

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
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INSPIRATION AND INEBRIATION

TRANSFORMATIVE DRINKS IN OLD NORSE LITERATURE

Candidate Number: H6158

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Declarations

I declare that this submission is substantially my own work. Where reference is made to the works of others the extent to which that work has been used is indicated and duly acknowledged in the text and bibliography. The style I have followed is that of the ASNC Dept.

I declare that the word count for this submission, including quotations and footnotes, but excluding the bibliography is 14,995 words.

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Introduction

DRINKS IN OLD NORSE LITERATURE

The first riddle with which Óðinn challenges Heiðrekr in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* goes thus:

Hafa vildak
þat er ek hafða í gær,
vittu, hvat þat var:
Lýða lemill,
orða tefill,
ok orða upphesill.
Heiðrekr konungr,
hyggðu at gátu.¹

That would I have which I had yesterday; find out what that was: the crusher of men, the hinderer of words, and the up-raiser of words. King Heiðrekr, consider the riddle.

To what does it refer? The solution is of course ‘ale’, which Heiðrekr reaches easily. Yet, even within this simple puzzle exists a neat paradox concerning the polyvalent nature of alcohol and its contradictory effects; it inspires speech even as it inhibits expression. We may understand this as an example of a much broader theme in Old Norse literature: that of the transformative drink. Drinks are complex entities – fluid in form and significance, their agency of transformation befitting their own protean nature – with both drinking and drink-serving holding broad spectra of literary, mythological and cultural implications. The transformative drink need not be alcoholic, although alcohol’s effects are especially capricious, as evidenced by the suggestion in *Hávamál* 81 that ale ought only to be praised ‘er druccit er’.² Nevertheless, liquids of all sorts – including blood, water, milk, poisons and magic potions – are capable of effecting a multitude of transformations, both symbolic and literal, concerning not only individual drinkers, but also interpersonal

¹ *Heiðr*, p. 37 (ch. 10). All translations are my own, unless otherwise specified.

² ‘When it is drunk’. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 29. In the case of the *Poetic Edda*, whilst I cite the texts from Neckel and Kuhn’s fifth edition, I use the conventional way of spelling their titles, standard in the scholarship, rather than the edition’s (e.g. *Lokasenna* rather than *Locasenna*).

relationships. Nor are these metamorphoses always positive; whilst the transformative drink can have an intense binding effect on communities and impart special benefits to characters, its powers are problematised too by its potential for harm and use as a tool of revenge and manipulation.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

An investigation of the transformative drink profits from a consideration of broader scholarly attitudes towards the consumption of food and drink as an anthropological concept. Such scholarship finds its roots in discussion concerning food and, as Peter Scholliers summarises, ‘in the 1960s and 1970s Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mary Douglas stressed the role of food as signifier, classifier and identity builder’.³ More recently, Claude Fischler has argued that ‘food is also central to individual identity, in that any given human individual is constructed, biologically, psychologically and socially by the food he/she chooses to incorporate’.⁴ The particular prominence of drinks’ transformative properties is explained in part by Paul Manning’s observation that ‘temporally, the physiological effects of drinking many liquids, unlike foods, are registered within the event of consumption itself’,⁵ which accounts for the narrative immediacy of the transformative drink as a literary theme. Alcohol has received the most attention because, as Phil Withington describes, the phenomenon of intoxication is ‘a universal and essential feature of the human condition’.⁶ There has been a significant shift in the focus of alcohol studies in recent decades, with Toner and Hailwood identifying how ‘the “pathological” interpretation of historical alcohol use has been under fire in the field of drinking studies since at least the publication of anthropologist Mary Douglas’s edited collection *Constructive Drinking*’,⁷ in which she declared that ‘drinking is essentially a social act’.⁸ Nevertheless, alcohol’s potential for

³ Scholliers, ‘Meals’, p. 7.

⁴ Fischler, ‘Food’, pp. 279 and 275.

⁵ Manning, *Semiotics*, p. 3.

⁶ Withington, ‘Introduction’, p. 10. On the theme of intoxicating drinks in Germanic literature, see Doht, *Rauschtrank*.

⁷ Toner and Hailwood, ‘Introduction’, pp. 5–6.

⁸ Douglas, ‘Anthropological Perspective’, p. 4.

heterogenous transformations is evident in Marty Roth's analysis of the 'binary trope' of intoxication, whereby 'drink introduces a division in the self, either by transforming us into something new or revealing hidden depths'.⁹

Literary criticism reports similar findings to those of the anthropological studies, with Jon Miller commenting on how 'as an agent, drink changes a character in literature much as it changes a person in real life'.¹⁰ In relation to the theme's significance in Old English literature, Hugh Magennis contrasts the lack of interest in food with the fact that 'drink and drinking do receive much attention in the poetry'.¹¹ Yet, investigations concerning Old Norse literature have tended to restrict their focus to specific drink types; much progress is still to be made in forming broader conceptions of the transformative drink, with the theoretical approaches described above having the potential to aid new ways of thinking about its literary employment.

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

This dissertation aims to bridge existing gaps in our understanding of the multi-faceted literary theme of the transformative drink, by adopting a comparative approach and closely interrogating its most remarkable manifestations across a range of Old Norse texts of differing genres. The theme is most pronounced in the so-called *Poetic Edda* and in *Snorra Edda*, as well in *fornaldarsögur* such as *Völsunga saga*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, *Orvar-Odds saga* and *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*. It is also prominent, albeit with a more limited range of manifestation types, in sagas of other genres including *Egils saga* and *Heimskringla*. These texts form the focus of my investigation, although its significance is far more widespread than can be totally described in a study of this length.

I primarily examine the extent to which such drinks, in their literary presentation, may be conceived as belonging to a single system – rather than to absolute or discrete categories – whereby they have a unique potential as agents of

⁹ Roth, *Drunk*, p. 73.

¹⁰ Miller, 'Representations of Drinking', p. 376.

¹¹ Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites*, p. 11.

Introduction

transformation and vehicles for identity, capable of engendering powerful changes in their drinkers and servers alike. Whilst their effects on characters may be highly variegated, and sometimes brought about in conjunction with other factors, the fundamental characteristics of these drinks demonstrate notable similarities. Considering this transformative aspect of their nature, I show too, in cases where their inclusion serves clear narrative purposes, how their properties render them especially valuable as literary tools. A secondary strand of this dissertation moreover examines the variance of attitudes towards such drinks, insofar as they may be gleaned from their literary attestations. Indeed, that a potential exists for dichotomous attitudes is hinted at by the structure of this dissertation, which moves from considering those instances of broadly positive transformations, to those which are more problematic. This distinction, however, is often blurred, much as drinks themselves, by their very nature, lend themselves to being ambiguously mixed, rather than cut and dried.

I

Alcohol, The Individual and the Community

INTRODUCTION

Of the drinks analysed in this dissertation, alcoholic beverages appear most frequently in Old Norse literature. As Jenny Jochens remarks in relation to alcohol's textual prominence, 'it appears that "under the influence" was the normal or desired state, since sobriety can only be expressed as being "un-drunk" (*ódrukkan*)';¹² to this I would add that Cleasby and Vigfússon's dictionary also cites the occurrence of the term *drykkjúlítill* as meaning 'sober' in *Þorláks saga helga hin ýngri*.¹³ Jochen notes too how the literature suggests a popular awareness of alcohol's 'psychological and physiological effects', evidenced by the expression *ól er annar maðr*.¹⁴ In *Grettis saga*, this proverb is regarded by Grettir as 'satt'.¹⁵ In its quotidian favourable instances, however, the consumption of alcohol is primarily transformative in symbolic terms – even if the transformations are often predicated on alcohol's literal characteristics – with Magennis comparably arguing that Old English poetry refers to 'the social and symbolic significance of drinking, not to its physical reality'.¹⁶ This chapter focuses on the transformation types brought about by alcohol consumption which are broadly valorised, both in relation to the individual drinker and to the larger community.

¹² Jochens, 'Gender', p. 165.

¹³ Cleasby, and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *Dictionary*, p. 108. The term is found in *ÞBþ*, p. 158 (ch. 12).

¹⁴ 'Ale is another man' (i.e. a man is not the same when drunk). Jochens, 'Gender', p. 165.

¹⁵ 'True'. *Gr*, p. 66 (ch. 19).

¹⁶ Magennis, *Anglo-Saxon Appetites*, p. 27.

ALCOHOL AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Alcohol and status

There is much evidence in Old Norse literature to suggest that, as Bjørn Qviller argues, alcohol can be ‘vital for the display of authority and status’,¹⁷ and its consumption has at least a confirmative function in this respect. The correspondence between alcohol consumption and social class is evident in *Rígsþula*, in which three couples represent, as Margaret Clunies Ross identifies, ‘the three prototypical social classes’,¹⁸ and only the noble couple ensures that ‘vín var í kǫnno’.¹⁹ *Grímnismál* 19 furthermore describes how

[...] við vín eitt vǫpngöfugr
Óðinn æ lifir.²⁰

Óðinn, glorious in arms, always lives on wine alone.

The *vín* functions here, Einar Haugen suggests, as a ‘symbol of royalty’.²¹ By contrast, the consumption of a disgusting drink is humiliating and punitive in *Skírnismál* 35, when Skírnir threatens Gerðr with the following arrangement:

Hrímgrímnir heitir þurs, er þic hafa skal,
fyr nágrindr neðan;
þar þér vílmegir á viðar rótom
geita hland gefi!²²

The giant is called Hrímgrímnir, who shall have you beneath the gates of the dead; may wretches give you the piss of goats, there at the roots of a tree!

This situation is the antithesis of the splendour enjoyed by the *einherjar* in Valhöll, where the goat Heiðrún is to be found, and whose produce is described in *Grímnismál* 25:

scapker fylla hon scal ins scíra miaðar

¹⁷ Qviller, *Bottles and Battles*, p. 7.

¹⁸ Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes I*, 227.

¹⁹ ‘Wine was in the tankard’. *Rígsþula* 32 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 284).

²⁰ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 61.

²¹ Haugen, ‘The *Edda*’, p. 18. Jesús Rodríguez (‘Old Norse’, p. 145) suggests, however, that its mention may be a ‘late non-native addition’.

²² *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 76.

knáat sú veig vanaz.²³

She will fill a vat of bright mead; that drink cannot be exhausted.

The ritual of the oath cup moreover strengthens the association between the alcohol consumption and high status. In *Ynglinga saga*, the authority of the incoming king Ingjaldr is only formally recognized after he meets certain ceremonial preconditions: ‘skyldi sá þá standa upp í móti bragafulli ok strengja heit, drekka af fullit síðan’.²⁴ The drinking of alcohol may, however, be associated with low social rank in the case of women, and in *Völsunga saga* a maidservant admits that ‘ek var [...] vön í æsku at drekka mjök í óttu’.²⁵ Her confession of juvenile alcoholism, coupled crucially with her gender, precipitates the king’s realization that she is not a king’s daughter, as she pretends. In *Egils saga*, by contrast, the three-year-old Egill’s penchant for drinking, whilst a source of annoyance for his parents, is regarded by Yngvarr as acceptable, and the drunken verses the infant composes are well-regarded ‘við marga menn’.²⁶

Alcohol and masculinity

Indeed, there is a strong association between drinking behaviour and perceived masculinity in the literature, with Maurice Bowra’s contention that ‘delight in drink and intoxication are often regarded as proper to a hero, worthy of his physical strength’,²⁷ as well as Elvin Jellinek’s assertion that since ancient times ‘virility [has been] symbolically reflected in the ability to drink much’,²⁸ serving as useful starting points in this investigation.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²⁴ ‘He was then to stand up to receive the toast and make a vow, then to drink off the toast’. *Yng*, p. 66 (ch. 36).

²⁵ ‘I was, as a child, used to drinking a great deal before dawn’. *Völs*, p. 139 (ch. 12). Throughout this dissertation, the unlauded o is retained in quotations, where it exists in the editions cited.

²⁶ ‘Among many men’. *Eg*, p. 83 (ch. 31).

²⁷ Bowra, *Heroic Poetry*, p. 199.

²⁸ Jellinek, ‘Symbolism’, p. 862.

In *Þrymskviða*, the disguised Þórr, in whom Clunies Ross argues ‘the gods’ honour and their virility come together’,²⁹ consumes both ‘sáld þriú miaðar’ and vast quantities of food,³⁰ thereby provoking the following exclamation from Þrymr:

sáca ec brúðir bíta in breiðara,
né inn meira mioð mey um drecca.³¹

I never saw brides eat more broadly, nor a maiden drink more mead.

Þórr’s prodigious thirst and drinking ability – he ‘eats and drinks like a real man’, as Annette Lassen remarks –³² cause Þrymr to question the true identity of his ‘bride’, whose hyper-masculinity cannot here be contained. Similarly, in *Gylfaginning*, Þórr attempts to use his drinking prowess, which he regards as an *íþrótt*, as a means of affirming his *mátt*.³³ This is partly a response to Útgardaloki’s patronizing use of the designation ‘sveinstauli’ to address Þórr, simultaneously challenging his status, physical stature and virility. The effort involved in the drinking trial itself – even if John McKinnell regards Þórr’s performance a ‘total failure’ –³⁴ is equated with competitive exertion, with the verb *þreyta* (used to describe his second and third draughts) having adversarial connotations.³⁵

Drinking may be incorporated into a *mannjafnaðr*, as in *Qrvar-Odds saga*, when Oddr is required to out-drink and out-recite his opponents.³⁶ The drinking match is one of a series of contests, much like Þórr’s challenges, and the test of whether or not Oddr is a ‘mikill drykkjumaðr’ is thus allied to the trials of his archery and swimming abilities.³⁷ In *Egils saga*, too, alcohol consumption may increase a drinker’s perceived masculinity, and Egill, whom Theodore Andersson regards as a ‘hero of intoxication’,³⁸ distinguishes himself in a drinking bout at

²⁹ Clunies Ross, ‘*Þrymskviða*’, p. 188.

