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EINAR ÓLAFUR SVEINSSON
THE FOLK-STORIES OF ICELAND

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson

THE FOLK-STORIES OF
ICELAND

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Edited by Anthony Faulkes

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PREFACE

This English translation of Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's book *Um íslenskar þjóðsögur*, originally published in Icelandic in 1940, has a long history. First of all, Benedikt S. Benedikz began the translation in about 1970, assisted by Jacqueline Simpson, especially with the verse quotations, and the author himself at that time made some revisions to the Icelandic text. Einar G. Pétursson contributed to the author's revisions up to 1980, especially as regards the sources for folk-stories in Iceland after the Reformation. Einar Ólafur died in 1984, having been ill for some time, and was not able to attend to the revision as much as he had hoped. Contributions to the translation of Part I and the first two sections of Part II were made by Peter Foote and Rosemary Power in the 1990s. The whole translation was then edited and revised by Anthony Faulkes and Einar G. Pétursson, with contributions to the bibliography by Richard Perkins, and is now published as volume XVI of the Viking Society Text Series.

The text of the book naturally shows clear signs of having been originally compiled at the beginning of the Second World War. It was not practicable to rewrite it completely, and anyway it is doubtful whether that would have been desirable. My role in the final preparation of this publication has mainly been to try to bring up to date and make consistent the footnotes, and to check and supplement the references, bearing in mind that they were now intended for a non-Icelandic readership. An attempt has also been made to a certain extent to provide fuller references than were in the original book, by, for instance, giving the full names of authors and titles of articles, instead of just letting the name of the periodical suffice, though entire consistency has not been possible throughout the book. Even so, it ought now to be fairly easy to locate the writings referred to, and such inconsistencies as remain should not cause too much difficulty.

An attempt has been made to include references to works published after the original book came out, and in the footnotes the chief of the more recent pieces of research on particular topics, such as, for example, *tilberar* (magical beings that stole milk from ewes and cows) and exposure of infants, have been referred to. Though these references are undoubtedly incomplete, they may perhaps be of use to some.

Particular care has been taken to extend the coverage of Icelandic material in Part II, on sources, and Part III, on Icelandic folk-belief and folk-legends. A good deal of unpublished material is referred to here, and these sections are therefore of particular value. Since the publication of Einar Ólafur's original book in Icelandic, great strides have been taken in research into Icelandic history and literature of the sixteenth century onwards. It was obviously necessary to take account of this more recent research, and those who have been involved in the final stages of the preparation of the present book have been particularly well qualified to do this.

References have usually been made to the first and second editions of Jón Árnason's folk-stories; when the second edition is specified, which is in other respects a reprint of the first, it is usually to its extended indexes. This is more convenient than using the third edition, and since that has page references to the previous editions, stories are easy to locate whichever edition one looks in. Of course it is necessary to use the third edition for stories in the later supplementary volumes.

All quotations from Icelandic texts have been translated into English, but note that in Icelandic words and names, *þ* is pronounced like *th* in 'thin', and *ð* like *th* in 'there'.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have helped to make this book possible. I hope it will help to promote the study of the subject in the future.

E. G. P.
March 2003

PART I
SURVEY

I

An Icelandic old wives' tale tells of a princess, Mjaðveig Mánadóttir, who fled from her stepmother and found herself a refuge far from all human habitation—some say at the tip of a peninsula out in the sea, some say in a hut in a forest which was so protected by magic that she was invisible to her persecutors. Her sanctuary is described in this little verse (JÁ II 312):

<i>Þá gala gaukar</i>	There cuckoos sing
<i>og þá spretta laukar</i>	and herbs spring
<i>og þá fer hrútur úr reyfi sínu.</i>	and there the ram sheds his fleece.

Mjaðveig's name is not to be found in any church register, nor does any historical source tell us where she lived—for this is a fairy-tale. Her father's name (Máni, 'Moon') adds a mythical overtone, and her own name is peculiar to her and suggestive; a personal-name scholar has speculated that she was originally some kind of fertility goddess. She is seen there, walking in golden shoes in this Icelandic fairy paradise, the spring sun shines on the dew on the green plants that grow in this place of peace, cuckoos with human intelligence sit in the birches and rowans, and the ram sheds its fleece four times a year and changes colour each season. There is all that she could want, and she is well content, in spite of her solitude. Each day is more beautiful than the last, but behind it all is an impenetrable curtain which she has no wish to have drawn back. And her refuge is surrounded by menace, for it is not far to the world of men. Behind the peninsula are cliffs and narrow paths, and it is a good thing that no one can find the way without the aid of the fine ball of thread which her mother had given her. Inland from the cliffs are dark forests. She had got lost there, and would have fared worse if her mother had not come to her in a dream and given her what she needed. Beyond the forest she sees in her mind the troll-like figure of her stepmother, the ogress, who had put on a queen's shape, tricked the king into marrying her, and laid these heavy trials on her. This stepmother must not get angry, for then her human shape

got too tight, and she was transformed into a most horrible hag. In time she would eat up all the king's people and kill him too.

The story is not without complexity, but each component is simple and unified, each personality is consistent (only King Máni's is split), and this is revealed by events; impulse leads directly to action. The ideas of the story are found in the plot itself, not in description or stylistic adornments. Incidental details are included only if they are necessary to the story; it is this reduction to essentials that lends the story its strength. And without any long description each of the basic elements is clearly impressed on the mind's eye.

This internal consistency is the strength of the story; it is whole cloth from beginning to end. But there are many other things to note as well. The story is timeless and unlocalised, so that for the listener it takes place at all times and places as well as here and now. It is wrought out of the depths of human life, but lifted above the everyday level by its exaggerations and supernatural subject-matter—it is as if the ideas break reality's unnatural bounds. It has some of the characteristics of a myth which is set in the morning of time but still fresh and valid every day. Truly, the story is a myth created by ordinary people, by women and children, and on it the light of hall or castle has never shone—it is a folk-story. But, like other folk-stories, it possesses something of the primeval power, the fecundity and imaginative wealth of myth; such stories were invented at a time when Greek mythology was exhausted and Christian 'mythology' had become remote, north of the Alps at least, and they were given a warm welcome by ordinary people, and poets and artists found in them a new and inexhaustible mine of materials for their creativity.

On the lips of men and women these stories were so sifted that trifles and irrelevancies were removed and only what was most important and meaningful was left. An audience with unsophisticated and lively imaginations and sharp wits, children, women and men in twilight and leisure hours, preserved that awareness of the primary experiences of life which many of these stories possessed from the beginning, and renewed the vitality of that awareness every time they were told. But the simplicity of oral transmission and the homogeneity of society kept the stories within the bounds of common human experience, so that every listener could invest the story with his own concerns, and every artist or poet with his own ideas and feelings.

It is the plot that dictates the tone of the narrative; emotions are not given separate lyric treatment except sometimes in short pieces of verse. Mjaðveig's sanctuary gains from the little verse that celebrates it, as does the story of the Deacon of Myrká from the stanza intoned by the ghost (JÁ I 281):

<i>Máninn líður,</i>	The moon glides
<i>dauðinn ríður;</i>	and death rides.
<i>sérðu ekki hvítann blett</i>	Can't you see a white mark shine
<i>í hnakka mínum,</i>	on this bare nape of mine,
<i>Garún, Garún?</i>	Garún, Garún?

The moon's pale light is spread over the whole scene, fearful, perplexing. There is a partial analogy to Mjaðveig's refuge in many outlaw legends, though in them it is given greater particularity. It is a hidden valley in the wasteland; no snatches of verse convey the idyll, but the delight of the discovery of the valley is revealed in the simple words of the narrative that there were green slopes there, rich grassland, fine sheep, and a brook babbling down the middle of the dale.

This is enough to affect a listener's mood, but it does not interrupt the story, the sequence of events which is the heart of the matter. There is no lack of clarity or speed in the Deacon of Myrká, and the stanza is after all only one of those snatches that can dominate a story and set a stamp on it. Otherwise the story is a well-composed and logical whole with sharp contrasts, deep shadows and bright lighting, and a dramatic conflict between them. A woman has a man who is both her lover and a dangerous ghost who wants to drag her into the grave with him. One emotion after another passes through her mind: anticipation, joy, puzzlement and terror, and these are reflected in the narrative, in her actions and those of the revenant. This dramatic pace and tension, this tug-of-war uncertainty, all within the compass of a consistent and orderly structure, makes such stories highly effective when told in the right place and in the right circumstances and can make them excellent material for artistic reworking afterwards.

