ed.), *Saxo Grammaticus. Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes* vol. 1 trans. Peter Fisher (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 383; Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 188.

⁷⁶ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 40.

the *vǫlva* is to find out about the fate of the world and gods.⁷⁷ *Vǫluspá* has little direct speech, yet the *vǫlva* is evidently being tested: in st. 28 (*Hvers fregnit mic, | hví frestið mín?*) Óðinn presses the *vǫlva* for answers. The location of this encounter is again not specified, though we do learn that the *vǫlva* sits *út* ‘outside.’ However, we can infer, based on other textual evidence involving *vǫlur*, that a liminal setting is to be imagined, in the land of the dead and/or in a cave, both of which are consistent with other portrayals of *vǫlur*. Again the implication is that Óðinn must undertake a downward journey. This journey also establishes the *vǫlva*’s abode at the lower end of the vertical axis. As will be discussed below and in Chapter two, only select individuals can travel along this axis, including Freyja, Loki, and Hermóðr (with Sleipnir). Both Óðinn and Freyja have close associations with the dead and their realm (they each receive half of those slain in war), and at least one example can be adduced of Freyja’s consulting with *vǫlur* in pursuit of wisdom.

A similar journey to the underworld to speak with a *vǫlva* can be adduced from the eddic poem *Baldrs draumar*, in which Óðinn demands to know about the fate of his son Baldr, who is having bad dreams. Her darkened abode is suggested in the description of Óðinn’s journey in st. 2, *niðr þaðan | Niflheliar til* ‘down from there he rode to Mist-hell,’⁷⁸ as well as st. 4, *Þá reið Óðinn | fyr austan dyrr* ‘then Odin rode east of the doors,’⁷⁹ the first putting the destination on the vertical axis with the second on the horizontal axis. Despite this incongruity (a feature of ancient religions, according to Schjødt), Óðinn has the ability to travel along either axis, emphasising two distinct binaries (up:down and east:west) at the same time, as with Óðinn’s entry into Hnitbjörg. Óðinn also accuses the *vǫlva* of being *þursa móðir* ‘mother of [three] giants,’⁸⁰ associating her strongly with this race of beings and their realm. Despite the ensuing argument and liminal location (whether on the horizontal or vertical axis), Óðinn demonstrates his significant powers of movement, physical and social, in being able to overcome the obstacles in his way.

⁷⁷ This is similar to the wisdom contest in *Vafþrúðnismál* in which Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir enter into a colloquy where questions and answers are posed by each interlocutor, leading to a climax in which Óðinn emerges as the winner.

⁷⁸ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 277; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 235.

⁷⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 277; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 235.

⁸⁰ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 279.

Loki, Space and Movement

Loki's ability to travel through different spatial realms is analogous with his close-knit agnatic relations with both the gods and the 'forces of chaos,' e.g., giants and monsters. Although included among the Æsir, some authors regard him as not of divine heritage, given his father's identity.⁸¹ In addition, he often breaks the bonds of friendship with the gods and is probably responsible for Baldr's death.⁸² That said, Loki also sometimes betrays his giant kin in order to help the gods accomplish, acquire, or retrieve certain objects (e.g., Iðunn's apples). His personality and loyalty are contradictory,⁸³ giving Loki a 'dualistic' character. In a similar way, Loki's relationship to space is contradictory.⁸⁴ On the one hand, he is capable of various types of movement (flying,⁸⁵ sea journeys, and has a theriomorphic ability). But there are also indications that he is never in full control, as shown by the fact that there is always a limiting factor involved, which, I argue, is connected to his, and his offspring's, fundamental association with binding and stasis.⁸⁶ For example, when he builds his house

⁸¹ Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes* I, 64, and Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, "Starkaðr, Loki and Egil Skallagrímsson," *Sagas of the Icelanders. A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland, 1989), 150–53, argue the case for Loki's mother as an *ásynja*, whereas Jens Peter Schjødt, "Om Loke Endnu Endgang," *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* vol. 96 (1981), 56, and Näsström, *Freyja*, 115, regard him as wholly giant.

⁸² He is described as the *rógbera* 'slanderer' of the gods by Snorri and *mjök fjölbreytinn at háttum* 'very variable in manner' (Faulkes, *Edda*, 26). Yet, at the same time, Loki is capable of 'good' deeds as well, as when, after having cut off all of Sif's hair, he coerces the dwarfs to forge a golden head of hair; he also deceptively manages to get these dwarfs to make certain magical items, such as the arm-ring Draupnir, Óðinn's spear Gungnir, Mjöllnir, as well as Skíðblaðnir and a golden-haired boar for Freyr: see Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 137.

⁸³ Snorri implies as much when he says *Hann kom Ásum jafnan í fullt vandræði ok opt leysti hann þá með vælræðum* 'He was always getting the Æsir into a complete fix and often got them out of it by trickery' (Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 27; Faulkes, *Edda*, 26).

⁸⁴ Olof Sundqvist, "Myternas universum – om makterna och deras boningar," *Odens öga – mellan människor och makter i det förkristna Norden/Odin's Eye – between people and powers in the pre-Christian north* ed. Anders Andrén and Peter Carelli (Helsingborg: Dunkers Kulturhus, 2006), 60.

⁸⁵ Some scholars believe that since one of Loki's by-names, *Loptr*, means 'sky' he should be regarded as the god who rules the air: see, for instance, Albert Morey Sturtevant, "Etymological Comments upon Certain Old Norse Proper Names in the Eddas," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* vol. 67, no. 7 (1952), 1154–6.

⁸⁶ In the story where Skaði comes to Ásgarðr demanding justice for the death of her father Þjazi, Loki contrives to make her laugh by tying the beard of a goat to his testicles. The goat pulls one way while Loki pulls the other. I suggest that this is an example of Loki's 'capitalisation' of, in this case, horizontal space: *En þat var Njōðr ór Nóatúnun. Þat hafði hon ok í sættargjörð sinni at Æsir skyldu flat gera er hon hugð at þeir skyldu eigi mega, at hlægja hana. Þa gerði Loki þat at hann batt um skegg geitar nokkvorrar ok oðrum enda um hreðjar sér ok létu þau ymsi eptir ok skrækti hvárttveggja við hátt*: Anthony Faulkes (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson: Edda. Skáldskaparmál* vol. 1 (London: Viking Society, 1998), 2.

after being chased out of Ásgarðr he puts four doors in it,⁸⁷ one for each cardinal direction.⁸⁸ The four-doored house underpins his cunning facility for using space, but also an overwhelming fear of being captured by his enemies (as is eventually the case).⁸⁹

Dealings with giants

Evidence for Loki's power of movement, but also his loss of autonomy, can be adduced from the myth of the theft of Iðunn and her apples, found in the *Skáldskaparmál* section of Snorri's *Edda*.

The basic thrust of this story accounts for the source of the gods' immortality and the devastating consequences of its theft. It begins with a picnic intended to be enjoyed by Óðinn, Loki and Hœnir.⁹⁰ They are trying to cook an ox in an earth-oven, watched by an eagle, who offers his help.⁹¹ They accept the eagle's help, but Loki becomes angry at the quantity of food it consumes and attacks it with a pole (*stǫng*). Unhurt, the eagle grasps the pole with its claws and launches into the sky, with Loki somehow stuck to the other end.⁹² In this myth Loki is portrayed as completely helpless and as having lost control over his own body. He pleads with the eagle for a truce, but it only agrees if Loki can persuade the goddess Iðunn to come 'outside' Ásgarðr (*út of Ásgarð*) with her apples. Iðunn's apples give the gods eternal youth.⁹³ Loki then returns to his comrades, but does not mention his bargain with the eagle.

⁸⁷ One of the earliest Christian churches in Norway (dated by Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide to between the late-eighth and mid-tenth century), on the island of Veøy in Romsdalsfjorden, contains a graveyard with four gates each facing a different cardinal direction: see Nordeide, "The Christinization of Norway," *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume IV: The Christinization Process, Bibliography, and Index* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1629.

⁸⁸ A four-sided house such as this is unique to Norse myth, though it has parallels in the Iron Age fortress at Trelleborg in Denmark (see Chapter five, 176–7): see John Lindow, "The Social Semantics of Cardinal Directions in Medieval Scandinavia," *Mankind Quarterly* vol. 34 (1994), 211.

⁸⁹ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 48: *Þá er guðin váru orðin honum svá reið sem ván var, hljóp hann á braut ok fal sik í fjalli nokkvoru, gerði þar hús ok fjórar dyrr at hann mátti sjá ór húsinu í allar áttir*. It is doubtful whether the other gods would have need of such a house on the grounds that none of them are portrayed as having a duplicitous relationship with members of their own race (with the possible exception of Óðinn), thus mitigating any fear that hostility might come internally.

⁹⁰ It is interesting that two of these gods also appear in *Völuspá* 18 as the progenitors of mankind, the other being Lóðurr, whom some scholars identify as Loki.

⁹¹ Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, 56: *Vilið þér gefa mér fylli mína af oxanum, þá mun soðna á seyðinum*.

⁹² Anna Birgitta Rooth, *Loki in Scandinavian Mythology* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerups Förlag, 1961), 187, considers the myths in which Loki 'catches' something or is himself 'caught' to be the most authentic to his character; according to Snorri, the eagle flies to such a great height that Loki bangs his feet on the stones, gravel and trees: Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, 1: *Orninn flýgr hátt sva at fætr taka niðr grjótit ok urðir ok viðu*.

⁹³ Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, 1: *Hann kallar ok biðr allflarfliga orninn friðar, en hann segir at Loki skal aldri lauss verða nema hann veiti honum svardaga at koma Iðunni út of Ásgarð með epli sín*.

One day Loki lures Iðunn into a forest, a wild space, where the giant Þjazi, whom we can infer was the eagle all along, kidnaps Iðunn and takes her to his home in Giantland. Consequently, the gods experience sickness, quickly growing hoary and old.⁹⁴ However, they also realise that Loki is responsible for Iðunn's theft and threaten him with torture or death unless he can bring her back. Although here Snorri has Loki borrow a *valshamr* 'falcon's skin,' there are instances in other myths where he changes his appearance through *seiðr*, a branch of magic closely associated with women and fertility, in order to acquire something. This places him in an ambiguous position in the binary of male:female. His ability to use *seiðr* is demonstrated when he arrives at Þjazi's and finds Iðunn on her own and transforms her into a nut (*i hnotar liki*), so that he can carry her in his claws. As soon as they are safely back in Ásgarðr, the Æsir set fire to a pile of woodchips and burn the pursuing Þjazi, who has changed back into an eagle.

Þjazi's home is very far to the north, one of three cardinal directions (the others being east and south) where giants were thought to dwell. We can also infer that there are geographical barriers in the way, as these kinds of liminal landscapes are associated with Giantland and the giant race. Loki is therefore portrayed as being able to travel along both the horizontal axis and the vertical axis through the air, with the help of a *valshamr*, which distinguishes him from many of the other gods. However, while the *valshamr* gives him temporary control over the skies in contrast to his portrayal earlier in the myth, unlike Óðinn, he is dependent on the use of the *valshamr* for such autonomy in movement. Moreover, his powers of movement are clearly able to be restricted by other powerful beings.

A comparable portrayal of Loki's not completely free movement is found in the myth of Þórr's conflict with the giant Geirrøðr as presented in *Skáldskaparmál* chs 17–18, but framed rather differently in *Þórsdrápa*. In the latter, the domain of the sky, in which vertical movement is passive, is an important element behind the events. For example, Loki is said to be flying *at skemta sér* 'for his enjoyment' when he finds himself in Geirrøðr's hall. This irritates the giant who orders his servant to climb up the wall and catch him. Loki is pleased by the annoyance he has caused and intends to wait until the last second before escaping, but

⁹⁴ Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál, 2: Æsir urðu illa við hvarf Iðunnar ok gerðusk þeir brátt hárir ok gamlir*.

in the critical moment he finds that his feet are stuck.⁹⁵ The reason for Loki's feet being stuck is not made explicit, but the similarities with various other Loki-themed myths, in which he is made unable to move, are unlikely to be coincidental. An explanation for the strange episode discussed in the previous subsection in which Loki gets his feet stuck to Þjazi's pole is similarly absent. In that myth, Loki seems to have been the victim of a kind of power beyond his control, so he makes a truce with the giant.⁹⁶ In this story he simply miscalculates – it is his own fault – so he ignores Geirrøðr's interrogation (*Loki þagði*), which causes him to be locked in a chest for three months.⁹⁷

Loki's being locked in a chest brings out a significant spatial element of his character, namely his association with fettering, binding and positions of 'stasis.' The binary pair movement:stasis, which is present in Loki's dealings with Þjazi and Geirrøðr, offers a useful analytical framework. In parts of the myths discussed above, Loki has access to a 360° scope of movement, as he is wearing a *valshamr*. His mobility is also portrayed in the several journeys he undertakes with the other gods, mainly Þórr, to liminal realms, such as Giantland. However, as these myths develop, the kinetic liberty that the *valshamr* gives to Loki is replaced by an approximation of its antonym, stasis – in one myth, by having his feet suddenly and invisibly stuck, a turn of events we could associate with the practice of sorcery, and in the other by being locked in a chest. It is in such a static or immobile state that Loki (or anybody) is most vulnerable; in the account of his punishment, the Æsir bind him to a rock from which it is impossible to escape – no truce is offered. The immobile state that he experiences, caused by Geirrøðr and Þjazi, forces Loki to swear the oaths that attempt to deprive the gods of their precious resources and personnel. Thus Loki's association with stasis and his restriction of movement cause major problems, which he then attempts to fix, though not without fracturing his relationship with the gods.

⁹⁵ Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskapramál*, 24: *Þat þótti Loki got er hann sótti erfiðliga til hans ok ætlaði sér stund at fljúga eigi upp fyrr en hann hafði farit alt torleiðit. En er maðrinn sótti at honum þá beinir hann fluginn ok spyrnir við fast ok eru þá fætrnir fastir.*

⁹⁶ Þjazi was thought to be a very powerful giant, causing what John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 287, describes as “one of the most dangerous moments for the gods in the mythological present.”

⁹⁷ Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskapramál*, 24: *Þá læsti Geirrøðr Loka í kistu ok svelti hann þar þrjá mánuðr...En þá er Geirrøðr tók hann upp ok beiddi hann orða, ok sagði Loki hvern hann var, ok til *fjörlausnar vann hann Geirrøði þess eidda at hann skyldi koma Þór í Geirrøðargarða svá at hann hefði hvárki hamarinn né megingjarðar.*

Binding

The account of Loki's punishment by the gods in Snorri's *Edda* involves him being bound and therefore encapsulated in permanent stasis. The relevant passage from the *Edda*, which is quoted in full, follows directly from the description given by Snorri of Loki's four-sided house:

Þá tóku Æsir þarma hans ok bundu Loka með yfir þá þrjá steina—einn undir herðum, annarr undir lendum, þriðji undir knésfótum—ok urðu þau þond at járni. Þá tók Skaði eitroorm ok festi upp yfir hann svá at eitrit skyldi drjúpa ór orminum í andlit honum. En Sigyn kona hans stendr hjá honum ok heldr mundlaugu undir eitrdropa. En þá er full er mundlaugin þá gengr hon ok slær út eitrinu, en meðan drýpr eitrit í andlit honum. Þá kippisk hann svá hart við at jörð öll skelfr. Þat kallið þér landskjálpta. Þar liggr hann í þondum til ragnarøks.⁹⁸

This episode emphasises Loki's association with stasis, which is as important an aspect of his character as his ability to roam through different spatial realms. I think Loki's own stasis should be understood in connection with the binding or restricting of his children, Hel, the Miðgarðsormr and Fenrir, who are all associated with binding in a fundamental way. Hel is the ruler of the land of the dead, which places her in a liminal as well as a static position (as I argue in Chapter two, Hel is 'fixed' – dead beings do not return to the upper world).

Miðgarðsormr grows so big that it must be wrapped around the earth. It only enters into the myths in conflicts with Þórr and at Ragnarøk, when the two great adversaries kill each other. Fenrir is coerced into being bound physically with fetters. Father and children likewise break out of their bonds at Ragnarøk, until which they are in temporary stasis. According to Snorri, two other offspring of Loki, Váli⁹⁹ and Nari (or Narfi), are with Loki when he is caught by the gods, who somehow (with *seiðr*?) turn Váli into a wolf that kills his brother. The slain Nari's/Narfi's guts (*þarmar*), i.e., the flesh and blood of Loki's own child, are then used to bind Loki to the stone. In a curious way, Nari/Narfi joins his siblings and father as an

⁹⁸ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 49; Faulkes, *Edda*, 56: 'Then the gods took the guts [of Loki's son] and bound Loki to three stones – one under the shoulders, the second under the loins, the third under the knee – and the fetters were like iron. Then Skaði took a serpent and fastened it above him so that poison should drop from the serpent onto his face. And Sigyn, his wife, stands by him and holds a cup to catch the poison-drops. And when the cup is full she must go to empty the poison, meanwhile the poison keeps dripping on his face. Then he shrieks so piercingly that the whole world shakes. You call that earthquakes. There he lies bound until Ragnarøk.'

⁹⁹ Some scholars have interpreted this as referring to the son that Óðinn begot on Rindr to avenge Baldr: for example, Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*.

instrument or recipient of binding.¹⁰⁰ Thus, binding and stasis are elements strongly associated with Loki, but he also passes them on to his children, all of whom cause significant destruction at Ragnarøk. While the gods make attempts to restrict their powers of movement by making them immobile, it is only temporary and, in a way, it appears to increase their power, perhaps symbolic of natural forces, which is ultimately beyond that of the gods.

Þórr, Space and Movement

Þórr is generally understood to have been one of the most popular gods throughout Scandinavia during the Viking Age,¹⁰¹ especially among the common people, farmers and warriors.¹⁰² This is certainly the impression gained from an examination of some skaldic poems, which may have influenced the systematisation and selection of material in Snorri's *Edda*, in which Þórr is favourably treated¹⁰³ (as opposed to certain eddic poems: see Chapter three).¹⁰⁴ Almost without exception, Þórr is portrayed as aggressive and impulsive, qualities

¹⁰⁰ There are some visual *comparanda* of Loki's binding on two Anglo-Scandinavian crosses from the north of England: the Gainford Cross, dated to between 900 and 950, and the cross at Kirkby Stephen, probably from the tenth century. Both crosses have been variously identified both as the bound Loki and the 'Bound devil,' a common pictorial representation of the imprisonment of Satan in Hell from *Revelation* 20. Some scholars have also proposed Völundr, Gunnarr and Mors, the personification of death in Roman myth, as alternative possibilities, though less persuasively: see Richard Bailey and Rosemary Cramp (eds.), *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, II: Cumberland, Westmorland, and Lancashire-North-of-the-Sands*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 121, and Richard Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture in Northern England* (London: Collins, 1980), 140, for a full discussion). The Gainford cross also appears to depict both Loki (or the 'Bound devil') and a quadruped, probably Fenrir, see Rosemary Cramp (ed.), *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture, I: County Durham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 82.

¹⁰¹ Þórr's main attributes are the goat, the hammer and the axe: see Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 84. All three motifs were depicted by Scandinavian Bronze Age rock-carvers, suggesting that they are older than the figure of Þórr himself.

¹⁰² Þórr can also be characterised as a god of warriors (e.g., the second function) but also of farmers, a phenomenon noticed by Georges Dumézil, who calls it a *glissement* 'gliding' between the various functions, typical of Germanic society: see Dumézil, "La Rigsthula et la structure glissements fonctionnels de divinités dans la religion germanique," 1–19, and Näsström, *Freyja*, 30.

¹⁰³ Some accounts, such as the eddic poem *Þrymskviða*, contradict this favourable notion of Þórr by highlighting the burlesque aspects of his character, or place him in embarrassing situations that portray him unflatteringly. However, if we consider the ordering of the mythological eddic material in the Codex Regius into Þórr- and Óðinn-poems, we might argue, as some scholars have done, that such a layout suggests a transfer of the hierarchy of status from father to son. At the same time it could be argued that the positioning of the Óðinn poems at the start of the Codex Regius suggests the primacy of this god.

¹⁰⁴ John Lindow, "Mythology and Mythography," *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature. A Critical Guide* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 27. According to Adam of Bremen, however, Þórr's throne was in the middle of the temple at Uppsala with Wodan (Óðinn) and Fricco (Freyr) on either side: Francis Tschan and Timothy Reuter (eds.), *Adam of Bremen. History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 207. Also see P. A. Munch and Anne Holtsmark, *Norrøne gude- og heltesagn* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967), 37, who regard Þórr as a 'fruktsbarhetsgud' who also "måttet dele plass med vaneguddomene," an idea that receives little support today; Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 86. Of the roughly 4000 names listed in *Landnámabók* nearly a quarter begin with the element Þór-. Archaeological evidence, mainly necklaces or pendants depicting his hammer Mjöllnir, as well as onomastic evidence, suggests that he was worshipped widely throughout Scandinavia, particularly in Iceland. The earliest

that frequently steer him into conflict.¹⁰⁵ His weapon of choice is the hammer Mjöllnir, a clear phallic symbol,¹⁰⁶ whose absence renders Þórr considerably less powerful, leading to accusations of *ergi*.¹⁰⁷ Mjöllnir is thus an essential tool in the defensive system used to guard Ásgarðr from the giants and ‘forces of chaos.’ As explained in the introduction to this chapter, Þórr’s powers of movement are more restricted than Óðinn’s or Loki’s. However, there are several myths in which he demonstrates his ‘command’ of spaces situated on the horizontal axis, discussed below. He is a frequent visitor to Giantland, where he roams around with impunity slaying giants in order to control their population. Þórr is also sometimes associated with other kinds of movement, such as up and down movement or movement through the earth, that contradicts his normal abilities.

Horizontal movement in Þrymskviða

Þórr is generally associated with movement along the horizontal axis. It appears that the sole object of his journeys is to prevent the growth of the giant population and thereby maintain Ásgarðr’s dominance. Þórr is not associated with death or the earth/underworld, like Óðinn or Freyja are; consequently, he does not travel to the underworld to speak to *vødur* or any other beings that are thought to dwell there.¹⁰⁸ In *Þrymskviða* Mjöllnir is stolen by the giant Þrymr, who uses it as leverage to demand Freyja.¹⁰⁹ The loss of Mjöllnir leaves the gods in a vulnerable situation; denuded of this weapon, the giants suddenly gain the upper hand. Moreover, Þórr cannot simply invade Giantland in his usual fashion, since the hammer is

material evidence of Mjöllnir comes from the beginning of the ninth century, which coincides with the beginning of missionary activity in Scandinavia – Anders Andrén regards such objects as a “backlash against the Christian cross”: “Skandinavisk religion i tid och rum,” *Odens öga – mellan människor och makter i det förkristna Norden/Odin’s Eye – between people and powers in the pre-Christian north* ed. Anders Andrén and Peter Carelli (Helsingborg: Dunkers Kulturhus, 2006), 35. Visual depictions of Þórr in Scandinavia and the British Isles were also some of the most popular images in the Viking Age. Loyalty to Þórr almost certainly continued after the conversion and may have been encouraged by the clergy to some extent due to the clear parallels between Þórr and Christ. There are some surviving double-sided moulds, such as one made at Foss in Hrunamannahreppur, in south-west Iceland, from the tenth century, which have an imprint of Mjöllnir on one side and a Christian cross on the other. The distribution of Mjöllnir images is most dense in Denmark, southern Norway and south-eastern Sweden, areas where the interaction with Christianity was its most intense: see Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 83

¹⁰⁵ Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes* I, 43, among others, argues that the characterisation of Þórr in the mythological prose sources is similar to that of saga portraiture.

¹⁰⁶ Mjöllnir is thought, according to Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 81, to have a fertility role in *Þrymskviða* 30 *brúði at vígja* ‘hallowing the bride.’

¹⁰⁷ See Introduction, 10, for an explanation of this term.

¹⁰⁸ He does converse with a dwarf in *Alvíssmál* in a wisdom contest (a most un-Þórr-like activity) but there is little indication of location apart from the fact that it must be above ground since the dwarf is turned into stone by the sun at the end of the poem thereby sealing Þórr’s victory.

¹⁰⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 112: *hann engi maðr aptr um heimtir, nema færi mér Freyjo at qvæn* ‘No man shall recover it unless he brings me Freyja to be my wife.’

crucial for that strategy. Instead, he and Loki forge a plan in which Þórr is dressed in Freyja's 'bridal linen.' Despite Þórr's rather unconvincing display (the poet describes his obviously masculine features and huge appetite, eliciting the giant's suspicion), the journey is a success and ends with the safe return of the hammer followed by the deaths of every giant at the banquet.¹¹⁰ That the fate of Ásgarðr depends on the safe return of the hammer can be inferred from st. 7:

Hvat er með ásom, hvat er með álfom?
hví ertu einn kominn í iotunheima?’
Illt er með ásom, illt er með álfom,
hefir þú Hlórriða hamar um fólgin?’¹¹¹
 ‘What news of the gods, what news of the elves?
 Why have you come to Giantland?’
 ‘Ill news of the gods, ill news of the elves,
 have you hidden Hlórriði's [Þórr's] hammer?’¹¹²

The theft of the hammer has a direct impact upon the ‘happiness’ – the mental disposition of the gods: they have become *illr* ‘evil, bad, mean,’ Loki reports. Moreover, it is not only the gods who are affected by the hammer's disappearance, but the elves as well, a class of beings sometimes associated with ‘goodness,’ thought to live in Álfheimr, close to the gods.¹¹³

We learn from st. 5 that Þrymr dwells in *iotun heima* ‘the residences of the giants’ and therefore probably in the east, the cardinal direction conventionally associated with giants. Moreover, when Loki arrives in st. 7 Þrymr is sitting on a ‘grave mound’ (*haugr*), which is also suggestive of liminal spaces, such as the underworld. Despite the remote location, Þórr and Loki make it to Giantland by ‘driving’ the former's chariot, both gods dressed in drag. Þórr's and Loki's journey is described in similar terms to Þórr's arrival to the banquet in *Lokasenna* st. 55: with the shaking or splitting of mountains. This signals cosmic power, and the displacement or destabilisation of space. Loki's companionship on the journey is also significant. Loki frequently accompanies the gods to Giantland (often to serve his own agenda), perhaps because he mediates the god:giant dichotomy. Earlier in the poem, Loki

¹¹⁰ *Þrymskviða* is very much intended as a comedy or ‘burlesque’ as Gunnell puts it, particularly the wedding scene, and one can imagine that live performances, if they did occur, would have been very amusing: see Gunnell, ‘Eddic Poetry.’

¹¹¹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 112.

¹¹² Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 94.

¹¹³ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 17.

travels to Giantland with a *fiaðrhamr* ‘feather cloak,’ a means of transport not available to Þórr, who either travels by foot or a chariot pulled by goats. In any event, Þórr overcomes the mountainous barrier with little comment by the poem,¹¹⁴ other than that it causes a great deal of fire and noise, which is an important distinction between him and the other Æsir who could or did not have the ability to travel to Giantland.

Fight with Hrungrnir

Another instance of Þórr’s ability to travel along the horizontal axis is found in the account in *Skáldskaparmál* of his fight with Hrungrnir, ‘strongest of all giants.’¹¹⁵ The presentation of space in this story is important as it relates how a giant is able to enter Ásgarðr with impunity, then boast of his strength and ill-intent towards the gods.¹¹⁶ It is noteworthy that no individual god is stated as having invited Hrungrnir in (*buðu Æsir honum til drykkju*), merely ‘some’ Æsir, as no article is used.¹¹⁷ Hrungrnir’s tripartite threat consists of ‘moving’ all of Valhøll to Giantland, causing Ásgarðr to ‘sink’ down into the earth, and killing all the gods except Freyja and Sif, who will be his serving girls.¹¹⁸ The use of the subjunctive mood in this sentence means that the threats only exist on a hypothetical level; moreover, Snorri’s description of the gods’ reaction suggests a casual attitude (*Ásum leiddisk ofrefli hans*). Regardless, it is a terrifying prospect, especially the displacement of Ásgarðr from its original position, which would move it literally and metaphorically closer to the wild parts of the earth, such as the underworld and Giantland, thus subverting the Æsir’s dominance.¹¹⁹ At this point Þórr enters the story and challenges Hrungrnir to a duel. It is clear that up till now, no other god, save perhaps Óðinn, has the bravery to confront Hrungrnir, thus emphasising Þórr’s role as a guardian deity. The duel takes place away from Ásgarðr in Grjótúnagarðar ‘stone-field-enclosure,’ on the *landamæri* ‘borderland’ with Giantland. A border of stone corresponds to our knowledge of the giants and many of their characteristics from Old Norse myth. Stones and related materials are chthonic materials - they originate in the earth and

¹¹⁴ The absence of an explanation suggests that Þórr was accustomed to the journey.

¹¹⁵ Faulkes, *Edda*, 77.

¹¹⁶ It should be noted that the skaldic poem *Haustlǫng*, attributed to Þjóðólfr of Hvinir, does not specify the motivation for the conflict between Þórr and Hrungrnir. Furthermore, a kenning in *Ragnarsdrápa - Þrúðar þjóðs ília blað* ‘‘footsoles’-leaf of the thief of Þrúðr’ - was interpreted by Snorri to refer to Hrungrnir, leading scholars to conclude that the reason Þórr fought Hrungrnir was over the theft of his daughter.

¹¹⁷ Later Hrungrnir claims that Óðinn himself invited him in for a drink (*Óðinn bauð honum til drykkju*), which is consistent with the latter’s duplicitous character.

¹¹⁸ Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, 17: *Hann lézk skyldu taka upp Valhøll ok færa í Jǫtunheima, en sökva Ásgarði en drepa guð ǫll, nema Freyju ok Sif vill hann heim færa með sér.*

¹¹⁹ The word *sökkva* is the same word the *vǫlva* uses at the end of *Vǫluspá* when she concludes her vision and returns to the underworld.

have no obvious ‘animating’ or ‘life-giving’ property as opposed to other kinds of organic matter. In a Norse mythological context, they are dialectically ‘dead,’ unlike the green meadows that adjoin the gods’ abodes. The giants themselves are both chthonic and liminal beings, many of whom dwell in seemingly uninhabitable spaces, such as the giantess Gunnlǫð, guardian of the mead of poetry, whose residence is a mountain. Conversely, we know from *Vǫluspá* 25 that timber is used to build the ramparts at Ásgarðr, a material associated with the creation of the first human pair, Ask and Embla, names meaning ‘ash’ and (possibly) ‘elm.’

In order to reach Grjótúnagarðar, Þórr must travel to the east or north. Snorri tells us nothing of Þórr’s own journey, though of the giant’s journey he says that Hrungrnir *hleypti ákafliga* ‘galloped mightily’ and *var fǫr hans allfræg með jǫtnum* ‘his journey was very widely talked about among the giants,’ but Þórr’s journeys are not always described in detail in other texts either.¹²⁰ Þórr does not travel alone, however, which is not uncommon on his trips to Giantland, such as the one examined above from *Þrymskviða*, where he travels with Loki. His companion to Grjótúnagarðar is Þjálfi, who also performs the role of Þórr’s second. In the moments before hostilities commence, when Þórr has not yet arrived at the battlefield,¹²¹ Þjálfi warns Hrungrnir and his attendant Mǫkkurkálfi¹²² that Þórr will attack ‘from below.’¹²³ Hrungrnir reacts by standing on his shield to counter that avenue of attack, but it is a fatal mistake as Þórr emerges front-on and throws his hammer at him, splitting his skull.¹²⁴ Þjálfi’s words, which Hrungrnir takes seriously enough, are important, as they imply that Þórr is able to move vertically through the earth, which contradicts his powers of movement in many other myths, and shows Hrungrnir’s own stupidity. Vertical movement is associated with beings such as Óðinn, Freyja or even Kvasir, usually in connection to numinous knowledge – not the normal object of Þórr’s desire.

¹²⁰ It also said that other Æsir come up to the battlefield to see Þórr trapped under Hrungrnir’s leg though only after the danger has passed.

¹²¹ Or possibly hiding - which is not really consistent with Þórr’s character.

¹²² Þjálfi and Mǫkkurkálfi only appear in Snorri’s account of the story, not in *Haustlǫng*.

¹²³ Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, 21: *Þú stendr óvarliga, jǫtunn, hefir skjöldinn fyrir þér, en Þórr hefir sét þik ferr hann í neðra í jǫrðu ok mun hann koma neðan at þér.*

¹²⁴ Hrungrnir’s weapon is a whetstone which is split into two pieces by Mjöllnir in mid-air, one of which lands on the ground and is thought to be source of all whetstones (*heinberg*), but the other gets lodged in Þórr’s forehead and remains stuck there despite the best efforts of the *vǫlva* Gróa. This duel is the subject of *Haustlǫng* by the skald Þjóðólfr of Hvinir, preserved in *Skáldskaparmál*.

Fight with the Miðgarðsormr

A story that depicts Þórr's ability to travel along the horizontal axis more freely than on any other concerns his engagement with the Miðgarðsormr, known from *Hymiskviða* and the *Gylfaginning* section of Snorri's *Edda*, as well as a number of early skaldic poems. Adding to its fame are several visual reproductions depicted on certain Viking Age stone monuments from Scandinavia and the British Isles. In the version from *Gylfaginning*, Þórr decides to hunt the Miðgarðsormr to atone for his performance at Útgarðaloki's, so in the form of a young boy (*ungr drengr*) he travels to the giant Hymir's house.¹²⁵ The deception is reminiscent of a *rite de passage* of a young warrior who must overcome certain challenges in order to be acknowledged as an adult, such as in the *Fornaldarsaga Hrólfs saga kraka* 'The saga of King Hrólfr kraki,' or *Fjolsvinnsmál* 'The Sayings of Fjolsvinnr.' It is probably not a full metamorphosis of the kind that Loki and Óðinn are capable of, but it is still unusual enough to be worthy of comment.¹²⁶

When Hymir tells Þórr that he is preparing to go fishing, Þórr offers his companionship. Hymir's answer reveals his ignorance of the young *drengr*'s true identity: *En Hymir sagði at lítill liðsemð mundi at honum vera er hann var lítill ok ungmenni eitt. "Ok mun þik kala ef ek sit svá lengi ok útarliga sem ek em vanr."*¹²⁷ Hymir's misgivings notwithstanding, the duo set out to sea with an ox-head that Þórr intends to use as bait. They row out such a long way that the giant starts to feel uncomfortable (arguably because of the ferociousness of the Miðgarðsormr rather than the distance), but it is very much consistent with Þórr's other journeys that take him to many wild spatial realms:

*Sagði þá Hymir at þeir váru komnir á þær vazztir er hann var vanr at sitja ok draga flata fiska, en Þórr kvezk vilja róa myklu lengra, ok tóku þeir enn snertiróðr. Sagði Hymir þá at þeir váru komnir svá langt út at hætt var at sitja útar fyrir Miðgarðsormi. En Þórr kvezk mundu róa eina hríð ok svá gerði, en Hymir var þá allókátr.*¹²⁸

At the climax of the story, Þórr hooks the Miðgarðsormr by the mouth, but the creature exerts so much force on him that his feet sink through the bottom of the boat (*brá hann við svá hart*

¹²⁵ Þórr rarely alters his appearance like Óðinn or Loki, perhaps for the reason that it would contradict his normative warrior status, though it has to be said that the sagas are full of proscribed deceptive behaviour: see William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

¹²⁶ The ability to shapeshift was in many cases associated with duplicitous behaviour – cf. Óðinn's attempts to woo Rindr in *Gesta Danorum*, Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus* 1, 163.

¹²⁷ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 44.

¹²⁸ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 44.

at báðir hnefar Þórs skullu út á borðinu), an image so memorable that it appears as the key motif on several visual interpretations of the myth. A desire for conflict is usually at the heart of Þórr's journeys, despite the risk (*hætta*) involved; in comparison, Óðinn risks life and limb in the pursuit of wisdom.

As in the story of the engagement with Hrungnir, there is an interesting element of verticality to Þórr's legs hanging under the boat, which, especially since this particular image was so popular, associates him with the vertical axis, contradicting his normal powers of movement.¹²⁹ To (literally) relieve the tension, Hymir cuts the line, allowing the Miðgarðsormr to escape, though Þórr throws his hammer at it. The efficacy of this act clearly divided thirteenth-century Icelanders like Snorri.¹³⁰ That Þórr later goes on to destroy the Miðgarðsormr at Ragnarøk suggests that it did survive, a sentiment put in the mouth of one of the Æsir from Troy.

Visit to Útgarðaloki's dwelling

On one of Þórr's expeditions to Giantland he encounters the powerful being known as Útgarðaloki, a version of which is told by Snorri in his *Edda*.¹³¹ Þórr's travelling companions on this journey include the human pair Rǫskva and Þjálfí, as well as Loki. On the way, they meet a huge, giant-like being called Skrýmir, possibly a manifestation of Útgarðaloki, lying in a forest, whom Þórr attempts to kill several times during the night, but Mjöllnir causes him little damage. Having reached Útgarðaloki's hall, Þórr and his companions face off against Útgarðaloki in a series of unwinnable games: Loki competes with *Logi* 'fire' to see who can eat the most, Þjálfí has a running race with *Hugi* 'thought,' and Þórr is challenged by Útgarðaloki himself to drain a horn in fewer than three draughts, lift up a 'cat,' and wrestle an old woman *Elli* (lit. 'old age'), but they lose all the contests. However, in the denouement, Útgarðaloki reveals that the games were in fact *sjónhverfingar* 'optical illusions produced by

¹²⁹ According to Adam of Bremen, in the temple at Old Uppsala there was a statue of Þórr, who "presides over the air, which governs the thunder and lightning, the winds and rains, fair weather and crops": Francis Tschan and Timothy Reuter (eds.), *Adam of Bremen. History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 207.

¹³⁰ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 45: *En Þórr kastaði hamrinum eptir honum, ok segja menn at hann lysti af honum hofuðit við grunninum. En ek hygg hitt vera þér satt at segja at Miðgarðsormr lifir enn ok liggir í umsjá.*

¹³¹ It is generally considered to be a faithful transmission of an old Germanic myth; Lindow, "Mythology and Mythography," 43.

spells.’¹³² For example, the ‘goblet’ Þórr drinks from leads directly to the sea, while the ‘cat’ is in fact the Miðgarðsormr; moreover, it was impossible to stop the process of aging that lies behind *Ellí*’s strength. Útgarðaloki also admits that Skrymir blocked Mjöllnir’s strikes with a *setberg* ‘seat-formed rock, table-mountain,’ otherwise even the first, lightest touch would have killed him.¹³³ The products of the strikes are in fact three valleys carved out by Mjöllnir next to Útgarðaloki’s hall, each one deeper than the last.¹³⁴

The episode at Útgarðaloki’s hall suggests that certain powerful beings in Old Norse myth have the ability to transpose parts of the landscape for deceptive purposes, or perhaps even literally - otherwise the *setberg* would not have prevented Þórr from killing Skrymir with a single blow. Hrungrnir’s threat to the Æsir that he would ‘move’ Valhøll to Giantland (*taka upp Valhøll ok færa í Jötunheima*) should possibly be regarded as part of the same conceptual category. We may also question whether Útgarðaloki’s *sjónhverfingar* or Hrungrnir’s threat would have worked in the presence of Óðinn since the former says that Þórr specifically did not ‘see’ the *setberg* being placed in front of him, whereas Óðinn’s vision is exceptional. However, the so-called deceptions must have some physical aspect to them, as Útgarðaloki’s retainers feel great fear when Þórr manages to lift the ‘cat’s’ foot off the ground.¹³⁵

Visit to Geirrøðr’s dwelling

The myth about Þórr’s journey to Geirrøðr’s associates Þórr with a variety of different movements, both horizontal and vertical. However, while Þórr is in full control over horizontal forms of movement (on journeys to Giantland), his ability to move vertically is very limited and is frequently associated with deception or accident, as I shall argue. The two most important witnesses to Þórr’s journey to Geirrøðr’s are *Þórsdrápa* by the tenth-century

¹³² John Lindow, “Thor’s “hamarr”,” *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* vol. 93, no. 4 (1994), 492. Tolley, *Shamanism in Norse Myth and Magic* vol. 1, 63, has also pointed out that some Sámi use optical illusions in *Gesta Danorum* in an encounter with Angrimus in which they transform into three stones that resemble mountains.

¹³³ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 43: *En því næst laust þú mik með hamrinum þrjú hogg, ok var it fyrsta minzt ok var þó svá mikít at mér mundi endask til bana ef á hefði komít.*

¹³⁴ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 43: *En þar er þú sátt hjá holl minni setberg, ok þar sáttu ofan í þrjá dali ferskeytta ok einn djúpastan, þar váru hamarspor þín.*

¹³⁵ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 43: *ok þér satt at segja þá hræddusk allir þeir er sá er þú lyptir af jörðu einum fætinum.*

skald Eilífr Goðrúnarson, the fullest and oldest version of the myth,¹³⁶ and the summary by Snorri in the *Skáldskaparmál* section of the *Edda* in which the former is preserved.¹³⁷ Like the story of the theft of Iðunn, this myth is introduced with an episode about Loki, which has already been discussed (see pp. 26–7). The two myths are also paralleled in the way that the main protagonists are ‘lured’ to Giantland; according to Snorri, Iðunn is lured under the pretence of investigating some apples, but as to Þórr’s motivation he is reticent. The first stanza of *Þórsdrápa* is more forthcoming:

*Flugstalla réð felli**
fjornets goða at hvetja
—drjúgr var Loptr at ljúga—
lögseims faðir heiman.
Geðreynir kvað grænar
Gauts herþrumu brautir
vilgi tryggir til veggjar
viggs Geirrøðar liggja.

‘The father of the sea-thread [= Miðgarðsormr > = Loki] decided to goad the preparer of the life-net [KILLER] of the gods of precipice-altars [MOUNTAINS > GIANTS > = Þórr] to leave home; Loptr <= Loki> was assiduous at lying. The by no means trustworthy mind-tester of the Gautr <= Óðinn > of host-thunder [BATTLE > WARRIOR = Þórr > = Loki] said that green paths lay towards the steed of the wall [HOUSE] of Geirrøðr <giant>.’¹³⁸

Although we do not know the actual words Loki uses to convince Þórr, his proficiency at lying (*drjúgr var Loptr at ljúga*) and Þórr’s lack of foresight combined with the fact that *fýstusk þeir at þrýsta Þorns niðjum* ‘they were eager to crush the descendants of Þorn <giant> [GIANTS]’¹³⁹ from the following stanza is ample reason to go on an expedition to Giantland.

¹³⁶ John Lindow, “Mythic Narrative Modes as Exemplified in the Story of Þórr’s Journey to Geirrøðr (and His Daughters),” *Nordic Mythologies: Interpretations, Intersections, and Institutions* Mythology 1 ed. Timothy R. Tangherlini (Berkeley and Los Angeles: North Pinehurst, 2014), 3.

¹³⁷ A stanza usually attributed to Eilífr is found in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*: see Tarrin Wills, “Þórr and wading,” *Die Faszination des Verborgenen und Seine Entschlüsselung - Ráði Sá Kunni: Beiträge Zur Runologie, Skandinavistischen Mediävistik und Germanischen Sprachwissenschaft* ed. Jana Krüger, Vivian Busch, Katharina Seidel, Christiane Zimmermann and Ute Zimmermann (Berlin; Boston: de Gruyter, 2017), 416.

¹³⁸ Edith Marold with the assistance of Vivian Busch, Jana Krüger, Ann-Dörte Kyas and Katharina Seidel, translated from German by John Foulks, “(Introduction to) Eilífr Goðrúnarson, *Þórsdrápa*’ in *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages III* ed. Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 68:

¹³⁹ Marold *et al.*, “*Þórsdrápa*,” 68.

There seems to be a clear falsehood, however, in Loki’s assertion that ‘green paths’ lead to Geirrøðr’s abode, which contradicts the way Giantland is usually described: cold, uninhabitable (by humans), and representing ‘nature’ in opposition to ‘culture.’ In st. 3 Eilífr states that *gall- manntælendr hall | -ópnis ilja gaupnum | Endils um Mó spenndu* ‘the destroyers of the man of the halls of the shrill-crier <eagle>[lit. ‘man-destroyers of the halls of the shrill-crier’) MOUNTAINS > GIANT > = Þórr and his companion] clasped the Mór <horse> of Endill <sea-king> [SHIP] with the palms of their foot-soles.’¹⁴⁰ According to the *OED*, ‘moor’ (from Old English *mor* but cognate with Old Norse *mór* or *mær*) is defined as a “piece of unenclosed waste ground.”¹⁴¹ Clearly, Eilífr himself imagined a barren landscape as the setting for Þórr’s journey, rather than the verdant one that Loki promises. Moreover, st. 4, found in the *Third Grammatical Treatise*, refers to the difficulty of travelling over bogs and marshes, probably during the spring:

Vóru vøtn ok mýrar
 — *verðr hitt, at þau skerða* —
(svell vas áðr of alla)
øll torráðin (halla).

‘All the lakes and marshes were difficult [to traverse]; it happens that they intersect [the path]; ice was already on all the cliffs.’¹⁴²

Finally, in Saxo’s version of the story in Book VIII of his *Gesta Danorum*, which does not discuss the river crossing in great detail, Geirrøðr’s hall is said to be located in ‘Biarmaland,’ which he describes as very cold and desolate, with dangerous rivers.¹⁴³

Þórr’s first stop in Giantland is at the house of a giantess called Gríðr, whom Snorri says is Víðarr’s mother. She gives him a number of enchanted objects, including a *megingjörð* ‘girdle of strength,’ a pair of *járngreipr* ‘iron gauntlets’ and a *stafr* ‘staff, pole’ called Gríðarvølr. These objects mitigate the loss of Mjöllnir and his own girdle of strength, which Loki persuades him to leave at home.¹⁴⁴ Gríðarvølr immediately comes in handy

¹⁴⁰ Marold *et al.*, “Þórsdrápa,” 68.

¹⁴¹ “Moor, n. 1,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2022), available at Fisher Library (University of Sydney) under databases, accessed 27 September 2022.

¹⁴² Marold *et al.*, “Þórsdrápa,” 68.

¹⁴³ Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus* 1, 575; Wills, “Þórr and wading,” 418, points out that the account in *Þórsteins saga bæjarmagns*, in which Þórr is replaced by Óláfr Trygvasson’s human retainer Þórstein, the focus is similarly on the events at Geirrøðr’s.

¹⁴⁴ The verb *spenna* is the ancestor of ME ‘span’; thus, Faulkes in his translation has ‘Þórr spanned [walked] the heath.’ *Spenna* is often used in connection to the fastening of a belt or clasp. It is interesting that Þórr receives a *megingjarða* ‘girdle of might’ from Gríðr when ‘belt’ is a synonym of girdle. The most

during a river crossing in which Þórr uses it to anchor himself downstream from the current. The water then floods up to Þórr’s shoulders, at which point Snorri has Þórr recite a verse in *ljóðahátttr* ‘charms-metre,’ an eddic metre associated with magic. Eilifr is much more explicit about the river crossing to which he devotes five stanzas, mainly describing the speed of the current and Þórr’s worsening plight. His description of the swollen river echoes the description of Ragnarøk as it appears in *Völuspá*, in which various natural disasters ravage and eventually destroy the earth.¹⁴⁵

The binary high:low is emphasised in *Þórsdrápa*, particularly in stanza 8,¹⁴⁶ which shares some features with *Völuspá* 57.¹⁴⁷ In *Þórsdrápa* Þórr declares that his strength will grow to the *salþak* ‘roof of the world’ (lit. ‘hall-roof’), demonstrating not only the cosmic significance of his undertaking, but also a curious connection to the vertical parts of the cosmos. *Völuspá* also mentions the upper edge of the sky in a description of the flames that ‘play against high heaven itself.’ Such drama is almost totally absent from the version in *Skáldskaparmál*, which is much more routine, except for the moment when Þórr grabs onto a rowan tree (*reynir*) for safety, hence the periphrasis *björg Þórs* ‘salvation of Þórr.’ Gríðarvølr, an item whose shape is symbolic of the high:low binary and an *axis mundi*, proves indispensable to Þórr’s successful crossing in *Þórsdrápa*, especially stanza 10: *Æddu stáli stríðan / straum Hrekkmímis ekkjur* ‘The windows of Hrekkmímir <giant> [GIANTESS] infuriated the stream, harsh against the weapon.’¹⁴⁸ Insofar as the *stál* ‘steel,’ a reference to Gríðarvølr, is the target of the ‘infuriated stream,’ it actually protects Þórr. In the following two lines (ll. 6-8) of *Þórsdrápa* 10, Þórr begins to ‘advance’ against the current with the help of the staff, his temper rising: *stophnísu fór steypir | stríðlundr með vøl Gríðar* ‘the overcomer of the cliff-porpoise [GIANTESS > = Þórr] went stubbornly with the staff of

notorious ‘belt’ in Old Norse myth is of course the Miðgarðsormr, Þórr’s great adversary, the one who “girdles the earth.”

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion regarding Þórr and his relationship with water, see Chapter three, 102–3, of this thesis, and refer to the chapter by Wills, “Þórr and wading,” 411–28; also of interest in this context is a runic plate from Södra Kvinneby from south-eastern Öland which has the incantation *Þórr gæti hans meðr þēm hamri sæm ūr hafi kam!* ‘May Þórr protect him from the hammer that came from the sea,’ which identifies Mjöllnir as originating in the sea: cf. Anne-Sofie Gräslund, “Conversion, Popular Religion, and Syncretism: Some Reflections,” *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink* ed. Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist and Declan Taggart, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 222.

¹⁴⁶ Marold *et al.*, “*Þórsdrápa*,” 68: *Þverrir lét, nema þyrri | Þorns barna sér, Mǫrnar | snerriblóð, til svira | salþaks megin vaxa* ‘The diminisher of the children of Þorn <giant> [GIANTS > = Þórr] said that his strength would grow to the neck of the roof of the earth [SKY] unless the rushing blood of Mǫrn <female mythical being> [RIVER] receded.’

¹⁴⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 14: *geisar eimi | við aldrnara, | leicr hár hiti | við himin siálfan.*

¹⁴⁸ Marold *et al.*, “*Þórsdrápa*,” 68.

Griðr <troll-woman>.¹⁴⁹ This is a significant combination of horizontal movement facilitated by an object that represents the vertical axis. Another binary pair, nature:culture, can be associated with the river Vimur, particularly in relation to the destructive elements of its portrayal by Eilífr, but also in the kenning ‘fish-trap-forest,’ whose base-word ‘forest’ is semantically always a place of nature (cf. the forest in *Lokasenna*, see Chapter three). Moreover, as was mentioned above, journeys to spaces associated with ‘nature’ often involve loud noises or the sudden appearance of destructive elements, like lightning or fire. The river crossing therefore represents Þórr’s transition from his world, or ‘culture,’ to an ‘other’ world, or ‘nature,’ characterised by chaos and destruction.

Considerable attention is devoted by both Snorri and Eilífr to Þórr’s engagement with Geirrøðr at the latter’s house. In most respects these texts mirror each other quite closely. In this part of the myth, Þórr is portrayed as being capable of several kinds of movement associated with the vertical and horizontal axes. As soon as Þórr and his companions arrive at Geirrøðargarðar, they are directed into a room with a single chair. Once Þórr is seated, the chair starts to levitate towards the roof, which would have crushed him had he not wedged Griðarvqlr in the roof beams, exerting trenchant downward pressure as he does on the boat in *Hymiskviða*. A loud crack and a scream follow as the narrators reveal that Geirrøðr’s daughters Gjálp and Greip, whose backs were broken, had been under the seat.¹⁵⁰ This episode from the *Edda* has some details not found in the corresponding part of *Þórsdrápa*, which does not mention a seat or Þórr being lifted into the air, though it does present the giantesses as being trodden on and having their backs broken by Þórr:

*Hofstjóri braut hvöru-
hreggs váfreiðar -tveggja
hlátrelliða hellis
hundfornan kjöl sprundi.*

‘The temple-steerer of the hovering chariot of the thunderstorm [= Þórr] broke the age-old keel of the laughter-ship [BREAST > BACK] of both women of the cave [GIANTESSES].’¹⁵¹

As such, we can infer that a certain amount of vertical movement must have been thought to

¹⁴⁹ Marold *et al.*, “*Þórsdrápa*,” 68.

¹⁵⁰ Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, 25: *Þá varð hann þess varr at stóllinn fór undir honum upp at ræfri. Hann stakk Griðarveli upp í raptana ok lét sigask fast á stólinn. Varð þá brestr mikill ok fylgði skrækr mikill. Þar höfðu verit undir stólinum dætr Geirrøðar Gjálp ok Greip, ok hafði hann brotit hrygginn í báðum.*

¹⁵¹ Marold *et al.*, “*Þórsdrápa*,” 68.

have occurred in Eilífr's version for the treading and back-breaking to take place. This kind of movement is unusual for Þórr, who is more commonly associated with horizontal movement across space.¹⁵² Griðarvǫlr is an interesting literary device in that it represents a kind of vertical axis by virtue of its shape but also in the way Þórr uses it to push himself down and thus return to a normalised state on the ground. Conceptually, the pole or staff forms a parallel with Þjazi's use of the same item in the myth of the theft of Iðunn. In the latter Loki manages to get himself stuck to one end of a long pole, probably with magic, on which he is dragged along the earth on a death-defying ride. As discussed above, Loki is totally powerless while attached to the pole, despite being taken into a domain of space with which he is somewhat acquainted; ultimately, he has no control over the situation.

Þórr is thrust into a similarly dangerous situation at Geirrøðr's in which he is outnumbered and in foreign territory; he is also, at least in Snorri's version, in the unusual position of being hoisted into the air, but instead of pleading for a truce, as Loki does, he uses a tool in a way that mechanically increases his strength. Þórr's experience at Geirrøðr's demonstrates an example of quick-thinking based on dynamic movement that is not always associated with this god, and is in fact absent in certain portrayals of him (cf. Chapter three). Another pole-like object is also integrated into the denouement of the story when Geirrøðr makes his assault on Þórr when the former hides behind a *járnsúl*, a kind of iron pillar or column.¹⁵³ It is not enough to save him, however, as the molten lump of iron penetrates right through both the pillar and Geirrøðr himself and, in fact, through the wall of the house too.¹⁵⁴ Finally, we may observe that a number of binary pairs are in operation in the last two myths discussed in this section, namely nature:culture (Giantland and Ásgarðr, river and dry land), up:down (the sky and the earth, Geirrøðr's roof and floor) and control:submission (in the presentation of Þórr's and Loki's contrasting behaviour when they are in the dangerous situation of being 'lifted' up). These binaries help to frame the complex relationship Þórr has with space and movement.

¹⁵² John Lindow, "Written Sources," *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume I: Basic Premises and Consideration of Sources* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 82, notes that if Geirrøðr's daughters had done what they had set out to do (lift Þórr up into the sky), they might have accomplished a "cosmogonic act" comparable to hurling the eyes of Aurvandill and Þjazi into the sky.

¹⁵³ For an interesting, albeit brief, analysis of this episode: see Emily Lyle, "Thor's Return of the Giant Geirrod's Red-Hot Missile Seen in a Cosmic Context," *Temenos – Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion* vol. 55, no. 1 (2019), 121–36.

¹⁵⁴ Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, 25: *Þórr kastaði síunni ok laust gognum súluna ok gognum Geirrøð ok gognum vegginn ok svá fyrir útan <í> jorðina.*

Minor figures, Space and Movement

Although the lesser-known gods Heimdallr, Baldr, Hermóðr, and Víðarr appear obscure to us now, and perhaps to thirteenth-century Icelanders too, we cannot gainsay the possibility that they may have held positions of importance or were revered at some stage in the pre-Christian past.¹⁵⁵ These Æsir generally feature less conspicuously in the myths in their present form than the ones discussed above; consequently, it is difficult to say anything too precise about their spatial associations and powers of movement. However, the ones I discuss in this section reveal associations with space comparable in significance to those of the more prominent gods (particular in relation to the binary of movement and stasis). Many of the myths in which they appear can also be regarded as canonical or as being fundamental to the mythical world in some way.

Heimdallr

A god like Heimdallr, who performs an important function as the sentry of Ásgarðr (*vorðr goða*), has perhaps the strongest connection to space of the minor gods. It has been suggested that Heimdallr occupied a powerful position in the Iron Age, but that knowledge of him had faded by the time the myths were written down.¹⁵⁶ He is the subject of the otherwise unknown poem *Heimdallargaldr* ‘Heimdallr’s spell,’ quoted in *Gylfaginning* ch. 27, in which we learn that he is the son of nine mothers who are also sisters (*níu em ek mæðra mögr, níu em ek systra sonr*) and is frequently alluded to in other texts, notably *Rígsþula* ‘The List of

¹⁵⁵ There are various kinds of evidence, for example, archaeological, onomastic and literary, that Týr was the most important god in the late Scandinavian Iron Age (500 BCE–800 CE): see de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 19–21. Scholars generally accept that his importance gradually migrated to the other so-called ‘warrior’ gods, Þórr and Óðinn, who represent a “legally better-organised form of governance,” perhaps influenced by Roman social and political organisation: see Polomé, *Essays on Germanic Religion*, 101, de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 153–63, and Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 182–84). Cf. Tacitus, *History* IV, 64. According to de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 182, the name Týr may derive from the same root as the Greek Zeus and Sanskrit Dyaus. Clear evidence for Týr’s popularity comes from the fact that his name is the basis for ‘Tuesday’ in most of the modern Germanic languages. It is derived from Proto-Germanic *Tīwaz: see Polomé, *Essays on Germanic Religion*, 78. The runic letter ᚛ ‘t’ is named after Týr: see Erik Moltke, *Runes and their Origin. Denmark and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseets forlag, 1985), 37. Old English writers occasionally gloss Týr (OE *Tiw*) with the Latin Mars. As many of these hypothesised changes took place during a pre-literate time, the surviving written sources, recorded much later, understandably tell us little about Týr. Apart from the day of the week he gives his name to, we largely remember him for his other great sacrifice, that of his right hand which was ripped off by Fenrir.

¹⁵⁶ It has also been suggested that Heimdallr was possibly a Vanir god: see John Lindow, “Vanir and Æsir,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1036. Georges Dumézil, *From Myth to Fiction. The Saga of Hadingus* trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 128, characterises him as a “frame god” on the grounds that, like the Vedic Dyauh, he is first in time and action but also the last, open and closed, and does not live according to the same temporal rhythm as the other gods, whom he “enframes [sic].”

Rígr,’ where he is identified in the prose header as the titular character Rígr (perhaps derived from Old Irish *rí* ‘king’).¹⁵⁷ It has been suggested that his nine mothers represent the sea’s waves, which would give Heimdallr liminal associations and therefore imply a connection to the giant race.¹⁵⁸ This is further suggested by the fact that the names of his mothers, listed in *Völuspá in skamma* ‘The shorter *Völuspá*,’ pertain to giantesses.

We know from *Grímnismál* 13 that Heimdallr lives in a place called Himinbjörg (‘Heaven’s castle’). There he is protector of the ‘holy places of the gods,’ and drinks peacefully in his halls:

Himinbjörg ero in átto, enn þar Heimdall

kveða valda véum;

þar vorðr goða dreccr í væro ranni,

*glæðr, inn góða mioð.*¹⁵⁹

‘Himinbjörg is the eighth, and there, they say,
Heimdall rules over his sanctuaries;
There the gods’ glad watchman drinks good mead
in the peaceful hall.’¹⁶⁰

According to Snorri, Himinbjörg is said to be *við* ‘next to’ Bifröst, the rainbow bridge that connects Valhöll with Ásgarðr. It is also said to be at the ‘end of the world’ (*himins enda*), which aligns with Heimdallr’s role as a watchman. Snorri’s brief description of Heimdallr’s character suggests a kind of passivity and/or liminality consistent with his primary function. In this role he is able to see a hundred leagues away as well at night as in the day (*Hann sér jafnt nótt sem dag hundrað rasta frá sér*). He can hear the grass grow on the earth and wool on sheep (*Hann heyrir ok þat er gras vex á jörðu eða ull á sauðum*), as well as ‘everything that sounds louder than that’ (*allt þat er hæra lætr*).¹⁶¹ It has been suggested that Heimdallr’s

¹⁵⁷ *Rígsþula* is found only in the mid-fourteenth century ‘Codex Wormianus’ manuscript of the *Poetic Edda* (AM 242 fol.). Not all scholars agree that Rígr should be identified as Heimdallr. However, as I argue in this section, certain aspects of the poem are consistent with Heimdallr’s character known from other sources, particularly in relation to his powers of movement.

¹⁵⁸ According to Gro Steinsland, “*Völuspá* and the Sibylline Oracles with a focus on the ‘Myth of the Future’,” *The Nordic Apocalypse: The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Völuspá and Nordic Days of Judgement*, Acta Scandinavica 2 ed. Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 156, Heimdallr’s ‘whiteness’ and absence of patrilineal genealogy also makes him a good typological analogue to Christ; on these grounds, she argues, both he and Christ could be the identity behind *inn ríki* ‘the mighty one’ referred to in the Hauksbók version of *Völuspá* st. 65 and *Hyndluljóð* st. 44.

¹⁵⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 59–60.

¹⁶⁰ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 50.

¹⁶¹ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 25.

magnificent hearing is the result of the sacrifice of his *hljóð*, usually translated as ‘hearing’ or ‘noise,’ but probably meaning ‘ear,’ which one can compare with Óðinn’s sacrifice of his eye and the loss of Týr’s arm. All three examples can be said to represent an attempt to acquire an ability at the cost of a so-called ‘mutilation.’¹⁶² Heimdallr’s spatial attributes are rather exceptional among the Norse gods; his unusual abilities give him a command of space and the ability to see into a wide variety of spaces, literally and/or figuratively. Heimdallr’s ability to see space in this way can be compared with the four-sided house that faces in all directions built by Loki.¹⁶³ It is also not dissimilar to Óðinn’s and Freyr’s marvellous line of sight when they sit on Hliðskjálf from where they can look into every realm.

In the prose introduction to the eddic poem *Rígsþula*, Heimdallr, identified as Rígr, is travelling along *sióvar-ströndo noccorri* ‘the sea-shore somewhere.’¹⁶⁴ The word *strönd* can mean ‘beach, beach-edge or coast,’¹⁶⁵ all of which fit with my presentation of Heimdallr insofar as it relates to his epithets, ‘guardian on the hinterland’ and the ‘son of nine mothers [waves].’¹⁶⁶ The main storyline of the poem then has Rígr visit three houses on his travels, each one representing a different socio-political class. At the first house Rígr sleeps for three nights between *Ái* and *Edda* (‘great-grandfather’ and ‘great-grandmother’), who have a son called *Þræll* (‘thrall’) who marries a coarse woman called *Þír* (‘bondwoman’) from whom all slaves are descended. At the second house Rígr lies for three nights between *Afi* and *Amma* (‘grandfather’ and ‘grandmother’), who produce a son called *Karl* (‘freeman’) from whom all farmers are descended. Lastly, he visits the house of *Faðir* and *Móðir* (‘father’ and ‘mother’) and spends three nights with them, which results in the birth of *Jarl* (‘earl, prince’).¹⁶⁷ When

¹⁶² Polomé, *Essays on Germanic Religion*, 105.

¹⁶³ Sebastian Cöllén, “Heimdallr in *Hyndluljóð*: The Role and Function of the ‘Enigmatic God’ in an Enigmatic Poem,” *Theorizing Old Norse Myth Acta Scandinavica 7* ed. Stefan Brink and Lisa Collinson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 98, points out that in *Hyndluljóð* sts 35–41 Heimdallr and Loki can be compared on a number of points, particularly in Heimdallr’s role as a guardian of the geographical borders of the gods (as well as the social borders exemplified in *Rígsþula*) and Loki’s as a the “transgressor of borders *par excellence*.”

¹⁶⁴ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 280.

¹⁶⁵ Definition of *strönd* taken from the Dictionary of Old Norse Prose website (accessed 27 September 2022).

¹⁶⁶ Stanza 8 of Úlfr Uggason’s *Húsdrápa* mentions Heimdallr ‘riding’ (presumably a horse) to Baldr’s funeral, which was thought to have taken place next to the sea. Horse-riding was a form of transport often associated with travel between different spatial realms or zones: *Kostigr ríðr at kesti, | kynfróðs þeims goð hlóðu | hrafnfreistaðar, hesti | Heimdallr, at mög fallinn* ‘Splendid Heimdallr rides a horse to the pyre which the gods erected for the fallen son of the kin-wise raven-tester [= Óðinn > = Baldr].’ See Edith Marold with the assistance of Vivian Busch, Jana Krüger, Ann-Dörte Kyas and Katharina Seidel, translated from German by John Foulks, “Úlfr Uggason, *Húsdrápa*,” *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics* Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages III ed. Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 402.

¹⁶⁷ The poem itself is incomplete but the names Rígr and Danr recur in genealogies of the ancient kings of Denmark: see Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 151. The Irish word for king *rí* is thought to be

Jarl grows up he has twelve sons, one of whom is called *Konr* ('son') – which, when combined with *ungr*, becomes the Old Norse word *konungr* 'king' - and it is from him that all royalty claim to be descended.¹⁶⁸ The presentation of Heimdallr's spatial associations in *Rígsþula* appears to contradict his portrayal in other mythological texts where his immobility is emphasised, but as a 'sentry god' his role may have involved a certain amount of marching, which forms the basis of his activities in *Rígsþula*. Like many of the gods discussed above, he seems to be presented in diverse, sometimes contradictory, ways in terms of his movement and association with space, which is not surprising given the sometimes fragmentary nature of the written sources, especially in relation to the 'minor' gods.

Baldr

The story of Baldr's death is important for the mythological system as a whole, as it prefigures the annihilation of the gods at Ragnarök.¹⁶⁹ Part of the tragedy from the Æsir's point of view is that Baldr cannot access Valhöll, since he is not killed in battle (unless mistletoe is regarded as a weapon?) and, as a result, will not join his father at Ragnarök.¹⁷⁰ His death causes profound existential angst among the gods, which explains why it appears in so many different kinds of media, not only in the Middle Ages, but also in the Romantic movement of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in the fine arts.¹⁷¹

a possible ancestor of Rígr which has led some scholars to presume that *Rígsþula* was composed in the British Isles or Ireland: see Jean Young, "Does *Rígsþula* betray Irish influence?," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* vol. 49 (1933), 97.

¹⁶⁸ Dumézil, *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, 125, has traced the development of Indo-European social structure into what he regards as an original Germanic structure, distinguished by the lack of a sacerdotal class.

¹⁶⁹ Highlighting what Edgar Polomé calls the "growing decay of basic ethics" in Ásgarðr: see Polomé, *Essays on Germanic Religion*, 93. It is significant that Baldr is the first god to die, as he is described by Snorri as the fairest in speech, the wisest and most beautiful, and so forth, though his 'judgement never holds' (*engi má haldask dómr hans*): see Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 23. He is killed by his brother Höðr with the humble *mistiltein* 'mistletoe,' but there are hints that Loki guides his aim. Loki's actions following the funeral are certainly suspicious; for example, in *Skáldskaparmál* Snorri calls him *ráðbani Baldrs* 'Baldr's killer-by-counsel': see Kevin Wanner, "Sewn Lips, Propped Jaws, and a Silent Áss (or Two): Doing Things with Mouths in Norse Myth," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* vol. 111, no. 1 (2012), 8.

¹⁷⁰ Baldr's popularity is demonstrated by the size of his funeral, which is attended by representatives of many different races, including the powerful giantess Hyrrokkin, a being of immense strength, who was required to push Baldr's ship out to sea. Female giants are possibly conventionally associated with journeys to the land of the dead as they appear in several such instances: for example, the giantess Móðgudr who guards the Gjallarbrú in Hermóðr's journey to Hel and in *Helreið Brynhildar* ('Brynhildr's Hel-ride') Brynhildr encounters a being who is referred to as *gýgjarkyn* ('ogress's brood'); Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 46: *gekk Hyrrokkin á framstafn nokkvans ok hratt fram í fyrsta viðbragði svá at eldr hraut ór hlunnunum ok lönd öll skulfu*. This precise scene probably appears on Hunnestad 3 from Skåne: see Moltke, *Runes and their Origin*, 253.

¹⁷¹ See Stefanie Würth, "The Role of Völuspá in the perception of Ragnarok in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature," *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society* ed. Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Medieval and Early Modern Centre, 2003), 222, for a discussion of how the Baldr sources are at variance with each other.