³⁰ ‘Three casks of mead’. *Þrymskviða* 24 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 114).

³¹ *Þrymskviða* 25 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 114).

³² Lassen, ‘Hǫðr’s Blindness’, p. 226.

³³ ‘Accomplishment’; ‘might’; and ‘little boy’. *Gylf*, pp. 39–41 (ch. 46). The offence of the appellation is nevertheless tempered by Útgardaloki’s use of it (*Gylf*, p. 40 (ch. 46)) also with reference to Hugi (‘Thought’), the winner of the running race.

³⁴ McKinnell, *Both One and Many*, p. 84.

³⁵ ‘Struggle’. *Gylf*, p. 41 (ch. 46).

³⁶ ‘Man-comparison’. For further discussion concerning the *senna* and the *mannjafnaðr*, see Clover, ‘Germanic Context’.

³⁷ ‘Great drinker’. *Qrv*, p. 310 (ch. 27).

³⁸ Andersson, ‘Character’, p. 3.

Ármóðr's farm, in contrast to others' deficiencies: 'er forunautar hans gerðusk ófærir, þá drakk hann fyrir þá, þat er þeir máttu eigi'.³⁹ That Ármóðr's excessive provision of 'it sterkasta mungát' represents a test of Egill's masculinity is evidenced further by the pointed nature of Egill's revenge the following morning,⁴⁰ when he removes Ármóðr's facial hair and gouges out one of his eyes. As Lassen notes, beardlessness may connote effeminacy, and the destruction of his eye indicates – besides Odinic overtones – a symbolic castration.⁴¹

The rejection of a drink may correspondingly trigger taunts whose force hinges on implications of unmanliness. *Frá dauða Sinfjötla* relates how, after Sinfjötli twice refuses Borghildr's (poisoned) drink, 'ámælisorð' accompanies its third appearance,⁴² with the *Völsunga saga* version of the scene recording Borghildr's provocative invocation of Sinfjötli's family: 'it þriðja sinn kom hún ok bað hann drekka af, ef hann hefði hug Völsunga'.⁴³ Her pressure, appealing to Sinfjötli's sense of personal and dynastic honour, gains the desired reaction – he consumes the beverage and dies – despite its clear danger. Nevertheless, drinking can also render men ironically vulnerable to emasculation.⁴⁴ In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Helgi's heavy drinking enables Ólöf to prick him with a *svefnþorn* ('sleep-thorn') and remove his hair; the bodily penetration and inversion of conventional gendered power relations is comparable with Holofernes's experience in the Old English *Judith*. Ólöf furthermore 'rakaði þá af honum hárit allt ok neri í tjöru', causing Helgi to experience humiliating 'sneypu ok svívirðing'.⁴⁵

³⁹ 'When his companions became incapacitated, he then drank for them what they could not [finish]'. *Eg*, p. 225 (ch. 71).

⁴⁰ 'The strongest ale'. *Ibid*.

⁴¹ Lassen, 'Hóðr's Blindness', p. 222.

⁴² 'Insult'. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 162. Chapter III analyses Borghildr's employment of poison more closely.

⁴³ 'She came a third time and told him to drink it off, if he had the courage of the Völsungs'. *Völs*, p. 134 (ch. 10).

⁴⁴ The deleterious effects of drinking are discussed in Chapter III. The most famous instance of drunken emasculation in Germanic literature occurs in the Old English *Judith*, in which Holofernes's heavy drinking enables Judith to execute what Alexandra Hennessey Olsen ('Inversion', p. 291) describes as his 'symbolic rape'.

⁴⁵ 'Then shaved off all his hair and rubbed him with tar'; and 'disgrace and dishonour'. *Hrólfr*, p. 16 (ch. 7).

Alcohol and sexuality

The effects of alcohol on characters' sexual behaviour in the literature has not received widespread scholarly attention, although Lynn Martin argues that 'the association between the consumption of alcohol and sexual activity has remained constant in Western culture', which holds true when examining Old Norse literature.⁴⁶ Jochens observes that drinkers may become *kátr*, which as well as meaning 'cheerful', 'can also suggest sexual arousal'.⁴⁷ Three encounters in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*, described by Jochens as 'the only sexual, almost pornographic, scenes in the Old Norse corpus',⁴⁸ illustrate the association well. Their colourful accounts of sexual intercourse are all importantly preceded by descriptions of the serving of 'gott öl', 'mungát' and 'gott vín', and by details of the flirting that ensues, with the sequence of the economical prose implying each time that Bósi's passion is expedited by the drinking.⁴⁹ The sex act itself is playfully imagined in the second scene as an act of drinking, the innuendo-laden language heightening the passage's erotic charge: 'hann brynnir nú folanum heldr ótæpiliga, svá at hann var allr á kafi'.⁵⁰ Bósi's sexual climax is bawdily conceptualized in the lovers' dialogue in analogous terms, with the girl suggesting, 'mun ekki þat mega vera, at folinn þinn hafi drukkit meira en honum hefir gott gert ok hafi hann ælt upp meira en hann hefir drukkit?'.⁵¹ The correspondence is finally confirmed in the third sex scene, when Bósi asks the girl how she has enjoyed the lovemaking, and she replies, 'svá dátt sem ek hefði drukkit ferskan mjöð'.⁵² The parallels between the three episodes thus not only suggest that drinking is an inhibition-releasing precondition for sexual activity between strangers, but also that the satisfaction derived from each activity is in some ways equivalent.

⁴⁶ Martin, *Alcohol*, p. 9.

⁴⁷ Jochens, *Women*, p. 109.

⁴⁸ Jochens, 'Illicit Love Visit', p. 380.

⁴⁹ 'Good ale'; 'ale'; and 'good wine'. *Bósa*, pp. 298, 308 and 315 (chs. 7, 11 and 13). We note too that, following his consumption of Grímhildr's drink of forgetfulness, it is when Guðrún is serving drink that 'Sigurðr sér, at hún er væn kona' ('Sigurðr sees that she is a beautiful woman'), further evidencing the association between drinking and sexual arousal. *Vǫls*, p. 174 (ch. 26).

⁵⁰ 'Now he waters his foal rather generously, so that it was all immersed'. *Bósa*, p. 308 (ch. 11).

⁵¹ 'Could it not be that your foal has drunk more than was good for it, and has vomited up more than it has drunk?'. *Bósa*, p. 309 (ch. 11).

⁵² 'As charming as if I had drunk fresh mead'. *Bósa*, p. 316 (ch. 13). Concerning the Odinic parallels of these episodes, see van Wezel, 'Myths', pp. 1039–40.

Alcohol's role in this respect is not, however, always favourable. An accusation levelled against Halldórr by Haraldr in *Halldórs þáttur Snorrasonar inn síðari*, that 'þú níðisk á drykkju við gamalmenni ok hleypr at vændiskonum um síðkveldum, en fylgir eigi konungi þínum',⁵³ emphasizes the perceived correlation between (excessive) drinking and sexual promiscuity. The theme of the sexually-transformative drink, however, is most interestingly modified in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, where the power of the mead served to Haraldr by Snæfríðr represents an extension of alcohol's aphrodisiacal properties into a magical dimension. Haraldr's transformation is as instantaneous as it is devastating, with the saga describing how 'þegar var sem eldshiti kvæmi í hörund hans ok vildi þegar hafa hana á þeiri nótt'.⁵⁴ The repeated adverb *þegar* emphasizes the temporal compression of the phenomenon, and the fiery simile underlines its destructive and all-consuming influence. A hasty marriage follows, but with disastrous results, as 'konungr festi Snæfríði ok fékk ok unni svá með ærslum, at ríki sitt ok allt þat, er honum byrjaði, þá fyrir lét hann'.⁵⁵ That his sudden lust was founded upon witchcraft is confirmed when Snæfríðr's body is cremated, releasing a swarm of contemptible creatures, after which Haraldr regains his wisdom. Snæfríðr's mead thus represents an amplification of the excitatory nature of alcohol, whose properties are magically fortified and exploited in this episode.

ALCOHOL AND THE COMMUNITY

Returning to the advantageous effects of alcohol consumption, its most common function relates not, however, to its transformative effects on individuals, but to its potential as a catalyst for social cohesion. Jochens notes the 'loosening of verbal restraint' that accompanies drinking,⁵⁶ and alcohol's symbolic value as an agent of

⁵³ 'You cheat at drinking with old men and spring upon whores late in the evening, but do not follow your king'. *HalldSn*, p. 268 (ch. 2).

⁵⁴ 'It was immediately as if a fiery heat came into his flesh, and he instantly wanted to have her that night'. *HHáf*, p. 126 (ch. 25).

⁵⁵ 'The king betrothed [himself] to Snæfríðr and married [her] and loved [her] with such madness, that he then let go his kingdom and all his responsibilities'. *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Jochens, 'Gender', p. 165.

integration is partly related to the literal effects it has on human beings.⁵⁷ Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonarkviða* 28, for instance, describes drink in the following way:

Þar gullker
geiga knáttu
inni full
unna greipum,
en inndrótt
allra stríða
heilivágr
til hjarta fell.

Inside there full gold-goblets swung, caressed the hands, and the soothing balm of all
torments [> wine or ale] penetrated the hearts of the retinue.⁵⁸

Given the hall-drinking context, the kenning here hints at alcohol's dual capabilities to heal pain within the individual, and smooth over trouble between drinkers. As my Review of Scholarship Essay recognised, this unificatory aspect of Germanic drinking has received much attention,⁵⁹ especially in relation to the broader significance of drinking customs. There is, nevertheless, value in briefly examining the role specifically played by alcohol in effecting such interpersonal transformations.

The hospitable provision of good alcohol may effect an incorporative transformation upon a guest, as Preben Meulengracht Sørensen suggests: 'when he [...] participates in the drinking he is admitted into the fellowship with all those present'.⁶⁰ As well as bringing communities together, alcohol works as a binding force at the microcosmic level, as witnessed in *Hávamál* 52:

með hálfom hleif oc með hóllo keru
fecc ec mér féлага.⁶¹

⁵⁷ By extension, the effect of the drink which Hrólfr and Stefnir consume in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* works as a supernatural augmentation of the integrative action of alcohol, in that it instantly causes Stefnir to become so 'blíðr' ('friendly') towards Hrólfr that he is prepared to abandon his own bridal quest for the sake of his drinking companion. *GHr*, p. 255 (ch. 32).

⁵⁸ *Hákonarkviða* (ed. and transl. K. E. Gade, p. 720). The verb *unna* (lit. 'love') again playfully hints at the association between alcohol and sexuality.

⁵⁹ In addition to the references there, Stephen Pollington foregrounds the use of commensality to strengthen social bonds in early medieval society. See, for example, Pollington, 'Mead-Hall Community'.

⁶⁰ Meulengracht Sørensen, 'Loki's *Senna*', p. 253.

⁶¹ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 25.

with half a loaf and with a tilted goblet, I gained myself a companion.

Conversely, the failure to provide alcohol may elicit resentment in guests, as is the case in *Egils saga* when, having initially been offered ‘skyraskar’ and ‘afr’ by Bárðr,⁶² Egill makes clear his attitude towards such poor hospitality:

Sogðuð sverri flagða
sumbleklu ér, kumbla,
því telk, brjótr, þars blétuð,
bragðvísan þik, dísir.⁶³

You told the enemy of troll women [> (noble) man > Egill] there was a lack of feasting (i.e. beer) as you, the desecrator of graves [> evil man], worshipped the goddesses; therefore I consider you cunning.

The provision of *skyr* seems to serve as a means of expressing animosity towards a person,⁶⁴ with Björn in *Bjarnar saga Hittlækappa* also referring to it as ‘óvinafagnað’.⁶⁵

Alcohol’s effectiveness in supporting amity, however, is not without its limitations, and in *Lokasenna*, the initial harmony of the feast at Ægir’s hall is based upon fragile foundations. The poem’s prose introduction describes the happy situation existing before Loki launches into his invective: ‘Siálft barsc þar ql. Þar var griðastaðr mikill’.⁶⁶ The juxtaposition of these two sentences is no accident: rather, it concisely expresses the potential which commensal drinking holds in fostering community spirit. The image of idealized peacefulness, however, is transient. In response to the external force of disruption which Loki embodies, Sif attempts to smooth over hostilities through the reconciliatory offer of mead.⁶⁷ Yet alcohol’s power cannot heal rifts as great as those which Loki intends to forge. He stands in opposition to everything which communal drinking represents, with his own hostility ironically described in liquid terms, using the vocabulary of poisoning. He

⁶² ‘Bowls of curd’; and ‘buttermilk’. *Eg*, p. 107 (ch. 43). The later provision of *skyr* by Ármóðr is similarly disappointing.

⁶³ *Eg*, p. 108 (ch. 44).

⁶⁴ For further literary attestations of *skyr*, see Rodríguez, ‘Old Norse’, pp. 21–7.

⁶⁵ ‘Enemies’ joy’. *BjH*, p. 185 (ch. 27).

⁶⁶ ‘The ale served itself there. That was a great place of peace’. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 96.