These stories are the fruit of feelings both tender and hostile, of love and hate, of joy, grief and fear. This is revealed in symbols and fantasies of the most diverse kind, powerfully affecting and rich in poetry. Outwardly their origin is varied; they are masks of every shape and kind, some smooth, beautiful and cheerful, others imposing, fearsome or strange, weird, distorted and hideous. They show all too well the

signs of being the expression of the nature of a poor and oppressed people, but they are imposing and poetic none the less.

The imaginative life of the folk-stories was shaped by an Icelandic rural culture which was homogeneous, simple and poor looked at from the outside, but at the same time enriched by knowledge and practice of poetry, familiarity with a literary tradition and unbroken links with the ancient culture of the country. Their imaginative world was enlarged both by their native traditions and by Christianity, and it may be that this enlargement so counter-balanced the poverty of the Icelanders that their folk-stories are much more than reflections of those of neighbouring countries. Not but what the folk-stories of all countries bear witness to the effects of stepmotherly neglect, and their horizon becomes in consequence rather narrow. Yet sometimes these stories contain simple truths in effective dress, common human attitudes depicted from profound experience. Nowhere else has faith in a good heart, or trust in the inner worth of an unimpressive and despised exterior, been expressed with such firm conviction. In that and in many other respects, this Cinderella among the creative arts had a function to fulfil.

The Mjaðveig story is a fairy-tale, remote in content from people's everyday activity; but legends about the hidden valley inhabited by outlaws have grown out of the life and work of men in Iceland, as a kind of 'myth' that came into being from the experience of tending and rounding up sheep in autumn and of journeys through the wastelands of the interior. The Icelandic way of life, collectively and individually, and the nature of the country—all are mirrored equally in these outlaw legends; they reflect above all Icelandic humanity, what people have wrestled with, the victories they have won and the defeats they have suffered, their joys and their sorrows. Their origins are various—some stories are clearly Icelandic in origin, others are foreign. But these latter have become no less Icelandic than the others; they have received an Icelandic impress and are imbued with an Icelandic spirit from having been told and heard by Icelanders and passed on as a legacy from one generation to another. The folk-stories are a good example of the balance that ought properly to exist between the native and the foreign in Icelandic culture. National characteristics are strong and firmly entrenched in people's minds. While they are very eager to know what is going on in other countries, and to learn from them, what they acquire they reshape to suit Icelandic ways and

habits. That is a natural and necessary attitude for this island people. Whatever may have been their origin, the folk-stories come to mirror the people's life and character, and in the period when the idea gained ground that all power comes from the people, their poetry and lore became sacred things which were revered and looked to as a potential source of strength. Icelandic folk-stories were similarly an important element in the Icelanders' struggle for national and cultural integrity in the nineteenth century. They were more truly Icelandic than anything else worthy of the name.

II

This book is intended to deal with folk-stories and their history, and the reader may well wish to be told at the outset, clearly and unequivocally, what it is that is being discussed. And even though the reader may know precisely what a folk-story is, the author may still want to discuss the term to ensure that they are both talking about the same thing when they use it.

What are folk-stories and fairy-tales? What are their characteristics? How are they to be defined? This is our first matter of concern.

First, then, we must see to what extent the meaning of these terms can be defined. Such definition can never be mathematically precise. That is possible in those sciences like logic or mathematics which are created from first principles entirely in the human intellect. But the situation here is very different. In our material very complex phenomena are described, which are sprung from many roots, and the most diverse beings meet and mingle in them. Here we are dealing with stories that have arisen from men's daily lives and thoughts, from reason and superstition, from the old and the new; here all kinds of story exist side by side, mingle together and are influenced by all literary genres and aspects of culture. Literary genres are often developed by thinkers who devise rules for their composition during their formative stages; but here we have art-forms of ancient origin which we meet only in their extreme old age. Analysis can therefore only take place late in the day; the primeval forest, which has grown spontaneously without ever feeling the axe, has to be controlled and classified. Moreover, the names popularly given to these art-forms are very muddled, and the science of folklore has still a long way to go towards maturity.

We must not therefore expect too much. We cannot give a proper definition, just a description which may possibly be of benefit.

The first and most noteworthy quality of the folk-story is that it is an oral narrative. It is told. A written folk-story may well be a faithful transcript of an oral story, but in many ways it follows different rules and to some extent achieves its effects by other means. On the other hand it does not matter if a folk-story originates from a written story; it is just as much a folk-story for all that. A number of Icelandic fairy-tales and comic folk-stories are of literary origin; the fairy-tale of Hermóður and Háðvör is descended from a written source, and the anecdote of the demon on the church beam is found in texts of the thirteenth-century *Maríu saga* (MS 176–80). But for a written story to become a folk-story, it must circulate orally, not necessarily through many tellers, though if it is to be effective in its oral version, the narrator should have lost sight of the book. Hans Christian Andersen's story 'The Tinder Box', which I have read in his *Fairy Tales* and tell to children, is no folk-story; but it could become one in a society less rich in books. Moreover, it was one before Andersen wrote it (AT 562 'Fire-steel'), and who knows its real age? Many folk-stories are centuries old and some have been current for thousands of years.

An old oral story tells how a man saw a ghost. A man tells me today his own experience of a similar event. This latter story is not a folk-story; to be one it has to circulate orally more widely. Properly, it should not be possible to trace the links in the transmission back to the original teller, and to be a good specimen it should bear the marks of oral currency. On the other hand it does not matter whether the hero is known or unknown, given his right name or not. Thus the greater number of Brynjólfur Jónsson's *Dulrænar smásögur* (1907), 'Mystical anecdotes', are not folk-stories, but accounts of people's paranormal experiences, in themselves of no small importance for an understanding of the genesis of folk-stories.

The folk-story is a prose narrative. It may contain verse, even several stanzas, but the story itself is in prose. Poems based on the story may indeed be composed, and they may even circulate orally, but in such cases only the content can be labelled folk-story. This procedure was very common in earlier times, when the matter of a folk-story was reworked in a different medium or style that was in better accord with contemporary ideas of what literature should be. Versions of this

kind are often important sources of our knowledge of the plots of folk-stories told in former ages.

It is hardly necessary to emphasise that there must be a story in a folk-story. An old custom, belief or superstition is no folk-story. It is not a folk-story to tell that elves live in such and such a hillock. It only becomes a folk-story if and when the account reports some specific event. Nor is a family tree a folk-story, even though it is entirely made up of oral information which has been handed down from one person to another; once again the story is missing.

The more recent a folk-story is, the harder it is to separate it from other matter. As time passes unimportant, non-essential details are forgotten and the main points alone are preserved. Those stories which may be counted among the best are old, usually it is impossible to say how old, told by one person to another. They are generally easily recognised. Other stories are younger, even contemporary, but they have circulated orally, and sometimes cannot be distinguished from common gossip. There are innumerable long-lived anecdotes about comic old men and women that have come down orally, and these cannot be denied the honourable title of folk-stories. Then we may not be in a position to distinguish these in manner and matter from contemporary anecdotes, or even from an event which the author or reader may himself have witnessed.

But what about its truthfulness? Some will say a folk-story is always an invention. Yet this is not an absolute criterion. It may be that a very high percentage of folk-stories are either pure invention or at least heavily adulterated truth. It is a fact that may be noted in describing them but no story is excluded from the ranks of the folk-story solely because it is true.

There is supernatural material in most folk-stories, but this is not a necessary condition for inclusion in the category either. The story of Grámann (JÁ II 511–16) is one of those that contain no supernatural material, but it is a perfectly valid folk-story. The same applies to a number of stories connected with specific persons of earlier centuries.

Next, it is right to look at the term 'folk-story' (Icelandic *þjóðsaga*). An appropriate name should tell us something about what it stands for. This term is really only a translation of the German *Volk(s)sage*, *Volksmärchen*. The first element, 'folk', Icelandic *þjóð*, reflects two ideas which have both been professed by scholars in the past. *Volk* has

been used in the sense of 'nation'; folk-stories were supposed to be the creation of the nation as a whole, as the brothers Grimm believed. This notion is partly right and partly wrong, and I shall come back to it later. Alternatively, *Volk* can mean 'people' in the sense of 'the common people', ordinary folk—that is not the nobility or clergy—and then the folk-story becomes the story that belongs to the people. This is an interpretation that reflects notable features of folk-stories and their background in many parts of the world. The folk-stories have grown in the shadows as it were, and flourished best among common country folk who were either totally illiterate, or else put their reading and writing skills to very little use. They were peasants in societies where many other people, individually or as whole classes, were educated among books and fostered a literature very different from the verbal arts of the rural population. The songs and stories of the folk were generally not regarded as fit for written record without considerable alteration.