Baldr can be associated with the sky, heaven and ‘high’ things, as his abode Breiðablik (‘Broad gleaming’) stands *á himni* ‘in the air.’ It is somewhere ‘high up’ that the mistletoe that killed Baldr is said to grow (‘west of Valhøll,’ *vex viðarteinungr einn fyrir vestan Valhøll*).¹⁷² The mistletoe’s young age – Baldr’s youth is often emphasised too, is said to be the reason that Frigg does not get it to swear an oath of peace. In Breiðablik nothing unclean is said to be found there (*Í þeim stað má ekki vera óhreint*), a notion of purity normally associated with the Christian heaven, another high space.¹⁷³ The Christian elements in the Baldr story are striking, and there is a strong parallel between Baldr and Christ.¹⁷⁴

Baldr’s powers of movement appear to be limited in comparison to the major Norse gods. In fact, he is probably most well-known for being in a position of stasis as a result of his death. However, if we focus on Baldr’s dead body or his ‘post-death existence,’ we see that he must undergo a ‘journey’ of a kind comparable to other sources pertaining to death rituals in Scandinavia (see Chapter five, 171–2).¹⁷⁵ Baldr’s body is made to travel in a vertical direction down to Hel, which contrasts with his abode in the sky, a space figuratively and literally in opposition to Hel, albeit linked by the vertical axis. In a few details, Baldr’s funeral parallels that of a Norse chieftain on the Volga river described by Ibn Fadlan in which a serving girl ‘volunteers’ to be ritually put to death and cremated on a ship with her master to accompany him to the ‘other world.’¹⁷⁶ In both instances a sea journey to a different realm is thought to take place. Baldr’s horse, a means of transport and a significant animal in Norse myth, is also *leiddr á bálit*. This is comparable to Hermóðr’s journey to Hel, with Óðinn’s

¹⁷² Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 45.

¹⁷³ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 23.

¹⁷⁴ Baldr could certainly be regarded as an example of what Lars Lönnroth calls a ‘noble heathen’ in the manner of other figures considered ‘appropriate’ to Christian sensibilities, such as Sigurðr Fáfnisbani or Þórhall the Prophet: see Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 120. The question of Christian influence pivots on the nature of the various extant manuscripts, one of which, Hauksbók (AM 544 4to), omits the episode on Baldr’s death in *Völuspá* (sts 28–33 in the Codex Regius), but introduces a powerful Christ-like figure in the penultimate st. 65: see Lindow, “Mythology and Mythography,” 30–1.

¹⁷⁵ Jan-Henrik Fallgren, “Ritual Places, Sacral Place-Names, and Wetlands: Some Spatial and Archaeological Contexts from the Baltic Island of Öland,” *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink* ed. Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist, and Declan Taggart (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 75, has interestingly pointed out that Óðinn’s ring Draupnir undergoes the same journey to the underworld and back via Baldr and Hermóðr respectively, and mentions a particular find from Skeddemosse in Öland containing nine snake-headed rings, including one which had been melted.

¹⁷⁶ The interpretation of the Baldr myth as an initiation ritual (*rite de passage*) has been proposed notably by de Vries, in *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, and, more recently, Schjødt, in *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, as an alternative to Dumézil’s idea that it represents a component of a vast Indo-European myth vis-à-vis the Zoroastrian tradition in Iran: see Dumézil, *From Myth to Fiction. The Saga of Hadingus*, 49–65.

horse Sleipnir, to ask for Baldr's release.¹⁷⁷ According to Margaret Clunies Ross, Schjødt's suggestion that Sigurðr *fáfnisbani*'s horse Grani is "endowed with mobility which enables it to mediate between all spheres" has general applicability.¹⁷⁸ She suggests that the horse is central to the Norse mythological system as a mediator between different worlds.¹⁷⁹

Baldr's funeral significantly takes place by the sea, the midway point between civilisation and chaos, which is the description given for the battleground at Ragnarøk, known as Vígríðr or Óskópnir. A location by the sea implies that the funeral's location is on the horizontal axis 'away from centre.' We are told that the Æsir literally carry Baldr's body (*Æsirnir tóku lík Baldrs ok fluttu til sævar*), another example of movement he experiences in his post-death existence. The foregoing analysis of Baldr in relation to movement shows that he is a difficult, albeit interesting, figure to categorise. In life it appears he is a rather passive figure, though a good deal of movement or action occurs by proxy – cf. the custom of throwing weapons at him, or Óðinn's hazardous mission to the *vǫlva* on his son's behalf. Baldr's post-death existence, a state in which he is both passive and active, takes him on journeys along both axes; moreover, at the end of *Vǫluspá*, he returns to live in the new world, so his overall presence in time and space is significant.

Hermóðr

Connected to Baldr's death is Hermóðr, who goes on a journey to Hel following the former's demise. Hermóðr is of uncertain heritage, so that he could be either god or giant, though Snorri calls Baldr *bróður sinn* 'his brother.' Anthony Faulkes explains Hermóðr as the son or servant of Óðinn and in st. 2 of *Hyndluljóð* (discussed in Chapter two) he appears to dwell with Óðinn in Valhøll; he is also listed as one of Óðinn's sons in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 75. Hermóðr is most familiar to us from the Baldr myth in which his role is to travel vertically to Hel with Sleipnir, Óðinn's horse, to find out whether Baldr's death will be permanent. As noted elsewhere, horses were probably thought capable of transporting mythological figures along the vertical and horizontal axes, particularly to the land of the dead or 'other world.'¹⁸⁰ Hermóðr's journey, which takes nine nights, eventually brings him to the river Gjöll, one of

¹⁷⁷ Several Iron Age and Viking Age graves have been discovered that contain people, often of high status, and horses, possibly to help with the transition between worlds.

¹⁷⁸ Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 419.

¹⁷⁹ Margaret Clunies Ross, "The Role of the Horse in Nordic Mythologies," *Nordic Mythologies: Interpretations, Intersections and Institutions* ed. Timothy R. Tangherlini (Berkeley: North Pinehurst Press, 2014), 52.

¹⁸⁰ The giant Hrungrnir also rides to Ásgarðr and back on a horse.

the rivers enumerated in *Grímnismál*, which is crossed by the Gjallar-bridge (*gjalla* ‘to resound, shriek’). Snorri’s account of this part of the journey is as follows: *en þat er at segja frá Hermóði at hann reið níu nætr dökkva dala ok djúpa, svá at hann sá ekki fyrr en hann kom til árinnar Gjallar ok reið á Gjallar brúna*.¹⁸¹ Both river and bridge are stock motifs of medieval vision literature, so their appearance may have some connection to this genre.¹⁸² We could also compare it with the story of Hadingus, related by Saxo in *Gesta Danorum*, who goes on a journey *sub terra* ‘under the earth’ with a woman in order to find where hemlock (a summer plant) grows in winter.¹⁸³ Along the way they encounter a river with various kinds of weapons floating in it as well as a bridge.¹⁸⁴

After encountering Móðguðr (‘Furious-battler’), possibly a *vǫlva* or giantess, who tells him that Hel is located downwards and northwards (in contrast to downwards and westwards in *Baldrs draumar*), Hermóðr enters the gates of Hel where he meets his dead brother.¹⁸⁵ He then asks Hel to free Baldr because of his beloved status among the gods; Hel agrees on the condition that *allir hlutir* ‘all nature, things in existence’ living or dead weep for him (*kykvir ok dauðir, gráta hann, þá skal hann fara til Ása aptr*). When the giantess Þökk, thought to be Loki in disguise, refuses to cooperate the gods must accept Hel’s judgment (*nautka ek karls sonar | haldi Hel því er hefir*). Though ultimately unsuccessful, Hermóðr’s journey is

¹⁸¹ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 47; Faulkes, *Edda*, 50: ‘And it is said of Hermóðr, that he rode nine nights through dales deep and dark, and he saw nothing, before he came to the river Gjöll and rode over the Gjallar-bridge.’

¹⁸² Cf. Peter Dinzelbacher, *Die Jenseitsbrücke im Mittelalter* (Vienna: Verband der wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaften Österreichs, 1973). Vision literature was known in Iceland both in Latin and vernacular translations, such as *Niðrstigningar saga*, based on the story of Christ’s descent into Hell from the Gospel of Nicodemus, and *Duggals leiðsla*, a translation of the twelfth-century *Visio Tnugdali* ‘Vision of Tnugdalus,’ which presents Duggal (Tnugdalus) in a dark valley filled with the blindness of death. Moreover, accounts of the English monk Drythelm’s vision in Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* would also have been known in Iceland in the medieval period.

¹⁸³ Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus* 1, 65; Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 275–9.

¹⁸⁴ Snorri’s debt to vision literature is uncertain, though in John Lindow’s view, a mix of outside learned texts and native tradition seems likely (such as the alliteration of *dökkva dala ok djúpa* ‘dark and deep dales’ - a common literary device in vernacular Germanic poetry - which suggests an older eddic poem): see Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 117. This is the position I adopt, rather than the one advanced by Richard North, who writes of Snorri that his works consist merely of “imaginative reconstructions”: see Richard North, *Pagan Words and Christian Meanings* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1991), 11. On this debate see also Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 99, and Gerd W. Weber, “Edda, Jüngere,” *Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde* 2 ed. H. Beck (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 408. For an overview of Snorri’s status as a layman and the reliability of *Snorra edda* insofar as it transmits pagan ideas, see Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 97–107. Cf. *Vǫluspá 36 á fellr austan | um eitrdala, | sǫxum oc sverðom* (Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 8).

¹⁸⁵ John Lindow and Anders Andrén, “Worlds of the Dead,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume II: Social, Geographical, and Historical Contexts, and Communication Between Worlds* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 913.

motivated by the acquisition of wisdom connected to future events, the very reason that Óðinn goes on his own journeys, so the two figures share a special bond.

Another of Hermóðr's roles is the one he performs in *Hákonarmál* 'Words about Hákon,' in which he welcomes the Norwegian king Hákon góði (920-61) to Valhøll after the battle of Fitjar. His presence in *Hákonarmál* and *Gylfaginning*, in which he acts on behalf of another figure, suggests a connection with upward and downward travel, much like his mentor/father Óðinn. He is one of the most mobile of the minor gods, and he has been compared to Scírnir,¹⁸⁶ Freyr's messenger in *Scírnismál*, in which he travels to Giantland as proxy to Freyr; certainly, in Snorri's *Edda*, but also *Hákonarmál*, Hermóðr can be framed in a similar way.

Víðarr

Even less is known about the god Víðarr, who does not appear in Turville-Petre's (until now) standard English-language overview of Old Norse 'religion.'¹⁸⁷ Notwithstanding this omission, Víðarr appears in a list of *heiti* of the Æsir in *Skáldskaparmál*. He is also briefly mentioned in another major section of Snorri's *Edda*, *Gylfaginning* ch. 51, and st. 55 of *Völuspá*, of which the CR and Hauksbók manuscripts contain different versions. The mention of Víðarr in *Gylfaginning* occurs in the context of Ragnarøk, specifically when the Æsir and the 'forces of chaos' engage in one-on-one fighting.¹⁸⁸ According to Snorri, Víðarr survives the encounter with Fenrir then presumably perishes at Ragnarøk, though his death is not reported and he is thought to return to the earth when it is reborn.

¹⁸⁶ Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 173.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. the new four-volume series on this topic edited by Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén called *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures*.

¹⁸⁸ That encounter sets Freyr against Surtr, Þórr against the Miðgarðsormr, Týr against Garmr, Heimdallr against Loki, and Óðinn against Fenrir, in which there are no clear victors. Loki's son Fenrir manages to survive his fight with Óðinn at which point Víðarr enters the story: *En þegar eptir snýsk fram Víðarr ok stígr qðrum fæti í neðra keypt úlfsins. (Á þeim fæti hefir hann flann skó er allan aldr hefir verit til samnat: þat eru bjórar þeir er menn sníða ór skóm sínum fyrir tám eða hæl. Því skal þeim bjórum braut kasta sá maðr er at því vill hyggja at koma Ásunum at liði.) Annarri hendi tekr hann inn efra keypt úlfsins ok rífr sundr gin hans ok verðr þat úlfsins bani: Faulkes, Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning, 50–51. 'And immediately Víðarr went forward and put his foot in the lower jaw of the wolf. (On his feet are shoes that have been put together throughout time thus: it is the waste pieces that people have thrown away from the heel and the toe. Thus anyone that wishes to assist the Æsir must throw these pieces away.) With the other hand he took the upper jaw of the wolf ripped his jaws apart which caused his death': Faulkes, *Edda*, 54. The foregoing text from Snorri is an extended version of *Völuspá* 55, which also states that Víðarr avenged his father, but via a different method of execution: *Þá komr inn micli | mōgr Sigfōður, | Víðarr, vega | at valdyri; | lætr hann megi Hveðrungs | mund um standa | hiqr til hiarta, | þá er hefnt fōður* (Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 13).*

The discarded *bjórar* ‘offcuts’ that people throw away from their shoes may indicate some kind of cult practice in relation to Víðarr and suggests that he is a god associated with walking. He is also said to have a *skó þjǫkkvan* ‘thick shoe,’ an item suited to this activity. This fact concretely associates Víðarr with travel in certain directions, perhaps in liminal spaces along the horizontal axis, though no myth in which he may have done so survives. The foot and arm levered inside the wolf’s jaws to the point where its throat must have been ripped off is a grotesquely striking image; it has led some scholars, particularly Georges Dumézil, to thus regard Víðarr as a god with a strong command of space, in a not dissimilar fashion to how I have characterised certain other mythological figures, notably Loki and Óðinn. Snorri’s use of the adjectives *neðri* ‘nether, lower’ and *efri* ‘upper’ certainly calls to mind the opposite ends of a vertical axis.¹⁸⁹ The section on Ragnarǫk in *Gylfaginning* also mentions that Fenrir’s jaws span the vertical space between the sky and the earth: *En Fenrisúlfr ferr með gapanda munn ok er hinn efri kjǫptr við himni en hinn neðri við jǫrðu. Gapa mundi hann meira ef rúm væri til.* Moreover, if Víðarr’s name is derived from *viðr*, meaning ‘mast, wood,’ it is tempting to draw a connection between Víðarr and the world tree Yggdrasill, symbolic of the vertical axis. Alternatively, his name might come from *viða*, meaning ‘wide, large, extensive,’ perhaps a reference to his presumed ability to occupy ‘all space’ at once. As was mentioned, it is not explicitly said that Víðarr actually dies (though this is implied in the word Ragnarǫk ‘Doom of the powers’), so we might conclude that his relationship to space presents an element of continuity since he survives into the post-Ragnarǫk world, which is a significant achievement. He is also the only god who kills an adversary and comes back after Ragnarǫk. Finally, it has been argued that Víðarr may have drawn his power (he is said to be ‘nearly as strong as Þórr’ *sterkr næst því sem Þórr er*) and perhaps his presence in ‘all space’ too from his inability to speak – he is called *hinn þǫgli Áss* (‘the silent god’), as has been suggested in relation to other gods, who also acquire special abilities as the result of a ‘mutilation.’¹⁹⁰

Conclusion

The Æsir gods, when measured against each other, show they are capable of a diverse range of movement, occasionally bordering on the paradoxical. That statement is in part due to the

¹⁸⁹ Depictions of Víðarr in the wolf’s jaws appear on some Viking Age stone monuments from Scandinavia and the British Isles.

¹⁹⁰ See Polomé, *Essays on Germanic Religion*, 105, and Lassen, “Hǫðr’s Blindness,” 222.

fragmentary, sometimes contradictory, nature of the Old Norse sources themselves, which tend to focus on a few gods at the expense of the rest, a situation reflected in the structure of this chapter. As such, the gods Óðinn, Loki and Þórr have been prioritised over the so-called minor gods, Týr, Heimdallr, Baldr, Hermóðr and Víðarr, though I have argued that in some ways the latter are remarkably complex in terms of their connections to space.

Óðinn stands out as the god with the fewest restrictions on his ability to move. He has access to both axes, with the vertical axis being slightly more marked. Not infrequently he is joined on his journeys by other gods or rides his eight-legged horse, which he allows others to use to facilitate travel to the ‘other world.’ Óðinn’s other ‘steed,’ Yggdrasill, functions as a nexus between the territories of the living and the dead, and the *rúnar* ‘wisdom, hidden lore’ that lie at its roots are his personal quarry. He is a practitioner of theriomorphic activity, conventionally taking the form of a snake or a bird, giving him the power of flight, but is equally skilled at changing his human appearance. Óðinn’s blood-brother, Loki, is similarly connected to both axes and also possesses the ability to fly, though this is restricted, so he must borrow a *ffaðrhamr* ‘feather-coat’ from a fellow god, such as Freyja. Throughout this chapter I argue some aspects of Loki’s spatial associations and powers of movement are comparable to Óðinn’s. Loki is also able to change his bodily appearance and the *ffaðrhamr* is also available to him. He also has a strong connection to the cardinal directions, manifested in the house he builds on a mountain with doors that face north, east, south and west. On the other hand, Loki is also sometimes caught up in situations where his movements are severely curtailed, which leaves us with two conflicting interpretations of this interesting figure. This tension is explored by Jan de Vries in *The Problem of Loki* in which he emphasises Loki’s ‘dual’ nature. Similarly abstruse is Loki’s sexuality, a characteristic he shares with Óðinn, which in both cases is associated with their capacity to roam through different spatial realms. Both gods are known cross-dressers (as, to some extent, is Þórr – but only under duress), placing them in a liminal space between male and female. Loki is thought to have had sex as a mare, which produced an offspring, and this also aligns him with the animal kingdom. A similar kind of mediated position between ‘there’ and ‘somewhere’ is implied when he builds his four-sided house.

Þórr’s kinetic abilities are very strongly marked in terms of movement along the horizontal axis, which is consistent with the way he appears to patrol the border with Giantland in several sources. He is also known for crossing (or attempting to cross)

seemingly impassable bodies of water, including going on a fishing expedition to hunt his adversary, the Miðgarðsormr. Notwithstanding his indubitable association with and occasional mastery over water, he encounters problems when faced with raging currents as in *Þórsdrápa* (or very large fiords – he also has to rely on others to supply a boat, see Chapter three, 97). It is also worth noting the peculiar references to vertical travel in certain sources that hint at a more nuanced portrayal of Þórr than an examination of the sources usually permits, such as in the account of his battle with Hrungrnir in which the giant is led to expect an attack from below the ground. Þórr is, however, notably absent when it comes to sky travel, which further reinforces his association with the spatial realms aligned with the horizontal plane; at the same time it also highlights some of his physical limitations. It seems to be part of the fabric of Old Norse myth that Þórr is excluded from that domain - cf. his journey in *Brymskviða* with Loki in which they ‘drive,’ rather than fly, to Giantland. Since sky travel is in fact only accessible to certain figures, it would be of future value to investigate the commonalities between them, which might help our understanding of this problem. Sky travel may be associated with possession of a higher intellect, as in the case of Óðinn and Loki, or royalty, as in the case of Óðinn as the chief Æsir deity but also Freyr, a Vanir god, whose name means ‘Lord.’

The so-called ‘minor’ gods have remarkably complex connections to space. Víðarr and Heimdallr are presented in myths that have them perform actions that connect them to many different spatial realms normally identified with Loki and Óðinn, discussed above. For example, Víðarr breaks the wolf’s enormous jaws by exerting downward and lateral pressure in a manner that mediates its awful bite. Heimdallr, like Óðinn, has marvellous vision and hearing, so metaphorically ‘inhabits’ the space around him for the express purpose of warning the gods before an impending attack. Like their more esteemed colleagues, Baldr and Hermóðr go on journeys along the vertical axis, Baldr in a passive way after his death, and Hermóðr by riding Sleipnir. As Óðinn’s beloved son, Baldr might have shared other qualities with his father in relation to space, but in some ways he surpasses most other figures by being present in a pre- and post-Ragnarøk world. While even less is known of Hermóðr, whom some sources say is Baldr’s brother, his journey to the underworld to acquire knowledge puts him in a unique category among the Old Norse gods and may reflect an echo of an ancient ritual journey involving a *rite de passage*. In the following chapter I construct spatial profiles of certain other groups that inhabit the mythological world.

CHAPTER TWO: VANIR, *VQLUR*, GIANTS, THE ‘FORCES OF CHAOS,’ DWARFS AND ELVES

Introduction

The Æsir are clearly the dominant beings in the Norse mythological world, but nevertheless coexist with several other so-called ‘races.’¹⁹¹ Some of these races align with the interests of the Æsir, while others stand in literal and metaphorical opposition to them. This chapter is a study of those races (Vanir, *vqlur*, the giants, the ‘forces of chaos,’ dwarfs and elves) and their associations with space and movement. Overall, this chapter follows a similar line of enquiry to the foregoing one to the extent that many of the key theoretical concepts introduced there shall also be used here. For this reason the reader is referred to the discussion of the terms and concepts outlined in the ‘Introduction’ (pp. 4–5) to this thesis.

I begin with the Vanir, a distinct group of fertility gods, who are incorporated into the Æsir group after a war between them ends in stalemate (see *Vqluspá* 24). In accordance with their function, they are associated with the earth as well as the underworld. Freyja, in particular, demonstrates powers of movement analogous to those of some of the Æsir gods, especially Óðinn, whom she calls to mind when she goes to acquire sacred knowledge in *Hyndluljóð*. I then discuss *vqlur*, the Old Norse equivalent of the Greek ‘sibyls’ (*sybullai*). *Vqlur* are thought to exist in chthonic or liminal places, such as caves, close to the underworld; in this way, they have a strong association with death and the giant race. Next I discuss two groups that exist on an interrelated semantic field: the ‘forces of chaos’ (the Miðgarðsormr, Fenrir, and Hel) and the giants. All of the individual figures examined in these two sections live on the margins of the Norse mythological world, either in the primordial Giantland (*Jötunheimar*) or another inhospitable location, such as the sea. In contrast to the Æsir and Vanir, the range of movement of the ‘forces of chaos’ is restricted, sometimes severely, in some way. This restriction is achieved by the gods themselves out of an anxious need to enforce a kind of hegemony over their enemies, who espouse different social and cultural values. The final sections of this chapter explore elves and dwarfs, mythological races that can also be associated with the earth and the underworld, who at times have an uneasy relationship with the Æsir.

¹⁹¹ The term ‘race’ I take to mean “a group of people, animals, or plants, connected by common descent or origin,” as defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary*: “race, n.6.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2022), available at Fisher Library (University of Sydney) under databases, accessed 9 November 2022.

The Vanir

The gods known collectively as the Vanir (sg. *vanr*) form a race or group distinct from that of the more numerous Æsir.¹⁹² Vanir are generally characterised as unwarlike and more chthonic (i.e., associated with the underworld and death) than other gods. Their main functions relate to the harvest, ‘peace and production’ (*ár ok friðr*), which is why Georges Dumézil places them in the last, and least important, class of his *idéologie tripartite*.¹⁹³ In the ‘first’ war described in *Völuspá* 24, the Æsir and the Vanir fight each other.¹⁹⁴ Some scholars, including Gabriel Turville-Petre¹⁹⁵ and Dumézil,¹⁹⁶ contextualise the conflict within Celtic, Greco-Roman and Indian mythologies, which describe violent struggles between groups belonging to the different functions (sovereignty, war and justice, and fertility).

As has been noted in the previous chapter, the main Vanir figures are Njǫrðr (the ‘Nerthus’ or *terra mater* of Tacitus, *Germania* 40),¹⁹⁷ and his children, Freyr and Freyja.¹⁹⁸ The ancestral realm of the Vanir is Vanaheimr, where Snorri says Njǫrðr is *upp fæddr* ‘raised’ before he is ‘given as a hostage to the gods’ (*gísluðu hann goðunum*).¹⁹⁹ Despite the

¹⁹² The appearance of Njǫrðr together with Freyr in *Arinbjarnarkviða* st. 17 (from the Möðruvallabók manuscript (AM 132 fol) that contains *Egils saga*) is sometimes taken as evidence of the Vanir as a homogenous group. See John Lindow, “Njǫrðr,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings* ed. John Lindow, Jens Peter Schjødt and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1333n2.

¹⁹³ Britt-Mari Näsström, *Freyja, the great goddess of the North* (Lund: University of Lund Press, 1995), 64.

¹⁹⁴ According to Snorri’s *Ynglinga saga*, the war concludes with the exchanging of hostages: Hœnir and Mímir are sent to the Vanir, while Njǫrðr and his son Freyr, along with Kvasir, go in the opposite direction; see Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson (ed.), *Heimskringla I-III Íslenzk fornrit XXVI- XXVIII* trans. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society, 2011), 7. Kvasir, like Mímir, does not survive for long after being exchanged and his death eventually leads to the creation of the mead of poetry, one of the most important Norse myths.

¹⁹⁵ Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964), 162.

¹⁹⁶ Georges Dumézil, *Les dieux des indo-européens* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1952), 25.

¹⁹⁷ On the basis of place-name evidence and the writings of Tacitus, it is thought that deities analogous to the Vanir were worshipped as part of a fertility cult up to a thousand years before the Old Norse sources describing them were written down. Accordingly, during the late Scandinavian Iron Age/Migration period they were displaced in the religious culture of the North by figures whom we now recognise as the Æsir, which serves to explain the scarcity of material about the Vanir. This is especially the case in those parts of Scandinavia where agriculture was widely practised, such as south-eastern Norway and southern Sweden: see Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 168.

¹⁹⁸ There are, of course, other beings who share characteristics with the Vanir, such as Hadding (Haddingus), a semi-mythological figure (and likely Óðinn hero) who went on a journey to the underworld with a woman bearing herbs (Freyja?). The significance of Hadding and his wife Ragnhild is discussed further below. Näsström (*Freyja*, 67) also lists Heimdallr as a Vanir. Nerthus, who is only mentioned by Tacitus in *Germania*, trans. Harold Mattingly (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), ch. 40, is now thought to be an amalgamation of a male and female fertility god (the ‘divine couple’) and later becomes known as Njǫrðr: see Näsström, *Freyja*, 67.

¹⁹⁹ Anthony Faulkes (ed.), *Snorri Sturluson, Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (London: Viking Society, 2000), 23.

initially hostile relations, the Vanir eventually assimilate into divine society to the extent that they appear in lists of Æsir gods in several sources.²⁰⁰ A presumed early reference to the Vanir and their relationship with space comes from a description of ‘Frothi’ (equated with Freyr) being carried around in a *regali uehiculo* ‘royal carriage’ in the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus.²⁰¹ Many scholars have noted the likeness with a description of Freyr in the younger text *Gunnars þáttur* ‘Short tale of Gunnar’ in which an animated icon of Freyr is transported around a part of Sweden on a cart. We can also compare it with the depiction of Nerthus in Tacitus’s *Germania* ch. 40 from a millennium earlier. Finally, the marriage alliances of the Vanir are of great importance, as they are not marriages with female Æsir; instead, they take giant wives. Doing so aligns them with the liminal spaces of Giantland, in contrast to the Æsir, who marry within their own group.

‘Lowness’

The Vanir gods exhibit a curiosity about the low parts of the human body, especially the genitalia, on an anthropological level; that is, the motif of the lower half of the body operates as a metonym for the earth. Lowness aligns the Vanir with the earth and underground spaces. It also associates them with the other races discussed in this chapter. For Freyja and Freyr, that curiosity is of a sexual nature. Freyja’s famous beauty arouses the desire of several beings, including the giants, who attempt to win her, notably in *Brymskviða* (see Chapter one, 30–1).²⁰² She is also accused of being the lover of Óðinn: her husband’s name - Óðr - is etymologically related. According to Adam of Bremen, Freyr was represented by an ithyphallic image in the ‘temple’ at Old Uppsala, though no material evidence has survived.²⁰³ His rampant libido can also be seen in the effort he, or rather his manservant Scírnir, makes to marry the giantess Gerðr (a journey that mediates Ásgarðr and Giantland). Though obviously less sexual, their father Njörðr is involved in a myth in which Þjazi’s

²⁰⁰ Some scholars also suggest a biological relation between the Vanir and the *álfar*, or in Lotte Motz’s view, the dwarfs: see Lotte Motz, “Of Elves and Dwarfs,” *Arv: Journal of Scandinavian Folklore* vol. 29–30 (1973–4), 94–102, and Jens Peter Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion* trans. Victor Hansen (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2008), 386. Functionally, the elves are attached to the same chthonic group as the *landvættir* ‘land-spirits’ in *Egils saga*, according to Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 385. Also see Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* vol. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1956–57), 260–1, and Ernst Alfred Philipson, *Die Genealogie der Götter in germanischer Religion, Mythologie, und Theologie* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1953), 19, who observes that “Der Unterschied zwischen Wanenreligion und Asenreligion ist fundamental: die Wanenreligion war die ältere authchthone, entwickelt aus der Ackerbaukultur.”

²⁰¹ Karsten Friis-Jensen (ed.), *Saxo Grammaticus. Gesta Danorum: The History of the Danes* vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 355.

²⁰² Loki accuses her of sleeping with all the gods, including her brother, in *Lokasenna*.

²⁰³ Tschan and Reuter, *Adam of Bremen*, 207.

daughter Skaði has to choose a husband based purely on the aesthetics of his feet. The pair she eventually settles on are described as *forkunnar fagra* ‘exceedingly beautiful,’ leading her to believe they are Baldr’s though, in fact, they belong to Njörðr (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 55). ‘Lowness’ thus associates the Vanir closely with the earth and chthonic spaces, unlike the beings discussed in the previous chapter.

Schjødt contrasts the Vanir’s predilection for the lower half of the body with the Æsir, particularly Óðinn, who is associated with the head, the repository of wisdom, and high spaces (see Chapter five, 171–2).²⁰⁴ Such differing interests in these body parts support the high:low axis that can be applied to the relationship between the Æsir and Vanir, beings who are associated with high and low spaces respectively. Vanir can also be seen as mediators between the Æsir, on the one hand, and the land of the dead or Giantland, on the other. As mentioned, as fertility deities, the Vanir, especially Freyja and Freyr, also have a connection to death, dialectically associated with the underworld. However, despite their transience and ‘foreign’ origin (according to *Heimskringla*), the Vanir are also said to dwell in Ásgarðr, mediating two disparate spaces. Meanwhile, the male Vanir take wives from the giant race, bringing them into the divine fold, something the Æsir once did, but otherwise a practice the latter seek to avoid. Vanir, then, have spatial associations and characteristics that are rather distinct from those of the other gods.

Freyr

In this subsection I mainly concentrate on Freyr’s powers of movement in relation to the eddic poem *Scírnismál*, though it is worth briefly discussing two sources already mentioned above: Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* ‘Deeds of the Bishops of Hamburg’ and *Gunnars þáttr*. In addition to the phallus already mentioned, Adam, or rather Adam’s witness, says of ‘Frikko’ that he is worshipped for his ability to bestow ‘peace and pleasure on mortals’ and that marriages are to be celebrated to him. In *Gunnars þáttr* the warrior Gunnarr flees to Sweden, following the death of Hallvarðr, where he encounters a *blót* ‘sacrifice to heathen gods’ that includes a large effigy or statue of Freyr, through which *fjándinn* ‘the devil’ could speak. The narrator further notes that it was the common belief that this Freyr was obliged to have sexual relations with his ‘wife’ and that he

²⁰⁴ Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 386.

ensures a good harvest for people.²⁰⁵ This suggests that the character of Frikkó/Freyr has a strong connection to fertility and the earth and perhaps supplies a motivation for his journey to obtain a wife in *Scírnismál*.

In the prose introduction to *Scírnismál* (or *For Scírnis*), Freyr is sitting in Óðinn's high-seat Hliðskjálf from which he sees Gerðr in Giantland.²⁰⁶ Such powerful visual ability to see across space is rare in Old Norse myth; it is usually associated with Óðinn, who himself uses Hliðskjálf in *Grímnismál*, but also Heimdallr, whose acute vision and hearing are innate. This has a parallel with Loki, who builds himself a fortress with four doorways so that he is able to detect enemies approaching from any direction (see Chapter one, 24) - Loki's fortress and Hliðskjálf are both located in a 'high' space. According to Snorri, in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 Hliðskjálf, sometimes characterised as a 'watchtower,' is located in 'heaven,' emphasising the vertical axis.²⁰⁷ After deciding that he wishes to marry Gerðr, Freyr sends his manservant Scírnir to go in his stead. In Magnus Olsen's view, Scírnir, whose name means 'the bright one,' should be thought of as analogous to Freyr.²⁰⁸ If this is accepted, as the evidence suggests it should be, then Scírnir-Freyr's journey in sts 9 and 10 emerge as significant in this discussion of Freyr's command of space:

Freyr qvað:

*'Mar ec þér þann gef, er þic um myrquan berr,
vísan vafrloga,*

²⁰⁵ Ian Wyatt and Jessie Cook (eds.), *Two Tales of Icelanders. Ögmundar þáttur dytts og Gunnars Helmings/Ólkofra þáttur* Durham Medieval Texts 10 (Durham: Department of English, University of Durham, 1993), 7.

²⁰⁶ Gustav Neckel & Hans Kuhn (eds.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983), 69: *Freyr, sonr Niardar, hafði sezt í Hliðskjálf oc sá um heima alla. Hann sá í lötunheima, oc sá þar mey fagra, þá er hon gecc frá fōður síns til scemmo. Þar affecc hann hugsóttir miclar.* Carolyne Larrington, *The Poetic Edda* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 57: 'Freyr, the son of Niard, had seated himself in Hliðskjálf and looked over all the worlds. He looked into Giant-land and saw a beautiful girl, as she was walking from her father's hall to an outbuilding. From that he caught great sickness of heart.' In *Gylfaginning* ch. 37 Snorri says that Freyr looked *í norðræt* 'in a northerly direction' when he saw Gerðr and her farm.

²⁰⁷ Faulkes, *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 20: *Sá stendr á himins enda við brúar sporð, þar er Bifrost kemr til himins. Þar er enn mikill staðr er Valaskjálf heitir. Þann stað á Óðinn. Þann gerðu guðin ok þökðu skiru silfri, ok þar er Hliðskjálf in í þessum sal, þat hástæti er svá heitir.* Freyr and Loki also both possess the ability to fly, sometimes reified as a *fiadrhamr*, though Freyr does not seem to use it himself (perhaps a reflection of the source situation). Henning Haglskær Kure, "Frigg's Cunning: Initiation in the Framing Myth of *Grímnismál*," *The Wild Hunt for Numinous Knowledge. Perspectives on and from the Study of Religions in Honour of Jens Peter Schjødt* ed. Karen Bek-Pedersen, Sophie Bønding, Luke John Murphy, Simon Nygaard and Morten Warmind (*Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* (Special Issue) 74, 2022), 34n35, suggests that "the deities take turns at sitting in Hliðskjálf." For a discussion of the Old Norse concept of heaven, see Anne Holtmark, *Studier i Snorres Mytologi* (Oslo: Universitets forlaget, 1964), 35–8.

²⁰⁸ Magnus Olsen, "Fra gammelnorsk myte og kultus," *Maal og minne* (1909), 17–36.

oc þat sverð, er siálftr mun vegaz,
ef sá er horscr, er heftr.’

Scírnir mælti við hestinn:

‘Myrct er úti, mál qveð ec ocr fara
úrig fiqll yfir,
þyria þjóð yfir;
báðir við komomc, eða ocr báðr tecr
sá inn ámátki iotunn.’²⁰⁹

‘Freyr said:

‘I’ll give you that horse which will carry you through the knowing,
dark, flickering flame,
and that sword which will fight by itself
if he who wields it is wise.’

Skirnir said to the horse:

‘It is dark outside, I declare it’s time for us to go
over the dewy mountain,
through giant realms;
we’ll both get there or the all-powerful giant
will seize us both.’²¹⁰

It is not inconceivable that Scírnir was invented as a kind of proxy for Freyr, since the Vanir are not apparently capable of moving horizontally to Giantland, despite an association with this place. Obstacles of particular interest in Scírnir’s path are *úrig fiqll* ‘misty mountains’ and *myrqvan vaftrloga* ‘dark flickering fire.’ Mountains are usually presented as massive obstacles, separating Ásgarðr from Giantland, with few gods presented as being able to traverse them. Fire is thought to be one of the elements least easily contained due to its

²⁰⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 71.

²¹⁰ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 58–9. For recent analyses of *Scírnismál*, see articles by Lukas Rösli, “The Agency in *För Scírnis* – Subjects, Objects, and *Différance*: A Subversive Reading,” *Myth, Magic, and Memory in Early Scandinavian Narrative Culture. Studies in Honour of Stephen A. Mitchell* Acta Scandinavica 11 ed. Jürg Glauser Pernille and Hermann in collaboration with Stefan Brink and Joseph Harris (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 77–90, and Richard Cole, “The Threat of Induced Desire in *Skírnismál*,” *Myth, Magic, and Memory in Early Scandinavian Narrative Culture. Studies in Honour of Stephen A. Mitchell* Acta Scandinavica 11 ed. Jürg Glauser Pernille and Hermann in collaboration with Stefan Brink and Joseph Harris (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 91–109.

unpredictable behaviour. It is also a primal element. Thus, Scírnir travels over the kinds of space normally inaccessible to most beings.

The poem turns when Freyr gives Scírnir his horse Blóðughófi,²¹¹ who could understand human speech (*Scírnir mælti við hestinn*),²¹² which facilitates Scírnir's successful journey to Giantland. It is also the horse Sleipnir that allows Hermóðr to travel in a downward direction to Hel in the Baldr myth (see Chapter one, 45–7). Margaret Clunies Ross argues that the presence of horses in graves from the Vendel (540–790 CE) and Viking (790–1100 CE) periods suggests that early Scandinavians understood horses as liminal beings, who ensured a safe transition across spatial realms, in particular the final journey to the world of the dead (see Chapter five, 170–1).²¹³

The persona of Freyr can be associated with the earth, in several ways, going back to pre-Christian times. Near the pagan temple at Uppsala, for long the centre of Freyr's cult, Adam of Bremen describes a sacred grove with a well, in which sacrificial victims would be ritually drowned. Adam goes on to say that 'each day one man was offered together with other animals.'²¹⁴ Although no extant Norse myth has Freyr travel to underworld spaces, his role as a fertility god connects him closely to this realm through the cyclical rotation of the seasons.²¹⁵ As a member of the giant race (possibly a frost-giant), Freyr's wife Gerðr also has a connection to the underworld, all giants being semantically close to death and destruction. Gerðr's name is also related to the word *garðr* 'wall, enclosed space, field,'²¹⁶ which leads Turville-Petre to suggest that she personifies the "corn field held fast in the clutch of winter."²¹⁷ Edgar Polomé suggests that Gerðr, in fact, resides in the 'other world' (implicitly

²¹¹ A name which does not occur in this poem but in the anonymous *pula*, *Kálfsvísa* 'Kálfr's vísa.'

²¹² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 71.

²¹³ Margaret Clunies Ross, "The Role of the Horse in Nordic Mythologies," *Nordic Mythologies: Interpretations, Intersections and Institutions* ed. Timothy Tagherlini (Berkeley: North Pinehurst Press, 2014), 52. Leszek Gardela (*Magic Staffs in the Viking Age* (Vienna: Faesbinder, 2016), 49, suggests that horses were used to pull wagons/carts to the grave and were then interred with the bodies of magic-workers.

²¹⁴ Tschan and Reuter, *Adam of Bremen*, 207.

²¹⁵ Freyr has little direct connection to the dead in the written sources *per se*, but the cycle of life and death relates to his status as a fertility god. Freyr's importance as the latter is supported largely from Snorri's *Ynglinga saga*, which goes into great detail about the nature of the harvest following Freyr's death, as well as onomastic evidence in Scandinavia, especially Sweden, which has revealed a network of cultic sites dedicated to Freyr. Some scholars also regard *Scírnismál* as an example of a *hieros gamos*, a 'holy marriage' between two supernatural beings for ritual purposes. If we can accept that Freyr was a fertility god, albeit one whose popularity diminished during the Viking Age, then at least the two most prominent Vanir gods have strong chthonic associations, which aligns them with the bottom position on the up:down axis.

²¹⁶ See Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter - Universitätsverlag, 1992), 80–1.

²¹⁷ Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 174.

the underworld), meaning that is where Scírnir-Freyr must travel to acquire her. Polomé's interpretation is based on the prose between sts 10 and 11 of *Scírnismál*, which mentions a wooden fence encircling Gerðr's house that Scírnir presumably jumps over, reminiscent of how Hermóðr with Sleipnir enter Hel.²¹⁸ This implies a barrier or obstacle separating the world of the living from the world of the dead. Thus Freyr can be associated with the earth and the space below through (a) his wife, a liminal being, (b) his chthonic role (*ár ok friðr*), and (c) his membership of a group associated with the earth, death and renewal. Finally, he is the owner of the ship *Skiðblaðnir*, which has extraordinary powers of movement: it sails in the air and on water, and could be folded up and carried around in one's pocket (see Chapter five, 185–7, and n. 801).²¹⁹ However, it was also large enough to be able to fit all the Æsir, which suggests an interest in the physical and spatial capacities of objects. Overall, Freyr can be associated with kinetic abilities that are highly distinct from those of the other gods.

Freyja

Freyja travels to the land of the dead in the eddic poem *Hyndluljóð*, where she has a confrontation with a *vǫlva*, reminiscent of Óðinn's dealings with these beings.²²⁰ The poem's dialogue is set in a location either (a) on the way to Valhǫll or (b) near the *vǫlva*'s tomb and thus associated with the underworld; both locations can be aligned with a high:low binary, suggestive of movement along the vertical axis. Freyja's exhortation to the *vǫlva* Hyndla to 'wake up' draws the latter's ire, who is clearly not accustomed to being interrupted, hence the stern response in st. 6: *Flá ertu, Freyia, | er þú freistar mín* 'You're deceitful, Freyia, when you test me so.'²²¹ This implies that Hyndla is sleeping or dead before the meeting with

²¹⁸ Edgar Polomé, *Essays on Germanic Religion* (Washington DC: Institute for the Study of Man, 1989), 121.

²¹⁹ Anthony Faulkes (ed.), *Edda: Skáldskaparmál* (London: Viking Society, 1998), 35: *Skiðblaðnir hafði byr þegar er segl kom á lopt, hvert er fara skyldi, en mátti vefja saman sem dúk ok hafa í pung sér ef þat vildi.*

²²⁰ Half of all those slain on the battlefield are dedicated to Freyja, and she causes discord in war, which forges a close connection to Óðinn. She is therefore similar in some ways to the *valkyrjur*, whom Óðinn sends out from Valhǫll to collect slain warriors, though their role appears to be limited to psychopomps. Folke Ström, *Loki: ein mythologisches Problem* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1956), 64–8, argues for a conflation of identities between Freyja and Hel, or for Freyja as the personification of Hel on the grounds of her relatively equivalent status to Óðinn: "Wenn man sagen kann, dass Freyja in ihrer Walkürengestalt mit dem Walhall der gefallenen Kriegerscharen zusammengehört, ist es ebenso sicher, dass sie auch in dem Todesreiche der allgemeineren Glaubensvorstellung als Herrscherin in Hel oder als die personifizierte Hel zu Hause ist." As Jens Peter Schjødt has pointed out, the existence of a single Freyja-Hel figure, which cannot be proven, is less important than the semantic relationship that exists between one chthonic being who resides in the underworld and another who takes half of all dead warriors destined for Valhǫll. Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 387, calls Hel a 'goddess,' and Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 60, calls her a 'death-goddess,' though I am less inclined to do so given her consanguine relationship to the 'forces of chaos,' e.g. the *Miðgarðsormr* and *Fenrir*.

²²¹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 289; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 246.

Freyja, both of which are kinds of stasis, which, I argue, are normally negatively portrayed within an Old Norse ‘worldview’ (see Chapter five, 171–2).

As mentioned, Freyja and Óðinn share several characteristics in relation to space and movement. In Óðinn’s dealings with *vǫlur*, the location is also an underworld space. We may compare *Hyndluljóð* 6 with *Vǫluspá* 28 (*Hvers fregnit mic, | hví frestið mín?*) in which the *vǫlva* reacts similarly to Óðinn’s questions regarding the future.²²² Freyja’s grooming of Óttarr, her protégé, who is competing for an inheritance against the claims of someone called Angantyr, can also be compared with Óðinn’s special relationship with valiant warriors and kings, whom he sometimes assists. Freyja and Óðinn share powers of movement in order to travel along the vertical axis to acquire knowledge or wisdom. Freyja also takes a share of dead warriors to her realm, Fólkvangr, reminiscent of the bands of warriors Óðinn keeps in Valhǫll. On the other hand, her familial bonds associate her with chthonic and liminal beings with strong connections to the ‘low’ parts of the earth or nature itself. Her association with various animals deepens Freyja’s terrestrial connections, in particular the boar/swine (sacred also to Freyr), which is a symbol of fertility, virility and strength, but also cats, the creatures that pull her chariot around the countryside.²²³ The Miðgarðsormr is represented as a cat in a myth about Útgarðaloki (see Chapter one, 35–6), which could indicate a fascination on the part of early Scandinavians with the way these creatures themselves move through space. A boar with shining bristles called Hildisvíni ‘Battle-boar,’ in fact, accompanies Freyja on her journey to Valhǫll/the underworld in *Hyndluljóð*.²²⁴ Freyja’s associations with both high (Valhǫll) and low spaces (animals, the earth and underworld) are thus contradictory and highly distinct.

Njǫrðr

Though eventually overshadowed by his son Freyr, Njǫrðr was probably an important god in his own right in parts of pre-Christian Scandinavia and northern Europe.²²⁵ He likewise can be regarded as having a strong affinity with the earth and ‘lowness.’ Njǫrðr lives in a realm

²²² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 7.

²²³ One of her nicknames is *Sýr* ‘sow.’

²²⁴ According to Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 176, Hildisvíni is Freyja’s lover, a claim possibly made with *Lokasenna* 30 in mind, associating her closely with ‘lowness.’

²²⁵ Despite this, Njǫrðr only appears in place-names in Norway, while place-names with the goddess Njæper (cf. Nerthus from Tacitus’s *Germania*) can be found in Sweden: see Stefan Brink, “How Uniform Was the Old Norse Religion?,” *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross* ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 118.

called Nóatún (a kenning meaning ‘enclosure of ships’ [sea]) where he is said to rule over the winds, the sea and fire (*Hann ræðr fyrir gøngu vinds, stillir sjá ok eld*).²²⁶ Wind, water and fire are fundamental aspects of nature to which the Vanir, chthonic beings, have a strong connection, which is especially so for Njörðr. Moreover, they have a dual life/death-giving function, particularly with fire, which could be regarded as the most destructive. Fear of such elements and a need for apotropaic means of protection probably lies behind an invocation to Njörðr in *Gylfaginning*: *á hann skal heita til sæfara ok til veiða* ‘he [Njörðr] ought to be invoked for voyaging at sea and for hunting,’ certainly very active kinds of movement.²²⁷

Snorri states that Njörðr is raised in Vanaheimr but is given, in a passive sense, to the Æsir (*gísluðu hann goðunum*), in accordance with the peace treaty (*sætt*) that also includes his son.²²⁸ The act of being ‘given’ or ‘taken’ (*gísla*) as a hostage signals a kind of ‘upward’ journey, given that Vanaheimr is thought to have existed on a ‘lower’ plane than that of the gods. Such ‘lowness’ can be perceived in relation to Mímir, also ‘taken’ by the Vanir, who kill him and send his head to the Æsir. Mímir, or at least his head, thus experiences a kind of ‘initiation’ that results in a new state of being. We can also see that Njörðr and his children emerge with a different status, namely assimilation into divine culture, an example of social movement (see Chapter three, 119–21).

Njörðr’s close affiliation with ‘lowness’ on the vertical axis is also evident in the story of his marriage to Skaði, daughter of the giant Þjazi, as told by Snorri in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 56.²²⁹ According to Polomé, this story is derived from the Indo-European idea of a ‘free choice marriage’ (Old Indic *svayamvara*-).²³⁰ Skaði’s choosing of Njörðr solely on the evidence of his feet also appears to be related to the Vanir’s interest in ‘lowness’ (explained above), their pronounced sexuality and roles as fertility gods, a function that ties them to the

²²⁶ Faulkes, *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 23.

²²⁷ Faulkes, *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 23.

²²⁸ Faulkes, *Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 23.

²²⁹ Anthony Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, 61: *En Skaði, dóttir Þjaza jotuns, tók hjálm ok brynju ok öll hervápn ok ferr til Ásgarðs at hefna föður síns. En Æsir buðu henni sætt ok yfirbætr, ok hit fyrsta at hon skal kjósa sér mann af Ásum ok kjósa at fötum ok sjá ekki fleira af. Þá sá hon eins manns fætr forkunnar fagra ok mæli: “Þenna kys ek, fátt mun ljótt á Baldri.” En þat var Njörðr ór Nóatúnnum.* Anthony Faulkes, *Edda* (London: Everyman, 1987), 61: ‘But Skadi, daughter of Thiassi, took her helmet and mail-coat and all weapons of war and went to Asgard to avenge her father. But the Æsir offered her atonement and compensation, the first item of which was that she was to choose herself a husband out of the Æsir and choose by the feet and see nothing else of them. Then she saw one person’s feet that were exceptionally beautiful and said: “I choose that one, there can be little that is ugly about Baldr.” But it was Niord of Noatun.’

²³⁰ Polomé, *Essays on Germanic Religion*, 117.

earth. The fascination for low things situates them at the bottom end of a high:low binary on both a ‘macro’ or geographical level (through the area below the earth), and an ‘anthropological’ level, through the human body itself, specifically genitalia and feet.²³¹

Vǫlur

In several mythological texts, knowledge is acquired from an old woman or ‘prophetess, seeress,’²³² as it is usually translated into English, known in Old Norse as a *vǫlva* (pl. *vǫlur*).²³³ *Vǫlur* are not mythological beings *per se*; rather they are a social group conceptualized as human women in touch with the supernatural world through their magical practices. They also interact with other human characters in several sagas. In *Eiríks saga rauða*, for example, the *vǫlva* Þorbjörg lítilvǫlva lives in relative harmony with the Norse settlers in Greenland where she is described as going from house to house to offer her predictions of the future. The portrayal of *vǫlur* in sources such as *Eiríks saga rauða* is significantly different from the one gathered by analysing only the eddic poems which present *vǫlur* as having a somewhat difficult relationship with the gods.

The type of myths that feature *vǫlur* usually involve a journey of some kind to a liminal and/or chthonic space, typically, the world of the dead. As such, many of the myths regarding Óðinn, a frequent visitor to this place, feature a *vǫlva*, but there is also at least one non-Ódinic myth where a *vǫlva* is present. *Vǫlur* dwell in a liminal space for several reasons. They are non-mainstream members of society, possibly related to the giant race who themselves dwell in the liminal Giantland. They are in a sense ‘dead’ (much of the language used to describe them makes use of adjectives relating to death; for example, in st. 4 of *nás orð um qvað* ‘[the *vǫlva*] spoke corpse-words’), and therefore dwell underground or in the earth, putting them in a position of ‘stasis.’²³⁴ *Vǫlur* may practise a kind of magic (*seiðr*), an antisocial trait, in order to prognosticate future events (Óðinn and Loki, who are both of

²³¹ Saxo also relates a story in *Gesta Danorum* in which the Norwegian princess Regnilda chooses her husband from among the suitors by feeling his legs in which she had earlier hidden a ring, which shows that the story was widespread: see Georges Dumézil, *From Myth to Fiction. The Saga of Hadingus* trans. Derek Coltman (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 22–23, Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus* 1, 65, and Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 386.

²³² ‘Seeress’ may be a preferable term to ‘sibyl’ because of its Greek overtones; in any case, this thesis uses the ON form.

²³³ For an overview of *vǫlur* in mythological, heroic and saga contexts see John McKinnell, “Encounters with *Vǫlur*,” *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society* ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Odense: Odense University Press, 2003), 110–131.

²³⁴ Neil Price, *The Viking Way: Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), 73.

debatable gender/sexuality, may also know *seiðr*).²³⁵ *Vǫlur* are, therefore, marginalised from the rest of society, cf. the *vǫlva* who ‘sits outside’ in *Vǫluspá* (see below). By virtue of the numinous knowledge they possess and their darkened abodes, the *vǫlur*, as they are presented in eddic poetry, are associated with lowness, much like the Vanir as well as the giants, whom *vǫlur* may be genetically related to. In the following, I analyse the three eddic poems that present *vǫlur* in the context of their liminal spatial setting: *Vǫluspá*, *Baldurs draumar* and *Hyndluljóð* – all thought to date to a pre-Christian time.

Vǫluspá

In Old Norse myth extreme old age appears to be an indicator of spatial liminality: *vǫlur* are some of the oldest beings in Old Norse myths.²³⁶ We know from sts 1–2 of *Vǫluspá* that the anonymous *vǫlva* of the poem is very old.²³⁷ She remembers that she is ‘raised, birthed’ (*fædda*) by giants, though *fæða* can also mean ‘to feed, give food to.’²³⁸ As the *vǫlva*’s giant heritage is indicated elsewhere, the sense of *fæða* here could include both nourishing/rearing and labour. The use of *fæða* echoes st. 40 where the *vǫlva* describes the ‘birth, upbringing, rearing’ of the children of Fenrir (or Loki) in the east in ‘Iron wood.’²³⁹ Woods and forests are spaces located ‘away from centre,’ on the margins of civilisation (see Chapter four, 154), and the east is conventionally associated with Giantland. Thus one can contrast *vǫlur*, and the beings described in st. 40, with the younger Æsir gods, who live in Ásgarðr, a ‘central’ space.

While the geographical positioning of Óðinn and the *vǫlva* is imprecise, a liminal location seems likely, assuredly the underworld, especially given other encounters between gods and *vǫlur*. In *Hyndluljóð*, discussed below, a heated verbal exchange between Freyja and a *vǫlva* takes place on the road to Hel. Similarly, the *vǫlva* of *Vǫluspá* signals her

²³⁵ Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 65. It is implied that Óðinn often changed his sex as well as his form: cf. *Lokasenna* 24; Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus* 1, 167.

²³⁶ Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North*, 159.

²³⁷ As the name indicates, the story is, at least in part, narrated by a *vǫlva*. The idea has been raised that there are two *vǫlur*, indicated by the change from first to third person pronouns at various stages throughout the poem. Stefanie Würth, “The Role of *Vǫluspá* in the Perception of Ragnarøk in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature,” *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society* ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Viborg: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003), 225, and Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda. Volume II: Mythological Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 27–9, have noted the similarities between *Vǫluspá* and sibylline literature based on the use of first and third person pronouns *ek* ‘I’ and *hon* ‘she.’

²³⁸ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 1: *Ec man iǫtna, ár um borna | þá er forðom mic fædda hǫfðo* ‘I remember giants born early in time | those nurtured me long ago’ (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 4).

²³⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 9: *Austr sat in aldna í Iárníði | oc fæddi þar Fenris kinder* ‘In the east sat the old woman in Iron-wood | and gave birth there to Fenrir’s offspring’ (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 9).

resistance to Óðinn’s implied questions in st. 28: *Hvers fregnit mic, | hví freistið mín?*²⁴⁰ The beneficiary in this encounter is certainly not the *vǫlva* herself, probably due to the culture of ‘negative reciprocity’ in which the myths are set.²⁴¹ With this inferred encounter in mind, it is logical to assume that a journey by Óðinn should be imagined to have taken place before the verse of *Vǫluspá* begins, bringing him to a place where he can induce the *vǫlva* to tell her prophecy. The destination of Óðinn’s journey is likely to be the land of the dead, on the vertical axis, as is also implied, I argue, in the other eddic poems that involve *vǫlur*. As mentioned, the *vǫlva* is said to sit *úti* ‘outside,’ a reference meaningful at the literal level, but also signifying that she exists outside the domain of the gods in a liminal space.²⁴² Schjødtt points out that *sitja úti* ‘to sit outside’ is a *terminus technicus* “for a special way of coming into contact with beings from The Other World.”²⁴³ Furthermore, I agree with his assertion that Óðinn has probably “come to the *vǫlva* in a liminal space.”²⁴⁴ Although little of *Vǫluspá* suggests movement on her part, the final half line of the poem, *nú mun hon sœcqvaz*,²⁴⁵ has her disappear beneath the earth,²⁴⁶ presumably back to her earthy abode.²⁴⁷ This implies movement (through the earth) along the vertical axis.

Baldrs draumar

In the eddic poem *Baldrs draumar*, a *vǫlva* is summoned by Óðinn to answer questions about the bad dreams his son Baldr is having. This poem is not found in the CR, but only in the other main manuscript containing eddic poetry – the early thirteenth century AM 748 4to.²⁴⁸ The *vǫlva* in *Baldrs draumar* is described as dwelling in a liminal space in more explicit

²⁴⁰ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 7. Despite her obvious distress, she is forthcoming in her answers, which are very detailed, while the repetition of *vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?* in sts 27, 28, 33, 35, 39, 41, 48, 62 and 63 make it clear that some sort of tacit back and forth conversation is occurring.

²⁴¹ A term I borrow from Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes* vol. I (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994).

²⁴² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 7.

²⁴³ Schjødtt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 219n69.

²⁴⁴ Schjødtt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 219.

²⁴⁵ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 15; ‘Now she will sink down’ (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 12).

²⁴⁶ ‘Sinking’ or ‘sucking’ might have been thought to be a common way of reaching the underworld as it occurs in a range of texts; cf. the fragmented eddic poem *Buslubæn* contained within *Bósa saga: Getr þú ei ráðit, | svá at mér rétt þikki, | þá skulu þik hundar | í hel gnaga, | en sál þín | sökvi í víti* ‘If you cannot guess, so that it seems correct to me, then let dogs gnaw you to death and your soul sink to punishment.’ Trans. Wilhelm Heizmann, ‘*Bósa saga* 9 (Busla, *Buslubæn* 9),’ *Poetry in fornaldarsögur* Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages VIII ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 36.

²⁴⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 15: *berr sér í fiððrom | – flýgr vǫll yfir –, | Níðhoggr, ná;* ‘Nidhogg flies over the plains, in his pinions | he carries corpses’ (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 12).

²⁴⁸ Schjødtt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 224, and John McKinnell, “Encounters with *Vǫlur*,” 126–8, both argue that this poem has deep pre-Christian roots.

terms than the one in *Völuspá*. In st. 4 it says that *reið Óðinn | fyr austan dyrr*.²⁴⁹ The east is associated with liminal beings, particularly the giants (and elsewhere I argue that *völur* may have giant heritage), but also in certain historical texts with non-Norse speaking peoples, who themselves sometimes live to the *east* of Scandinavia. St. 5 confirms that the *völva* has been dead a long time (*dauð var ec lengi*),²⁵⁰ as the *völva* in *Völuspá* presumably is too, emphasising the up:down binary, as the dead in Norse myth always travel in a vertical direction.²⁵¹ She is also described as lying static in a grave and must be reincarnated with a ‘corpse-reviving spell,’ equipping her with powers of movement. If, like the *völva* in *Völuspá*, she is very old, as we are presumably meant to interpret *lengi*, then we can characterise her as dwelling in a liminal space, since old age and liminality appear to be linked (as opposed to the youth and centrality of the *Æsir*). Óðinn’s spell forces the *völva* to travel the ‘difficult road’ (*erfit sinni*), probably a figurative expression. She then describes the adverse weather that afflicts her resting place – ‘I was snowed upon, I was rained upon | dew fell on me, dead I’ve been a long time’ – meteorological phenomena commonly associated with liminality. Moreover, the action in this stanza, being snowed and rained on, is highly suggestive, albeit in a figurative way, of her location at the bottom of the vertical axis.

Although Óðinn gets the answers he is looking for under the pseudonym *Vegtamr*, relations turn sour in st. 13 when the *völva* realises his true identity:²⁵²

*Ertattu Vegtamr, sem ec hugða,
heldr ertu Óðinn, aldinn gautr.*²⁵³

‘You are not Way-tame, as I thought,
rather you are Odin, the old Gaut.’²⁵⁴

Óðinn’s rejoinder to the *völva*, ‘mother of three ogres’ (*briggia þursa móðir*),²⁵⁵ implies that *völur* are related to the giants, liminal figures, in some way. The *völva* then exhorts Óðinn to ride back to his *heimr* ‘world,’ that is, move from her ‘low’ abode back to the centre – *Heim*

²⁴⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 277.

²⁵⁰ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 277.

²⁵¹ According to Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 223, the *völva*’s knowledge is likewise ‘dead’ or ‘latent’ until Óðinn receives it.

²⁵² It is not certain how the *völva* knows Óðinn’s true identity; Klaus von See *et al.*, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda/Band 3: Götterlieder* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter verlag, 2000), 449–61, argue that it is the mention of maidens (*meyiar*) in st. 12 that jogs her memory. According to Jere Fleck, *Die Wissensbegegnung in der altgermanischen Religion* (Unpublished PhD thesis: Universität München, 1968), 93–8, these are the maidens who accompany Baldr on the funeral pyre.

²⁵³ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 279.

²⁵⁴ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 237

²⁵⁵ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 279; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 237.

ríð þú, Óðinn – emphasising her remoteness and location on the vertical axis.²⁵⁶ In the final two lines of st. 14, she evokes the image of Loki breaking his bonds signalling the onset of Ragnarøk:

er lauss Loki líðr ór þöndum
*oc ragna røc riúfendr koma.*²⁵⁷
 ‘until Loki is loose, escaped from his bonds,
 and the Doom of the Gods, tearing all asunder, approaches.’²⁵⁸

These words show her enmity for Óðinn and the Æsir, and reveal her solidarity with the ‘forces of chaos’ at Ragnarøk, although *vølur* and the gods are not enemies *per se*.²⁵⁹ Like in the previous poem, the *vølva* in *Baldrs draumar* lives in a liminal space, probably the underworld, that can be associated with ‘lowness,’ which can be contrasted with Óðinn’s journey to get there from ‘above.’

Hyndluljóð

The other major eddic poem featuring a probable *vølva* (she is called merely a ‘giant woman’) is *Hyndluljóð*, known only from Flateyjarbók GkS 1005 fol. (circa late fourteenth century).²⁶⁰ As in the previous poems, a god ‘wakes’ the *vølva* up from her immobile state:

Vaki, mæc meyia, vaki, mín vina,
*Hyndla systir, er í helli býr!*²⁶¹
 ‘Wake up, girl of girls, wake up, my friend,
 Hyndla, sister, who lives in the rock cave!’²⁶²

Interestingly, Freyja calls Hyndla her friend and sister, terms of endearment absent from the other poems (I argue elsewhere that the Vanir are ‘closer’ to liminal beings like *vølur* than the Æsir). In *Baldrs draumar* the space in which the encounter takes place adjoins the *hávo* |

²⁵⁶ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 279.

²⁵⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 279.

²⁵⁸ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 237.

²⁵⁹ Jens Peter Schjødt, “Journeys to Other Worlds in pre-Christian Scandinavian Mythology: Different Worlds – Different Purposes,” *Between the Worlds: Contexts, Sources and Analogues of Scandinavian Otherworld Journeys* ed. Matthias Egeler and Wilhelm Heizmann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 27, suggests that *vølur* should not be classified as ‘dangerous’ in the way that the giants are, especially if “treated according to certain rules.”

²⁶⁰ Originally thought to be of late composition, Flateyjarbók is now regarded as probably an ancient creation. de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* II, 109–10, argues that the version we have of *Hyndluljóð* is an amalgam of two originally separate poems. It is the focus of important examinations by Gro Steinsland, *Det hellige bryllup og norrøn kongeideologi: en analyse av hierogami-myten i Skirmismál, Ynglingatal, Háleygjatal og Hyndluljóð* (Oslo: Solum, 1991), and Britt-Mari Näsström, *Freyja, the great goddess of the North*, among others.

²⁶¹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 294.

²⁶² Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 245.

Heliar ranni ‘high hall of Hel’ – a grand description - whereas Hyndla is said to live in a cave (*hellir*).²⁶³ Nevertheless, this fits with descriptions of the dead and liminal beings in other texts, some of whom also live in caves or *haugar* ‘mounds, cairns.’ Freyja asks Hyndla to ride with her to Valhøll, to the holy sanctuary (*til vés heilags*),²⁶⁴ tempting her with Óðinn’s treasure and guarantees of peace from Þórr (*hann æ við þic einart láti* ‘that he [Þórr] will always be reliable to you’).²⁶⁵ In Schjødt’s analysis of this poem, he argues it is more likely that the exchange takes place in Hyndla’s cave than on the way to Valhøll,²⁶⁶ citing st. 46 in support: *Snúðu burt heðan! sofa lystir mic* ‘Go away from here! I wish to sleep.’²⁶⁷ Freyja also exhorts Hyndla to ‘take one of your wolves out of the stable’ so they can race next to each other, providing an interesting and unparalleled allusion to a *völva*’s kinetic abilities. The choice of animal is also significant and may itself signal liminality and a kind of power. The wolf Fenrir (discussed below, pp. 74–7) is synonymous with Ragnarøk, the triumph of chaos over the gods, both a perlocutionary reference to her alignment with the ‘forces of chaos’ and a literal statement. As Schjødt observes, Hyndla’s initial dismay at being woken up (moving from a passive to an active state) soon turns into a ‘pronouncement of knowledge,’ as it does in the other *völur* poems, potentially facilitated by Hyndla’s and Freyja’s sisterly relations. In any case, since the acquisition of numinous knowledge tends to take place in the underworld, there is good reason to assume that Hyndla’s cave is located there, as are apparently the abodes of the other *völur* discussed in this section.

The ‘forces of chaos’

The term ‘forces of chaos’ refers to a category of mythological beings that the Æsir struggle to control, namely the Fenrisúlfr or Fenrir, Jǫrmundgandr or the Miðgarðsormr, and Hel.²⁶⁸ Their genesis presents a conundrum for the gods, who immediately go to their *rocstólar* to decide what must be done. The gods’ anxiety is founded on two details according to Snorri’s

²⁶³ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*; 277; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 235.

²⁶⁴ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 288.

²⁶⁵ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 288.

²⁶⁶ Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 252. Other scholars who share this view are Åke Ohlmarks, “Totenerweckung in Eddaliedern,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* vol. 52 (1936), 264–97, Judy Quinn, “The Gýgr, the Völva, the Ásynja and her Lover: Meetings with Remarkable Women in the Eddic Poems,” *Treasures of the Elder Tongue. Fifty Years of Old Norse in Melbourne. Proceedings to Celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Old Norse at the University of Melbourne, 14th May 1994* ed. K. Burge (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1994), 137–48, and von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*.

²⁶⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 295; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 251.

²⁶⁸ In Anna Birgitta Rooth’s assessment, *Loki in Scandinavian Mythology* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerups Förlag, 1961), 162–75, the concept of Loki as the progenitor of the ‘forces of chaos,’ as well as other monsters, derives from medieval learned tradition, particularly the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville (circa 560–636).

Edda: (a) their place of origin, and (b) their parentage.²⁶⁹ The solution to the issues presented by the ‘forces of chaos’ relate significantly to their associations with space and movement, which the gods attempt to restrict. They thus decide to kidnap the children, separate them from each other and, for the Miðgarðsormr and Hel, banish them to spaces on the margins of society.²⁷⁰ Óðinn puts Hel in Niflheim, located under Yggdrasill’s roots, giving her authority over all those who die of sickness or old age. The Miðgarðsormr is thrown into the sea where it coils around the entire earth so that it can bite its own tail. The third sibling, Fenrir, is brought up in Ásgarðr where it grows enormously strong, forcing the gods to devise a creative stratagem to contain it. Lilla Kopár connects each of Loki’s offspring with the limitations of human existence: the Miðgarðsormr with spatial boundaries, Hel with the limits of life and death, and Fenrir with the limitation of time.²⁷¹ I would also suggest that the other two children, not just the Miðgarðsormr, represent spatial limitations, which impede their ability to move, as will be shown below.²⁷²

Hel

In Norse myth, there are two realms of the dead: Hel and Valhøll. Located underground, Hel is the final destination of all those who do not die in battle.²⁷³ But it is also the name of the

²⁶⁹ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 27: *En er goðin vissu til at flessi þrjú systkin fæddusk upp í Jotunheimum ok goðin røkðu til spádóma at af systkinum þessum mundi þeim mikit mein ok óhapp standa ok þótti öllum mikils ills af væni, fyrst af móðerni ok enn verra af faðerni.* It is particularly the identification of the parents, the giantess Angrboða and Loki, that initiates a practical response to the situation. The threat posed by Angrboða and her offspring is clear: while comparatively weak mentally, giants possess formidable physical strength, which they seek to use against the Æsir. However, epithets for giants, such as *hundvíss* ‘exceptionally wise,’ suggests a range of opinions regarding their intelligence. Loki, literally and metaphorically, transgresses the border between god and giant, so the ambiguity inherited from him is potentially more serious.