⁶⁷ Sif’s attempt at diplomacy, however, is made at the expense of the other Æsir, in her disloyal suggestion that she is alone amongst the Æsir in being ‘vammalausa’ (‘free of fault’). *Lokasenna* 53 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 107).

declares that ‘blend ec þeim svá meini mioð’,⁶⁸ and Eldir utilizes similar imagery to describe Loki’s speech-acts as analogous to the spouting of liquid, with the verb *ausa* literally denoting pouring or sprinkling:

hrópi oc rógi ef þú eyss á holl regin:
á þér muno þau þerra þat.⁶⁹

If you pour accusation and abuse on the gracious gods, they will wipe it off on you.

Loki’s malevolence is thus conceptualized as the very antithesis of the incorporative drink, and the transformation which its metaphorical serving effects is one of disorder, accelerating the mythological trajectory towards Ragnarøk.

⁶⁸ ‘I shall thus blend their mead with harm’. *Lokasenna* 3 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 97).

⁶⁹ *Lokasenna* 4 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 97).

II

Drinks of Inspiration

INTRODUCTION

Although drinks in the corpus may occasionally inspire enhanced somatic capabilities,⁷⁰ the most significant drink-inspired transformations, of those which are broadly favourable, relate instead to improved intellectual and creative prowess, even if the distinction is not always clear-cut.⁷¹ Both ordinary alcohol and supernatural drinks are capable of inspiring wisdom, poetic artistry and powers of mnemonic retention. Indeed, the act of drinking itself may be conceived, as Judy Quinn argues with reference to eddic poetry, as the assimilation of ‘liquid knowledge’.⁷² The metaphor is particularly apt, Quinn notes, considering that ‘the sense of knowledge as flowing from mouth to mouth and being ingested [is] a product of a society not dependent on writing’.⁷³ Peter Orton considers such an understanding of ideas as substances as belonging (in the language of cognitive linguistic theory) to ‘the complex of ontological metaphors [called] the “conduit metaphor”’.⁷⁴ To this analysis I would add the specific relevance of the metaphor of ‘memory as stomach’ which Jens Eike Schnall identifies in medieval learned works.⁷⁵ In the mythological context, the significance of drinks in imparting knowledge is especially evident in the details of the three key episodes which Mircea Eliade regards as confirming Óðinn’s status as ‘the undisputed master of wisdom and of all the occult sciences’.⁷⁶ His initiatory hanging ritual, the sacrifice of his eye and his theft of the mead of poetry all enable, or are accompanied by, the consumption of a transformative drink.

⁷⁰ Vilhjálmr, for example, claims to have been afforded ‘aff’ (‘strength’) from a drink in *Gongu-Hrólf’s saga*. *GHr*, p. 234 (ch. 27).

⁷¹ Hötr’s mental and physical transformation in *Hrólf’s saga kraka* is analysed in Chapter IV.

⁷² See Quinn, ‘Liquid Knowledge’.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁷⁴ Orton, ‘Spouting Poetry’, p. 291.

⁷⁵ Cited in Heslop, ‘*Minni*’, p. 79.

⁷⁶ Eliade, *History* II, 161.

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THE MEAD OF POETRY

The mead of poetry is the archetypal example of such drinks, however, its mechanism is fairly nebulous in our principle source concerning the myth: *Skáldskaparmál*. Snorri relates how Fjalarr and Galarr ‘blendu hunangi við blóðit ok varð þar af mjöðr sá er hverr er af drekkur verðr skáld eða fræðamaðr’.⁷⁷ After its regurgitation, ‘Suttunga mjöð gaf Óðinn Ásunum ok þeim mönnum er yrkja kunnu’.⁷⁸ The use of the verb *verða*, with the sense ‘to become’, implies a radical transformation of the consumer’s nature – albeit with ambiguously binary alternatives – that goes beyond the mere reception of factual information, although this too is suggested by the new status of *fræðamaðr*. The genitive element of this compound-noun primarily denotes knowledge, learning or lore, with the whole term thus presupposing the acquisition of concrete data, as opposed to raw skills alone. The emphasis of the first quotation is nevertheless on the mead’s creation of new identities, although this reading is problematized in the light of a potential implication of the second quotation: that Óðinn gives the mead to those who already *yrkja kunnu*.⁷⁹ The relative clause, lack of temporal adverbs and shared past tense of the verbs *gaf* and *kunnu* work together in this sentence to create a perfect storm of ambiguity, making the establishment of a causative relationship between poethood and the provision of the mythic mead impossible. My interpretation would prioritise the universal sense of the distributive pronoun *hverr* in the first quotation as suggesting that, in the second, the consumption of the mead is a prerequisite for poethood, and not vice-versa. The universality of opportunity suggested by the first quotation does not, however, exclude the possibility that once the mead is in the possession of the Æsir, Óðinn is at liberty to serve the mead only to those selected for their innate ability.

⁷⁷ ‘Blended honey with the blood and it turned into that mead whoever drinks from which becomes a *skáld* or a man of learning’. *Skm*, p. 3 (ch. G57). As Clunies Ross (*Prolonged Echoes* II, 174) remarks, poetry is attributed much value in Old Norse literature as a ‘locus of intellectual power, social control and corporate memory’. See also Whaley, ‘Skaldic Poetry’, p. 480.

⁷⁸ ‘Óðinn gave Suttungr’s mead to the Æsir and to those men who could compose poetry’. *Skm*, p. 5 (ch. G58).

⁷⁹ Whereas Clunies Ross (*A History*, p. 83) argues that Óðinn ‘gave it only to those people who already possessed the skill’, Kevin Wanner (*Snorri Sturluson*, p. 137) correctly identifies the presence of ‘chicken-and-egg logic’ here, albeit without attempting to resolve the dilemma.

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INSPIRATIONAL ALCOHOL

However we unpick this dilemma, and temporarily leaving aside the debate surrounding the conceptual origin of the myth,⁸⁰ we may at a basic level consider the mead of poetry to be a version (albeit an extraordinary one imbued with layers of fortifying symbolic potency) of the transformative alcoholic drink, capable of inspiring poetic composition.⁸¹ As Alison Finlay suggests, ‘the link between intoxication and inspiration suggested by the metaphor of fermented drink for poetry remains subliminal’.⁸² Heather O’Donoghue likewise remarks that ‘inebriation and inspiration go hand in hand’ in the myth.⁸³ Indeed, that an intoxicating drink became the mythological symbol of poetic and scholarly wisdom points to a broader understanding of the inspirational value of alcohol in Old Norse literature.

Although Óðinn’s transmission of mythology to Agnarr in *Grímnismál* in part indicates his desire to reward the boy for hospitably offering him a *horn fult* in the prose introduction,⁸⁴ the instrumentality of the (implicitly human) drink in inspiring Óðinn’s recollection and recitation should not be underestimated. John Lindow acknowledges such a function, albeit with a stress on the joint agency of several factors: ‘Odin’s performance is set off not only by his consumption of a drink, as is normal in contests of wisdom, but also by his being hung in the fire’.⁸⁵ The emphasis of the poem’s introduction is nevertheless on the effectiveness of Agnarr’s drink-serving as a means of loosening Óðinn’s tongue, in contrast to

⁸⁰ My Review of Scholarship Essay considers various theories concerning the mead’s religious significance, its parallels in other mythologies and its associations with sovereignty.

⁸¹ As Jan de Vries states (*Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 416), Óðinn’s name is etymologically related to *óðr*, which as an adjective Hilda Ellis Davidson interprets (*Lost Beliefs*, p. 60) as meaning ‘raging’ or ‘intoxicated’. This further heightens the association between insobriety and the poetic inspiration of which Óðinn is patron.

⁸² Finlay, ‘Pouring Óðinn’s Mead’, p. 92.

⁸³ O’Donoghue, *English Poetry*, p. 180. The correspondence of course extends far beyond early Scandinavian thought, with Steven Pritzker noting (‘Alcohol and Creativity’) the valorization of alcohol by eminent ‘creative’ people dating back to Aristophanes. Interestingly, the association, long held true in popular belief, is now gaining scientific support. A recent psychological study (Jarosz, Colflesh and Wiley, ‘Uncorking the Muse’) showed that moderate alcohol intoxication improved participants’ performance on a creative problem solving task.

⁸⁴ ‘Full horn’. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 57.

⁸⁵ Lindow, *Handbook*, p. 151. In *Vafþrúðnismál* 8, Óðinn’s ‘þyrstr’ arrival at Vafþrúðnir’s hall holds the figurative double meaning of thirst for a wisdom contest. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 46. Unlike in *Grímnismál*, however, Óðinn’s desire for hospitality is there satisfied by his host and, by stanza 19, he is invited to join the giant on his bench.

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Geirroðr's failed attempt to elicit information forcibly. Carolyne Larrington interprets *Grímnismál* as fundamentally being about remembering,⁸⁶ arguing, with reference to an experimental study by Goodwin *et al.*,⁸⁷ that ‘what is learned drunk is better recalled drunk than sober’ and that Óðinn’s learning and recall are thus state-dependent.⁸⁸ This provides a useful starting-point for comparing Óðinn’s recollection of mythological facts in *Grímnismál* with what Larrington terms his ‘use of self-mortification to gain – that is, encode in memory – the runes in *Hávamál*’.⁸⁹ A summary of the equivalences between the two scenes is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Circumstances surrounding Óðinn’s mnemonic encoding and recall of mythological information in *Hávamál* and *Grímnismál*.

	<i>Hávamál</i> 138–41	<i>Grímnismál</i> introduction and vv. 2–3
Nature of suffering	Óðinn hangs from a tree, wounded by a spear.	Óðinn is set between two fires.
Duration of suffering	Nine nights.	Eight nights.
Agency of suffering	Óðinn sacrifices himself to himself.	Geirroðr carries out the torture, however, Óðinn is willingly hosted by him, despite Frigg’s explicit warnings about his poor hospitality.
Initial lack of sustenance	Óðinn receives no loaf (of bread) or drink.	Óðinn is offered no food; the heat of the fire presumably makes him thirsty.
Nature of subsequent drink	Óðinn gains a drink of the precious mead.	Agnarr provides Óðinn with a full horn of apparently ordinary drink.
Consequences of imbibition	Drinking the mead, Óðinn has already gained the runes and spells, however, the imbibition appears to catalyse further transformation. The stanzaic sequencing and the emphatic placement of the temporal adverb <i>þá</i> at the beginning of stanza 141 hint at the mead’s causation in the commencement of a new process (indicated by the modal construction <i>nema</i> + infinitive) of growth and understanding.	Óðinn’s wisdom revelation begins shortly after the introduction relates his consumption of the drink. Stanza 3 describes the recitation as a reward for Agnarr.
	In both cases, wisdom flows fully in the moment immediately following imbibition: in <i>Hávamál</i> it is absorbed and in <i>Grímnismál</i> it is emitted. The consumption of a drink serves as the final precondition for both encoding and recall.	

⁸⁶ Pernille Hermann (‘Key Aspects’, p. 17) similarly points to Óðinn’s concern for Muninn, the raven representative of memory, in stanza 20 as indicating memory’s importance in the poem.

⁸⁷ Goodwin *et al.*, ‘Alcohol and Recall’.

⁸⁸ Larrington, ‘Myth’, pp. 273–4. Larrington proposes that similar encoding occurs during Óðinn’s visit to Fjalarr in *Hávamál* 13–14.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

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The inspirational qualities of drink may furthermore be enjoyed by human consumers of everyday alcohol, as in the drinking contest in *Orvar-Odds saga*, in which Edwards argues that alcohol ‘becomes the source of inspired poetry, releasing not paralysing the energies of creative imagination’.⁹⁰ Poetic and drinking skills are directly correlated in the episode, with Oddr delivering as many verses and draining as many horns as Sigurðr and Sjólftr initially manage together. The fact that verbal performance occurs at all – despite verse-composition being extrinsic to the wager – marks the recitation of poetry as a spontaneous outcome of alcohol intoxication. Excessive drunkenness is nevertheless implicitly the reason behind Sigurðr and Sjólftr’s later silence, although Lönnroth reasonably proposes an alternative explanation: that Sjólftr gives up ‘because he does not have any more accomplishments to brag about’.⁹¹ Similarly, the verbal effects of drinking in *Egils saga* may, as Jochens suggests, be ‘honed to more than simple loquaciousness’.⁹² Several of the verses attributed to Egill in the saga are spoken whilst inebriated, although it is not always clear as to whether the poetry is composed with the aid of alcohol’s influence, or in spite of it. Just as Óðinn may only offer the mead of poetry to individuals with inbuilt poetic ability, the inspirational quality of ordinary alcohol likewise influences characters discriminately, with alcohol often incapacitating Egill’s companions. Ale alone is thus insufficient to transform a talentless man into a *skáld*, but neither is it a prerequisite for poetic composition in those with aptitude.

NON-ALCOHOLIC INSPIRATIONAL DRINKS

The inspirational qualities of alcoholic drinks may furthermore be attributed, by extension, into accounts of non-alcoholic drinks. Egill’s composition of *Sonatorrek* directly follows Þorgerðr’s tricking him into drinking milk, an act whose ‘bodily effect’ Russell Poole argues ‘looses Egill’s grief and directs it into a socialised mode of expression’.⁹³ Although dairy-based drinks are generally regarded as lowly – as

⁹⁰ Edwards, ‘Alcohol into Art’, p. 91.

⁹¹ Lönnroth, ‘Double Scene’, p. 104.

⁹² Jochens, ‘Gender’, p. 167.

⁹³ Poole, ‘Counsel’, p. 785.