This viewpoint, that folk-stories are the oral stories of the common people, greatly helps towards an understanding of them. One must, however, observe a certain caution as far as Icelandic folk-stories are concerned. Reading and writing have been far more widespread accomplishments among all classes in Iceland than in other countries, and literary influences on Icelandic folk-stories are commoner than elsewhere, as are also the influences of folk-stories on literary works. Class distinction has also been less sharp than elsewhere, and the Icelander's universal antagonism towards foreign domination and foreign superiors affected every aspect of national culture. If these special conditions are kept in mind, then the idea that folk-stories are the oral stories of the common people can serve a valuable purpose.

III

So far only a little has been brought forward to define, or rather describe, folk-stories. If we try to come closer, we discover how very heterogeneous they are. We cannot postpone facing the issue; sooner or later we must attempt to comprehend their differences and see how far they can be classified. It is also very true that classification will bring us much closer to understanding what the word 'folk-story' refers to.

Let us first of all look at oral narratives on the fringe of the folk-story, or even outside it, for these ought to be mentioned too. Every-

one knows contemporary anecdotes, more or less humorous, of the stupidity or funny ways of old men or women, their odd replies, trickiness or wit, and everybody in Iceland knows little stories with a verse as the kernel. Much of this kind of stuff lives on in men's memories, from one generation to another, and often one has no inkling of the antiquity of the anecdote until one comes across it in ancient sources, or unless it contains a reference to outdated manners or a verse that gives away its age. In these stories it is impossible to separate truth from fiction, but they have one factor in common: the events *could* have happened, there is nothing inherently supernatural in them, and they survive because of their entertainment value or because of the verse. All these stories are as short as can be, usually anecdotes of a single happening. It is common for several anecdotes to exist about one person, whether because of his odd behaviour or his wit, but each of them is a self-contained entity.

Another group resembles these in verisimilitude, but not at all in expansiveness and theme. These are narratives of events that took place at least one generation ago, or narratives to do with personal or family history. Enough of note happens in every age, and in every age there are plenty of people about whom stories would exist if there was anyone to tell them—not merely funny anecdotes, but whole chains of events. Recollections of such subject-matter may live on in oral tradition, but in order to do so, the events have to be in some way peculiar and memorable, and even then only a summary will be preserved, usually of only the most important events, often quite distorted. Genuine folk-stories, stories with a supernatural element for instance, often come to be mixed in with these, but it remains characteristic of such narratives that most of what they tell is 'natural' and concerns historical events. Such stories are usually longer than the folk-story in general. Such oral 'histories' have existed in Norway, with some of their components going back to *c.* 1600. These have been called *ættesogor*, 'family stories', by Norwegian scholars even though in some cases the collection relates only to one person.¹ I think it likely that many of Gísli Konráðsson's sources were narratives of this kind. The composite stories that are often found in Jón Árnason's *Þjóðsögur* and elsewhere and add up to fairly long narratives, are most probably the work of scribes or editors.

¹ See Knut Liestøl, *Norske ættesogor* (1922).

This finally brings us to stories which are unquestionably folk-stories proper. These can be classified into two extensive groups. One is in German entitled *Volkssagen*, which I refer to as ‘folk-legends’; the other is the *Märchen*, which Jón Árnason translated as *ævintýri*, and which English-speaking scholars usually now refer to as fairy-tales or ‘wonder-tales’.

Folk-legends comprise an enormous group of stories, and cover the usual stories of trolls and elves, ghosts and wizards, dreams, weird happenings, beasts, people of a heroic past and outlaws. A mass of place-names is embedded in these stories, and some independent stories are solely concerned with the explanation of place-names. Almost all these stories are given Icelandic locations and they often concern people known to history, Sæmundr the Wise (1056–1133) for instance, or Torfi of Klofi (died c.1504), or Þormóður of Gvendareyjar (c.1668–c.1741) (JÁ I 485–502, 541–54, II 132–38). They are often associated with particular places and sometimes they explain features of a particular site; *Skessulág*, ‘Ogress’s rest’, is a name used to explain a dip in the ground, rocks are trolls turned to stone and so on. Some stories have little or no supernatural matter in them; they then tell of some memorable event, and are unhesitatingly believed. Others are admittedly about supernatural beings, e.g. elves or ghosts, but these are legitimate extensions of beliefs actually held by the people. They may be called ‘legends based on popular beliefs’ and if they do not overstep certain limits they are found credible as long as these beliefs flourish. The titles given to such legends in printed collections are misleading, because in them many stories are often linked into one narrative. The individual legend is in fact normally rather short, sometimes indeed extremely brief, and tells of only one event, but others relate to a sequence of events and many extend into several sections. The longest are like simpler fairy-tales in the way their parts are disposed. Some, such as the longer outlaw stories, have little supernatural content and make a kind of *Novelle*. In this respect they remind us of stories in the section ‘Romantic tales’ (*Novelleartige Märchen*) in AT. In the same way one is able to find some narratives very like fairy-tales among stories of elves and even of trolls. On the other hand it is by no means rare for a short fairy-tale to turn into a folk-legend. One such is the story of Gilitrutt, which is given a local setting under Eyjafjöll and made to conform to the pattern of an ordinary story of

trolls (JÁ I 181–82). As for the story of the eighteen outlaws (AT 956B) and some of the hagiographical anecdotes, which are counted among wonder-tales in the catalogues of non-Icelandic scholars, it is very hard to know where to place them.

Various scholars have proposed a subdivision of this large class. Maurer's classification, which follows, is governed by expediency:

- I. 'Mythological' stories (1. Gods; 2. Elves; 3. Water and sea beings; 4. Trolls).
- II. Stories of ghosts (1. Revenants; 2. Reawakened ghosts; 3. Fetches (Icelandic *fylgjur*)).
- III. Stories of magic (1. Stories of 'second sight' etc.; 2. Magic formulas; 3. Stories of individual magicians. The division between subclasses 1 and 3 is unsatisfactory, and subclass 2 belongs to the section on folk-belief, not folk-story).
- IV. Stories of natural phenomena (1. Animals; 2. Plants; 3. Stones; 4. Heavenly bodies and atmospheric phenomena; 5. Place-name stories. Much of this material belongs to the realm of folk-belief, and the division is unnatural).
- V. Stories of religious import (1. God and the Devil; 2. Saints; 3. Heaven and Hell; 4. God's punishments; 5. Papistical superstitions. Since 5 deals with beliefs, the division is unnatural).
- VI. 'Historical' stories—which Jón Árnason calls 'Stories of events' (Icelandic *viðburðasögur*) (1. Ecclesiastical stories; 2. Stories of ancient times (before the end of the Icelandic Commonwealth); 3. Stories of later centuries; 4. Stories of outlaws).
- VII. Fairy-Tales or Wonder-Tales.
- VIII. Humorous Stories.

Jón Árnason accepted this classification with two modifications; he omitted the 'mythological' stories (those about heathen gods) and made the Stories of outlaws into a separate main class. Many others have treated them in the same way. Jónas Jónasson used the following divisions:

- I. Stories of human nature (a. Dreams, b. Waking visions, c. Mysterious talents, d. Mysterious powers, e. Other beings in human shape (elves, trolls, sea beings), f. Influences from the next world, g. Influences from religion).
- II. Stories from the natural world (a. Animals, b. Earth, c. Air).
- III. Stories of events (a. Historical legends, b. Outlaws, c. Wonder-tales).

Sigfús Sigfússon divides his material into thirteen sections (*SS Íþ*; his entire work is in fifteen parts, but two of these represent other interests). The stories concern:

1. The highest powers, 2. Visions, 3. Ghosts, 4. Earth beings, 5. Sea beings, 6. The natural world, 7. Superstitions, 8. Magic, 9. Place-names, 10. Exceptional men (this occupies 2 volumes), 11. Outlaws, 12. Wonder-tales, 13. Humorous stories.

The present author used the following classification in *EÓŠ If*:

1. Stories connected with Icelandic history.
2. Place-name stories: churches, wells, graves, buried (hidden) treasure, caves, avalanches, volcanic eruptions, geysers.
3. Animal stories: from natural animals to supernatural ones, ending with the merman (where the category begins to approach the human).
4. Elves.
5. Trolls.
6. Ghosts.
7. Magic, including second sight etc.; stories of magicians, leading into those involving the Devil.
8. Stories of religious content, insofar as they can be counted among folk-legends.
9. Stories of outlaws.