²⁷⁰ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 27: *Þá sendi Alfǫðr til guðin at taka börnin ok færa sér.* Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes* I, 62, has pointed out that the lack of social complexity, e.g., kinship relations, among the forces of chaos is an appropriate attribute of these beings when viewed in opposition to the social relations of the gods and even the giants.

²⁷¹ Lilla Kopár, “Spatial Understanding of Time in early Germanic Cultures: The Evidence of Old English Time Words and Norse Mythology,” *Interfaces between Language and Culture in Medieval England: A Festschrift for Matti Kilpiö* ed. Alaric Hall, Olga Timofeeva, Ágnes Kiricsi, and Bethany Fox (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 223.

²⁷² The efforts on the part of the gods to impose order on the ‘forces of chaos’ are, of course, ultimately, in vain, as both sides kill each other in a bloody melee at Ragnarøk. In Rasmus Trandum Kristensen’s opinion, “Why Was Óðinn Killed by Fenrir?,” *Reflections on Old Norse Myths* ed. Pernille Hermann, Jens Peter Schjødt, and Rasmus Trandum Kristensen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 162, the ‘forces of chaos’ pose a formidable threat, since they transgress the border between giant/troll and Æsir. Their significance precedes Ragnarøk. In fact, the ‘forces of chaos’ are an integral part of the fabric of Old Norse myth: Preben Meulengracht Sørensen and Gro Steinsland, *Før Kristendommen: digtning og livssyn i Vikingetiden* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1990), 33, describe them as a “kaos-uhyre, men dog det helt nødvendige element, som holder verden sammen.” That idea is personified in the figure of Hel, who guards the dwelling space for the dead souls of criminals and the sick, in much the same way that Óðinn and Freyja marshal slain warriors for service in Valhøll/Fólkvangr.

²⁷³ According to Christopher Hale’s analysis, “The River Names in *Grímnismál* 27–29,” *Edda: A Collection of Essays* ed. Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba

figure who rules over this realm.²⁷⁴ Like her siblings, Hel is thought to be a threat of some kind to the Æsir, so she is installed in this liminal abode. However, in contrast to the Miðgarðsormr and Fenrir, who are literally ‘bound’ in some way,²⁷⁵ Hel is given *vald yfir níu heimum* ‘power over nine worlds.’²⁷⁶ She appears to be given this power voluntarily on the part of the gods – cf. Fenrir, who must be tricked into letting the gods put the fetters on him at the cost of Týr’s hand.²⁷⁷ Her realm is said to contain great halls, courts and a large gate.²⁷⁸ Were it not for the negative impression of Hel when framed by certain oppositional pairs (including life:death, upper-world:underworld, masculine:feminine, nature:culture), this might appear to be a significant ‘position.’

However, as Schjødt observes, the realm of Hel is ‘fixed’ or ‘passive,’ concepts with negative associations in the Norse ‘worldview.’²⁷⁹ As such, the beings that are sent to Hel cannot return to the world of the living, with a few exceptions (see Chapter one, 47–8).²⁸⁰ This mythological certainty is given expression in the story of Baldr’s death in *Gylfaginning* ch. 49. Baldr is killed with an arrow made of mistletoe, the only lifeform his mother Frigg does not ask to swear an oath of peace (see Chapter one, 45).²⁸¹ Despite a bargain being struck that would let Baldr go back, the cave-dwelling giantess Þökk declines to weep,²⁸²

Press, 1983), 177, of the river names in *Grímnismál* 27–29, the orientation of Gjöll would locate Hel “down and north” from it.

²⁷⁴ According to John Lindow and Anders Andrén, in addition to the evidence from Snorri’s *Edda*, Hel must also be considered a person based on st. 31 in *Grímnismál*, which clearly depicts her as a living being (cf. *búa* ‘to live, dwell’) on par with the frost-giants and humans: “Worlds of the Dead,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume II: Social, Geographical, and Historical Contexts, and Communication Between Worlds* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 900.

²⁷⁵ Fenrir with fetters, Miðgarðsormr by biting its own tail.

²⁷⁶ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 27.

²⁷⁷ Furthermore, she has to ‘administer board and lodging to those sent to her’ (Faulkes, *Edda*, 27; Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 27: *ollum vistum með þeim er til hennar váru sendir*), namely, those who die from sickness (*sótt dauðir*) or old age (*ellidauðir*). Sámi eschatological belief included a realm of the dead specifically for those who died of infectious diseases: see Thomas A. DuBois, “Encounters: Sámi,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume I: Basic Premises and Consideration* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 369.

²⁷⁸ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 27: *Hon á þar mikla bólstaði ok eru garðar hennar forkunnar hávir ok grindr stórar*.

²⁷⁹ This explains why Hel does not play an active role at Ragnarøk.

²⁸⁰ Schjødt, *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, 389.

²⁸¹ There has been some discussion as to whether Snorri was aware of the mistletoe as it does not grow in Iceland. Therefore, the possibility has been raised as to whether he was confusing it with something else: cf. the reed that kills Víkarr in *Gautreks saga*.

²⁸² The ‘weeping of nature,’ as it has sometimes been termed is, according to Anne Holtmark, a natural phenomenon that anyone living in the far north would be able to observe on cold clear nights when someone steps out from a heated house into the cold outside: see Anne Holtmark, *Studier i Snorres mytologi* (Oslo: Det norske videnskap-akademi i Oslo, 1964), 80). Rooth, *Loki in Scandinavian Mythology*, 147–8, has also adduced several parallels of the lament of nature with other world religions, including the Christian story of the Passion of Jesus.

excluding him from Valhøll.²⁸³ Baldr therefore stays in Hel until after Ragnarøk, when he is reincarnated. Hel's passivity is particularly noticeable when contrasted with Valhøll, a militaristic realm whose *raison d'être* involves training warriors for Ragnarøk. In this thesis, I include passivity in the same semantic sphere as *ergi* and *seiðr*, concepts associated with ambiguity and liminality. A figure associated with this semantic sphere is Óðinn, who is frequently represented as blurring conceptual categories (see Chapter one, 18–19). Óðinn operates in this ambiguous, in-between space when he goes on expeditions to the underworld or another liminal space to obtain a valuable item for the gods, which increases in value and usefulness as it undergoes a transformation from nature (liminal) to culture (central space).²⁸⁴ According to Schjødt, despite its passive nature, generally perceived negatively, Hel plays an important role in various myths as the space where precious resources are found, without which divine society could not be established. This is arguably what Sørensen and Steinsland mean when they describe the 'forces of chaos' as a "helt nødvendige element, som holder verden sammen" (see n. 272).

In addition to being the place where the old and the sick go after they die, Hel is also a kind of waypoint for *vándir menn* 'evil men' on their way to the related realm Niflhel. Niflhel is described by Snorri as located *niðr í níunda heim* 'down in the ninth world,' thus potentially lower than Hel. It is not known why people go to Niflhel, nor what their crimes were, but we may suppose, based on its low position, that it is considered an appropriate domain for odious wrongdoers. In contrast, according to Snorri's *Edda*, only those *rétu eru siðaðir* 'who conduct themselves correctly' will access Gimlé or Vingólf. This echoes the dualistic Christian worldview in which Heaven and Hell represent opposing moral states. It is an aspect of Hel's lot to rule over the criminals of the world because of her dubious parentage (discussed above). As for Niflhel, the weight of evidence suggests that it stems from Christian tradition, transmitted via descriptions of Hell.²⁸⁵ A famous occupant of Niflhel is

²⁸³ John Lindow, *Murder and vengeance among the gods: Baldr in the Scandinavian mythology* (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1997), 127.

²⁸⁴ Mathias Nordvig, *Volcanoes in Old Norse Mythology: Myth and Environment in Early Iceland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 82, points out that wisdom/knowledge (*mannviti*) cannot be absorbed in Hel – it *must* undergo a transformation in the human (upper) world (as many scholars have recognised).

²⁸⁵ The idea of Niflhel as occupying a northerly location "enveloped in mist" has recently been proposed by Peter Jackson, "The Merits and Limits of Comparative Philology: Old Norse Religious Vocabulary in a Long-Term Perspective," *More Than Mythology: Narratives, Ritual Practices, and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions* ed. Catharina Raudvere and Jens Peter Schjødt (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2012), 61, on the basis of its relationship to its Indo-European analogues.

the master builder who is killed by Þórr when he ‘breaks’ a contract to build the gods a fortress in three seasons. According to Snorri, Þórr ‘sends’ him to Niflhel, which suggests that Niflhel is a place of punishment for the dead.²⁸⁶

The Miðgarðsormr

The Miðgarðsormr ‘World serpent’ or Jǫrmungandr ‘Mighty stick, stave, wand’ is an enormous creature that wraps around Miðgarðr, similar to the ouroboros. The Miðgarðsormr parallels the various sea monsters from ancient and (post-)medieval folktales, such as the Mesopotamian Tiamat, the Christian Leviathan or the Greek *Cetus*. The Miðgarðsormr may thus represent a Norse/Germanic reflex of a common European motif. The principal Old Norse written sources that deal with the Miðgarðsormr are Snorri’s *Edda* and the eddic poems *Vǫluspá* and *Hymiskviða*, but it is also the subject of a number of skaldic poems.

Miðgarðsormr is the second of Loki’s children with Angrboða and possibly the most unnatural. While we get some evidence that Hel and Fenrir are capable of direct speech, for instance (cf. Hel’s conversation with Hermóðr and the episode about the binding of Fenrir), the Miðgarðsormr appears to be mute. For unexplained reasons, it has a permanent rivalry with the god Þórr and, as such, tends to appear in myths in which Þórr is the main protagonist, such as his visit to Útgarðaloki’s hall in which the Miðgarðsormr, disguised as a cat, is one of Þórr’s ‘opponents.’ Contrary to some scholars, I argue Miðgarðsormr can be classified as a kind of fish, or fish-like being, as it is domiciled in the sea even, though it is often identified as an *ormr* ‘worm, snake’ – I base this claim, in part, on *Hymiskviða* 24 where it is called a *fiscr*.²⁸⁷ Thomas DuBois argues that fish belong to the wild spaces of giants and dwarfs, outside the ambit of the gods.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ H. A. Molenaar, “Concentric dualism as transition between a lineal and cyclic representation of life and death in Scandinavian mythology,” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde* vol. 138 (1982), 42, argues that in a sense the Master Builder was also denied “the coming of life in a lineal sense” since he was not able to secure a marriage contract with Freyja.

²⁸⁷ The Miðgarðsormr is described as a fish in *Hymiskviða* 24: *Sœpiz síðan sá fiscr í mar* ‘Then that fish sank itself into the sea’: see John Lindow, “Þórr,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1066–7. Fish/fishing as an economic and social operation in Old Norse texts is usually limited to its role as a source of food (such as in *Eyrbyggja saga* and *Eiríks saga rauða*): the references to Miðgarðsormr represent a significant departure from this tradition. Margaret Clunies Ross has also pointed out to me that several skaldic snake-kennings use base-words for types of fish, such as Einnarr Skúlason, *Geisli* 16/2–3^{VII} ‘the dark coiling fish of the heather’ (pers. comm.)

²⁸⁸ Thomas DuBois, “Diet and Deities: Contrastive Livelihoods and Animal Symbolism in Nordic Pre-Christian Religions,” *More Than Mythology: Narratives, Ritual Practices, and Regional Distribution in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religions* ed. Catharina Raudvere and Jens Peter Schjødt (Lund: Nordic Academic

The only substantial myth involving the Miðgarðsormr recounts Þórr's fishing expedition with the giant Hymir. There are two versions of this event, one from the *Gylfaginning* section of Snorri's *Edda*, and the other the main narrative strand in *Hymiskviða*. The Miðgarðsormr's abode is located far out to sea. As related above, Óðinn sends it there postnatally. It is a location presumably chosen due to its remoteness from the gods and their world. According to John Lindow, the mythological world was thought to be of a disc-like shape with the abodes of the gods at the centre and a great ocean on the margins.²⁸⁹ Such marginality puts restrictions on Miðgarðsormr's range of movement, so we can therefore say that it occupies a position of stasis; though, of course, this gets reversed at Ragnarøk when the Miðgarðsormr slithers out of the crashing waves up onto the land *í jötunmóð* 'in a giant frenzy':

*Þá varð Þórr reiðr ok færðisk í ásmegin, spyrndi við svá fast at hann hljóp báðum fótum gognum skipit ok spyrndi við grunni, dró þá orminn upp at borði. En þat má segja at engi hefir sá sét ógurligar sjónir er eigi mátti flat sjá er Þórr hvesti augun á orminn, en ormrinn starði neðan í mót ok blés eitrinu.*²⁹⁰

'Then Thor got angry and summoned up his As-strength, pushed down so hard that he forced both feet through the boat and braced them against the sea-bed, and then hauled the serpent up to the gunwale. And one can claim that a person does not know what a horrible sight is who did not get to see how Thor fixed his eyes on the serpent, and the serpent stared back up at him spitting poison.'²⁹¹

This scene appears on several Viking Age stone monuments from Scandinavia and the British Isles, among them a stone from Hørdum, Denmark. In my analysis of this myth in Chapter one, 33–5, I note the physical exertion it requires Þórr requires to keep himself steady. The story creates a sense of tension in several ways: the brutal nature of the encounter, the fishing line separating them, and the sense that the fate of the world is at stake. Neither Þórr nor Miðgarðsormr actually succeeds in drawing the other into their respective domains, though both come close – Þórr's legs dangle beneath the boat and part of Miðgarðsormr's body is hauled up onto the gunwale. In this moment, two opposing and equal worlds are

Press, 2012), 86. But such a classification does not easily accord with the presumed importance fish must have had in the medieval Scandinavian diet

²⁸⁹ John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 230.

²⁹⁰ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 45.

²⁹¹ Faulkes, *Edda*, 48.

simultaneously colliding and being held in perfect balance. When the theatre of conflict moves to land at Ragnarøk, the encounter becomes more deadly.²⁹²

We get a fairly consistent idea of Miðgarðsormr's spatial characteristics from the myths. This owes something to its various names, which explicitly invoke either a territory, Miðgarðr, or a degree of size, *jörmun-* 'vast.' Thus, according to Snorri, when Óðinn throws Miðgarðsormr into the sea it grows so big that *hann liggir í miðju hafinu of öll lönd* 'he lay in the middle of the sea around the whole earth.' When Þórr goes to hunt Miðgarðsormr, he finds that its size prevents him from reeling it in, causing his feet to poke through the ship's deck and his fists to slam down. Here Þórr has to summon all the *ásmegin* 'divine strength' he can muster. In the *Edda*, the Miðgarðsormr is able to blow poison across the sea, land and sky.²⁹³ These are extraordinary and highly distinct powers of movement. From the account mentioned above, we also learn that Þórr uses an *oxahöfuð*, the head of an ox, probably among the largest (land) animals known to medieval Scandinavians. Interestingly, in Old Norse myth the head could symbolise wisdom due to an association with Mímir's head, which gives Óðinn secrets. In Chapter five, I examine the picture stone Ardre VIII on which the ox head has possibly been depicted, including the corral whence the animal came. It was clearly of some importance to early Scandinavians, but its exact nature is mysterious. On Ardre VIII the Miðgarðsormr is depicted in an area associated with water, close to, but distinct from, other kinds of landscape (see Chapter five, 184–92).

An allusion to Miðgarðsormr's magnitude is developed during Þórr's visit to Útgardaloki. In this myth, which is only extant in Snorri's *Edda*, Þórr and his companions, Loki and Þjalfi, compete in a non-verbal kind of *mannjafnaðr* with Útgardaloki's servants. One of the several tasks set for Þórr is to lift a 'cat,' but he only manages a single paw. This rather absurd image clearly shames Þórr whose status among the gods relies on his dominant strength, especially given his verbal struggles (see Chapter three, 125–7).²⁹⁴ The cat, as it turns out, is, in fact, the Miðgarðsormr, transposed to Útgardaloki's hall by means of a *sjónhverfingr* 'ocular delusion.' Lindow points out that a *þula* in Snorri's *Edda* lists *koþtr*

²⁹² It is significant that a being who mediates between the gods and the 'forces of chaos' is the one that cuts the fishing line.

²⁹³ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 50: *Miðgarðsormr blæss svá eitrunu at hann dreifir lopt öll ok lög.*

²⁹⁴ John Lindow, "Thor's Visit to Útgardaloki," *Oral Tradition* vol. 15 (2000), 182, suggests that Þórr's failure to lift the cat should not be regarded as shameful but rather as analogous to his fishing trip, where the encounter with the Miðgarðsormr ends in a kind of draw.

‘cat’ as a name for a giant, information Þórr is supposedly not aware of.²⁹⁵ Miðgarðsormr’s expansiveness makes it a formidable enemy to the gods. It occupies a significant part of space, since it stretches across the whole ocean, thereby forming a barrier. At the same time Miðgarðsormr’s representation as a cat on Þórr’s visit to Útgarðaloki’s hall, a creature no doubt intended to amuse medieval audiences but significantly one that is the spatial opposite of Miðgarðsormr (due to its small size), actually draws attention to Miðgarðsormr’s vastness and occupation of space.

Fenrir

Loki’s third child is the wolf Fenrir, sometimes referred to as Fenrisúlfr or simply *úlfrinn* ‘the wolf.’ Unlike his siblings, Fenrir is raised among the Æsir, though we do not know why. Incidentally, some sources assign Loki another wolf-related progeny called Váli or Nari, who is turned into a wolf by the Æsir (*Brugðu Æsir Vála í vargs líki*) and, subsequently, kills his brother Narfi. Neither Váli/Nari nor Narfi are classified as ‘forces of chaos.’²⁹⁶ Their threat to society is vastly reduced by presumably having grown up among the Æsir and having an *ásynja* mother, Sigyn. The Æsir are initially confident that Fenrir is tameable until one day they notice the incredible rate at which he is growing. This sparks a well-known tale in which the gods attempt to bind the wolf with fetters (*fjotra*) at the cost of Týr’s hand. Fenrir’s association with space and movement (or its antonym, stasis) is therefore significant.

The widespread popularity of this myth is evident in its being portrayed in Old Norse texts and stone monuments from Scandinavia and the British Isles. The longest version is in the *Gylfaginning* section of Snorri’s *Edda*, which begins with the statement that Týr is the only god brave enough to feed Fenrir. This frames the episode to a degree. The first fetter they try, in an attempt to restrict movement, is called Leyðing, which, we are told, the wolf did not consider to be very powerful (*úlfinum flótti sér þat ekki ofrefli*). Indeed, he ‘spurns’ Leyðing on the first attempt. The gods tell Fenrir it would be commendable if he could break the next fetter, Dróma, said to be ‘a half stronger’ than the previous one. He agrees but as

²⁹⁵ Lindow, “Thor’s Visit to Útgarðaloki,” 180. Þórr’s ignorance of poetic speech is demonstrated elsewhere in Old Norse literature, as Carol Clover, *Hárbarðsljóð* as generic farce,” *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 51 (1979), 137, argues.

²⁹⁶ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 49.

soon as it is on, he wriggles it off,²⁹⁷ causing it to smash on the ground.²⁹⁸ Dróma's failure greatly worries the gods, so they send Freyr's servant Scírnir 'down' to Svartálfaheim to acquire an even stronger fetter called Gleipnir from a certain dwarf. For unexplained reasons, the gods bring Fenrir to an island called Lyngvi on Lake Ámsvartnir, a location 'away from centre.' We are told that, to Fenrir, it seemed that he would gain little fame from breaking such a soft-looking fetter, but it would be equally humiliating if it was imbued with magic.²⁹⁹ The gods assure Fenrir that they will let him go, but he does not trust them and demands a 'show of good faith.' None of the Æsir step forward except for Týr, an important god in pre-Christian times, who deposits his hand into the wolf's mouth. As Fenrir kicks, the fetter tightens, restricting him more and more, until eventually he is totally bound. This is how Týr loses his arm, an image that decorates several Viking Age monuments. In order to completely immobilise Fenrir, the gods take the cord attached to the fetter and thread it through a huge stone, fastening it way down below the earth. Stones and rocks such as this are associated with chthonic as well as liminal spaces, particularly Giantland. Then they take another stone and bury it even further below the earth as an anchoring peg. And in Fenrir's gaping jaws they thrust a sword, with the saliva that runs from its mouth creating the river Ván ('Hope'), an example of a 'force of chaos' creating rather than destroying space.

We can see from this episode that Fenrir ends up in a similar position to his siblings; that is, a state of stasis or immobility. It is a protracted process, one that requires the co-operation of an outlying group. This varies significantly from the way in which Hel and Miðgarðsormr, without any attempt to raise them among the gods, are unhesitatingly put in their positions of stasis. This suggests that Fenrir is regarded as the most dangerous of the 'forces of chaos' - he certainly is from Óðinn's point of view. The threat posed by Fenrir involves his enormous jaws which he uses to swallow his adversaries, but also to annihilate whole parts of the physical world, an unparalleled level of destruction of space for one being. He causes particular carnage at Ragnarøk where it is thought that he swallows the moon (*Þá tekr annarr úlfrinn tunglit*) before devouring Óðinn (*Úlfrinn gleypir Óðin*) - the sources are at

²⁹⁷ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 27: *En úlfrinn hugsaði at þessi fjöturr var sterkr mjök, ok þat með at honum hafði afl vaxit síðan er hann braut Leyðing. Kom þat í hug at hann mundi verða at leggja sik í hættu ef hann skyldi frægr verða, ok lét leggja á sik fjöturinn.*

²⁹⁸ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 27: *Ok er Æsir tölðusk búnir, þá hristi úlfrinn sik ok laust fjötrinum á jörðina ok knúðisk fast at, spyrnir við, braut fjöturinn svá at fjarri flugu brotin.*

²⁹⁹ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 28: *“Svá lízk mér á þenna dregil sem önga frægd munak af hljóta þótt ek slíta í sundr svá mjótt band, en ef þat er gort með list ok væl, þótt þat sýnisk lítit, þá kemr þat band eigi á mína fætr.”*

variance regarding exact identity, however. *Völuspá* makes reference to the moon and Óðinn being swallowed by wolves but they are not named. Snorri regards Sköll and Hati Hróðvitnisson, Hróðvitnir being another name for Fenrir, as the moon's and sun's destroyers respectively.³⁰⁰

The spatial characteristics of Fenrir's jaws are significant. Snorri says that when his jaws 'gape' they reach from the heavens to the earth (*Fenrisúlfr ferr með gapanda munn ok er hinn efri kjöptr við himni en hinn neðri við jörðu*).³⁰¹ The scale of Fenrir's jaws potentially implies some sort of vertical dimensionality that is somewhat distinct in Norse myth in which the air and high spaces are restricted domains.³⁰² The way he uses his jaws to 'suck up' the space around him, including some celestial bodies, is a difficult image to grapple with insofar as it goes beyond the limit of empirical human experience. As such, it is fitting that he is described as a chaotic figure, as the loss of the sun and moon robs the gods of the means by which they reckon the passage of time set out in *Völuspá*. It takes a deity with similarly large-scale spatial associations to defeat Fenrir - this is Víðarr - who exerts vertical and horizontal pressure with his powerful shoes in order to rip the wolf's throat apart (*Víðarr ok stígr qðrum fæti í neðra keypt úlfsins*).³⁰³ As explained in Chapter one, Víðarr is a god associated with feet, and his name potentially also means 'mast, tree trunk,' derived from *viðr*, emphasising his connection to the vertical axis. At the same time his shoes and powers of movement clearly associate him with the horizontal axis. This combination of force from different angles, representing the two axes, proves to be a powerful weapon, and the death-bane of Fenrir.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁰ He also identifies the dog, Garmr, as Týr's foe, which, as Kopár, "Spatial Understanding of Time in early Germanic Cultures," 224, has rightly pointed out, is not coherent with the version of the story from the *Edda*, summarised above, in which Fenrir maims Týr. That Fenrir, Sköll, Hati and Garmr could be metatheses of each other is a possibility.

³⁰¹ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 50.

³⁰² Fenrir with his enormous jaws is possibly represented on the Tullstorp stone in Skåne, Sweden, which depicts a beast with 'gaping wolf-jaws': see Erik Moltke, *Runes and their Origin. Denmark and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseets forlag, 1985), 248.

³⁰³ *Völuspá* and *Vafþrúðnismál* do not agree on the manner of Fenrir's death: in the former he is killed with a sword, in the latter as described above. In Kevin Wanner's opinion, "Sewn Lips, Propped Jaws, and a Silent Áss (or Two): Doing Things with Mouths in Norse Myth," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* vol. 111, no. 1 (2012), 14, *Vafþrúðnismál*'s testimony "seems likely to be the older one."

³⁰⁴ Dumézil considers Víðarr, who is usually shrouded in obscurity, an important god for this reason (although he is usually not seen as such in most modern analyses).

The Giants

The giants (pl. *jötnar*, sg. *jötunn*) play an important role in Norse myths in which they are generally regarded as the ‘adversaries’ of the gods against whom they are constantly judged.³⁰⁵ This state of affairs is at odds with evidence showing several qualities the two have in common, including, a shared heritage, which mediates their polarising geographical and social positions.³⁰⁶ The giant ‘pantheon’ is comparable in number to the Æsir, though many of them only appear in a single narrative or sub-narrative, probably because they often perish. As has been argued by some scholars and developed further below, the killing or dismembering of giants can be perceived as a ‘creative’ act insofar as their deaths can result in the production of new physical space. As such, giants have a much stronger connection to the earth than the gods. While most scholars tend to unite all giants into one group, there is in fact little evidence that relations among giants are harmonious or even that they were all thought to dwell in the same location. On the other hand, they do share some common features - mainly based on their names - such as a love of chaos and a connection to liminal types of terrain.

In *Gylfaginning* 7, Óðinn and his brothers, Vili and Vé, kill their mother’s relative Ymir/Aurgelmir, the first known giant in the world. Some scholars observe that the killing of a senior male kinsman on the mother’s side is a common motif in Indo-European mythology more broadly, particularly given the presumed foster-brotherhood between Borr and Ymir as a result of their upbringing by Auðhumla.³⁰⁷ The blood that emanates from Ymir’s corpse triggers a flood in which the entire race of giants is killed except for one survivor called Bergelmir. It is from him that all subsequent giants are descended (*eru af þeim komnar hrímþursa ættir*). The flesh from Ymir’s body is also the material Óðinn and his brothers use

³⁰⁵ Giants and gods have a complex relationship. Certainly, in many ways the giants seem to be antipodal to the gods, an idea which can be expressed through several oppositional pairs: nature:culture, life:death, male:female, west:east and dominance:subservience. But it is significant that Óðinn was himself half-giant; subsequently, all his descendants carry some giant ancestry. It is a fact Snorri, for example, notes but does not comment on. According to *Gylfaginning* 6, Óðinn was the son of Borr (Burr in *Völuspá*), who married Bestla, daughter of the giant Bölþorn. Borr’s father Búri was licked into creation by the primeval cow Auðhumla, though it is generally agreed that Búri was not a giant. We can also explore this complex relationship through other figures, such as Loki, who resembles Óðinn somewhat in personality and action. Loki’s father was the giant Fárbauti and his loyalty oscillates between his matrilineal and agnatic kin. Þórr’s mother Jörð has also been associated with the giant race. So, in fact, the three major Æsir gods that are discussed in Chapter one are all associated with the giants in a more than nominal way.

³⁰⁶ Molenaar, “Concentric dualism,” 34–5.

³⁰⁷ Auðhumla does not appear in eddic poetry though her role is thought to have been widely known in Scandinavia: see Margaret Clunies Ross, “Pseudo-Procreation Myths in Old Norse: an Anthropological Perspective,” *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* vol. 1 (1990), 154, and Jarich G. Oosten, *The War of the Gods: The Social Code in Indo-European Mythology* (Milton Park: Routledge, 1985), 37.

to create various physical components. His body, which they put in Ginnungagap, becomes the earth, his blood the sea and water, and his skull the sky, which they fix above.³⁰⁸ The celestial bodies are also set in motion, together with the arrangement of various elements and the reckoning of time (*Svá er sagt í fornum vísindum at þaðan af váru dægr greind ok áratal*).³⁰⁹ Thus giants perform several important etiological roles in connection to the early existence of the world, which ultimately leads to the creation of the Æsir. According to Clunies Ross, Ymir represents the source of anthropomorphic diversity as well as the whole natural world.³¹⁰

The giants have significant geographical identifiers encoded within their names. Snorri distinguishes between *hrímþursar* and *bergrisar*, ‘frost giants’ and ‘mountain/rock giants’ respectively, while at other times he refers simply to *risar* or *jǫtnar* ‘giants, trolls.’³¹¹ Their sexual dimorphism is not pronounced, but female giants are distinguished linguistically by the terms *gríðr* ‘giantess,’ *grýla* ‘giantess,’ *gýgr* ‘giantess, hag’ and *trollkona* ‘female troll,’ among others. The collocation *hrímþursar ok bergrisar* is introduced in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 where Hár is describing the location of the rainbow bridge Bifrǫst in relation to Valhǫll. Bifrǫst, Hár states, can only be crossed by the gods, as it leads to Valhǫll; Snorri’s careful explanation is interesting - the implications of the presence of giants on Bifrǫst are presumably obvious. This suggests that the giants were thought to be capable of crossing it. The collocation appears twice more in *Gylfaginning*, in ch. 21 in relation to Mjǫllnir, described as the bane of frost/rock giants, their fathers and kinsmen, and again at the funeral of Baldr in ch. 49.³¹² The first two instances of *hrímþursar ok bergrisar* refer to some of the fundamental attributes that can be applied to all giants: namely, that they desire to inhabit Ásgarðr or exchange it with Giantland in some way, thus reversing mythical geography; and

³⁰⁸ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 11: *þeir tóku Ymi ok fluttu í mitt Ginnungagap, ok gerðu af honum jörðina, af blóði hans sæinn ok vǫtnin*. Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 12: *Tóku þeir ok haus hans ok gerðu þar af himin ok settu hann upp yfir jörðina*. The equivalent passage in the eddic poem *Vafþrúðnismál* is: ‘Ór Ymis holdi | var iorð um scöpuð, | enn ór beinom biorg, | himinn ór hausi | ins hrímkalda jǫtuns, | enn ór sveita siór’ (Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 48). ‘From Ymir’s flesh the earth was shaped, | and the mountains from his bones; | the sky from the skull of the frost-cold giant, | and the sea from his blood’ (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 40).

³⁰⁹ As Clunies Ross, “Pseudo-Procreation Myths in Old Norse,” 153, observes, the river from which the giants were created was described by Snorri as containing *eitrkvikja* ‘venomous yeast’ – a further negative association.

³¹⁰ Clunies Ross, “Pseudo-Procreation Myths in Old Norse,” 153.

³¹¹ In *Mythologie der Germanen* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1909), E. H. Meyer tries to distinguish the different categories of giant basis on the type of space they are associated with (e.g., mountain, forest).

³¹² Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance*, 76, has pointed out that at Baldr’s funeral the mountain giant Hyrrokkin’s mobility is “reduced” while the gods seem to still enjoy their mobility over the land.

the adversarial relationship that obtains between the giants and Þórr and Mjöllnir, which is far more than a simple weapon (see Chapter three, 113–4). Not all giants can be considered *hrímbursar* or *bergrisar*, given the very specific spatial attributes these terms imply. For example, based on his description in *Völuspá*, the being known as Surtr is presumably a kind of ‘fire giant’ who comes from the south to incinerate the earth (*Surtr ferr sunnan með sviga lævi*). Moreover, some giants, such as Hymir, have greater associations with the sea/water than snow, ice or rock.³¹³

The giants’ dwelling spaces are similarly varied, with some choosing to live in mountains or caves, while others appear to have built ‘halls’ comparable, though of lesser quality, to those of the Æsir.³¹⁴ Caves, in particular, are chthonic spaces connected to death and nature; they can also be understood as opposite to the abodes of the gods, which bear greater resemblance to historical medieval towns. One famous ‘mountain-dweller’ is Gunnlōð, who appears in the myth of the mead of poetry in which she lies with Óðinn for three nights inside the mountain Hnitbjörg before she shares the mead. As I explain in Chapter one, 19–21, the mead, while in the possession of the giants, could be described as inert or ‘part of nature,’ though clearly it is still precious to them. Once the mead is brought back to Ásgarðr and poured (cf. vertical movement) into containers it can be shared with aspiring poets. Given Gunnlōð’s domain, it seems likely that she is herself ‘inert’ in some way, which suggests a conceptual relationship with the mead, rather than simply one of stewardship. Moreover, the mixing of the liquids resulting from their presumed sexual relations seems to parallel or foreshadow the mixing of the mead with Óðinn’s saliva.

The giantess Þökk ‘Thanks’ lives in a cave, a liminal space antipodal to Ásgarðr.³¹⁵ Þökk appears in the myth involving Baldr’s death. She is mainly remembered as the only creature in ‘all creation’ who does not weep for Baldr, which makes his stay in Hel permanent. We learn from Snorri that Þökk is an identity adopted by Loki, a figure himself associated with liminal spaces. He thus mediates the binary pair centre:periphery, among

³¹³ For the purposes of this thesis, *hrímbursar* or *bergrisar*, together with *risar* and *jotnar*, are used interchangeably as generic names

³¹⁴ In *Gesta Danorum* Saxo describes the giant-like being Utgarthilocus’s halls as a ruin: *Illic uisendum fore Vgarthilocum, tetros horrendosque specus sordida mansione complexum* ‘There he [Thorkil] could see Utgartha-Loki, who had taken a hideous, eery cavern for his squalid dwelling’: Friis-Jensen, *Saxo Grammaticus* 1, 617.

³¹⁵ In *Norna-Gests þáttur* ‘Short tale about Nornagestr,’ a giantess who has been talking to the dead Brynhildr ‘disappears’ into a rock: Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda I* (Reykjavik: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1959), 331.

others. Loki's masquerading as Þökk had to have taken place outside Ásgarðr, a space associated with 'high' culture, which does not exist in subterranean spaces like caves.

Contrastingly, some giants are associated with spaces comparable to the gods. For example, Útgarðaloki, a giant-like being,³¹⁶ supposedly lives in an enormous fortress (*borg*), according to Snorri, with servants and banquet halls. Although Útgarðaloki's hall turns out to be an ocular illusion, which could be construed as a parody of the gods' palaces.³¹⁷ Nevertheless, various practices associated with the conventions of the hall are related in *Þrymskviða*. In this poem we see that the giant Þrymr, who steals Þórr's hammer, maintains an abode comparable to that of the Æsir. When Loki goes on a preliminary journey to Giantland he encounters Þrymr with his dogs who are adorned with 'bridles of gold':

Þrymr sat á haugi, þursa dróttinn,
greyiom sínom gullbönd snøri
oc mörum sínom mōn iafnaði.³¹⁸

'Thrym sat on a grave-mound, lord of the ogres,
plaiting golden collars for his bitches;
He was trimming his horses' manes.'³¹⁹

In addition, his horses are described as having their manes trimmed, an aesthetic choice one would not readily associate with liminal beings. Þrymr also arranges a banquet involving ritual celebrations of the wedding, which suggests a set of values not at total odds with the Æsir. The wedding-banquet and Þrymr's performance thus mediates the oppositional pair nature:culture. At another level, however, the whole affair smacks of base perversion or burlesque, exemplified by the groom's sister's hasty demand for the dowry. The subsequent slaughter of the entire wedding party by Þórr re-establishes the imbalance between the two races which the giant's theft of the hammer and marriage to an *ásynja* sought to redress.

The location of Giantland varies from source to source and is often only vaguely expressed. As I argue, the giants are associated with three of the four cardinal directions:

³¹⁶ There is some debate concerning the classification of this figure, who only appears in *Snorra Edda*.

³¹⁷ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 43: *En því næst laust þú mik með hamrinum þrjú hogg, ok var it fyrsta minzt ok var þó svá mikít at mér mundi endask til bana ef á hefði komit. En þar er þú sátt hjá holl minni setberg, ok þar sáttu ofan í þrjá dali ferskeytta ok einn djúpastan, þar váru hamarspor þín.* Moreover, it is explicitly mentioned that Þórr is not able to see through the various disguises, implying that another more discerning being would not have been fooled (see Chapter one, 35–6).

³¹⁸ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 111.

³¹⁹ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 94.

north, east and south. The absence of the remaining compass point can be explained in terms of early medieval seafaring descriptions in which Norway is by default the point of departure in the ablative preposition *vestan* ‘from the west.’ Giantland therefore could be imagined as occupying the space that surrounds the world of men in the west. Eleazar Meletinskij³²⁰ and Kirsten Hastrup³²¹ imagine the entire mythological universe, including Giantland as a sequence of expanding concentric rings, with Miðgarðr at the centre. In contrast, other scholars, such as Clunies Ross,³²² argue for the existence of more conventional borders between the different worlds in the form of concentric semicircles, based on an interpretation of the word *garðr*, which can mean ‘wall, fence’ (which may have had an older meaning ‘enclosure’).³²³ I argue both views have merit; however, given that the east is the cardinal direction that receives the most attention from Snorri and is often where Þórr is said to be prowling, conventional ‘walls’ or ‘fences’ seem more appropriate.

The giants are restricted in their ability to move, but also cannot be said to be in completely static positions or states. Evidently, they can travel in a horizontal direction, otherwise Þrymr would not have been able to enter Þórr’s domain to steal his hammer, nor would Hrungrnir have chased Óðinn into Ásgarðr to sit with the other gods at a feast. As we have seen, those actions do not take place in a vacuum; in fact, both myths result in confrontations with a very angry Þórr, who acts as executioner. Therefore, for a giant, to travel through different spatial realms is fraught with risk. In other ways, their mobility parallels that of the gods: they ride horses (again cf. Hrungrnir who rides his horse to Giantland), shapeshift into winged animals to access the domain of the air (cf. Þjazi flying into Ásgarðr in pursuit of Loki), and go on sea voyages (cf. Hymir’s and Þórr’s expedition to catch the Miðgarðsormr). In the sources that contain the examples in parentheses, there is no apparent irony or hyperbole in their presentation, so we must reckon with the possibility that some giants were conventionally thought to be able to move in such a way. It is certainly interesting that at other times the mythological sources present the same creatures as being semantically ‘dead’ due to their associations with the inanimate material, chthonic places and

³²⁰ See Eleazar Meletinskij, “Scandinavian Mythology as a System,” *The Journal of Structural Anthropology* vol. 1 (1973), 43–58, and the related article of the same name in the same journal, vol. 2 (1974), 57–78.

³²¹ Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland: An Anthropological Assessment of Structure and Change* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985).

³²² Clunies Ross, “Pseudo-Procreation Myths in Old Norse,” 147–58.

³²³ Per Vikstrand, “Ásgarðr, Miðgarðr, and Útgarðr. A linguistic approach to a classical problem,” *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives Vægar til Midgård* 8 ed. Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), 354.

liminality. Unlike the ‘forces of chaos,’ who present ‘greater’ problems to the gods who seek to restrict their movement at a fundamental level, no such measures are taken in relation to the giants; rather there exists a ‘system’ of retributive actions. At the same time, the conceptual categories that separate the gods from the giants are mediated somewhat by their shared ability to move freely, though naturally skewed in favour of the gods by virtue of their relative impunity. In this light, I question the assumption that these categories are somehow self-evident or transparent and call for a redefinition of these terms. As I have shown, the giants are capable of moving through different spaces in a comparable way to the gods, and, indeed, are occasionally associated with similar kinds of institutions and practices. It is evident from my analysis of Þórr’s experience at Geirrøðr’s house in Chapter one (pp. 36–41) that the giants’ powers of movement could outperform those of the gods, at least temporarily. However, there is a danger in activating this power, which inevitably leads to the death of the giant involved, though not without threatening the fabric of the gods’ existence.

Elves

Old Norse sources tell us comparatively little about the mysterious *álfar*, but there is sufficient evidence to suggest that they can be regarded as a mythological race on a par with the *Æsir* (cf. the formula *æsir ok álfar*, which appears regularly throughout eddic poetry and twice in Snorri’s *Edda*). On first glance, it might seem as though there is a paucity of sources regarding elves when, in fact, they appear fairly frequently, albeit inconsistently, especially in eddic poetry. There is also a certain amount of confirmatory evidence from Anglo-Saxon England, which suggests that the elves may have enjoyed some popularity there for a time. The variable nature of the Old English material regarding elves is, however, considerable, which is probably accounted for by the Anglo-Saxons’ greater reliance on classical modes of thought.³²⁴

Belief in the existence of elves and their association with the earth and underground spaces is strongly associated with pre-Christian Sweden. We see this clearly in the term *álfablót*, which refers to a sacrifice made to the elves: it is a *hapax legomenon*, which occurs in a poem found in *Heimskringla* and *Flateyjarbók*, attributed to the early eleventh-century poet Sighvatr Þórðarson. In the *Austrfaravísur* ‘Verses on a Journey to the East,’ a group of

³²⁴ See Alaric Hall’s book *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007).

travellers representing King Óláfr II Haraldsson (r. 1015–28) of Norway get a bad reception at a farm in western Sweden as they interrupt the inhabitants’ preparations for the *álfablót*:

‘Gakkat inn’, kvað ekkja
‘armi drengr, en lengra.
hræðumk ek við Óðins,
erum heiðnir vér, reiði.’
rýgr kvazk inni eiga
Óþekk, sús mér hnekði,
alfablót, sem ulfi,
ótvín, í bæ sínum.

“Do not come any farther in, wretched fellow’, said the woman; ‘I fear the wrath of Óðinn; we are heathen.’ The disagreeable female, who drove me away like a wolf without hesitation, said they were holding a *sacrifice to the elves* inside her farmhouse.’³²⁵

This event is alleged to have taken place in the winter of 1019/20. A ritual akin to the *álfablót* is also mentioned in the thirteenth-century *Kormáks saga*, which describes a *veizla af slátrinu* ‘feast of flesh-meat’ for the elves.³²⁶ As Rudolf Simek has pointed out, this passage from the saga suggests that the elves lived underground and had magical healing powers, so were unsurprisingly regarded by thirteenth-century Icelanders as “heathen, otherworldly creatures.”³²⁷ The elves’ connection to the earth will be developed throughout this section.³²⁸

³²⁵ R. D. Fulk (ed.), “Sigvatr Þórðarson, *Austrfararvísur* 5,” *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035* Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages I ed. Diana Whaley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 590.

³²⁶ Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Vatnsdæla saga* (Reykjavik: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 1958), 288: *Hon segir: ‘Hóll einn er heðan skammt í brott, er álfar búa í; graðung þann, er Kormákr drap, skaltu fá ok rjóða blóð graðungsins á hólun útan, en gera álfum veizlu af slátrinu, ok mun þér batna.’*

³²⁷ Rudolf Simek, “Elves and Exorcism: Runic and Other Lead Amulets in Medieval Popular Religion,” *Myths, Legends, and Heroes: Essays on Old Norse and Old English Literature in Honour of John McKinnell*, ed. Daniel Anlezark (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 200.

³²⁸ Snorri describes an ancient Swedish dynasty in his *Yngalinga saga*, who stem from a place called Álfheim ‘Realm of the elves,’ situated between Raumelfr and Gautelfr, names themselves suggestive of elvish connections. The inhabitants of Álfheim are exceptionally tall and beautiful, *miklu fríðara en engi önnur mannkínd á Norðrlöndum* ‘much more handsome than any other people in the northlands,’ so it states in the related *Sögubrot af nokkrum fornkonungum* ‘Fragment of a saga about certain ancient kings’: see Jónsson, *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda I*, 362, and Ben Waggoner, *The Sagas of Ragnar Lodbrok* (New Haven, CT: The Troth, 2009), 58. The setting of these texts suggests that elves were perhaps once widely believed in, particularly in parts of southern Sweden, where the Ynglings were thought to originate. Knowledge of elves is also evident from medieval folktales, especially those of Denmark and Saxony: see Simek, “Elves and Exorcism,” 213. However, by this time, the connection between elves with demonic/heathen rituals or practices was greatly emphasised.

In the *Edda*, light elves are separated from dark elves (*ljósálfar* and *dökkálfar* respectively), distinctions which arise in that text alone. According to Snorri, the two kinds of elves *eru þeir ólíkir þeim sýnum en myklu ólíkari reyndum* ‘are as different in appearance as they are in reality.’³²⁹ It must remain a possibility that the distinction Snorri creates is his own doing, perhaps to mimic Christian descriptions of the angels, who are differentiated according to their nature. In the absence of material explicitly stating this, we should be wary of such an idea.³³⁰ Moreover, *dökkálfar* do not seem to share the morally corrupt status of fallen angels, nor are they openly hostile to the gods; in fact, they even assist in the binding of the wolf Fenrir. In terms of appearance, *ljósálfar* are described as ‘fairer in appearance than the sun’ (*fegri en sól sýnum*), echoing *Sögubrot af nokkrum fornkönungum* (see n. 328), while the dark elves are ‘blacker than pitch’ (*svartari en bik*). As Simek has pointed out, in addition to the formula *æsir ok álfar*, the elves are frequently included in poetic lists of the major races, *Æsir*, Vanir, giants and dwarfs, together with their reputed ‘leaders.’ This occurs twice in *Hávamál* (sts 143 and 160) and several times in *Alvíssmál* (sts 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24, 28, 30, 32). In light of the foregoing summary, elves could be thought of as a supernatural race distinguishable from the *Æsir*, giants and dwarfs, as well as humans, as some scholars have labelled them.³³¹

Elves have strong associations with certain types of space, especially chthonic parts of the earth. The home of the elves is called *Álfheimr*, a term which refers simply to ‘elves,’ so it is not immediately clear whether both kinds of elves live there or solely the light elves. Thus, according to Snorri, *Margir staðir eru þar gofugligir. Sá er einn staðr þar er kallaðr er Álfheimr. Þar byggvir fólk þat er ljósálfar heita, en dökkálfar búa niðri í jörðu.*³³² I argue the dark elves still live in *Álfheimr*, but on a lower ‘plane.’ Based on Snorri’s presentation of light and dark elves, and the probable Christian-influenced bias against things labelled ‘dark,’ we might question why they live in close proximity to each other. However, as was said earlier, the dark elves can be called upon to fashion magical items for the gods, so they should not be described as wholly corrupt beings. Since the light elves are described as being ‘fairer than the sun,’ an abode on the earth’s surface makes good sense. It would also align

³²⁹ Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 17.

³³⁰ See Holtsmark, *Studier i Snorres Mytologi*, 37, who seems to suggest that the association between light elves, dark elves, angels and demons is deliberately played up by Snorri.

³³¹ Ármann Jakobsson, “The Extreme Emotional Life of Vǫlundr the Elf,” *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 78 (2006), 227–54.

³³² Faulkes, *Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 19.

them with the gods whose own living spaces bear the mark of agriculture, such as green meadows. The ‘blacker than pitch’ dark elves conversely seem to thrive in the absence of light, which is certainly reminiscent of the underworld, presumably a dark space, as well as the figure of Hel, who is herself half dark blue, half flesh coloured. Such a space associates the dark elves literally and metaphorically close to the inhabitants of the land of the dead, which, by proxy, includes criminals and the sick, but also the giants, *vǫlur* and ‘forces of chaos.’ Unlike the latter, dark elves are not explicitly said to take part in Ragnarøk, though we know from the surviving (Christian) Anglo-Saxon sources that elves were thought to be demonic or represent evil. The author of *Kormáks saga*, as was said, assigned the elves a similar subterranean abode. Accordingly, sacrifices to the elves are carried out at a *hóll/hváll*, a ‘hill, hillock, knoll.’

In some non-mythological texts, such as *Íslendingasögur* ‘Sagas of Icelanders’ and *Fornaldarsögur*, elves are identified as being particularly mobile beings comparable to supernatural spirits. For example, in *Guðmundar saga góða*, contained within *Sturlunga saga*, a number of miraculous things occurred one year, including the presence of two suns in the sky at once while *álfar* and other ‘kinds/species’ of men (monsters?) were seen riding around together.³³³ In *Norna-Gests þáttur*, an elf is able to pass through a locked door into a house, much to the astonishment of the king.³³⁴ These descriptions paint the elves as mysterious, possibly devious creatures, who move between and across different realms, which, in some ways, is a rather different portrayal to the one Snorri gives in the *Edda*. Finally, a verse from the fourteenth-century *Bósa saga* aligns elves with trolls and *nornir* in a similar way to *Guðmundar saga*:

*‘Tröll ok álfar ok tǫfrnornir
 búar, bergrisar brenni þínar hallir.
 Hati þik hrímþussar, hestar streði þik,
 strain stangi þik, en stormar æri þik,
 ok vei verði þér, nema þú vilja minn gjörir.’*

³³³ Jón Jóhannesson, Magnús Finnbogason and Kristján Eldjárn, *Sturlunga saga I* (Reykjavik: Sturlunguútgáfan, 1946), 123: *Sá vetr var kallaðr kynja-vefr, því at þá urðu margir undarligir hlutir. Þá vóru sagnar sólar tvær senn. Ok þá vóru sagnar álfar ok aðrir kynjamenn ríða saman í flokki í Skagafirði.*

³³⁴ Jónsson, *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda I*, 307: *Þótti konung einn álfr eðr andi koma inn í húsit ok þó at luktum dýrum.*

‘May trolls and elves and magic-Norns, supernatural inhabitants and mountain giants burn your halls. May frost giants loathe you and stallions violate you, straw prick you and storms bewilder you; and harm will come to you unless you do my bidding.’³³⁵

The speaker (Busla) of this verse (st. 8 in the skaldic project edition) clearly believes that elves belong to the same category as the other mischievous creatures she cites, but it is not an opinion shared across the board, as Simek has discovered: for example, *Elis saga ok Rosamundu* and *Mottuls saga* present the elves in a rather more positive light. The comparison with the *nornir* is interesting, as comparatively little is known about them or the kinds of space they inhabit, though their association with the wells at Yggdrasill’s roots places them in a ‘low’ position.³³⁶ There are grounds to suggest that trolls and giants share chthonic origins with elves, though such an association goes against the close relationship elves seem to have with the gods in *Lokasenna*. By the seventeenth century, elves appear as morally good creatures in Icelandic ballads, such as *Ljúflingsdilla* or *Ljúflingsmál*, which contain an elvish lullaby for babies written in the common eddic metre *fornyrðislag* ‘old story metre’ (or *ljúflingslag* as it came to be known).³³⁷

The most well-known elf of the whole Old Norse corpus is undoubtedly Vǫlundr, who is the subject of the eddic poem *Vǫlundarkviða* ‘The Lay of Vǫlundr’ as well as the Old West Norse *Þiðreks saga af Bern*.³³⁸ In the prose introduction to the former, Vǫlundr is described as *vísi álfa* ‘prince of elves.’ Contrary to most depictions of elves, Vǫlundr does not live underground, but near a lake, a potentially chthonic or liminal space, with his two brothers and their swan-maiden wives. Vǫlundr is subsequently abducted and imprisoned by King Níðuðr and his wife, who force him to be their personal blacksmith. Vǫlundr’s final act is to rise into the air, possibly with a pair of wings he has made, and fly away. As far as I can determine, it is the only instance of an ‘elf’ accessing this domain. It is clearly a well-known

³³⁵ Heizmann, “*Bósa saga* 8 (Busla, *Buslubæn* 8),” 34.

³³⁶ Olof Sundqvist, “Myrternas universum – om makterna och deras boningar,” *Odens öga – mellan människor och makter i det förkristna Norden/Odin’s Eye – between people and powers in the pre-Christian north* ed. Anders Andrén and Peter Carelli (Helsingborg: Dunkers Kulturhus, 2006), 57, describes them as “belonging to the powers of Miðgarðr,” which implies that they were in some way allied to the Æsir.

³³⁷ Shaun Hughes, “Late Secular Poetry,” *Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture* ed. Rory McTurk (Williston: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 217.

³³⁸ Vǫlundr was also well known in other parts of Europe, such as in Anglo-Saxon England, where he appears in several texts, and the medieval German lands.

feature of his character, given that it appears on several stone monuments from the north of England.³³⁹

It is hard to extricate the elves from their more recent presentations, but I have now shown that they were thought to possibly move in highly distinct ways, such as through solid objects. They were also associated with dwelling in the earth, together with the beings discussed in the next section.

Dwarfs

The dwarfs are another mythological ‘race’ who have their roots in the pre-Christian era that should be familiar to a modern audience, mainly owing to a substantial body of medieval folktales about them. Like the elves, dwarfs are associated with chthonic, underground spaces and inanimate materials, which they fashion into precious objects.

The person(s) responsible for the composition of the Old Norse *Völuspá* clearly regards the dwarfs as an important part of the cosmic ecology, since the *dvergatal* ‘catalogue of dwarfs,’ believed by some scholars to be an interpolation, appears in a marked position between stanzas 10 and 16.³⁴⁰ In *Völuspá* 9, the gods go to their *rocstólar* to decide who should create the primordial dwarf:

³³⁹ The Old English poem *Deor*, another poem that portrays *Völundr*, does not mention his elvish heritage, rather his skill as a blacksmith, so *Völundarkviða* remains our main source for this identification. According to Snorri, elves have a reputation as marvellous craftsmen, so there may be a tacit connection in *Deor*. As was said, some dark elves are commissioned to make a magic fetter for the wolf Fenrir, and smiths in the medieval period were renowned for their creative and commercially lucrative abilities: see Manu Braithwaite-Westoby, *Images from Old Norse Mythology and Legend on Anglo-Scandinavian and Scandinavian Stone Sculpture* (Unpublished MA thesis: University of Sydney, 2014), 33–45, and Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda. Volume II*, 255–301.

³⁴⁰ The *dvergatal* then catalogues a number of dwarf names, totalling several stanzas. Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 99, notes that with the inclusion of the *dvergatal*, we learn more about the dwarfs than the gods. The *dvergatal* is preceded by the arrival of three giant maidens. It has, therefore, been suggested that the creation of the dwarfs was necessitated to combat this threat. It is an interesting idea, especially when one considers that dwarfs can be thought of as being conceptually related to the giants and possibly the elves, who have an ambivalent relationship with the gods. Dwarfs are also equally unfairly treated in terms of the production of goods, which unilaterally favours the gods. For example, Fjalarr and Galar, the dwarfs who ingeniously create the mead of poetry do not get to enjoy its fruits. Moreover, the dwarfs make some of the most precious material objects of the gods, often under duress, for example: Sif’s golden headpiece, the ship *Skíðblaðnir*, and Óðinn’s spear *Gungnir* made by the sons of Ívaldi; Eitri and Brokkr make a boar with golden bristles, the ring *Draupnir* and Þórr’s hammer *Mjöllnir*; Óðinn has the dwarfs make the fetter *Gleipnir* to bind Fenrir; Loki gets gold from the dwarf *Andvari* to compensate *Hreiðmar* for the death of his son *Ótr*; and *Freyja* exchanges sexual favours to some dwarfs for a golden boar and the *Brísingamen*. The absence of material assistance going the other way suggests that the dwarfs belong to the same culture of ‘negative reciprocity’ as the giants, who are never the beneficiaries in encounters with the gods. Snorri may have also intentionally blurred the category separating

*Dá gengo regin ǫll á roçstóla,
Ginnheilög goð, oc um þat gættuz,
hverr scyldi dverga dróttin scepia,
ór Brimis blóði oc ór Bláins leggiom.³⁴¹*

‘Then all the Powers went to the thrones of fate,
the sacrosanct gods, and considered this:
who should create the lord of the dwarfs
out of Brimir’s blood and from Blain’s limbs?’³⁴²

All subsequent dwarfs are made by this figure, who himself emerges from the blood of Brimir and the limbs of Bláinn. St. 9 echoes the cosmogony related in *Gylfaginning*, in which the world is made out of Ymir’s body; Brimir and Bláinn are poetic names for the giant Ymir, so a direct biological link between dwarfs and giants could be established. Brimir’s name contains the element *brim* ‘surf, seaway,’ which may be a reference to the sea that is created from Ymir’s blood.³⁴³ It also occurs in *Völuspá* 37, where it is a *biórsalr* ‘beer hall’ of a giant at a place called Ókólnir, another reference to liquid. According to John Lindow, Bláin’s name, which contains the adjective *blár* ‘blue,’ could refer to the sky, so the binary pair sea:sky might be the constitutive elements behind the primordial dwarf lord.³⁴⁴ The latter is given the name Mótsognir in the following stanza:

*Þar var Mótsognir mæztr um orðinn
dverga allra, enn Durinn annarr;
þeir manlícon mǫrg um gorðo,
dvergar, ór iorðo, sem Durinn sagði.³⁴⁵*

‘There Mótsgnir became most famous of
all dwarfs, and Durin next;
Many manlike figures the dwarfs made,
out of the earth, as Durin recounted.’³⁴⁶

dwarfs from the elves, since in *Skáldskaparmál* he relates a story in which Loki travels to the land of the dark elves Svartálfaheim to acquire the dwarf Andvari’s gold.

³⁴¹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 2.

³⁴² Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 5.

³⁴³ Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 82 and 88.

³⁴⁴ Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 82.

³⁴⁵ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 3.

³⁴⁶ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 5.

An additional dwarf is marked out by the name of Durinn, though little is known of either. Subsequently, Durinn is supposed to have told (*Durinn sagði*) the *völva* that the other dwarfs were made out of the earth, according to the ‘likeness of men.’³⁴⁷

As opposed to giants or elves, the dwarfs are not assigned a ‘realm’ as such. It is possible, based on the above, that they were thought to co-exist with the dark elves in Svartálfaheim, with whom they share some chthonic features and creative skills, but we should recall that *Völuspá* does not support this. It may say something about the thirteenth-century Icelandic perception of dwarfs’ moral character. While we cannot locate them in a realm, it seems clear that dwarfs were thought to somehow live in rocks or mountains, which associates them with giants and elves.³⁴⁸ It implies movement of a vertical kind, especially in a downward direction, which metonymically refers to the land of the dead. For example, in Loki’s journey to Svartálfaheim mentioned above, he captures Andvari, who leads him to a stone where he keeps his wealth.³⁴⁹ We may recall that the dark elves were thought to live ‘below the earth’ (*en dökkálfar búa niðri í jörðu*) further down than the light elves, so in order to reach Svartálfaheim, Loki and Andvari must travel in a downward direction. Andvari’s *steinn* is interesting; it can be translated as ‘stone,’ ‘boulder,’ ‘rock’ or even ‘stone building, cloister.’ Anthony Faulkes chooses ‘cave,’ probably to rationalise the image of Andvari hiding his treasure, but a hiding place that has the outward appearance a rock or stone seems compatible with a dwarf’s nature. Another being who is explicitly said to live in a *hellir* ‘cave, cavern’ is the *völva* Hyndla, who, like all *völur*, transmits wisdom and knowledge; like the dwarfs (and dark elves), Hyndla’s abode is probably on the road to Hel.

Moreover, some dwarfs were literally thought to be able to ‘live’ or ‘travel’ into rocks: for example, in Þjóðólfr of Hvinir’s *Ynglingatal* ‘Enumeration of the Ynglingar,’ the Swedish king Sveigðir is tricked by a dwarf into chasing it into a rock. We can connect this stanza to the instances of humans who, after death, take up residence in mountains or hillocks (*hólar*), reported in several prose sources, such as *Landnámabók* and *Eyrbyggja saga*³⁵⁰:

³⁴⁷ John Hines, “Myth and Reality: The Contribution of Archaeology,” *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society* ed. Margaret Clunies Ross (Viborg: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003), 34, argues that the creation of the dwarfs represents a new “order of producers” than the gods, necessitated by the arrival of the giant maidens.

³⁴⁸ For example, Sundqvist, “Myternas universum – om makterna och deras boningar,” 54, recently assigned the dwarfs rather vaguely to the spaces ‘utanför den världen [Miðgarðr]’ in association with the giants.

³⁴⁹ Faulkes, *Edda. Skáldskaparmál*, 45: *Ok er þeir koma í steininn, þá bar dverggrinn fram alt gull þat er hann átti.*

³⁵⁰ Lindow and Andrén, “Worlds of the Dead,” 916.

*‘En dagskjarr
 Dúrnis niðja
 salvörðuðr
 Sveigði vélti,
 þás í stein
 hinn stórgeði
 Dusla konr
 ept dvergi hljóp.
 Ok salr bjartr
 þeira Sökmímis
 jötunbyggðr
 við jöfri gein.’*

‘And the daylight-shy guard of the hall of the descendants of Dúrnir <dwarf> [(lit. ‘hall-guard of the descendants of Dúrnir’) DWARFS > ROCK > DWARF] tricked Sveigðir when the great-minded offspring of Dusli [=Sveigðir] ran into the rock after the dwarf. And the bright giant-inhabited hall of Sökmímir <giant> and his followers [ROCK] gaped at the prince.’³⁵¹

In Snorri’s summary of the story, the dwarf is sitting by a stone at a farm called ‘Steinn’ after sundown when he sees the king and ‘summons’ him into the stone.³⁵² The belief that dwarfs were thought to live in or beside rocks/stones is also supported by *Alvíssmál* st. 3, in which the dwarf Alvíss ‘All-wise’ states that he lives beneath the earth under a rock:

*Alvíss ec heiti, bý ec fyr iorð neðan,
 á ec undir steini stað.*³⁵³

‘All-wise is my name, I live below the earth,
 my dwelling is under a rock.’³⁵⁴

This poem subsequently presents a wisdom contest similar to *Vafþrúðnismál* between Alvíss and Þórr, whose daughter Alvíss desires to marry. In the final stanza, Alvíss is killed by the sunlight that floods into the hall in which they have been competing:

³⁵¹ Edith Marold with the assistance of Vivian Busch, Jana Krüger, Ann-Dörte Kyas and Katharina Seidel, translated from German by John Foulks, “(Introduction to) Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, *Ynglingatal*,” *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035* Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages I ed. Diana Whaley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 3.

³⁵² There are several instances in other Old Norse texts of figures or even whole families being associated with chthonic spaces. For example, the members of Þórolfr Mostrarskegg’s family in *Eyrbyggja saga* wanted to be buried in Helgafell where they went on ‘living’: see Molenaar, “Concentric dualism,” 30.

³⁵³ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 124.

³⁵⁴ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 105.

*uppi ertu, dvergr, um dagaðr,
nú scínn sól í sali.*³⁵⁵

‘day dawns on your now, dwarf,
now sun shines into the hall.’³⁵⁶

The manner of Alviðs’s death suggests his, and other dwarfs’, fatal aversion to natural light, which might lead us to speculate about such a vulnerability among other beings associated with dark spaces, such as the dark elves.³⁵⁷ Þórr presumably returns to his halls on the surface of the earth in Ásgarðr, which is associated with a kind of agricultural environment in which the sun plays an essential role. It might be helpful to think of an up:down axis separating the gods from the dwarfs based on the contrasting spaces they are associated with. Overall, despite the placement of the *dvergatal* in *Völuspá*, and their apotropaic genesis, dwarfs probably have more in common spatially with the giant race and other chthonic beings, such as dark elves.³⁵⁸

Conclusion

This chapter is prefaced with a statement outlining its methodological and stylistic similarities with the foregoing one. In terms of content, however, and associations with space and movement, the races discussed in this chapter have been approached in a rather different way. I began by discussing the Vanir gods, Freyr, Freyja and Njörðr, whom I have examined separately from the Æsir. In my opinion, this decision is justified, even though they are often described as being ‘together’ in a more or less formal way (cf. the eddic poem *Lokasenna*).³⁵⁹ For instance, Freyja and Freyr can both be associated with Óðinn. Freyja and the latter share half of all slain warriors who go to their respective worlds, whose names refer to death and war; she also travels to the ‘other world’ to consult with *völur* on behalf of a ‘chosen’ warrior

³⁵⁵ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 129.

³⁵⁶ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 109.

³⁵⁷ Several other texts supporting this idea can be adduced: for instance, in the prose introduction to *Reginismál* the dwarf Andvari is said to go *í steini* ‘into a rock’: cf. *Sǫrla þáttr* ch. 1, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* ch. 5, and *Áns saga bogsvegis* ch. 1. For a discussion of this material, see Terry Gunnell, “Dvergar (Dwarfs),” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings* ed. John Lindow, Jens Peter Schjødt and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1562.

³⁵⁸ A point also argued by John McKinnell, “Useless Knowledge? The Paradox of *Alviðsmál*,” *Saga-Book* vol. 41 (2017), 82. Declan Taggart, *How Thor Lost His Thunder: The Changing Faces of an Old Norse God* (London: Routledge, 2017), 19, points out that Reginn, Sigurðr fáfnisbani’s uncle, is variously portrayed as a human, dwarf and giant, in different sources.

³⁵⁹ But according to Jens Peter Schjødt, “Journeys to Other Worlds in pre-Christian Scandinavian Mythology,” 21, the Vanir, as well as the giants and other chthonic races, represent a spatial and cultural ‘out-group’ in contrast to humans and the Æsir who together form an ‘in-group.’ On this basis, it seems perfectly reasonable to separate them in the manner I have.

or leader. Similarly, Freyr uses Óðinn's high-seat in *Scírnismál* from where he peers into all the realms connected to Yggdrasill's roots – tremendous vision is also an attribute of Heimdallr, a god with possible chthonic origins (see Chapter one, 42–4). At the same time, the Vanir are related to the giants in terms of their connection to space. The Vanir have strong ties to the earth and were likely the premier fertility gods during the Iron Age/early Viking Age, especially in terms of sexuality and sacrifice for a good harvest, which is manifested in an emphasis on 'low' parts of the body/earth. Moreover, with the exception of Freyja, Freyr and Njörðr take giant spouses, a sign of their partial assimilation into divine society.

I then examine the Old Norse 'sybils' known as *vǫlur*, among the oldest and wisest beings in the mythological world. *Vǫlur* share with the giants a chthonic/liminal abode. Giants also live in stone halls or caves. *Vǫlur* seem to dwell close to or perhaps in the land of the dead. In some myths, a god/goddess visits a *vǫlva* at her home, usually for the purpose of acquiring secret knowledge. In some cases, however, she is 'summoned' above the earth, as in *Vǫluspá*, which shows that *vǫlur* are able to 'move' in some way. The *vǫlva* in *Vǫluspá* also returns to her abode by 'sinking' below the earth once she finishes her vision.

The next two groups I examine are the giants and 'forces of chaos,' both of whom are associated with liminal and/or chthonic spaces. Giants are indubitably linked to the very creation of space, since all giants descend from Ymir, who is responsible for the cosmogony. Interestingly, they are very much capable of the opposite process: at Ragnarøk, the giants contribute to the earth's destruction. In this sense, giants are much more aligned with 'nature,' seen as a destructive force, than with 'culture,' a constructive force. Giants move around in ways equivalent to some of the gods. For instance, as when Hrungnir and Þjazi penetrate the border with Ásgarðr, a seemingly unthinkable act; their punishment is a grisly death. Clearly, not all giants were thought to be capable of such transgressive movement; in fact, the ones named above are described as the most powerful of their kind. Nor do we encounter giants visiting the underworld in search of wisdom/knowledge, though perhaps they were thought to be present there in some form, given their association with the earth and lowness (cf. the giantess Móðguðr who guards the gate of Hel).

While the giants are more or less restricted to Giantland, the 'forces of chaos' do not inhabit one realm in particular, but many different kinds of space, so the threat they pose to

the gods is in fact more severe. In a way, they seem to represent the dangers of natural forces beyond control, since they are ‘present’ on sea, sky and land. Sensing this threat, the gods try extremely hard to impose limits on their movement, even employing ‘low’ races to invent new technologies. The dwarfs and elves make various fetters to bind Fenrir with, whereas the Miðgarðsormr is banished to the sea where he is kept in check by Þórr with his dwarf-made hammer. Hel is confined to the underworld where she controls the dead souls of criminals and the sick beneath the roots of the World Tree. To an extent, the ‘forces of chaos’ have a direct hand in the destruction of the earth, more than the giants. Fenrir literally swallows the space around him, including the space between the earth and the sky, while the Miðgarðsormr, who is unstoppable once Þórr dies, crawls out of the sea, signalling the triumph of nature.