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demonstrated above – its consumption here (coupled with Þorgerðr’s show of solidarity) is instrumental in altering Egill’s frame of mind and inspiring him to compose an *erfíkvæði* (‘funeral poem’) for Bǫðvarr. There are also Odinic resonances in the sequence of Egill’s suffering and the agency of a drink in inspiring this transformation. Most striking are the hitherto unrecognized parallels between the circumstances surrounding Egill’s composition of *Sonatorrek* and those described in the frame of *Grímnismál* as precipitating Óðinn’s own poetic performance. The *Egils saga* passage thus benefits from analysis using the same parameters as employed above in the examination of *Hávamál* and *Grímnismál*.

Table 2: Circumstances surrounding Egill’s composition of *Sonatorrek* in *Egils saga*.⁹⁴

	<i>Egils saga</i> ch. 78
Nature of suffering	Egill’s experiences intense grief following the deaths of his sons Bǫðvarr and Gunnarr.
Duration of suffering	Two nights.
Agency of suffering	Whilst the agency of Bǫðvarr’s death is external, Egill voluntarily imprisons himself in his bed-closet and starves himself of food and drink.
Initial lack of sustenance	
Nature of subsequent drink	Þorgerðr tricks Egill into drinking milk and eating <i>spl</i> (‘dulce’).
Consequences of imbibition	Egill is initially angered by the trick, but soon becomes amenable to attempting an <i>erfíkvæði</i> .

It is readily apparent in Table 2 that the process of Egill’s inspiration closely resembles that of Óðinn’s in *Grímnismál*. Both characters experience partially self-imposed suffering and a lack of sustenance over several nights, followed by the provision of drink (and food) which kindles new interest in poetic performance. That there should be such a parallel is of course highly appropriate, given Egill’s Odinic affinities throughout the saga,⁹⁵ as well as his references to Óðinn and the *Viðurs þýfi* in *Sonatorrek* itself.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ *Eg*, pp. 243–5 (ch. 78).

⁹⁵ These are well-attested in the scholarship. See, for example, Finlay, ‘Pouring Óðinn’s Mead’; and Eichhorn-Mulligan, ‘Anatomies’, pp. 216–7.

⁹⁶ ‘Theft of Viðurr (i.e. Óðinn) [> mead of poetry]’. *Eg*, p. 246 (ch. 78).

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In the mythology, non-alcoholic drinks may also inspire esoteric understanding. It is possible to understand as water the liquids contained within Mímir's well,⁹⁷ which Snorri interprets in *Gylfaginning* as harbouring 'spekð ok mannvit',⁹⁸ although other theories have been proposed, and *Völuspá* 28 declares the contents to be *mioðr* ('mead').⁹⁹ Either way, that a drink from *Mímis brunnr*, and perhaps the conduit of the *Gjallarhorn*, is exceptionally valuable is evidenced by Óðinn's sacrifice, attested by Snorri: 'þar kom Alföðr ok beiddisk eins drykkjar af brunninum, en hann fekk eigi fyrr en hann lagði auga sitt at veði'.¹⁰⁰ The 'Hugrúnar' described in *Sigrdrífumál* 13, which enable one to become 'geðsvinnari' than every other man, are likewise obscurely derived from an organic fluid source,

af þeim legi, er lekið hafði
ór hausi Heiddraupnis
oc ór horni Hoddrofnis.¹⁰¹

From that liquid which had leaked from the skull of Heiddraupnir and from the horn of Hoddrofnir.

Even after their reification as inscribed objects, the runes are in stanza 18 reintegrated into the liquid form of the sacred mead – via a process of scraping and dissolution or suspension – highlighting the superiority of drink as a vehicle for the transmission of arcane knowledge.

MEMORY DRINKS

Much as Óðinn's drink in *Grímnismál* provokes mythological recollection, certain drinks in the literature may restore lost memories. *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* describes how Möndul, having rubbed Ingibjörg with ointment, 'gaf henni minnisveig at drekka, ok vitkaðist hún þá skjótt'.¹⁰² This *minnisveig* works antidotally against Ingibjörg's

⁹⁷ See Lassen, 'Höðr's Blindness', p. 224.

⁹⁸ 'Wisdom and intelligence'. *Gylf*, p. 17 (ch. 15).

⁹⁹ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 7. Judy Quinn ('Liquid Knowledge', p. 207) deduces that 'Ymir's blood might also be understood to be the origin of wells beneath the surface of the earth'. The Mímir-complex is most fully analysed by Schjødt in his *Initiation Between Two Worlds*, pp. 108–33.

¹⁰⁰ 'Alföðr (i.e. Óðinn) came there and asked for a single drink from the well, but he did not get it until he deposited his eye as a pledge'. *Gylf*, p. 17 (ch. 15).

¹⁰¹ 'Mind-runes'; and 'stronger-minded'. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 192.

¹⁰² 'Gave her *minnisveig* to drink, and she then quickly came to her senses'. *GHr*, p. 230 (ch. 25).

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amnesia, which the narrative implies was too brought about by a drink.¹⁰³ More frequently, however, memory drinks aid the encoding process, so as to provoke comparison with the function of the precious mead in Óðinn's self-hanging ritual in *Hávamál*. The *minnisveig* described in the prose of *Sigrdrífumál* is of this sort, although it is administered to Sigurðr before his exposure to occult knowledge, unlike Óðinn's imbibition in *Hávamál*. Whereas in *Sigrdrífumál*, the *minnisveig* implicitly suffices in providing Sigurðr with a means of retaining Sigrdrífa's runic wisdom, the *Völsunga saga* interpretation of the episode casts the drink's mnemonic agency in more ambiguous terms, with Brynhildr declaring: 'drekkuð bæði saman, ok gefi goðin okkr góðan dag, at þér verði nyt ok frægð at mínum vitrleik ok þú munir eftir, þat er vit ræðum'.¹⁰⁴ Sigurðr's powers of retention are here ultimately contingent on divine favour, rather than on the direct potency of Brynhildr's brew. Nevertheless, its serving is also accompanied in *Sigrdrífumál* by what Larrington terms an 'invocation of the cosmic powers' in stanzas 3–4.¹⁰⁵ If we interpret the *biórr* of stanza 5 as identical with the *minnisveig*, the latter's powers are combined too with a multimedia concoction – reminiscent of the mead composite in stanza 18 – of written formulae, magical devices and abstract qualities:

Biór færi ec þér, brynþings apaldr,
magni blandinn oc megingtíri;
fullr er hann líóða oc lícnstafa,
góðra galdra oc gamanrúna.¹⁰⁶

Beer I bring to you, apple-tree of battle, mixed with strength and great glory; it is full of spells and beneficent runes, good charms and pleasure-bringing runes.

The cocktail's mnemonic properties nevertheless do little to limit the subsequent effectiveness of Grímhildr's drink of forgetfulness on Sigurðr, presumably because the functionality of the *minnisveig* is short-term and enhances only of Sigurðr's ability to encode numinous information, offering little protection against a drink

¹⁰³ Drinks of forgetfulness are analysed in Chapter III.

¹⁰⁴ 'We shall both drink together, and may the gods grant us two a fair day, that advantage and renown may befall you through my wisdom, and you may later remember that which we two discuss'. *Völs*, pp. 157–8 (Ch. 20).

¹⁰⁵ Larrington, *Store of Common Sense*, p. 86.

¹⁰⁶ *Sigrdrífumál* 5 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 190).

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designed to inhibit recollection. Sigrdrífa's *minnisveig* is furthermore comparable to the *minnisöl* which Freyja requests for the disguised Óttarr in *Hyndluljóð* 45:

Ber þú minnisöl mínom galti,
svát hann öll muni orð at tína
þessar ræðo á þriðia morni,
þá er þeir Angantýr ættir rekia.¹⁰⁷

Bring *minnisöl* to my boar, so that he may remember all the words, in order to recount this conversation on the third morning, when he and Angantýr trace their lineages.

If we interpret the *minnisöl* literally,¹⁰⁸ it is similarly intended to encourage Óttarr's encoding of genealogical and mythological material as well as its subsequent recall, although the *minnisöl* is to be drunk after the recitation, unlike the *minnisveig* in *Sigrdrífumál*.

¹⁰⁷ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 295.

¹⁰⁸ Judy Quinn ('Liquid Knowledge', p. 188) suggests that the *minnisöl* functions 'as affect, a metaphor for benefiting – or not – from what has been heard'. Geirroðr's metaphorical drunkenness in *Grímnismál* comparably serves as symbol of his failure to benefit from Óðinn's wisdom revelation. See below, pp. 25–6.

III

Drunkenness and Hostile Drink-Giving

INTRODUCTION

Whilst both the natural and supernatural effects of consuming alcoholic drinks are frequently valorized in Old Norse literature, there are nevertheless widespread references, also, to the potential of alcohol and other transformative drinks to have unambiguously deleterious consequences. Indeed, the advantageous outcomes associated with alcohol intake are often overshadowed by their adverse counterparts, although attitudes concerning inebriation are rarely stated in the literature, with Magennis arguing that ‘there is no moral objection to drunkenness in Old Norse heroic poetry’.¹⁰⁹ There are, however, several examples in the corpus of instruction concerning the practical dangers of drunkenness. The effects of alcohol and other potentially harmful drinks may also be harnessed for hostile purposes by characters as a means of transforming power relations between server and drinker. Although the legitimacy of such acts is not generally commented upon directly, they are often implicitly presented as treacherous.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS DRUNKENNESS

The clearest expressions of attitudes concerning drunkenness are found in the wisdom literature, which provides a useful starting point when investigating the problematization of alcohol. Whilst a full examination of wisdom poetry relating to drinking is beyond the range of this dissertation, we may note that, much as in Old English literature, the Old Norse corpus contains a sizeable body of gnomic advice about the perils of intoxication. The text most frequently cited in this respect is *Hávamál* – described by Terry Gunnell as ‘a guide to survival in the Viking-Age world’^{–110} and which conveys practical maxims including the following:

¹⁰⁹ Magennis, *Images*, p. 51.

¹¹⁰ Gunnell, ‘Eddic Poetry’, p. 85. Andersson (‘Displacement’, p. 588) conversely views *Hávamál* as a ‘moral treatise’.

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vegnest verra vegra hann velli at,
enn sé ofdryvvia þls.¹¹¹

He does not carry worse provisions across the field, than the excessive drinking of ale.

Excessive drunkenness is contrasted unfavourably with *manvit*,¹¹² reckoned metaphorically to be a traveller's most valuable resource. Yet, although the poem claims that ale

era svá gott, sem gott qveða,¹¹³

is not as good as they say it is good,

Hávamál does not promote abstinence, but rather the principle of *hóf* ('moderation'). Indeed, the mysterious *óminnis hegri* ('heron of forgetfulness') flutters perilously close to those drinking ale in stanza 13,¹¹⁴ even if its appearance – suggestive of the deterioration of mental and mnemonic faculties which may accompany inebriation – is paradoxically juxtaposed with the speaker's allusive reference to an instance of profitable drunkenness:¹¹⁵

Qlr ec varð, varð ofrþlvi
at ins fróða Fialars;
því er þlðr bazt, at aprt uf heimtir
hverr sitt geð gumi.¹¹⁶

Drunk I became, I became excessively drunk at wise Fialarr's; in this case is ale-drinking best, that each man recovers possession of his mind.

This apparent valorization of extreme drunkenness – emphasized by chiasmatic word-order and the polyptotic use of the intensified *ofrþlvi* – is incongruous in the context of the wisdom that precedes it, although Brittany Schorn helpfully suggests that it is 'Óðinn's individual identity [that] allows for the double standard'.¹¹⁷ Odinic wisdom is similarly deployed in *Grímnismál* 51, in which Óðinn announces

¹¹¹ *Hávamál* 11 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 18).

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Hávamál* 12 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 19).

¹¹⁴ For discussions of this enigmatic image, see Dronke, 'Óminnis hegri'; Evans, 'Commentary', p. 80; and Heslop, 'Minni', p. 83.

¹¹⁵ On the speaker's 'vivid kaleidoscope of voices' (p. 41), see McKinnell, 'Personae'.

¹¹⁶ *Hávamál* 14 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 19).

¹¹⁷ Schorn, "'How Can His Word Be Trusted?'" p. 65. McKinnell (*Meeting the Other*, p. 166) interprets the poet's use of the mythological allusion as a joke.

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qlr ertu, Geirroðr, hefr þú ofdruccit,¹¹⁸

You are drunk, Geirroðr; you have drunk too much,

although here the accusation works figuratively rather than literally, with Geirroðr's alleged drunkenness paralleling his failure to contemplate Óðinn's recitation, and symbolizing the deprivation of divine favour. The charge nevertheless simultaneously illustrates the commonplace danger of alcohol as an intellectual inhibitor, a hazard which Sigrdrífa identifies too in *Sigrdrífumál* 29 with the observation that 'margan steln vín viti'.¹¹⁹ There is little irony in the fact that her address to Sigurðr is conducted over drink, as the transformative properties of the *minnisveig* are far removed from the usual characteristics of alcohol.