None of these classifications, which are fundamentally attempts to arrange an existing corpus of material, is scientifically satisfactory, though one must admit that others proposed by scholars outside Iceland fail the same test. One of the most noteworthy is Carl von Sydow's attempt to classify the stories by their origin.¹ Some of them are answers to the question, How did this or that come about? These von Sydow calls *upphovssögner* (aetiological stories): the rock became as it is because the dawn caught a troll unawares and turned him to stone. The second class is the *memorat* or *minnessögner*, stories which relate what a specific person saw or experienced. The third is the *fabulat* or *vittnessögner*, where the imagination has a greater say, though the content of a story always depends on some folk-belief.

¹ C. W. von Sydow, 'Om folkets sägner', *NK IX B*, 96–112.

We now turn to the fairy-tale (Icelandic *ævintýri*), the wonder-tale class. It is fairly easy to subdivide them, and essential to do so if we are to comprehend this vast and varied group with its extreme diversity of origin. The first subdivision covers the Fables, i.e. stories with animals as central figures, illustrating the cunning of the fox, the prodigious feats of the bear and so forth. They do not exist in Iceland, so we may pass quickly on to the second subdivision. This comprises *ævintýri* proper, the wonder-tales, stories of the old man and old woman in their cottage and the king and queen in their palace. Most of these stories are full of the most amazing wonders, supernatural beings, spells and magical objects, and no popular stories stray so far beyond the bounds of credibility as these. Indeed, it may be said that one principal difference between them and folk-legends is that for many centuries no one has believed the wonder-tales, everyone knowing them to be fabrications. They take place in foreign parts, no one knows where, and though the heroes are given names, everyone knows that they are not to be found in any historical record. Most of the wonder-tales are long stories with many episodes, and they are usually constructed with great skill. Love affairs are at the heart of many of them, and they always have a happy ending. Qualities like valour, enterprise and shrewdness feature in many of them, but faith in simple human good nature is the essential mark of their ethical outlook. A few stories in this great gathering have a hagiographical tone; God, Christ, the apostles or other saints replace trolls or other creatures of superstition as the central characters, and the outcome then naturally conveys a religious and moral message. Another small group of stories are those with little or no supernatural content, which tell of adventures, i.e. uncommon experiences, encountered by the characters. These are romantic stories, and since they are related to the *Novellen* of past writers, one might describe these as '*Novelle*-type stories'. Next come humorous stories, and on their borders are stories of tricks played by men on stupid giants. After these giants have been dealt with, nothing supernatural remains in the stories. Next comes a huge group of stories which, in comparison with the wonder-tales themselves, may be called realistic; not all of them are credible, but there is nothing supernatural in them. They include the purely funny stories, Numskull stories, about the brothers of Bakki (cf. the English 'Wise Men of Gotham' or the inhabitants of Mols in Denmark), for example, or the man who believed

he was dead. There are also, by contrast, a good many stories where cunning and trickery play a major part, as in the stories of Grámann the Master Thief or Sigurður Bag-beater (Big and Little Claus in Hans Christian Andersen's version); stories too of good or bad luck as in the story of 'Christ with the cross on His shoulders' or of the old man who got four shoemaker's needles for a golden comb. There are also countless comic stories, not always over-polite, about parsons; and finally there is a good number of outright tall stories. These stories are very variable in length, some tell a single episode, some relate a sequence of events like the wonder-tales. Characteristic of these stories are their *joie de vivre* and plain speaking; the rule of life they illustrate is 'beati possidentes', and good luck to the swindler who wins the trick. They often attack the hypocrite and charlatan, and parsons are sometimes put down. Some of these anecdotes make fun of the magical objects of the wonder-tales. Such stories are later creations, both in matter and content, stemming from the irreverence of the townee, the third estate. The stories with a religious tone are of clerical inspiration. On the other hand, the general run of the folk-story of the *ævintýri* class contain relics of older provenance.

Some scholars count such mnemonic poems as the 'story' of Brúsaskeggur (Brush-beard) next after the 'Tall Stories', and with this we are in the field of folk poetry. The stories of the brothers of Bakki are closely akin to ordinary 'humorous stories', and the circle is thus complete. We have now surveyed the classes into which the folk-stories may be divided.

It is obvious how diverse and varied folk-stories are in origin and content. In oral transmission, however, they influence each other, and, like all stories passed on by word of mouth, they are given a characteristic stamp, and so come to resemble one another still more. It is clear that some classes of stories are closely related to certain literary categories. Thus the animal stories are related to the *exempla* with animal characters found in Aesop's *Fables* or the Indian *Pantschatantra*. Stories of religious bent are closely related to medieval saints' lives which, though they were of course written compositions, were often read aloud to audiences, especially but not only in churches, and used in sermons, and so in a sense were orally transmitted. Intention and content were at one in religious stories. The aim was to proclaim as movingly as possible Christian faith and conduct and trust in the supernatural person (angel, Virgin Mary, apostle or other saint) of whom

the story told. The content was precisely fitted to this aim, and many of these stories were very influential. Some medieval stories of this kind have joined the corpus of Icelandic folk-stories, as I shall discuss in more detail later (pp. 75–76 below). We must also remember that the *fabliau* (German *Schwank*) was a very widespread literary form in the Middle Ages and the Reformation period. The medieval examples were chiefly in verse, but prose versions began to appear in Renaissance Italy, and similar prose versions soon followed in other countries. Stories that have circulated orally in later times are frequently found in early written collections of stories, and one may state categorically that numerous Icelandic *fabliaux* descend from such written sources. Lastly one should mention that the ‘*Novelle*-type stories’ are related to romantic stories which an author like Boccaccio included in his *Decameron*, though it is true that he inclined more towards stories of the *fabliau* type. One of his stories, that of Patient Griselda, has become an Icelandic folk-story (AT 887), and the story of the nun wearing the abbot’s drawers for a wimple (JÁ II 73) is also to be found in Boccaccio. All these literary genres, saints’ lives, *fabliaux* and romantic *Novellen*, lived half their lives in oral transmission and were highly appreciated (otherwise they would not have been given literary form). It can be safely affirmed that their reputation and popularity as literature are responsible in no small measure for the fact that we now find whole groups of folk-stories and wonder-tales related to them, and we must bear this in mind when discussing their origin and dissemination. But the great majority of folk-stories, especially the true wonder-tales, have other origins, much more complex and much more difficult to detect.

IV

In the previous section we considered classes of stories, but any class is composed of individuals, and in this context that means individual stories. Let us take, for, instance, the story of Vilfríður Völufegri (‘the fairer than Vala’). It is found in Jón Árnason’s *Þjóðsögur*, and at the end Jón says that it exists in numerous versions and gives further details about them (JÁ II 406 n.) This is to be understood to mean that several different stories are known, all about a woman called Vilfríður Völufegri, or with a name something like that, and that the main story is the same in them all. In other words, these are all *variants* (‘tilbrigði’)

of the same story.¹ Variants can differ so much that only the principal points remain alike, but their various relationships divide them into classes and the variants within each class are similar enough to make it clear that they are all descended from one original. A class of this kind is then called a *redaction* (Icelandic *gerð*). As was pointed out earlier, the wonder-tales are often long, with many episodes and admirably constructed; it is easy to distinguish their parts, but that point need not be discussed here. On the other hand it should be observed that in surveying the contents, one can find in them smaller units from which the whole is constructed. These are called its *motifs* (Icelandic *minni*). It is difficult to define this concept, because the word is used of so many and various things. Many stories have the motif of the cruel stepmother, for instance, and magic curses, magical objects, tasks or trials to be undergone, are all called motifs. These components of stories are invariably such that they catch the audience's attention, make a lasting impression and are easily retained in the memory. They often occur in more than one story; some travel all over the world, and can then be called 'wandering motifs' (*farandminni*). Naturally the ease with which they move from story to story varies greatly.