I conclude the chapter by examining two further mythological ‘races’ that live in liminal parts of the mythological community. The elves are assigned their own realm by Snorri, of which there are two levels, one for each kind. The formula *æsir ok álfar*, found in several eddic poems, appears to connect the elves rather closely to the gods, though substantial evidence for this is lacking. Relations between gods and elves must have been thought to be friendly, since even the ‘ominous’ dark elves contribute material aid to the gods. However, the latter’s abode *niðri í jorðu* might also imply that the light elves live underground, which certainly contrasts with the gods’ homes. Moreover, references from (later) saga literature describe the elves rather negatively as mysterious beings who dwell in rocks and hills associated with pagan sacrifice, which becomes the dominant perception of elves in medieval European folklore. Dwarfs were also thought in the pre-Christian period to dwell under the earth or in caves and are particularly associated with inanimate matter, which they use to create precious objects. Their association with darkness is signalled by their intense aversion to sunlight. In *Alvíssmál*, for example, the dwarf Alvíss is turned into stone by the sun’s rays after losing a wisdom contest with Þórr. Their status among the gods is thus highly ambiguous. They were much revered by other mythological beings in their capacity as master smiths, providing the gods with a number of technological inventions, such as the hammer Mjöllnir. But their connection to the earth, secrecy and aversion to light align them closely with the giants. Like the elves, their legacy in historical/semi-historical sources is somewhat tainted by their presumed role as tricksters, more likely to lure human kings into rocks than to help them.

Having now constructed spatial profiles for the major mythological beings for which I utilise a range of different sources, I now turn to the presentation of space and movement in the context of two eddic poems.

CHAPTER THREE: A SPATIAL READING OF *HÁRBARÐSLJÓÐ*

Introduction

Hárbarðsljóð ‘Hárbarðr’s song’ is one of the mythological poems of the Old Norse *Poetic Edda*, known principally from two Icelandic manuscripts, GKS 2365 4^o (henceforth referred to by its common designation the Codex Regius or CR) dating from circa 1275, and AM 748 I a 4^o, which dates from the beginning of the fourteenth century. Based on the combination of verse and prose lines that it employs, as well as a number of words that only appear in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Klaus von See *et al.* assign to *Hárbarðsljóð* in its present form a *Terminus ante quem* of circa 1225.³⁶⁰ *Hárbarðsljóð* sits fifth in the sequence of items in the CR, where it seems to divide the group of Óðinn-themed poems from the Þórr-themed ones. Apart from a short prose introduction and some occasional signposting of the speakers, the entire poem is in dialogue form.³⁶¹ It is usually described in English as a flyting poem, in which two or more characters exchange versified insults, though the Old Norse name for this genre is *senna*,³⁶² but *Hárbarðsljóð* also contains a *mannjafnaðr*, and scholars frequently merge the two genres.³⁶³ According to several scholars (such as Marcel Bax, Tinneke Padmos and Carol Clover),³⁶⁴ the structure of *Hárbarðsljóð* is threefold: the *senna* occurs in stanzas 1–14, followed by the longer *mannjafnaðr* in stanzas 15–46, then the ‘aftermath’ in stanzas 47–60.³⁶⁵ According to von See *et al.*, Snorri Sturluson did not quote from *Hárbarðsljóð* in his *Edda* because it did not offer any new mythological information, though he knew of its existence.³⁶⁶

³⁶⁰ *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda/Band 2: Götterlieder*, eds. Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge, Eve Picard, Ilone Priebe, and Katja Schultz (Heidelberg: Carl Winter – Universitätsverlag, 1997), 169.

³⁶¹ Elias Wessén, “Den isländska eddadiktningen: Dess oppteckning och redigering,” *Saga og sed* (1946), 15–16, believes that *Hárbarðsljóð* must have always had a prose introduction.

³⁶² *Senna* means ‘invective, diatribe, quarrel’: see Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter – Universitätsverlag, 1992), 225.

³⁶³ For a discussion of the significance and function of modern and medieval terminology as it relates to genre see Lukas Rösli, “Terminology,” *A Critical Companion to Old Norse Literary Genre* ed. Massimiliano Bampi, Carolyne Larrington and Sif Rikhardsdóttir (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2020), 47–60.

³⁶⁴ One of the most famous of these was Jan de Vries, whose two-volume work on PCRN has been the bedrock of the field. His opinion of *Hárbarðsljóð*, however, was not a positive one: “[Hbl] zeigt, wie vielgestaltig die altnordische Dichtkunst in ihrer Blütezeit war und dass neben den wohlgepflegten Pflanzen der Skaldik auch manches wilde Gewächs emporgeschossen ist”: *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* vol. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1964), 58. More recently, Jens Peter Schjødt has emphasised the dearth of numinous knowledge in the poem: “Óðinn,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1160.

³⁶⁵ Marcel Bax and Tinneke Padmos, “Two types of Verbal Duelling in Old Icelandic: The Interactional Structure of the *senna* and the *mannjafnaðr* in *Hárbarðsljóð*,” *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 55 (1983), 151.

³⁶⁶ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 156; Judy Quinn, *The Eddic Tradition: A Study of the Mode of Transmission of Eddic Mythological Poetry in the Middle Ages* (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Sydney, 1990), 118. For the opposite view, see Jón Helgason, “Norges og Islands digtning,” *Nordisk kultur, VIII*:

In this chapter I focus on the motif of space in *Hárbarðsljóð* and the attendant concept of movement/stasis. In *Hárbarðsljóð*, space, by which I mean that represented by the natural elements earth and water as well as more abstract types of space such as ‘nation’ or ‘home,’ is arranged and referred to in several different ways: chiefly (a) through allusions to places and locations both real and imagined; (b) by reference to the types of space associated with warfare and fighting; and (c) by bringing to the fore the continuum of mobility, passivity and stasis as it relates to space. The geographical setting of *Hárbarðsljóð* is also pivotal, described in the poem by two terms, *sund* ‘sound’ and *vágr* ‘bay, creek, sea.’³⁶⁷ Some modern scholars refer to this alternatively as a ‘sundering flood.’ As Clover recognises,³⁶⁸ there are other occasions in Old Norse literature where this ‘sundering flood’ setting is used, such as the three Helgi poems (*Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* ‘The First Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani,’ *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* ‘The Second Poem of Helgi Hundingsbani’ and *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* ‘The Poem of Helgi Hjörvarðsson’), as well as in Germanic literature more broadly, including *Beowulf*, *Das Niebelungenlied* and Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* (written in Latin).³⁶⁹ In *Hárbarðsljóð*, the *sund* acts a barrier between Þórr and Hárbarðr/Óðinn, both physical and metaphorical; indeed, the *sund* could be more than a barrier, as water in Norse myth is usually a sign of “forces that cannot be controlled.”³⁷⁰ The scenario in *Hárbarðsljóð* has Þórr on one side of the *sund* and Hárbarðr on the other: it quickly becomes apparent that Þórr needs to cross the *sund*, but cannot do so without assistance from Hárbarðr, which he spurns. There is one significant material difference between the two: Hárbarðr has a boat of some kind, Þórr does not. Although neither god ‘moves’ to any great extent, there appears to be a distinct absence of autonomy in Þórr’s static position, whereas Hárbarðr’s performance in the contest and ownership of a boat denotes a clear capacity for movement.³⁷¹ *Hárbarðsljóð* presents an intense interplay of power and prestige between the two chief Norse gods, borne out in both what they say in the

Litteraturhistorie 2 vols. ed. Sigurður Nordal (Stockholm/Copenhagen/Oslo: Albert Bonniers Förlag/H. Aschehoug & CO.s Forlag J. H. Schultz Forlag, 1942–53), 29.

³⁶⁷ For uniformity I use the term *sund* except when a semantic distinction needs to be made.

³⁶⁸ Carol Clover, “*Hárbarðsljóð* as Generic Farce,” *Scandinavian Studies* vol. 51, no. 2 (1979), 125.

³⁶⁹ See von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 166, for more occurrences of this setting in Norse literature.

³⁷⁰ Annette Lassen, “Höðr’s Blindness and the Pledging of Óðinn’s Eye: A Study of the Symbolic Value of the eyes of Höðr, Óðinn and Þórr,” *Old Norse Myths, Literature & Society* ed. Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross (Sydney: Centre for Medieval Studies, 2000), 224; cf. Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes* vol. 1 (Odense: Odense University Press, 1990), 53.

³⁷¹ Most mythic sources could be said to adopt a positive view of mobility and a negative one of its opposite, stasis. However, Kirsten Hastrup, in her anthropological survey of Icelandic society, *A Place Apart* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 164, observes that, as a result of the emergence of a new class of *lausamenn* (lit. ‘loose men’) in the fourteenth century, the opposite was the case.

verbal duel and in the motif of the sound that clearly embodies a disparity in their powers of movement or otherwise. Having said this, both gods display a proclivity for different types of movement in *Hárbarðsljóð* that can be supported elsewhere in Old Norse literature.

Real and imagined spaces

The following is an analysis of space in *Hárbarðsljóð* as it relates to real and imagined spatial realms, a distinction that is not always clear cut. When the poem mentions Valland, for example, are we to understand this as a reference to southern Europe? For a modern audience its modern equivalent ‘France, southern Europe generally’ is a real geographical area, but for a medieval reader it may well have connoted a legendary or fictitious space. During the Viking Age (late eighth to mid-eleventh centuries), Valhøll, Hel and Giantland were probably believed to exist in some form, but by the presumed date of the poem these spaces had become abstract concepts that may have lost some of their meaning as they were subsumed in the new Christian understanding of geography.³⁷² This may explain why these spaces are not actually named in *Hárbarðsljóð*, but instead tangentially referred to. The exception to this pattern is when the poem mentions the ‘east,’ a conventional way of referring to the area where in the Norse imagination giants were thought to dwell. The same is true of Ásgarðr, the home of the gods, in the poem called *Óðins landa* ‘Óðinn’s lands.’ Spaces on the periphery and geographical barriers also seem to be a preoccupation of *Hárbarðsljóð*, notably the *sund* that separates the interlocutors. Finally, the spatial unit at the centre of Icelandic thinking, the *bú* ‘farm,’ does not feature greatly, but certain concepts relating to land ownership filter through occasionally.

Valland and Hlésey

Literally ‘land of the foreigners,’ Valland refers to France or southern Europe in saga literature. It is the first of two real-world locations referred to in the poem:

*Var ec á Vallandi oc vígom fylgðag,
atta ec iqfrom, enn aldri sættac.*³⁷³

‘I was in Valland, and I followed the war,
I incited the princes, never reconciled them.’³⁷⁴

³⁷² See Margaret Clunies Ross and Rudolf Simek, “Encyclopedic literature,” *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia* ed. P. Pulsiano and K. Wolf (New York: Garland, 1993), 164–6.

³⁷³ Gustav Neckel & Hans Kuhn (eds.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter - Universitätsverlag, 1983), 82.

³⁷⁴ Carolyne Larrington (ed.), *The Poetic Edda* 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2014), 69.

However, von See *et al.*, following H. Gering and B. Sijmons,³⁷⁵ regard this as a fictional place meaning “Land der Walstätten, der Schlachtfelder.”³⁷⁶ Other eddic poems can set their entire narratives in real-world locations, but these texts are of a heroic or legendary kind; mythological eddic poems (e.g., poems about the gods) tend to take place in the ‘other world.’³⁷⁷ The only other mythological poem that mentions a real-world location is *Lokasenna*, which shares a significant number of features with *Hárbarðsljóð*, discussed in Chapter four.³⁷⁸ The second real-world location in *Hárbarðsljóð* appears in st. 37, in which Þórr says *Brúðir berserkia | barðac í Hléseyio* ‘Berserk women I battled in Hlésey,’³⁷⁹ which corresponds to modern Læsø in Denmark,³⁸⁰ an island in the Kattegat, north-east of Jutland.³⁸¹ In the prologue to his *Edda*, Snorri Sturluson gives a euhemerised account of the gods’ migration from Tyrkjaland (Turkey) to Sigtuna in Svíþjóð (the area around Stockholm in central Sweden) via Saxland (north Germany) and Reiðgotaland (the land of the Hreið-Goths, southern Sweden). In various parts of Saxland a different son of Óðinn is put in place as sovereign (Prologue chs 10–11). Óðinn’s third son Siggi is made ruler of Frakkland (France) whose descendants produce the Völsungar dynasty. In this light, we can discern that it is probably conventional to associate the gods with real spatial realms, especially Óðinn who is said to involve himself in the affairs of human kings.³⁸² This is in fact what we find in relation to Valland: *atta... enn aldri sættac* ‘I incited...never reconciled them [foreign

³⁷⁵ H. Gering and B. Sijmons, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda Hälfte 1* (Halle (Saale): Buchhandlung des Waisenhauses, 1927).

³⁷⁶ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 207. Also see Andreas Nordberg, *Krigarna i Odins sal: Dödsföreställningar och krigarkult i fornordisk religion* (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Stockholm, 2003, 131).

³⁷⁷ The domain which differentiates the ‘sacred’ from the ‘profane’: see Jens Peter Schjødt, “Theoretical Considerations,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume I: Basic Premises and Consideration* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 3.

³⁷⁸ For a discussion of the literary connections between *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna*, see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 166: “Hrbl. und Ls. in engster Beziehung zueinander stehen und wohl aus demselben Milieu stammen.”

³⁷⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 84; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 71. John McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Old Norse Myth and Legend* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2005), 110–11, argues that on one level the berserk brides are in fact the waves of the sea.

³⁸⁰ Hlér/Hlésey also appears in the *Bragaræður* (‘Bragi’s sayings’), the frame text to *Skáldskaparmál*.

³⁸¹ If the *berserkia* in *Brúðir berserkia* is in the genitive case, then, it should technically be translated ‘brides of berserkers’ rather than ‘berserk women’ as Larrington has done. The sense of the former, however, could well imply that the brides themselves also have berserk-like qualities since they are married to them. The choice of the word *Brúðir* (sg. *brúðr*) is interesting since, although it can well mean the generic “women,” *Hárbarðr* makes an allusion to Þórr’s wife Sif, suggesting that she has been unfaithful. The concept of marriage, specifically the way in which brides are chosen, is one of the gods’ most pressing preoccupations and played a large role in determining the hierarchical structure of the Norse cosmos: see Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes*, 56–7. Hlésey/Læsø also appears in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* st. 6 and *Oddrúnargrátr* st. 30.

³⁸² For example, in *HH. II* st. 34. Also, in *Sǫrla þátr*, Óðinn entices Freyja to sow discord between the two kings Heðinn and Hogni. Óðinn is also a “collector of princes” according to von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 208, who occasionally kills them for that: see *Hákonarmál* sts 1, 9–13, and 15, and *Eiríksmál* st. 7.

princes].’ Among other things, this statement implies a degree of flexible social and physical mobility on the part of Óðinn. In Chapter one I analysed a number of myths in which he demonstrates such powers of movement. In saga literature Óðinn is often portrayed as an old one-eyed or blind man, wandering from place to place, offering advice to would-be kings or involving himself in riddle contests, as in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*.³⁸³ The Valland episode is probably a literary device: it elevates Hárbarðr’s status as he is suddenly put in the company of exotic southern rulers, whom he is supposedly able to manipulate. Within this contextualising framework the challenge Þórr poses to Hárbarðr emerges as slight and his reputation for great physical strength becomes irrelevant.

The ‘east’ or Giantland

Twice Þórr refers to actions he undertakes in the east or on the ‘eastern road,’ of monumental significance in Norse myth due to its association with giants. The two references occur in sts 23 and 29, prompted by the refrain *Hvat vanntu þá meðan, Hárbarðr?* ‘What were you doing meanwhile, Hárbarðr?’ Þórr is also said to have come from the east in the prose introduction: *Þórr fór ór austrvegi ok kom at sundi eino*.³⁸⁴ The past tense *fór* (from *fara* ‘to go, travel’) suggests that Þórr is returning from one of his patrolling missions when he encounters Hárbarðr. The implied horizontal movement is conventionally associated with Þórr and we see the statement ‘Þórr was in the east’ regularly enough elsewhere in Old Norse literature (such as *Lokasenna*, discussed in the following chapter). The east as a place then appears for the first time in this verse,³⁸⁵

*Ec var austr oc iotna barðag,
brúðir þólvísar, er til biargs gengo;
mikil myndi ætt iotna, ef allir lifði,
vætr myndi manna undir miðgarði.*³⁸⁶

‘I was in the east, and I fought against giants,
malicious women, who roamed in the mountains;

³⁸³ Also see *Nornagests þátr*, set in the year 1000, where Óðinn in disguise visits the missionary king Óláfr Trygvason and recites poetry.

³⁸⁴ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 78; ‘Thor was travelling from the east and he came to an inlet’: Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 65.

³⁸⁵ John Lindow points out that the inclusion of ‘Miðgarðr’ implies that encounters between giants and humans were thought to have taken place which indicates moreover that Þórr was a god of the common people. This idea is unequivocally stated in st. 24: see “Þórr,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos Collective and Supernatural Beings* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1080.

³⁸⁶ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 82.

great would be the giant race if they all survived:

there'd be no humans within Midgard.³⁸⁷

Some scholars, such as F. W. Bergmann,³⁸⁸ relate Þórr's journey in st. 23 to his encounter with Geirrøðr's daughters as narrated in *Þórsdrápa* and *Skáldskaparmál* while others believe it cannot be identified as a specific event.³⁸⁹ The polysemy of the cardinal direction 'east' is vast. In cosmographical terms the east is where the gods' adversaries the giants live, but in a realistic literal sense it also refers to the Slavic, Baltic and Finno-Ugric regions of northern and eastern Europe.³⁹⁰ The linguistic unintelligibility of these language groups and Old Norse may have contributed to a sense of otherness among the Norse.³⁹¹ The role of Þórr's journey to the east in st. 23 is conventional in that it refers to his usual opponents, 'giants and malicious women.' As was mentioned, the gods' adversaries are thought to live in the east and many of the problems the gods face can be attributed to giant men in some way. Þórr is also well known for killing female giants, probably as a form of population control (cf. st. 23 *mikil myndi ætt iotna, | ef allir lifði* 'great would be the giant race if they all survived').³⁹² The killing of women was in all probability a reprehensible act in Viking Age Scandinavia, but it may be mitigated here since it took place in the east.³⁹³ It is perhaps for this reason that Hárbarðr does not overtly accuse Þórr of *ergi*. In the view of von See *et al.*, Þórr, in the conception of the poem, "weiß eben nichts anderes mit Frauen anzufangen, als sie

³⁸⁷ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 69.

³⁸⁸ *Das Graubartslied (Harbardslíod). Loki's Spottreden auf Thór. Norrænisches Gedicht der Sæmunds Edda. Kritisch hergestellt, übersetzt und erklärt* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1872).

³⁸⁹ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 205.

³⁹⁰ However, Jakob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* vol. I (George Bell & Sons: London, 1882–88), 188, points out that the origins of the Skilfingar are placed in the east: see Faulkes, *Skáldskaparmál*, 193 *sú kynslóð er í austrvegum*. Interestingly, Grimm, p. 218, also states that "some have fancied that the Alfs and Iötuns stand for Celtic races, and the Vanir for Slav," but does not cite a source.

³⁹¹ Of course, this must be balanced against the inter-cultural/linguistic contacts between mainly Swedish Vikings and those who lived in what is now Russia and Ukraine as well as Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and former East Prussia. See Anders Andrén, "The Spatial and Temporal Frame," *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume I: Basic Premises and Consideration* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 205–14, John Lindow, "The Linguistic Frame," and Leszek P. Słupecki, "Encounters: Slavic," 215–22, in the same work.

³⁹² Other texts which mention attacks against giantesses include a *lausavísa* addressed to Þórr by Vetrliði Sumarliðason and a stanza by Þorbjörn díarskáld (*Poem about Þórr* st. 2) also dedicated to Þórr; both found in *Skáldskaparmál*: see Margaret Clunies Ross, "Giants," *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings* ed. John Lindow, Jens Peter Schjødt and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1549.

³⁹³ Women, especially those of the giant race, were thought of as closer to nature than men, which may be a justification for the harshness that Þórr displays towards them. By the Early Modern Period women become more closely associated with the farmstead: see Hastrup, *A Place Apart*, 138.

totzuschlagen,” and several female giant-killing episodes show that this is normal behaviour for him.³⁹⁴

In sts 15 and 19 Þórr boasts of his duels with the giants Hrungrnir and Þjazi (discussed further below) without mentioning the east or Giantland at all, though we know from Snorri’s *Edda* that the encounter with Hrungrnir takes place in Grjótúnagarðar, whose name is reminiscent of Giantland’s rocky landscapes.³⁹⁵ In st. 23/2 the evil women were *til biargs gengo* ‘roaming in the mountains’ (lit. ‘who went to the mountains’), which agrees with other sources about the liminal landscape of Giantland.³⁹⁶ In addition we know that Giantland is surrounded by a mighty sea; Baldr’s funeral, in which he is given a ship burial, is said to take place in a medial location between the gods’ abodes (where he is killed) and Giantland. We can contrast these rocky, watery spaces with the green fields,³⁹⁷ in which the gods play in *Völuspá* 4; later on in the eschatological section of *Völuspá*, the earth is engulfed in a destruction of the elements (fire and water) that appear to have their origin in places like Giantland (cf. Surtr who brings fire from the south).³⁹⁸ In st. 38 Hárbarðr upbraids Þórr for killing the eastern women: *Klæki vanntu, Þórr, | er þú á konom barðir* ‘That was a shameful deed, Þórr, to fight against women.’ Þórr explains his actions in st. 39, likening his opponents to wild beasts:

*Vargynior vóro þær, enn varla konor,
sceldo scip mitt, er ec scorð at hafðac,
ægðo mér iárnlurki, enn elto Þiálfa.*³⁹⁹

‘They were she-wolves, and scarcely women,
they rattled my ship which I’d beached on trestles,
they threatened me with an iron club, and chased Thialfi.’⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁴ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 228. On the other hand, as Margaret Clunies Ross has pointed out to me (pers. comm.), Þórr is married to Sif (from *sifjar*), whose name suggests ‘affinity, kinship by marriage.’

³⁹⁵ Or Grjótún ‘rock-field’ as it is called in *Haustlǫng* st. 14.

³⁹⁶ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 206, think this could suggest that the giantesses were “peacefully on their way home.”

³⁹⁷ Cf. Old English *neorxnawang*, whose second element *wang* means ‘field,’ and is often used to gloss the Christian ‘Paradise.’ Cf. also *Rígsþula* 1 *grænar brautir* ‘green paths.’

³⁹⁸ According to Bertha Philpotts, “Surt,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* vol. 21 (1905), 14–30, the figure of Surtr is predicated on volcanic activity in Iceland, which between the beginning of the settlement period and the middle of the fourteenth century experienced approximately fifty-six eruptions: also see Mathias Nordvig, *Volcanoes in Old Norse Mythology* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 34–6.

³⁹⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 84.

⁴⁰⁰ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 71.

one) before him. Regardless of that outcome, his intention in st. 29 is not to cross the river, but to defend it. According to some scholars (such as Bergmann⁴⁰⁷ and Magnus Olsen⁴⁰⁸ with whom Heinz Klingenberg⁴⁰⁹ agrees), the river cited in st. 29 is likely to be the Ífing mentioned in another eddic poem, *Vaffbrúðnismál* st. 16 (the Ífing is understood to be the border between Giantland and Ásgarðr/Miðgarðr, though this remains speculative⁴¹⁰). Unfortunately, the identity of Svárangr (the name is a *hapax legomenon*) and his sons is a mystery to us, but the plural ‘sons’ conveys the impressive nature of Þórr’s encounter against these giants. It is possible to call them giants based on their location *austr* and the watery setting (see p. 97).⁴¹¹ In st. 29 Þórr’s fighting acumen comes to the fore or at least his ability to withstand a lot of damage does: *grióti þeir mic bǫrðo*.⁴¹² The account of the melee is unflattering towards Þórr, mainly as it presents him passively letting himself be pelted with stones, rather than inflicting damage on his enemies, which could be construed as *ragr* behaviour. The stones themselves are primitive weapons and reminiscent of Hrungrnir’s whetstone, which he also throws at Þórr, and reinforces the cultural/technological divide between the giants and Æsir. Þórr is the ‘target’ of different kinds of projectiles in more ways than one; firstly, on one of his eastern adventures he is hit with stones by giants, but more generally he is bombarded with verbal abuse from afar. It is interesting that Þórr agrees to ‘settle for peace’ with Svárangr (*friðar at biðia*), given that he in fact breaks a number of oaths, agreements or contracts in other tales with giants - probably because they were thought of as oath-breakers themselves. In fact, the notion of Þórr having peaceful relations with the giants is at odds with the impression gained of him from most of the surviving literary and visual evidence concerning his behaviour with these beings.

Valhöll and Hel

Though not named in the poem, Óðinn’s ‘fallen nobles’ who die in battle in st. 24/3 (*Óðinn á iarla, | þá í val falla*) are presumably taken to Valhöll. The clearest reference to Valhöll in eddic poetry comes from *Grímnismál* 8:

Glaðsheimr heitir inn fimti, þars en gullbiarta

⁴⁰⁷ *Das Graubartslied*.

⁴⁰⁸ *Edda- og skaldekvad: Forarbeider til kommentar I* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1968), 35.

⁴⁰⁹ “Hárbarðslið. Individuelles und überindividuelles Erzählen,” *Helden und Heldensage*. Otto Gschwantler zum 60. Geburtstag ed. Hermann Reichert and Günter Zimmermann (Vienna: Fassbaender, 1990), 143–86.

⁴¹⁰ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 216.

⁴¹¹ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 216.

⁴¹² Cf. the giant Hrungrnir, who uses a whetstone as a weapon.

*Valhøll víð of þrumir;
enn þar Hroptr kýss hverian dag
vápndauða vera.*⁴¹³

‘Gladshheim a fifth is called, there gold-bright Valhall
extends out widely;
there Odin chooses every day
those dead in combat.’⁴¹⁴

It is also given a very detailed picture in the *Gylafaginning* section of Snorri’s *Edda* and appears as a scene in the skaldic poems *Eiríksmál* ‘Words about Eiríkr’ and *Hákonarmál*.⁴¹⁵ According to John Lindow, Valhøll as a mythological conception goes as far back as the written records.⁴¹⁶ For this reason it may not have been necessary for Valhøll to be named in *Hárbarðsljóð* since the link between Óðinn’s chosen warriors who died in battle and the afterlife was well-established. We can compare st. 24/3 with the following line in which Þórr is said to have ‘owned the race of thralls’ (*enn Þórr á þræla kyn*).⁴¹⁷ Though *Grímnismál* 8 leaves open the possibility that anyone ‘killed with weapons’ (*vápndauða*) could be chosen by Óðinn,⁴¹⁸ *Eiríksmál* and *Hákonarmál* portray the human kings Eiríkr *blóðøx* and Hákon *goði*’s reception into Valhøll.⁴¹⁹ This also accords with Óðinn’s dealings among the ruling classes (see discussion on Valland, pp. 98–100, above). As I discuss below, slaves in medieval Norse society were legally akin to property and when killed did not command the same rate of compensation as a *bóndi* ‘farmer.’ As occupants of such a low hierarchical position in society it appears unlikely that slaves would have been thought of as suitable inhabitants for Valhøll, though no doubt many fulfilled the criteria as set out in

⁴¹³ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 58–9.

⁴¹⁴ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 49.

⁴¹⁵ Whether these poems are skaldic or not is debatable: although their authors are known (one of the hallmarks of the genre), they most often employ eddic metres.

⁴¹⁶ John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 309.

⁴¹⁷ This is reminiscent of the scene in *Gautreks saga* in which it is decreed that Starkaðr will be admired by the noble classes but be despised by the common people, as pointed out by John Lindow and Jens Peter Schjødt, “The Divine, The Human, And In Between,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume II: Social, Geographical and Historical Contexts, and Communication between Worlds* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 977n42.

⁴¹⁸ As Jens Peter Schjødt remarks, we should probably not take this idea too literally, since Njörðr (*Ynglinga saga* ch. 9) and Sinfjolti (*Völsunga saga* ch. 10) both ascend to Valhøll without being killed in battle: “Warrior Bands,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume II: Social, Geographical and Historical Contexts, and Communication between Worlds* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 560n3.

⁴¹⁹ Nordberg, *Krigarna i Odins sal*, 213–20.

Grímnismál.⁴²⁰ St. 24/4 thus appears to work on three levels: (a) Þórr is directly associated with thralls, (b) by implication he cannot access Valhøll, and (c) moreover, nor can he enter *Óðins landa* either.

In contrast to Valhøll, whose character in this poem I suggest we must infer based on comparative material, the Norse underworld Hel is named in st. 27. It appears in a threat Þórr delivers to Hárbarðr:

Hárbarðr inn ragi, ec mynda þic í hel drepa
*ef ec mætta seilaz um sund.*⁴²¹

‘Harbard, you pervert! I would knock you into hell
if I could stretch over the water.’⁴²²

Information about Hel comes chiefly from *Grímnismál* 31 and the *Gylfaginning* section of Snorri’s *Edda*, among other sources. The former tells us:

Priár rotr standa á þria vega
undan asci Yggdrasils;
Hel býr undir einni, annarri hrímþursar
*þriðio mennzcir men.*⁴²³

‘Three roots there grow in three directions
under Yggdrasill’s ash;
Hel lives under one, under the second, the frost-giants,
under the third, humankind.’⁴²⁴

In *Grímnismál* we must reckon with the fact that Hel is considered a person, one of the children of Loki along with Fenrir and the Miðgarðsormr. According to Lindow, Hel as a place is probably the earlier conception since it appears in older poetry. Thus the noun *Hel* probably means something like ‘grave.’ Even if the poem intends *ec mynda þic í hel drepa* to mean something like ‘I would send you to the grave’ (or ‘hell’ as Larrington has it), an association can still be made with the Norse underworld since the general preoccupation with death present in all cultures would have been widespread. Perhaps Þórr’s statement should be

⁴²⁰ In contrast, Bo Gräslund, “Swine, Swedes, and Fertility Gods,” *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink* ed. Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist and Declan Taggart, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 231, argues that Scandinavian warriors would be buried “alongside slaves, whose labour they not would have liked to be without on the other side,” though it should also be stated that written sources and attitudes towards slaves in the Middle Ages were on the whole quite negative.

⁴²¹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 83.

⁴²² Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 69.

⁴²³ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 63.

⁴²⁴ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 53.

understood satirically, designed to draw attention to his own lack of basic cosmological knowledge (if we follow *Grímnismál* that those ‘killed with weapons’ gain access to Valhøll). The accusation of *ergi* in relation to Hárbarðr, if true, would also be grounds for exclusion from Valhøll since the purpose of this space is to train warriors in the art of war in readiness for Ragnarøk and is therefore no place for *ragr* men (from the point of view of the Æsir). A survey of the major Norse myths shows that some of Óðinn’s activities leave him open to accusations of *ergi* and contravene normative behaviour for a male god (or human). According to Olsen, Hárbarðr’s name (‘Hoary beard’) puts in mind the beard of a goat, the animal thought to be the epitome of *ergi*.⁴²⁵ If we can presume that the audience were aware of Óðinn’s secret identity there may be some substance to Þórr’s claim.⁴²⁶ According to von See *et al.*, the accusation of *ergi* hints at Óðinn’s preference for giving hurtful speeches while avoiding the fight himself; though, as Andreas Nordberg has shown, Óðinn’s association with war plays a considerable role in the pre-Christian Norse religion.⁴²⁷ It cannot be denied that Óðinn possesses a kind of tactical awareness related to war, evident in his insouciant relations with the great warriors whom he attempts to transport to Valhøll.⁴²⁸

Óðins landa

In st. 56 we are told what lies on Hárbarðr’s side of the water is *Óðins landa* ‘Óðinn’s lands,’ presumably Ásgarðr, the *heimr* where the gods live. It is interesting that Hárbarðr names this land after himself, since he is actually Óðinn, while Ásgarðr, which refers to the gods collectively (*áss* ‘god, deity’), is not named. Apart from Þórr’s son Magni (who is mentioned twice) none of the other major Norse gods are named in *Hárbarðsljóð*. In fact, in the absence of the term Ásgarðr their existence is not even acknowledged. In the opening stanzas, Þórr appears unwilling or unable to name the other side as *Óðins landa*; in st. 1 he calls it merely ‘that side of the inlet’ (*fyrir sundit handan*). When it is called *Óðins landa* in st. 56 Hárbarðr

⁴²⁵ See Olsen, *Edda- og skaldekvad*, 68, and von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 214. Also cf. *Hrómundar saga Gripssonar*, 274 (based on the *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda* version), in which Óðinn wears a goat-beard before going off to battle, and Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 81n237.

⁴²⁶ According to Annette Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2011), 360, there has always been controversy surrounding this issue, at least since the nineteenth century. von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 155, have pointed out, however, that the identification Hárbarðr-Óðinn has been stable since Felix Niedner’s rejection of contemporaries F. W. Bergmann and V. Rydberg.

⁴²⁷ See von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 214, and Nordberg, *Krigarna i Odins sal*.

⁴²⁸ At the same time, however, flippancy use of the word *ragr* (as well as *stroðinn* and *sorðinn*, which connote being sexually penetrated by another man) could lead to full outlawry or permit the person insulted to kill in revenge. Þórr’s exclusion from Óðinn’s lands may be seen in this light, perhaps as a kind of banishment: see John Lindow, “Ethics,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume II: Social, Geographical and Historical Contexts, and Communication between Worlds* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 494.

has the measure of Þórr as well as a degree of control over him. Initially, Þórr addresses the figure who stands *fyrir sundit handan* as *sveina svein* ‘lad of lads,’ a derogatory term, whereas by the end of the poem it has become apparent, at least to the audience if not to Þórr himself, that his interlocutor is none other than Óðinn. If the side of the sound that Hárbarðr is standing on leads to *Óðins landa* then the other side might well represent the wilderness that is conventionally thought to surround Ásgarðr/Miðgarðr. This is consistent with Óðinn’s command in st. 60 *farðu nú, þars þic hafir allan gramir* ‘go where the monsters’ll get all of you,’⁴²⁹ the implication being that the territory that Þórr currently occupies is filled with fiendish beings.⁴³⁰ In Old Norse myth, as well as other kinds of medieval literature, water is sometimes found separating chaos from order. For instance, in Snorri’s *Edda* Hermóðr crosses the Gjallarbrú over the river Gjöll to find out whether Baldr’s stay in Hel will be permanent, an event that exposes the gods’ mortality, foreshadowing Ragnarøk, where many of the gods perish and the physical space of earth is torn apart. While the events in *Hárbarðsljóð* have less cosmic significance, the function of the liquid boundary is comparable, as it represents the threshold (*limen*) of ordered civilisation in contrast to the wild spaces inhabited by monsters. The term *Óðins landa*, moreover, shows that Óðinn has sovereignty over his territory (and over Þórr) in the same way that order presupposes a kind of ruler, which may be absent in a society characterised by chaos. Þórr’s recourse is to travel the *vinstra veggins* ‘the left-hand road’ until he gets to Verland ‘land of men’ where he will meet his mother Fjörgyn, which von See *et al.* understand to be a taunt.⁴³¹ This new situation is hardly ideal for Þórr as it is a long journey (*langat er at fara*) and he has already come from the distant east.⁴³²

Borders

The cosmic border of the sky or heaven is evoked when Þórr says that he *varp augom | Allvalda sonar | á þann inn heiða himin* ‘threw up the eyes of Alvaldi’s son into the bright heaven.’⁴³³ In *Skáldskaparmál* chs 56–7, Alvaldi is called the father of the giant Þjazi whose

⁴²⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 87; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 73.

⁴³⁰ According to Lindow, “Þórr,” 1082, Hymir’s realm may qualify as the place Þórr is being banished to, i.e., where the gods fetch the kettle to brew beer for their feasts (in the Codex Regius *Hárbarðsljóð* precedes *Hymiskviða*).

⁴³¹ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 248.

⁴³² If Verland is to be understood as the world of humans (though the A redaction has *val land*) as the place where Þórr meets Fjörgyn, then it would presumably lie between the giants’ realm and the gods’ realm, making it agree with Snorri, *Gylfaginning* 6: see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 249.

⁴³³ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 81; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 68. This statement is at odds with what is written in *Snorra Edda*, where Óðinn is the one who is said to carry out this deed.

daughter is Skaði. According to Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker, *himin* ‘heaven, sky’ is comparable to the idea of the firmament, which, from a medieval Christian point of view, is thought to be an enormous glass dome made by God on the second day of creation.⁴³⁴ This is not the only instance of a god causing the creation of an astral body in Norse mythology; there is an account of the same event in Snorri’s *Edda* in which Óðinn is credited with the responsibility perhaps based on his putative creative, intellectual and kinetic abilities; to Snorri Þórr’s talents in these fields may have seemed too limited.⁴³⁵ The focus here is on the creative act of ‘space production.’⁴³⁶ The most famous example of this is the formation of the earth that occurs after the killing of the primeval giant Ymir by Óðinn and his brothers, treated in *Grímnismál* chs 40–1 and *Gylfaginning* ch. 8: *Þeir tóku Ymi ok fluttu í mitt Ginnungagap, ok gerðu af honum jörðina, af blóði hans sæinn ok vötnin. Jörðin var gør af holdinu en björgin af beinunum, grjótt ok urðir gerðu þeir af tönnum ok jöxlum ok af beinum er brotin váru.*⁴³⁷ In this account the sky is made from Ymir’s head which reflects an anthropomorphic division of space based on the human body (see Chapter five, 170–1). Þórr shows that he too is capable of this kind of creative act when he unwittingly creates new landscapes⁴³⁸ whilst attempting to despatch Skrímir/Útgarðaloki in *Gylfaginning* ch. 47: *En þar er þú sátt holl minni setberg, ok þar sáttu ofan í þrjá dali ferskeytta ok einn djúpastan, þar váru hamarspor þín.*⁴³⁹ He is also well-acquainted with the physical act of throwing, the method by which he says he manages to create the constellation out of Þjazi’s eyes.⁴⁴⁰ He amply demonstrates his throwing abilities in his duel with Hrungnir, whom Þórr killed by

⁴³⁴ La Farge and Tucker, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda*, 113.

⁴³⁵ It is worth noting that the *Edda* is a systemisation of Old Norse myth by the learned Icelander, Snorri Sturluson, who may well have altered or omitted certain details and incongruities to fit with his own understanding of the myths as well as his Christian faith.

⁴³⁶ Kate Heslop, “Metaphors for Forgetting and Forgetting as Metaphor,” *Myth, Magic, and Memory in Early Scandinavian Narrative Culture* ed. Jürg Glauser and Pernille Hermann in collaboration with Stefan Brink and Joseph Harris (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 246, argues that star transformation is connected to the commemoration of skaldic poetry in *Skáldskaparmál* in which it is the most important part of the settlement process with Skaði.

⁴³⁷ ‘They took Ymir and transported him to the middle of Ginnungagap, and out of him made the earth, out of his blood the sea and the lakes. The earth was made of the flesh and the rocks of the bones, stone and scree they made out of the teeth and molars and of the bones that had been broken’: Faulkes, *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, 12.

⁴³⁸ According to a Norwegian folktale *Torsvegen over Urebøuren* a troll called Toer (Þórr) destroys a farm where a wedding is taking place by causing a landslide. This creates the ridge Urebøuren. This shows that the association between Þórr and the creation of spaces survived well into the Christian period via oral transmission/social memory: see Nordvig, *Volcanoes in Old Norse Mythology*, 18, and Olav Bø, Ronald Grambo, Bjarne Hodne and Ørnulf Hodne, *Norske Segner* (Oslo: Samlaget, 1995), 89–90.

⁴³⁹ ‘But where you saw near my hall a table-mountain, and down it you saw three square valleys, one deepest of all, these were the marks of your hammer’ (Faulkes, *Snorri Sturluson. Edda*, 45).

⁴⁴⁰ Lindow, “Þórr,” 1078, has noted Þórr’s proclivity for “throwing and breaking things” in not only the Hrungnir tale, but also the story of his journeys to Geirroðr’s and Hymir’s.

hurling Mjöllnir at his head. In this myth the action of throwing is wholly destructive, i.e., Hrungrnir dies without a following creative event. Óðinn is also a prolific thrower of things: before the Æsir-Vanir war reported in *Völuspá* 21 he hurls a spear which may be why it is customary in saga literature for characters to throw a spear into or over the enemy thereby dedicating the fallen to Óðinn, causing them to die in battle.⁴⁴¹

As I have touched on elsewhere in this chapter *Hárbarðsljóð* concerns itself with the notion of barriers or borders. The foremost example is the setting of the poem; Þórr and Hárbarðr are themselves aware of the sound as a barrier of some kind by the way they refer to their respective positions, initially as *fyr sundit handan* ‘on the other side of the sound’ and *um váginn* ‘across the bay,’⁴⁴² but towards the end of the poem the side of the sound occupied by Hárbarðr, or at least the territory beyond, receives the designation *Óðins landa*. As we have seen, Þórr is closed off from *Óðins landa*, at least temporarily, who is diverted to Verland. As Margaret Clunies Ross observes, Þórr is the god who guards the border with the giants whose realm is thought to lie somewhere in the east.⁴⁴³ It is his responsibility to patrol this border and repel giant incursions into Ásgarðr. From time to time Þórr travels into Giantland for certain reasons so we know that the space between Giantland and Ásgarðr is accessible to him and possibly other gods. In *Hárbarðsljóð* Þórr meets an opponent who performs a similar role with the upshot that he cannot enter. As I have laid out above Þórr is accustomed to crossing borders unchallenged, so his sudden inability to do so in *Hárbarðsljóð* comes as a surprise (the gods clearly rely on Þórr to protect them, as their feebleness in his absence demonstrates (cf. *Lokasenna*) and may be an argument against an early composition date). We can imagine that Þórr is probably quite ‘good on his feet’ if he were to successfully patrol the whole of the border with Giantland. On the contrary, in *Hárbarðsljóð* he has to stop before the barrier of the *sund* and is thus led into a position of stasis.

‘Three good farms’

Despite the gravitas of much eddic poetry there is still room for the mundane and parochial. Hárbarðr’s rather amusing statement in st. 6 that Þórr does not ‘own three good farms’ (*briú*

⁴⁴¹ Cf. *Styrbjarnar þátr Svíakappa* from the Flateyjarbók: see H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (London: Penguin, 1964), 53.

⁴⁴² Sts 1 and 2 respectively.

⁴⁴³ Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes* vol I, 112.

bú góð eigir) belongs to this category. Land and its possession was a key definer of success in medieval Iceland: those who owned enough land or *bú/ból/bæli* ‘farms, estates’ were eligible to attend the yearly Alþing (the national assembly) at which individual influence was correlated with wealth and means. Moreover, as a social and political unit the *bú* was of grave importance in Iceland since it lay at the centre of a concentric ordering of space.⁴⁴⁴ As such, it connoted a kind of social order, permanence and immutability.⁴⁴⁵ Kirsten Hastrup observes that the acquisition of land was the crucial factor in how the Norse settlers in Iceland eventually came to recognise themselves as a separate people.⁴⁴⁶ There is then something distinctly Icelandic about the immutable ownership of land based on one’s *ætt*, a system which was dissolved in Norway during the reign of Haraldr Hárfagri (r. 872–930).

When Hárbarðr specifies that Þórr lacks *three* farms it clearly means something (otherwise why qualify it?). The number nine is the cosmically salient number in Norse myth (nine worlds, nine roots of Yggdrasill and so on) but three⁴⁴⁷ also seems to be a significant number by itself: cf. the three *nornir* ‘norns, goddesses of fate,’ the three sons of Bestla or Óðinn’s by-name Þriði (‘Third’).⁴⁴⁸ It not only appears in relation to Óðinn; Þórr, son of Þriði, has three magical possessions (Mjöllnir, the girdle of strength and a pair of iron gloves), which, in *Þórsdrápa*, are taken away from him, supposedly to make him a weaker adversary to Geirröðr (see Chapter one, 36–41). Evidently there is a kind of power or salience in the number, so we could speculate that, in the poem’s social setting at least, the ‘three farms’ may have been thought of as the minimum quantity that commanded a certain social standing, though I stress the conjectural nature of this assertion.⁴⁴⁹ Anne-Sofie Gräslund has

⁴⁴⁴ The non-commercial farming of animals (mainly cattle and sheep) was a fundamental part of Icelandic society and subsistence until the mid-twentieth century: see Hastrup, *A Place Apart*, 17.

⁴⁴⁵ Hastrup, *A Place Apart*, 153.

⁴⁴⁶ Hastrup, *A Place Apart*, 32.

⁴⁴⁷ The cardinal number ‘three’ appears in many European folktales, according to Jens Peter Schjødt, “Continuity and Break: Indo-European,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume I: Basic Premises and Consideration* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 234. However, it can also have negative connotations – cf. a copper plate from Solberga from Öland which bears the inscription *Purs ek fā hinn þrihöfðaða hinn meramuldiga frān manns kunu. Hann at seiði, öiðki! Sinn haus virkti hann ī, ī loga(?) umliðinn* ‘I carve (or mark with signs) the three-headed troll, covered with crushed earth, from the man’s woman. May (I) enchant him there, destroy (him!) His head pained him (when it) disappeared into the fire’: see Sofia Pereswetoff-Morath, *Vikingatida runbleck: Läsningar och tolkningar* (Uppsala: Institutionen för nordiska språk, Uppsala universitet, 2017), 160. Leszek Gardela, *(Magic) Staffs in the Viking Age*. Vienna: Faesbinder, 2016), 149 and 175, has recently noticed the significance of the number three in relation to *seiðr* in *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Scírnismál*.

⁴⁴⁸ Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology* I, 162, notes that Zeus is also called τριτός.

⁴⁴⁹ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 180, merely state: “Offenbar haben die hier erwähnten "drei guten Gehöfte" den Stellenwert eines ansehnlichen Besitzes.” Hastrup mentions in *A Place Apart*, 115, that at

recently pointed out that in the Christian Norwegian Gulaping's law three farms should come together to brew a batch of beer for the purpose of attaining *ár ok friðr*, a potential example of acculturation of Christian and pagan elements, with the possibility that this number of farms carried some ancient significance.⁴⁵⁰ Hárbarðr's slur, true or not, places Þórr not quite on the lowest rung of any society, but certainly in an undesirable position and one which would involve some subservience.⁴⁵¹ Finally, we could also look to the wedding feast in *Þorgils saga ok Hafliða* in which Oláfr insults Þórðr, implying he eats cheap food; the seriousness of the calumny lies in the fact that Þórðr is of lower socio-economic status than Oláfr. As a result, Oláfr leaves the feast: an unusual act. Similarly, in *Hárbarðsljóð*, Hárbarðr's occupation places him lower in society to Þórr, who is insulted and must also 'leave' the scene of their dispute.⁴⁵²

Conflict and space

Conflict looms large in *Hárbarðsljóð*, as it does in many other Old Norse texts, while the presumed date of the present version of the poem (early thirteenth century) would place it in a period of great internal strife in Iceland. In this section I shall analyse the types of spaces associated with conflict, as well as its kinetic significance. While the relationship between the characters in *Hárbarðsljóð* is undoubtedly quite aggressive, no actual physical violence ensues between them. Instead we learn of Þórr's and Hárbarðr's fighting abilities mainly from the *mannjafnaðr* section (sts 15–46), in which various deeds are recounted and compared, but also in some of the sporadic threats that pass between them.⁴⁵³ In the *mannjafnaðr* Þórr's tales of conflict take place in remote, uninhabitable or wild spaces. For example, he refers to the well-known episode of his successful duel with the giant Hrungnir that took place on the border between Ásgarðr and Giantland, but we also discover that he went into the mountains to kill troll women. Hárbarðr exploits the theme of conflict to a

Hrollaugseyjar (named after the original *landnámsmaðr* Hrollaugr) there were three farms but gives no indication that this is an auspicious number.

⁴⁵⁰ Anne-Sofie Gräslund, "Conversion, Popular Religion, and Syncretism: Some Reflections," *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink* ed. Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist and Declan Taggart, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 215.

⁴⁵¹ By way of contrast, what Felix Niedner, "Das Hárbarðsljóð," *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* vol. 31 (1887), 273, calls "eine Travestie."

⁴⁵² See Stephen A. Mitchell, "Framing Old Norse Performance Contexts. The Wedding at Reykjahólar (1119) Revisited," *Old Norse Poetry in Performance* ed. Brian McMahon and Annemari Ferreira (London: Routledge, 2022), 30–2.

⁴⁵³ See von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 159–61, for a discussion of the representation of Óðinn's and Þórr's respective "Kriegertypen" in *Hárbarðsljóð*.

lesser extent, but the connection between conflict and specific kinds of spaces and environments is evident.⁴⁵⁴

Þórr

The description of Þórr's duel with the giant Hrungrnir foregrounds movement in an attempt to make him appear dominant. Þórr is prompted into discussing this encounter after Hárbarðr's proclamation in st. 14 that *fanntaðu mann inn harðara | at Hrungni dauðan* 'you've encountered no tougher man since Hrungrnir's death.' In response Þórr says:

*Hins viltu nú geta, er við Hrungrnir deildom,
sá inn stóruðgi iotunn, er ór steini var höfuðit á;
þó lét ec hann falla oc fyrir hníga.⁴⁵⁵*

'This is what you're talking about: Hrungrnir and I fought
the great-spirited giant whose head was made of stone:
and yet I brought him down and made him fall forward.'⁴⁵⁶

The language Þórr uses to describe Hrungrnir's death manipulates motion in an interesting way: Þórr does not simply kill Hrungrnir, he 'brought him down and made him fall before me.'⁴⁵⁷ Þórr does not need to categorically state that he killed Hrungrnir since this is a well-known fact (hence Hárbarðr's admission). Hrungrnir's defeat and humiliation is signalled in the act of being made to collapse onto the ground, where he now occupies a 'low' position. In Norse myth 'low' things can signify subservience or a closeness to nature. In *Hárbarðsljóð* Þórr only gives the denouement of the encounter, i.e., the moment in which Hrungrnir falls, but it is likely that a contemporary audience would have been aware of the fuller narrative. For this account we must turn to the *Skáldskaparmál* section of *Snorra Edda* (see Chapter one, 31–3) in which the mightiest of giants made his way into Ásgarðr following Óðinn, where he makes threatening remarks to the gods until Þórr arrives and agrees to a duel. The duel takes place in the remote and liminal Grjótúnagarðar where earthy, inanimate materials play a wider role (cf. Hrungrnir's whetstone and his second, Mǫkkurkálfi, who is said to be made of clay), which the *Hárbarðsljóð* poet seems to have picked up on when describing Hrungrnir's head (*er ór steini var höfuðit á*). The outcome is a success for Þórr who manages

⁴⁵⁴ Schjødtd, "Continuity and Break: Indo-European," 235, distinguishes between what he calls the "collective" kind of war associated with Óðinn's and Þórr's individual battles with giants.

⁴⁵⁵ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 80.

⁴⁵⁶ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 67.

⁴⁵⁷ The formulations *lata falla* and *fyrir hníga* in st. 15 are also used in the description of Hrungrnir's death in *Haustlǫng* 18, suggesting that the *Hárbarðsljóð* poet was aware of the skaldic Þórr-poems: von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 167.

to smash Hrungrnir's skull with the airborne Mjöllnir (cf. nature(stone):culture(hammer/tool)). Þórr himself does not come out unscathed though as a piece of whetstone gets lodged in his forehead and he is also temporarily immobilised by Hrungrnir's huge draping leg. There is also an element of intimacy about the duel, a type of close quarter fighting, which is conspicuously absent from the allusion to the myth in *Hárbarðsljóð*.⁴⁵⁸ The problem for Þórr is that he cannot exercise his control over the *sund* in the way that he does in the rocky terrain of Giantland. There Þórr is a dominant figure and dispatches Hrungrnir rather easily. It is the idea of dominance that Þórr is trying to impress on his opponent in *Hárbarðsljóð*, which is clearly expressed in the way he had Hrungrnir 'brought down,' but it is not exploited effectively.

In sts 27 and 47 Þórr threatens Hárbarðr with a blow from his hammer unless he acquiesces in helping him across the *sund*, but in both instances the dominances he tries to assert lacks any real substance. Þórr's threats are normally not taken lightly; Hrungrnir, the strongest of the giants, grew anxious before his fight with him. St. 27 gives us a good idea of Þórr's rage and the sort of physical violence⁴⁵⁹ that we are accustomed to seeing:

*Hárbarðr inn ragi, ec mynda þic í hel drepa,
ef ec mætta seilaz um sund.*⁴⁶⁰

'Harbard, you pervert! I would knock you into hell
if I could stretch over the water.'⁴⁶¹

Þórr's fury and proclivity for physical violence is clear: he wants to 'knock... [Hárbarðr] into hell.' This should be a terrifying image but the element of terror is cancelled out by what follows, which foreshadows the futility of Þórr's situation. Thus we learn that Þórr would do horrible things to Hárbarðr to 'if' (ON *ef*) he could stretch over the water. We might ask why Þórr did not just throw his hammer at Óðinn? For although a hammer is a close-fighting weapon, in Þórr's hand it was equally deadly at range. Even with his formidable *áss*-strength he presumably cannot throw it far enough, nor is he able to reach the other side. As was the

⁴⁵⁸ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 167, regard the portrayal of Þórr as a "sea-warrior" in st. 39, as in the Helgi poems, as unusual ("Hier wird Thor - ungewöhnlicherweise - wie die beiden Helgi als Seekrieger dargestellt") but given his associations with water outlined in this thesis and elsewhere, especially his conflict with the Miðgarðsormr, I am less certain it is so unusual.

⁴⁵⁹ Six of eight instances of the word *drepa* 'to strike, kill, smite to death' in eddic poetry occur in relation to Þórr, according to Wolfgang Butt, '*Sterben* und '*töten*' in der Sprache der altnordischen Dichter (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Kiel, 1967), 35, who relates it to striking with a blunt weapon, e.g., a hammer, though *drepa* is certainly not limited to this usage.

⁴⁶⁰ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 83.

⁴⁶¹ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 69.

Drymskviða - and has no choice but to rely on the help of others.⁴⁶⁷ Of course, sometimes his colleagues also fail him. In other words, with Þórr, the presence or absence of others is always an issue. In the current context Þórr actually has Mjöllnir, but the *sund* has rendered its power inert.

Finally, the verb *vaða*⁴⁶⁸ ‘to wade’ is used in an interesting way, given the type of space he is trying to journey over. To ‘wade’⁴⁶⁹ through a body of water would seem to imply that it is shallow,⁴⁷⁰ but the inlet in *Hárbarðsljóð* is referred to on ten occasions as a *sund* ‘sound’ and four times as a *vágr* ‘sea, bay, creek.’ These definitions connote mainly deep bodies of water, which would be well over one’s head (hence the need for a boat).⁴⁷¹ Þórr does wade the rivers Kqrmt, Qrmt and the two Kerlaugar in *Grímnismál* 29, and the same word appears in both poems, so it may be conventional for Þórr to wade through things. In *Grímnismál*, however, Þórr appears to be in full control of his actions: *þær skal Þórr vaða* ‘Þórr has to wade through [them] every day.’ It is a regular occurrence for Þórr. In *Hárbarðsljóð* he never appears to be fully in control despite the *ráð* ‘counsel, advice’ he acts on. *Vaða* also has the meaning ‘to rush into fight,’ something Þórr is definitely well-known for and probably what he would like to do, which further suggests that *vaða* in both its meanings is conventionally associated with him since it appears in several other literary texts as well.

Óðinn

In the previous section I analysed Þórr’s martial attributes as they are portrayed in *Hárbarðsljóð* in relation to movement, and will now do the same for Óðinn albeit more briefly. Generally, Óðinn’s boasts in *Hárbarðsljóð* are less martial in nature than Þórr’s. This

⁴⁶⁷ John Lindow, “Language: Religious Vocabulary,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume I: Basic Premises and Consideration* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 112.

⁴⁶⁸ It is surprising that von See *et al.* did not comment on this word, which has clear parallels with other Norse texts, notably *Grímnismál*.

⁴⁶⁹ Henning Kure, “Wading Heavy Currents: Snorri’s Use of *Völuspá* 39,” *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Völuspá and Nordic Days of Judgement Acta Scandinavica* 2 ed. Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 81, has pointed out another interesting instance of *vaða* in st. 39 of *Völuspá* in Snorri’s *Edda* in which the *völva* saw wading there *þunga strauma | menn meinsvara | ok morðvargar* ‘heavy currents: | Perjured men | and murderers.’ Kure suggests the image of wading criminals tormented by a dragon was deliberately added by Snorri in order to make it sound more like the New Testament Book of Revelation (especially §21.8 and 12. 9). A further instance in *Reginismál* st. 4 suggests to Kure that Snorri also considered wading through water a kind of punishment, but *Grímnismál* st. 21 *valglaumi at vaða* ‘for the rejoicing slain warriors to wade’ and st. 22 imply that is not always penologically associated.

⁴⁷⁰ Not so, however, in *Þórsdrápa*, where Þórr is said to cross the river Vimur.

⁴⁷¹ Regarding the word ‘creek,’ in British English it means an arm or large river of the sea, but in Australian, New Zealand, and even American, English, it designates a small stream: see H. L. Mencken, *The American Language* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), 64.

is possibly due to convention: there are few instances of Óðinn in a traditional warrior role in Norse literature, the opposite situation to Þórr.⁴⁷² But, in fact, Óðinn has a striking connection with certain aspects of military action: being stabbed, marked or penetrated with a spear point is a sign of dedication to him (cf. the spear Gungnir that he throws over the opposing army in *Völuspá* 25).⁴⁷³ He is also well known for his cunning attempts to bring fallen warriors to Valhöll. This has led some scholars to postulate the existence of a warrior cult, such as a ‘Männerbünde,’⁴⁷⁴ dedicated to Óðinn in the pre-Christian period.⁴⁷⁵ In Kevin Wanner’s view, Óðinn merges the warrior and sovereign roles of the trifunctional system (*idéologie tripartite*) applied to Proto-Indo-European society by French mythographer Georges Dumézil.⁴⁷⁶

There is one example of Óðinn actually engaged in fighting and two examples in which he is associated with battle rather than being a participant in *Hárbarðsljóð*. All three appear in the *mannjafnaðr* and are deployed as boasts designed to outperform the opponent. The sole instance of the first type appears in st. 16 when Hárbarðr says:

*Var ec með Fiolvari fimm vetr alla,
í ey þeiri, er Algræn heitir;
vega vér þar knáttom oc val fella.*⁴⁷⁷

‘I was with Fiolvar five winters long
on that island called All-green;
we fought there and wreaked slaughter.’⁴⁷⁸

The vocabulary leaves little doubt as to the kind of role Hárbarðr is performing: *vega* is a common verb that delineates ‘killing’ or ‘to gain by fighting’ and *val* ‘the slain’ appears in

⁴⁷² Schjødt, “Óðinn,” 1149, notices that Óðinn’s confrontations with other mythic figures, particularly giants, concern a battle involving intellectual abilities rather than weapons. The major exception is the giant Ymir, who was killed by Óðinn and his brothers as part of the cosmogony. The majority of Óðinn’s many cognomina show, however, that war was an important aspect of his character.

⁴⁷³ I therefore do not agree with scholars who characterise Óðinn as unwarlike on the basis of eddic material, such as Olof Sundqvist, “Myternas universum – om makterna och deras boningar,” *Odens öga – mellan människor och makter i det förkristna Norden/Odin’s Eye – between people and powers in the pre-Christian north* ed. Anders Andrén and Peter Carelli (Helsingborg: Dunkers Kulturhus, 2006), 63. Many of Óðinn’s other names are connected to battle: see Neil Price, *The Viking Way: Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), 63–8.

⁴⁷⁴ Promulgated chiefly by Lily Weiser-Aall and Otto Höfler.

⁴⁷⁵ A nuanced study of Óðinn’s association with war is Nordberg, *Krigarna i Odins sal*, 122–36.

⁴⁷⁶ Wanner, “God on the Margins: Dislocation and Transience in the Myths of Óðinn,” *History of Religions* vol. 46, no. 4 (2007), 322, writes that Óðinn is a “god of battlefield stratagems who determines or influences the outcome of war.”

⁴⁷⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 80.

⁴⁷⁸ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 67.

many compounds to do with death such as Valhøll and *valkyrja* ‘chooser of the slain.’ It appears that Óðinn had a fighting companion in the form of Fjølvarr who, according to Lindow,⁴⁷⁹ could be the male counterpart of Fjølvrǫr, a giantess listed among the *þulur*.⁴⁸⁰ Where they fought is a less certain matter: Felix Niedner argues that the *hapax legomenon* Algrœn ‘All-green’ is an epithet for the earth.⁴⁸¹ Regardless, it is clear that Óðinn and Fjølvarr fought on this verdant land where they ‘wreaked slaughter,’ quite possibly to swell the number of fighting men at Ragnarøk. In st. 40 Hárbarðr is not as active a participant as in st. 16, but is still portrayed as part of an army while there is also an association with his chosen blood-stained weapon:

Ec varc í hernom, er hingat gorðiz
*Gnæfa gunnfana, geir at rióða.*⁴⁸²
 ‘I was in the army, which set out here
 to raise battle-banners
 and to redden the spear.’⁴⁸³

In st. 24 Hárbarðr says *Var ec á Vallandi | ok vígom fylgðag* ‘I was in Valland and I followed the war.’⁴⁸⁴ We should observe that while this statement lacks Hárbarðr ‘wreaking slaughter’ as in st. 40, it does reveal his keen interest in the affairs of foreign conflicts, especially those involving royalty. This phenomenon is well-attested in Norse literature, especially skaldic poetry and *Fornaldarsögur* in which Óðinn makes it his business to involve himself in the lives of famous heroes, usually to bring them into his fold. To do this, he would presumably

⁴⁷⁹ Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 117.

⁴⁸⁰ For Niedner the similarity between Fjølvar and the Óðinn name Fiǫlsviðr reaffirms the identification of Hárbarðr as the chief god: see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 194.

⁴⁸¹ See Niedner, “Das Hárbarðsljóð,” 219, and von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 194.

⁴⁸² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 84.

⁴⁸³ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 71. This is a confusing stanza with a variety of possible interpretations, not least because of Þórr’s reply in the next stanza. It is untangled assiduously by von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 230–2.

⁴⁸⁴ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 82; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 69. According to John McKinnell, “Tradition and Ideology in Eddic Poetry,” *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink* ed. Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist and Declan Taggart (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 146, *val-* ‘southern, exotic’ is an ancient meaning of this word. It also appears in *Atlakviða* sts 2, 4 and 28. Stanza 24/1 *vígom fylgðag* can be interpreted in a few different ways. *Fylgðag* is derived from *fylgja* whose principal meaning is ‘to follow’ and this is the way Larrington has chosen to translate *vígom fylgðag*: ‘I...followed the war.’ There are two additional meanings of *fylgja* that should be considered, however: all three, it should be stressed, are indicative of movement of some kind. Firstly, *fylgja* can mean ‘to accompany, help’ especially when paired with a dative object, which, in st. 24/1, it is: *vígom*. This would then impart the sense that Óðinn took part directly in the war in Valland. This ascribes to him a more active role than ‘followed the war,’ which may just mean that he observed it without participating himself. The other meaning of *fylgja* I want to draw attention to is ‘to lead, guide.’ This also ascribes a much more active role to Óðinn: in fact, in a way it is the antonym to the principal meaning of *fylgja* ‘to follow.’ Deciding which meaning of *fylgja* to proceed with is not an easy choice. Perhaps all three are intended simultaneously (which would fit with Óðinn’s flightiness, e.g., changing from observer in a conflict to active participant).

use the word applied to him in st. 47/1: *orðkringi*,⁴⁸⁵ translated by Hugo Gering as ‘Zungenfertigkeit, Redegewandtheit’ (‘eloquence, fluency in speech’).⁴⁸⁶ Óðinn’s ‘Redegewandtheit’ is comparable to the freedom of movement and ability to penetrate seemingly impassable spaces he demonstrates, the prime example being the hole in the mountain he moves through when acquiring the mead of poetry. Thus it is clear from the three statements outlined above that Óðinn is considered capable of fighting even though we do not have detailed narratives of him in this mode as we do for Þórr. Þórr’s own martial boasts are to some extent offset by those of Óðinn, a feat which should not be underestimated given Þórr’s specific warrior role. Óðinn’s ‘fluent’ performance enables him to emerge from the *mannjafnaðr* in better shape at the expense of his opponent.

Mobility, passivity and stasis

I shall now analyse the binary pair movement:stasis (punctuated by the less extreme state of passivity) insofar as it can be applied to *Hárbarðsljóð*. I begin with a brief discussion of movement in relation to social class, which will help in understanding the remainder of the section. As I touch on above, on one level the two characters’ movements are very restrained: they are engaged in a dialogue – a spoken conversational exchange. As such, both Þórr and Óðinn could be said to occupy positions of stasis. While this is superficially so, there are several ways in which the poet appears to nuance the idea of stasis to make it seem as though other reasons lie behind their respective positions. This is done, for example, by using certain words, grammatical moods, injunctions and commands, as well as by means of insulting remarks. As my analysis will show, Óðinn’s position of stasis appears to be more self-determined than that of Þórr who seems to lack control of himself and his physical situation. At the same time the poem is also highly energised, with each god evading and delivering the mental blows demanded by the verbal duel. This, to some extent, mirrors the great potential for movement that the poet assigns to Óðinn, when she/he puts the tales of their adventures in foreign lands into their mouths. In the end, Óðinn may well emerge as having won the contest and as more successful in subverting his position of stasis, but Þórr shows that he is not totally incapable of doing this.

⁴⁸⁵ Þórr’s objection to Óðinn’s *orðkringi* is in response to st. 44, which Margaret Clunies Ross has taken to be a reference to intimate relations between the “ancient men...in the woods” (the dead) and Jǫrð, Þórr’s mother: “Hildir’s Ring: A Problem in the Ragnarsdrápa, Strophes 8–12,” *Medieval Scandinavia* vol. 6 (1974 [1973]), 85.

⁴⁸⁶ H. Gering, *Vollständiges Wörterbuch zu den Liedern der Edda* (New York: Hildesheim, 1971).

Social movement

In st. 24/3–4 we encounter the memorable line:

Óðinn á iarla, þá er í val falla,
enn Þórr á þræla kyn.⁴⁸⁷

‘Odin owns the nobles who fall in battle
and Thor owns the race of thralls.’⁴⁸⁸

Whether or not it is thought to be true, it is a stinging indictment of Þórr’s character, since slaves in Iceland and Norway had no or very few legal rights.⁴⁸⁹ On the other hand, Óðinn is held up as a *jarl*, the highest social position beneath the king (and later bishop in Christian times). As we know that Þórr gets beaten so soundly, this invective represents the poem as a whole to some extent, where it is just one of several insulting remarks made about Þórr’s low status. It also raises some interesting points about his and Óðinn’s (in)abilities in relation to movement and travel, which carry over from other mythological texts. Firstly, Óðinn, like the *jarlar* who die for him, moves about relatively freely. He is able to travel on both the vertical and horizontal axes and by changing his shape he can access spaces well beyond the physical limits of the human body.⁴⁹⁰

Similarly, the upper classes that Óðinn ingratiates had a greater degree of social autonomy than those at the bottom of society. Travel on a interregional or even international scale was also more available to them than anyone else, none more so than the *þræla kyn* that

⁴⁸⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 82. *En(n)* with double ‘n’ is a temporal adverb usually taken to mean ‘yet’ or ‘still,’ but, according to Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), in manuscripts *en* ‘and’ can be spelt *enn*. This is why certain translations have st. 24/4 ‘and Thor owns the race of thralls’ rather than ‘yet Thor owns the race of thralls’ (my emphasis). The distinction is significant because to translate it the latter way would arguably mitigate some of the humiliation intended by assigning the *þræla kyn* to Þórr.

⁴⁸⁸ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 69, and von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 207, make the point that Hárbarðr here is making a general statement (“allgemeine Festellung”) and is not actually claiming responsibility for it himself, though, Þórr reacts as if this is so. The fundamental differences between Þórr’s and Óðinn’s characters are laid out in a sequence in *Gautreks saga* in which each god bestows contrasting gifts/abilities on the human hero Starkaðr, which are in full agreement with the above statement.

⁴⁸⁹ For a brief overview of social mobility in Norway and Iceland, see Else Mundal, “Medieval Nordic Backgrounds: Written Culture in an Oral Society,” *Moving Words in the Nordic Middle Ages. Tracing Literacies, Texts, and Verbal Communities Acta Scandinavica* 8 ed. Amy C. Mulligan and Else Mundal (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), 51–4.

⁴⁹⁰ Old Norse gods cannot simply go wherever or do whatever they want and can even perish: Baldr, who dies an ignominious death, is the ultimate example. Óðinn himself undergoes pain, anguish and sacrifice in acquiring the runes of knowledge. Despite the ‘unrealistic’ aspects of Norse myth, of which there are certainly many, in terms of the physical manifestations of their bodies, humans (i.e., the characters in heroic poetry such as Sigurðr) and gods are drawn from the same blueprint. Cf. *Hávamál* 164 *allþorǫf ýta sonom, óþorǫf iotna sonom*, which suggests that gods and humans are on the same side against the giants: see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 206.