DELETERIOUS EFFECTS OF DRINKING

Drunken deeds

The sagas contain numerous attestations of the detrimental, often lethal, transformations which characters undergo through alcohol intoxication. Snorri's description in *Ynglinga saga*, for example, of Fjølñir as 'dauðadrukkinn' after a feast is pregnant with proleptic irony,¹²⁰ as he subsequently dies by falling into a large vat of mead. The compound-adjective hints not only at his imminent demise, but also at its means, which is alcoholic in more ways than one. Snorri extrapolates from *Ynglingatal* a similarly appropriate death for Fjølñir's son, Sveigðir, when 'Sveigðir ok hans menn váru mjök drukkñir'.¹²¹ A dwarf, taking advantage of Sveigðir's state, lures him into a *steinn*, perhaps a barrow,¹²² from which he never emerges. Sveigðir's drunkennesses hence functions as narrative tool for explaining an improbable death which Snorri inherits from his source; its suitability is strengthened too by the implication of an inherited susceptibility to alcohol. In *Sverris saga*, Sverrir delivers a powerful speech at the *þing* following a series of drink-fuelled commotions, including

¹¹⁸ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 67.

¹¹⁹ 'Wine steals the wits of many a man'. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 195.

¹²⁰ 'Dead-drunk'. *Yng*, p. 26 (ch. 11).

¹²¹ 'Sveigðir and his menn were very drunk'. *Yng*, p. 27 (ch. 12).

¹²² See Chadwick, 'Norse Ghosts', p. 52.

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another drowning. His declaration that ‘veldr þessu ofdrykkja’ and his enumeration of alcohol’s sinful qualities demonstrate how the prism of Christianity may render the evils of drinking the more severe.¹²³

Drunken speech

Alcohol inspires speech, but the words it encourages are often regrettable, as in *Orvar-Odds saga* when the drunken Óttar and Ingjaldr make boastful bets about Oddr’s abilities. Fortunately for the brothers, Oddr excels in each of his challenges, although he is right to tell them ‘nú hafi þit svá heimskliga veðjat’ after they drunkenly wager their heads.¹²⁴ Sigmundr’s drunken exhortation in *Frá dauða Sinfjötla* that Sinfjötli should use his moustache as a filter against the harm of Borghildr’s poisoned horn, conversely, has fatal consequences. That it is specifically the ale speaking there is, however, only made explicit in the *Völsunga saga* version of the scene, which describes how ‘þá var konungr drukkinn mjök, ok því sagði hann svá’.¹²⁵ This added explanation illustrates well ‘the problem of intentionality’ with which Torfi Tulinius argues the saga is preoccupied,¹²⁶ as the narrative requires the death, and the irrationality of inebriation is used to account for otherwise inexplicable behaviour.¹²⁷ *Völsunga saga* also attributes to drunkenness Gunnarr’s decision to accept Vingi’s treacherous offer of regency, a choice which Ronald Finch regards as a ‘difficulty’ for the saga author.¹²⁸ The full explanation, however, is complex, revealing that ‘nú var bæði, at Gunnarr var mjök drukkinn, en boðit mikit ríki, mátti ok eigi við sköpum vinna’.¹²⁹ The polysyndeton of the sentence emphasizes a multiplicity of factors involved in Sinfjötli’s resolution; his drunkenness, greed and fatalistic outlook work together to sway his mind. The final motive nevertheless comes across as an afterthought, as the conjunction *bæði*

¹²³ ‘Over-drinking causes this’. *Sv*, p. 159 (ch. 104).

¹²⁴ ‘Now you two have wagered thus foolishly’. *Orv*, p. 310 (ch. 27).

¹²⁵ ‘The king was then very drunk, and therefore he spoke thus’. *Völs*, p. 134 (ch. 10).

¹²⁶ Torfi Tulinius, *Matter of the North*, p. 148.

¹²⁷ Sigmundr’s unintended mauling of Sinfjötli earlier in the saga is likewise contingent upon the loss of control associated with the wolf-state.

¹²⁸ Finch, ‘*Atlakviða, Atlamál and Völsunga Saga*’, p. 129.

¹²⁹ ‘Now it happened both that Gunnarr was very drunk, and was offered much power; he could also not withstand fate’. *Völs*, p. 201 (ch. 33).

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anticipates only two reasons. Sinfjötli's inebriation is thus the most convincing authorial rationalization of the decision.

Drunkenness and the breakdown of social cohesion

Whilst moderate alcohol consumption may promote social cohesion, drunkenness can accelerate the escalation of hostilities between hosts and guests, both human and mythological. When Hrungnir is invited to drink with the Æsir in *Skáldskaparmál*, he empties each of Þórr's drinking-bowls, so that 'er hann gerðisk drukkinn þá skorti eigi stór orð'.¹³⁰ Threats to seize Valhöll, destroy Ásgarðr and kill the gods ensue, although Hrungnir's heightened aggression is not solely contingent on the influence of ale. It functions, rather, within the immediate narrative frame of Óðinn's own boasting in Jötunheimar and the broader dynamic of antagonism between the Æsir and the giants. Nevertheless, whilst drink prompts Hrungnir's boasting, it seems not to inhibit his ability to think on his feet, as when Þórr arrives, Hrungnir strikes a deal to postpone their fight. Loki's hostility in *Lokasenna* is comparably ascribed to drunkenness by Heimdallr in stanza 47 (which contains advice reminiscent of that given in *Hávamál*):

Qlr ertu, Loki, svá at þú er ørviti,
hví né lezcaðu, Loki?
þvíat ofdryccia veldr alda hveim,
er sína mælgj né manað.¹³¹

You are drunk, Loki, so that you are out of your wits; why do you not give up, Loki?
Because over-drinking affects each man who forgets his talkativeness.

Loki's animosity in the poem functions, however, at multiple levels. He declares his intention to bring about 'ioll oc áfo' even before the verse suggests he takes his first drink, which implies that alcohol's agency in determining Loki's behaviour is not primary.¹³² Indeed, Heimdallr's accusation of drunkenness may be taken as a symbolic affirmation of Loki's transgression, equivalent to Óðinn's declaration of

¹³⁰ 'When he became drunk, there was no lack of great words'. *Skm*, p. 20 (ch. 17).

¹³¹ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 105.

¹³² 'Discord and strife'. *Lokasenna* 3 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 97).

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Geirroðr's figurative drunkenness in *Grímnismál*. It could also be interpreted as an apologetic attempt at diplomacy and an acknowledgement of the failure of alcohol to heal interpersonal rifts. Loki's hostility, either way, is evidently to his drunkenness alone, even if it plays a contributory role.

The drunkenness of guests in *Egils saga*, however, is unambiguously literal, with its physiological effects described in graphic detail. At the end of a night of heavy drinking at Bárðr's farm, the saga relates how 'Ólvir lá þar vitlauss' in his own vomit.¹³³ In the same scene, Egill violently impales Bárðr with a sword whilst under the influence of alcohol, and in a later drinking episode vomits upon his host Ármóðr. There is nevertheless a deliberateness in Egill's actions which contrasts with the drunken loss of control experienced by Sigmundr in *Völsunga saga*, and evidences Andersson's paradoxical contention that 'the more he drinks, the more he asserts his control'.¹³⁴ The precision with which Egill directs his hostile stream of vomit into Ármóðr's eyes, nostrils and mouth – tactically disabling both his breathing and sight – is drawn in sharp contrast to the purposeless spewing of the sprawled-out Ólvir. It gains further significance as a controlled act of aggression from its juxtaposition with a retrospective declaration of intent, and from its imitation of Óðinn's strategic vomiting in *Skáldskaparmál*. The physiological consequences of intoxication, far from debilitating Egill or demarcating the limits of his drinking prowess, become ironically empowering when harnessed as a tool of revenge, and he continues to drink solidly afterwards. The offence of the act, however, is not lost on the other characters, and Ármóðr's men remark that 'Egill skyldi fara allra manna armastr ok hann væri inn versti maðr af þessu verki'.¹³⁵ Indeed, the fact that Egill retains self-control removes the mitigation of incapacitation, rendering his behaviour the more reprehensible, and representative of the immoderation and violence which Clunies Ross argues are presented as morally negative in the saga.¹³⁶

¹³³ 'Ólvir lay there unconscious'. *Eg*, p. 111 (ch. 44).

¹³⁴ Andersson, 'Character', p. 3.

¹³⁵ 'Egill must go most wretched of all men (i.e. be cursed), and he was the worst man on account of this deed'. *Eg*, p. 226 (ch. 71).

¹³⁶ See Clunies Ross, 'Art of Poetry', p. 127.

HOSTILE ALCOHOL SERVING

Although Egill makes tactical use of his own drunkenness, it is usually the drunkenness of others that is exploited to gain an advantage over an enemy. When given with hostile intent, alcohol transforms not only its recipient; its deleterious effects may be harnessed to invert power relations between drinker and server, or to gain treacherous revenge. In *Ynglinga saga*, Ingjaldr (who later gains the epithet ‘inn illráði’)¹³⁷ invites six kings and their followers to a feast at Uppsala. Once the guests are drunk, Ingjaldr has the hall burned, killing all within, and takes control of the other kingdoms. Magennis remarks that ‘duplicity at a feast heightens the enormity of a crime, striking at the very centre of accepted order and civilization’,¹³⁸ and Ingjaldr’s deception is the more offensive because it is ‘ætlat’, rather than opportunistic.¹³⁹ Hall-burning, described by William Miller as ‘an especially egregious tactic’ when employed in *Njáls saga*,¹⁴⁰ is itself likewise accorded a morally negative value here and elsewhere in *Ynglinga saga* as a dishonest and cowardly stratagem. This attitude is evident in Snorri’s use of the verb *svíkja* to describe the deceptive nature of Ingjaldr’s killings: ‘dræpi tólf konunga ok sviki alla í griðum’.¹⁴¹ The wickedness of such deceit is comparably evoked in *Egils saga* when Hárekr claims that Þórólfr had engineered a plan to get Haraldr’s men drunk and ‘veita yðr atgöngu með eldi ok vápnum’.¹⁴² Although the accusation is false, Haraldr’s rage on discovering the scheme highlights the transgression that such a conspiracy would entail.

The archetypal use of alcohol as a means of gaining revenge is that by Guðrún.¹⁴³ In *Atlakviða* 35, her actions are described thus:

Scævaði þá in scírleita, veigar þeim at bera,
afkár dís, iofrom [...].¹⁴⁴

¹³⁷ ‘The wicked’. *Yng*, p. 71 (ch. 39). Ingjaldr’s consumption of wolf’s heart contributes to his wickedness: see below, p. 43, n. 212.

¹³⁸ Magennis, *Images*, p. 51.

¹³⁹ ‘Planned’. *Yng*, p. 67 (ch. 36).

¹⁴⁰ Miller, ‘*Why is Your Axe Bloody?*’, p. 222.

¹⁴¹ ‘He killed twelve kings and betrayed them all under truce’. *Yng*, p. 71 (ch. 39).

¹⁴² ‘Make an attack on you with fire and weapons’. *Eg*, p. 31 (ch. 12).

¹⁴³ Guðrún’s serving of drink mixed with human blood is analysed in Chapter IV.

¹⁴⁴ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 246.

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The bright-faced woman then darted forwards to bring drinks, the frightful woman, to those princes.

The stanza emphasizes the discrepancy between Guðrún's serene outward appearance – encapsulated in the positive epithet *in scírleita* – and her inner perfidy, indicated by *afkár dís*. Ursula Dronke interprets the term *dís* as associating Guðrún with the supernatural: 'she has become, like the *dísir*, one who controls the fate of men'.¹⁴⁵ Indeed, through her encouragement, Atli drinks to the point of immobilization:

Óvarr Atli, móðan hafði hann sic druccit,
vápni hafði hann ekki, varnaðit hann við Guðrúno.¹⁴⁶

Atli, unsuspecting, he had drunk himself weary; he did not have a weapon, he was not on his guard against Guðrún.

Atli's fatal lack of awareness ironically extends to the focalized description of how *móðan hafði hann sic druccit*. What Atli believes to be self-imposed intoxication – indicated by the reflexive pronoun *sic* – is in fact engineered by Guðrún, whose vengeance culminates in Atli's death and the burning of his hall.

Although the manipulative serving of drinks usually occurs at large-scale feast scenes, the literature also records striking instances of equivalent behaviour at the individual level. In an inversion of Óðinn's seduction of Gunnlóð in return for the mead of poetry, Völundr utilizes the sedative properties of beer to facilitate the apparent rape of Þoðvildr in *Völundarkviða* 28.¹⁴⁷ Given the stanza's elliptical nature, our attitudes towards Völundr's unstated act are inevitably determined in relation to his revenge's broader legitimacy. Although Þoðvildr's implied trust for Völundr may have yielded consensual sex, his employment of alcohol is unambiguously cunning:

Bar hann hana bióri, þvíat hann betr kunni,
svá at hon í sessi um sofnaði.¹⁴⁸

He overcame her with beer, because he was cleverer, so that she slept on the bench.

¹⁴⁵ Dronke, 'The Lay of Attila', p. 19.

¹⁴⁶ *Atlakviða* 40 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 247).

¹⁴⁷ It is regarded as such in, for example, von See *et al.*, *Kommentar* III, 224.

¹⁴⁸ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 121.

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The beer transforms Þoðvildr from an independent woman into an unconscious sexual object, exploitable by the hamstrung Völundr, whose disability perhaps hinders his ability to assault her by force alone, even if he is earlier capable of beheading her brothers. The verb *bera* indicates a process of oppression whose grammatical and literal instrument is alcohol, and which is permitted – the verb *kunna* suggests – by his superior knowledge. Þoðvildr is transformed again by the act into a tool of Völundr’s revenge, as it emerges she is carrying his child. Although Þoðvildr’s feelings are ambiguous, Völundr’s own cruelty is evident in the description of their respective departures, in which parallel present participles highlight Völundr’s callous disregard for Þoðvildr:

Hlæiandi Völundr hófz at lopti,
grátandi Þoðvildr gecc ór eyio.¹⁴⁹

Laughing, Völundr lifted himself into the air; weeping, Þoðvildr went from the island.