Earlier I mentioned the stepmother motif, which Icelandic story-tellers have found very convenient to use as the source of evil power in the plot. It is in fact the commonest way these stories begin. Such an opening may go: 'Once upon a time there were a king and queen in their kingdom; they had one son (or daughter). When he (she) was grown up the queen fell sick and died. The king grieved deeply for her, but after some time he took another wife . . .' Normally, however, the opening is more detailed. It is often specified that in his grief the king *sat on the queen's grave* and did not attend to the government of the kingdom; his *counsellors* saw that this would not do, and so pressed him to take another wife. At length he gave way and *sent them* to find a possible wife, but stressed that he did not want *an island-woman or a wood-wife*. On their journey they encounter fog and *lose their way at sea*, but come to land at last. They are relieved to find themselves on solid ground, leave the shore and walk inland. Then they hear the very beautiful *sound of a harp*, follow it and come to a tent where they find a woman with whom they talk. (Here certain minor motifs come

¹ All the known Icelandic variants of this story are listed in *Verz.* 98–102.

in, which can be omitted for the present.) The upshot of the talk is that their king is to marry her. When they return with her to the ship the *fog clears* and they see they are not on the mainland, but on an island. So one could continue. Certain key-words have been italicised in this sketch. They are details of the story and I call them 'narrative motifs', as they do not affect the main plot but only fill out the narrative. It may be said that *as a whole* the story is untouched by the inclusion or omission of this or that detail, but narrative motifs of this kind naturally add some adornment to the telling. The wording in general also tends to be somewhat stereotyped, and we shall return to this feature when we consider the style of the wonder-tale (pp. 249–59).

We now come to other minor details which are similar to narrative motifs in as much as they are hardly necessary to the action. One of these is the clew of thread that shows the way. This is an essential item in the Greek legend of Theseus and Ariadne, but one can imagine that people brought up in Icelandic landscape would be shown the way by other means, and it has a slightly false ring in an Icelandic wonder-tale. Two other small motifs may be mentioned. In some medieval sagas we hear of an ogress whose nose is so long that she can use it as a poker; in others of an ogress or a woman under a spell who wore a dress of skin long in front and obscenely short behind. These minor details are of course of no importance in the main thread of the story, but they will have amused some listeners. It would be possible to list a large number of minor motifs of this kind that are of small import to the story as a whole. There are on the other hand motifs which are the main props of the story, and others again that have an intermediate importance. It is of course easiest for the motifs that have least significance for the plot to move between unrelated stories.

It is sometimes maintained that major motifs are original parts of a story, but this can hardly be right, for stories mingle and alter in their transmission, and some motifs are fashionable at one stage and others at another. Naturally these facts influence the preservation and dissemination of stories. A motif which is popular because of current fashion can spread a long way in a short time. On the other hand, if a motif is not popular, for instance for religious reasons, it is likely to be altered—even if only by such a change as the substitution of a Christian saint for a pagan god. In an age of rationalism motifs with supernatural elements are in danger and it is likely that their supernatural

content will be watered down. When this has happened the motifs are termed *verblichene Motive* in German ('faded motifs'). Sometimes another motif is substituted for an older one of this kind, though this can also happen for other reasons. We shall consider changes in stories at several later points in this book.

Motifs follow a rigid pattern in the wonder-tales, but in legends based upon folk-beliefs they are much more flexible and irregular, more like the living beings or events of real life. It is also more difficult to classify such legends in single, independent types, for everything is fluid in form and resemblances and differences are always shifting. The stories normally come to have a more settled shape if they are transmitted orally over long periods—a notable fact of which much could be said. Oral stories generally have this faculty of acquiring a characteristic stamp. Their typical features are ascribed to what have been called *episke lov*, 'narrative laws', and Axel Olrik has made the best study of them.¹ I shall say something on this subject in my next section.

V

A good way to get our bearings on the form of the folk-story is to look at the story of *Kiðhús* as told by the artist Sigurður Guðmundsson to Jón Árnason (*JÁ* II 508–09).

Once upon a time there were an old man and his wife in their cottage; they were so poor that they possessed nothing of value except a golden whorl to the old-wife's spindle. The man's custom was each day to go hunting or fishing to keep body and soul together. Near the cottage was a big hillock. People believed that it was inhabited by an elf called *Kiðhús*, who was thought to be rather an ugly customer.

One day, as often happened, the man went hunting, while the old-wife stayed at home as she usually did. As the weather was good that day, she sat down outside with her spindle and spun for a while. It then happened that the golden whorl fell off and rolled away to one side, so that the old woman lost sight of it. She was upset by this, and looked for it everywhere about, but all in vain; she could not find it anywhere. Later her husband came home, and she told him of her misfortune. He said that *Kiðhús* must have taken it, and it was just like him. He now got ready to go out again and told the old-wife that he was going out to demand from *Kiðhús* either the spindle-whorl or something for it. At this the old-wife cheered up somewhat. The husband now went directly

¹*Nogle grundsætninger for sagnforskning*, 1921; translated by Kirsten Wolf and Jody Jensen as *Principles for Oral Narrative Research*, 1992.

to Kiðhús's hillock and beat on it long and savagely with a thick stick. At length Kiðhús answered:

Hver bukkar mín hús? Who gives my house such a thwack?

The old man said:

*Karl er þetta, Kiðhús minn,
kerling vill hafa nokkuð
fyrir snúð sinn.* Kiðhús, your old neighbour's back,
my old woman must be paid
for the golden whorl she mislaid.

Kiðhús asked him what he wanted for the whorl. The old man asked him for a cow that milked three gallons at a go, and Kiðhús obliged him with that. So off he went home with the cow to the old-wife. Next day, when she had milked the cow and filled all her pots and pans with milk, she thought she would make porridge, but remembered that she had no meal to make it with. So she goes to her husband and tells him to go to see Kiðhús and ask him for some. The husband goes to Kiðhús's hillock and bangs on it with his stick as before. Then Kiðhús says:

Who gives my house such a thwack?

The old man said:

Kiðhús, your old neighbour's back,
my old woman must be paid
for the golden whorl she mislaid.

Kiðhús asks what he wants. The old man tells him to give him something for the pot, because he and his old woman are going to cook themselves some porridge. Kiðhús gave him a barrel of meal. The old man took the barrel home, and the old-wife makes the porridge. When the porridge was ready, the couple sat down to it and ate as much as they could. When they were full there was still a lot left in the pot. They then started to think about what they ought to do with the left-overs; they decided it was most fitting to present it to their dear Saint Mary. But they soon saw that it was not going to be easy to get up to where she was. So they agreed that they should ask Kiðhús for a ladder that reached up to the sky, and felt that even at that the whorl was not overpriced. The husband goes and bangs on the hillock. Kiðhús asks as before:

Who gives my house such a thwack?

The old man once more answers:

Kiðhús, your old neighbour's back,
my old woman must get paid
for the golden whorl she mislaid.

At this Kiðhús grew annoyed and said, 'Is this confounded whorl never paid for?' The man kept on demanding and explained that they intended to present the porridge left-overs to Our Lady in buckets. Kiðhús then let himself be persuaded, gave him the ladder and raised it up for him. The husband was pleased at that and went off home to the old-wife. The couple then got ready

for the journey and took the buckets of porridge with them. But when they had got very high up the ladder their heads began to swim. They were so affected by it that they both fell down and shattered their skulls. Splashes of brains and porridge flew all over the world. Where the spatters of brain landed on rocks they made white lichen patches, while the porridge made the yellow patches, and both of these can be seen on rocks to this day.

Every work of art makes a kind of selection from the diversity of reality; one subject is treated, or perhaps a few, and only a small number of the incidents that go with it or them are included in the story. In folk-stories this selection tends to be narrow, as is clearly seen in the *Kiðhús* story, which deals only with the golden spindle-whorl, the payment for it and what the outcome of that was. It is extremely simple to grasp this subject-matter, the arrangement is so orderly that it is no trouble to divide the story into acts and scenes like a play. Here we do not find the muddle of cause and effect, the connections and tangles of human life; all the steps of the story are clear and simple. When a lot of things ought to happen all at once, the folk-story makes them come in orderly sequence, one after another.

Similarities are turned into parallels, differences into oppositions. The man goes three times to ask *Kiðhús* for payment for the whorl, the action is absolutely identical each time, the same words are repeated, only the payments differ. Such repetitions are extremely common. That the old man asks *Kiðhús* three times for payment is more memorable than a single demand; it creates suspense when in the story of *Búkolla* the sisters three times ask the cow to bellow.

Repetition and mounting tension often go together ('incremental repetition'), as when Helga Karlsdóttir meets first one-headed, then two-headed and finally three-headed trolls, or when Red Bull goes through woods where the leaves are first of copper, then of silver and finally of gold.