Þórr supposedly covets.⁴⁹¹ Thralls (*þrællar*) and servants (*ármenn*), i.e., those in servitude, are bound to a master or free farmer (sometimes literally with chains) for life, which curtailed if not completely deprived them of their freedom of movement.⁴⁹² Medieval slaves existed more than metaphorically in a kind of physical stasis, entirely dependent on the largesse of their master, who was legally allowed to kill his slaves if they disobeyed him (in the earliest Norwegian and Icelandic law codes, slaves were non-entities).⁴⁹³ The social restrictions placed on slaves and reduction of their movement are inherent in st. 24, which reminds us that Þórr is in comparison to Óðinn more limited kinetically and intellectually. Óðinn is also simply more convincing in his performance that the choice to move or not is self-determined. In *Hárbarðsljóð* the *sund* that Þórr is unable to cross in part causes his stasis, but it is by no means an expected reaction, since the same watery motif can be found in other texts as well. For instance, in *Þórsdrápa*, he is forced to cross a river, though not without considerable difficulty and he is also helped by being given several magical items by a ‘low’ being.

Additionally, in *Hymiskviða* Þórr sails beyond the range of the navigable ocean together with his travelling companion,⁴⁹⁴ the giant Hymir, who supplied the boat. A typical *sund* in Norway could be several kilometres in width, but also very deep with few accessible harbours, hence the emphasis on material aid in the poem. We are not told how the ferryman (*feriokarl*) came to be in possession of his *eikja* ‘oaken ferry-boat,’ only that it formerly belonged to his employer, Hildólfr. More importantly, Óðinn’s performance suggests he has the means to traverse the spatial gap commensurate with his high status, whereas Þórr, the *þræll*, is made subordinate to his ‘master’ and induced against his will into a position of stasis.

Mobility - passivity - stasis

Þórr

Þórr’s position of stasis is couched in some of the language he uses, specifically the verbal commands that appear at the beginning and end of *Hárbarðsljóð* which reinforce the power imbalance between him and Óðinn. For a start, the efficacy of these commands is dubious.

⁴⁹¹ Gering-Sijmons contend that the statement that *Þórr á þræla kyn* is a “böswillige Karikatur”: see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 209.

⁴⁹² von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 210, point out that the middle group, the freemen, are not mentioned, only the social extremes, perhaps indicating that the term *þræla kyn* should encompass all those not of noble birth.

⁴⁹³ Cf. Stefan Brink, “Slavery in the Viking Age,” *The Viking World* ed. Stefan Brink and Neil Price (Milton Park: Routledge, 2008), 50: “[thralls] were equal to the cattle they herded.”

⁴⁹⁴ John Lindow, “Language: Religious Vocabulary,” 112.

From a hierarchical perspective, Óðinn is certainly not obliged to take orders from Þórr, a ‘lower-ranked’ god (nor a petty thief which Óðinn accuses him of being), so in reality Þórr has scant grounds to proffer them.

Nevertheless, in an attempt at bargaining, Þórr says *Ferðu mic um sundit, | fæði ec þic á morgon* ‘Ferry me over the water and I’ll feed you in the morning.’⁴⁹⁵ *Ferðu mic* ‘Ferry me!’ is grammatically imperative, so Þórr’s immediate strategy, which to us may seem unadvisable, is to project an aura of authority. He also offers Óðinn a hypothetical reward in the form of food.⁴⁹⁶ However, already by sts 4 and 6, in which Óðinn compares Þórr to a tramp and (somewhat bizarrely) pronounces his mother to be dead, we can see that such a strategy is flawed:

*Þeygi er, sem þú þriú bú góð eigir;
berbeinn þú stendr, oc hefir brautinga gervi,
þatki, at þú hafir brocr þínar.*⁴⁹⁷

‘It doesn’t look as if you own three good farms;
Barelegged you stand, wearing your beggar’s gear,
You don’t even have any breeches.’⁴⁹⁸

*Dauð hygg ec at þín
móðir sé.*⁴⁹⁹

‘I think your mother’s dead.’⁵⁰⁰

Þórr’s further failure to compose a glib rejoinder, the basic premise of the *senna* genre, perhaps agrees with the mindlessness he can be accused of in other (mainly late) sources, but it certainly supports the view advanced by Clover that ignorance of poetic speech led to his downfall.⁵⁰¹ Þórr evidently did not learn from his mistakes, as another construction involving an imperative (*Stýrðu* ‘Steer!’) followed by a hypothetical situation appears shortly afterward:

⁴⁹⁵ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 78; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 65.

⁴⁹⁶ This would seem to imply that the exchange is taking place at night: see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 174. Though somewhat later than the presumed date of *Hárbarðsljóð*, the legal parallels here are interesting. According to Magnús Hákonarson’s *Landslög*, the men of the district are meant to pay for those in need of a ferry-crossing, while *Jónsbók* 45 states that it is a violation of the law to demand more than the stipulated payment or refuse crossing to a traveller willing to pay: see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 173–4.

⁴⁹⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 79.

⁴⁹⁸ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 66.

⁴⁹⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 78.

⁵⁰⁰ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 66.

⁵⁰¹ “A vein thoroughly mined by the poet”: Clover, “*Hárbarðsljóð* as Generic Farce,” 135–6.

Stýrðu hingat eikionni! ec mun þér stöðna
*kenna.*⁵⁰²

‘Steer the oaken ship here-
I’ll direct you to the landing stage.’⁵⁰³

In this instance, however, Þórr is less obsequious and, rather than tempting Óðinn with food – the only thing he can exchange, he glibly offers to help him find the ‘landing stage.’ Þórr does himself no favours by referring to Óðinn’s boat as an *eikja*, a pejorative term for a small boat.

It is worthwhile comparing st. 7 (l. 1 quoted above) with st. 53:

Ráð mun ec þér nú ráða: ró þú hingat batinom,
*Hættom hotingi, hittu fǫður Magna.*⁵⁰⁴

‘I’ll give you some advice now: row your boat hither,
Let’s stop this quarrelling, come and meet Magni’s father.’⁵⁰⁵

In this stanza, which occurs in the so-called ‘Aftermath’ of the poem, Þórr finally adopts a diplomatic stratagem, signalled in a less inflammatory choice of word for Óðinn’s vessel: *bátr* ‘boat.’ The most un-Þórr-like l. 2 *hættom hotingi* ‘let’s stop this quarrelling’ clearly shows he has lost his stomach for the fight. Meanwhile, Hárbarðr is unmoved: *Farðu fírr sundi! | Þér scal fars synia* ‘Go further away from the inlet, you shall be refused passage!’ he replies scathingly.⁵⁰⁶ Thus, Þórr’s so-called ‘commands’ in sts 3, 7 and 53, combined with the general threat presented by his hulking frame, are no doubt designed by the poet to frighten Óðinn, yet somehow Þórr fails to execute. It is not for lack of trying, however, since Þórr does modify his manner towards Hárbarðr, whom he may have increasingly realised is not really a mere *feriokarl*. Though in the end the material and intellectual obstacle before him is too great and he cannot disentangle himself from his static position. Even his appeal to

⁵⁰² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 79.

⁵⁰³ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 66.

⁵⁰⁴ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 86.

⁵⁰⁵ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 73.

⁵⁰⁶ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 86; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 73

genealogy (st. 9⁵⁰⁷ ‘Óðinn’s son’) and crucially important role as *miðgarðz véor* ‘protector of Miðgarðr’ (*Völuspá* 56) does not induce Óðinn to change his mind.⁵⁰⁸

Twice in succession towards the end of *Hárbarðsljóð*, Óðinn ridicules his opponent by accusing Þórr of wasting time on his journey. Profligacy is particularly insulting to Þórr since he is famous for being *miðgarðz véor*, a role for which haste seems crucial. Moreover, in medieval terms, a speed advantage over one’s rival could mean the difference between success and failure or even life and death. And so we see st. 50:

*Satt hygg ec mic segia, seinn ertu at for þinni;
langt myndir þú nú kominn, Þórr, ef þú litom forir.*⁵⁰⁹

‘Truth I think I’m saying, you’re slow in your journey,
you’d now be well on your way, Thor, if you’d travelled by day and night.’⁵¹⁰

The near absence of journey-related time-elements in eddic poetry suggests that it is held to be extraneous or at least of minor interest, which is only surprising given a modern perspective which is heavily dependent on and structured around time.⁵¹¹ Nonetheless, a journey of some length can be inferred from *Hymiskviða 7 driúgan dag*,⁵¹² glossed by La Farge and Tucker as a ‘long day.’⁵¹³ However, such instances must be seen as exceptional. Giantland is often presumed to be the origin of Þórr’s journey in *Hárbarðsljóð*, its liminal landscape suggesting a remote and/or inaccessible location. Indeed, there are several occasions in Old Norse myth in which a (male) god had to borrow a *fjaðrhamr* to fly to Giantland, so a journey on foot presumably took a good while. *Jötunheimar*’s geographic obscurity was probably well known to a medieval audience, a remnant of which exists in later folklore. Implicitly, st. 50 encourages us to contrast the increasingly immobile Þórr with Óðinn, whose potential for dynamism does not need to be stated. The audience already know he has his own transport and, more impressively but unbeknownst to Þórr, has morphed into

⁵⁰⁷ The poet might be suggesting that it is better to strategically conceal one’s identity on purpose. Nevertheless, according to Ward Parks, “Flyting and Fighting: Pathways in the Realization of the Epic Contest,” *Neophilologus* vol. 70 (1986), 301, the flyting cannot fully operate until the identities of the persons involved are made known.

⁵⁰⁸ Denying Þórr passage is evidently no great burden on Hárbarðr: ‘It’s a little thing to refuse: it’s a long time to travel’ (st. 56). This also reveals the scale of the journey before Þórr.

⁵⁰⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 86.

⁵¹⁰ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 72.

⁵¹¹ See Jens Peter Schjødt, “Horizontale und vertikale Achsen in der vorchristlichen skandinavischen Kosmologie,” *Old Norse and Finnish Cultic Religions and Place Names*, Scripta Instituti Donneri Aboensis, 13, ed. Tore Ahlbäck (Åbo: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History, 1990), 35–57.

⁵¹² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 89.

⁵¹³ La Farge and Tucker, *Glossary*, 39.

the likeness of another man. There are also several tales in which Óðinn went on journeys to different spatial realms, often at great personal risk, and nowhere is he forced to abandon them or slow down because of geographic constraints.⁵¹⁴ Þórr, on the other hand, twice rests for the night on the way to Útgarðaloki's hall (with damaging consequences). A lackadaisical attitude towards his journey is presumably the intention behind the word *litom* in l. 2, likely derived from *litr* 'colour,' which could be used to describe the hue of the sky at dawn or dusk.⁵¹⁵ Thus: *langt myndir þú nú kominn, | Þórr, ef þú litom fyrir* 'you'd now be well on your way, Þórr, if you'd travelled by day and night.'⁵¹⁶ While a sense of sluggishness, if it can be so described, remains fairly different to complete stasis they probably belong to the same discourse (or part of the same continuum) in terms of meaning, e.g., as forms of indolence that were negatively perceived by the composer of *Hárbarðsljóð* especially when contrasted with Óðinn.⁵¹⁷

Þórr is again accused of being slow in st. 52 in which Hárbarðr says:

*Ása-Þórs*⁵¹⁸ *hugða ec aldregi mundo*
*glepia fēhirði farar*⁵¹⁹

'I never thought Ása-Þórr would let
a herdsman hold up his journeys,'⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁴ I am reminded of Francisco Goya's painting *Saturn Devouring His Son* (1819–23): Saturn's/Kronos's countenance has a wild, bestial quality that reflects his irrepressible drive for self-preservation and supremacy over his children.

⁵¹⁵ See von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 243–5, for the many possible interpretations of this phrase. Many commentators seem to alight on an interpretation involving a change ("wechseln") of something, such as the light or Þórr's bodily appearance. Hjalmar Falk's interpretation is based on a Norwegian dialect word meaning 'moment,' which is taken up by Åke Ohlmarks and Jan de Vries in their translations. Björn Collinder, "Eddica," *Nordisk tidsskrift for filologi* vol. 18 (1922), 23–6, on the other hand, has it: "wenn du einen kleinen Umweg gemacht hättest." Larrington's translation seems to be based on Finnur Jónsson's interpretation, also followed by Valtyr Guðmundson and Magnus Olsen. von See *et al.* recommend following either Jónsson or Olsen.

⁵¹⁶ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 86; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 72. This phrase also occurs in a stanza in *Bergbúa þátr* 'The tale of the mountain-dweller' (*Hallmundarkviða 7/2 ferk opt litum* 'I often travel between sunrise and sunset').

⁵¹⁷ Slowness is also arguably associated with death and the land of the dead (Hel) via Snorri's mention in *Gylfaginning* of Ganglati and Ganglōti, denizens of Hel, whose names are the masculine and feminine forms of a compound adjective meaning 'lazy at walking, slow-moving': cf. John Lindow and Anders Andrén, "Worlds of the Dead," *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume II: Social, Geographical, and Historical Contexts, and Communication Between Worlds* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 904n13.

⁵¹⁸ When Hárbarðr calls himself *fēhirði* or 'herdsman' in st. 52 a diametric opposition is created with *Ása-Þórs* 'Þórr of the Æsir,' a name that might imply high status. *Ása-Þórs* is the only such designation of Þórr in the poetry, though, it occurs multiple times in *Snorra Edda* and in some *Fornaldarsögur* (such as *Gautreks saga* and *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinssonar*). This binary pair ridicules Þórr, inviting the suggestion that a divine being could be challenged by a serf.

⁵¹⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 86.

⁵²⁰ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 72.

which turns on the meaning of the verb *glepja*, generally taken to mean ‘trip up, lead astray, thwart, frustrate, or interfere.’ The Cleasby and Vigfusson dictionary contributes ‘to confound or beguile,’⁵²¹ while in her translation Carolyne Larrington chose ‘hold up’ in the sense of ‘delay.’ At their core, all definitions of *glepja* have in common the upshot that Þórr is hindered in some way. The agent of *glepja* is emphasised with the first and third person pronouns *Ec* ‘I’ and *féhirðir* ‘herdsman,’⁵²² the latter ironically echoing the associations of the earlier line ‘Þórr owns the race of thralls.’⁵²³ Since Þórr, so-called master of slaves,⁵²⁴ cannot overcome the *féhirðir* his delay on the wrong side of the water is set to continue, with his only recourse being to travel a ‘long time’ around it. Thus in addition to the considerable setback this must have caused, Þórr’s embarrassment is compounded by (a) the negative perception of stasis in Norse society and (b) a social inferior as the agent of the action.⁵²⁵ Þórr is therefore not just being interrupted on his journey in the sense of time, but his mental and psychological state is being affected as well.⁵²⁶ Clover makes the case for this sense of *glepja* in her analysis as well. Thus, Þórr’s failure in the *mannjafnaðr* is not only a result of his ill-acquaintance with its mechanics, as Clover and others argue, but also because he is being confused, confounded and beguiled, all of which have a paralysing effect on him, manifesting in an immobile or static state.

A static state characterises some of Þórr’s statements expressing his need for Hárbardr’s boat, which subject him to accusations of passivity that smack of *ergi*. In sts 3 and 7 Þórr’s meek injunction to have the boat brought to him follow some disparaging remarks by Hárbardr.⁵²⁷ In early Norse society, which we can arguably take to embody (or be

⁵²¹ *Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 203.

⁵²² Some editors, such as Sophus Bugge and N. F. S. Grundtvig, render *féhirði* as *farhirði* (‘Ferryman’), which von See *et al.* consider to be unnecessary, but, for the purposes of my investigation, would work just as well, as it also occupies a low social position, and similarly contrasts *Ása-Þórs*.

⁵²³ Judy Quinn, “Gender,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume II: Social, Geographical and Historical Contexts, and Communication between Worlds* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 514, notes that a shepherd, along with all females would have had the least access to Christian learning and therefore were on the extreme margins of society.

⁵²⁴ Related insults directed towards Þórr also occur in sts 6 and 8 in which Hárbardr likens him to a clothing-less peasant (*berbeinn þú stendr*) and horse-thief (*hrossa þjófa*) respectively (discussed below).

⁵²⁵ While Hárbardr’s insult is indubitably scurrilous, Stefan Brink, “How Uniform Was the Old Norse Religion?,” *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross* ed. Margaret Clunies Ross, Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 115, points out that several Þórr place-names in Scandinavia are to do with agrarian activities, such as Torsåker, Torsager and Torsvang.

⁵²⁶ According to von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 246, *glepja* is used in connection to the seduction of women in eddic poetry.

⁵²⁷ Thus Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 78: *Hverr er sá karl karla, | er kallar um váginn?* ‘Who is that churl of churls who calls over the gulf?’ (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 65), and Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 79: *Peygi er, sem*

‘isomorphous’ of)⁵²⁸ cosmic society,⁵²⁹ the two dominant ideologies were honour and shame.⁵³⁰ The full extent of these ideologies is displayed most acutely in the *Íslendingasögur*, in whose colourful narratives powerful Icelandic families feuded against each other ostensibly to repair damaged reputations, often as a result of accusations of *ergi*, cowardice or failing to act.⁵³¹ Hárbarðr’s statements quoted above are unequivocally designed as insults. *Karl* (cognate with ‘churl’) can simply mean a man, but also tends to convey servility, while st. 6 accuses Þórr of indigence and thus of low social rank. In the *Íslendingasögur* should such insults go unpunished, accusations of the nature outlined above would be expected. And yet we find that Þórr does basically nothing to repair this slight. Instead, he repeats his need for help and, in the case of st. 3, offers to give Hárbarðr breakfast, a response bordering on a non sequitur.⁵³²

A similarly mild response to an insult occurs in st. 53 in which Þórr is hardly recognisable:

*Ráð mun ec þér nú ráða: ró þú hingat batinom,
hættom hætingi, hittu fjoður Magna!*⁵³³
‘I’ll give you some advice now: row the boat here,
let’s stop this quarrelling, come and meet Magni’s father!’⁵³⁴

It is striking that from an Old Norse ideological point of view an appropriate response is not forthcoming. Instead, Þórr is conciliatory (*Hættom hotingi*), which must be perceived as a failure to act in an ‘honour and shame’ society. It is certainly not the behaviour one would

þú þriú þú góð eigir; | berbeinn þú stendr, oc hefir brautinga gervi, | þatki, at þú hafir brocr þinar ‘It doesn’t look as if you own three decent farms; | barelegged you stand, wearing your beggar’s gear, | you don’t even have any breeches’ (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 66).

⁵²⁸ Jens Peter Schjødt, “Journeys to Other Worlds in pre-Christian Scandinavian Mythology: Different Worlds – Different Purposes,” *Between the Worlds: Contexts, Sources and Analogues of Scandinavian Otherworld Journeys* ed. Matthias Egeler and Wilhelm Heizmann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 27.

⁵²⁹ Since Georges Dumézil it has been assumed that mythology/religion reflects certain aspects of a society in which they functioned: see Schjødt, “Continuity and Break: Indo-European,” 232.

⁵³⁰ In Folke Ström’s view, “*Níð, ergi* and Old Norse moral attitudes,” *The Dorothea Coke Memorial Lecture in Northern Studies* (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1973), 15, even though instances of *ergi/ragr* in mythical and heroic texts may seem to have little to do with the real world they “always tell us something about the existing set of social values.” That honour and shame operate within the same semantic realm is argued by, for instance, John Lindow, “Ethics,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume I: Basic Premises and Considerations* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 490.

⁵³¹ In ch. 20 of *Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa* a man pays with his life for the recitation of versified *níð*.

⁵³² *Ferðu mic um sundit, | foði ec þic á morgon* ‘Ferry me over the water and I’ll feed you in the morning’: Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 78; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 65.

⁵³³ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 86.

⁵³⁴ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 73.

expect of the god who surely has the most to lose from accusations of cowardice. Nevertheless, elsewhere Þórr is not above subverting various cultural norms in order to get what he wants, as his cross-dressing antics in *Þrymskviða* show. However, there are far more instances where he is quick to act when his honour is called into question (cf. for example, his immediate acceptance of Hrungnir's invitation to a duel in *Skáldskaparmál*, and even his immediate reaction upon the return of Mjöllnir in *Þrymskviða*). In st. 53 where one might expect to find Þórr charging into battle, he instead remains passive and chooses to ignore Hárbarðr's insults, since he requires the boat to be brought to him. Not only does the *sund* in *Hárbarðsljóð* operate as a physical barrier between Þórr and Hárbarðr, it also lays bare the extent to which Þórr is prepared to sacrifice his honour to advance his own interests.

Óðinn: mobility and stasis

Óðinn can also be accused of appearing to be immobile in *Hárbarðsljóð*, but there is one important distinction: Þórr's static position is forced on him externally, while Óðinn's is not. Earlier I drew attention to the language used in relation to Þórr's plight on his side of the *sund*, much of it rendered in the passive voice, which seems to rob Þórr of his own agency. The language the poet uses to describe Óðinn's static position in the location of the *sund* is more active and self-determining. It conversely presents Óðinn in a position of power and authority, suggesting that his stasis is intentional or elected in some way.⁵³⁵ This is clearly indicated in st. 14 in which Hárbarðr says *hér mun ec standa | oc þín heðan bíða* 'here I'll stand and wait for you.'⁵³⁶ In contrast to Þórr, who is hindered by his static position as well as the need for transport, Hárbarðr chooses to take up a static position for tactical reasons. Hárbarðr's unwillingness to meet Þórr does not arise out of cowardice, as we learn in st. 12 that he would defend himself if it were necessary,⁵³⁷

*Enn þótt ec sacar eiga, fyr slícom, sem þú ert,
þá mun ec forða fiorvi míno, nema ec feigr sé.*⁵³⁸

'Whether or not I have a dispute, I'd defend my life
from such as you are, unless I were doomed.'⁵³⁹

⁵³⁵ See von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 192, for similar formulations of *hér mun ec standa ok þín heðan bíða* in other Norse texts.

⁵³⁶ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 80; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 67.

⁵³⁷ The word order of this stanza differs in the Codex Regius than what is presented here, which follows Bugge and Grundtvig.

⁵³⁸ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 80.

⁵³⁹ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 67.

As a result the onus to ‘do something’ lies with Hárbarðr, who, despite his own position of stasis (conventionally perceived in a negative way) is able to subvert it more successfully than Þórr.

Further evidence can be supplied by examining the suggestion of potential movement observable in certain statements and the allusions to various kinds of physical and social movement completed in the past that arise as a result of the *mannjafnaðr*. An example of potential movement occurs in st. 8 in which Óðinn says:

*Hildólfr sá heitir, er mic halda bað,
reccr inn ráðsvinni, er býr í Ráðseyiarsundi;
baðat hann hlennimenn flytia eða hrossa þjófa,
góða eina, oc þá er ec gerva kunna;
segðu til nafns þíns, ef þú vill um sundit fara!*⁵⁴⁰

‘Hidolfr he’s called, the man who’s ordered me to keep it,
that warrior wise in counsel, who lives in Counsel-island Sound;
he told me not to ferry highwaymen or horse-thieves
but good men alone, and those whom I recognized clearly;
tell me your name if you want to cross the inlet.’⁵⁴¹

In this stanza we learn that Óðinn is willing and able to transport across the sound those whom he decides are worthy (*góða eina*). The criteria exclude ‘highwaymen and horse-thieves,’ which is obviously intended to cast aspersions on Þórr, who, as far as we know, is undeserving of such epithets.⁵⁴² Critically, st. 8 shows the potential for movement that Óðinn possesses but does not utilise, at least not for Þórr’s benefit. As a result, the symbolic gulf, to say nothing of the literal one, between Óðinn and Þórr is widened. Óðinn could help transport Þórr across the *sund*, but decides that Þórr does not meet his criteria: ‘good men alone, and those whom I recognized clearly.’ Þórr is therefore either not a ‘good’ man or Hárbarðr does not recognise him or both. According to Niedner, we learn of Hárbarðr’s true identity through the epithet he gives his employer Hildólfr, *ráðsviðr* ‘abundant in advice,’ as well as the

⁵⁴⁰ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 79.

⁵⁴¹ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 66.

⁵⁴² Regardless, as von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 168, have pointed out, there is a legal precedent in Magnús Hákonarson’s *Landslog* (1263) and *Jónsbók* (1281) not to transport recognised thieves on ferries. Thus “scheint der Dichter einer reales, rechtlich geregeltes Umfeld vor Augen gehabt zu haben”: von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 169. von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 182, also point out that Þórr’s travelling attire (“seiner Aufmachung”) prompts Hárbarðr to state his conditions.

meaning of his residence Ráðseyiarsund ‘Advice-island sound.’⁵⁴³ More potential movement is suggested in sts 12 and 14 in which Hárbarðr reacts to Þórr’s threats of violence with statements of his own willingness to fight. In st. 12 he says

*Enn þótt ec sacar eiga, fyr slícom, sem þú ert,
þá mun ec forða fiqrvi míno*⁵⁴⁴

‘Whether or not I have a dispute,
I’d defend my life from such as you are’⁵⁴⁵

and in st. 14,

*hér mun ec standa oc þín heðan bíða;
fanntaðu mann inn harðara at Hrungni dauðan.*⁵⁴⁶

‘Here I’ll stand and wait for you;

you’ve encountered no tougher man since Hrungnir’s death.’⁵⁴⁷

St. 14 contradicts the fullest version we have of the Hrungnir story from *Snorra Edda*. In the prose, Óðinn is in fact fleeing from Hrungnir, whom he has insulted over the issue of whose horse is more magnificent. This would seem to suggest that Óðinn is afraid of Hrungnir, whom, indeed, Snorri describes as the *þeira sterkastr* ‘strongest of them [giants].’ However, sometimes it is difficult to ascertain Óðinn’s motives for acting in certain ways, which is in keeping with the perfidy he is occasionally accused of. Once Hrungnir enters the *Áss*-gates Óðinn vanishes from the story – the sources are quiet on his sudden disappearance, but it is possible that he gambles on Þórr’s encounter with Hrungnir in Ásgarðr, knowing that he would immediately resort to violence, i.e., ‘delegating’ the task of killing Hrungnir to Þórr. The latter possibility notwithstanding, mentioning Hrungnir in their verbal duel *prima facie* seems to undermine Hárbarðr’s claim of equality, let alone superiority, with Hrungnir based on his outwardly craven behaviour.

In the final section of the poem, once the *mannjafnaðr* has been completed and it is clear that Hárbarðr is the winner, Hárbarðr utters two statements that cement their respective positions on opposite sides of the sound. In st. 54 Hárbarðr says *Farðu firr sundi! | þér scal*

⁵⁴³ See Niedner, “Das Hárbarðsljóð,” 219, and von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 182.

⁵⁴⁴ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 80.

⁵⁴⁵ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 67.

⁵⁴⁶ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 80.

⁵⁴⁷ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 67.

*fars synia*⁵⁴⁸ ‘Go further away from the inlet, you shall be refused passage!’⁵⁴⁹ This statement appears directly after a plea from Þórr to ‘stop this quarrelling.’ Not only has Þórr lost, but earlier in *Hárbarðsljóð* he is also accused of being a highwayman and a horse-thief, hence his injunction in st. 53, *ró þú hingat batinom*. By st. 54 Hárbarðr’s patience with Þórr has worn thin, which is reflected in the language he uses. His statement in st. 54 is a command in the imperative mood. Moreover, Þórr is not only being told he cannot cross the sound, he is being ordered away from it. Þórr actually seems resigned to this outcome:

Scamt mun nú mál okkat vera, allz þú mér skætingo
*einni svarar.*⁵⁵⁰

‘Short will be our conversation now,
since you answer me only with jeers.’⁵⁵¹

Hárbarðr, though, rubs salt in the wounds in st. 58, *Taca við vil oc erfiði | at upverandi sólo* ‘with toil and difficulty you’ll get there.’⁵⁵² To go ‘further away’ from the sound would physically distance Þórr from *Óðins landa*, presumably a significant setback for him. In the final stanza of the poem Hárbarðr says *Farðu nú, þars hafi allan gramir!* ‘Go where the monsters’ll get you!’⁵⁵³ Again, we observe that it is a command, i.e., Þórr has no choice in the matter. In fact, von See *et al.* suggest that Þórr fails both on a rhetorical level and in his desire to get across the sound, as signalled in this stanza.⁵⁵⁴ In st. 60 the drama increases. Not only is Hárbarðr ordering Þórr to remove himself, but sends him knowingly into the path of *gramir*, lit. ‘angry ones,’ usually translated as ‘fiends, demons’ (though in the singular it is an adjective meaning ‘wroth, angry’).⁵⁵⁵ In Iceland the belief in evil creatures, such as elves, inhabiting the landscape continued into the early modern period, and this statement could be seen as reflecting commonly-held views on the dangers of overland travel (see Chapter two,

⁵⁴⁸ When Hárbarðr says *Þér scal fars synia* the primary referent of *fars* (‘passage’) is the boat. An alternative meaning of *far* is ‘life,’ ‘conduct’ or ‘behaviour’ – in other words the ‘journey’ one undergoes through life. The oblique interpretation of this statement seems to be that Þórr’s conduct in life, or his *raison d’être*, is being challenged. As I suggest elsewhere Þórr is used to getting his own way in confrontations. This includes the constant patrolling of the borders between the gods’ territory and Giantland where, we presume, he is successful in hunting his quarry. Þórr therefore requires as few prohibitions on his capacity for movement as possible – indeed, the security of Ásgarðr/Miðgarðr depends on it. *Þér scal fars synia* therefore has a dual meaning, based on the variant meanings of *far*, both detrimental to Þórr and to the race of gods in general: (1) Þórr is not allowed on Hárbarðr’s boat, which clearly bruises his ego and (2) Hárbarðr denies validity to Þórr’s conduct in life, e.g., his giant-killing journeys, an insult that cuts deeply.

⁵⁴⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 86; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 73.

⁵⁵⁰ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 87.

⁵⁵¹ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 73.

⁵⁵² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 87; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 73.

⁵⁵³ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 87; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 73.

⁵⁵⁴ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 252.

⁵⁵⁵ The formulation in st. 60 is similar to curses in other eddic poems, such as the prose introduction to *Grímnismál* and *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* st. 44: see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 252.

83–7). Hárbarðr's contempt is on full display in st. 60: it is obvious that Þórr will not cross, but he cannot resist making one final callous remark. Óðinn constantly pushes the boundaries of normative behaviour to the point where he can be thought of as a kind of mischief-maker. Ultimately, sts 58 and 60 serve to show Hárbarðr's dominance of both the space around him and his opponent. Although Hárbarðr remains in a position of stasis, his potential for movement is palpable. Conversely, Þórr is released from his static position, but it is not the outcome he would have wanted. Instead of continuing his journey, he must backtrack and risk encountering *gramir*.

Conclusion

Given the richness of mythological material in *Hárbarðsljóð*, it is perhaps surprising that so little has been written about it since the 1970s (at least in English). This may have something to do with its low status advanced by scholars in the early twentieth century, foremost among them Jan de Vries. From the foregoing analysis, this seems hardly a fair assessment. The editors of *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda*, the most up-to-date treatment of this and the other eddic poems, no doubt share my view. One of the most remarkable aspects of the poem is the great store it seems to set on spatial topics, especially when interpreted in light of the binary pair movement:stasis. Space actually dominates the focus from the outset: consider the setting in which the verbal duel takes place, a sound. This immediately creates a division between the interlocutors, both real and imagined. Moreover, space and movement/stasis is the central tenet of many of the boasts advanced by Þórr and Óðinn. Frequently, these are belligerent in nature, but can also include various kinds of voyages and also social and metaphorical motion. In fact, the structure of the verse itself is suggestive of dynamic aerial movement: while no hammer travels across the sound, insults move back and forth. Stasis is an equally important element of *Hárbarðsljóð*: while both figures stand motionless on opposite sides of the sound Þórr's immobility is externally imposed by forces beyond his control, while Óðinn likewise does not move, but the sense is that his powers of mobility could be engaged at any moment. Generally speaking, Óðinn's kinetic abilities in *Hárbarðsljóð* are consonant with the other mythic texts, where he appears to inhabit and move into spaces with few restrictions even to the point where he changes his own corporeal form. This flexibility of motion is also in keeping with his tactical abilities and powers of persuasion if he thinks he can manufacture some kind of advantage for himself, such as acquiring recruits for his army in Valhøll. While Þórr, on the other hand, also shows signs that he is capable of kinds of complex movement in *Hárbarðsljóð*, they are made to appear

hollow and even farcical when compared with Óðinn's capacities.⁵⁵⁶ Þórr's violent escapades with giant women in the east are especially emphasised (though they do serve a cosmic purpose as a form of population control): his justifications are morally questionable, and subject him to accusations of *ergi* on the grounds that fighting women is an unmanly thing to do. This can be balanced against his treatment in *Snorra Edda*, which casts him in a more positive light, in which he defends Ásgarðr against the incursions of several threatening and powerful giants and the 'forces of chaos,' as well as in *Lokasenna*, analysed in the next chapter.

⁵⁵⁶ As Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament*, 366, has noted, the versions of Óðinn and Þórr we encounter in *Hárbarðsljóð* and their reported adventures are decidedly more positive and negative respectively compared to other texts.

CHAPTER FOUR: A SPATIAL READING OF *LOKASENNA*

Introduction

The eddic poem *Lokasenna* is attested in only one manuscript, GKS 2365 4^o (CR), which dates from circa 1270–80.⁵⁵⁷ For *Lokasenna* von See *et al.* give a *Terminus ante quem* of 1225,⁵⁵⁸ i.e., around the time when Snorri was drafting his *Edda*, in recognition of the fact that his work reveals a (now non-extant) version of the poem.⁵⁵⁹ Comparisons with *Hárbarðsljóð* are made throughout this chapter, and significant similarities and differences emerge in the role played by the spatial setting across the two poems. In *Hárbarðsljóð* this is a *sund* ‘sound, inlet’ while *Lokasenna* is dominated by the setting of a drinking hall (Ægir’s to be exact).⁵⁶⁰ While the *sund* maintains a spatial separation between the characters, the banqueting hall associates the characters together in close proximity, functioning to unite rather than divide. Indeed, we are told that representatives of several different mythological races (gods, giants, elves) were in attendance at the feast *Ægis hallir í* ‘in Ægir’s halls.’⁵⁶¹ A notable absentee, at least initially, is Þórr, who is away in the east (*hann var í austrvegi*).⁵⁶² The eclectic guest list suggests an occasion of cosmic or eschatological importance and several scholars have considered *Lokasenna* as pointing or alluding to the onset of Ragnarøk.⁵⁶³ The major hindrance to the fulfillment of the banquet is the god Loki, after whom the poem is named. Initially, he is in the hall, but is expelled to the forest for murdering Ægir’s servant Fimafengr. On his return Loki launches into a *senna*, a type of

⁵⁵⁷ As in the previous chapter I rely on the *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda* for matters of dating.

⁵⁵⁸ Jan de Vries, *The Problem of Loki* (FF Communications: Helsinki, 1933), 178, proposes an eleventh-century *Terminus a quo*.

⁵⁵⁹ Klaus von See, Beatrice La Farge, Eve Picard, Ilone Priebe, and Katja Schultz (eds.), *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda/Band 2: Götterlieder* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter – Universitätsverlag, 1997), 384.

⁵⁶⁰ The importance of the setting in *Lokasenna* and the emphasis placed on drinking and the banquet is briefly analysed in Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, “Loki’s Senna in Ægir’s Hall,” *Idee, Gestalt, Geschichte. Festschrift Klaus von See* ed. G. W. Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1988), 240–59.

⁵⁶¹ This feast is presumably the one alluded to in *Hymiskviða* (also suggested by the arrangement of the Codex Regius). In *Grímnismál* 45 Óðinn mentions another feast at Ægir’s, so they may have been thought to take place regularly: *ϕllom ásom | þat scal inn koma, | Ægis becci á, | Ægis drecco at* (Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 66).

⁵⁶² See Chapter one, 35–41 for further discussion of Þórr’s eastern exploits. von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 387, and Meulengracht Sørensen, “Loki’s Senna in Ægir’s Hall,” 245, argue that Þórr’s absence can perhaps be explained by his status as the enemy of the giants *par excellence*, so he was not willing to feast in Ægir’s hall.

⁵⁶³ See Annette Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums Forlag, 2011), 367, Heinz Klingenberg, “Types of Eddic Mythological Poetry,” *Edda: A Collection of Essays* ed. Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1983), 152–3, and John McKinnell, *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism* (Rome: Il Calamo, 1994), 47. Meulengracht Sørensen, “Loki’s Senna in Ægir’s Hall,” 246, has also pointed out how the only mythological story mentioned in the prose introduction is one that is definitely connected to Ragnarøk, namely the binding of Fenrir.

contest poem or flyting often involving *níð* ‘derision, libel,’ with the guests, first turning his gaze towards Bragi.

Like the previous chapter the present one is an analysis of space and motion, literal and metaphorical. In this regard Loki is an interesting case-study as a figure who does not fit neatly into prescribed categories, spatial or otherwise. His actions consistently subvert the normative codes of behaviour that the hall demands, summed up well in his self-confessed aim to ‘mix their mead with malice’ (*blend ec þeim svá meini mioð*), found in stanza 3. In addition, much of the dialogue in *Lokasenna* concerns the notion of what it means to be ‘in, inside’ a defined space, in this case the mead hall. The state of being inside the hall is communicated in a few different ways: besides the above mentioned *Ægis hallir í*,⁵⁶⁴ which is the most common, we encounter the following prepositional phrases: *hér inni*, *inni hér*, both ‘in/inside here,’ *er innar sitr* ‘who sits further inside,’ *fyr innan* ‘inside,’ *í sessi* ‘in a seat/sitting’ and *í hollina* ‘in the hall.’ We also see the concentric worldview of early medieval/Viking Age Scandinavia in operation;⁵⁶⁵ while spaces ‘in, inside’ are seen as inherently good and imbued with positivity, the spaces that are further away acquire more malevolent overtones.⁵⁶⁶ This is observable in micro- and macrocosmic terms in the space of the hall itself, vis-à-vis the inner and outer benches, as well as the disparity between hall and wilderness (signified by the *skógr* ‘forest’ to which Loki is banished), which stand in for the binary pair society:chaos.

We find in *Lokasenna* an important interrogation of the relationship between space and identity. This is achieved primarily through identifiable relationships between certain figures/groups and various spaces. Many of these places do not exist independently from the mythological figures said to inhabit them, resulting in a frequent conflation of place and person. Two prominent examples of this phenomenon are Hel and Muspell. For instance, in st. 63 we encounter a reference to ‘Hel.’ Hel is both a person and a place: she is the daughter

⁵⁶⁴ Compare with *Hávamál* 111 *Háva holla í* ‘In the High-one’s halls’: Gustav Neckel & Hans Kuhn (eds.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter - Universitätsverlag, 1983), 30.

⁵⁶⁵ Cf. Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* vol. II (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1957), 372–3.

⁵⁶⁶ We may also see such a hierarchy of space in the later *Frostaping Law* (§ 2.10) which dictates that crimes committed in the larger churches and cathedrals attracted a larger penalty than if they took place in county and private churches: see Sæbjørg Walaker Nordeide, “The Christianization of Norway,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume IV: The Christianization Process, Bibliography, and Index* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andréén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1636.

of Loki *and* the underworld inhabited by criminals as well as those that die of sickness or old age. Although Þórr is most likely alluding to the place Hel rather than the person, they are too closely linked to be divorced altogether.⁵⁶⁷ In contrast, the word Muspell in the phrase *Muspellz synir* ‘Muspell’s sons’ in st. 42 clearly designates a giant being associated with the cosmogony and Ragnarøk. But in *Gyfaginning* Snorri also mentions a place called Muspellsheimr ‘Muspell’s realm,’ a southern region that he describes as being as hot as Niflheimr in the north is cold, presenting a further close association between a mythological figure and a place bearing the same name.

Other places are identified with the mythological beings who inhabit them without necessarily being synonymous with them. In st. 43 Bragi compliments Freyr’s *sællíct setr* ‘blessed dwelling,’ which, as I explain on p. 164, could be an allusion to *Álfheimr* ‘Realm of the elves.’ This residence is said to have been ‘given’ to Freyr, but it is also etymologically associated with the *álfar* (see Chapter two, 83–7). While Vanaheimr is not named in *Lokasenna*, I discuss it here because of the focus on Njörðr’s early origins in sts 34–5 and the poem’s obvious interest in spaces. Finally, the *austrvegir* ‘eastern roads’ and allusions to the east in general are metonyms for Giantland, a place with which Þórr is closely connected and, indeed, where he is before his arrival at Ægir’s hall.

A word on the prose frame

The prose frame of *Lokasenna* is probably a later invention than the poem itself and is unlikely to have been recited at performances. If it was created sometime in the early thirteenth century, it reveals a medieval audience’s view of what a presumably earlier eddic poem was like and what was considered worthy of being emphasised. Thus in the prose introduction it was important to mention the guests who attended the feast, including many of the Æsir, but also giants and elves. It cannot be a coincidence that the mythological beings named here are those whom Loki confronts during the *senna*.⁵⁶⁸ As I shall explain, it does not appear that Loki’s opponents in the *senna* were chosen at random: their roles in this are necessitated by the underlying fabric of Old Norse myth. Skaði, for example, may be targeted for her kinship with Þjazi, the giant that imprisoned Loki as related in *Skáldskaparmál* chs 56–7. And Týr may have drawn Loki’s ire as the one responsible for deceiving Loki’s son,

⁵⁶⁷ In Carolyne Larrington’s translation it is ‘Hell.’

⁵⁶⁸ The notable exception is Gefion.

Fenrir, into having a magical fetter put on him. It was also important to the composer to mention Þórr's absence, which probably gives Loki the freedom to act so unabashedly, as it is only Þórr's arrival in st. 57 that precipitates Loki's exit. Finally, Loki's banishment to the forest is key to understanding *Lokasenna*. The prose states that Loki is banished because he killed Fimafengr, one of Ægir's servants. As I shall explain, one of the main themes of the poem is that Loki is in the wrong by committing murder in the deeply symbolic space of the drinking hall. This is the reason for the gods' shock and surprise in the prose interruption between sts 5 and 6. Loki's motivation for returning from the forest, however, may be driven by annoyance with the gods' reaction to Fimafengr's murder, a figure well below Loki's own station, as much as by his supposed love of chaos. The prose introduction therefore establishes the dramatic background against which *Lokasenna* plays out.

Movement

Most of the movement that takes place in *Lokasenna* is presented in prose, particularly in the frame narrative, but also in a series of short individual statements embedded between certain stanzas.⁵⁶⁹ These prose parts⁵⁷⁰ have not been systematically discussed by scholars⁵⁷¹ perhaps for the reason that they often describe seemingly banal kinds of action ('Then Sif went forward' and so forth).⁵⁷² However, when they are interpreted in the light of certain binary pairs (for example, hall:forest and up:down) another layer of meaning is revealed. Three types of movement adduced from the prose shall be discussed: (1) movement towards and into the hall, (2) movement inside the hall, and (3) the god Þórr's arrival. Finally, I will examine two further examples of movement that arise or are alluded to in the poem but do not fit into these categories, namely flying and shaking.

⁵⁶⁹ According to Finnur Jónsson, "Eddadigtneenes samling," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* vol. 42 (1926), 227, nearly all the prose in *Lokasenna* is based on the verse, with a certain amount also coming from a separate source that Snorri and the original redactor had access to.

⁵⁷⁰ Margaret Clunies Ross, *Poetry in Fornaldarsögur Part I. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages VIII* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), lx, points out that prose interruptions are much more numerous in the legendary part of the Codex Regius manuscript of *The Poetic Edda* than the mythological one.

⁵⁷¹ The exception is Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995), 228–9, whose interest in *Lokasenna* is in whether it contains evidence of dramatic performance and concludes that the internal prose is comprised of tautological statements that are already implied by the poem itself. Interest in the prose frame has generated lively debate: see Gustav Lindblad, *Studier i Codex Regius av Äldre Eddan* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1954), 227, and Margaret Clunies Ross, *Skáldskaparmál. Snorri Sturluson's ars poetica and medieval theories of language* (Odense: Odense University Press, 1987), 140.

⁵⁷² That the prose parts of the dialogic eddic poems convey "simple action or movement" has been noted by Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*, 234 and 238–9, and Bertha S. Philpotts, *The Elder Edda and Ancient Scandinavian Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 107–8, who suggests that they could be "stage directions" of some kind.

Movement towards/into the hall

In st. 1 Loki, having been in the forest, stands at the entrance to the hall while he speaks to the guardian figure Eldir (from *eldr* ‘fire’), one of Ægir’s servants.⁵⁷³ Loki warns Eldir not to take one step further until he tells him about the subject of the gods’ discussion in the hall:

*Segðu þat, Eldir, svá at þú einugi,
feti gangir framarr:
hvat hér inni hafa at ólmádom,
sigtíva synir?*⁵⁷⁴
‘Tell me, Eldir, before you step
a single foot forward,
what the sons of the victory-gods here inside
talk about over their ale.’⁵⁷⁵

In sts 6 and 7, having already killed Fimafengr, Loki returns from the forest and enters Ægir’s hall whereupon he sees the gods, who all immediately stop talking. The teasing final line of st. 7 (*eða heitið mic heðan* ‘or tell me to go away’) breaks them out of their silence; Bragi, the god of poetry, answers.⁵⁷⁶ Bragi’s response concerns the *sess* ‘seat, place to sit,’ which he says the gods will never give him:

*Sessa oc staði velia þér sumbli at
æsir aldregi,
þvíat æsir vito, hveim þeir alda scola
gambansumbl um geta.*⁵⁷⁷
‘A place to sit at the feast
the Æsir will never assign you,
for the Æsir know for whom they should
provide their potent feast.’⁵⁷⁸

⁵⁷³ Barbro Söderberg, “Lokasenna – egenheter och ålder,” *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* vol. 102 (1987), 35, sees a “bewußte kompositionelle Verbindung” between Eldir’s name and the flames that Loki envisages ravaging Ægir’s hall in st. 65: von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 390.

⁵⁷⁴ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 96. Eldir’s supine behaviour can possibly be explained by examining other examples of flyting in heroic literature, such as that between Beowulf and Unferð (which also takes place inside a drinking-hall), in which the host remains as uninvolved as possible: see Ward Parks, “Flyting and Fighting: Pathways in the Realization of the Epic Contest,” *Neophilologus* vol. 70 (1986), 300.

⁵⁷⁵ Carolyne Larrington, *The Poetic Edda* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 81. According to von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 390, these sorts of commands can be found in other eddic poems: cf. Freyr’s command to Scírnir in *Scírnismál* 40.

⁵⁷⁶ This has probably been inferred by the redactor as *Bra* is written in the margin. Bragi is also described as welcoming dead heroes to Valhöll in *Hákonarmál* sts 14 and 16: see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 401.

⁵⁷⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 98.

⁵⁷⁸ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 82.

The role of feasting (in which having a ‘place to sit’ was both a necessity and a marker of socio-political importance) in Germanic society was significant and connoted good social relations among different groups and individuals.⁵⁷⁹ Thus Bragi’s refusal to allow Loki a place at the feast shows his and the gods’ hostility towards Loki; Loki has transgressed the rules twice (firstly, by killing Fimafengr, which resulted in a banishment to the forest, and then by returning to society represented by the hall) and is technically performing an illegal act. The concept of *grið* ‘truce, mercy, grace, quarter’ in Old Norse society was very important, particularly in relation to the drinking hall.⁵⁸⁰ It is clear that *grið* figures significantly in the mind of the poet/composer,⁵⁸¹ as we are made aware in the prose introduction that *Þar var griðastaðr mikill* ‘That [the hall] was a great place of peace’ immediately prior to a declaration of Loki’s crimes. However, Bragi does not address Loki’s challenge *heitið mic heðan* ‘order me away from here.’ In the prose introduction Loki is chased to the forest by the gods as immediate punishment for Fimafengr’s death.⁵⁸² But perhaps here the conditions of Loki’s wrongdoing are less clear, so the most the gods can do is to deny him *sessa oc staði*. As we shall see below, it is not until the arrival of Þórr at the hall that Loki’s own departure becomes a realistic proposition, which suggests that the gods are in fact incapable of expelling him (the poem generally seems to expose the gods’ powerlessness in the face of a chaos figure).⁵⁸³

⁵⁷⁹ See Meulengracht Sørensen, “Loki’s Senna in Ægir’s Hall,” 253, James W. Earl, “The Role of the Men’s Hall in the Development of the Anglo-Saxon Superego,” *Psychiatry* vol. 46 (1983), 139–60, and, for an Icelandic context, Jón Viðar Sigurðsson, “The Christianization of the North Atlantic,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume IV: The Christianization Process, Bibliography, and Index* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1660.

⁵⁸⁰ Definition obtained from the Dictionary of Old Norse Prose website, accessed 13 December 2022.

⁵⁸¹ According to the early twelfth century law code known as *Grágás*, a man who breaks a truce is subject to full outlawry from Norway ‘from one end...to the other’: Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote and Richard Perkins (eds.), *Laws of early Iceland: Grágás. The Codex Regius of Grágás, with material from other manuscripts* vol. I (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1980), 184. Also cf. the Old Gutnish evidence for *grið* and its violation which resulted in the paying of a *wergild*: Stefan Brink, “Ogu *vergildi* and *Välde* in Etelhem, Gotland,” *Myth, Magic, and Memory in Early Scandinavian Narrative Culture* ed. Jürg Glauser and Pernille Hermann in collaboration with Stefan Brink and Joseph Harris (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 341–5.

⁵⁸² The enmity between Loki and the other guests is symbolised in the oppositional pair hall:forest, which symbolises culture and nature respectively. This pair are also crucial parts of the concentric structure of the universe that we find in medieval Norse society. In this structure the hall is located in the centre and is therefore analogous to civilisation or culture whereas the forest (or any other similarly ‘wild’ space) is on the periphery. The forests’ denizens are often portrayed as thieves and murderers (in Iceland an outlaw convicted of greater outlawry was called *skóggsgangsmáðr* – lit. ‘forest-going man’). Loki is no stranger to the forest as we can see from other Old Norse texts: in *Völuspá* 40 his children (presumably the ‘forces of chaos’) are born in *Járnviðr* ‘Iron-wood’ in the east. It is thus associated with universal destruction. In the prose introduction *Frá Ægi oc goðom* Loki is forced into the forest by the gods: *elto hann braut til scógar*. In effect it is a banishment from culture (hall) to nature (forest). After a brief respite though he reverses his journey (*Loki hvarf aprt*). At the end of the poem he leaves a final time and subsequently morphs into a salmon, a comparable transformation from culture (man) to nature (animal).

⁵⁸³ Meulengracht Sørensen, “Loki’s Senna in Ægir’s Hall,” 247: “the purpose of the poem is to demonstrate that the contradiction which Loki represents cannot be over.”

Like the prose passages that frame *Lokasenna* the prose text between stanzas 5 and 6 informs the audience about Loki's physical movements in relation to the hall: *Síðan gecc Loki inn í hollina. Enn er þeir sá, er fyrir vóro, hvern inn var kominn, þognoðo þeir allir* 'Afterwards Loki went into the hall. And when those inside saw who had come in, they all fell silent.'⁵⁸⁴ It also designates a "Szenenwechsel" and in Diego Poli's view a change of 'state' as the gods recognise the intruder.⁵⁸⁵ According to Poli, Loki's presence defiles the hall, bringing with him the poisonous odour of the 'outer world,' i.e., the chaotic forest.⁵⁸⁶ He observes: "Loki finds in his arrogance a substitute to the enactment that leads him in, without being permitted neither by the host nor the doorkeeper, polluting in this way the hall with the germs of the homicide."⁵⁸⁷ Once Loki enters, the mood suddenly drops, signalled in the way the gods all become silent (*þognoðo þeir allir*). John Lindow has drawn attention to the fact that in *Gylfaginning* the gods are denied their usual verbal powers due to the impact of Baldr's death, a major cosmic event, only to regain them once the giantess Hyrrokkin (called *ffalla Hildir* 'Hildir of the mountains' in *Húsdrápa* 11) has released his funeral ship.⁵⁸⁸ The gods' silence here may similarly indicate that Loki's interruption will have far-reaching consequences, as some scholars have argued. But we should also remember that the (in)ability to perform linguistically is an important literary device in Old Norse literature, especially in texts reporting on the pre-Christian age when oral modes of communication were dominant. It is especially poignant when matters of honour were at stake; for men a loss of face in a verbal dispute may have led to accusations of *ergi*. It may be a step too far on Loki's part to accuse the gods of *ergi*, but their silence definitely generates an association with the semantic centre of this concept. Finally, Loki's presence in the hall also suddenly demands a cessation of normal activity (drinking, speech making), just as his absence meant a resumption of these things (*enn þeir fóro at drecca*), marking two clear *Szenenwechseln*.

⁵⁸⁴ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 96; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 80.

⁵⁸⁵ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 399.

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. the modern Swedish term *ovanskogsing* (lit. 'person from the other side of the woods') to mean a "blunt, unwashed, and somewhat backward" individual: see Per Vikstrand, "Ásgarðr, Miðgarðr, and Útgarðr. A linguistic approach to a classical problem," *Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives* Vágar til Midgård 8 ed. Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert and Catharina Raudvere (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2006), 356.

⁵⁸⁷ Diego Poli, "Concord and Discord in the Icelandic Banqueting Hall," *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages* (Spoleto: Presso la sede del Centro studi, 1990), 602.

⁵⁸⁸ John Lindow, "The Tears of the Gods," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* vol. 101 (2002), 162.

sit down at the feast.⁵⁹⁵

One god is replaced by the other, accompanied by contrasting directional movement.⁵⁹⁶ Within this there is the oppositional pair Víðarr:Fenrir. The poet refers to Loki by the circumlocution *úlfs fǫður* ‘father of the wolf,’ a likely reference to Fenrir.⁵⁹⁷ Víðarr famously kills Fenrir at Ragnarøk in revenge for his father’s death, meaning that Óðinn’s son kills Loki’s son. As Meulengracht Sørensen has pointed out Óðinn’s invitation to the *úlfs fǫður* to sit down reminds the audience of the permanent enmity between Loki/the giants and the gods that cannot be overcome despite their blood-brotherhood.⁵⁹⁸ In the prose text between sts 10 and 11 there is more movement, as Víðarr indeed rises from his seat and goes to pour Loki a drink: *Þá stóð Víðarr up oc scenti Loca. Enn áðr hann drycci, qvaddi hann ásona* ‘Then Vidar stood up and poured a drink for Loki, and before he drank, he toasted the Æsir.’⁵⁹⁹ It should be remembered that Víðarr is associated with walking and the death of the wolf (see Chapter one, 49–50). To a degree, these oppositional pairs are emblematic of the poem, which depicts a verbal contest between Loki, who represents destruction/chaos, and the other Æsir, who uphold more mainstream values.⁶⁰⁰ They also reflect the distinction between the different kinds of spaces that Loki, on the one hand, and the Æsir gods, on the other, represent.

After st. 11 we do not encounter any more prose interventions until st. 52, by which time Loki has nearly finished his *senna* with the gods, which leads into the denouement of the

⁵⁹⁵ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 82.

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. the many kennings for Loki in the skaldic poem *Haustlǫng*, including *faðir ulfs* in st. 8: see Judy Quinn, “Fifth-Column Mother: Týr’s Parentage According to *Hymiskviða*,” *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink* ed. Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist and Declan Taggart, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 176. According to Michael J. Enright, “Lady with a Mead-Cup: Ritual, Group Cohesion and Hierarchy in the Germanic Warband,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* vol. 22, no. 1 (1998), 179, sitting does not occur very often in Germanic literature and when it does it speaks to the significance of the occasion. Furthermore, the apportioning of places at a feast conveys an appropriate sign of status and positions corresponding to rank.

⁵⁹⁷ The story about the origin of Fenrir is alluded to in the prose introduction to *Lokasenna* when introducing Týr: *Týr var þar, hann var einhendr. Fenrisúlfr sleit hönd af hánom, þá er hann var bundinn* ‘Tyr was there; he was one-handed, for Fenrir the wolf tore his hand off when he was bound’: Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 96; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 80. For a discussion and summary of this story see Chapter two, 74–5.

⁵⁹⁸ In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* a poetic synonym for a criminal, *vargr* ‘wolf,’ is associated with the forest, the antithesis of the hall, when an enraged Sigrun says to her brother Dagr that he will become a *vargr* | *á viðum úti* ‘wolf | outlaw in the woods’: see Carolyne Larrington, “Sacred Hero, Holy Places: The Eddic Helgi-Tradition,” *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink* ed. Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist and Declan Taggart, (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 164, and Meulengracht Sørensen, “Loki’s Senna in Ægir’s Hall,” 247.

⁵⁹⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 98; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 82.

⁶⁰⁰ Jens Peter Schjødt, “Journeys to Other Worlds in pre-Christian Scandinavian Mythology: Different Worlds – Different Purposes,” *Between the Worlds: Contexts, Sources and Analogues of Scandinavian Otherworld Journeys* ed. Matthias Egeler and Wilhelm Heizmann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), 21.

poem with the arrival of Þórr from the *austrvegir*. In the prose between sts 10 and 11, Víðarr is instructed by his father to give up his place to Loki, with the possibility that the audience is reminded of the hostility between gods and giants, especially by the use of the phrase *úlfs fǫður*.⁶⁰¹ In contrast the prose between sts 52 and 53 is not encoded with a double meaning, largely because of the character performing the action: *Þá gecc Sif fram oc byrtaði Loca í hrímkálki mioð* ‘Then Sif went forward and poured out mead for Loki into a crystal goblet.’⁶⁰² As in the prose text discussed above this statement strikes a conciliatory tone; Sif gets up from her place and offers Loki a drink to show that there is no enmity towards him, as did Víðarr. Similarly, Loki has no qualms about accepting the mead a second time: *Hann tók við horni ok dracc af* ‘He took the horn and drank from it.’⁶⁰³ Unlike st. 10, however, the preceding stanza does not contain a polemical circumlocution (*úlfs fǫður*), nor is it followed by an aggressive outburst (albeit one provoked by Loki himself – cf. sts 13–14). In fact, Sif’s message to Loki in st. 53 attempts to absolve her from any wrongdoing:

*heldr þú hana eina látir með ása sonom
vammlausa vera.*⁶⁰⁴

‘You should rather admit, of the Æsir’s children,
that Sif alone is blameless.’⁶⁰⁵

Thus we can see that the language in these prose interpolations is straightforward and direct (‘Sif went forward,’ etc.) in its presentation of space and movement, in comparison to the verse which is polyvalent.⁶⁰⁶ This is also true of the prose interpolations in *Scírnismál* and *Vǫlundarkviða* – the two other mythological eddic poems that have prose inserted directly into the text (as contrasted with a prose colophon). However, given the adjoining dialogue the earlier prose appears to be a more disingenuous attempt at appeasement than the latter examples.

⁶⁰¹ This kind of intense interpersonal interaction is also the focus of a recent study of *Scírnismál* by Harriet Soper, “Dramatic Implications of Echoed Speech in *Skírnismál*,” *Old Norse Poetry in Performance* ed. Brian McMahon and Annemari Ferreira (London: Routledge, 2022), 95–6, who uses modern performance theories to contextualise the poem.

⁶⁰² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 107; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 89.

⁶⁰³ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 107; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 90.

⁶⁰⁴ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 107.

⁶⁰⁵ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 89.

⁶⁰⁶ In Philip N. Anderson’s view, “Form and Content in *Lokasenna*: A Re-evaluation,” *The Poetic Edda: Essays on Old Norse Mythology* ed. Paul Acker and Carolyne Larrington (Routledge: Milton Park, 2002), 235, Sif is less concerned with “preserving the sanctity of the hall” than in saving her own reputation. Moreover, Þórr’s absence from the hall makes her particularly vulnerable.

Þórr's arrival

In st. 55 Beyla informs Loki (and us) that Þórr is coming:

Fioll ǫll sciálfa, hygg ec á for vera
heiman Hlórriða;
hann ræðr ró, þeim er rægir hér
*goð ǫll oc guma.*⁶⁰⁷

‘All the mountain-range shakes; I think Thor must be
on his way from home;
he’ll bring peace to the one who badmouths here
all the gods and men.’⁶⁰⁸

Þórr’s arrival at the banquet is signalled by the shaking of all the mountains,⁶⁰⁹ a literary motif that often accompanies his journeys.⁶¹⁰ Thus as Þórr moves through space he shakes it. The geological disturbances that occur in *Lokasenna* 55 and *Þrymskviða* 21 are clearly meant to evoke Þórr’s power and relationship to nature; in these poems he seems to almost have a mastery over it. However, in *Hárbarðsljóð*, he finds himself at the mercy of nature, stuck on the shore of a sound on his way to *Óðins landa*. Nor in *Hárbarðsljóð* do we see the same kind of geological disturbances (see Chapter one, 31, and Chapter three, 144–46) accompanying his journey in *Þrymskviða*, *Grottasöngur* ‘The Song of Grotti,’ *Scírnismál* or *Þórsdrápa*. We can also compare st. 55 with the onset of Ragnarök in *Völuspá* 45–54, in which the *völva* has a kind of apocalyptic vision of the dismantling of the entirety of physical space; for example, *Völuspá* 50 *griótbiörg gnata* ‘rocky cliffs clash together’ and *enn himinn klofnar* ‘and the sky splits apart.’ We could therefore posit that Þórr’s journeys, as described in *Lokasenna* and other poems, have a cosmic spatial significance comparable to the destructiveness of Ragnarök.⁶¹¹ In *Þrymskviða* Þórr’s missing hammer presents a real crisis to

⁶⁰⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 107.

⁶⁰⁸ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 90.

⁶⁰⁹ Anderson, “Form and Content in *Lokasenna*,” 235, claims that the poet has used Loki’s magic to “conjure Þórr into Loki’s presence,” but I cannot find any evidence that this is case. Loki does, however, break the guest-host relationship by accepting the drink from Sif but continuing to insult his fellow guests.

⁶¹⁰ Cf. Þórr’s journey to Giantland with Loki in *Þrymskviða* 21, *biörg brotnoðo, brann iorð loga* ‘the mountains split asunder, the earth flamed with fire,’ and Þórr’s journey to fight the giant Hrungnir in *Haustlǫng* 14–16: see Margaret Clunies Ross, “Þjóðólfr ór Hvini, *Haustlǫng*” *Poetry on Treatises on Poetics* Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages III ed. Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 453–7.

⁶¹¹ This is certainly the view of Lars Lönnroth, “*Iorð fannz æva né upphiminn*: A Formula Analysis,” *Speculum Norro-neum: In Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre* ed. Ursula Dronke et al. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), 322, who has examined several similar formulations, all based around the *iorð/upphiminn* formula, in Old Norse, Old English and Old High German, and links them to a common poetic usage. In his view, the one who has arrived (Þórr, Surtr) “should imply a threat to the natural order and ultimately the complete destruction of the world (Ragnarök, Judgement Day).”

the gods; similarly, in *Lokasenna*, it is only his arrival that causes Loki to cease his diatribe against the gods, who, up to this point, have been held in thrall. Beyla says that Þórr is ‘on his way from home,’ which appears to contradict *Frá Ægi oc goðom*, in which he is said to be *í austrvegi* ‘in the east.’ It is possibly implied that we are meant to presume that in the interim Þórr has returned home from his eastern journey and thence made his way to Ægir’s. These are instances of the kinds of movement and association with spatial realms that Þórr demonstrates in many other mythical texts (see Chapter one, 29–41).

Flying and shaking

In st. 50 Loki alludes to one of the most important of the Norse myths, the theft of Iðunn and the death of Þjazi:

fyrstr oc øfstr var ec at fiurlagi,
*þá er ér á Þiaza þrifom*⁶¹²
 ‘first and foremost I was at the killing
 when we seized Thiazi.’⁶¹³

This myth, which is related in some of the early stanzas of *Haustlǫng* ‘Autumn-long’ and *Skáldskaparmál* chs 56–7, has Loki adopt a *valshamr* so that he may recover Iðunn and fly safely back to Ásgarðr from Þjazi’s realm. Loki also flies in the eddic poem *Þrymskviða* and the by-name Loptr ‘sky’ directly associates him with this realm.⁶¹⁴ The ability to fly is an uncommon gift, even among gods and giants. Hrungrnir, for example, said to be the strongest of giants, travels on a horse. Þjazi is thus a figure of unusual power and his death has significant consequences. While Loki is clearly able to move dynamically he just as readily loses control and ends up at the mercy of a powerful being, which is what happens in this myth (see Chapter one, 25–8).⁶¹⁵ Loki is quarrelling with the giantess Skaði, daughter of Þjazi; both characters are linked by giant heritage.⁶¹⁶ Since Þjazi is a very powerful giant it is perhaps odd that Loki would boast of being ‘foremost’ at his killing when he no doubt would

⁶¹² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 106.

⁶¹³ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 89.

⁶¹⁴ Cf. the story of the origin of the gods’ greatest treasures in *Skáldskaparmál* in which Loki transforms himself into an insect that can fly, and *Sǫrla þáttur* ch. 2 where Loki turns himself into a flea or fly.

⁶¹⁵ A further contradiction, or perhaps irony, in Loki’s character is the way in which he is captured by the Æsir for killing Baldr: Kvasir sees the burnt traces of his net and surmises that Loki has morphed into a salmon. In this way, Loki becomes the “victim of his own invention”: de Vries, *The Problem of Loki*, 153. Also, Loki’s stream of invectives in *Lokasenna*, and glibness with words in general, can be contrasted with his punishment by Brokkr, who sews Loki’s lips shut.

⁶¹⁶ Meulengracht Sørensen, “Loki’s Senna in Ægir’s Hall,” 248, suggests that Loki’s provocation of Skaði may be an attempt to initiate a breach between her and her assimilated family, which would have cosmic consequences.

have been a useful ally, especially given his flying abilities. Loki's attitude towards Þjazi shows his ambivalence towards both the races he is descended from, gods and giants, which suggests that perhaps it is the gods themselves, in their heavy-handed punishment, who push him into the adversarial role he plays at Ragnarøk. Indeed, we know that Loki often did things for his own enjoyment, *at skemta sér*, flying included.

In the prose frame of *Lokasenna* Loki is associated with two instances of 'shaking' that recall one another.⁶¹⁷ Firstly, the gods shake their shields at Loki in outrage over the murder of Fimafengr: *scóco æsir scioldo sína oc oþþo at Loca, oc elto hann braut til scógar*⁶¹⁸ 'then the Æsir shook their shields and shrieked at Loki and chased him out to the woods.'⁶¹⁹ This action seems innocuous at first and may simply evoke the repartee that often took place in the moments before a battle (cf. *berserkir* biting their shields in anxious anticipation),⁶²⁰ but it also destroys the *grið* of the feast and precipitates the quarrel, giving the action cosmic implications.⁶²¹ At the same time Loki is himself associated with the action of shaking, namely when he is bound by the gods and writhes in pain when poison drips on his face, as recounted in *Frá Loka*, the rubric that precedes the prose colophon to *Lokasenna*, as well as occurring in *Gylfaginning*.⁶²² *Frá Loka* describes this: *kiptiz hann svá hart við, at þaðan af scialfiorð qll* 'then he writhed so violently at this that all the earth shook from it.' The

⁶¹⁷ See Declan Taggart, *How Thor Lost His Thunder: The Changing Faces of an Old Norse God* (London: Routledge, 2017), 75–8, for a discussion of the motif of shaking in Old Norse myth, especially as it relates to the conceptual ecosystems of Scandinavia and Iceland.

⁶¹⁸ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 390, see a contradiction between *elto hann braut til scógar* in *Frá Ægi* and st. 6 *Þrystr ec kom þessar hallar til | Loptr, um langan veg*. Is it because of the absence of the word 'forest'? I see no reason why we cannot supply this ourselves nor why it cannot be located 'far away.' Alternatively, Loki may also be lying about where he has come from, as I suggest below.

⁶¹⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 96; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 80. Cf. fragment 27h1 of the Oseberg tapestry, which seems to depict soldiers holding 'wavy' spears, which Nicolai Lanz, *The Enigma of the Horned Figure. Horned Figures in Pre-Christian Germanic Societies of the Younger Iron Age* (Unpublished MA thesis: University of Iceland, 2021), suggests may represent the act of shaking them: see Neil Price, "Performing the Viking Age: From Edda to Oseberg," *The Wild Hunt for Numinous Knowledge. Perspectives on and from the Study of Religions in Honour of Jens Peter Schjødt* ed. Karen Bek-Pedersen, Sophie Bønding, Luke John Murphy, Simon Nygaard and Morten Warmind (*Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* (Special Issue) 74, 2022), 79.