POISONED DRINKS

The hostile potential of the transformative drink is naturally more extreme when poison is added to the mix. Poison-giving is especially disgraceful when considered in relation to the concept of *morð* (‘murder’), which is defined in the legal code *Grágás* as follows: ‘En þa er morð ef maðr leynir eða hylr hræ eða gengr eigi i gegn’.¹⁵⁰ Furtive killings are thus condemnable, with Jesse Byock noting that the discovery of *morð* ‘meant ostracism and usually led to death or outlawry’.¹⁵¹ Although poison-giving is often ironically transparent in the literature, Sigrdrífa nevertheless stresses in *Sigrdrífumál* 7 the importance of deploying preemptive countermeasures against such hostility:

Qlrúnar scaltu kunna, ef þú vill, annars qvæn
vélit þic í trygð [...]¹⁵²

Ale-runes you should know, if you want another’s wife not to deceive you.

¹⁴⁹ *Atlakviða* 40 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 247).

¹⁵⁰ ‘And that is *morð* if a man conceals or hides the body, or does not confess’. *Grág* I, 154.

¹⁵¹ Byock, ‘Feuding’, p. 239.

¹⁵² *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 191.

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There is not room here to discuss fully the association between women and poisoning implied by this stanza, however, poisoning often provides female characters with a means of transforming gendered power relations, much as the exploitation of drunkenness does for Guðrún. Borghildr's offer of a poisoned drink, discussed above, allows her to avenge her brother's death; it is an empowering tool that transforms the woman into a killer. That the drink is 'giorótt', however, makes her intention plain to Sinfjötli,¹⁵³ thereby detracting from its treachery and contributing to its legitimacy as a means of defeating her adversary. In *Hyndluljóð* 49, Hyndla responds to Freyja's request for *minnisql* by instead offering Óttarr beer 'eitri blandinn mioc';¹⁵⁴ her statement of its contents is perhaps intended as a curse, but again reduces the drink's deceitfulness and prompts Freyja to counter its harm. *Egils saga*, conversely, presents Bárðr's attempted poisoning of Egill during the drinking scene discussed above as cowardly, although Egill successfully utilises runic magic reminiscent of that recommended in *Sigrdrífumál* against the poison. By distancing himself from his opponent through the medium of a drink and the proxy of a servant – instead of confronting Egill directly – Bárðr's craven treachery is confirmed.

DRINKS OF FORGETFULNESS

A final type of hostile drink exaggerates the amnesiac properties of ordinary alcohol and causes its drinker to forget a significant aspect of their life, thereby representing an inversion of the beneficial *minnisveig* and *minnisql* and thence of the mead of poetry.¹⁵⁵ It often paves the way to a new romance, and this effect may too be considered an amplification of the sexually transformative characteristics of alcohol described above. As a literary motif, the drink of forgetfulness is an invaluable narrative tool for explaining characters' improbable behaviour, comparable to ordinary alcohol. The mnemonic transformations such drinks enact, however, are usually partial and may be reversed. The *minnisveig* in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*,

¹⁵³ 'Cloudy'. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 162.

¹⁵⁴ 'Mixed thoroughly with poison'. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 296.

¹⁵⁵ The gendered aspect of the use of magic potions is discussed in Varley, 'Mead'.

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discussed above, is deployed against the effects of a drink which causes the following: Ingibjörg ‘gerðist öll blá sem hel, en sinnaði um engan hlut, sem hún væri vitstola’.¹⁵⁶ Möndul tricks Ingibjörg with the drink in order to sleep with her, much as Völundr does with Bøðvildr. Both Ingibjörg and Bøðvildr are deprived of their mental faculties – and thus of their ability to exercise free will – although Ingibjörg’s symptoms are longer-lasting, and she had unambiguously opposed Möndul’s advances. Amnesia is likewise accompanied by physical illness in *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, when Dís offers Víkingr a drink, causing him to contract *líkþrá* (‘leprosy’) and experience *óminni* (lit. ‘un-memory’) so that he forgets his betrothal to Húnvör. The suspiciousness of her drink-serving is emphasized when she craftily produces the horn ‘undan yfirhöfn sinni’, much as Möndul does in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*.¹⁵⁷ Her name, reminiscent of Guðrún’s epithet *afkár dís* in *Atlakviða*, also hints at her association with the supernatural, which is made explicit elsewhere in the saga, and emphasizes the power which the drink affords her over Víkingr’s fate. Dís’s drink-serving is also comparable to Guðrún’s in that it serves as revenge for the killing of her brother. Its effects, however, may be reversed by drinking from the opposite side of her drinking horn, whereas Atli’s death is permanent.

Grímhildr’s drinks

A drink of forgetfulness is also administered to Sigurðr by Grímhildr in *Völsunga saga*,¹⁵⁸ causing Sigurðr to forget, and therefore betray, Brynhildr. The drink’s potency is particularly evident when we consider how, moments before its consumption, ‘þat finnr Grímhildr, hvé mikit Sigurðr ann Brynhildi’.¹⁵⁹ Even when Sigurðr meets Brynhildr whilst winning her for Gunnar, his memory of their love is unrestored. This tragically causes Sigurðr to redouble his unwitting treachery, and it is too late when he eventually remembers his vows after the wedding feast. Torfi Tulinius points to how such drinks help the saga author to ‘compose a coherent

¹⁵⁶ ‘She became all black as Hel, and cared for nothing, as if she were out of her mind’. *GHr*, p. 222 (ch. 23).

¹⁵⁷ ‘From under her overcoat’. *ÞorstVik*, p. 11 (ch. 5).

¹⁵⁸ The corresponding narrative is missing from the Codex Regius, in which there is a lacuna of eight leaves following *Sigrdrífumál* 37.

¹⁵⁹ ‘Grímhildr notices that, how much Sigurðr loved Brynhildr’. *Völs*, p. 173 (ch. 26).

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story on the basis of the different versions of it found in the surviving eddic poems',¹⁶⁰ although it is also possible, as Andersson suggests,¹⁶¹ that the drink of forgetfulness existed in **Sigurðarkviða in meiri*, and was therefore an integral part of the Sigurðr cycle in eddic poetry.¹⁶²

The drink given by Grímhildr to Guðrún is extant in both *Völsunga saga* and the *Poetic Edda*. The prose passage *Dráp Níflunga* describes how Guðrún's consumption of *ómínnisveig* leads to her marriage with Atli. The apparent straightforwardness of the term – the negative prefix *ó-* sets it up in opposition to the *mínnisveig* – and of its implied effectiveness, however, belies the complexity of the drink's effects on Guðrún as described in the poem that follows, *Guðrúnarkviða II*. The liquid itself is described in the stanza 21 as 'svalt oc sárlic',¹⁶³ its sharpness hinting at the malevolence behind its serving. The central irony of the poem nevertheless stems from the paradox of just how much Guðrún (unlike Sigurðr) does remember: her first-person account makes plain her thoughts about Sigurðr and her brothers, both before and after the drink-taking. As Robert Glendinning suggests, 'memory of the past is the very essence of the poem',¹⁶⁴ and there is at least a partial contradiction between the intended outcome of the *ómínnisveig* and its consequences, with the final clause 'þat man ec gorva' ironically serving as a motto for the poem as a whole.¹⁶⁵ Indeed, the scope of the drink's efficacy is described inconsistently, with the comment 'né ec sacar munðac' in stanza 21 suggestive of a more comprehensive mnemonic eradication than the account in stanza 23 – 'hon sacar deyfði' – which implies merely a muffling of her recollection.¹⁶⁶ There is an emotional intensity in Guðrún's recollection of Sigurðr's death that indicates the freshness of her pain:

Nótt þóttí mér niðmyrcr vera,

¹⁶⁰ Torfi H. Tulinius, 'Sagas', p. 455.

¹⁶¹ Andersson, 'Lays', p. 14.

¹⁶² Kate Heslop, (*Mínni*, p. 83), building on the work of Joachim Grage ('Vergessenheitstrank'), argues that the drinks of forgetfulness in the *Poetic Edda* 'are strategies to counter the *memoria* of the text, by papering over the cracks between the divergent bodies of narrative material in the compilation'. For a similar earlier argument, see Turville-Petre, *Nine Norse Studies*, p. 136.

¹⁶³ 'Cool and bitter'. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 227.

¹⁶⁴ Glendinning, '*Guðrúnarkviða Forná*', p. 269.

¹⁶⁵ 'I remember that clearly'. *Guðrúnarkviða II 44* (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 231).

¹⁶⁶ 'I did not remember the strife'; and 'it soothed the strife'. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, pp. 227–8.

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er ec sárla satc yfir Sigurði.¹⁶⁷

The night seemed to me to be pitch-black, when I sat sorrowfully over Sigurðr.

The gloomy imagery through which Guðrún relives her grief indicates that it is no less sore in its retelling than it was originally. Even if we suppose that Guðrún, as the narrator, fully regained her memory at some point between the consumption of the drink and poem's telling, Guðrún, as a character, remembers Sigurðr's death vividly even in the immediate aftermath of her consumption of the *óminnisveig*, telling how

[...] Sigurðar sárla drucco
hrægífr, Huginn hiartblóð saman.¹⁶⁸

The carrion-monster [> wolf] [and] the raven bitterly drank Sigurðr's heart-blood together.

Perhaps it is part of her poetic conceit to attribute retrospective speeches to her character, which – had the drink functioned as the defective stanza 24 seems to suggest – she cannot have said at the time, in order to express her present anguish. More likely, the failure of Grímhildr's drink receives the poetic emphasis. The transformative properties of the *óminnisveig* do, however, manifest themselves in Guðrún's change of attitude towards Gunnarr and Hǫgni. Following their involvement in Sigurðr's death, Guðrún curses Hǫgni in stanza 9 and says that 'né ec trúa gerðac' either brother.¹⁶⁹ Yet by the end of the poem, she expresses sympathy for them in a proleptic account of their deaths, also thereby demonstrating that, despite the intended effects of the *óminnisveig*, she is endowed with remarkable foreknowledge.

¹⁶⁷ *Guðrúnarkviða II* 12 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 226).

¹⁶⁸ *Guðrúnarkviða II* 29 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 229).

¹⁶⁹ 'I did not trust'. *Guðrúnarkviða II* 20 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 227).

IV

Blood-Drinking

INTRODUCTION

Blood is a curious liquid in Old Norse literature, and its consumption may effect quite ambivalent transformations in characters. The polyvalence of its influence in part stems from the inherent ambiguity which blood as a bodily fluid possesses, as is suggested in Janet Carsten's catalogue of its contradictory significances as a cultural concept across the ages. She writes that 'blood may be associated with fungibility, or transformability, as well as essence; with truth and transcendence and also with lies and corruption; with contagion and violence but also with purity and harmony; and with vitality as well as death'.¹⁷⁰ Whilst not all of these associations necessarily apply to blood's presentation in Old Norse literature, Carsten's conjecture that it may be thought of as a 'vector of connection between bodies or persons' serves as a useful starting point when examining the effects of its consumption.¹⁷¹ Indeed, the extent to which this understanding of blood is borne out in Old Norse texts, as well as the degree of its literary valorization as a drink, form the central focuses of this chapter.

BLOOD IN OLD NORSE MYTHOLOGY

The consumption of blood in Old Norse literature is far more nuanced than the secular drinking of blood is in Old English literature,¹⁷² although it is connected in both with the animalistic. As a kenning referent in skaldic poetry, blood is described in terms of its being drunk by scavengers in 23% of instances currently documented by the Skaldic Project;¹⁷³ the association is similarly reinforced in Snorri's poetic advice concerning the *vargr* in *Skáldskaparmál*, that 'þat er rétt at

¹⁷⁰ Carsten, 'Introduction', p. 2.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁷² Grendel's drinking of Hondsco's blood in *Beowulf*, for example, is straightforwardly monstrous, especially in the light of the Old Testament proscription of blood-drinking. For a discussion of the Eucharist, see below, p. 44, n. 214.

¹⁷³ *Skaldic Poetry of the Scandinavian Middle Ages: Skaldic Database*.

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kenna við blóð eða hræ svá at kalla verð hans eða drykk'.¹⁷⁴ Blood's significance, however, transcends its nutritional benefits, and in the mythological context it is a fundamental, generative and protean fluid, with the creation of the sea from the blood of the primordial giant Ymir attested in *Vafþrúðnismál* 21, *Grímnismál* 40 and *Gylfaginning*. The second describes how

Ór Ymis holdi var iorð um scoðuð,
enn ór sveita sær.¹⁷⁵

From Ymir's flesh the earth was formed, and from his blood the sea.

Ymir himself has a liquid genealogy, with *Vafþrúðnismál* 31 and *Gylfaginning* telling of his growth from *eitrdropar* spurted from the *Élivágar*,¹⁷⁶ and of his quickening from melted *hrím*.¹⁷⁷ *Gylfaginning* describes, too, his procreation of a man and woman from the *sveiti* emitted under his arms.¹⁷⁸ Ymir gains lactic sustenance from the cow Auðumla, who in turn came into being from *hrím*,¹⁷⁹ further contributing to the contention that fluids, and especially blood, are conceived in the mythosphere as genetic vehicles of procreation and carriers of identity.¹⁸⁰

This sharpened appreciation of blood's self-transformative properties proves useful when considering the most famous descriptions of blood-drinking in the literature. As recorded by Snorri, Kvasir too has a liquid genesis, emerging from the spittle that was collectively emitted by the *Æsir* and *Vanir* as a *gríðamark*,¹⁸¹ in what Margaret Clunies Ross interprets as a form of male pseudo-procreation mimicking the 'female processes of pregnancy and giving birth'.¹⁸² Kvasir's ability – 'Hann er svá vitr at engi spyrir hann þeira hluta er eigi kann hann órlausn' – is

¹⁷⁴ 'Wolf'; and 'it is correct to refer to it in terms of blood or corpses in such a way as to call [them] its food or drink'. *Skm*, p. 87 (ch. 58).