The story of *Kiðhús* is very well told, but nothing of the narrative would survive unchanged in oral tradition except the verse refrain, and it would therefore have to live on its subject-matter. It is in the contents, the action, that the characteristics and outlook of the man, the old-wife and *Kiðhús* appear. The thread of the narrative is a sequence of living pictures which are clear and readily comprehensible to the listener's mind: the old-wife spinning, the man beating on the hillock, the old-wife making the porridge, the pair of them on the ladder, even the brain-splashes and porridge-splashes may be visualised

in the mind's eye. The descriptions are very simple, the stories belong among people with primitive, lively imaginations; a thing only needs to be mentioned and the listener sees it before him. Opposites are brought up against each other and contend on the story's stage: the old-wife and *Kiðhús*, the husband and *Kiðhús*. The scenes that are produced by this means are often very memorable, and they are equally vivid whether the matter is supernatural or pure invention.

The story is a single logical whole; each scene has its purpose and nothing is superfluous. The principal themes appear clearly. Every folk-story is normally a single narrative entity, though it is far from unknown for two or more wonder-tales to be joined together, and more than one unrelated motif may well appear in the same folk-legend. In the long oral histories the framework may be a family or the career of an individual, which does not in itself make a complete whole (this is often the case in the Norwegian *ættesogor*).

Things are usually described in temporal and causal sequence, with no digressions and no references to earlier events interpolated. It is also counted a characteristic of oral stories that the narrative does not proceed on two fronts, but sticks close to the hero. This is in fact the most usual pattern, though we can find occasional examples in Icelandic stories of a two-stranded narrative, or where past events appear in dialogue in such a way as to appear as a story within a story rather than as part of a conversation.¹ It is highly likely that these deviations from the norm are due to the influence of literary narratives which were familiar to everyone in Iceland.

Personages in folk-stories are usually few and normally there is only one clear principal actor. It is impossible to decide which of the old couple is more important in the story of *Kiðhús*, and this is the case in other stories too which deal with husband and wife; sometimes it turns out in such stories that the man is the principal in name (and narration) but the woman is the principal in fact.

Two persons occupy the scene at a time, or else only one: the old man goes out hunting, so that the old woman can lose her spindle-whorl at leisure. *Kiðhús* is an invisible actor in this 'scene'. Then the couple come together, after which the man leaves his wife to go and

¹ Examples: *Hildur álfadrottning*, JÁ I 109, 114, 116; the story told by the troll-wife to the counsellor in some stepmother stories, JÁ II 359, 367; the story of *Geirlaug* and *Græðari*, JÁ II 379–83.

bang on Kiðhús's door. This is the predominant procedure in folk-stories, and when more than two people are 'on stage' at once, the extras are over-shadowed and they vanish from the narrative, or else a pair do the deeds of one, like the Haddings in *Hervarar saga*, and function as a single person. The interacting characters always appear as contrasts: they are presented as opposites in one way or another, either as direct enemies or with antithetical characteristics, big and little, good and evil, wise and foolish, so that each casts a light on the other.

Some numbers appear with greater frequency than others. The potent numbers, 3, 6, 9, 12 or 7, are particularly common; so is 5, and also multiples of all these. The husband goes three times to see Kiðhús: three is the commonest number of all, and one of the most typical marks of the folk-story.¹ It is almost always the case that when a series appears in a story, there will be emphasis on one particular step in the sequence. It is usually the last; for example, when there are three brothers, the youngest proves the best and a third attempt succeeds when the previous two have failed. But it can happen that the first member of a series is emphasised, as a form of distinction, as in Óðinn, Vili, Vé for instance. Olrik calls these phenomena *forvægt* 'initial emphasis' and *bagvægt* 'concluding emphasis.' In the Kiðhús story the greatest weight is laid on the last request, because the couple polish themselves off as a consequence of it.

The beginnings and ends of the stories are normally according to set conventions, as may be seen in our example. It begins in a calm unhurried manner with the description of the couple and their affairs, but it comes in no time to peculiar and exciting events. Nor does the story terminate abruptly with the end of the main narrative. At this point some quiet observations are introduced: the brain-splashes and porridge-splashes are still to be seen, the audience has a chance to calm down. Often wonder-tales end with a wedding or a general remark on the happiness of the hero and heroine in later life. A story often begins and ends with a set formula, which can often turn into a whole rigmarole, e.g. *Áttu börn og buru*, 'They had offspring and sons', and so on; see pp. 250–51, note 2. It is all meant to set the audience at ease.

We have now considered those rules governing the form of oral stories which Olrik describes in his book. They apply most closely to folk-stories, especially to wonder-tales. The closer the story comes to

¹ For examples of this, see JÁ² II 665–707.

reality, the farther it departs from them—or, alternatively, the farther it is from bearing the marks of having been current among the ‘folk’.

These rules apply more strictly to European folk-stories than to others. Jan de Vries, for example, has pointed out that stories from Asia and eastern countries or from primitive peoples are far more disparate and fragmented than European ones.¹ If we examine individual variants of wonder-tales, we find that they too are generally less perfect than people imagine the ‘genuine’ story should be. It is a point worth bearing in mind.

VI

The classification of oral stories and the description of individual types presented above depend on our knowledge of what has been current in European countries in recent centuries. It would be rash to make any dogmatic assumption that they are equally relevant to the folk-stories of any nation whatsoever and at any period. We have already observed that the stories of some non-European peoples have a different structure. We noted too that saints’ lives, *fabliaux* and *Novellen* existed as esteemed and popular works, whether written or oral, in the Middle Ages and Renaissance and subsequently had a considerable influence on folk-stories. Legends of saints naturally accompanied the northward spread of Christianity. *Fabliaux* and *Novellen* are closely connected with urban culture, and were not native to the early Germanic world; they belong rather to Mediterranean and eastern civilisation, among Greeks, Romans, Indians and Arabs, or else they came into being at later stages of historical development. There can be no doubt that humorous stories existed among the early Germanic peoples, but their nature was conditioned by the rural way of life.

At the time of the settlement of Iceland there were many stories in circulation, including myths, heroic legends and stories of Viking exploits. Around 1200 the first evidence of folk-stories becomes visible, and many stories of great events of the Saga Age must have been current, doubtless providing the first foundations of the Sagas of Icelanders. Associated with them would be stories based upon folk-belief and stories that accounted for place-names and other things—material that would be comparable to the folk-legends of later ages. Later on I shall

¹ Jan de Vries, *Die Märchen von klugen Rätsellösern*, 1928 (FFC 73), 408–10.

try to give a more detailed account of the interrelation of all these kinds of story.

Folk-legends may be regarded as either ancient or modern, according to one's point of view. Doubtless a great many individual stories are of recent origin, and in some types motifs and attitudes of mind have certainly been more or less modernised. Nevertheless, this kind of story is unquestionably one of the oldest in the northern world. Folk-belief has been hardy and slow to alter, and similar stories could grow from it in any and every age. Stories sprung from folk-belief are in consequence like a freshwater spring, the same well but always new water. In contrast the wonder-tales are more like a river which has rolled far from its source. It seems to me most likely that legends about revenants, trolls and place-names show the strongest connections with the earliest times in Iceland. Besides these, however, we may be sure that in Scandinavia there were once other stories that were similar in form to the extant Icelandic folk-legends and linked with various superstitions but are now for ever lost, though the odd motif from them may have found its way into surviving wonder-tales.

VII

The wonder-tales have a different history, and in order to grasp it, we must search for their existence in ancient sources. If these ancient sources show a narrative sequence and plot similar in many ways to those of the wonder-tales of our own time, then this is unquestionably worthy of note; the likeness may appear so close that it becomes possible to postulate a definite relationship between them. Sometimes this proves to be so on a cursory examination—the similarities are obvious—but at other times a closer investigation is called for. It is then necessary to be confident that our technical vocabulary is sufficiently precise and capable of sufficiently delicate nuances, for two stories can be similar in content but very different in intention and imagery and in the stage of their development. The name 'wonder-tale' (*ævintýri*) is used in this book of a particular kind of popular story of recent centuries, but we cannot be sure that these are entirely identical to ancient stories containing similar subject-matter. If the latter are to be considered in detail, several things have to be taken into account besides the narrative structure itself: the social plane of the story, for instance, and the degree of credence accorded to it. When

we come across similar subject-matter in an ancient and a modern source, it does not follow that the ancient story was regarded in the same way as the wonder-tales of the last three to four centuries. It is consequently unjustifiable to use the same term for both manifestations. To distinguish the two I shall refer to such narratives in ancient sources as 'archaic wonder-tales'. This may stand as a provisional label until it perhaps becomes possible to discern their true nature.