⁶²⁰ For a discussion of several instances of warriors shaking, and performing dance- or war-rituals associated with shaking, see Andreas Nordberg, "What Did King Hákon góði Do before the Battle of Fitjar and after the Battle of Avaldsnes?," *The Wild Hunt for Numinous Knowledge. Perspectives on and from the Study of Religions in Honour of Jens Peter Schjødt* ed. Karen Bek-Pedersen, Sophie Bønding, Luke John Murphy, Simon Nygaard and Morten Warmind (*Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* (Special Issue) 74, 2022), 123–8.

⁶²¹ In his article on *Lokasenna*, "The Prose-Frame of *Lokasenna*," 204–14, van Hamel questions whether Fimafengr's murder would have really caused the gods to expel Loki from the hall; he proposes that the prose pieces, which recount Fimafengr's death, represent a variant which the redactor has combined with the stanzas in *Lokasenna*.

⁶²² Anna Birgitta Rooth, *Loki in Scandinavian Mythology* (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerups Förlag, 1961), 47, relates Loki's shaking (caused by a serpent) with the punishment of Prometheus in Greek myth, in which an eagle pecks at Prometheus's liver also causing him to writhe in pain.

etiological detail that Loki's shaking is the origin of earthquakes, which is found in both sources, associates him with elemental forces. It also calls to mind the other instances of the earth shaking in Norse myth which often seem to be eschatological or cosmic in some way. The most obvious parallel is the eschatological section of *Vǫluspá* in which the earth is engulfed in a maelstrom of chaotic natural disasters (floods and darkening of the sky). But it is equally apparent when Þórr's hammer is stolen in *Þrymskviða* where his journey to Giantland to retrieve it is accompanied by the cosmic shattering of mountains and flame-scorched earth. Moreover, Loki's shaking also alludes to the anthropogony and cosmogony in the displacement of the earth's physical structure. Loki's successful breaking of his bonds and subsequent role at Ragnarøk suggests that an incipient power lay behind the shaking; indeed, Loki's son Fenrir is also bound by the gods but breaks free to play a major role in the earth's destruction, so the strategy of binding ultimately fails. Thus the action of shaking seems to be an important part of Loki's character and his powers of movement, but shaking can also be associated with Þórr who shakes space as he walks or drives through it (see p. 143–4, above). However, Þórr's shaking has a different effect to that of Loki's. Loki's shaking destabilises space, creating a disorientation, hence the association with earthquakes which similarly destabilise physical space.

Inside/outside

The confrontation between Loki and the other gods takes place *Ægis hallir í* but halls generally in Old Norse society were important because of their connection to religion and politics as well as for social reasons. The sacrosanct nature of the hall in *Lokasenna* is emphasised by its status as *griðastaðr mikill* 'a great place of peace,' a term which implies a truce or peace albeit one limited by time and space.⁶²³ Due to a concentrically structured view of the world spaces that lay outside the immediate surrounds of the hall, farm or *bú*, were more exempt from legal and moral obligations and thus considered 'wild' or close to nature.⁶²⁴ We see this distinction applied especially to spaces that were unfit for human habitation, such as forests, swamps and mountains. The distinction between these vastly

⁶²³ Richard Cleasby and Gudbrand Vigfusson, *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 215.

⁶²⁴ Bertil Nilsson, "Sacredness Lost: On the Variable Status of Churches in the Middle Ages," *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink* ed. Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist, and Declan Taggart (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 123, has shown in a very different context, that of the provincial laws of medieval Sweden, that crimes committed in different parts of the church required different kinds of recompense, with the worst offences occurring in the area near the altar. According to Nilsson, p. 134, the "zones of peace" did not exist in western canon law or episcopal liturgies of consecration, which are typical of the thirteenth-century Hälsinge law, for example.

different spaces is often reflected in the tussle between acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour. In the following I shall analyse the semantics of the terms ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ as they pertain to certain aspects of the hall in *Lokasenna* and the impact on the characters within.

Loki

Loki’s punishment, alluded to in st. 49 and given full expression in *Frá Loka*, is a clear example of an act that is permissible in one space (wilderness) but not in the other (hall). *Lokasenna* is one of the two most detailed sources for information about Loki’s punishment, the other being *Snorra Edda*. The salient points are: (a) Loki in salmon-form is captured by the Æsir in a place called Fránangrsfors,⁶²⁵ (b) Skaði ties him to a rock with the guts of his son Nari/Narfi, (c) poison drips into a bowl held by Sigyn but when she empties it Loki writhes in agony. Though not mentioned in *Frá Loka* we can look to the *Gylfaginning* section of Snorri’s *Edda* to locate Fránangrsfors (‘Fránangr’s waterfall’) in a chthonic or liminal landscape. Fránangrsfors is described in *Gylfaginning* as *griðalauss* ‘peaceless’ which is in contradistinction to Ægir’s hall, repeatedly labelled throughout *Lokasenna* as *griðastaðr mikill*. Spaces that can be characterised as ‘peaceless’ are coterminous with the wilderness in the Norse hierarchy of space. We can also infer that since *Gylfaginning* 50 describes Loki building a house with four doors *í fjalli nokkvoru* ‘in a certain mountain’ immediately before the appearance of Fránangrsfors that the latter likely lay in the same mountainous region. Mountains especially are associated with spatial realms inhabited by giants and trolls (cf. the mountain Hnitbjörg in which dwelt the giantess Gunnlōð who guards the mead of poetry) and the action of travel across difficult physical landscapes.

In keeping with the chthonic/liminal nature of Fránangrsfors and Loki’s house outlined above Skaði ties him to three *hellur* ‘flat stones, slabs of rock.’ Moreover, the encounter takes

⁶²⁵ In st. 31 Freyja warns Loki that he will go home *hryggr* ‘sad, discomforted’: *hryggr muntu heim fara* ‘you’ll go home discomforted.’ It seems possible that this is a reference to the punishment that awaits him, as it is reported in *Frá Loka* and Snorri’s *Edda*. The nature of Loki’s punishment, however, is not adequately conveyed by the semantic range of *hryggr*, in my opinion. Nor should Fránangrsfors be regarded as Loki’s ‘home’ if we are to take Freyja literally. Loki’s home is hard to locate in the myths. Clearly, he spends some time with the gods at Ásgarðr, but he is also a being who belongs both with the gods and the race of giants, so, in a sense, Giantland is also his home. According to *Völuspá* 48, Loki steers the ships carrying Muspell’s troops (a giant being associated with fire, but in *Gylfaginning* 4 Muspell is a ‘southern region’) that come to destroy the world, so we can say that Loki deliberately chooses his giant kin over the gods at Ragnarøk. It is therefore the gods who are more likely to go home *hryggr* since the confrontation in *Lokasenna* seems to represent an irreparable fracture between Loki and the other Æsir that leads to the final destruction.

place in a *hellir* ‘cave, cavern.’ Rocks and caves are objectively part of nature and function in opposition to Ægir’s hall and the benches therein, which are representative or even metonymic of the Æsir’s cultural practices. Loki’s punishment is not permissible in the hall as it would have violated the *gríðastaðr mikill* as well as more general notions of conduct and behaviour in a sacred/central space. When Loki is tied to the slab with his son’s innards it is not the only time he experiences being bound; there are several other myths where he (and consequently his freedom of movement) is bound or restricted in some way.⁶²⁶ For example, in the myth that explains the origins of the Æsir’s immortality Loki is captured by Þjazi with a pole or staff. Also, in *Skáldskaparmál* on his visit to Geirrøðargarðar he is locked in a chest for three months until he acquiesces in bringing Þórr to Geirrøðr. In these instances, the engineer of Loki’s stasis is a giant. This is also true of *Lokasenna* where Skaði is said to be responsible (Skaði had earlier threatened Loki with *köld ráð* ‘cold counsel’ from her halls for his part in the death of Þjazi); thus both father and daughter are responsible for binding and/or restricting Loki in some way. The restriction of Loki’s movement and association with confined spaces can be compared with the freedom of movement he displays in other myths, usually in the form of an animal, such as a salmon or a hawk (discussed above).

St. 49 also refers to the punishment meted out on Loki and his association with binding and confined spaces, given full expression in *Frá Loka* and Snorri’s *Edda* (discussed above). This stanza is put into the mouth of Skaði:

Létt er þér, Loki, munattu lengi svá

⁶²⁶ The binding of the wolf and Loki’s son Fenrir is mentioned in st. 39 when Týr points out his involvement in the binding and adds ‘it’s not pleasant for the wolf, who must in shackles wait for the twilight of the gods.’ Loki’s son Fenrir is one of the ‘forces of chaos,’ beings who are associated with nature and who are beyond the control of the gods. Týr emphasises the agony endured by Fenrir *úlfgi hefir oc vel* ‘it is not pleasant for the wolf,’ so it is clearly meant to be a punishment of some sort. Though a shadowy figure, Týr himself has been described as a god of contracts or oaths, which entail a bond between two individuals. At the same time, however, he is also the ‘breaker of bonds’ in the sense that he tricked Fenrir with a false oath. It seems logical that the words in st. 39 were deliberately put in the mouth of Týr because of his own association with binding and the role he performs in the binding of Loki’s dangerous son. A little later in st. 58 Loki reminds Þórr of Fenrir’s final destructive act at Ragnarök: that he will swallow Óðinn, which I argue is analogous to binding or putting something/one in a position of stasis. This myth is also known from *Gylfaginning* 51 where Snorri says *svelga hann allan Sigföður* ‘he [will] swallow Odin all up.’ Fenrir is himself famously bound at the behest of the Æsir when very young – a decision that ultimately backfires as the wolf’s strength grows inordinately as a result. We also see the motif of binding associated with both Loki and Óðinn in different myths. Loki himself is bound or immobilised in several narratives (for instance, on his journey to Þjazi’s kingdom in *Snorra Edda*, not to mention the present poem we are discussing), while Óðinn as well as being bound himself was also thought to be able to stun or frighten his enemies so as to render them inactive – in my view, analogous to binding. For instance, in *Ynglinga saga* 7 Snorri says that Óðinn possesses the power to ‘bind’ those who dwell in earth, mountains, rocks and burial mounds “with mere words” (*ok batt hann með orðum einum þá, er fyrir bjoggu*). Óðinn’s death, or his binding by Fenrir, is thus part of the schema of binding and stasis that can be related to figures and stories in Norse myth: see Chapter one, 27–9, and Chapter two, 68–77.

leica lausom hala
þvíat þic á hiorvi scola ins hrimkalda magar
*gornom binda goð.*⁶²⁷

‘You’re light-hearted, Loki; you won’t for long
 play with your tail wagging free,
 for on a rock-edge, with your ice-cold son’s guts,
 the gods shall bind you.’⁶²⁸

Above I discussed the implications of *hellur* and *hellir*, both of which form a counterpart to the halls. Similarly in this stanza Skaði foresees Loki being tied to a *hjorr* or ‘rock-edge.’⁶²⁹ In keeping with the theme of torture rocks are an appropriately hard surface to be bound to, but they are also part of nature, and are thus chthonic elements. Moreover, rocks are not far from the semantic centre of the giants and Giantland,⁶³⁰ which, as was mentioned, is studded with inhospitable mountain ranges. Instead of flesh some giants have body parts of stone, such as mighty Hrungrnir, while his companion is built from clay. If we also consider the figures involved in st. 49, Loki and Skaði, both of whom have full or partial giant heritage, and the actual punishment, the likelihood of it taking place in Giantland increases.

Regardless of where this space is located certain details from *Lokasenna* and Snorri’s narrative are clearly contrastable with Ægir’s hall in *Lokasenna* as well as with other spaces that have been ‘cultivated’ by the gods, such as the verdant fields described in *Völuspá*. Here activities that invert moral and social conventions, such as torture, murder, etc., present a crisis – compare the gods’ paralysis when Baldr is killed by Höðr which eventually leads to revenge but only when *grið* is no longer in operation.⁶³¹ This is why Loki is allowed to leave Ægir’s halls unscathed in *Lokasenna*, which we know is a *griðastaðr mikill*. Thus the *hjorr* not only adds to Loki’s misery but also establishes a completely necessary parallel to the civilised spaces of the gods in which atrocities become permissible. And Loki is not the only victim as the ice-cold guts (*hrimkalda magar gornon*) (*hrim* ‘ice’ also puts one in mind of

⁶²⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 106.

⁶²⁸ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 89.

⁶²⁹ This word usually means ‘sword’ in poetry.

⁶³⁰ Cf. the giant-kenning *byrgi-Týr bjarga* ‘the enclosing-Týr of mountains’ from *Haustlög* 2, which refers to the giant Þjazi. Margaret Clunies Ross, “Style and Authorial Presence in Skaldic Mythological Poetry,” *Saga-Book* vol. 20 (1978–81), 296, points out that not only does this kenning stem from the common idea that giants inhabited rocks and mountains, it also, she suggests, reveals Þjazi’s intention to enclose the goddess Iðunn “in a rocky fastness.”

⁶³¹ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 389, have pointed out that a similar *griðastaðr* was in place when Fenrir was born, hence why the gods could not kill him on the spot.

Giantland as well as the cosmogony) of his son Narfi become the cordage with which he is bound. The final image of Loki's shaking that creates the phenomena of earthquakes to appear in the world also seems to have a causal relationship with Giantland and Ragnarøk.

In *Lokasenna* Loki trespasses into the greatest microcosmic symbol of society, the hall. His mission, as I explain elsewhere, is to import chaos into this space or as he says himself: 'mix their mead with malice.'⁶³² Loki channels this malice from his own person but he also 'brings' it with him from the outside, specifically the forest, which has an antithetical rivalry with the hall. Loki is portrayed as a powerful figure in *Lokasenna*, despite being alone, partly due to the effect of the above sentiment which the gods have no answer to. However, in the penultimate stanza of the poem we see the limit of this power and possibly a degree of fear as well. Before the other Æsir he more or less speaks with impunity but when Þórr arrives he is confronted with a different kind of adversary. Unlike the other gods Þórr has a reputation not just for strength (shared by his children as well as Ullr) but for damaging physical force: *enn fyr þér einom | mun ec út ganga, | þvíat ec veit, at þú vegr* 'but for you alone I shall go out, for I know that you do strike.'⁶³³ He also has a fiery temper which can usually only be quelled by a destructive act, namely killing. In a one-on-one encounter Þórr would be the obvious favourite, so when he appears Loki's departure is imminent. But it already seems that Loki's attempt to 'mix their mead with malice' has succeeded: he has contaminated the halls, the cultural zenith of the Æsir, not only with his wicked words but by goading the Æsir into following suit.⁶³⁴ The refrains in sts 57, 59, 61 and 63 that 'Mjöllnir will deprive you of speech' echoes this concern that harsh words are metaphorically causing the foundations of the hall to collapse. Moreover, Þórr's enumerated threats of violence towards Loki, while necessary, contribute to the hall's debasement. When he is finally chased out the gods are safe again but as we know it is only temporary. Thus when Loki has the power to move freely through space, he makes trouble with space and its normal boundaries and definitions. This often results in his being bound or restricted in some way, but it is not a long-term solution, and his punishment and subsequent writhing and destabilisation of space at the end of *Lokasenna* foreshadows Ragnarøk where all physical space is ultimately destroyed.

⁶³² In Poli's opinion, "Concord and Discord," 602, Loki attempts to impose the limits of the "outer world," of which he is a representative, onto the "inner world," in *Lokasenna*, that is the civilised drinking-hall.

⁶³³ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 109; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 91.

⁶³⁴ Meulengracht Sørensen, "Loki's Senna in Ægir's Hall," 256.

Bragi

Bragi is the god of poetry and performance, described as ‘best of poets’ in *Grímnismál* 44 in a list of ‘bests.’ He is very much associated with the hall and feasting, perhaps most notably in the frame to *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri’s treatise on poetic diction, in which Bragi narrates several famous tales to Ægir at a feast for the Æsir. He also appears in the skaldic poems *Hákonarmál* and *Eiríksmál* where he welcomes certain warriors to Valhöll, as well as in various other sources. He is therefore closely associated with drinking and the etiquette of hospitality as well as the performance of poetry.⁶³⁵

Bragi responds to Loki’s accusation of cowardice in st. 14 with literal reference to the antithetical pair outside:inside. As we have seen above, this pair can be applied with great effect to Loki whose primary goal is to introduce the chaos that originates in the outside or wilderness into the social space of the hall (cf. ‘mix their mead with malice’), a space associated with “unverletzlichen Friedens.”⁶³⁶ Whether he is successful in this venture or not his actions can be perceived as tabu and thus deserving of condemnation. As in Chapter three wild spaces, such as the forest or a *sund*, appear to enable contentious words or conversations, which would otherwise be banned in a space of civilisation like the hall. At least initially the gods appear rather timid (cf. their surprise at Loki’s entry in st. 6). Bragi’s replies, though somewhat sententious, reflect the convention that forbids violence in the hall. The difference between the two spaces is precisely spelled out: *ef fyr útan værac, | svá sem fyr innan emc* ‘if I was outside, as I am now inside.’⁶³⁷ It is outside the hall, Bragi intimates, that violence would ensue between them (*hofuð þitt | bæra ec í hendi mér* ‘your head I’d be holding in my hand’).⁶³⁸ There is a degree of inflexibility behind these words that contrasts with the way Loki is able to slip back and forth between the hall and forest eluding the guard at the door and now appearing before the stunned audience. Bragi’s adherence to the ‘rules’ tells us that he is firmly part of the conventional Æsir society; unlike Loki he sits at the feast with the other gods and thus can only offer a hypothetical challenge (which Loki does not take seriously anyway). In his disregard for the ‘rules’ of the hall Loki becomes an

⁶³⁵ According to Ursula Dronke (ed.), *The Poetic Edda, Volume II: Mythological Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997), 357, Bragi is chosen as the one who refuses Loki a place at the banquet, since he performs a similar role in *Hákonarmál* albeit in a more welcoming way: *Einherja grið | skalt þú allra hafa | Þigg hafa þú at ósum ó!* ‘From all the champions you shall have a pledge of peace – accept from the Æsir their ale!’: Dronke’s translation.

⁶³⁶ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 409.

⁶³⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 99; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 83.

⁶³⁸ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 99; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 83.

antithetical figure, and figuratively very much stands outside even when he is physically inside.

In st. 11 Loki praises all the gods except Bragi:⁶³⁹

Heilir æsir, heilar ásynior
oc þll ginnheilög goð!
nema sá einn áss, er innar sitr,
*Bragi, becciom á.*⁶⁴⁰

‘Hail to the Æsir, hail to the Asynior,
and all the most sacred gods!
-except for that one god, who sits further in,
Bragi, on the benches.’⁶⁴¹

He refers to Bragi’s place at the feast, *er innar sitr*, a space which lies concentrically closer to the centre thus commanding greater honour. Loki’s seat, made available to him by Víðarr, is plausibly imagined to be on the outer benches.⁶⁴² Little is known of Víðarr but he is called *hinn þogli áss* ‘the silent god,’ an obscure epithet which might deny him as central a spot at the feast as the god of poetry (see Chapter one, 42–5). This relative hierarchy of space in the hall would explain the focus of Loki’s invectives to Bragi: *sniallr ertu í sessi* ‘Clever are you in your seat’ and the *hapax legomenon beccscrautuðr* ‘bench ornament’ clearly evoke the idea of stasis or immobility. Both insults, which contain hints of *ergi*, imply that Bragi is better suited to a life of passive decadence (i.e., drinking, feasting, “nutzlos und feige auf dem Bank herumsitzt”) rather than the warrior he evidently considers himself to be based on in the previous stanza.⁶⁴³ This is because stasis in Old Norse society is generally viewed negatively, its semantic range connoting indolence and passivity, among many other things. At this stage in the poem these are accusations that cannot be directed towards Loki (cf. his movement between forest and hall) though we know from other myths that stasis is part of the general discourse around him.

⁶³⁹ In Söderberg’s view, “Lokasenna - egenheter och ålder,” 28, Bragi is Loki’s direct competitor in terms of linguistic competence, which is why Loki assaults him here directly.

⁶⁴⁰ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 98.

⁶⁴¹ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 82.

⁶⁴² Stephen A. Mitchell, “Framing Old Norse Performance Contexts. The Wedding at Reykjahólar (1119) Revisited,” *Old Norse Poetry in Performance* ed. Brian McMahon and Annemari Ferreira (London: Routledge, 2022), 28–9, maintains that at the wedding at Reykjahólar people were arranged like “books or jars on a shelf being properly sorted,” which describes well the highly artificial nature of seating arrangements in medieval culture.

⁶⁴³ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 411.

Baldr

In st. 27 Óðinn's wife Frigg mentions their son Baldr, who she says, if he were alive, would not tolerate Loki's abuse in Ægir's halls: *Veiztu, ef ec inni ættac | Ægis hǫllom í | Baldri lican bur* 'You know that if I had here in Ægir's hall | a boy like my son Baldr.'⁶⁴⁴ As some scholars have noticed, this stanza shows that the events of *Lokasenna* take place in the time after Baldr's death, i.e., when the gods become aware of their own mortality. The adverbs *inni* 'inside, in the house' and *út* 'out, outside the house' are deployed in a significant way.⁶⁴⁵ Frigg uses *inni* to refer to the space inside Ægir's halls, specifically where Baldr would have been together with the other gods. As has been mentioned, Ægir's halls in *Lokasenna* are a *gríðastaðr mikill*, which Loki has entered and violated. He is thus antithetical to the 'inside-ness' of the hall. The concept of being 'in' or 'inside' was important in medieval Norse society as it denoted being in the 'centre' of the concentric worldview. In st. 27/3 Frigg says that *út þú né kvomir | frá ása sonom* 'you wouldn't get away from the Æsir's sons,'⁶⁴⁶ meaning that he would not be able to flee from Baldr, so in that sense Loki would remain at the centre, though perhaps as a prisoner.⁶⁴⁷ But *út* is what Loki naturally gravitates towards (cf. his affiliation with the 'outside,' i.e., the forest, Giantland, the forces of chaos), which has negative associations within the Norse worldview.

Despite Frigg's motherly assertion that her dead son would be by her side we also know that Baldr is sent to Hel which is concentrically antithetical to the gods' realms, so Baldr is himself more or less directly associated with liminality as well as centrality. In st. 28 Loki says to Frigg *er þú riða sérat | síðan Baldr at sǫlom* 'you will never again | see Baldr ride to the halls.'⁶⁴⁸ For context we must rely on *Snorra Edda*, in which we learn that Baldr is killed and sent to Hel, a subterranean realm.⁶⁴⁹ Although it is not explicitly stated, we can

⁶⁴⁴ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 102; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 85.

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. the adverb *inni* 'inside, in the house' as well as several compound nouns such as *inni-hús* 'dwelling-house' and *innan-garðs* 'inside the fence, wall': Cleasby and Vigfusson, *Icelandic-English Dictionary*, 315.

⁶⁴⁶ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 102; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 85.

⁶⁴⁷ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 439, suggest that Frigg only learns of Baldr's true murderer during this verse.

⁶⁴⁸ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 102; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 85.

⁶⁴⁹ A causal connection between Loki and Baldr's death can be gleaned from *Vǫluspá* 32 in which the motif of Hǫðr's slaying of Baldr is followed by the bound Loki, which suggests to von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 442, that Loki may have been the instigator. Eugen Mogk, *Novellistische Darstellung mythologischer Stoffe Snorris und seiner Schule* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1923), 12, rejects such an interpretation on the grounds that *Lokasenna* 28 refers not to Baldr's killing, but to the giantess Þökk, who prevented Baldr's return from Hel. It is clear, in any case, that Loki is responsible for Baldr's absence at the feast. A full discussion is in von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 442–3.

establish that conceptually Hel lies on a remote concentric ring while the halls are at the centre of the same worldview. Thus Hel, which is *út*, is the opposite of the *salir* in the ‘upper world,’ which are *inni*. We also know from this source that Baldr is killed by his brother Höðr but it is Loki who guides the hand of the blind god. Loki also disguised himself as the giantess Þökk, the only being that would not weep for Baldr thus making his stay in Hel permanent (at least in a kind of ante-diluvian sense as he does ‘return’ after Ragnarök). Thus Loki’s involvement in Baldr’s death and subsequent absence at the banquet is considerable. Ultimately, Baldr remains in Hel, which is fixed and analogous to chaos. Frigg is understandably anxious as Baldr is the best and wisest (cf. the fact that after his death all the gods weep, an unusual phenomenon in the Icelandic tradition) and the fate of the gods is writ large in his destiny.⁶⁵⁰

‘Words of blame’

The word *lastastofum* (nom. pl. *lastastafir* ‘words of blame’) appears in st. 16 in conjunction with the phrase *Ægis hóllo í* ‘in Ægir’s hall,’ as it does in st. 10. In that stanza it is put in the mouth of Óðinn, who is speaking to Víðarr about Loki (‘lest he [Loki] speak words of blame to us in Ægir’s hall’). In this instance, Iðunn is upbraiding Bragi for using *lastastafir* against Loki. The common element in both utterances is *Ægis hóllo í*. The hall is the social space where certain rules are observed; in *Lokasenna* we are told explicitly that there is a ‘great peace’ over Ægir’s hall. In st. 10 Óðinn’s wish to avoid *lastastafir* being used against the gods behoves him to arrange a place for Loki at the feast. In st. 16 Bragi is accused of using *lastastafir* against Loki, which would seem to violate the *gríðastaðr mikill* associated with the hall’s space. It is notable that after this stanza, while various attempts are made to placate Loki, mainly by the female deities, allusions to his dubious behaviour and other slanders are brought against him by the male gods. So, in some ways Loki’s plan to ‘mix their mead with malice’ – i.e., to contaminate the halls with chaos and *lastastafir* - has succeeded, as it causes the Æsir to forget the ‘great peace’ they seek to uphold in the early part of the poem.

St. 18 concludes the small sequence in which the word *lastastafir* together with the formula *Ægis hóllo í* are used, following sts 10 and 16. It is interesting to note that each instance of the word *lastastafir* is expressed through a different grammatical person: first

⁶⁵⁰ John Lindow, “Baldr,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings* ed. John Lindow, Jens Peter Schjødt and Anders Andréén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1316n15.

person (st. 18), second person (st. 16) and third person (st. 10).⁶⁵¹ They are also expressed in different rhetorical ways: in st. 10 the potential for *lastastafir* is there, but it has not yet occurred; in st. 16 Iðunn considers Bragi’s reply to Loki in st. 14 as *lastastafir*; in st. 18 Iðunn proclaims that what she is not doing is using *lastastafir* against Loki. The point of the *lastastafir*-sequence is to show that there is an element of ambiguity in how the *senna* arises. While it is probable that Loki intends to cause strife among the Æsir, the gods themselves are not blameless, demonstrated by Bragi’s hot-headed reply in st. 14. The question of blame is an especially pertinent one because the exchange takes place *Ægis hǫllo í* ‘in Ægir’s hall,’ which is a *griðastaðr mikill*, a space in which words of conflict are not allowed. Óðinn’s and Iðunn’s attempts to propitiate Loki suggest an acknowledgement of his potentially chaotic nature, but Loki continues with his diatribe against the gods, almost as if Bragi’s threats have given him licence to do so.

Gefion’s question (*Hví iþ æsir tveir | scolod inni hér | sáryrðom sacaz?* ‘Why should you two Æsir in here | fight with wounding words’) in st. 19 uses the word *sáryrðom* (nom. pl. *sár-yrði*), which has a very similar meaning to *lastastafir* (but with more of an emphasis on the wounding nature of insults).⁶⁵² It is also accompanied by a signposting of space, *inni hér* ‘in here.’ It is not quite clear who *iþ æsir tveir* ‘you two Æsir’ are, but probably Loki and Bragi, since Bragi can be accused of using *lastastafir/sár-yrði* much more readily than Iðunn (the speaker of the previous stanza).⁶⁵³ If Bragi is one of the referents, it can be confirmed that both he and Loki have contravened the rules of Ægir’s hall as a *griðastaðr mikill*, unburdening Loki of some of the offence.⁶⁵⁴ To some extent, the gods are not wholly virtuous beings themselves, living as they do under a system of ‘negative reciprocity’⁶⁵⁵ with their neighbours the giants (to whom they are genetically related) but also demonstrated here by Bragi.⁶⁵⁶ The gods’ guilt may be echoed in the post-Ragnarøk world when only the so-called

⁶⁵¹ Anderson, “Form and Content in *Lokasenna*: A Re-evaluation,” 231, has pointed out that Iðunn uses *lastastafir* first in relation to her husband and then herself.

⁶⁵² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 100; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 84.

⁶⁵³ Based on the structure of *Lokasenna* we would expect Gefion to name the speaker of the previous stanza in her ‘A strophe’: cf. Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia*, 242–3 and n207.

⁶⁵⁴ According to Annette Lassen, *Odin på kristent pergament*, 367, the poem “fremhæves negative sider ved guderne.” In Lassen’s analysis of *Lokasenna*, pp. 366–71, she concludes that the poem was likely composed by a Christian pretending to be pagan in order to show that the old Scandinavians had already become doubtful of their religion, echoing classical works such as *Lactanti Divinae institutiones* and *Passio sancti Clementis*.

⁶⁵⁵ Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes I*.

⁶⁵⁶ See Margaret Clunies Ross, “Giants,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1530–5: also cf. *Gylfaginning*, chs 10–11.

‘innocents’ are reincarnated, such as children of the Æsir or those gods that die before Ragnarøk.

Ása oc álfa

St. 13 presents the second instance of the formula *ása oc álfa* ‘of the gods and the elves’ in *Lokasenna*,⁶⁵⁷ which appears commonly enough throughout other eddic poems as well (cf. *Hávamál* 159–60, *Grímnismál* 4 and *Scírnismál* 7).⁶⁵⁸ The *Lokasenna* poet says that the gods and elves *hér inni ero* ‘are in here,’ a clear reference to the space ‘inside, in the hall.’ As we saw from Loki’s banishment, the area outside the hall leads to the forest which is antithetical to civilisation, a distinction that can be supported by the mere fact that Loki is sent there but also via certain Old Norse legal terms that associate the forest with outlaws (cf. *skóggangsmaðr/søk*).⁶⁵⁹ For the elves to be ‘inside’ the hall with the gods is suggestive of parallel cultural interests, though such a connection is not anywhere actualised. Some scholars link the elves with the Vanir, a distinct group of deities that settle among the Æsir after the first war in the world.⁶⁶⁰ Nevertheless, in eddic poetry elves are portrayed as beings in their own right, though their exact function and status is unclear (see Chapter two, 83–7).⁶⁶¹

In *Snorra Edda* we get more: there are two races of elves, light and dark, the latter hailing from a subterranean abode and being in most respects the binary opposites of their paler kin. Snorri credits the dark elves with creating magical items for the gods, so even the kind of elves that for all intents and purposes represent antithetical characteristics could behave benevolently towards the gods, which is true to some extent of the giants in relation to the gods. It seems likely that by Snorri’s day (early thirteenth century) attitudes towards elves had changed as a result of Christianity, when like many other supernatural beings they were demonised since they did not fit into a monotheistic system. However, in *Lokasenna* elves have equal status with the gods; despite this their exact function in the poem is unclear. Their mysteriousness, which perhaps imbued them with a sense of the divine, may have attracted the poet, hence their association with the Æsir. St. 30/3 presents another instance of the

⁶⁵⁷ Or third if the prose introduction is included: *Mart var þar ása oc álfa* ‘Many of the Æsir and the elves were there.’

⁶⁵⁸ But never in prose: see von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 387.

⁶⁵⁹ *Grágás* II k. 63.

⁶⁶⁰ See Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 27, who links the elves with the Vanir based on certain information in *Skáldskaparmál*.

⁶⁶¹ In *Alvíssmál*, which makes a distinction between separate mythical races, the elves have a word for each conceptual category (more than the Vanir, who have nine) except for the last one, *öl* ‘beer.’ One may therefore wonder what these elves were drinking in Ægir’s hall!

formula *ása oc álfa, er hér inni ero* ‘of the Æsir and elves, who are in here,’ used here in relation to Freyja’s rampant sexuality. As was mentioned, the positioning of the gods and elves in the same space, *hér inni* unites the two races in spatial terms.⁶⁶² Significantly, st. 30 is uttered by Ægir’s servant Eldir, who is already at the feast, i.e., a member of the in-group, albeit an obscure one.⁶⁶³ In st. 30 Loki repeats the same formula but clearly to mock not only Eldir but also Freyja whom he states has had sexual relations with all those ‘in, inside’ the hall, gods and elves. This remark makes use of the allegation of Freyja’s promiscuity to debase the hall as well as the strict tabu on incest among the Æsir (but not the Vanir).⁶⁶⁴ This would also tally with the incestuous reputation assigned to her in many other mythical texts (*Hyndluljóð* 47, *Ynglinga saga* ch. 4).⁶⁶⁵

Mixing and blending

The idea of mixing or blending occurs in sts 3, 9, 32 and 56 in *Lokasenna* and appears to be significant in terms of its relation to space and movement, especially ‘shaking’ and other kinds of destabilising physical action.⁶⁶⁶ In st. 3 Loki states *blend ec þeim svá meini mioð* ‘I shall mix their mead with harm.’⁶⁶⁷ The *mjoðr* ‘mead’ in this statement refers to the type of fermented beverage made from honey similar to *öl* ‘ale’ that was customarily drunk in Old Norse society. However, the discourse related to mead goes beyond its role as an alcoholic drink. It is described, for example, as the embodiment of poetic inspiration and one of the ways in which the gods maintain a superior hierarchical position over their rivals the *jotnar*.

⁶⁶² Much like st. 30, in which we see *hér* in the statement *ása oc álfa, er ero hér inni*, in st. 45 Byggvir mentions that he is with the *Hroptz megir* ‘sons of Hroptr [Óðinn],’ so *hér* establishes a place, but also a relationship status. Moreover, Byggvir and the other gods are drinking ale collectively, whereas Loki is alone and although he may be physically inside Ægir’s halls to deliver his invectives he is not truly *hér* as Byggvir and the other gods are because he does not observe its social conventions.

⁶⁶³ John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 108.

⁶⁶⁴ An obvious example of this comes from *Sqrla þátrr* in which Freyja promises four dwarfs one night each with her in exchange for a necklace: Guðni Jónsson (ed.), *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda I* (Reykjavik: Íslendingasagnaútgáfan, 1959), 367–8. As was mentioned, some scholars have noted the close relationship between elves and the Vanir, in which case *ása oc álfa* could just as well mean ‘of the Æsir and the Vanir’: see Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 27.

⁶⁶⁵ Ingunn Ásdísardóttir, “Freyja,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1275–82, gives a discussion of these and other sources in relation to Freyja’s sexuality.

⁶⁶⁶ A further example of mixing in *Lokasenna* that I do not mention here occurs in st. 36 where Loki accuses Freyja of being *meini blandin mioc* ‘much mixed with evil.’

⁶⁶⁷ The combination of drink ‘blended’ with *mein* (or equivalent) can be found elsewhere in Norse literature where *mein* can mean something like ‘poison.’ For example, as pointed out by Helmut de Boor, *Kleine Schriften* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1964), 275, it is attributed to the giantess/*völva* Hyndla in *Hyndluljóð* 49: *...biór | eitri blandinn miok* ‘beer...mixed with a great deal of poison.’

In st. 3, however, Loki's intentions are to destabilise or violate the hall, which he does by using a metaphor that contrasts two opposing concepts. The hall, as I explain, is a sacred space, which does not allow words of conflict to be used, among other things. It is also the place where the mead is ritually drunk, an act that could often symbolise cordial relations between different groups or individuals. Loki's presence, movement from the forest, and belligerent attitude towards the gods violates the sacred space of the hall. It is clearly thought akin to poisoning the sacred drink that binds the gods in harmony, in much the same way that Loki's shaking destabilises the normal order of things by causing physically destructive earthquakes.⁶⁶⁸ The uses of *blanda* 'to mix, brew, blend' in sts 32 and 56 appear in the context of Loki's insults to Freyja and Beyla respectively, where Loki repeats the phrase 'and much imbued with malice' to describe the two goddesses. This harks back to the use of *blanda* in st. 3; again the emphasis is on the juxtaposition of two opposing concepts – Freyja and Beyla are both firmly aligned with the values associated with the conventions of the hall. The malice Loki brings and accuses them of violates this idea.⁶⁶⁹ In st. 9 another kind of mixing is mentioned. It refers to a (lost) myth,⁶⁷⁰ in which Loki and Óðinn become blood brothers (cf. the *jarðarmen* rite):

*Mantu þat, Óðinn, er við í árdaga,
blendom blóði saman;
ólvi bergia léztu eigi mundo,
nema ocr væri báðom borit.*⁶⁷¹

'Do you remember, Odin, when in bygone days
we blended our blood together?
You said you'd never imbibe beer
unless it were brought to both of us.'⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁸ In the story of the mead's genesis, told in full in *Skáldskaparmál* chs 57–8, and *Hávamál* sts 104–10, the mixing-of-liquids motif is very striking. It is this mead that Loki intends to 'mix' with *mein* 'harm, damage, or disease,' which would be a major setback, comparable to a 'bond' breaking (cf. Ragnarøk): see Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 206.

⁶⁶⁹ In st. 43 the past tense of the verb *mola* meaning 'to crush, break into small pieces' is used by Byggvir to describe what he would do to Loki (i.e., 'crush' him to death). This operates on a similar semantic level to *blanda*, which we see occur in the other stanzas. Moreover, it is Byggvir's intension to crush Loki into *mergr* 'marrow,' a liquid substance, comparable to the gods' ale.

⁶⁷⁰ de Vries, *The Problem of Loki*, 193–5, connects this with the blood-brotherhood between Helblindi and Býleistr in *Skáldskaparmál* 24, who are mentioned as Loki's brothers (Helblindi is also one of Óðinn's names in *Grímnismál* 46).

⁶⁷¹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 98. Sophus Bugge, *Studier over de nordiske gude- of heltesagns oprindelse* (Christiania/Oslo: A. Cammermeyer, 1881–9), 76, hypothesised that this episode was influenced by the story of Lucifer, who, according to clerical tradition, was the angel closest to God.

⁶⁷² Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 82.

Loki's relationship with Óðinn is sometimes given as the reason for the gods' reluctance to attack him in the hall. Jan de Vries believes their *fóstbræðralag* may be due to Óðinn and Loki belonging to the same "sphere of activities" as culture heroes.⁶⁷³

Allusions to mythical spaces

There is a rich variety of mythical spaces alluded to in *Lokasenna* that encompass chthonic spaces associated with giants and 'demons' as well as civilised domains comparable to the hall in which the poem takes place. A handful of these spaces are named but often they are given a generic description such as 'the east' or 'beneath the earth.' These spaces are often conventional enough that we can identify them with certain mythic beings or ideas. For example, st. 23 'beneath the earth' probably refers to the underworld while 'the east' is a circumlocutionary term for Giantland. Interestingly, two divine residences are referred to, those of Freyr and Skaði neither of whom are genetically related to the Æsir but later get assimilated. Vanaheimr is also alluded to due to the importance placed on Njǫrðr's origins in st. 34. Other spaces that are transparent include (a) Sámsey, a Danish island in the Baltic Sea possibly identified with the worship of Óðinn, (b) Muspell, often believed to be a person rather than a realm, and (c) Nágrindr 'Corpse-gate,' the gate that grant access to Hel. Many of the spaces discussed in this section exist on an opposing axis to the setting of the poem, a hall, a centrally located space. This creates an interesting dynamic within the poem, which itself is characterised by a blending or mixing of two contrasting states or ideas (cf. the discussion on mixing above).

The space 'beneath the earth,' Hel, and Nágrindr

As Larrington notes, the tale Óðinn alludes to in st. 23 is unknown.⁶⁷⁴ However, ll. 3–5 'eight winters you were, beneath the earth, a milchcow and a woman, and there you bore children' can be related to Loki's ability to procreate.⁶⁷⁵ *Átta vetr | vartu fyr iorð neðan* 'yet eight

⁶⁷³ de Vries, *The Problem of Loki*, 276.

⁶⁷⁴ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 295.

⁶⁷⁵ Or what Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes* I, 152, has coined "male pseudo-procreation." A famous example of this is the eight-legged horse Sleipnir, whom Loki is said to give birth to in the *Gylfaginning* section of *Snorra Edda* as well as *Hyndluljóð* 40. According to Rooth, *Loki in Scandinavian Mythology*, 39, the story of Loki's procreation in *Hyndluljóð* as well as in a Faroese folktale are probably variants of the Master Builder myth; to beget Sleipnir Loki transformed himself into a mare in order to entice the Master Builder's horse. *Hyndluljóð* 40 says that he "got the wolf" on Angrboða, but we are less certain about the other 'forces of chaos' who may well have been the result of Loki's own parturition. In this stanza Óðinn adds an eighth line (one more than the traditional *galdralag*) in an attempt to outdo Loki (see *Lokasenna* 13). The number eight seems to be of some importance: cf. the similar formulation *átta rǫstom | fyr iorð neðan* 'eight leagues under the earth' from *Drymskviða* 8: von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 427. According to Jens Peter Schjødt, it is undecided whether *kýr*

winters were you, beneath the earth’ is of interest as it refers to underground spaces.⁶⁷⁶ It is conventional to assign many of Loki’s journeys to the horizontal axis. However, ‘eight winters...beneath the earth’ could be interpreted as contradicting that notion, as the space below the surface of the earth is normally thought of as belonging to the vertical axis (see Introduction, 4–5). Various sources of numinous knowledge, such as *Mímis brunnr*, which Óðinn is said to drink from every day, are located ‘beneath the earth.’ Thus it is possible that if a lost tale lies behind st. 23 it may have described a journey to obtain numinous knowledge,⁶⁷⁷ although as I explain in Chapter one, Loki’s powers of movement are limited, sometimes severely. For example, he frequently goes on expeditions with Þórr and Óðinn, but is liable to get into trouble, resulting in his being physically bound in some way. The ultimate meaning of the statement in st. 23 is unclear, though it is reminiscent of remote spaces of the earth, which Loki is certainly associated with.

In st. 63 stanza we learn that a blow from Þórr’s hammer would send Loki to Hel, the realm of the dead, which is inhabited by thieves, murderers and those who die of sickness or old age: *Hrungnis bani | mun þér í hel koma, | fyr nágrindr neðan* ‘Hrungnir’s killer will send you to hell, | down below the corpse-gate.’⁶⁷⁸ Þórr makes a similar threat to Hárbarðr in *Hárbarðsljóð* 27 (‘I would knock you into hell if I could stretch over the water’). In *Lokasenna*, he is more specific: *fyr nágrindr neðan* ‘below the corpse-gate.’ The Nágrindr are one of the gates that guard the entrance to Hel (the others being Helgrindr and Valgrindr).⁶⁷⁹ That Þórr says ‘below’ Nágrindr is interesting insofar as it relates to the idea of ‘lowness’ in Norse myth (see Chapter two, 55–6) and the association with the vertical axis. Lowness is associated with various beings, above all the giants, some of whom Þórr ‘sends’ to Hel.⁶⁸⁰ It is possible that *fyr nágrindr neðan* is about as low as the *Lokasenna* poet is able to imagine; it

mólcandi is transitive or intransitive. While Larrington prefers the latter, a transitive translation would render it ‘a milking cow.’

⁶⁷⁶ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 101; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 84.

⁶⁷⁷ Dronke, *The Poetic Edda, Volume II: Mythological Poems*, 361, connects the eight years Loki allegedly spends in the underworld to “a traditional period of alienation or of sacral interludes (as in the great sacrificial festivals at Uppsala).”

⁶⁷⁸ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 109; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 85.

⁶⁷⁹ This can be compared with *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* st. 16 in which Atli says to Hrímgærd that she should be buried nine leagues beneath the earth, *nío røstum | er þú scyldir neðarr vera*: see Larrington, “Sacred Hero, Holy Places: The Eddic Helgi-Tradition,” 163.

⁶⁸⁰ The Vanir are also associated with the earth and fertility and ‘low’ things in general (cf. the way Skaði selects Njörðr as a marriage partner based on his feet). The giants and *vødur* were thought to literally and metaphorically live below the earth: the *vødur* in *Hyndluljóð* and *Baldrs draumar* both dwell in ‘halls’ in the underworld, which are only accessible to certain beings. Dwarfs were also thought to live in underground spaces such as rocks and mounds as were elves in late medieval texts and early modern folktales.

would therefore be a space reserved for those who stand the furthest in opposition to the gods.

Remote spaces: Muspell, and the east

Muspell

In st. 42 Loki refers to the ‘sons of Muspell’ riding over Mirkwood. Muspell, also known as Muspellsheimr, can refer to both an individual and a place, probably a hot southern region, clearly quite far from the Æsir.⁶⁸¹ *Völuspá* 50 describes the south (another hot place) as the origin of Surtr, who brings *sviga lævi* ‘branch’s ruin [fire].’ In Larrington’s view,⁶⁸² the *Völuspá* poet understands Muspell to be a giant’s name and *Gylfaginning* is unequivocal in establishing a connection between the ‘sons of Muspell’ and Surtr.⁶⁸³ Muspell, and the beings who inhabit it (‘the sons of Muspell’ – possibly demons), should probably be thought of as negative counterparts to Ásgarðr and the gods. Loki’s statement is therefore designed to frighten and destabilise the gods and the location in space they are associated with. In a recent monograph Mathias Nordvig, who clearly regards it as a realm, characterises Muspell, as well as the freezing Niflheimr, as “qualitatively evil and grim, unfriendly to humans.”⁶⁸⁴ Muspell is thus a hostile place for gods and humans in contrast to the hall in which *Lokasenna* takes place. Loki perhaps mentions the sons of Muspell *ríða Myrcvið yfir* ‘riding over Mirkwood’ in response to Týr’s assertion in st. 37 that *Freyr er beztr | allra ballriða | ása gorrðom í* ‘is the best of all the bold riders in the courts of the Æsir.’⁶⁸⁵ At Ragnarøk both sides are said to ‘ride’ to the battlefield, the enormous Vígríðr (thought to be a hundred leagues in every direction).⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸¹ According to Mathias Nordvig, *Volcanoes in Old Norse Mythology: Myth and Environment in Early Iceland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 67, this is an invention of Snorri’s. Muspell probably originates in the Old Saxon *Heliand* from the mid-ninth century and also appears in the tenth century Old High German *Muspilli*. In both texts it is identified with the theme of the apocalypse. Nordvig speculates that the concept was later brought to the north by Icelandic clerics who had trained in the Rhineland and Saxony.

⁶⁸² Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 285n48.

⁶⁸³ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 50: *Miðgarðsormr blæss svá eitrunu at hann dreifir lopt ǫll ok lög, ok er hann allógurgligr, ok er hann á aðra hlið úlfinum. Í þessum gný klofnar himinninn ok ríða þaðan Muspells synir. Surtr ríðr fyrst ok fyrir honum ok eptir bæði eldr brennandi.*

⁶⁸⁴ Nordvig, *Volcanoes in Old Norse Mythology*, 68.

⁶⁸⁵ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 104; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 87.

⁶⁸⁶ Although the one narrative myth we have about Freyr ‘riding’ has his servant Scímir doing this on his behalf. It is also a conventional mode of transport and associated with war. A horse cult dedicated to Freyr may also have existed during the Viking Age, which *ballriða* may be alluding to. It is somewhat tendentious of Loki to allude to Freyr’s (as well as the other gods’) destruction by means of an important aspect of his cult, the horse.

The east

As a cultural valence the east is very significant in the Norse mythic universe as it designates the wild spaces of giants and monsters. It can also be taken to refer to the trade routes leading to Old Rus and Byzantium from Scandinavia, so it is a polysemic term. We know from the prose introduction that Þórr is away in the east fighting giants when the guests are named and a number of other sources make Giantland/the east his destination as well.

In st. 59 Þórr threatens to throw Loki up onto the eastern roads *upp ec þér verp | oc á austrvega* ‘I shall throw you up on the roads to the east.’⁶⁸⁷ Larrington suggests that such action relates to Þórr’s creation of various heavenly bodies by throwing people (Þjazi and Aurvandill) into the sky, although on first glance *austrvegir* ‘eastern roads’ would appear to refer to the ‘road to Giantland,’ rather than somewhere in the sky. Þórr also says that *síðan þic mangi sér* ‘afterwards no one will ever see you,’ which supports Larrington’s suggestion. The general discourse on Þórr regarding ‘throwing things’ is strong; cf. the way he despatches Hrungrir by flinging his hammer at him and the many references to throwing in *Hárbarðsljóð* (see Chapter three, 108–9). The *austrvegir* ‘eastern roads’ Þórr speaks of, I would argue, denote remoteness, rather than literally referring to a particular place in the mythological world. Both spaces, Giantland (or the ‘eastern roads’) and the heavens, are being drawn on to symbolise spaces that exist outside the limits of the Æsir’s world.

In the following stanza Loki says that Þórr should never relate his eastern journeys to people (*Austrforom þínom | scaltu aldregi | segia seggiom frá* ‘Your eastern journeys you should never | relate to people’).⁶⁸⁸ I am inclined to view Loki’s words here as similar to Hárbarðr’s insults towards Þórr in *Hárbarðsljóð*, where we see that Þórr’s attempts to declaim his achievements in the east are turned on their head by Hárbarðr, who draws attention to Þórr’s proclivity for fighting women. Loki is one of Þórr’s main travelling companions in Norse myth, so he is probably well-placed to comment on Þórr’s adventures. In fact, Loki alludes to a well-known myth in the remainder of st. 60 to justify his point, namely the visit of Þórr and Loki to the kingdom of Útgardaloki. In this tale Þórr is embarrassingly deceived by the power of Útgardaloki and the gigantic being Skrímir whose likeness, by means of an ocular illusion, he adopts. Þórr and his companions are travelling in

⁶⁸⁷ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 108; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 90.

⁶⁸⁸ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 108; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 91.

a forest and take shelter in a building, which actually turns out to be the *hanzki* ‘glove’ of Skrímir. After an attempt to kill the giant goes awry, they lie in fear all night listening to his snores, which Snorri likens to earthquakes. Here then ‘the east’ is used to refer to a space where normally tabued kinds of behaviour, such as the killing of women, are permitted. The reference to Skrímir and shaking also draws attention to other instances of shaking in *Lokasenna* and elsewhere in Norse myth, shaking being a disruptive form of movement that destabilises physical space (see Chapter one, 31).⁶⁸⁹

In st. 34 the east again seems to be used to refer to remoteness, without denoting a specific place. Loki reminds Njörðr that *þú vart austr heðan | gísl um sendr at goðom* ‘you were sent from here | eastwards as a hostage to the gods.’⁶⁹⁰ Njörðr himself confirms this in the following stanza: *ec varc langt heðan | gísl um sendr at goðom* ‘I from far away was sent as a hostage to the gods.’⁶⁹¹ Njörðr uses the term *langt*, which the poet evidently regards as analogous to *austr*. While these two statements are not in agreement (the first has Njörðr being sent from ‘here’ while Njörðr says himself in st. 35 that he left ‘far from here’), it is conventional to associate Njörðr with a hostage role.⁶⁹² The exact meaning of ‘here’ in *Lokasenna* 34 is unclear, though it could well allude to Ægir’s hall.⁶⁹³

⁶⁸⁹ Thus we can observe that although Þórr’s adventures in Giantland/the east are often for the good of divine society and he is *miðgardz véor* (*Völuspá* 56) there is frequently also something farcical about them, sometimes as a result of Þórr’s meagre intellect.

⁶⁹⁰ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 103; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 86.

⁶⁹¹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 103; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 86.

⁶⁹² Although other hostages are sent, as stated in *Ynglinga saga*, Njörðr is the first one listed, so is most strongly associated with this role: see John Lindow, “Njörðr,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings* ed. John Lindow, Jens Peter Schjødt and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1335. *Gylfaginning* chs 21–3 state that Njörðr is brought up in the land of the Vanir and sent to the Æsir as a hostage, and a more detailed picture of the same story is given in ch. 4 of *Ynglinga saga*. *Vafþrúðnismál* 38 also says that he is sent to the gods as a hostage without giving a directional valence: *seldo at gíslingo goðom*.

⁶⁹³ Magnus Olsen, *Edda- og skaldekvad. Forarbejder til kommentar II* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1960), 27–30, argues that Viking Age Norwegians thought of Ægir’s hall as being situated on an imaginary island far off the coast of northern Norway, and credits the Trondheim fjord region as a likely place of origin for the poem. Also see Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, “The Hall in Norse Literature,” *Borg in Lofoten: A chieftain’s farm in North Norway* ed. Gerd Stamsø Munch, Olav Sverre Johansen and Else Roesdahl (Trondheim: Tapir, 2003), 271. The cardinal point *austr* ‘east’ clearly designates a horizontal type of motion (i.e., east-west). We could speculate on the Vanir’s association with the east although there is also little evidence that supports this. The major exception is Snorri’s euhemerised account of the Æsir’s migration from Ásaland/Ásaheimr west towards Scandinavia in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 1, in which he mentions a region called Vanaland or Vanaheimr, thought to be near the river Tanais (Don) in central Russia. If we domicile the Vanir in the east in some way this would associate them with the giant race, who are also thought to dwell somewhere in the east. In *Ynglinga saga*, the Æsir’s homeland, Ásaland, is presented as being cognate with ‘Asia,’ so it is possible to domicile the Æsir in the east as well. Lindow has noted the ambiguity of *at goðom* which can just as well mean ‘on behalf of the gods.’ Thus in his view the exchange of hostages could be interpreted as Njörðr’s marriage to Skaði, which represents a settlement similar to the one reached after the Æsir-Vanir war. The point made here, however, must remain speculative, unless confirmatory evidence emerges.

Sámsey

In *Lokasenna* 24 Loki accuses Óðinn of practicing *seiðr* ‘witchcraft’ on Sámsey,⁶⁹⁴ a location that, in Stephen A. Mitchell’s view, can be associated with the worship of Óðinn.⁶⁹⁵

Witchcraft in Old Norse society is an activity associated with the female sphere and antisocial kinds of behaviour. It is therefore contradictory to the conventions of the hall. Óðinn, in particular, has a strong association with *seiðr*, having possibly learned it from the sorceress Gullveig, described in *Völuspá* 22 as *angan illrar brúðar* ‘the delight of evil women,’ who uses *seiðr* against the gods during the Æsir-Vanir war. In response, the gods burn her *í holl Hárs* ‘In the High One’s [Óðinn’s] hall,’ which creates an interesting parallel with *Lokasenna*: in both poems the sacral space of the hall is violated, in *Lokasenna* by a guest, in *Völuspá* 22 by the host. In st. 24 of *Lokasenna* Loki also accuses Óðinn of journeying over mankind ‘in the likeness of a wizard.’ Óðinn, as I argue in this thesis, is a very mobile god, who likes to ingratiate himself with certain figures, especially royalty and powerful warriors, often disguised as an old man.⁶⁹⁶ According to Mitchell, who has worked extensively on Samsø in the twenty-first century, numerous placenames connect parts of the landscape with worship of Óðinn, the most famous being the village of Onsbjerg ‘the hill dedicated to Óðinn’ (recorded in 1424 as *Othensberg* and 1445 as *Odensbergh*) near Tranebjerg on the southern end of the island. Near Onsbjerg is a hill by the strange name of Dyret (lit. ‘The Animal’), so-called since it is thought to resemble an animal’s back.⁶⁹⁷ The

⁶⁹⁴ von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 431, connect Sámsey to the Danish island Samsø (much like Hlésey/Læsø in *Hárbarðsljóð* 37). Sámsey is also the island where Hjálmar and Qrvar-Oddr fight the twelve berserk brothers led by Angantýr.

⁶⁹⁵ The name Sámsey may have the possible meaning of ‘Island of the Finns’ (from *sámr* ‘swarthy, blackish’ + *ey* ‘island’). Depictions of the various non-Norse speaking peoples in Scandinavia tended to be somewhat unflattering in Old Norse literary texts. The Finno-Ugric-speaking Finns, Lapps and Sámi were sometimes portrayed as having strange customs and an association with the wild forces of nature: cf. Sigvatr Þórðarson’s *Vikingarvísur* ‘Viking verses’ 3. It is not inconceivable therefore that they might have been thought to practise a kind of sorcery. von See *et al.*, *Kommentar*, 430, point out that the R redaction of *Lokasenna* does not offer *síða* ‘to perform magic’ as a reading, but *síga* ‘to sink [down],’ as in *Völuspá* 57: *sígr fold í mar*. As such, they suggest that Óðinn may be experiencing a kind of trance- or death-like state in the manner of a Lappish shaman, similar to that reported in *Historia Norwegiæ* 85. Thomas A. DuBois, “Encounters: Sámi,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume I: Basic Premises and Consideration* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 359, suggests that perceptions around *seiðr* may have been influenced by contact with Sámi, who were often described as being practitioners of *seiðr* themselves. Sámi alterity is also depicted in Adam of Bremen’s late eleventh-century *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* 4.31. See Stephen A. Mitchell, “Place-Names, Periphrasis, and Popular Tradition,” *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink* ed. Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist and Declan Taggart (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 285.

⁶⁹⁶ This occurs famously in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* where he adopts the pseudonym Gestumblindi, but also in *Hárbarðsljóð* in which he calls himself Hárbarðr ‘Hoary beard’ and recounts his divisive dealings with the princes in Valland.

⁶⁹⁷ The residents of modern Samsø claim that its original name was the same as the neighbouring town, a change Mitchell regards as the result of an “emerging cultural memory...by taking the island’s famous and very

reference to Sámsey/Samsø thus appears to be deliberate on the part of the composer, who draws attention to the antisocial and disruptive nature of witchcraft, part of the same semantic sphere as *ergi*. It also emphasises, and contrasts with, behaviour associated with the location in which the events of *Lokasenna* are taking place – the hall, a synecdochic expression of conventional society.

Freyr's home

In st. 43 Bragi describes Freyr's abode as *sællit setr* 'a blessed dwelling.'⁶⁹⁸ According to *Grímnismál* 5, the gods give him Álfheimr when he 'cut his first tooth,' which Sundqvist following Simek takes to refer to a *tannfé* 'tooth-gift,' a gift given to a child by their godmother.⁶⁹⁹ However, as Lindow points out, Snorri assigns Álfheimr to the light-elves⁷⁰⁰ (in *Ynglinga saga* ch. 10 Freyr 'king of the Svear' builds his residence at Old Uppsala). He also suggests that Freyr's 'blessed dwelling' is located in the sky.⁷⁰¹ The poet's mention of Freyr's 'blessed dwelling' could ultimately be to emphasise the sacred space of the hall in which the events of *Lokasenna* are set.

In st. 37 Týr says that Freyr is the *beztr allra ballriða ása gǫrðom í* 'best of all the bold riders in the courts of the Æsir,' the first and only occurrence of this phrase in the poem.⁷⁰² It might appear as though Freyr seldom rides anything although he does possess a horse with anthropomorphic abilities and a marvellous ship. This might be due to the absence of tales about him, though there are several references to Freyr's powers of movement in poetry. For

specific connection to Óðinn and turning it into a sensible explanation": Mitchell, "Place-Names, Periphrasis, and Popular Tradition," 292.

⁶⁹⁸ For a discussion of the history of this name see Olof Sundqvist, "Freyr," *Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume III: Conceptual Frameworks: The Cosmos and Collective Supernatural Beings* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 1197–1201.

⁶⁹⁹ See Sundqvist, "Freyr," 1204, and Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* trans. Angela Hall (Cambridge: Brewer, 2007), 8.

⁷⁰⁰ Lindow, *Norse Mythology*, 123.

⁷⁰¹ This might suggest that Freyr is an itinerant god. However, in *Scírnismál* Freyr comes across as rather passive, but we are also told that he climbed (vertically) into Hliðskjálf which can be construed as a kind of 'watchtower.' Moreover, Freyr is associated with several modes of transport: the horse, the ship Skíðblaðnir and possibly the wagon if we can identify him as the mythical manifestation of King Fróði (Frotho) from *Gesta Danorum* whose corpse was toured around the land of the Skjöldungar; see Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, Book V. Some or all of these elements may have some relevance to fertility and/or war rituals: see Sundqvist, "Freyr," 1208. H. R. Ellis Davidson *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe* (London: Penguin, 1964), 97, points out that a horse cult may have been associated with Freyr, as evidenced in *Hrafnkels saga*, whose eponymous character dedicates his stallion to the god.

⁷⁰² Barbro Söderberg, "Till tolkning av några dunkla passager i Lokasenna," *Scripta Islandica* vol. 35 (1984), 81, suggests that *ballriða* might be derived from either *bal* 'vagina' or *bolllr* 'testicle,' which strongly reminds one of Freyr's sexual nature.

example, in *Húsdrápa* ‘House-*drápa*’ 7 he rides not a horse but a boar to the pyre of Baldr and is called ‘battle-skilled.’⁷⁰³ And in *Scírnismál*, he desires to ride to Giantland to court Gerðr, but sends his servant Scírnir instead, which some scholars argue is actually Freyr. Again, the poet seems to be making a distinction between Loki and the other gods. Freyr is described as being associated with the gods and their homes (*ása gǫrðom í* ‘in the courts of the gods’) whereas in *Lokasenna* Loki is a disruptive, antisocial figure. Moreover, as explained in Chapter two, horse riding is associated with travel between different worlds, often to acquire a precious resource (a good act in the eyes of the gods). In contrast, Loki disruptively barges his way into Ægir’s hall following his banishment to the forest (a space anathema to the hall), a legal status which, according to thirteenth-century Icelandic law, meant he could be killed with impunity.

Conclusion

To a considerable degree the setting in *Lokasenna* influences and is influenced by the characters’ verbal confrontation. Whereas the fiord in *Hárbarðsljóð* supplies a physical barrier that highlights the opponents’ hostility, the characters in *Lokasenna* are separated by their behaviour and (non-)compliance with various cultural norms. It has long been acknowledged that royal banquets in the king’s hall played an important role as the venue in which the king would consolidate his power, often reified via ceremonial gift-giving.⁷⁰⁴ According to Meulengracht Sørensen, this procedure is the model for the cosmic setting in *Lokasenna*. Moreover, the hall was the centre of the traditional worldview that obtained in Iceland in the Middle Ages, so it was also steeped in socio-political and religious symbolism. We are also consistently made aware of the hall’s natural ‘enemy,’ the forest, the place where Loki is initially banished but returns from to mix the gods’ mead with malice. Thus Loki’s motion to and from the forest is important, as he mediates these two vastly different spaces, in the process bringing chaos with him. Similarly, movement in the hall itself, though mundane at first sight, is important in terms of its connection to hierarchy and honour. This chapter has also made use of the binary pair inside:outside to analyse acceptable and unacceptable forms of behaviour, something which the poet seems to be aware of him/herself. As a result, the gods are restricted in their behaviour in accordance with the hall as a

⁷⁰³ In *Þorgrímsþula I* Freyr is associated with the horse by the poetic synonym *oflugr attriði* ‘the mighty attacking-rider.’

⁷⁰⁴ See Meulengracht Sørensen, “Loki’s Senna in Ægir’s Hall,” 255n23, and Sverre Bagge, “Borgerkrig og statsudvikling i Norge i middelalderen,” [*Norsk*] *Historisk Tidskrift* vol. 2 (1986), 145–97.

place of *grið* (though with occasional lapses, cf. Bragi) in comparison to the transgressive Loki, who appears to have the upper hand in the confrontation. The exception to this is, of course, Þórr, who frightens Loki off with his reputation for violence. Finally, the clear concern with space is evident in several allusions to mythic spaces. Some of these spaces relate to lost myths while others can be balanced with information supplied elsewhere in Old Norse literature. Many of these spaces can be understood in the light of certain binary pairs such as up:down and nature:culture. Loki's punishment and its chthonic/liminal location, though never explicitly mentioned, is particularly important in terms of detail, personnel involved, and as a space which permits normally tabued kinds of behaviour.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE PICTURE STONES OF GOTLAND AND SPACE

Introduction

Having now surveyed (mainly) poetic texts for their presentation of space and movement, I now wish to turn to a supposedly more ‘authentic’ kind of source: Viking Age art. Art offers a slightly different perspective to literature; among other things, it creates the need to focus on a particular scene(s) at the expense of other elements. It is therefore highly conceptual. In this chapter I am going to concentrate on the picture stones of Gotland, which are unlike their counterparts on the Swedish mainland in many ways. A small number of them display mythological or heroic iconography that can be corroborated by later written sources.⁷⁰⁵ One such group is the so-called ‘keyhole’ stones, which, in the main, are thought to date from 700–1100.⁷⁰⁶ They are often very large and imposing, some of them well over four metres tall. Despite there being dozens of examples of the ‘keyhole’ stones, in this chapter I analyse only the six that clearly display mythological elements, as interpreted by earlier scholars, most notably Sune Lindqvist. I am also limited by the fact that Lindqvist’s pioneering study *Gotlands Bildsteine* is now eighty years out of date and, in the interim, many new picture stones have been discovered, but are yet to be subjected to thoroughgoing analysis (sixty-four stones were found between 1976 and 1988).⁷⁰⁷ This fact has fundamentally influenced the selection criteria used for the material of the current chapter. Methodological issues

⁷⁰⁵ Sune Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* vol. II (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1942), 106, noted the unique context in which text and object could interact, a literary phenomenon known as ‘ekphrasis,’ in the skaldic poems *Ragnarsdrápa*, *Húsdrápa* and *Haustlǫng*, remarking of *Ragnarsdrápa* that “Es zeigt, dass in der Zeit seiner Entstehung schon eine grosse Anzahl von Sagen und Mythosmotiven sowohl in Worten wie in Bildern wohlbekannt waren. Dies setzt voraus, dass man damals bereits ein reiches Erbe besass, das von älteren Generationen gesammelt worden war.”

⁷⁰⁶ Mostly falling under type C (eighth century) and D (late eighth/early ninth century), according to Lindqvist’s classification. Lindqvist’s method of dating the stones appears to be based on a typological similarity with the various styles of Viking art, as well as with Insular and Continental parallels: cf. *Gotlands Bildsteine* I, 112–222. Several attempts to redate the picture stones have been made since the appearance of Lindqvist’s work. See, for instance, Björn Varenius, *Det nordiska skippet. Teknologi samhällstrategi i vikingatid och medeltid* Stockholm Studies in Archaeology 10 (Stockholm: University of Stockholm, 1992), 52, and Lisbeth Imer, “Gotlandske billedsten – dateringen af Lindqvists gruppe C og D,” *Aarbøger for nordisk oldkyndighed og historie* vol. 2001 (2004), 47–111.

⁷⁰⁷ David M. Wilson briefly sums up the state of the scholarship (up until 1998) in “The Gotland Picture-Stones. A Chronological Re-Assessment,” *Studien zur Archäologie des Ostseeraumes von der Eisenzeit zum Mittelalter. Festschrift für Michael Müller-Wille* ed. Anke Wesse (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1998), 49–52. Other recent monographic analyses include Erik Nylén and Jan Peder Lamm, *Bildstenar: med katalog över samtliga på Gotland kända bildstenar samt bibliografi över bildstenslitteratur* (Visby: Barry Press, 1977), translated into English as *Stones, Ships and Symbols*, Beata Böttger-Niedenzu, *Darstellungen auf gotländischen Bildsteinen, vor allem des Typs C und D, und die Frage ihres Zusammenhanges mit Stoffen der altnordischen Literatur* (Unpublished PhD thesis: Universität München, 1982), and Lori Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland: A Study in Style and Motif* (Unpublished PhD thesis: University of Minnesota, 1983).

notwithstanding, some scholars, such as Anders Andrén⁷⁰⁸ and Birgit Arrhenius⁷⁰⁹ before him, argue that these keyhole stones represent doors to the ‘other world,’⁷¹⁰ i.e., the world of the dead.⁷¹¹ This element aligns with a long tradition of commemorating deceased family members on various media throughout Scandinavia from the pre-Christian era until well after the conversion.

The pictorial scenes on the keyhole stones vary in diversity and complexity, but only a few examples can be identified as having mythological content.⁷¹² For these identifications we must rely on Old Norse written sources, mainly from Iceland, most of which were written at least one (or several) hundred years after the keyhole stones were raised.⁷¹³ Occasionally, we may recognise with some certainty particular motifs from the literature depicted on the picture stones, such as Óðinn on his steed Sleipnir or the magical ‘elvish’ blacksmith Völundr with his forging equipment, but even this is not unequivocal ‘proof’ that a myth is being depicted.⁷¹⁴ Thus the vast majority of images cannot be assigned a specific mythological identity.