¹⁷⁵ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 65.

¹⁷⁶ 'Poison-drops'. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 50.

¹⁷⁷ 'Rime'. *Gylf*, p. 10 (ch. 5).

¹⁷⁸ 'Sweat' or 'blood'. *Gylf*, p. 11 (ch. 5).

¹⁷⁹ *Gylf*, p. 11 (ch. 6).

¹⁸⁰ We note too that in *Hyndluljóð* 41, Loki eats a 'hugstein kono' ('thought-stone of a woman' [> woman's heart]), with the stanza implying that this causes him to become pregnant. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 294.

¹⁸¹ 'Symbol of truce'. *Skm*, p. 3 (ch. G57). My Review of Scholarship Essay discussed the debate surrounding the nature of Kvasir. Roberta Frank ('Snorri', p. 159), for example, reads *Kvasis dreyri* unmythologically as meaning 'liquid of the fermenting mash'.

¹⁸² Clunies Ross, *A History*, p. 93.

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effectively bottled after his killing.¹⁸³ His blood is poured into containers, the bodily liquid acting as a vehicle for the transmission of the wisdom which he represented. As observed above, whoever drinks from his blood ‘verðr skáld eða frœðamaðr’,¹⁸⁴ albeit only after the blood is blended with honey and processed into mead, the alcoholic element of the drink implicitly imparting its own inspirational significance to the brew. Indeed, of the kennings in chapters 2 and 3 of *Skáldskaparmál* describing poetry – the mead’s principle gift – only one indicates the role played by Kvasir’s blood in the potency of the drink,¹⁸⁵ the remainder working with reference to the finished product, its owners or the process of its acquisition. Kvasir’s blood nevertheless performs a vital part in the process, acting at one stage as the principle bearer of his wisdom, whose value in the mythology is inestimable.

SIGURÐR’S BLOOD-DRINKING

The drinking of blood also has an intellectually transformative effect in the Sigurðr cycle, with Sigurðr’s consumption of Fáfnir’s blood affording him what Judy Quinn terms ‘an extraordinary cognitive ability’.¹⁸⁶ A prose passage in *Fáfnismál* tells how ‘er hiartblóð Fáfnis kom á tungu hánom, oc scilði hann fuglsrödd’.¹⁸⁷ The ability enables Sigurðr to understand the advice of birds concerning Reginn’s intended treachery; *Völsunga saga* similarly relates how avian wisdom teaches Sigurðr that Reginn ‘vill véla þann, sem honum trúir’.¹⁸⁸ The birds also point him in the direction of Fáfnir’s gold and Brynhildr, from whom he gains further wisdom, thereby affording him both material and intellectual benefits. The value of Sigurðr’s interpretive faculty is particularly evident when we consider the broader association between birds and wisdom in eddic poetry exhibited, for example, in the symbolism of Óðinn’s ravens Huginn (‘Thought’) and Muninn (‘Memory’), and in Atli’s

¹⁸³ ‘He is so wise that no one can ask him about those things to which he does not know the answer’ *Skm*, p. 3 (ch. G57).

¹⁸⁴ ‘Becomes a *skáld* or a man of learning’. *Ibid*.

¹⁸⁵ *Skm*, p. 12 (ch. 3).

¹⁸⁶ Quinn, ‘Liquid Knowledge’, p. 202.

¹⁸⁷ ‘When Fáfnir’s heart-blood came on his tongue, he also understood the language of the bird[s]’. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 186. For the parallels between Sigurðr’s transformation and Fionn mac Cumhaill’s acquisition of wisdom in Celtic sources, see, for example, Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, p. 203; O’Rahilly, *Early Irish History*, pp. 326–34; and Nagy, ‘Intervention’.

¹⁸⁸ ‘Wants to deceive the one who trusts him’ (i.e. Sigurðr). *Völs*, p. 155 (ch. 19).

address to a ‘fugl fróðhugaðr’ in *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 2.¹⁸⁹ The gift is similarly granted to Guðrún in *Guðrúnarkviða I* and in *Völsunga saga*, although it is a mixed blessing in the latter source, which describes her somewhat ambivalently as ‘miklu grimmari en áðr ok vitrari’ following her ingestion of a piece of Fáfnir’s heart.¹⁹⁰

Indeed, a closer inspection of Sigurðr’s blood-drinking confounds a simplistic understanding of the effects it entails. For instance, the fact that Fáfnir has already warned Sigurðr in *Fáfnismál* 22 that Reginn ‘þic ráða mun’ is under-recognized, considering its potential to govern Sigurðr’s subsequent interpretation of the bird’s twittering.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, the vast semantic range of *ráða* as a transitive verb does render Fáfnir’s advice more ambiguous than the birds’ lucid communication of Reginn’s intent.¹⁹² The blood’s potency is also problematized its lack of a discernible effect on Reginn. Whilst both the prose of *Fáfnismál* and *Völsunga saga* tell how ‘dracc hann blóð ór undinni’,¹⁹³ there is no suggestion in either source that its consumption renders him any wiser or more aware of his own impending death. I would hypothesize that this is because, whereas Sigurðr and Guðrún specifically consume the flesh of Fáfnir’s heart, with it still dripping *sveiti* and *hiartblóð* in Sigurðr’s case,¹⁹⁴ Reginn drinks only from the cavity from which it was extracted, dying before he may consume the cardiac tissue proper. We might surmise too that the cooking procedure – whereby the heart is converted from raw muscle to cooked meat – contributes to its potency, in a Lévi-Straussian culinary transformation that parallels the fermentation process by which Kvasir’s blood is fortified into the mead of poetry.¹⁹⁵ This theory is supported by the conception of the heart as a container of intellect that we find in the skaldic corpus, where the determinants of heart-kennings often relate to the mind, as Snorri notes in

¹⁸⁹ ‘Wise-minded bird’. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 141. See also Bourns, ‘Language of Birds’.

¹⁹⁰ ‘Much grimmer and wiser than before’. *Völs*, p. 174 (ch. 26). *Hávamál* 55 similarly declares that ‘snotrs mannz hiarta / verðr sialdan glatt’ (‘the heart of a wise man seldom becomes glad’). *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 25.

¹⁹¹ ‘Will betray you’. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 184.

¹⁹² All the same, the parallelism of the whole phrase ‘Reginn mic réð, / hann þic ráða mun’ (‘Reginn betrayed me; he will betray you’) suggests that the counsel indeed predicts perfidy, when Fáfnir’s own situation is taken into account.

¹⁹³ ‘He drank the blood from the wound’. *Fáfnismál* (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 185).

¹⁹⁴ ‘Blood’; and ‘heart-blood’. *Fáfnismál* (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 186).

¹⁹⁵ See Lévi-Strauss, *Le Cru et Le Cuit*. Clunies Ross (*Prolonged Echoes I*, 218) describes Kvasir’s ‘three-fold transformation’ in such terms. Judy Quinn (‘Liquid Knowledge’, p. 202) also identifies an equivalence between the blood of Kvasir and Fáfnir in this respect.

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Skáldskaparmál: ‘kalla má ok hús eða jörð eða berg hugarins’.¹⁹⁶ Cleasby and Vigfússon’s dictionary similarly records *hjarta* as encompassing the senses of ‘mind’ and ‘feeling’ in the literature more generally.¹⁹⁷ Even after Sigurðr’s ingestion of the blood-soaked organ itself, however, we question whether he indeed becomes ‘hverjum manni vitrari’ as the birds perhaps hyperbolically predict in the saga.¹⁹⁸ Whilst the transformation indeed furnishes him with enhanced linguistic prowess, paving the way to Fáfnir’s hoard and the acquisition of avian knowledge, his wisdom is not such that he acts upon Fáfnir’s counsel that ‘þér verða þeir baugar at bana’.¹⁹⁹

BLOOD-DRINKING IN *HRÓLFS SAGA KRAKA*

In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, blood-drinking has both instantaneous and long-term consequences for its consumers, although in this text, too, there is ambiguity as to whether blood or flesh is the principle agent of transformation. Whereas Bera’s consumption of bear meat whilst pregnant contributes to the theriomorphic deformities of Elg-Fróði and Þórir hundsfótr,²⁰⁰ the drinking of raw blood in the saga is broadly beneficial. Remarking upon his brother’s inferior strength, Elg-Fróði ‘nam sér blóð í kálfanum ok bað hann drekka, ok svá gerir Böðvarr’.²⁰¹ Böðvarr’s transformation, resulting from this act of consumption, is sufficient for Elg-Fróði to announce that ‘helzt ertu nú sterkr, frændi’, with the narrative supporting his verdict: when Elg-Fróði shoves Böðvarr to test his new strength, Böðvarr stands firm.²⁰² Blood thus functions here as Carsten’s ‘vector of connection between

¹⁹⁶ ‘One may also call [it] the house or the ground (i.e. resting-place) or the rock of thought’. *Skm*, p. 108 (ch. 70).

¹⁹⁷ Cleasby, and Guðbrandur Vigfússon, *Dictionary*, p. 266.

¹⁹⁸ ‘Wiser than every man’. *Vǫls*, p. 155 (ch. 19).

¹⁹⁹ ‘Those rings will be your death’. *Fáfnismál* 9 (*Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 182). The inevitable flip-side of this argument, however, is suggested by Sigurðr’s response in stanza 10, which emphasizes the inability to alter one’s fate.

²⁰⁰ A similar phenomenon – which Dean Miller (*Epic Hero*, p. 301) terms the ‘forbidden meal’ – is recorded in *Landnámabók*, which emphasizes the correspondence between Oddr Arneirsson’s consumption of polar bear meat, and his becoming *illr* (‘evil’) and *hamrammr* (‘able to shape-shift’). *Ldn*, p. 287 (ch. H223).

²⁰¹ ‘Drew blood from his own calf, and told him to drink it, and Böðvarr did so’. *Hrólfr*, p. 59 (ch. 31).

²⁰² ‘You are now especially strong, kinsman’. *Ibid*.

bodies’,²⁰³ even if Elg-Fróði’s superhuman strength is in its own right problematic, with his excessive fierceness rendering him incompatible with civilized life.

The most notable blood-induced transformation in the saga is that of Hötrr. The character, whom Georges Dumézil describes as ‘the terrorized whipping-boy of the *hirðmenn*’,²⁰⁴ is initially a coward who screams and ‘skelfr ákaft’ at the first sign of danger.²⁰⁵ Indeed, Böðvarr must carry Hötrr towards the beast which he intends to kill, such is Hötrr’s fear. When the creature is slain, Böðvarr offers his initiand its blood and ‘lætr hann drekka tvá sopa stóra’, moreover forcing him to ‘eta nokkut af dýrshjartanu’.²⁰⁶ As with Böðvarr’s own initiatory consumption of Elg-Fróði’s blood, Hötrr’s transformation is confirmed both physically and verbally. After ‘áttust þeir við lengi’ – the middle voice of the verb *eiga* hinting at Hötrr’s new ability to fight with Böðvarr on a level playing field – Böðvarr declares that ‘helzt ertu nú sterkr orðinn’.²⁰⁷ Schjødt describes the scene as ‘a straightforward initiation sequence’, paralleling Böðvarr’s own.²⁰⁸ Indeed, the choreography of the proceedings, as well as Hötrr’s earlier symbolic cleansing by Böðvarr, supports such a view. There are, nevertheless, elements of the narrative which resist a ‘straightforward’ reading. The most significant is the charade of the dummy-killing, designed as a public display of Hötrr’s new character but whose purpose Dumézil questions ‘when it adds nothing to Hötrr’s merit, his vigor, or his future chances’.²⁰⁹ The overall efficacy of the transformation is, however, confirmed when Hrólfr, despite seeing through Böðvarr’s trick, acknowledges Hötrr’s new status as a *kappi*, bestowing upon him the title ‘Hjalti inn hugprúði’.²¹⁰

²⁰³ Carsten, ‘Introduction’, p. 7.

²⁰⁴ Dumézil, *Destiny*, p. 155.

²⁰⁵ ‘Shakes vehemently’. *Hrólfr*, p. 67 (ch. 35).

²⁰⁶ ‘Makes him drink two great mouthfuls’; and ‘eat some of the beast’s heart’. *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ ‘They fought each other for a long time’; and ‘you have now become especially strong’. *Ibid.* In *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, the comparable emboldening properties of the ale designated by Hreggviðr for Hrólfr’s men, which causes them to become fearless fighters, may be understood as a supernatural amplification of the ordinary heartening characteristics of alcohol. *GHR*, p. 255 (ch. 32).

²⁰⁸ Schjødt, ‘Myths’, p. 269.

²⁰⁹ Dumézil, *Destiny*, p. 156.

²¹⁰ ‘Champion’; and ‘Hjalti the stout-hearted’. *Hrólfr*, p. 72 (ch. 37).