Egyptian civilisation is among the oldest known. Much has been preserved from its heyday, including superb works of art which after thousands of years still have the power to enchant. They must undoubtedly have possessed a great literature, but little of it is now preserved: inscriptions on stone, a few writings on papyrus, and a few of their old stories now extant in early versions in other languages. But among these we find stories which contain some of the same motifs as are known to us from stories of later times. Not just the motifs, but also the thread of the story may be similar, and then we can speak of 'archaic wonder-tales'. A full survey cannot of course be given here, but we may look at some conspicuous instances. (The accounts of stories from ancient civilisations that are given here are mostly derived from BP IV; references to English versions of them will be given below where possible.)

The most famous is the story of Anpu and Bata (sometimes transcribed Bitiu) in a papyrus dated to the thirteenth century BC.¹ It tells of two brothers. In the first part of the story we have the Joseph and Potiphar's wife motif: Anpu's wife tried to seduce Bata, failed and slandered him. Bata said that he would go to the Valley of Cedars and hide his heart in a flower on a certain tree. Anpu was to watch his beer; if it began to foam unduly, then someone had hewn down the tree, and the heart had fallen to the ground. Anpu was thereupon to go to the Valley of Cedars and search unceasingly until he found the heart, which he was then to place in a bowl of clean water. Bata would then return to life and take vengeance on the person who had done him injury.

The second part tells of the wife whom the gods gave to Bata. She was very beautiful, but not without flaw. Once she lost a lock of her hair in the sea, and it floated all the way to Egypt; it gave off a sweet odour and was brought to the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh wanted to wed the woman from whom the lock of hair came, and sent men to search

¹ Translated in William Flinders Petrie, *Egyptian Tales, Second Series*, 1895, 36–65.

her out and bring her to him. She was willing to go, and she had the cedar tree hewn down (which meant the death of Bata), and accepted the Pharaoh's embraces. Then Anpu went to the Valley of Cedars and brought his brother back to life; Bata took on various guises and finally accomplished his revenge.

The second part of the story, Bata's vengeance on the woman who betrayed him, corresponds to a story still to be found in Russia and Central Europe. The names in this story are those of Egyptian gods, and various incidents are thought to have parallels in Egyptian myths.

There is another Egyptian story from about the same period which looks in every respect like a wonder-tale.¹ It tells of the prince at whose birth it was prophesied by the seven Hathors that he would die because of a dog or a crocodile or a snake. Later he wins the king of Naharana's daughter by climbing up to her window, a hundred feet above the ground, and finally we are told how his wife kills the snake. It seems that the crocodile will not be fatal to him, either, but there the papyrus breaks off. We may guess that his death was ultimately caused unintentionally by his dog.

The Hathors in the story correspond to fairies or sibyls in later times, and the climbing feat of the prince is also well known in later stories. The story of Qrvar-Oddr and his horse looks like a very remote echo of this story.²

I would like to mention a few more examples from Egyptian sources. We have here a host of stories of magic and magicians; for many of the motifs in these stories we find welcome parallels in the Old Testament. There are also traces of animal stories. Of particular importance for the study of folk-stories of later times is the story Truth and Falsehood (AT 613), found in a papyrus of the thirteenth to twelfth century BC. The Norwegian scholar, Reidar Th. Christiansen, made a study of this type before the Egyptian version came to light and at a time when the oldest known variants were from India. The Indian traditions tempted him, naturally, to think of the East as the origin of this type, but the discovery of the Egyptian variant should prompt us to caution in the future.³

¹ 'The Doomed Prince', Translated in William Flinders Petrie, *Egyptian Tales, Second Series*, 1895, 13–27.

² *Qrvar-Odds saga*, ed. R. C. Boer (1888), 14–17 and 194.

³ Reidar Th. Christiansen, *The Tale of the Two Travellers or the Blinded Man*, 1916 (FFC 24).

I would also like to mention a papyrus fragment whose content is also dated to the thirteenth century BC. Here we read about a king of Lower Egypt who sends messengers to his colleague in the south, complaining that the hippopotamuses in the latter's pool disturb him during the night. The king of Upper Egypt consults his ministers. There the manuscript breaks off, leaving the reader tantalised, but I am inclined to think that we are dealing with a story similar to that of Haikar the Wise in *A Thousand and One Nights* (AT 922B, Achicar), the oldest version of which otherwise is an Aramaic translation found in Egypt, written about 420 BC, which has an Assyrian bias. Finally I may mention a humorous story, the story of the Master Thief (AT 950), preserved in Greek translation by Herodotus; it is a well-known migratory story in Scandinavia.

In Babylonian literature we have stories of gods and heroes. The most famous of the heroic is the Epic of Gilgamesh, which contains a number of motifs found in stories of later times. They include the two fosterbrothers, Gilgamesh and the wild man Enkidu, their fight with a fire-breathing monster, a bull in the sky and so on. Some motifs or episodes in other epic poems remind one of details in later stories. From the Epic of Etana, for example, who was carried to heaven by an eagle, we have a mutilated version with parallels in East European and Finnish folk-stories. From Babylon we have also traces of animal stories and other motifs.¹

In ancient Hebrew literature we come across many religious or narrative motifs that are of interest in the present study. A complete story (AT 507) corresponding to one of our wonder-tales is provided by the Book of Tobit. Later we meet a great many exempla and other stories built on folk-story motifs.

With their poetic and artistic genius, the Greeks created a host of stories about their gods and heroes. Some supernatural elements naturally always feature in stories of gods, but a comparison of Greek hero-stories with those of the Germanic peoples shows that the former have much more supernatural matter in them than the latter. Now, for a long time the Greeks believed in their stories of heroes as much as they did in those of the gods, and some of the heroes enjoyed a cult. No wonder therefore, that the Greeks could use the same word, *mythos*, for both categories of story.

¹ See *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, tr. Andrew George, 1999.

If we compare the subject-matter of Greek myths with the wonder-tales of later times, we find plenty of identical motifs in them, and every now and then we meet whole stories in the myths that are more or less the same as in later stories. Thus the myth of Perseus reminds us strongly of AT 300, 'The Dragon Slayer', and there is not much doubt that our wonder-tale descends in some way or other from the myth. This and some of the following examples from Greek sources may well arouse the suspicion that what we have named 'archaic wonder-tales' are in reality identical with narratives we now call 'myths'.

The same seems to be the case with the myth of the Argonauts when compared with AT 513–14. Those are two outstanding and famous examples; others may easily be found. If the story of Bellerophon in Book 6 of the *Iliad* had been known in Iceland and got into oral tradition, nobody would have been able to distinguish it from other Icelandic wonder-tales. Such a notion is of course only a flight of fancy, since only educated people in Iceland could get to know the Greek story. That a hero is required to perform difficult tasks imposed on him is a common motif in Greek hero-stories. The labours of Hercules are probably the best known. Stories of this kind are also very common in Icelandic romance sagas (*lygisögur*) and oral stories (especially in types of the latter that appear to be ancient), and it would not be difficult to point out intermediary versions. In the *Odyssey* we meet the humorous story of the giant Polyphemus, which spread and is known everywhere in later times. There are Greek versions of the silly wish motif (cf. the story of *Kiðhús*, pp. 26–28 above). The myth of the death of Pan, told by Plutarch, is found as a folk-legend in various countries in later times (Stith Thompson F442.1). Animal stories are also found in plenty (cf. Aesop's *Fables*). All this material comes from before the birth of Christ. In the second century AD, however, we find Apuleius basing his *Golden Ass* on Greek writings, and telling the story of Cupid and Psyche—which in turn became a well-known and widespread wonder-tale (AT 425).

India has often been called the classic home of the wonder-tale, for there such stories have flourished as in a primeval jungle. Everything is found there higgledy-piggledy: myths, heroic legends, stories of holy men, humorous stories, fables (often animal ones) and wonder-tales. Some of the Indian stories are of great antiquity. The story of *Urvasī* and *Purū-ravas*, the swan-maiden and the man who wins her, is already in the *Rig-Veda*, and is subsequently told in many other

works. The story is closely related to a widespread wonder-tale (AT 400), and the swan-maiden motif is found in *Völundarkviða* as well as far and wide elsewhere. The great verse collections, *Mahā-bhārata* and *Rāmāyana*, contain various wonder-tale items, as do also the accounts of sacred Buddha, especially the Jatakas, the stories of his former incarnations. Finally there are the collections of fables, some of which have stories akin to Icelandic folk-stories. The oldest and most interesting of them is the *Pantschatantra*, compiled at some time within the great span of 300 BC to AD 550. The greater part of this collection consists of exempla, chiefly animal fables, intended to teach wisdom and prudence. It was very popular, and was translated and retranslated, first into Persian, then Syriac and Arabic, and later into numerous European languages. There is an Icelandic version possibly made around 1600, which is extant in a number of manuscripts.¹ But stories similar to wonder-tales are more numerous in other Indian books, such as Somadeva's *Kathā Sarit Sāgara* (*The Ocean of Story*), the *Veāla-panchavinsatī* and the *Suka-saptatī*. It can be seen that these works had their sources in certain important collections of folk-stories from the first millennium AD. It is not possible to give a more detailed account of them here, but these works are conglomerates of such complexity that one cannot classify their contents in the same way as the folk-stories of Europe.