⁷⁰⁸ Anders Andrén, “Doors to Other Worlds: Scandinavian Death Rituals in Gotlandic Perspectives,” *Journal of European Archaeology* vol. 1 (1992), 36.

⁷⁰⁹ Birgit Arrhenius, “Tür die Toten. Sach- und Wortzeugnisse zu einer frühmittelalterlichen Gräbersitte in Schweden,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* vol. 4 (1970), 389–90. Arrhenius also argues that the keyhole-type stones would have once accompanied ‘mortuary houses’ (*Totenhäusern*) at which people made offerings.

⁷¹⁰ For a discussion of this term see Jens Peter Schjødt, “Theoretical Considerations,” *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North: History and Structures, Volume 1: Basic Premises and Consideration* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 3.

⁷¹¹ The term used by Marianne Hem Eriksen, *Architecture, Society and Ritual in Viking Age Scandinavia: Doors, Dwellings, and Domestic Space* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 190, is ‘death spaces,’ the most of important of which to the warrior aristocracy were Valhöll and Fólkvangr, both depicted as “feasting halls functioning as realms of the dead.” Henning Kure’s ‘heathen’ (in the sense of the worldview expressed in *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál*) interpretation of *Völuspá* 38–9, “Wading Heavy Currents: Snorri’s Use of *Völuspá* 39,” *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Völuspá and Nordic Days of Judgement*, Acta Scandinavica 2 ed. Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 88, is very interesting and helps us to imagine how the journey to the afterlife might have proceeded in the minds of everyday people: “Criminals (‘menn meinsvarir ok morðvargar’) as well as slain warriors (‘valglaumr’) are reported to wade the roaring ford or the heavy currents (that is, they die). The warriors appear to end up at the gate leading to Valhöll, but the criminals will come ashore in the underworld (‘sólu fiarri’) on the beach of the dead (‘Náströnd’) where they will be enclosed in poisonous enmity (‘eit’).”

⁷¹² Stefan Brink, “*Verba Volant, Scripta Manent?* Aspects of Early Scandinavian Oral Society,” *Literacy in Medieval and Early Modern Scandinavian Culture* The Viking Collection. Studies in Northern Civilization ed. Pernille Hermann (Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2005), 113.

⁷¹³ In the Rune-text database website, sponsored by Uppsala University, most of the keyhole stones are given a dating range of 700–1100, i.e., the Viking Age, so, in some cases, there may be a disparity of up to five to six hundred years between text and image.

⁷¹⁴ It is worth noting that it remains notoriously difficult to date and identify the corpus of Gotlandic picture stones. A project entitled ‘Ancient Images 2.0’ led by a team from the University of Stockholm are currently re-examining all the extant picture stones from Gotland by using a powerful new light and high-resolution cameras combined with cutting-edge imaging software, with results expected to be available within the next few years: <https://www.archaeology.su.se/forskning/forskningsprojekt/ancient-images-2-0-a-digital-edition-of-the-gotlandic-picture-stones-1.432181> (accessed 19/11/2021).

However, given the context in which the picture stones were raised, i.e., in pre-Christian times, it seems very likely that at least some of their imagery reflects current mythological motifs or related religious conceptions. This is particularly likely in relation to images that display a means of transport (ships,⁷¹⁵ horses, carts), but also certain kinds of enclosures that are sometimes depicted.⁷¹⁶ I will argue that these images reflect a preoccupation with space and movement or motion in the Old Norse cosmology that is also found in literary texts;⁷¹⁷ the contours of this interest reflect the values of a society that favoured activity over passivity.⁷¹⁸ Activity, it is generally true to say, is equated with industry and masculinity, while passivity is regarded as indolent, feminine, and often associated with *ergi*.⁷¹⁹ This may explain why many of the picture stones, especially the keyhole types, contain so many images involving movement/action, and especially masculine pursuits such as sailing, fighting and horse-riding.⁷²⁰ Comparable images of mythological

⁷¹⁵ While predominantly seagoing vessels, ships could be repurposed in order to contain houses – cf. the Oseberg ship burial which contains a gabled mortuary chamber.

⁷¹⁶ For a brief discussion of the enclosure motif on the picture stones, see Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 33.

⁷¹⁷ An anonymous half-stanza from Snorri's *Edda* conceptualises poetry as the 'hardly-decayed ship of dwarfs' being blown forward by 'winds of thought,' an imagined image which aligns the sailing of ships with memory: *Bæði ák til brúðar | bergjarls ok skip dverga | sollinn vind at senda | seinfyrnd götu eina* 'I have both, my swollen wind of the wife of the mountain-jarl [GIANT > GIANTESS > THOUGHT] and the never-forgotten ships of dwarfs [POEMS], to send in the same direction': Kari Ellen Gade, Margaret Clunies Ross and Matthew Townend, 'Anonymous, *Stanzas from Snorra Edda*,' *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics* Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages III ed. Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 512. Also see Kate Heslop, "Metaphors for Forgetting and Forgetting as Metaphor," *Myth, Magic, and Memory in Early Scandinavian Narrative Culture* ed. Jürg Glauser and Pernille Hermann in collaboration with Stefan Brink and Joseph Harris (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 247.

⁷¹⁸ The state of being 'bound' or 'fettered' was also seen in a negative way and may have also been associated with female magic (*seiðr*), hence *Hávamál* 113's injunction to never sleep in the arms of a *ffjolkunnigri konu* 'woman skilled in magic' because she will 'enclose you in her limbs': Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 27.

⁷¹⁹ Cf. the runic inscription on the two Bällsta stones (U 225/226) from Vallentuna parish, Uppland, which praises the 'active' sons of Ulfr for their dedication to hard work, taken from Joseph Harris, "The Bällsta-Inscriptions and Old Norse Literary History," *International Scandinavian and Medieval Studies in Memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber* Studies in Western Literature and Civilization vol. XII ed. Michael Dallapiazza, Olaf Hansen, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen and Yvonne S. Bonnetain (Trieste: Edizioni Parnaso, 2000), 223–39. Text reconstructed and normalised by Elias Wessén and Sven B. F. Jansson (eds.), *Upplands Runinskrifter* Pt. 1, Sveriges runinskrifter, utgivna av Kungl. Vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien vol. 7 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1940–43), 349: *[Ulfkell?] ok Arnkell ok Gyi þæir gærðu hiar þingstað... | [M]unu æigi mærki mæiri verða, | þan Ulfs synir æftir gær[ðu], | [sniall]ir svæinar at sinn faður | Ræistu stæina ok staf unnu (?) | ok inn mikla at iarteknum* 'Ulfkell and Arnkel and Gyi, they made here a thing place. – There shall no mightier | memorials be found | than those Ulv's sons/ set up after him, | active lads | after their father. | They raised the stones | and worked the staff | also, the mighty one, | as marks of honour': translation provided by Peter Foote in Sven B. F. Jansson, *Runes in Sweden* trans. Peter Foote (Möklinta: Gidlunds, 1987). Also cf. Leszek Gardela's comments regarding 'active' or 'aggressive' animal heads on staffs found in Viking Age graves from Birka, Gävle and Klinta, which would help the owner produce a 'spiritual attack' on his/her enemies: (*Magic*) *Staffs in the Viking Age* (Vienna: Faesbinder, 2016), 200.

⁷²⁰ The spiral whorls on the earliest picture stones (circa 400–600) may have attempted to depict the movement of the sun rolling back and forth: see Erik Nylén and Jan Peder Lamm, *Stones, Ships and Symbols* (Stockholm: Gidlunds Bokförlag, 1988), 20.

origin appear elsewhere in north-west Europe, such as on certain Christian stone monuments dedicated to the dead in northern English and Manx churchyards, locations of sustained Norse presence from the late ninth century onward. A similar development of image-making involving these masculine pursuits may have occurred in Gotland, an idea supported by several runic inscriptions dedicated to certain deceased people that occasionally accompany the images. If this is the case the images discussed in this chapter might suggest that the deceased person celebrated on the stone, while not necessarily a participant in the scenes depicted, nonetheless conducted themselves ‘actively,’ as the gods and legendary heroes would have, assuring them of a place in the afterlife. According to Oscar Montelius, ships and other modes of transport were thought to ‘carry’ the dead person to the other world.⁷²¹ However, like Andréén,⁷²² while I agree that this is probably one of the ships’ functions, I think it is possible that these images also reflect a wider concern with different spatial realms and ideas of space.⁷²³

Many of the stones on Gotland, including the majority of those examined in this chapter, are shaped in an almost anthropomorphic way, with a ‘head’ and ‘body.’ It is possible that such a division to some extent reflects an attempt to distinguish the parts of existence we might define as ‘sacred’ from the ‘profane.’⁷²⁴ As I mention elsewhere in this chapter, the scenes depicted on the ‘body’ of the stones are often connected to mundane activities, such as fighting, hunting or sailing. Although I argue that they have a mythological basis, these are activities whose foremost role concerns basic survival or sustenance. In comparison, the nature and meaning of the scenes on the ‘head’ of the stones is much less clear. Is this because they depict activities or rituals that only existed in abstract form even to

⁷²¹ Especially so regarding ships made of iron or stone, i.e. materials that to a medieval person would have seemed impractical for such a purpose – the ship *Naglfar*, said to be made from human finger nails might belong to this category: see Mathias Nordvig, *Volcanoes in Old Norse Mythology: Myth and Environment in Early Iceland* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021), 96, Oscar Montelius, “Om högsättning i skepp under vikingatiden,” *Svenska fornminnesföreningens tidskrift* vol. 6 (1885–7), 149–89, and Kure, “Wading Heavy Currents: Snorri’s Use of *Völuspá* 39,” 87.

⁷²² Andréén, “Doors to Other Worlds,” 47.

⁷²³ In Gro Steinsland’s view, “*Völuspá* and the Sibylline Oracles with a focus on the ‘Myth of the Future’,” *The Nordic Apocalypse: The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Völuspá and Nordic Days of Judgement Acta Scandinavica* 2 ed. Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 150, death spaces such as Valhöll should probably be seen as an example of an individual “post-death existence” in comparison to the post-Ragnarök “common, future world” described in *Völuspá* 59–65.

⁷²⁴ In using the term ‘sacred’ I do not refer to its meaning in a strict eucharistic sense, but rather, following the *Oxford English Dictionary*, as a space or object “set apart for or dedicated to some religious purpose, and hence entitled to veneration or religious respect; made holy by association with a god or other object of worship; consecrated, hallowed” (“sacred, n.3.,” *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2022), available at Fisher Library (University of Sydney) under databases, accessed 14 December 2022).

the people that created them? Though the idea of an abode of the dead similar to Valhøll seems to have obtained in most of Scandinavia there was unlikely to be strict uniformity regarding its general appearance or the way in which it was framed spatially, and reached by the dead. We might also consider that the head was probably regarded as the most ‘intelligent’ part of the body; it was also associated with secrets and wisdom, which makes the ‘head’ of the stone a more suitable part for expressing sacred ideas.

There are several studies available that focus on identifying the mythological scenes and figures on the stones in Scandinavia and elsewhere, but few that also attempt to understand the spatial arrangement of the material or that develop a spatial typology.⁷²⁵ This is surprising, given that on some of the picture stones, such as Lärbro Stora Hammars I (LSH I), an intentional division into horizontal image bands has been made. These visual ‘stanzas’ may have spurred Hallvard Lie’s surmise⁷²⁶ that the earliest *dróttkvætt* (‘court metre’) skaldic poems represent poetic imitations of Viking Age art.⁷²⁷ Outside of LSH I, which is unparalleled in all forms of Nordic art, many other picture stones have far less organisation or, at first glance, none at all: Ardre VIII might fall into the latter category.⁷²⁸ If we entertain the notion that the picture stones depict ideas from Old Norse myth, however, this can supply the groundwork for a greater understanding of their spatial configuration. For example, several depict horsemen being ‘welcomed’ by horn-bearing females, which certain scholars have identified as Óðinn, or an Odinic figure,⁷²⁹ entering a realm analogous to Valhøll or Gláðsheimr (‘Gleaming home’);⁷³⁰ these figures are often accompanied by a building or hall, presumably Valhøll itself. The most popular location for this scene is on the uppermost point/‘head’ of the stone: this would therefore seem to parallel the location of Valhøll represented in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15 as somewhere in the sky connected to the earth by the bridge Bilrøst/Bifrøst.⁷³¹ In this chapter I also examine the depiction of movement, as very

⁷²⁵ The major exception is Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*; but in this excellent study the perspective is technical and art historical, thus myth plays a relatively minor role.

⁷²⁶ ‘Natur’ og ‘unatur’ i skaldekunsten. II. Hist.-Filos. Klasse. Oslo: Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, 1957.

⁷²⁷ On this theory, which has not taken hold, see Margaret Clunies Ross, “Style and Authorial Presence in Skaldic Mythological Poetry,” *Saga-Book* vol. 20 (1978–81), 289.

⁷²⁸ Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 125.

⁷²⁹ Clunies Ross, “Style and Authorial Presence in Skaldic Mythological Poetry.”

⁷³⁰ However, in *Gylfaginning* ch. 14, Snorri describes Gláðsheimr as a temple (*hof*), built by Alföðr (Óðinn) on Iðavöllum, a field in the middle of Ásgarðr, whereas in *Grimnismál* 8 it is clearly a larger place.

⁷³¹ Snorri’s description may of course have been guided by the Christian vertical configuration of Heaven, Earth and Hell. However, the notion of a ‘vertical axis’ (see Introduction, 4–5) governing and restricting the flow of people and goods (i.e. to the Underworld and back) seems to also be a native Scandinavian construct. Although she was not able to establish a direct link, Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones*

few of the figures are represented as ‘standing still’ or in stasis.⁷³² In fact, some figures even seem to be moving beyond the borders of the image fields, which can be interpreted as an attempt to depict liminality.

Klinte Hunninge I (figs. 1–4)

Klinte Hunninge I (hereafter abbreviated as KH I) is an eighth- or ninth-century picture stone of the ‘keyhole’ type. Gotlands museet in Visby is its current home, but originally it would have stood in Klinte *socken* ‘parish’ in central west Gotland, near a large lake.⁷³³ It is divided vertically into two panels by an ornamental pattern that also frames the image field.

The upper panel (fig. 1) depicts a large figure on horseback armed with a spear and shield, facing, and moving, to the right.⁷³⁴ Smaller figures are depicted clockwise above; one is bent over or lying down and appears to hold a ring in “a fairly hidden position” (Lindqvist regards him as a *Kranzträger* ‘wreath-bearer’), another is upright and carries a sword and shield, as does the next figure in the sequence.⁷³⁵ Nylén and Lamm interpret the man with the ring as the rider’s ‘genius,’ who signifies victory in battle.⁷³⁶ Finally, a woman, indicated by the long dress, is depicted with a horn. Females carrying horns recall *Grímnismál* 36, in which Grímnir (Óðinn) chants the names of several *valkyriur* ‘choosers of the slain, valkyries,’ also alluding to their role as bearers of ale. If we can identify the horn-bearing female as a valkyrie then perhaps we may be able to interpret her as acting as a mediator

of Gotland, 47–9, compares the primary motifs (horse and rider, ship) on Gotland with the frequency and positioning that scenes of the Crucifixion appear on Irish crosses. She also draws parallels with images of the motif of Daniel in the Lions’ Den on weapons from the Merovingian (circa 450–751 CE) and Vendel periods, which had an expressly apotropaic or power-giving function.

⁷³² According to Erik Moltke, early ‘Germanic’ artists were very good at depicting swift movement in contrast to other European artists, who took a lot longer to develop this skill. Moltke, *Runes and their Origin. Denmark and Elsewhere* (Copenhagen: Nationalmuseets forlag, 1984), 109, adduces the late Iron Age gold bracteates as examples, such as those from Fyn, Denmark.

⁷³³ All Gotlandic picture stones would have once been displayed in the open air, sometimes in formations resembling rings; however, due to several factors, such as weathering and neglect, many picture stones have been restored and are now only visible in museums.

⁷³⁴ For an overview of the horse and rider motif, see Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 23–30.

⁷³⁵ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 99.

⁷³⁶ Nylén and Lamm, *Stones, Ships and Symbols*, 100; a similar man with ring image appears on Lärbro Tängelgårda I.

between different worlds.⁷³⁷ A quadruped,⁷³⁸ probably a dog, occupies the lower right-hand corner of the foreground.⁷³⁹ There is a great deal of movement depicted on KH I: idleness is nearly absent, with even the stationary figures engaged in activity. This is especially noticeable in relation to the horse and rider: the horse's front leg joint is articulated, its neck is upright and the rider is leaning backwards expressing the movement of riding.⁷⁴⁰ The two warriors engage in a duel: the presence of valkyries could suggest they are *einherjar* training for Ragnarök. Even the prostrate man is 'doing something,' i.e., ensuring victory for the rider.⁷⁴¹

The lower panel (fig. 2) is dominated by a left-facing 'Lillbjärstypus'⁷⁴² ship filled with warriors poised for battle.⁷⁴³ Shields are hung on the railing: four on the foredeck, three on the aft. The ship appears to be 'sailing' on peaks that resemble waves or sea-swell. As is common with ships on picture stones, the crew are depicted in direct profile whereas the sail is shown as it would be viewed from the front. In this way multiple points of view are deployed.⁷⁴⁴ The warriors grip their swords and shields as if ready to spring overboard, while

⁷³⁷ There are striking parallels between the Gotlandic 'woman welcoming a rider' and very similar, albeit distant in space and time, images from the Scythian-Iranian-Anatolian area from as early as the 4th century BCE: see Valter Lang, "Riding to the Afterworld: Burying with Horses and Riding Equipment in Estonia and the Baltic Rim," *Identity Formation and Diversity in the Early Medieval Baltic and Beyond: Communicators and Communication* ed. Johan Callmer, Ingrid Gustin and Mats Roslund (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 62–4. Hem Eriksen, *Architecture, Society and Ritual in Viking Age Scandinavia*, 176–7, suggests, like the *kolam* on thresholds in India, that women in pre-Christian Scandinavia were associated with the entrance to certain spaces and boundaries, which in turn reinforced the boundaries to their bodies. In her view, "to cross the threshold and enter a new and unknown space can become a metaphor of penetration and sexual acts."

⁷³⁸ According to Marjolein Stern, "Heroic images on runestones in the context of commemoration and communication," *Bilddenkmäler zur Germanischen Götter- und Heldensage. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde Band 91* ed. Sigmund Oehrl and Wilhelm Heizmann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 383, quadrupeds depicted on runestones from the Swedish mainland, such as Östergötland 181, can be classified into different sub-species of *canis lupus* (wolves, foxes and dogs) by snout shape. The quadruped's snout on KH I is too imprecise to fit one of these classifications, however. Quadrupeds that accompany horsemen are also more likely to be dogs.

⁷³⁹ Lang, "Riding to the Afterworld," 68, has pointed out that the dog was important in Indo-European mythologies as a dual nature-culture creature that accompanied a person to the underworld; similarly, Gardela, *(Magic) Staffs in the Viking Age*, 50, argues it was a kind of guardian of the dead. The mythical dog Garmr, sometimes associated with the wolf Fenrir, may also be of relevance here: in *Grímnismál* 44 he is called 'best of dogs' in a famous list. Like Fenrir, his role seems to be strongly connected to Ragnarök, cf. *Völuspá* 44 'Garm bays loudly before Ginpa-cave | the rope will break and the ravener fun free.'

⁷⁴⁰ For most of the C and D picture stones, horses are depicted in motion, what Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 135, calls a "running pace." In contrast, the horses with eight legs, usually identified as Sleipnir, lack articulated joints.

⁷⁴¹ Nylén and Lamm, *Stones, Ships and Symbols*.

⁷⁴² Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 71; for an overview of the different ship types in Gotland, see Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 18–23. In general, it seems there is a high degree of homogeneity in the depiction of ships.

⁷⁴³ The usual number of crew on C and D stones is somewhere between nine and twelve, a realistic number of men required to operate a Viking ship: Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 137.

⁷⁴⁴ Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 146.

the vertical elongated lozenges and thin curved lines on the sail “create the effect of movement and give the illusion of wind billowing in the sails.”⁷⁴⁵ The movement of the sea is complemented by that of the air filling the sail, and both align with the anticipated movement of the warrior-sailors.

Below (fig. 3) is a woman standing next to a kind of enclosure in which a male figure lying flat is surrounded by snakes.⁷⁴⁶ One of the snakes is biting him on the chest.⁷⁴⁷ This recalls the moment of Gunnarr Gjúkason’s death described in several sources, including *Völsunga saga* and *Atlakviða* ‘The Lay of Atli.’⁷⁴⁸ We know from *Atlakviða* 31 that he is alive (*lifanda*⁷⁴⁹ *gram*) at the time.⁷⁵⁰ The enclosure may suggest contact between different worlds: according to Marianne Hem Eriksen, doors or thresholds in pre-Christian Scandinavian belief can represent “in-between” spaces separating the realm of the living and the realm of the dead.⁷⁵¹ In this light, the gap in the ‘wall’ of the enclosure would be an expression of the border⁷⁵² between one world and the other.⁷⁵³ The identity of the woman

⁷⁴⁵ Laila Kitzler Åhlfeldt, “Picture-stone workshops on Viking Age Gotland – a study of craftworkers’ traces,” *Bildstenar til Germaniska Götter- och Heldensaga*. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde Band 91 ed. Sigmund Oehrl and Wilhelm Heizmann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 403 and 418.

⁷⁴⁶ While general opinion on the identity of this figure remains in favour of Gunnarr, in recent years new kinds of technology, such as photogrammetry, have been applied to the picture stones, resulting in, in some cases, wildly different interpretations. For example, Sigmund Oehrl, “Re-Interpretations of Gotlandic Picture Stones Based on the Reflectance Transformation Imaging Method (RTI): Some Examples,” *Myth, Materiality, and Lived Religion: In Merovingian and Viking Scandinavia* ed. K. Wikström af Edholm, P. Jackson Rova, A. Nordberg, O. Sundqvist, and T. Zachrisson (Stockholm: Stockholm University Press, 2019), 157, has recently done a photogrammetry analysis of the Sanda stone and KH I in which he disputes the identification of the figure in the snake pit, whom he regards as a woman, possibly Loki. Finally, Signe Horne Fuglesang, “Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery in Viking Scandinavia,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* vol. 3 (2007), 204, argues that despite certain reservations Gunnarr “must be allowed as a possibility.”

⁷⁴⁷ The depiction of snakes at KH I is consistent with iconographical presentation of snakes on runestones in other parts of Scandinavia during the Viking Age: Moltke, *Runes and their Origin*, 274.

⁷⁴⁸ Gustav Neckel & Hans Kuhn (eds.), *Edda, Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1983), 245: *Lifanda gram | lagði i garð, | þann er scriðinn var, | scatna mengi, | innan ormom* ‘The living prince they placed in the pit, | a crowd of men did it, | which was crawling inside with snakes’: Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 209.

⁷⁴⁹ Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda. Volume I: Heroic Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 23, places emphasis on this “telling” adjective in her analysis of the poem.

⁷⁵⁰ Arrhenius, “Tür die Toten,” 390, has pointed out that snakes were often “encapsulated” in the thresholds of a house or stable in old Swedish belief as they served a protective function. The snake also symbolised healing power and seduction. For another interpretation of the snake as guardian to the underworld see Jens Peter Schjødt, “Livsdrik og vidensdrik,” *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* vol. 2 (1983), 100.

⁷⁵¹ Marianne Hem Eriksen, “Doors to the dead. The power of doorways and thresholds in Viking Age Scandinavia,” *Archaeological Dialogues* vol. 20, no. 2 (2013), 202–3.

⁷⁵² There were several thresholds or gates in Old Norse mythology that permitted access to the land of the dead, such as Helgrindr ‘the gate to Hel’s realm,’ Nágrindr ‘the gate of corpses,’ and Valgrindr ‘the gate of the fallen:’ see Chapter four, 159–61.

⁷⁵³ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 104, has also speculated that the ‘snake’ that the woman appears to be taking from the snake-pit reappears below transformed as an ‘arrow’ and so forms a sequence of narrative scenes. He is reminded of the branch that Óðinn places in the hand of Starkaðr which transforms into a deadly

has caused debate: she is usually identified as a valkyrie welcoming Gunnarr to Valhöll, Gunnarr's sister Gúðrun, or his lover Oddrún.⁷⁵⁴ However, rather than referring to a specific myth, she may be related to the females that act as conduits to other realms, as in *Grógaldr* 'Gróa's Chant,' in which a dead woman (Gróa) is described as watching over the doors to the dead.⁷⁵⁵ This function is probably implied in *Hyndluljóð* as well where a dead *vǫlva* (Hyndla) is called upon by Freyja (see Chapter two, 60–1, and 67–8).

In the bottom left-hand corner (fig. 4) another woman holding a horn or stick stands on top of a slanted 'platform' while below right is a man holding a bow in one hand and a bird in the other.⁷⁵⁶ Clockwise (fig. 5), two more bowmen and a cow stand inside another enclosure. The presence of gabled houses suggests a large enclosure or fortress.⁷⁵⁷ At least one quadrilateral structure used for strategic purposes is emphasised in Old Norse myth, namely the four-sided house Loki builds in the mountains to hide from the gods with doors on each

spear. Lotte Hedeager, "Poetry and picturing in deep historical time," *Re-imagining Periphery* ed. Charlotta Hillerdal and Kristin Ilves (Oxford: Oxbow, 2020), 113, presumably agrees with this assertion, describing snakes as shapeshifters *par excellence*, analogous to Óðinn's shapeshifting abilities. In her view, the snake motif is "the single dominant figural composition and the structuring principle in the [Iron Age Scandinavian] iconography." Thus, the snake, and animals in general, were used to explore ontological concerns of the relationship between humans and animals up until the end of the pre-Christian era.

⁷⁵⁴ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "Gunnarr Gjúkason and images of snake-pits," *Bildenkmaeler zur Germanischen Götter- und Heldensage. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde Band 91* ed. Sigmund Oehrl and Wilhelm Heizmann (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015), 360.

⁷⁵⁵ Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (eds.), *Eddukvæði II* (Reykjavik: Hið Íslenska Fornritafélag, 2014), 437: *Vaki þú, Gró!, | Vaki þú, góð kona! | Vek ek þik dauðra dura, | ef þú þat mant | at þú þinn mög bæðir | til kumblýsjar koma* 'Wake up Groa! wake excellent lady! | I awaken you at the doors of the dead. | If you remember, you invited your son | to come to the grave-mound: Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 256.

⁷⁵⁶ A horn would identify her as a valkyrie if we recall Óðinn's words from *Grímnismál* 36, as well as similar depictions of valkyries on material discussed throughout this chapter. However, if the object she is holding is identified as a staff (ON *vǫlr*, *stafr*, *seiðstafr*, *gandr*, *gambanteinn* to name a handful), it opens the possibility that she could be received as a *vǫlva*. According to *Eiríks saga rauða* ch. 4, the *vǫlva*'s staff is an important part of her ritual dress. She is also set off from the rest of the image, and 'raised' somewhat, which accords with some of the evidence to do with *vǫlur* that regard them as subversive beings (though recent archaeological evidence may dispute this). See Olof Sundqvist, "Cultic Leaders and Religious Specialists," *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures, Volume II: Social, Geographical, and Historical Contexts, and Communication Between Worlds* ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow and Anders Andrén (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020), 774–8, and Neil Price, *The Viking Way: Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia 2nd* ed. (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2019), 55–190, for a discussion of the archaeological evidence for magical staffs and the practitioners who wield them.

⁷⁵⁷ *Guta lag* and *Guta saga*, texts from the Old Gutnish Codex Holm. B 64, mention *stafgarðar* in connection to ritual sites. *Stafgarðar* it seems were enclosed spaces surrounded by a wall of staves – their function has been the subject of heated debate since the nineteenth century in Sweden. The late date (circa 1350) of the manuscript raises source-critical problems when interpreting the pre-Christian era, but it certainly suggests that enclosed spaces in Gotland, and perhaps other parts of Scandinavia, was a very ancient concept: see Anders Andrén, "Stafgarðar Revisited," *Making the Profane Sacred in the Viking Age: Essays in Honour of Stefan Brink* ed. Irene García Losquiño, Olof Sundqvist, and Declan Taggart (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021), 109–20.

side, described in *Gylfaginning* ch. 50.⁷⁵⁸ In recent years archaeology has revealed that these kinds of buildings did exist, such as the Iron Age Trelleborg fortress in Sjælland, Denmark, which was aligned along cardinal directions.⁷⁵⁹ Norse myth also provides us with an etiological explanation for the four cardinal directions, expressed as the names of four dwarfs.⁷⁶⁰

KH I is one of the best-preserved stones of the mythological corpus. It presents a number of scenes that seem to be rooted in Norse myth. The male figures on the ‘head’ of the stone I connect to warriors training in Valhöll, while the horn-bearing female is likely to be a valkyrie. This kind of scenario of the afterlife, I argue, is depicted in a very similar way in the eddic poems *Grímnismál* and *Hyndluljóð*. Below is a splendid ‘Viking’ ship in full sail. This is the clearest depiction of movement on KH I, along with the horse whose right leg joint is articulated, indicating flexion. The bottom left image has traditionally been regarded as a rendering of Gunnarr’s death in *Atlakviða*. This interpretation could be bolstered if the woman extending her hand between the gap in the enclosure is identified as representing the threshold between different worlds, which is often guarded by a female figure. The scenes at the bottom of KH I are harder to connect to specific myths, though contact between different worlds and magic, indicated by a woman holding a possible wand or staff, seem to be depicted.

Lärbro Stora Hammars I (figs. 6–11)

A circa eighth-century stone, Lärbro Stora Hammars I (LSH I) is now located at Bungemuseet in Fårösund, Gotland, but originally would have stood nearby in Lärbro *socken* to the south. The iconography is divided into six distinct image subfields, which I have set out individually (see pp. 204–6). Unlike KH I, almost all the available space on the stone has been used, creating a sense of frenzied action.⁷⁶¹ The imagery of LSH I is filled with violence

⁷⁵⁸ *Gerði þar hús ok fjórar dyrr at hann mátti sjá ór húsinu í allar áttir* ‘[he] built a house there with four doors so that he could see out of the house in all directions’: Faulkes, *Edda*, 51.

⁷⁵⁹ A similar spatial awareness can be seen in various other Viking Age settlements, such as Ösarp, Halland, Sweden; Vorbasse, Jutland, Denmark; Sand, Rogaland, Norway; and Skeie, Rogaland, Norway: see Hem Eriksen, *Architecture, Society and Ritual in Viking Age Scandinavia*, 112 fig. 5.1. A tiny four-sided bronze house has been carved onto the shaft of an iron (possibly sorceress’s) staff from Klinta on Öland, often taken as the departure point for reconstructions of early Scandinavian buildings: Price, *The Viking Way*, 141.

⁷⁶⁰ Cf. *Gylfaginning* 8. John Lindow, “The Social Semantics of Cardinal Directions in Medieval Scandinavia,” *Mankind Quarterly* vol. 34 (1994), 209–24.

⁷⁶¹ The Lärbro stones tend to fill the entirety of the space, whereas older stones often leave blank spaces: see Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 144. Eshleman also ascribes the strong sense of action and reality on the Lärbro stones to the variation in the forms of the figures.

and adventure that would have appealed to young warriors and acted as a cautionary tale for them.⁷⁶² It is possible, according to Lindqvist, that the stone was meant to be ‘read’ from top to bottom. As the number of narrative ‘scenes’ increases, so does the mobility of the individual characters, culminating in the Viking ship at the bottom travelling at full speed.⁷⁶³ As Lori Eshleman has pointed out, the figures on LSH I face inwards, thus training the eye towards the centre of each subfield while also expressing motion and change.⁷⁶⁴

The top two subfields are quite worn; the ‘first’ (fig. 6) seems to include at least three figures holding swords, as well as a bird, possibly a rooster, as suggested by Lindqvist. On the subfield below (fig. 7) Lindqvist identifies two of the men as kidnapers and a third as their female victim.⁷⁶⁵ Both subfields show various groups during a confrontation, though it is difficult to connect them to any specific mythological tales. In these scenes the motion is implied: above the participants are in close combat rather than advancing, while those below could be engaged in a kidnapping, but this would not explain why their swords are stuck in the ground. The horse on the left might be the means by which they hope to escape with the victim. The horse itself appears to be tied to something fixed, possibly a post, so that it cannot run away.

The subfield third (fig. 8) from top contains two distinct scenes:⁷⁶⁶ to the left two figures of disproportionate size⁷⁶⁷ face each other separated by a table (apparently identified as an altar by Fredrik Nordin⁷⁶⁸) on which a man is stabbed with a spear, while a so-called ‘valknut’ and a bird of prey (“Raubvogel”) are suspended overhead. A warrior with a shield appears to be crouching to their left. In Lindqvist’s interpretation, this figure has a noose

⁷⁶² Thus, John Hines, “Ekphrasis as Speech-Act: Ragnarsdrápa 107,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* vol. 3 (2007), 240: “in the Viking Age the heroic ethos was indeed a way of life and death that was inculcated in those ambitious for eminence and renown by means of such commemoration, and which was then re-enacted by some of those individuals in practice.”

⁷⁶³ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 105.

⁷⁶⁴ Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 140.

⁷⁶⁵ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 86.

⁷⁶⁶ It also resembles certain scenes on the reconstructed tapestries from Oseberg (circa 835), which include a ‘Procession,’ ‘Sacrificial Hanging’ and scenes depicting battles and horsemen: see Bjørn Hougen, “Billedvev,” *Oseberg funnet, IV: Tekstilene* ed. Arne Emil Christensen and Margareta Nockert (Oslo: Kulturhistorisk Museum, Universitet i Oslo, 2006), 17–27, and Fuglesang, “Ekphrasis and Surviving Imagery in Viking Scandinavia,” 207.

⁷⁶⁷ The disparity in size between different figures depends to some extent on the presence of a ground line, according to Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 147, which “ties them to the frontal plane” in the case of the Lärbro stones.

⁷⁶⁸ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 86

around his neck attached to two trees which have been ‘bent’ over;⁷⁶⁹ once the trees are straightened the noose around the man’s neck will tighten.⁷⁷⁰ The other scene shows four warriors in battle array marching towards a bird-like figure. The man being hung on a tree is clearly reminiscent of the sacrifice of King Víkarr in *Gautreks saga*,⁷⁷¹ as well as Óðinn’s sacrifice to himself reported in *Hávamál* 138.⁷⁷² The other sacrificial scene might not have any literary parallels, though we know from the eyewitness who informed Adam of Bremen that men and animals were reportedly hung from trees at Old Uppsala every nine years. This scene is contrasted with a group of soldiers with raised swords separated by a bird-like figure.⁷⁷³ It is unclear whether there is a connection between these two scenes, though warfare and sacrifice are clearly interrelated. These soldiers do not appear to be moving, but rather they adopt a defensive posture.

On the left of the following subfield (fig. 9) is a confrontation between a ship of warriors with swords raised and some other warriors who are led by a woman.⁷⁷⁴ A ship usually implies water, which, below the ship as well as on other picture stones from Gotland, is signalled by large waves; however, this is by no means always the case. The men on board hold their swords, so the emphasis is clearly not on sailing, which it seems to be of the ship below. Since the focus is on fighting rather than sailing, the ship could be approaching land, even without the obvious visual markers, so it is a very different presentation of sea and air in relation to the ship on KH I above. The figures on the right are also holding their weapons above their heads; in contrast to the men on the left, there can be no question that they must be on land. Thus, the narrow gap between the ship and the foremost figure marks a beach,

⁷⁶⁹ The Lärbro stones depict a good deal of environmental elements, such as trees and waves, perhaps due to the appearance of distinct ground lines simulating the earth: see Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 152.

⁷⁷⁰ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 86. According to Nylén and Lamm, *Stones, Ships and Symbols*, 62, this is the only identifiable sacrifice scene in the corpus.

⁷⁷¹ This scene continued to arouse the interest of Scandinavians centuries later; for example, the Swedish scholar Olaus Magnus (1490–1557) chose to depict it on his *Carta marina*, the first map of the Nordic countries.

⁷⁷² ‘I know that I hung on a windswept tree | nine long nights, wounded with a spear, dedicated to Odin | myself to myself’: Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 32.

⁷⁷³ This bird figure as well as at least one other bird, depicted above the ‘altar,’ may have some relation to Óðinn, who could transform himself into an eagle, or Óðinn’s ravens, Huginn and Muninn, who represent ‘Thought’ and ‘Memory’ respectively (cf. *Grimnismál* 20): see Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995), 70, who discusses similar bird motifs on images from Iron Age Scandinavia, such as at Toroslunda and Valsgårde, in Sweden.

⁷⁷⁴ Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 34, likens this with a similar small boat on Stenkyrka Smiss I which contains the same order: small boat/woman/standing men.

which is a liminal space.⁷⁷⁵ The division of space and the presence of a female is presumably the reason why some scholars believe it to be a depiction of the Hjaðningavíg (‘Battle-of-the-followers-of-Heðin’), an event related in several sources, chiefly *Sqrla þátttr* ‘Short tale about Sqrlri’ and *Skáldskaparmál*, but also in *Ragnarsdrápa* ‘Drápa about Ragnar’ sts 7–12. The version in *Sqrla þátttr* frames the battle in the context of how Freyja obtains a precious necklace which Óðinn contrives to have stolen.⁷⁷⁶ When Freyja confronts Óðinn he agrees to return it on certain conditions, one being that she contrive through magic an endless battle between two kings that can only be interrupted by a Christian man. Freyja is out of the story at this point, but the condition is fulfilled by two kings Heðinn and Hqgni. If previous interpretations are correct, the woman on LSH I is probably Hqgni’s daughter Hildir (a valkyrie with a name meaning ‘war’), who resurrects the dead warriors at the end of each day in order to have them fight again. It is unclear what she is carrying, but perhaps a staff or wand, as magic plays an important role in the story.⁷⁷⁷

In the next subfield (fig. 10) the division of space suggests that the two opposing forces are enemies, as they face each other with raised swords. A figure being trampled by a horse lies between the two groups with no clear connection to either.⁷⁷⁸ This method of punishment strongly recalls the way Svanhildir is put to death in *Hamðismál* ‘The Lay of Hamðir’ and *Guðrúnarhvot* ‘The Whetting of Guðrún’:⁷⁷⁹

⁷⁷⁵ Other mythological events that occur on/at beaches include Baldr’s funeral, which suggests that beaches were thought to be liminal spaces, in between different worlds. There is also ample archaeological evidence that ships were buried in strategic locations close to water to facilitate the final journey.

⁷⁷⁶ Possibly the *brisinga men*.

⁷⁷⁷ It is possible she could depict the valkyrie Gqndul, whom Heðin approached to devise magic spells in order to abduct Hildir.

⁷⁷⁸ Bodily disfigurement is significant in Old Norse myth (cf. the god Týr who loses his hand as well as the one-eyed Óðinn), but also in Viking Age mortuary practices as a way of preventing the *draugr* or spirit of a dead person from causing harm to the living. Brutal treatment of the cadaver - decapitation, stabbing with knives and so forth, marked out its ‘spatial otherness,’ according to studies conducted by Eva Thäte, *Monuments and minds. Monument re-use in Scandinavia in the second half of the first millennium AD* (Lund: Wallin & Dalholm, 2007), and Leslek Gardela, “Buried with honour and stoned to death? The ambivalence of Viking Age magic in the light of archaeology,” *Analecta Archaeologica Ressoiviensia* vol. 4 (2011), 339–76. Also see Hem Eriksen, “Doors to the dead,” 205–6.

⁷⁷⁹ Elements of this encounter are also captured in *Ragnarsdrápa* 3–4, which spares little detail regarding the scale of violence: Margaret Clunies Ross, ‘Bragi inn gamli Boddason, *Ragnarsdrápa*,’ *Poetry from Treatises on Poetics* Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages III, ed. Kari Ellen Gade and Edith Marold (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 27. <<https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=text&i=1130>> (accessed 16 September 2021): *Knátti eðr við illan | Jqrmunrekkr at vakna | með dreyrfáar dróttir | draum í sverða flaumi. | Rósta varð í ranni | Randvés hqfuðniðja, | þás hrafnbláir hefndu | harma Erps of barmar.* ‘Jqrmunrekkr then awakened with an evil dream among the blood-stained troops in the eddy of swords [BATTLE]. There was tumult in the hall of the chief kinsmen of Randvér [= the dynasty of the Goths], when the raven-black brothers of Erpr [= Hamðir and Sqrlri] avenged their injuries.’ *Flaut of set við sveita | sóknar alfs á golfi | hræva dagg, þars hoggvar | hendr sem fætr of kenndu. | Fell í blóði blandinn | brunn qlskakki — runna | þats á Leifa landa | laufi fátt — at haufði.* ‘Dew of corpses [BLOOD] flowed over the bench together with the blood of the elf of attack [WARRIOR =

*Systir var yccor Svanhildr um heitin,
sú er Iormunreccr ióm um traddi,
hvítom oc svartom, á hervegi,
grám, gangtómom Gotna hrossom.⁷⁸⁰ (Hamðismál 3)*

‘She was your sister – Svanhild was her name –
whom Iormunrekk trampled with horses,
white and black, on the paved road,
with the grey horses of the Goths, trained to pace slowly.’⁷⁸¹

*Hví sitit, hví sofit lífi?
hví tregrað ycr teiti at mæla?
er Iormunreccr yðra systor,
unga at aldri, ióm of traddi,
hvítom oc svartom, á hervegi,
grám, gangtómom Gotna hrossom.⁷⁸² (Guðrúnarhvöt 2)*

Why do you sit, why do you sleep away your life?
Why does it not grieve to speak of cheerful things?
Since Iormunrekk had your sister,
still so young, trampled with horses,
white and black, on the paved road,
with the grey horses of the Goths, trained to pace slowly.’⁷⁸³

In both stanzas Guðrún is exhorting her sons Hamðir and Sqrli to avenge Svanhildr with phrases that emphasise the brutal manner of her death: ‘trampled by horses,’ ‘trained to pace slowly.’ The repetition of these two, and other, lines in both poems suggest that Svanhildr’s death is particularly memorable.⁷⁸⁴ Similarly, on this subfield of LSH I the horse and the trampled body are the focal point. As I have mentioned, it is difficult to represent speed in

Jormunrekk] on the floor, where people recognised hewn arms and legs. The ale-dispenser [RULER = Jormunrekk] fell head-first into a well mixed with blood; that is painted on the leaf of the trees of the lands of Leifi <sea-king> [SEA > SHIPS > SHIELD].’

⁷⁸⁰ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 269.

⁷⁸¹ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 230.

⁷⁸² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 265.

⁷⁸³ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 226.

⁷⁸⁴ Margaret Clunies Ross, “Stylistic and Generic Definers of the Old Norse Skaldic Ekphrasis,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* vol. 3 (2007), 180, suggests that it is not difficult to see how a powerful visual image of the “confused carnage” on the floor of Jormunrekk’s hall during the attack could have inspired Bragi’s description of this event in his *Ragnarsdrápa*, especially st. 4.

this kind of art; however, three of the horse's legs make contact with the ground, suggesting it is deliberately treading or *gangtamr* 'trained to pace slowly' as the poems describe it. Furthermore, their leg joints are not articulated, indicating that they are not moving. Moreover, despite the trauma induced by the horse's hooves, the trampled figure miraculously stretches out an arm, signalling to the audience his/her consciousness during the ordeal.⁷⁸⁵ If indeed the trampled body is that of Svanhildr, we should not be surprised to encounter other figures from this episode of the Völsung legend. Without distinguishing features it is hard to be sure, but the warriors on either end of the subfield might represent a depiction of the battle between the brothers Hamðir and Sqrli and Jormunrekkr, a version of which is related in *Hamðismál*. In st. 18 Jormunrekkr's men are said to be feasting in a hall when Hamðir and Sqrli arrive (*glaumr var í hqullo, | halir qlreifir*); it is implicitly outside the hall that the battle takes place.⁷⁸⁶ On LSH I the warrior on the far left seems to be standing on a step, which could be interpreted as the entrance to Jormunrekkr's hall, which would make this figure Jormunrekkr himself or his retainer. As Eriksen has argued, doorways and steps are liminal spaces (mediating society from chaos, sacred and profane, etc.), so there are two instances of liminality depicted on LSH 1.

The lowest subfield (fig. 11) is the only image on LSH I that does not depict two groups in opposition or conflict. In the absence of such conflict we might interpret this as a pure 'travelling' image; moreover, the soldiers on board the ship do not seem to be in a state of readiness for battle like their counterparts above. This image is also less likely to have mythological content if we adopt the view that the subfields higher up on the picture stones display concepts relating to the afterlife, while lower subfields are more profane. Nevertheless, the ship was also probably thought to be one of the main modes of transport to Valhøll in Gotland.⁷⁸⁷

LSH 1 presents an ordered sequence of scenes, at least two of which can be tied to written Norse myth and legend. These are the Hjaðningavíg and the killing of Svanhildr by Jormunrekkr. Other possible mythological scenes on LSH 1 include a depiction of the death

⁷⁸⁵ The trampled body of a man appears on Lärbro Tängelgård I, which suggests that it was a not infrequent form of execution in the early medieval period.

⁷⁸⁶ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 271.

⁷⁸⁷ Sea transport generally in Gotland was very important at the time the picture stones were raised to the extent that the inner parts of the island were accessible to boats via lakes which were only drained much later. See Kitzler Åhlfeldt, "Picture-stone workshops on Viking Age Gotland – a study of craftworkers' traces," 420.

of King Víkarr. Common to all the image bands is a division into opposing groups of figures, which help to frame the scenes and to create conflict and a sense of drama. It also helps to indicate certain kinds of spaces. Thus the depiction of Hjaðningavíg can be bolstered by interpreting the space between the warriors on the boat and the object-toting woman as a beach (fig. 9). And the raised platform on fig. 10 can be interpreted as the step leading into Jǫrmunrekkr's hall, the space where the brothers Hamðir and Sǫrli and Jǫrmunrekkr are said to do battle in *Hamðismál* and *Guðrúnarhvöt*.

Lärbro Stora Hammars III (figs. 12–14)

Lärbro Stora Hammars III (LSH III) is another circa eighth-century keyhole-type picture stone from Lärbro *socken*, now displayed outdoors a short drive away at Bungemuseet, Fårösund. Unfortunately, when compared to its sister stones, much of the iconography is worn, especially from the lower portion, so we must rely more on historical interpretations made when the images were clearer.

The 'head' of the stone consists of two subfields. The upper subfield depicts a horse facing left to right accompanied by its human rider. In the lower subfield a large bird-like figure with distinct wings lies prostrate, its head close to two human figures. Any accoutrement that may be depicted has been worn away. Lindqvist writes, "Sehen wir hier nicht vielleicht Suttung und seine Tochter in dem Augenblick, wo Oden den Dichternet getrunken und mit diesem Schatz die Flucht zu den Wohnungen der Götter angetreten hat?"⁷⁸⁸ In the myth he is referring to, which survives most fully in *Skáldskaparmál* chs 57-8, the god Óðinn discovers the hiding place of the mead, which is being guarded by the giantess Gunnlǫð, and ingratiates himself enough for her to allow him to a drink of it. After lying with her for three nights, Óðinn transforms himself into an eagle and flies back to Ásgarðr, having swallowed the mead (see Chapter one, 19–21). It is difficult to interpret the upper subfield due to its current condition but based on its position on the 'head' of the picture stone and the probable presence of mythological content below, it is also likely to be of mythological significance. A horse on its own is difficult to interpret, as it could indicate any mythical or non-mythical horse, but given its prominence, the former seems more likely.

⁷⁸⁸ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 95.

Moving down the picture stone we encounter the central image of a rider, whose horse has one front leg lifted as if in mid-stride, and a woman with a long plait or pigtail, who seems to be receiving him. Lindqvist suggests a bird of prey is carved somewhere on this subfield as well, though I am unable to make it out.⁷⁸⁹ It is conventionally thought that this scene depicts a valkyrie welcoming a warrior, or the god Óðinn, to Valhöll.⁷⁹⁰ This interpretation presumably relies on the similarity with *Grímnismál* 36 and certain statements by Snorri regarding valkyries' activities in the afterlife. However, the horse clearly has only four legs in comparison to Sleipnir's eight,⁷⁹¹ so perhaps we are dealing with an Odinic figure rather than Óðinn himself. Thus, in Eyvindr *skáldaspillir* Finnsson's *Hákonarmál* the focus is on the Odinic human figure Hákon the Good, who is being escorted to Valhöll by two valkyries. Just as Eyvindr is commemorating Hákon by associating him with Óðinn, the rider and woman on LSH III imitate the welcome that Óðinn might have received on his return to Valhöll. Similarly, the ship below might be on its way to Valhöll or similar realm, again imitating a divine journey.

The images on LSH III are quite worn but certain figural depictions can be discerned. The horseman and long-haired woman arguably fit within the tradition on the picture stones of valkyries receiving a fallen warrior in Valhöll, and Lindqvist identifies the other scene as depicting the myth of the mead of poetry based on resemblances with the narrative in Snorri's *Edda*. In both instances a liminal space is depicted: the underworld and the mountain Hnitbjörg. Elements of liminality are depicted on several other stones discussed in this chapter as well, which suggests that it was an important theme for the carvers and/or patrons of the images.

Ardre VIII (figs. 15–25)

Ardre VIII is a keyhole-type picture stone discovered in Ardre church in the east of Gotland. It is dated to the period 700–800 and is now located in the Swedish History Museum (*Historiska museet*) in Stockholm. Like KH I, it is divided into two panels: the upper panel is much smaller, about a third of the overall composition, while the larger lower panel is less

⁷⁸⁹ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 87.

⁷⁹⁰ Cf. the same motif on KH I; *Grímnismál* 36 'Hrist and Mist, I wish would bear a horn to me.'

⁷⁹¹ Several eight-legged horses also appear on §1a & b of a Viking Age weave from Överhogdal, Härjedalen, which led Price, *The Viking Way*, 267, to question the validity of the interpretation of the eight-legged horses from Gotland as Sleipnir. He also points to circumpolar shamanistic parallels with the Överhogdal horses to support the view that this motif can be viewed as an aspect of Norse-Sámi interaction.

well-preserved and harder to interpret. The images on Ardre VIII, especially those on the lower panel, depict a great deal of ‘movement,’ much of it to do with the necessities of daily life, fishing, sailing and blacksmithing.⁷⁹² It is significant therefore that we can relate many of these activities to certain Old Norse myths. They show us that the myths that had a ‘practical application’ were important to whomever commissioned the Ardre VIII stone. It also suggests that the society in which the stone was produced, as pointed out in the introductory section of this chapter above (pp. 171–2), was one that favoured activity over passivity, a very significant part of the Norse worldview.

The upper panel (fig. 15) is generally held to be a depiction of the afterlife akin to that imagined as taking place in Valhøll in various sources. For this reason, it is programmatically unlike the lower one. The distinction may also be framed in terms of the juxtaposition of the concepts ‘high and low’ or ‘sacred and profane.’ It is dominated by a left-facing eight-legged horse with rider. The only eight-legged horse in Old Norse myth is Sleipnir, owned by the god Óðinn.⁷⁹³ The rider is holding the reins in one hand and in the other an item closely resembling a “Rackett.”⁷⁹⁴ To the left is a group of four human figures, one prostrate, who are organised in some fashion. On the left stands a man holding a sword much like Sigurðr on certain picture stones, such as the Ramsund stone (Sö 101), Södermanland, on the Swedish mainland. Lindqvist raises the possibility that a lur is depicted rather than a sword, which might suggest the involvement of the god Heimdallr, who is thought to blow on his Gjallarhorn at the beginning of Ragnarøk, according to *Völuspá* 46.⁷⁹⁵ Gabriel Gustafson, a contemporary of Lindqvist, suggests this scene might depict the raising of a picture stone. The gabled structure,⁷⁹⁶ which has strong parallels with Alskog Tjängvide I (AT I), is identified as ‘Valhalla’ by Lindqvist. It is depicted with a schematic view of the exterior.⁷⁹⁷ Finally, a man is bent over to form a U-shape, a motif also found on AT I, which is discussed

⁷⁹² Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 145, points out that in comparison to the rigid forms of the Lärbro stones, which generally maintain the integrity of individual figures, there is a good deal of contiguity on Ardre VIII, such as the way the princes’ bodies overlap amongst themselves while also touching the smithy.

⁷⁹³ As mentioned above, the eight-legged horses lack articulated leg joints, meaning they are not in a state of motion: see Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 136.

⁷⁹⁴ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 23.

⁷⁹⁵ *Hátt blæss Heimdallr, horn er á lopti*: Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 11. For a discussion of this motif, see Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte* vol. II (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1957), 241–2.

⁷⁹⁶ *Grimnismál* 24 emphasises roofed halls - ‘of all those halls which I know to be roofed, | my son’s I know is the greatest’: Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 51. Also cf. *Hávamál* 37 ‘A farm of your own is better, even if small, | everyone’s someone at home; | though he has two goats and a coarsely roofed house, | that is better than begging’: Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 18.

⁷⁹⁷ Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 139.

below. On Ardre VIII this man is alone, but on AT I he appears to stand on a platform below which another human figure appears.

While the upper panel depicts a vision of the afterlife peculiar to Gotland, the larger lower subfield (fig. 16) probably presents elements of several different myths known from across the Germanic area. In the top left-hand corner is a Viking ship (fig. 18) carved in the manner of KH I and LSH III; like these other ships it is also sailing from right to left. Four men are walking along the railing line in knee-length tunics, the two foremost carrying swords. Just nudging the ship's prow are the tools of a blacksmith as well as a hearth for firing. Below (fig. 19) is a small boat with two men and what might be a kind of fishing line or stick with bait. In the bottom left-hand corner (fig. 17) is another small boat with a crew of two, one of whom lunges at a fish with a spear. On the right-hand side in descending order are several "unsophisticated groupings" of figures,⁷⁹⁸ many too nebulous to interpret.⁷⁹⁹ The scene to the right of the sail (top right) also shows an enclosure as well as possibly some bellows. At the very bottom (figs. 20–1) is another enclosure in which a figure in repose is framed by several snakes. To the left (fig. 22) a woman, indicated by the trailing braid from a topknot, is shown standing with a horn or cup in both hands. This subfield is significant for the depiction of vigorous kinds of movement, which is remarkable given the difficulty of depicting movement on a fixed object like a picture stone.

The three boats are concentrated on the left of Ardre VIII and would be contiguous if not for two kneeling figures, neither of whom Lindqvist is able to identify.⁸⁰⁰ Clearly these parts of Ardre VIII are associated with movement across water. In fact, all three, regardless of size, have steering oars on their sterns. The largest ship on Ardre VIII is stylistically little different from the other 'Viking' ships discussed in this chapter. It is presented with an open sail and the steering oar is also visible. Ships were some of the most valuable forms of property in the Viking Age, so they were clearly status symbols. The frequency with which these ships appear on the picture stones, often without any programmatic relationship to the adjacent scenes, suggests that one need not assign any mythological significance to them.

⁷⁹⁸ Kitzler Åhlfeldt, "Picture-stone workshops on Viking Age Gotland – a study of craftworkers' traces," 403, thinks these images correspond to the way images are carved vertically in rectangular fields on pillars, known from Insular and Manx contexts.

⁷⁹⁹ Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 143: see Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 24, for his interpretation of these figures.

⁸⁰⁰ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 24.

Rather, as Montelius and Andrén argue, especially in a Gotlandic context, the popularity of the ships reflects their assumed importance in carrying dead souls to the underworld (see pp. 170–1) for a discussion of the importance of ships and ship burials in Scandinavia).⁸⁰¹ As John Lindow notes, ships appear in the earliest art, such as on Swedish petroglyphs from the Scandinavian Bronze Age (1700–500 BCE) and the ‘Sunwheel’ from Trundholm, Denmark.⁸⁰²

The boat in the middle is taken to depict the ship steered by Hymir when he and Þórr hunt for the Miðgarðsormr. It is one of the dramatic episodes of the story of Þórr’s fishing expedition related in *Hymiskviða* and given emphasis by Snorri in his *Edda*. Versions of the same scene appear in pictorial art in Scandinavia and England.⁸⁰³ The ox head, perhaps vital to the identification, is also visible as the object attached to the fishing line. The ox head appears elsewhere on Ardre VIII (discussed below). In *Hymiskviða* the ox head is acquired at Hymir’s farm before the expedition. We therefore see a chronological and geographical shift in the presentation of this myth on Ardre VIII. Ludwig Buisson identifies the other small boat carrying two figures as the gods fishing for Loki, who has transformed himself into a salmon, though the written sources do not mention the gods being in a boat. This myth is chiefly attested in *Gylfaginning* ch. 50 where it is explained how the gods manage to capture Loki. This may be the sole visual depiction of the scene from the Viking Age. It is generally thought that Loki appears again on Ardre VIII in the bottom right corner as a bound figure, a scene for which we have comparable visual material. Suffice to say, a comparable shift in time and space in the presentation of these two scenes occurs as well.

⁸⁰¹ ‘Large’ mythological ships naturally lead to associations with Skíðblaðnir, described in *Gylfaginning* ch. 42 as ‘big enough for all the Æsir to go aboard it with weapons and war gear, and it gets a fair wind as soon as the sail is hoisted, wherever it is required to go.’ It is also described in *Grímnismál* 43: *Ívalda synir | gengo í árdaga | Scíðblaðni at scapa, | scipa bezt, | scírom Frey, | nýtom Niarðar bur* (Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 66). ‘The sons of Ivaldi went in bygone days, | To create Skidbladnir, | The best of ships, for shining Freyr, | Njord’s beneficent son’ (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 54). The attestation of Skíðblaðnir in poetry and prose suggests that it was a fairly well-known concept, but it is not the only mythological ship: cf. Nagalfar.

⁸⁰² John Lindow, *Norse Mythology: A Guide to the Gods, Heroes, Rituals, and Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 271–2.

⁸⁰³ Cf. the early tenth century ‘Fishing stone’ from Gosforth, Cumbria, the eleventh century Altuna stone, in Uppland, Sweden, and a carving from Hørðum near Thisted, Jutland, dated to between the eighth and eleventh centuries. The latter two depict Þórr’s feet poking through the bottom of the boat, which was probably a way of capturing the intense struggle between the god and the Miðgarðsormr, which is recorded in several written sources, such as *Hymiskviða* (especially sts 23–4) and *Húsdrápa*. Of course, Ardre VIII is a much larger composition, and issues of space may account for some of the differences.

Finally, both small boats, as well as the larger one to some extent, are associated with the liminality involving bodies of water, which may have informed their positioning on Ardre VIII. In Norse myth water is often depicted as separating chaos from civilisation; it is also an important element in cosmic events that involve journeys to the underworld, such as ship burials, which were thought to literally carry the dead to an Other world. In the written sources, Þórr and Hymir sail out to the edge of the sea, much further than the giant is comfortable with, in order to find the Miðgarðsormr. The gods search for Loki in the waterfall Frárangrfors, located in the mountains, a type of landscape associated with giants and trolls. On Ardre VIII it is noticeable that the boats are positioned on the left-hand margin whereas the rest of the space is devoted to land-based movements.

Another figure associated with liminality is the half-giant Loki, thought to be depicted together with his wife Sigyn on the bottom right-hand margin of the stone (figs. 20–2).⁸⁰⁴ In this scene we see a bound Loki and Sigyn holding a drinking vessel. This is almost certainly Loki’s punishment, related in several sources, including the prose ending to *Lokasenna* and *Gylfaginning*.⁸⁰⁵ According to the latter, Loki is bound with the guts of his son Nari and chained to a rock while a snake perched above drips poison (*eitr*) onto his face while Sigyn catches as much with the cup as she could, but each drip she fails to catch causes him to writhe in agony.⁸⁰⁶ As discussed elsewhere in this thesis, Loki is associated with the action of shaking which, according to written sources, is the cause of earthquakes in the world. It is also associated with cosmic power and the destabilisation of physical space. Moreover, it is ultimately shaking that causes the world to be destroyed at Ragnarøk; shaking is thus a very significant part of his character, so its depiction here is vital in understanding the meaning of the images. The bound Loki is also depicted on the Gosforth cross in Cumbria, northern England, which depicts three distinct scenes from Ragnarøk. On the upper part of the east

⁸⁰⁴ This was certainly the view of early scholars, such as Lindqvist and Buisson, though the latter was less confident about Sigyn. More recently, Sigmund Oehrl, *Vierbeinerdarstellungen auf schwedischen Runensteinen Studien zur nordgermanischen Tier- und Fesselungsikonografie*. Ergänzungsbande zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde. Band 72 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 139, is more reticent in his views, but does not argue against Lindqvist *et al.* Guðmundsdóttir, “Gunnarr Gjúkason and images of snake-pits,” 362, has compared this motif on Ardre VIII with other snake pits on Nordic art and concluded that the legendary figure Gunnarr Gjúkason is more likely to be depicted.

⁸⁰⁵ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 110: *Scaði tók eitorm oc festi up yfir annlit Loca. Draup þar ór eitr. Sigyn, kona Loca, sat þar oc helt munnlaug undir eitriþ. Enn er munnlaugin var full, þar hon út eitriþ; enn meðan draup eitriþ á Loca.*

⁸⁰⁶ Ludwig Buisson, *Der Bildstein Ardre VIII auf Gotland. Göttermythen, Heldensagen und Jenseitsglaube der Germanen im 8. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen. Philologisch-Historische Klasse, Dritte Folge 102 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976), 66, thinks the quadruped beneath Sigyn is Loki’s son Váli, who kills his brother Narfi.

face, above the Crucifixion, the god Víðarr is shown ripping apart the jaws of a wolf by levering them open with his hands and feet (see Chapter one, 49–50).

A further two scenes on the west face of Gosforth depict Heimdallr fighting off monsters and his traditional enemy, Loki, whose punishment as described in Icelandic sources is clearly visible.⁸⁰⁷ While on Gosforth the Christian apocalypse and Old Norse Ragnarøk myth are explicitly invoked, Ardre VIII does not have an explicit apocalyptic programme. It is, however, at least on the upper panel, concerned with death and the afterlife. There is also an obvious attempt to depict several different spatial realms. As I argue in a previous chapter (see Chapter four, 147–50), the gods could not punish Loki near their dwelling halls; punishment had to happen in a location ‘away from centre.’ In the *Edda* Snorri states that Loki is taken to a cave and chained to three stone slabs. This is significant because it reflects and resembles the medium (stone) on which the scene of Loki’s punishment is being carved, a connection that likely would not have been lost on the audience. It is well known that caves were home to giants and giantesses, such as Þökk, who in the Baldr myth is said to have possibly been Loki in disguise. In this regard, it is interesting that Loki and Sigyn are presented at some distance from the ships and likewise from water, an element at odds with the hard, rigid properties of rocky landscapes. Loki’s very physical incapacity also contrasts with the freedom of movement afforded by sea travel. The depictions of Loki on Ardre VIII, his sojourn as a salmon, and punishment, are presented ‘away’ from Ásgarðr, both depictions also highlighting the transgressive aspects of his character.

Set at the very bottom of Ardre VIII is an enclosure with two figures and a quadruped.⁸⁰⁸ As with enclosures on many picture stones, it is depicted ‘in section’ so that the

⁸⁰⁷ See Richard Bailey, *Viking Age Sculpture* (Glasgow: William Collins & Sons, 1980), 125.

⁸⁰⁸ On a panel from Alskog church, a similar U-shaped building appears on the far-right of the image field. It contains two kneeling figures who face each other, while another figure kneels at their feet. The building clearly signals a kind of separation from the rest of the image field. A female(?) to the left of the building may have some connection with the figures inside, and may be attempting to communicate. Below are a group of three male figures walking to the right, as if ‘out’ of the stone. They seem to carry weapons or tools of some kind. On the bottom left-hand corner is a chariot or wagon with two figures being pulled by a horse. They are walking in the same direction as the aforementioned group and appear to be on level ground. Unlike LSH I the Alskog church stone has a more subdued, almost processual atmosphere. A man in a burial pit appears above the horse, where a figure, possibly a mourner, attends the grave. Above is a possible battle scene, as the figures involved carry objects that resemble shields. They may also have swords raised. Possibly the most striking and central image is the figure holding a hammer. This figure is flanked by a zoomorphic design that is tempting to identify as the Miðgarðsormr. Similarly, the hammer-wielding figure is more than likely Þórr, which strengthens the Miðgarðsormr identification. Below, to the right, is a woman facing four birds as well as

figures within are visible.⁸⁰⁹ Lindqvist identifies this image as Þórr acquiring the head of an ox from a corral,⁸¹⁰ an enclosure designed to confine or capture livestock.⁸¹¹ The other figure is presumably Hymir. It is unclear whether the quadruped is the unfortunate ox, in which case we must reckon with a chronological shift from the time before the ox head is acquired to the time after, though judging by the feet, it is certainly a kind of ungulate. The ox head is laconically dealt with in *Hymiskviða* 19.⁸¹² We encounter similar enclosures on other picture stones from Gotland, such as KH I, on which the enclosure probably represents some kind of fortification. The presence of gabled houses suggests the intention to present a large space. KH I also has very straight lines, which is more conducive to an interpretation as buildings, walls and palisades.⁸¹³ Ardre VIII's curved edges suggests the traditional shape of a corral or animal pen. Both enclosures are positioned on the bottom of the picture stones and are anchored to the frame of their respective subfield, rather than in the middle.⁸¹⁴ On Ardre VIII, we see a transformation from water on the left margin to a potential liminal location on the right margin (the cave) via the central part of the stone, which might be a domesticated space, hence a building related to the preservation of livestock.

The figures in the middle of Ardre VIII are framed by those myths discussed in the previous sections. It is thought by most scholars that they belong to the story of the magical smith Vǫlundr,⁸¹⁵ which survives in a range of different media across northern Europe.⁸¹⁶ There are three distinct images from the story that extend horizontally in a band without any

a headless figure. The latter is possibly standing on the roof of a building which contains a figure possibly holding a corpse(?) by the feet, though this is where the significant damage begins on the Alskog stone.

⁸⁰⁹ Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 146.

⁸¹⁰ The ox's (or bull's) head can clearly be seen on the Gosforth 'Fishing stone' from Cumbria.

According to *Gylfaginning* ch. 48, which fills in the gaps in *Hymiskviða*, Hymir was content catching flatfish, but Þórr wanted to row out much further in order to catch the Miðgarðsormr. One could therefore imagine that the placement of Þórr and Hymir's boat on the margins of the Ardre VIII stone might reflect the liminality conveyed in the written sources.

⁸¹¹ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 96.

⁸¹² Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 91: *Braut af þjóri þurs ráðbani | hátún ofan horna tveggja* 'That ogre-slayer broke off from the bull | the horns' high meadow, tore off its head' (Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 76).

⁸¹³ However, according to Anna S. Beck, "Opening Doors – Entering Social Understandings of the Viking Age Longhouse," *Dwellings, Identities and Homes: European Housing Culture from the Viking Age to the Renaissance* (Højbjerg: Jutland Archaeological Society, 2014), 130, Iron Age longhouses in Sjælland and Skåne typically had straight walls, whereas Viking Age longhouses in these locations had much more variation, sometimes including curved walls.

⁸¹⁴ As Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 123, has pointed out, the decorative band line often represents a ground line.

⁸¹⁵ At least this was the "herrschende Meinung" when Karl Hauck, *Wielands Hort: die sozialgeschichtliche Stellung des Schmiedes in frühen Bildprogrammen nach und vor dem Religionswechsel* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977), 14, was writing in the late 1970s.