WOLFISH AND CANNIBALISTIC BLOOD-DRINKING

Blood-drinking and flesh-eating are nevertheless most problematic in their associations with wolfish and cannibalistic behaviour. One of the *senna* insults deployed against Sinfjötli by Guðmundr in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* 36 declares in one breath that

þú hefir etnar úlfa krásir
oc bræðr þínom at bana orðit,
opt sár sogin með svølom munni,
hefr í hreysi hvarleiðr scriðit.²¹¹

You have fed on the delicacies of wolves [> carrion] and become your brother's killer.
Often you have sucked on wounds with a cold mouth, slid into a heap of stones, loathed everywhere.

Guðmundr links the consumption of blood with kin-slaying, hinting at the criminality which was societally equated with a lupine existence. Nor is the insult far off the mark when we consider Sinfjötli and Sigmundr's entrance into wolf-state in chapter 8 of *Völsunga saga*, although Sigmundr's drawing of Sinfjötli's blood with his teeth is there a symptom, not a cause, of the transformation, which is brought about by the donning of *úlfahamir* ('wolf-skins') rather than the ingestion of bodily matter. In the same saga, it furthermore seems that the drink given to Guttormr by Gunnarr and Högni containing 'vitnishræ' derives its ability to render Guttormr 'svá æfr ok ágjarn' that he will betray Sigurðr partly from its inclusion of this gory component.²¹² The association between wolves and treachery is evident too in Guðrún's entwining of a wolf-hair around a ring in *Atlakviða* to communicate Atli's duplicitous intentions to her brothers. It thus appears that by incorporating the animal's flesh through the medium of a drink, Guttormr takes on a particularly transgressive aspect of the wolf's perceived nature.

Whilst most of the discussion above relates to the consumption of animal blood and flesh, there are a few depictions in the literature of the drinking of

²¹¹ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 135.

²¹² 'Wolf's carrion'; and 'so angry and fierce'. *Völs*, pp. 189–90 (ch. 30). The motif is echoed in *Ynglinga saga*, in which Ingjaldr is fed a wolf's heart and 'varð hann allra manna grimmastr ok verst skaplundaðr' ('he became the grimmest and worst-tempered of all men'). *Yng*, p. 64 (ch. 34).

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human blood. After decapitating his foster-father,²¹³ the prose of *Fáfnismál* relates that Sigurðr ‘dracc blóð þeira beggia, Regins oc Fáfnis’.²¹⁴ The blood apparently imparts to Sigurðr symbolic rather than physiological value, even if Joseph Nagy argues that Sigurðr treats Reginn ‘as if he too was a container of a precious commodity, like his two deceased brothers’.²¹⁵ Sigurðr’s drinking thus functions as a sign of incorporative dominance over his adversaries and leads, as Carolyne Larrington remarks, to the confirmation that ‘his apprenticeship is now over’.²¹⁶ *Atlakviða* and *Atlamál* nevertheless present cannibalistic blood-drinking as horrific, with Guðrún explaining to Atli in *Atlamál* 82 how

hauða veiz þú þeira hafða at ǫlscádom
drýgða ec þér svá dryccio: dreyra blett ec þeira.²¹⁷

their (i.e. Erpr’s and Eitill’s) skulls, you know, I used as ale-cups. Thus I prepared the drink for you: I mixed it with their blood.

The grim relish with which she reveals the details of her treachery continues in stanza 83, with her description of Atli’s unsuspecting consumption of their sons’ flesh:

einn þú því ollir, ecci réttu leifa,
toggstu tíðliga, trúðir vel ioxlom.²¹⁸

you alone caused this, you left no remains; you chewed greedily, you relied fully upon your molars.

The gruesome particulars of the eating process make the act all the more depraved, the past tense cruelly emphasizing the completeness of an act which cannot be undone. Atli’s declaration in stanza 85 that ‘grimm vartu, Guðrún’ therefore

²¹³ Whilst the prose introduction of *Reginismál* describes Reginn as dwarfish, his anthropomorphic form – in contrast to the animalistic shapes of his brothers – is prioritized for the purpose of this discussion.

²¹⁴ ‘Drank the blood of them both, Reginn and Fáfni’. *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 187. Elizabeth Ashman Rowe (‘Quid Sigvardus’, p. 168) highlights that Sigurðr’s appearance on Manx crosses has been understood by scholars typologically, with his tasting of Fáfni’s heart potentially foreshadowing the Eucharist in that context. Perhaps surprisingly, though, I have found no explicit connections drawn in Old Norse literature between blood-drinking and the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist.

²¹⁵ Nagy, ‘Intervention’, p. 129.

²¹⁶ Larrington, *Store of Common Sense*, p. 85.

²¹⁷ *Edda*, ed. Neckel and rev. Kuhn, p. 259.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

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indicates her transgression of the most serious of social codes,²¹⁹ although his reaction in *Atlakviða* – he is rendered dumb – also points to his stunned acknowledgement of the atrocity he has committed. In a radical inversion of the motif of advantageous blood-drinking, whose benefits Sigurðr, Böðvarr and Höttir so manifestly enjoy, Atli's consumption of his sons' blood – far from stimulating gainful transformation – thus functions instead as the ultimate magnification of the kin-slaying taboo, and is accordingly presented as truly reprehensible.

²¹⁹ 'You were cruel, Guðrún'. *Ibid.*, p. 260.

Conclusion

This dissertation marks the first comparative analysis of the literary theme of the transformative drink across Old Norse literature. The transformative drink has a unique potential as an agent of change within literary characters, transcending generic boundaries and blurring the distinction between the realistic and the supernatural. Whilst the drink's symbolic function as a polyvalent identity builder and modifier is universal in the literature, the most extraordinary transformations enacted by its consumption feature in eddic texts and the *fornaldarsögur*, in which the supernatural is most readily accommodated. There are, however, exceptions to this generalization, such as Snæfríðr's mead in *Haralds saga ins hárfagra*, which causes Haraldr to experience an instantaneous infatuation. The attribution of *Heimskringla* to Snorri – whose interest in the supernatural is evident in his *Edda* – may partly account for the inclusion of this magical drink, although his version of the episode hardly deviates from his source, *Ágrip af Nóregis konunga sögum*. Likewise, the remarkable inspirational effects of alcohol, and even milk, on Egill in *Egils saga* – which may too have been written by Snorri²²⁰ is explainable with reference to the character's Odinic persona and the saga's mythological references, as well as to the author's inheritance of such narrative elements from his poetic sources.

Alcohol is naturally central to this investigation, because it receives the most widespread textual attention, and effects the most variegated transformations in its drinkers. The symbolism applied to alcoholic drinks as literary objects stems from their material properties. As valuable commodities, their consumption may confirm (if not radically alter) one's perceived status. The latent equivalence between men's ability to drink prodigiously, without debilitation, and their physical prowess implicitly renders alcohol consumption a validator of masculinity. As reducers of inhibitions, alcoholic drinks may also stimulate loquaciousness – conceived literarily as poetic inspiration – as well as social cohesion and sexual activity. Literary attestations of intoxication conversely reflect, with physiological vividness, the deleterious transformations – often inversions of those positive ones

²²⁰ See the discussion and references in Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson*, p. 183, n. 66.

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induced by moderate intake – which drunkenness may entail. Physical injury or even death may follow excessive drinking, and boastful or foolish speech be inspired, often accelerating the collapse of peaceful relations. Alcohol's potential for harm is harnessed by antagonistic characters as a means of transforming power relations between individuals, often within a gendered dynamic; its hostile provision is comparable to the act of poisoning, although the furtiveness of the latter may render it more treacherous. The varied and contradictory outcomes of drinking alcohol consequently engender a plurality of attitudes towards drinking in the literature, both explicit – as in the gnomic wisdom of *Hávamál* and *Sigrdrífumál* – and implied.

The transformations triggered by supernatural drinks (the core components of which are usually alcoholic) may in turn be considered amplifications of those brought about by drinking ordinary alcohol. Alcohol as a validator of masculinity thus becomes Hreggviðr's ale in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, which converts cowards into heroes and restores the wounded. Alcohol's loosening of sexual inhibitions is augmented in Snæfríðr's mead, which induces sudden lust in Haraldr. Alcohol-induced amnesia is exaggerated in the effects of the drinks served by Möndul, Dís and Grímhildr, even if the impact of the *ómínnisveig* on Guðrún is ambiguous. The creativity inspired by prosaic alcohol is recast mythologically in the transcendent skills afforded by the mead of poetry, although the mnemonic benefits offered by the *mínnisveig* and *mínnisql* in *Sigrdrífumál* and *Hynndluljóð* perhaps stretch this principle of amplification to its limits, even if they too function (albeit paradoxically) as analogues of the poetic mead. The supernatural effects of blood-drinking, both intellectual and corporeal, also resemble the positive and negative consequences of everyday and supernatural alcohol consumption, which encourages their incorporation into the unified theme of the transformative drink. The conceptual mechanism by which blood transforms its drinkers, however, is markedly different, as its nature as a drink is inextricably tied to the identity of its producer. The presentation of blood as a protean and generative fluid in Old Norse literature furthermore upholds Carsten's theory that it may function as a 'vector of connection between bodies or persons', and the blood of Kvasir, Fáfñir and the beast in *Hrólfs saga kraka* confers its consumers some aspect of their nature, be that

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wisdom or vigour. Bearing in mind the equivalence between blood and water implicit in the mythological creation of the sea from Ymir's blood, the contents of Mímir's well may too be considered transmissive of fundamental wisdom of primordial origin. It is therefore unsurprising that the most valorized drink in the corpus, the mead of poetry, results from the conceptual blending of these two fundamental manifestations of the transformative drink: alcohol and blood.

By adopting a comparative approach, this dissertation also points to the common narrative purposes for which drinking may be included in the literature. Whilst drinks' employment may often passively reflect extra-textual understandings of their significance, they may also be actively utilised as facilitatory or explanatory narrative tools, either as fundamental plot elements or as instruments of rationalization by which the disparate strands of an author's sources may be unified. Sigurðr's ingestion of Fáfnir's blood drives his narrative by endowing him with the ability to understand the speech of the birds, whose primary function is to point him in the direction of his next scene. The narrative frames surrounding Óðinn's wisdom-revelation in *Grímnismál* and Egill's composition of *Sonatorrek* likewise predicate both recitations on the consumption of a drink. The motif of drunkenness is used to account for Sigmundr's fatal betrayal of Sinfjötli, and in *Ynglinga saga* for the clumsy deaths of Fjólnir and Sveigðir. By extension, the supernatural amnesia induced by Grímhildr's drinks helps account for the otherwise implausible forgetfulness of Sigurðr and Guðrún, which is necessary for the narrative to progress coherently.

The ambition of this dissertation has inevitably necessitated a curtailment in its selection of textual examples in order to elucidate its theme's range of manifestations and literary functions. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this study's novel findings – for which its broad scope is an essential precondition – may usefully lay the groundwork for further research, and that new readings of individual texts will be promoted by the fresh understanding of the transformative drink in Old Norse literature which this work affords.

List of Abbreviations

<i>BjH</i>	<i>Bjarnar saga Híttdælakappa</i> , in <i>Borgfirðinga sögur</i> , <i>Hænsa-Þóris saga</i> , <i>Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu</i> , <i>Bjarnar saga Híttdælakappa</i> , <i>Heiðarvíga saga</i> , <i>Gísli þátr Illugasonar</i> , ed. Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson
<i>Bós</i>	<i>Bósa saga ok Herrauðs</i> , in <i>Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda III</i> , ed. Guðni Jónsson
<i>Eg</i>	<i>Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar</i> , ed. Sigurður Nordal
<i>GHr</i>	<i>Göngu-Hrólfis saga</i> , in <i>Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda III</i> , ed. Guðni Jónsson
<i>Gr</i>	<i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i> , in <i>Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar</i> , <i>Bandamanna saga</i> , <i>Odds þátr Ófeigssonar</i> , ed. Guðni Jónsson
<i>Grg</i>	<i>Grágás</i> , ed. Vilhjálmur Finsen
<i>Gylf</i>	<i>Gylfaginning</i> , in <i>Snorri Sturluson. Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning</i> , ed. A. Faulkes
<i>HaldSn</i>	<i>Halldórs þátr Snorrasonar inn síðari</i> , in <i>Laxdæla saga</i> , <i>Halldórs þettir Snorrasonar</i> , <i>Stúfs þátr</i> , ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson
<i>Heiðr</i>	<i>Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks</i> , in <i>Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda II</i> , ed. Guðni Jónsson
<i>HHárf</i>	<i>Haralds saga ins hárfagra</i> , in <i>Heimskringla I</i> , ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson
<i>Hrólf</i>	<i>Hrólfis saga kraka</i> , in <i>Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda I</i> , ed. Guðni Jónsson
<i>Ldn</i>	<i>Landnámabók</i> , in <i>Íslendingabók</i> , <i>Landnámabók</i> , ed. Jakob Benediktsson
<i>Skm</i>	<i>Skáldskaparmál</i> , in <i>Snorri Sturluson. Edda: Skáldskaparmál</i> , ed. A. Faulkes
<i>Sv</i>	<i>Sverris saga</i> , ed. Þorleifur Hauksson
<i>Vols</i>	<i>Völsunga saga</i> , in <i>Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda I</i> , ed. Guðni Jónsson
<i>Yng</i>	<i>Ynglinga saga</i> , in <i>Heimskringla I</i> , ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson
<i>ÞBþ</i>	<i>Þorláks saga helga</i> , in <i>Biskupa sögur II</i> , ed. Ásdís Egilsdóttir

List of Abbreviations

- ÞorstVík* *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar*, in *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda III*, ed. Guðni Jónsson
- Qrv* *Qrvar-Odds saga*, in *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda II*, ed. Guðni Jónsson

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