⁸¹⁶ Including but not limited to the Old Norse *Vǫlundarkviða* and the Old English *Deor*.

particular sequential relationship. The clearest and least certain is a pair of figures thought to be Vǫlundr and Bǫðvildr (fig. 23).⁸¹⁷ In this image Vǫlundr is depicted in ‘bird-form’ also known from several Anglo-Scandinavian stone carvings, such as the Leeds cross.⁸¹⁸ His body is angled horizontally and seems to float in mid-air next to Bǫðvildr, who has her back turned to Vǫlundr. The central image (fig. 24) consists of a forge and several blacksmith’s tools, including two pairs of tongs and two forging hammers. In the third and final image (fig. 25) a row of headless bodies lies to the right of the forge. These are presumably identifiable as King Níðuðr’s young ‘cubs,’ killed by Vǫlundr in revenge for his imprisonment.⁸¹⁹ A comparable image of Vǫlundr’s workshop equipped with tools decorates the eighth-century Northumbrian Franks Casket, which also shows the (headless) body of one of the dead sons.⁸²⁰ These three images highlight different aspects of Vǫlundr’s character: his transformation and escape, his technical expertise and knowledge, and the danger he poses to his enemies. While the images no doubt represent different parts of the story, there seems to be another level of logic behind the order in which they appear on *Ardre VIII*. Thus, Vǫlundr is depicted in proximity to several watercraft, a means of transport that requires technical knowledge to operate, but also access to an exclusive domain. Vǫlundr is also associated with the liminality of water in the Norse poem: he is said to dwell peacefully on the shores of a lake and, indeed, he is later imprisoned near water on an island. As I have discussed in this chapter, water can be the site of cosmic power and liminality. Vǫlundr is indeed a very powerful being, as evidenced in his ability to fly and create things, which places him in an ambiguous position in the Norse worldview. Similarly, the air is a restricted domain in Old Norse myth, accessible only to a handful of beings. On the other hand, the unfortunate princes find themselves in the company of the bound Loki, himself tied with the guts of his own slain son. As a result, this part of *Ardre VIII* is associated with stasis, the antonym of movement.⁸²¹

⁸¹⁷ Hauck, *Wielands Hort*, 13–14, distinguished a neck ring around this figure, which led him to interpret it as one of the valkyries from the opening stanzas of *Vǫlundarkviða*, which he compares to the Franks Casket.

⁸¹⁸ See Manu Braithwaite-Westoby, *Images from Old Norse Mythology on Anglo-Scandinavian and Scandinavian Stone Sculpture* (Unpublished MA thesis: University of Sydney, 2014), 33–45.

⁸¹⁹ Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 121: *Kómo til kisto, | krǫfðo lucla | opin var illúð, | er þeir í lito; | sneið af haufuð | húna þeira, | oc undir fen fíoturs, | fætr um lagði; | enn þær scálar, | er und scǫrom vóro, | sveip hann útan silfri, | seldi Níðaði.* ‘He cut off the heads of those young cubs, | and under the mud of the forge he laid their limbs; | and their skulls which were under their hair, | he chased with silver, gave to Nidud’: Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 102.

⁸²⁰ Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 240, sees a parallel between the Gotlandic picture stones and the Franks Casket in terms of the latter’s “progressive action” of the figures, who overlap and exhibit strong variation in form.

⁸²¹ St. 17 and the adjoining prose interruption in *Vǫlundarkviða* tell how Vǫlundr was hamstrung, severely curbing his movement. This is probably the main motivation for the artificial wings that he then creates

Ardre VIII is probably the most complex stone discussed in this chapter. Unlike LSH I there is no clear division of the scenes into image bands. However, by adopting a spatial typology it is possible to attain a greater understanding of Ardre VIII than previously. Thus various parts of the stone are associated with different types of geographical spaces, such as water, sky, and earth. These seem to be depicted in a sequence, suggesting it was a deliberate choice. It is also possible to discern an attempt to depict the contrast between movement and non-movement, which again is laid out in a sequence, so that the bodies of Níðuðr's sons have been carved near the bound Loki. On the left-hand side of the stone nearly all the scenes depict vigorous movement. The distinction between movement and stasis on Ardre VIII could also be a way to signal that a particular realm is being depicted. Ardre VIII clearly shows that the Norse worldview perceived in the Icelandic myths is in operation in Viking Age Gotland.

Alskog Tjängvide I (figs. 26–30)

Alskog Tjängvide I (AT I) is a keyhole-type picture stone from Tjängvide, Alskogs *socken*, in eastern Gotland.⁸²² It has a broad dating range of 725–1100, i.e., the entire Viking Age.⁸²³ The iconography is divided into two panels separated by an interlace pattern.⁸²⁴

In the bottom left-hand corner of the upper panel (fig. 29) a man atop an eight-legged horse is 'welcomed' by a woman proffering a drinking horn.⁸²⁵ To the woman's left (see fig. 26) are a quadruped and a man and woman facing each other, the latter raising a goblet to her lips.⁸²⁶ Above the rider a prostrate figure lies beneath a U-shaped figure standing on top of a platform. A large 'Viking' ship is depicted in the lower panel (fig. 26); it is filled with a retinue of warriors, but battle does not seem imminent as they are not carrying their weapons.

and uses to escape from his captors, which may well be depicted on the Ardre VIII stone. Thus, in both the poem and the depiction of the story on the picture stone, the antithetical states of activity and passivity are manipulated by their respective creators with dramatic effect.

⁸²² AT I is so similar to Ardre VIII that they are often considered to be the work of the same carver: see Sven B. F. Jansson, Elias Wéssen and Elisabeth Svärdström, *Gotlands Runinskrifter* vol. 1 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1962), 194, and David M. Wilson, *Vikingatidens konst* Signums Svenska konsthistoria 2 (Lund: Signum, 1995), 64.

⁸²³ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* I, 120, suggests the Tjängvide stones might be later than the Lärbro ones.

⁸²⁴ In contrast to the foregoing stones, there is a good deal of empty space on Tjängvide, which Eshleman, *The Monumental Stones of Gotland*, 149, puts down to a lack of formal coherence.

⁸²⁵ And Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 17, thinks possibly a key in the other hand.

⁸²⁶ Here we may have two instances of the same scene – i.e. a valkyrie receiving a warrior, albeit one that depicts the god Óðinn. Perhaps the former represents the deceased after whom the stone is raised.

Like the ships on many other picture stones from Gotland, this one sails from right to left.⁸²⁷ The depiction of what may be intended as Valhøll on AT I is similar to the Ardre VIII stone, not only in its positioning in the top left subfield, but also in its style and composition with barrel-vaulted ceiling. It is more or less proportionately the same size, and also has a roof and entrance (AT I only depicts one entrance, as the left part of where Valhøll is depicted has been worn away). We know from *Grímnismál* 23 that Valhøll is thought to have five hundred and forty doors each of which allowed eight hundred soldiers to be mobilised for battle.⁸²⁸ Based on comparable imagery, discussed above, the upper panel probably depicts a valkyrie welcoming Óðinn to Valhøll.⁸²⁹

There is a clear stylistic relationship between the U-shaped figure on AT I (fig. 27) and the one on Ardre VIII, where they are depicted in a near identical position. The major difference is that the AT I figure is standing on some sort of platform.⁸³⁰ While it is impossible to ascertain the precise meaning of this image, as also with Ardre VIII, it is nevertheless likely to be of numinous import. The platform or board that separates these two figures resembles the only eyewitness narrative description of a Viking Age funeral by the Arab diplomat Ibn Fadlan (circa 879–960). In his *Risala*, he describes the rituals that take place for the death of a Rus chieftain on the Volga river. One of these involved lifting a slave girl up above a ‘door frame’ three times during which she is able to look into the ‘other world’ enabling her to see her dead kinsmen.⁸³¹ The unnatural ‘bent’ pose the figure is in is

⁸²⁷ The ship on AT I is the visually dominant image and is in the same position as the ship on Lillbjärs, the Lokrume stone and LSH I. Unlike the latter, however, the AT I ship occupies a much larger subfield and the overall preservation is better, so that we are able to make out individual soldiers. The ship is moving from right to left, like Óðinn above. As I explain elsewhere in this chapter, the ship was conceptualised as one of the principal means of transporting the dead from the world of the living to (one of) the world(s) of the dead. In Gotland, especially, the access point to the world of the dead may have been thought to lie across the sea rather than on land, since it is an island in the middle of the Baltic. For this reason sea-based activities may have been more important in Gotland than in inland parts of Sweden (where, for example, there were fewer ship stone-settings in mortuary practices – though ship burials were common in places along the eastern Swedish seaboard, like Birka).

⁸²⁸ Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 51: ‘Five hundred doors and forty | I think there are in Valhall; eight hundred Einheriar will pass through a single door | when they march out to fight the wolf.’

⁸²⁹ Hem Eriksen, *Architecture, Society and Ritual in Viking Age Scandinavia*, 157–8, has pointed out how certain mythological women are associated with thresholds and doorways, including Móðguðr, who guards the entrance to Hel, as well as the goddess Syn, ‘the one who keeps the door in the hall, and locks it before those who should go in,’ whom Eriksen associates with the Roman goddess of the hinge Cardea or Carda.

⁸³⁰ With the help of photogrammetry Sigmund Oehrl, *Die Bildsteine Gotlands. Problemer und neue Wege ihrer Dokumentation, Lesung und Deutung* vol. 2 *Studia Archaeologiae Medii Aevi* 3 (Friedberg: Likius Verlag), 188–94, interprets this as a spear, possibly as part of a war ritual, though the spatial relationship between the figures could still suggest a separation between different worlds or states of being.

⁸³¹ A similar instance of a woman being lifted up over a door-frame occurs in *Völsa þáttur*: cf. Price, *The Viking Way*, 125.

also interesting and contrasts with the upright poses of the other figures. In some Old Norse sources we encounter actions that invert the conventional way of performing actions, such as walking backwards or under strips of turf,⁸³² often to harness the numinous power of the ‘other world.’⁸³³ The latter ceremony, known as *jarðarmen* (see p. 17, n. 49), signals a symbolic journey to the underworld as part of a rite of passage. The platform itself might represent the access point between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Given the proximity to Valhøll and the comparative material, the U-shaped man might be related to the same semantic centre.⁸³⁴

On another scene comparable to *Ardre VIII*, a rider is arriving at Valhøll where he is welcomed by a valkyrie.⁸³⁵ Although *Ardre VIII* also shows a probable Valhøll scene, the one here is elaborate and makes the connection between women carrying horns and riders more explicit. The scene on *AT I* echoes the description of a welcoming ceremony from the skaldic poems *Hákonarmál* and *Eiríksmál*, in which great warriors and kings arrive in Valhøll where they are met by Óðinn and his retainers: clearly a prestigious occasion.⁸³⁶ In st. 1 of *Eiríksmál* Óðinn is anxiously awaiting the arrival of Eiríkr blóðøx, a tenth-century Norwegian king. Like an anxious host, he makes a mental to-do list prior to Eiríkr’s arrival, most of which are to do with revelry. The drinking of ale was a deeply symbolic part of elite Scandinavian culture (see Chapter four on *Lokasenna*), as were other forms of hospitality. On

⁸³² In Ibn Fadlan’s account, the closest relative of the dead Rus chieftain, the “naked and wary kindler of the pyre” in the words of Peter Foote & David M. Wilson, *The Viking Achievement* 2nd ed. (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980), 411, lights the funeral ship on fire after walking backwards with one hand covering his anus, perhaps out of fear of being ‘contaminated’ by something malevolent coming out of the ship: see Price, *The Viking Way*, 299.

⁸³³ Also cf. the *vǫlva* in *Vǫluspá* 28–9 who ‘sits out’ (*sat hon úti*) in order to communicate from the ‘other world.’: see John McKinnell, “Heathenism in *Vǫluspá*: A Preliminary Survey,” *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Vǫluspá and Nordic Days of Judgement Acta Scandinavica* 2 ed. Terry Gunnell and Annette Lassen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 101.

⁸³⁴ Andreas Nordberg, “What Did King Hákon góði Do before the Battle of Fitjar and after the Battle of Avaldsnes?,” *The Wild Hunt for Numinous Knowledge. Perspectives on and from the Study of Religions in Honour of Jens Peter Schjødt* ed. Karen Bek-Pedersen, Sophie Bønding, Luke John Murphy, Simon Nygaard and Morten Warmind (*Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift* (Special Issue) 74, 2022), 132, has recently interpreted this scene as representing a ritual involving a warrior ‘clashing’ a spear over the head of a fallen rival. A similar kind of ritual is possibly alluded to, according to Nordberg, in *Hákonardrápa* ‘*Drápa* about Hákon’ 6.

⁸³⁵ The quadruped could well be Sæhrímnir, the boar which feeds the soldiers every evening, or so says stanza 18 of *Grimnismál*. It is also possible that it is a dog, a creature associated with the journey to the underworld in many belief systems.

⁸³⁶ The first stanza of *Eiríksmál* exemplifies this well: *Hvat es þat drauma *, | es ek hugðumk fyr dag lítu | Valhøll ryðja | fyr vegnu folki? | Vakða ek einherja, | bað ek upp rísa | bekki at stráa, | borðker at leyðra, | valkyrjur vín bera, | sem vísi komi.* ‘What kind of dream is this, that I thought that a little before daybreak I was preparing Valhøll for a slain army? I awakened the einherjar, I asked them to get up to strew the benches, to rinse the drinking cups, [I asked] valkyries to bring wine, as if a leader should come’: R. D. Fulc, ‘Anonymous, *Eiríksmál*,’ *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035*. Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages I ed. Diana Whaley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 1003.

the upper panel on AT I, and to a lesser extent on Ardre VIII, Scandinavian drinking culture is foregrounded, as it would later be in the written versions of *Hákonarmál* and *Eiríksmál*, among others. In *Lokasenna* the gods feast at Ægir's, presumably in much the same way that Scandinavian chieftains would have during the pre-Christian era. Similarly, the man and woman, or *einheri* and *valkyrja*, imitate Óðinn and valkyrie to their right.⁸³⁷ Images like this one might represent a popular idea, at least in Gotland, of the nature of the afterlife.

AT I is crowded with an array of images, as well as a magnificent Viking ship on the lower panel. Again the ship, I argue, can be connected to general ideas about the journey to the afterlife; it seems to depict the journey of a group of human warriors, and it echoes the scenes above. The figures on the higher panel fit within the theoretical framework of images relating to the afterlife in the Norse worldview. Thus Óðinn riding Sleipnir being welcomed by a woman proffering a horn can be identified, reminiscent of the 'welcoming' scenes from the skaldic poems *Hákonarmál* and *Eiríksmál*. The other figural subjects can also be connected to descriptions of the afterlife depicted in *Grímnismál* and Snorri's *Edda*, and there may also be overlapping elements with the description of a Rus chieftain's burial on the Volga from a medieval Arabic source. The spatial arrangement of the material, with the latter scenes carved on the 'head' of the stone indicating liminality, bolsters these identifications.

Lillbjärs (figs. 31–2)

Lillbjärs from Stenkyrka parish in northern Gotland is dated to the late Iron Age or early Viking Age. Like LSH I and Ardre VIII, it has a border of decorative motifs around the edge that frame the narrative scenes. Lillbjärs has two panels, though a strict 'division' is absent.

The upper panel features a warrior with armour and a shield riding a horse from left to right. A small, probably female, figure to the right proffers a horn, which prompts associations with scenes on other picture stones such as AT I from the foregoing discussion, though on the latter, the rider's steed has eight legs, so we can basically be sure that the subject is mythical. The rider's shield features a spiral design, while above are two distinct motifs: a 'three-triangle group' and a 'group of three horns' by the rider's head.⁸³⁸ Below is a

⁸³⁷ Although as Clunies Ross, "Style and Authorial Presence in Skaldic Mythological Poetry," 290, has pointed out, women carrying horns probably do not refer to specific myths but rather reflect notions on the nature of the afterlife.

⁸³⁸ Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine* II, 123.

man in a knee-length shirt and belt, as well as the remains of other figures now rather indistinct. Below is a ship with a (double?) sail with elaborate bow and stern, crewed by two figures, one of whom steers a long oar. Contorted zoomorphic waves propel the ship from left to right, which contrasts with many depictions of the Gotland picture stones that show movement from right to left (“brechende Wellen mit schaumköpfen,” according to Lindqvist). However, this also creates a dissonance with the directional movement of the rider depicted above.

Like the picture stones discussed above it seems likely that the upper subfield (fig. 32) depicts an Odinic figure arriving in the afterlife where a valkyrie welcomes him⁸³⁹ with a drinking horn.⁸⁴⁰ This rider’s horse, however, is clearly in a state of motion, unlike the foregoing ones, so a journey has probably been undertaken. Another difference is the direction in which the horse and rider are travelling: from left to right. This detail is probably insignificant in itself, but it nevertheless creates symmetry with the ship below. It might be thought, therefore, that a parallel journey is taking place: in the upper subfield Óðinn/an Odinic figure (such as a king or great warrior) arrives in the afterlife and in the lower subfield a band of fallen warriors are themselves on their way to a similar destination.⁸⁴¹ The female is stylistically very close to the one from AT I. She is also carrying a drinking horn and seems to be ‘welcoming’ or ‘receiving’ the rider. Although the valkyries serve a single master, they were also expected to cater more generally for the *einherjar*,⁸⁴² as the following line from *Gylfaginning* shows: *Enn eru þær aðrar er þjóna skulu í Valhöll, bera drykkju ok gæta borðbúnaðar ok ǫlgagna.*⁸⁴³ As I have maintained throughout this chapter, the head of the picture stone is usually where we find these riders and women carrying horns, which suggests that it is a deliberate choice. This spatial arrangement may reflect a belief about the structure

⁸³⁹ Cf. *Grímnismál* 36 ‘Hrist and Mist [valkyries], I wish would bear a horn to me...’: Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 53.

⁸⁴⁰ We cannot say that this figure is unequivocally Óðinn, since the horse only has four legs, unlike Ardre VIII or AT I.

⁸⁴¹ There is a similar depiction of Valhöll on AT I where it is probable that Óðinn is welcomed to Valhöll by a Valkyrie adjacent to a warrior also being welcomed.

⁸⁴² In addition, *Grímnismál* st. 36 says they *kjósa feigð á men ok ráða sigri* ‘allot death to men and govern victory’ - very much like Óðinn himself: Neckel & Kuhn, *Edda*, 64; Larrington, *The Poetic Edda*, 53.

⁸⁴³ Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 31: ‘There are still others, whose function it is to wait in Val-hall, serve drink and look after the tableware and drinking vessels.’ In this context we could also consider *Hákonarmál* st. 1: *Göndul ok Skögul | sendi Gautatýr | at kjósa of konunga, | hverr Yngva ættar | skyldi með Óðni fara | ok í Valhöll vesa.* ‘The god of the Gautar [= Óðinn] sent Göndul and Skögul to choose among kings, which of the kin of Yngvi should go with Óðinn and live in Valhöll’: R. D. Fulk, “Eyvindr skáldaspillir Finnsson, *Hákonarmál*,” *Poetry from the Kings’ Sagas 1: From Mythical Times to c. 1035* Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages I ed. Diana Whaley (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 171.

of the cosmos, one in which the afterlife is located ‘away’ or ‘above’ the world of the living. Lillbjärs could also reflect a general understanding of what is thought to happen to the soul after death, especially for a warrior: the skaldic poem *Eiríksmál* illuminates this phenomenon. The ship in the bottom panel could well be sailing between different realms, as water in Old Norse myth often separated opposing concepts, such as civilisation and chaos.

Lillbjärs is the simplest of the stones discussed in this chapter but also one of the clearest, and most elegant. The horseman being welcomed by a maiden holding a horn is, as above, a probable depiction of the afterlife, especially given its placement on the ‘head’ of the stone.

Conclusion

In this chapter I analyse six Gotlandic picture stones that resemble certain Old Norse myths as they appear in Icelandic manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Despite the resemblances, however, the considerable chronological gap alone rules out a direct connection to say nothing of the physical distance between them. The existence of other similar kinds of plastic art with subjects from Old Norse myth from Scandinavia and the British Isles suggests that representing stories in visual form was one way of expressing a particular worldview. By means of orally transmitted storytelling, the same worldview would be independently expressed by Christian Icelanders, such as Snorri Sturluson, several centuries later. As a result of my analysis of the images a spatial typology has emerged that is independent of the specific detail of a particular myth but can be used to confirm the nature of one. In the following paragraphs I identify and explain the key components of this spatial typology.

Movement from left to right and vice versa

On all the picture stones considered in this chapter the greater part of the ‘movement’ that is depicted can be characterised as taking place from left to right or vice versa. In one sense, this mono-directionality of movement is necessitated by the configuration of the stones into distinct scenes; these are often framed with groundlines that create a narrow ‘frieze’ type of image, thereby limiting any depiction of vertical movement. The clearest evidence for movement from left to right or vice versa is the number of magnificent ships that appear on all six picture stones, but it is equally evident in the way many of the figures and animals are depicted in profile, allowing us to follow their gaze one way or the other. Lateral movement

induces one to imagine a wider field of vision in which the figures have the potential to move out of the picture stone through space and time. The written myths show a similar concern for movement across space with many of them involving a journey, often to a liminal space beyond the margins of civilisation. Many of the scenes on the picture stones that suggest this kind of movement show evidence that a journey of some kind has occurred, represented in the way certain figures, particularly the ships and men on horses, modes of transport crucial to long distance travel, are moving at speed or have suddenly halted, a stasis shown by depicting horses with articulated joints. Journeys that require such modes of transport are more likely to involve a liminal end or beginning point than those that can be achieved on foot. On some of the stones, such as LSH III, AT I and the Lillbjärs stone in particular, the ship and horseman are the dominant components, the two facing the same direction, perhaps indicating their shared destination.

Positioning of scenes

On all the picture stones examined in this chapter the positioning of scenes at the top, middle and bottom appears to be deliberately chosen by the carver(s). The clearest evidence of deliberate positioning is the top or 'head' of the stone. This is consistently where we find probable depictions of Valhøll, as well as other scenes that resemble rituals or ceremonies connected to rites of passage involving a spiritual death. There is usually also some of kind border separating this part from the rest of the stone, perhaps a way of indicating two different yet complementary spatial realms. It therefore seems likely that the top of the stone was thought to be more suitable to scenes representing the nature of existence after death. The picture stone that does not fit into this scheme is LSH I, whose entirety is carved with scenes known from literary sources in both Scandinavia and other Germanic-speaking areas. The area beneath the 'head' is by far the largest part of the picture stones, so it is unsurprisingly where most scenes are positioned. The scenes represented here refer to stories from Old Norse myth and legend that probably would have been well-known in Scandinavia at the time. There are, for example, visual analogues to Þórr's fishing expedition elsewhere in Sweden, Denmark and northern England, while knowledge of the Vølsung legend extended across much of northern Europe. To an extent, the central parts of the stones depict scenes of narratives that were probably thought to have already been completed in the past or perhaps in a distant mythic time and place. In contrast, the Valhøll scenes look forward in time or perhaps reflect an understanding of what happens immediately following a death.

Activity vs passivity

In parts of the foregoing chapters of this thesis I argue that Old Norse, particularly Icelandic, society was one in which activity was favoured over passivity, which could be construed as a form of *ergi* in men. I adduce evidence mainly from eddic poetry, but saga material is also highly relevant. For example, consider Loki's libel to Bragi in *Lokasenna* st. 15: *sniallr ertu í sessi, scalattu svá gora, Bragi, beccscrautuðr* 'You're brave in your seat, but you won't be doing that, Bragi the bench-ornament!' Despite Loki's impudence, it is clearly considered a bad thing to be one who idles so much that they become synonymous with the bench. The picture stones similarly express this worldview. It is noticeable that depictions of figures in repose are absent: apart from the dead bodies of Gunnarr and Svanhildr, nearly all of them are in fact 'doing something.' The dominant motif is of the magnificent ships, usually placed on the lower half of the stones, which must be considered the acme of Viking Age life.

Though they cannot necessarily be tied to a specific myth, their size and presentation, as if on the high seas, convey the value that Gotlanders placed on them. Several of the myths I have identified depict scenes in which the action is at its peak: Völundr transforming himself into a bird and Þórr hunting for the Miðgarðsormr on Ardre VIII; the Hjaðningavíg, the death of Svanhildr and the surprise attack on Jǫrmunrekkr on LSH I; as well as the various depictions of Valhöll which include welcoming ceremonies and the training of warriors. It is likely that a Viking Age audience would have approved of the active nature of these scenes. In contrast, the one relatively clear scene that does not present a subject in an active mode is the depiction of the punishment of Loki on the bottom right of Ardre VIII. Loki's immobility, created by being bound with the innards of his son, is a key component of the punishment as the poison drips onto his face of its own accord without Sigyn's intervention. Presumably, a Viking-Age audience would have recognised such a distinction.

Enclosed spaces

On KH I and Ardre VIII there are spaces that are clearly enclosed and separated from the rest of the composition. KH I famously depicts the death of Gunnarr in a snake pit and a larger enclosed space that seems to include a number of buildings with gabled roofs. However, both of these spaces also incorporate small gaps situated along the narrow side. On either end of the gap various figures are congregated: their function is unclear, though archaeological research on Iron Age Norwegian longhouses suggests they could be conduits between different worlds. Near or next to the enclosed are spaces are female figures, the one near the larger space holding an object that could be a wand. Eriksen has pointed out that women

guard the entrance to the Underworld in various world mythologies, including Old Norse, whose most famous female guardian is Móðguðr as well as the goddess Syn, ‘the one who keeps the door in the hall, and locks it before those who should go in.’ The figure synonymous with Norse underworld Hel is also female: in *Baldrs draumar* the decision to release Baldr from his imprisonment in Hel rests with her alone, so she could also be described as a kind of guardian figure. According to Eriksen, in pre-Christian Scandinavia women were also associated with boundaries and spaces by virtue of their bodies, which represented thresholds that when crossed become a metaphor for penetration and sexual acts. The enclosed space at the bottom of KH I also seems to perform a defensive function, since the figures within carry bows. It is reminiscent of *Gylfaginning* ch. 50 in which the god Loki builds a house with four doors on top of a mountain in order to have an unrestricted view of each cardinal direction. As was mentioned, the four cardinal directions are highly marked in Old Norse myth, where they are the names of four dwarfs.

Air, land and water

On many of the stones the carver appears to have made a conscious decision to depict different types of physical surroundings to reflect the background in which a particular scene plays out. For some scenes the presence of identifiable geographical features leaves no doubt as to the carver’s intentions. Thus, two of the ships, on LSH I and the Lillbjärs stone, are depicted on top of rolling waves, but this number would likely be higher if not for damage to the lower parts of the other stones. Some of the scenes have fairly clear groundlines, in some cases indicated by the desire on the part of the carver to distinguish individual stories or motifs, such as on LSH I. We also see this in depictions of Valhøll, which have a very clear groundline, removing any ambiguity between the Valhøll scenes and the rest of the iconography. On the depiction of the Hjaðningavíg on LSH I, waves beneath the ship are absent, but they are also unnecessary given that it is positioned directly opposite a group of warriors standing on a groundline, the point between the two representing a beach. On the scene below, the entrance to Jǫrmunrekkr’s hall might be indicated by the presence of a step on the far left, on which stands a warrior, who towers over his companion to his right. It is on Ardre VIII where we encounter the greatest diversity, as well as the most challenges to interpretation, however. In my analysis I suggest that certain vertical strands of Ardre VIII represent different physical surroundings. On the left, for example, are three ships, separated by a pair of unknown figures. The middle strand is composed of land and activities that utilise the earth’s resources: Vǫlundr’s workshop and the corral where Þórr and Hymir find

the ox's head. Here Vǫlundr is also transforming himself into a bird, so the air is also invoked, a mediating element between water and land. Finally, on the right is where Loki's punishment is depicted, which, according to the written sources, takes place in a rocky landscape, possibly Giantland. Thus, on Ardre VIII the geography changes from one extreme to the other at the same time as it changes from multidirectional movement (ships, Vǫlundr's flight) to stasis (Loki's punishment).

Final remarks

In this chapter I present and examine six Viking Age picture stones with what appear to be scenes connected to Old Norse myth and legend. I also acknowledge that secure interpretations of the stones are difficult, if not impossible, to establish, especially given the current condition of these millennium-old objects and a certain amount of disagreement among scholars as to how to make such interpretations. The likelihood increases, however, when we begin to examine the spatial signals that the people responsible for the images have left for us, consciously or otherwise. In many cases, such signals can be expressed as binary pairs or oppositions, including but not limited to movement:stasis, activity:passivity, enclosed:open spaces, and the arrangement of contrasting physical surroundings. These signals express a 'worldview' that stretches through time and space, finally appearing in the pages of Old Norse-Icelandic texts from the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This makes it possible to confirm the existence of the nature of a myth or legend despite the disparity of detail between the stones and the written stories.

Figs. 20 and 21 are facsimiled from Sune Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine*. The rest of the pictures in this section are taken by the author, with permission from the Swedish Historical Museum, Stockholm, and Gotlands Museet, Visby.

Klinte Hunninge



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Stora Hammars I



6.



7.



8.



9.



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11.

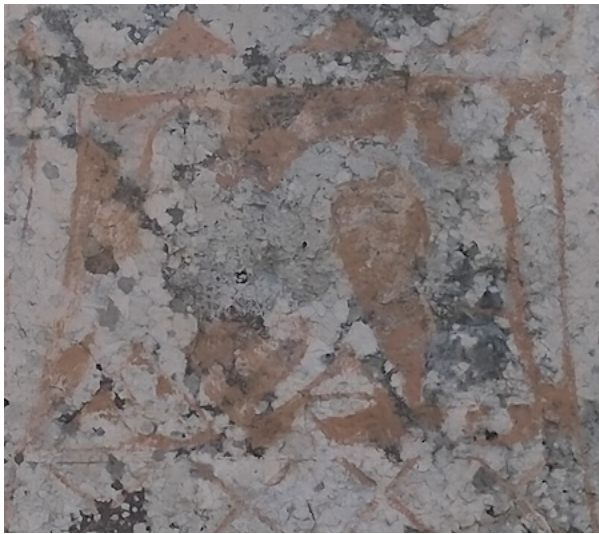
Stora Hammars III



12.



13.

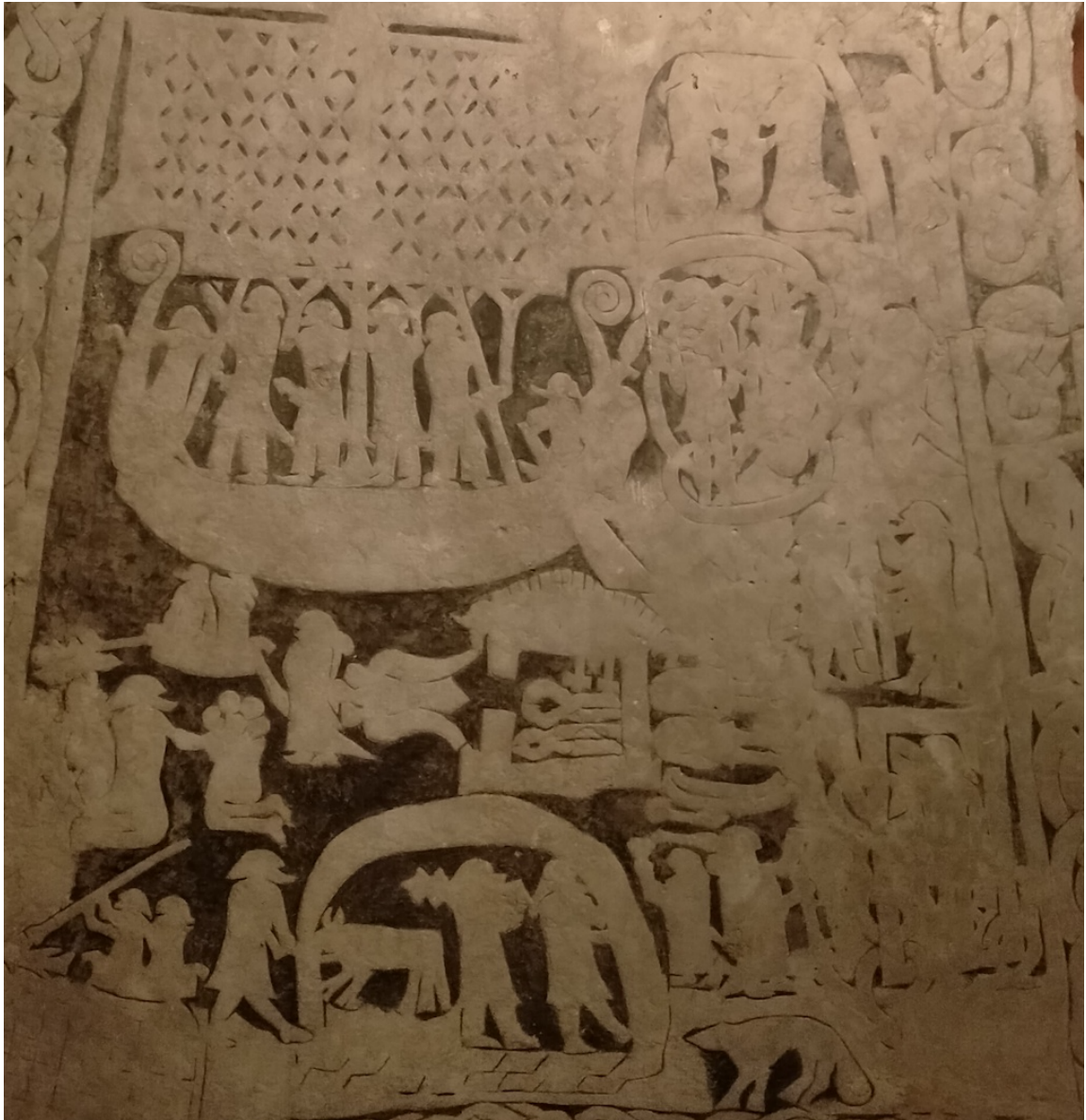


14.

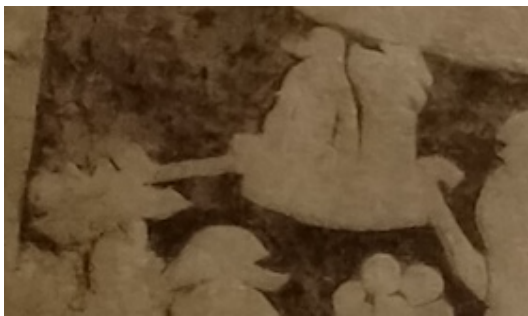
Ardre VIII



15.



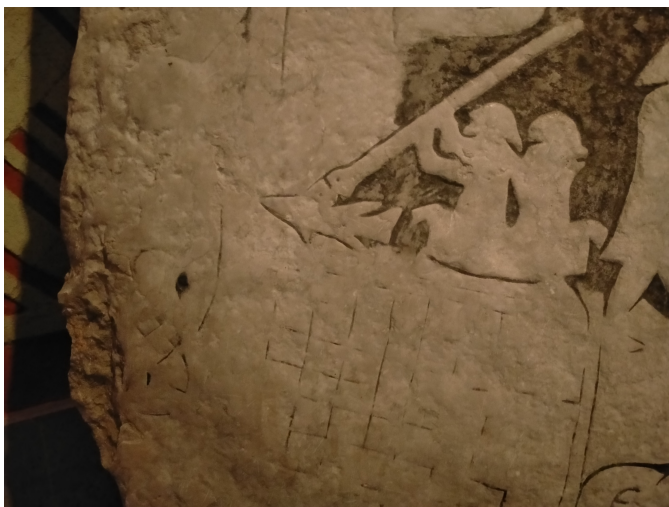
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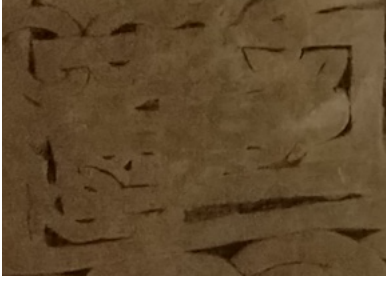
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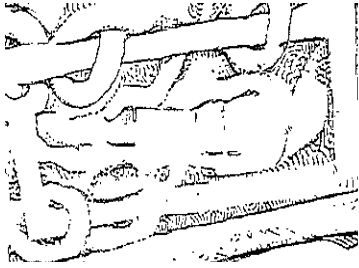
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19.



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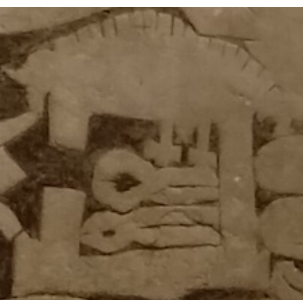
21.



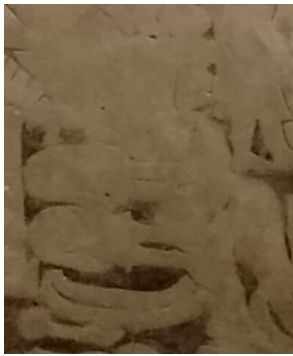
22.



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25.

Alskog Tjängvide I



26.



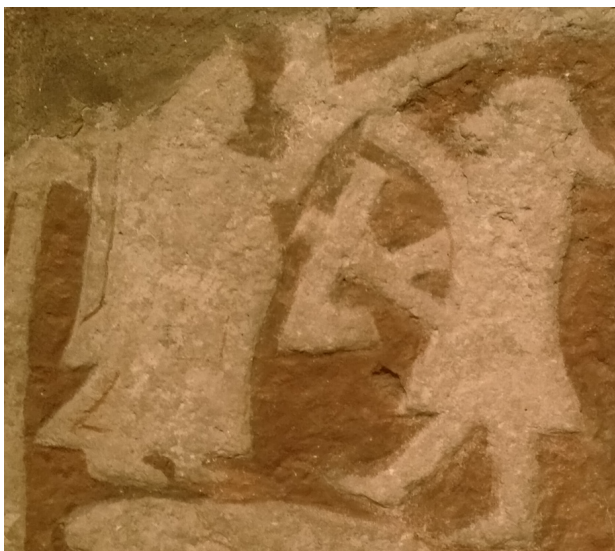
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CONCLUSION

This thesis has been concerned with the presentation of space and movement in Old Norse literature and art. My focus has been mainly on mythological eddic poetry, but also on other literary sources, such as skaldic poetry, Snorri's *Edda*, *Heimskringla*, and *Gesta Danorum*, which have been consulted to varying degrees. Chapters one and two utilised all extant mythological sources to construct spatial profiles for many of the major mythological beings: gods, giants, *vǫlur*, the 'forces of chaos,' elves and dwarfs. In Chapters three and four I limited the scope to two eddic poems, *Hárbarðsljóð* and *Lokasenna*, neither of which have received much attention of late.⁸⁴⁴ Finally, in Chapter five, I departed from literary sources and concentrated on certain picture stones from Gotland, arguably a more 'authentic' kind of evidence but one that is harder to interpret. In what follows I summarise the main arguments and conclusions from each chapter.

Chapter one

In this chapter I analysed some of the Æsir gods in light of their spatial characteristics and/or kinetic abilities. Each god can be identified with certain spaces or realms for reasons not made immediately clear in the written sources. To some extent, such an association depends on a god's particular role in the mythology or their motivations for going on journeys, which allows them to visit a certain realm but perhaps not another. A god may also be associated with a certain directionality, such as the ability to move up, down or across, which can be aligned with the notion of the horizontal and vertical axes outlined in the Introduction (pp. 4–5). At the same time, the sources occasionally present hints of an inherently contradictory logic in relation to the gods' kinetic abilities. This is particularly true of Þórr, a god strongly associated with mono-directionality of movement, but who is nonetheless sometimes made to appear able to move in ways that challenge this idea. In general, Old Norse mythological literature reveals a significant concern with the notion of movement and its rules and limitations when applied to certain figures, perhaps a reflection of early Scandinavian society's interest in the physical limits of the human body within a difficult physical environment.

⁸⁴⁴ Notwithstanding encyclopaedia entries, the latest detailed examinations of these poems are by Heinz Klingenberg (1990) and Diego Poli (1990) respectively.

From my analysis in Chapter one, the Óðinn imagined across Old Norse literature appears to have relatively few restrictions on his ability to move. To some extent, this mirrors the powerful socio-political position he occupies as the chief god, which requires a degree of dominance over rival members of the community. He is the only one of the Æsir who is able to travel along both axes, giving him access to a greater number of spatial realms. In particular, he is associated with the space below the earth, a location inhabited by a select group of mythological beings. It is in a space analogous to the underworld where, for example, he consults with *vǫlur*, an all-female race of soothsayers, discussed in Chapter two. And yet my examination has shown that Óðinn's journeys are not without their obstacles, which are often of a spatial nature. Thus he must frequently improvise, often by changing or manipulating his physical form, in order to carry out his objective. When acquiring the mead of poetry, for example, the entrance into the mountain where Gunnlǫð guards the mead is so narrow that Óðinn morphs into a snake to be able to pass through it. And when he is seeking to acquire runes beneath Yggdrasill he must perform a ritual self-sacrifice and hang from his feet while stretching downwards. These myths demonstrate a range of kinetic powers and a tactical adaptability uncommon in the Norse mythological world, particularly in a single figure. My analysis of Óðinn suggests that he is probably thought of as the Æsir god with the fewest impediments on his ability to move but it seems that total kinetic autonomy eluded even the most powerful.

As he is portrayed in Old Norse literature, Loki is another figure who, on the surface, appears to have a good command of his kinetic abilities. Unlike many of the other Æsir, Loki can fly, which gives him access to an exclusive domain. He is also a frequent companion of Þórr on his journeys to Giantland, although his support of Þórr in tense situations can be questionable. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of Loki's kinetic abilities occurs in *Þrymskviða*. In this poem Loki makes two return trips to Giantland: one on his own in a flying suit to ascertain the whereabouts of Þórr's hammer and another with the aid of a chariot so Þórr can be 'wed' to the giant Þrymr. However, it should also be stressed that despite a prolific talent for movement, there are several occasions in which he loses control of the situation, often resulting in him being 'imprisoned' in some way or put into a position of stasis, which was not perceived favourably in Old Norse society. Thus, we see that during his altercation with Þjazi, as narrated in *Skáldskaparmál*, he gets stuck onto the end of a pole and dragged along the earth. In order to be let go, he agrees to lure Iðunn to Giantland, which causes the gods to grow old. This story highlights the dual nature of this figure: his

occasional use of the bird form and ability to travel freely with Þórr and Óðinn give him access to several spatial domains, but ultimately it only takes a very simple device from which he cannot escape to keep him under control.⁸⁴⁵ In the account of his punishment in *Lokasenna*, he is put into a position of complete stasis by the gods, who also inflict maximum physical pain on him by letting poison drip onto his face, causing him to writhe. The tremors that are generated are said by Snorri to be the cause of earthquakes in the world. Indeed, the ‘scientific explanation’ behind earthquakes that we would refer to now – i.e. the shifting of tectonic plates – evokes the opposing violent forces (being bound and violent writhing) in Loki’s person.

The god Þórr is often associated with two things, travel along the horizontal axis and a low intellect. While there is certainly evidence to support such notions, my analysis in Chapter one has revealed that other sides to his character exist or once existed, portraying him in a richer light than previously acknowledged. Þórr is associated with the borderlands between Giantland and Miðgarðr/Ásgarðr, an area composed of ‘inhospitable’ kinds of terrain: swamps, mountains, rivers. He is presumably good at traveling across such landscapes. During his battle with Hrungnir, Þórr is informed by Þjálfi that the giant would attack him ‘from below [the earth].’ This implies an ability to move both *through the earth* and in a *vertical direction*, both of which are possible in Old Norse myth, but not in relation to Þórr.

We also see him aligned with the vertical axis on his engagement with Miðgarðsormr. In this story, Þórr’s and the serpent’s respective positions, each connected vertically to the

⁸⁴⁵ From Chapter one it should be evident that Óðinn and Loki bend or blur certain ontological categories. For instance, the nature of their sexuality and gender has received attention in recent times, since both gods have an association with feminine spheres of activity. In a patriarchal society, like early Scandinavia, the transfer of feminine qualities to males would likely result in accusations of unmanliness. However, it also comes with a certain power or beneficence: Óðinn’s knowledge of *seiðr* gives him control over his enemies, while Loki’s copulation with the Master Builder’s mare produces the eight-legged horse Sleipnir, which carries the gods to different spatial realms. It is possible that a similar explanation exists for the extraordinary movement Óðinn and Loki appear to be capable of. Óðinn, for example, can travel along both axes and even transcend physical obstacles. According to *Hárbarðsljóð*, he travels widely across the European continent to interfere with human kings in Verland (Chapter three); but he also regularly performs downward motion to drink from Mímir’s well and the *vǫlva* from *Baldri’s draumar* whom he visits also lives underground. Loki is also associated with a wide variety of movement. He accesses the domain of the sky in several myths and even enters the water on a number of occasions, one of which is possibly portrayed on the Ardre VIII stone on Gotland (see Chapter five). In *Lokasenna*, he mediates chaos and civilisation, embodied by the opposing spaces of the forest and mead-hall, by moving between them. He is, therefore, a liminal figure, like Óðinn, both of whom eschew their traditional roles, or what Georges Dumézil calls a *glissement* or ‘gliding’ between different functions.

other by means of the fishing line, represent an *axis mundi*, while the maelstrom it generates shows the cosmic importance of the event. While neither manages to pull the other into their respective domains, the presence of an up:down binary suggests a connection to underground realms not conventionally associated with Þórr, but which seems to have existed in the minds of learned Icelanders. In the hall at Geirrøðr's, Þórr is lifted up into the domain of the air, but propels himself back down, an example of up and down movement that he skilfully negotiates. It is at Geirrøðr's that Þórr demonstrates an ability to think and adapt quickly, which contrasts with his usual presentation. In a prequel to the main myth of Þórr's visit to Geirrøðr's, Loki fails to engineer a means of escape, which leads to his imprisonment. Scholars have so far not noticed the significance of Þórr's response to a dangerous situation, particularly in light of Loki's experience.

The so-called 'minor' gods, Víðarr, Baldr, Hermóðr, and Heimdallr, have not been examined by scholars in terms of spatial semiotics to the same degree as their more esteemed colleagues, with the possible exception of Baldr. Nor has this group been subject to an analysis of these particular gods as a group. To some extent, this is caused by the disparity between extant sources, which potentially skews our knowledge of such gods, who may have been the subjects of now-lost tales in the past. Nonetheless, it is striking that in the sources that have survived regarding these gods the physical world and their ability to move through it is emphasised in various ways. Few scholars have commented on this fact or its significance. It is significant because it shows that these 'minor' gods may have once possessed abilities similar to Þórr, Óðinn and Loki in relation to movement, but which at the time the myths were recorded were only vaguely remembered.

Indeed the concept of moving through different spatial realms permeates even some of the most obscure Old Norse myths. Víðarr and Heimdallr are particularly associated with walking, which is expressed as either a protective or a creative function— Víðarr uses his feet to destroy the wolf, while in *Rígsþula* Heimdallr/Rígr roams from house to house to create the foundations of the social hierarchy. The safety of the gods thus depends to some extent on this basic form of mobility. Baldr, or more specifically his dead body, performs a kind of journey after his death, which can be compared with the funeral of the Rus chieftain in Ibn Fadlan's eyewitness account. It can also be compared to the picture stones of Gotland, discussed in Chapter five, on which warriors are depicted in movement, possibly travelling to a realm like Valhöll. The question of whether the body continued to exist after death and, if

so, in what form was clearly of some concern both to Viking Age artists and medieval Icelandic scholars. Hermóðr also travels to the land of the dead, though while alive and with the help of Óðinn's horse, in order to learn of Baldr's fate: such journeys are usually associated with Óðinn alone, so Hermóðr must have been regarded as a figure of some importance.

Chapter two

In the second chapter, I examined a number of seemingly disparate races for their spatial characteristics and kinetic abilities: the Vanir, *vǫlur*, 'forces of chaos,' giants, elves and dwarfs. Jens Peter Schjødt has shown, and I very much agree with him, that the Vanir gods have a strong connection to the earth, as well as to categories and ideas that can be described as being 'low' in nature. However, I have argued that the idea of 'lowness' and a connection to the earth pervades all the races examined in this chapter, which has not been noticed by scholars before.

A 'lowness' refers to the very soil of the earth on a macrocosmic level, but also on an anthropological level to the human body. Njǫrðr exemplifies this point most acutely in the story of his betrothal to the giantess Skaði, who chooses her husband on the basis of his feet. But it can also be seen in the heightened sexuality associated with the other Vanir gods Freyr and Freyja; the latter often uses her body for sexual favours. This interest in low things also, of course, relates to their roles as fertility gods, a belief that can be traced back to Tacitus, who mentions a (female) figure called Nerthus or *terra mater*, no doubt an archaic form of the deity who is presented as Njǫrðr in Scandinavian myths. Njǫrðr may therefore have been associated with 'lowness' since the first century CE, at least in the Rhine region of present-day Germany. The siblings Freyr and Freyja are in fact rather mobile beings on a similar level to some of the Æsir. For example, Freyr recalcitrantly uses Óðinn's high-seat Hlíðskjálf to peer into Giantland, which precipitates Scírnir's journey to this place; however, it has been suggested that the latter is in fact Freyr himself, perhaps in disguise. He is also associated with several modes of transport, including horses, boars (which can be ridden!), the remarkable ship *Skíðblaðnir* and a *fjaðrhamr* that can be used for air-travel, though it must be said that he uses none of these objects in the extant myths, which is not to say that he is thought incapable of doing so.

As for Freyja, there are several instances in which she travels to a far-away place, which aligns her significantly with Óðinn, who may be her lover. She is also associated with several modes of transportation, including boars and a chariot driven by cats, also echoing Nerthus's chariot from *Germania*. Her abode Fólkvangr also associates her with Óðinn's semantic sphere as a counterpart to Valhöll, and several sources mention her duties regarding slain warriors, of whom she is entitled to a share, so she can also be associated with war in addition to fertility, love and sex. In the eddic poem *Hyndluljóð*, she consults with a *völva* regarding historical knowledge in a liminal space on the way to the underworld, so she is most likely thought capable of moving dynamically, possibly along both axes, again reminiscent of Óðinn. At the same time, however, the Vanir have various things in common with the giants, first and foremost a strong connection with the earth. The male Vanir also take giant wives, an indication of their partial assimilation into Æsir society, so perhaps they mediate the two races to some extent, especially when seen in light of their spatial associations.

In Chapter two, I also suggested that the aged character of certain beings corresponds to their abodes, which can be described as lying 'away from centre.' In particular, I referred to *völur* and giants, since the sources signal their antiquity. They can be contrasted with the comparatively young Æsir, most of whom live in locations we might say are centrally positioned. According to *Völuspá*, the oldest figure is the frost-giant Ymir, which is corroborated by Snorri in his *Edda*, who also adds that all *hrímbursar* trace their ancestry back to him. Thus, the giants were *ár um borna* 'born long ago.' Modern scholars tend to domicile the giants in Giantland, whose spatial dimensions are ill-defined but clearly vast. A great number of giants' names refer to the rugged landscape of this place, which is probably thought to be primeval and chaotic. More importantly, it is also probably thought to be located on the margins of the imagined mythical world, far from the civilised 'courts' of the Æsir. *Völur* are another ancient 'race,' signalled by a *völva*'s presence *forðom* in *Völuspá*. This particular *völva* claims she was 'nurtured by giants,' which suggests strong cultural and social links between these two races. Linguistically, *völur* lay no claim to a known territory or *heimr*, unlike gods and giants whose names can be connected to specific realms. It is possible that they were thought to live in a space that we would identify as Hel or a space that bears some resemblance to the underworld. The two *völur* examined in this thesis both live under the earth, which certainly associates them with such a realm. For instance, the *völva* in *Hyndluljóð*, Hyndla, lives in an underground 'rock cave' shrouded in darkness, located

somewhere on the road to the land of the dead. It is a ‘far-away’ location that contrasts markedly with descriptions of Ásgarðr. A figure who mediates the extremes of the underworld and Giantland with Ásgarðr is Óðinn, who frequently travels to and from all three locations for various reasons. Other mediating factors are Óðinn’s age and heritage, which align him with the giants, but from whom he is culturally, socially and geographically very distant.

In Chapter two, I demonstrated that the beings labelled ‘forces of chaos’ are associated with the concept of binding, which they seem to have inherited from their father. This seems to be a way of controlling or limiting their power, which the gods probably feared. In Chapter one, I analysed several Loki tales in which his power of movement is negated at a crucial moment until, finally, he is bound on a rock and tortured before Ragnarøk. While Loki is allowed to live among the gods and go on expeditions with them, the ‘forces of chaos’ embody an existential threat of a much greater magnitude. This threat relates in no small part to their powers of movement whose destructive force gets unleashed at Ragnarøk, particularly those of Fenrir and Miðgarðsormr, resulting in the annihilation of the space around them. In anticipation of this, the gods bind Fenrir with three magical fetters, banish Miðgarðsormr to the outer ocean and install Hel as the guardian of the underworld. As I explained, these actions cause the ‘forces of chaos’ to occupy positions of stasis or immobility, which reduces their power considerably. When Loki is put into a similarly static position, he is at his most vulnerable, rendering him defenceless. Hel and Miðgarðsormr are bound with the invisible shackles of being domiciled in marginal spaces. As Schjødt argues, Hel is also ‘fixed’ in the sense that dead beings cannot return to the land of the living; moreover, being ‘fixed,’ she does not take part in Ragnarøk. Miðgarðsormr’s realm is only visited once by two other beings, a meeting which echoes the final battle in cosmic importance. Miðgarðsormr ‘girds’ the earth, holding it in a kind of balance, which gets broken when it moves closer to the ‘centre.’ Fenrir is not banished to a marginal location, like his siblings, but is physically bound with a series of magical fetters, so his stasis or binding is the most conspicuous. At Ragnarøk, he literally devours the earth with his jaws, as well as the god Óðinn, so the need to contain him, or a specific part of him, is probably more acute than for the other ‘forces of chaos.’

As I explained in Chapter two, the dwarfs are not assigned a *heimr* or realm in the extant sources (though they are said to live as maggots in the flesh of Ymir, and later in the

earth and in rocks). This contrasts with the elves, to whom they seem to be related in certain ways. Snorri divides the elves into two groups, light elves and dark elves, which was possibly a move on his part intended to convey contrasting moral associations. Despite their generally negative connotations, the dark elves play a role in the production of Fenrir's fetter, a beneficent act. Similarly, the dwarfs also make several things for the gods, listed in Chapter two. Both elves and dwarfs can also be connected to hills, rocks and the earth, in which they might have been thought to live, though we must also reckon with the possibility that this reflects a post-medieval view of these creatures. The earliest sources tend not to make such a connection explicit, though obvious exceptions include Þjóðólfr of Hvinir's *Ynglingatal* (discussed above). Moreover, in *Skáldskaparmál*, Loki visits Svartálfaheimr, which he earlier mentions to be the realm of the dark elves, to get gold from Andvari, a dwarf. So perhaps dwarfs and elves, more specifically dark elves, were thought to dwell in similar or the same spaces, on some level. These creatures also seem to mediate between gods and giants, with whom they share certain characteristics. For example, elves appear in the oft-quoted poetic formula *æsir ok álfar*, which makes no apparent distinction between dark and light. Elves and dwarfs are also skilled craftsmen who make things that help the gods in their fight over chaos. However, they are both demonised in late medieval and early modern texts, which highlight their fraught relationship with humans. They also have a reasonably strong connection with the earth, that seems to be quite old, which aligns them with other chthonic beings, like giants and *vøllur*.

Chapter three

I argued here that *Hárbarðsljóð* does not readily distinguish between real and imagined spaces in a systematic way. It also does not use the common toponyms for the realms of gods and men common in other mythological texts. For instance, *Óðins landa* 'Óðinn's lands' and *Verland* 'land of men' are probably coded ways of referring to Ásgarðr and Miðgarðr respectively. Meanwhile, the 'warrior paradise' at Valhøll is deliberately invoked, but not named in st. 24/3 *Óðinn á iarla, þá í val falla*. Possibly the clearest references to a mythological space occur when Þórr relates his expeditions on the *austrvegir* or 'eastern roads,' a conventional term for Giantland. It is on the eastern roads that he battles with 'evil women' and giants, which makes the connection explicit. However, *Hárbarðsljóð* does refer to the 'real world' space of the island *Hlésey*, today's Læsø in Denmark, where Óðinn fights *brúðir berserkia*, probably trolls or giantesses. And there is also a reference to Hel in one of Þórr's threats to Hárbarðr (*ec mynda þic í hel drepa*), though by the time of the poem's

composition, Hel may have become synonymous with the Christian Hell. Even though *Hárbarðsljóð* involves probably the two most religiously significant gods, it lacks some of the drama present in other mythological eddic poems, like *Brymskviða*, in which Þórr's journey to Giantland is heralded with thunder and lightning. Indeed, there are certain elements of it in relation to space that one might describe as 'profane.' This is evident in the denuding of some of the realms of their mythological significance, discussed above, but also several references to legal and social conventions that obtained in medieval Iceland, such as the implications of owning 'three good farms.' All of this perhaps suggests that the border between these realms is not as fixed as we sometimes assume it to be, with some of the dialogue reflecting contemporary concerns.

In most Old Norse texts concerning Þórr he is portrayed as an ultra-aggressive god, universally feared for his reputation for killing. We get some indication of this in *Hárbarðsljóð*. For instance, in st. 14 Hárbarðr references the fight between Þórr and the giant Hrungrnir, whom he compares with himself. As I explained above, Hrungrnir is renowned as the strongest giant, which is demonstrated by the wounds he inflicts on Þórr with his whetstone. Þórr's rage is also apparent in st. 27 in which he threatens Hárbarðr with sending him to Hel if he does not help (quoted above) and the other promises of violence in st. 47. As I explained in this chapter, Þórr's threats of violence are usually realised, which make him a formidable figure. Even Loki, for example, in *Lokasenna* 64/3 eventually acknowledges Þórr's superiority in this regard, remarking that *ec veit, at þú vegr* 'I know that you do kill.' It is therefore noteworthy that by the end of *Hárbarðsljóð* Þórr is forced to retreat from the *sund*, having failed to obtain his objective. As was explained, the *sund* functions as a significant obstacle, but more so because of its spatial dimensions than through the presence of the water alone, otherwise he would 'reach' across it with his hammer. Moreover, Þórr is an accomplished mariner and wader of rivers. However, in many of Þórr's boasts, the action he refers to takes place away from the *sund* in the mountainous regions of Giantland. We also see that Þórr's verbal expression changes dramatically, reflecting his situation. At the beginning, for instance, he presumptuously demands to be transported across the *sund*, but gradually his tone becomes more obsequious as he realises threats alone will not persuade his opponent.

In *Hárbarðsljóð*, Þórr's movement is severely limited in several ways to the extent that it impinges on his manhood. As was explained, Þórr is normally portrayed as capable of

moving ‘dynamically,’ i.e., over long distances and across obstacles, such as rivers and mountains. His role as ‘protector’ of the gods therefore depends on this kind of movement, which, if curtailed, would render him less suited to perform it. Such a failure on a normative level might, in the Norse worldview, leave him exposed to accusations of unmanliness or a kind of *ergi*. One way this is expressed is the kind of language Þórr uses himself and others use about him. On several occasions, such as sts 3, 7 and 53, he expresses his need for Hárbarðr’s boat without which he cannot cross the *sund*. In the stanzas preceding 3 and 7, Hárbarðr insults Þórr’s socio-economic status, which he fails to properly rebut. This compounds the problems he experiences in sts 3 and 7, since he has failed to perform a duty expected of any free Viking Age or medieval man: the maintenance of honour. In st. 53, as was explained, he tries to negotiate a truce with Hárbarðr because he cannot engage with him physically, but an insult to match Hárbarðr’s is probably what the situation demands. We also see that Hárbarðr accuses Þórr of being profligate on his previous journeys, such as sleeping when he could be travelling on his way to Útgarðaloki’s. In that tale, Þórr’s opponent is a giant-like being, but in the present he is being ‘held up’ by a herdsman, Hárbarðr gleefully points out. Consequently, Þórr’s speech and actions regarding his immobile state seem to be connected to a loss of honour. Stasis, I have argued, is normally presented in a negative light in Old Norse texts anyway, but here the idea of stasis is also subtly juxtaposed with a nakedly insulting remark which is not rebutted.

Chapter four

As was indicated earlier, the prose parts of *Lokasenna* have not been extensively studied by modern scholars. This is perhaps surprising, given that such extrametrical interruptions in eddic poetry are relatively rare. A significant exception is Terry Gunnell’s analysis of the origins of drama in Scandinavia in which he argues that the prose interruptions were generated on the basis of the verse, a position I do not disagree with. However, I have argued they also perform a specific function, namely to help us to visualise the complex social intercourse that takes place, which could not otherwise be communicated. I identified three kinds of movement contained within the prose interruptions: (a) movement toward and away from Ægir’s hall, (b) movement inside the hall and (c) the movement that occurs in relation to Þórr’s arrival at the hall. Movement toward and away from the hall described in the prose mainly concerns Loki, who is initially banished to the forest by the gods for killing Fimefengr but later returns, a sequence of events that is narrated in a prose prologue to the poem proper. At the outset, relations between Loki and the other gods are extremely tense.

His banishment is akin to ‘greater outlawry,’ a criminal sanction that involves expulsion from Iceland and loss of legal rights; the Old Icelandic word for such an outlaw is *skógsgangsmaðr*, lit. ‘forest-going-man.’ His return from the forest is a further illegal act, one which renders him open to being killed with impunity. This heightened atmosphere is captured in the prose interruption that announces Loki’s arrival in the hall, which shocks the banqueters into a state of verbal paralysis. Movement inside the hall expressed in prose is *prima facie* less dramatic, though as was explained, it also emphasises the agonistic exchanges taking place. For example, Óðinn asks his son Víðarr to relinquish his seat to Loki, but calls him *úlfs fǫður* ‘the wolf’s father,’ a term that undisguisedly refers to the enmity between Loki and the other gods, since the wolf Fenrir is one of the ‘forces of chaos’ that destroys the world at Ragnarök. The goddess Sif, also Þórr’s wife, is described as getting up to pour Loki a drink in the prose between sts 52 and 53. She is eager to point out to Loki that they ought to have no quarrel, thus distancing herself from the other Æsir. The drink is clearly a gesture of goodwill, but it is her performance which requires her to move forward through the hall, presumably attracting the gaze of the other gods, that carries the greater meaning. The last depiction of movement in the prose interruptions relates to Þórr’s arrival at the hall, which is announced by Beyla, but presumably many of the guests would have noticed ‘all the mountain-ranges shaking.’ As Þórr suddenly appears, Loki turns to face him with a different tactic, since it is clear that Þórr is unlikely to participate in the *senna*. Þórr’s arrival breaks the interchange of speakers established earlier during the poem, so several shifts, physical and poetic, are occurring at once. This recalls the disjointed effect Þórr has on the exchange in *Hárbarðsljóð*, discussed above, as a result of his unfamiliarity with poetic discourse. In *Lokasenna*, however, he successfully rids Loki from the banquet, though not by intellectual means. I also examined a vivid description of the Æsir shaking their shields at Loki, which I compare with other examples of shaking in Old Norse literature; I conclude that the act of shaking or writhing is probably an important part of Loki’s character.

I then argued that a driving force within the poem can be reduced to the opposition between inside and outside, specifically the way in which space inside the hall can be contrasted with the forest. As was said, the drinking hall was literally and metaphorically central to the Norse worldview, most likely common to all early Germanic societies (cf. Hrothgar’s anguish at the burning of Heorot in *Beowulf*). The forest, on the other hand, is associated with thieves and murderers. It is where outlaws were banished, according to Icelandic law, while in Old Norse myth it is the place where Fenrir’s evil brood are born.

Thus, I argued that Loki's movement within and between these spaces is of considerable importance, especially the way he seems to move with such impunity until Þórr arrives. His evil intentions are signalled in his own words: *blend ec þeim svá meini mioð* 'I'll mix their mead with malice.' The mead is a metaphor for the gods' peace and happiness, while the malice he intends to bring comes from the forest, a juxtaposition of two opposing concepts. Drinking the mead are several mythological races, including the Æsir, Vanir, elves, and at least one giant (Skaði), all of whom *hér inni ero* 'are in/inside here [the hall],' the poem is at pains to point out. I also argued that the poem plays with the idea of permissibility, in particular the kinds of behaviours that are tolerable in one space but not another. Bragi illustrates this point well in his warning to Loki that he would fight if only they were someplace else, which Loki seizes upon in his attack in st. 15, calling him a *beccscrautuðr* 'bench ornament.' On a more serious note, the verse as well as the prose ending, *Frá Loka*, refer to Loki's punishment, an act of torture that the gods cannot carry out in the hall. Instead, I inferred that it probably takes place in a harsh landscape analogous to the forest. It is clear, however, that Loki is not against denying the hall's sanctity, at least for a while, due to his character, which the gods evidently fear, and the laws associated with the hall that forbade violence. This is signalled in the way Loki demands a place at the banquet, acknowledging the importance of this gesture. Þórr is another figure to whom the hall's laws might have mattered little, since it is a threat of violence to Loki that causes the latter to leave.

Chapter five

In Chapter five I argued that written versions of the Old Norse myths from Iceland and Norway can be used to illuminate our understanding of certain picture stones from Gotland. The picture stones I examined, which were all raised during the Viking Age and antedate the Icelandic sources by several centuries, are as follows: Klinte Hunninge I, Lärbro Stora Hammars I and III, Ardre VIII, Alskog Tjängvide I and Lillbjärs. While coherent narrative sequences on the stones are apparently absent, many depict individual scenes or motifs that can be paralleled with an equivalent scene from Old Norse literature. Several attempts have been made to identify these images as belonging to specific myths, though so far without full consensus: as with most works of art, interpretation is subjective, as it is to some extent an expression of personal perspective. For example, a picture of a boat containing a pair of figures and a fish-like creature that appear on the upper left of Ardre VIII's main panel has frequently been identified as Þórr and Hymir hunting the Miðgarðsormr. This mythical confrontation is described in several sources, including the skaldic poem *Ragnarsdrápa* and

the eddic poem *Hymiskviða*. However, this identification is potentially problematic, since Þórr's legs do not protrude from below the bottom of the vessel as they do on several other visual expressions of this scene (such as Hørdum, Gosforth, etc.). One could alternatively connect it to the commonplace task of catching fish. To overcome these issues, I adopted a holistic perspective on the stones and have discovered that many of the images should probably be regarded as having been composed with a specific worldview in mind; in fact, the same one that permeates the later written texts. The expression of this worldview is particularly apparent in the attempt to present a configuration of spatial units that have their genesis in a pre-Christian milieu. This way of thinking with space determined, for example, the positioning of different scenes, including the figures within them; the differentiation of geographic elements; the representation of complex forms of movement, such as the 'arrival' scenes in Valhøll; the interaction between figures in space; and the depiction of enclosed and open space. At a fundamental level, many of these spatial units are echoed in the later written texts, allowing us to confirm the existence of the nature of a myth, even though all the substantive elements may not be present.

Final remarks

As I have argued in this thesis, space and movement are categories that can be successfully applied to the study of Old Norse myth. The two are inextricably linked, since movement does not take place in a vacuum, but is, in fact, determined and conditioned by its spatial context. Spatial profiles for the various beings of Norse myth can be constructed on the basis of surviving evidence, even for those for whom such evidence is slight. Thus I have included Viðarr, Hermóðr and Heimdallr – figures who are sometimes ignored by modern handbooks on pre-Christian Norse myth and religion.

My approach shows that a sample of eddic poems treated as literary wholes offer rich veins to be mined using spatial frameworks, particularly for the subtle interpersonal relations that go unnoticed in more general studies. It would thus be of great benefit for future research to conduct similar kinds of spatial readings on the eddic corpus as a whole, and even on other kinds of Old Norse poetry. I consider that doing so will generate new insights and allow us to view the poems in a different light by imagining them as connected to the physical environment in which they were produced. Thus not only do the spaces tied to the places of composition play a role in the spatial presentation of Norse myth, but also spaces that only

existed in the minds of early Scandinavians and were drawn upon to emphasise certain ideas or emotions.

This thesis has also stressed the significance of movement (and non-movement) in mythological literature. Movement through space is a physical action no less important today than it was in the medieval period, where it was tied symbolically, I have argued, to honour and status in Old Norse society. It would also be very useful for future research to pay closer attention to this phenomenon than previously, especially in some skaldic poetry, for example *Haustlǫng*, which deploys various kinds of circumlocutions involving complex forms of movement.

Throughout this thesis, but especially in the final chapter, I have shown that a general ‘Norse worldview’ pervades both the written texts from twelfth- to fourteenth-century Iceland and the much earlier images from mainland Scandinavia, which will inform further studies on the relationship between text and object. My use of the term ‘worldview’ here is distinct as it allows for an interdisciplinary way to approach different kinds of evidence that seem to share a genetic relationship but which are normally separated according to scholarly conventions. I have demonstrated the efficacy of this approach in Chapter five in relation to only six of the best known picture stones from Gotland, a minuscule proportion of the total number of stones elsewhere in Gotland and mainland Scandinavia which have possible mythological elements belonging to this Norse worldview.

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