The Persians, and later the Muslims, followed the Indian practice of writing works of ethical and entertaining content. The first were translations, the *Kalila va Dimna* (of the *Pantschatantra*) and the *Tutinameh* (of the *Suka-saptatī*), along with the *Seven Sages* (a work later translated into Latin and several other European languages; in Iceland *rímur* were composed from it by Björn Sturluson c.1600). Finally, there is *The Thousand and One Nights*, one of the world's most famous collections of stories. Its kernel is a translation from the Persian (probably based on an Indian original), but a whole host of stories was added to it later, first in Baghdad and then in Egypt, so that as it stands it is a massive and diverse work. It was not translated into any European language until c.1700, but after that it spread rapidly all over the world, and has had some influence on folk-stories collected in the nineteenth century.

¹ Lbs. 549 4to, JS 86 4to, AM 94 8vo.

Extensive legends and many ancient and fascinating beliefs have survived among the Celts. Little of all this has been recorded except in the British Isles among the Welsh and Irish; the quantity of stories in Ireland is especially great and their contents often archaic. Christianity and continental contacts led to considerable foreign influence on them, but in medieval Irish manuscripts there are stories with substantial remnants of ancient beliefs and customs. Numerous peculiar motifs have been preserved in them, many of which also appear in later sources. Some of them reached Iceland and helped to add a particular atmosphere to the older wonder-tales of the Icelanders (see Part IV, especially pp. 231–32). As time passed, new stories grew out of the old ones. In these imagination was given freer rein and they appear as types of prose romance, much of whose material has been preserved in oral tradition in Irish stories of the last two centuries.

Finally, we should note that late in the twelfth century Abbot Karl Jónsson and his fellow Benedictine, Oddr Snorrason, explicitly testify to the existence of ‘stepmother stories’ in Iceland. From the centuries before and after that time there is also ample European evidence of the existence of some kind of wonder-tale, first and foremost in various clerical writings, collections of exempla, sermons and saints’ lives, but also in ribald poetry and secular anecdote (especially at a later date); and they can even be found in the courtly romances. There is therefore no doubt that wonder-tales (*ævintýri*) must have existed in great quantity in western Europe at that time.

VIII

Next we must examine what evidence ancient and medieval sources provide on the history of folk-stories in former ages. The first scholars to undertake this were the brothers Grimm at the beginning of the nineteenth century. At that time the evidence to be found in the literature of ancient Egypt and Babylon was buried in the sand or else undeciphered, and many things were less well known than now. Even so, there was much material that demanded a scholarly explanation. The same stories were found among peoples living far distant from each other, reshaped according to the local conditions and culture of each nation, but visibly sprung from the same root—in short, the same stories.

One might say that the explanation that was offered was already in the atmosphere of the age. It was in precise accord with the discover-

ies made at that time by the brothers Grimm, among others, of the kinship of many European and Asian languages.

Earlier, various expedients had been tried to explain the origins of words, e.g. by deriving them all by hook or by crook from Hebrew. Now it was noticed that the same words were found in several languages with only such differences as could be explained by regular rules, such as the so-called Germanic sound-shift (which led to correspondences between Latin and English words such as *pater* : *father*, *cornu* : *horn*, *piscis* : *fish*, *tu* : *thou*, and so on). It was also discovered that these languages have the same grammatical structure. This was to be explained not as the influence of one language on another, but as a result of their kinship: they are all descended from the same root-language, and they branched off from each other as the nations scattered over the earth. They were called the Aryan or Indo-European family of languages.

The Grimms worked out a similar explanation of the spread of folk-stories. They noticed that they were commonest among the Indo-European peoples—of course, it was among these peoples that they were first collected. From this arose the so-called Aryan hypothesis, propounding that the wonder-tales which are now universal common property were the heritage of the Indo-European nations, and belonged to them in origin. Even if examples of them could be found among other races, they came to them at second hand.

Common to all the Märchen are the remnants of a belief going back to the earliest times which expresses itself in figurative representation of immaterial things. These mythical concepts are like fragments of gems lying scattered on the grass and flower-covered earth, which can only be discovered by a sharp-sighted eye. Their meaning is long since forgotten, but it can still be perceived, and it gives the Märchen substance while at the same time satisfying the natural desire for the marvellous; they are never the mere play of empty fantasy. The mythical stretches further back the further we go back in time, indeed it seems to have formed the only content of the earliest literature.¹

A deep feeling for the poetic content of folk-stories appears in all that the Grimms wrote about them, but, on the other hand, the dangers inherent in the Aryan hypothesis are not much in evidence in their work. Those dangers become all the more noticeable in the work of later scholars who followed the Grimms' lead. Elaborate efforts were made to explain all myths in terms of natural phenomena, and, since

¹ J. and W. Grimm, *Kinder und Hausmärchen*, 3rd edn, 1856, III, 'Literatur', 409.

wonder-tales were thought of as descended from myths, they had to reflect natural phenomena as well. It is hardly necessary to point out that the methods used to demonstrate this were not at all dissimilar from those used earlier to derive Icelandic or French words, say, from Hebrew. As an example of this form of 'scholarship' we may take the explanation of the story of Little Red Riding Hood:

The red hood is the colour of dawn, and Red Riding Hood is the breaking day. The bread and butter she is carrying were perhaps brought as offerings. The grandmother is the dawn of yesterday. The wolf is either the burning sun or the clouds and night.

While all this was going on, a new voice was heard. In 1859 Theodor Benfey brought out a German translation of the *Pantschatantra*, with an introduction in a separate large volume that was longer than the work itself. There he charted its passage westwards, and examined other similar works of Asian provenance such as the *Seven Sages* and *The Thousand and One Nights* and traced their transmission to the West. He reckoned that these and similar works were largely responsible for the movement of Oriental folk-stories to the West and their diffusion there. Though Benfey made much of the literary transmission of the stories, he also thought that they had been carried orally from country to country. Thus he pointed out that the Tartars would provide links between Asia and Russia. Benfey's hypothesis has been called the Indian hypothesis. His principal contention is that folk-stories are transmitted from one country to another, with great emphasis placed on the part played by books in the process, and finally that India was the cradle of the folk-story.

This last point was bolstered by many arguments. The ancient Indian collections contained a great mass of folk-stories, and the oldest variants of numerous stories were found among them. The Indian stories were rich in imaginative power, varied and splendid in form. It also appeared most probable that they had grown out of the culture and religion of the people. Benfey maintained that they had originated among Buddhists. His primary argument for this was the great quantity of these stories in the Buddhist scriptures, which spread in all directions in translation: east to China, Tibet and Mongolia and then westwards. The stories were for religious use, for instruction and edification. Benfey thought that they were mostly inspired by Buddhist ideals and shaped by Buddhist thought, and that although various

marvels, belief in magical objects and other features, pointed to the East in a general way, other things pointed specifically to Buddhist origins, such as the evident love of animals and the belief that they were possessed of human intelligence, and stories of spells and shape-shifting, all of which were rooted in such Buddhist notions as the transmigration of souls.

It is generally agreed that the *Pantschatantra* is the oldest Indian collection of wonder-tales, and Benfey thought that it was originally compiled by a Buddhist. Later researches, based on better texts than Benfey had at his disposal, show that this is not so, but that the author was a Vishnu-worshipper. Not much account is taken nowadays of his theory of Buddhist origin, however Indian these wonder-tales may otherwise be.

This was not the only objection to Benfey's hypothesis. He had maintained that the Indian animal fables were descended from Greek fables (Aesop's and others), which were found in older sources. Benfey did not deny that other people besides Indians had had their fantastic stories, and that wonder-tales were descended from them, but he held that Indian wonder-tales had so excelled preceding ones that they had superseded them and swallowed them up. He said he only knew of one story of wonder-tale kind that was certainly of Western origin, the story of Midas and his ass's ears. But the stories of Eros and Psyche and the story of Tobit must certainly be added, as well as Egyptian and Babylonian stories which were not known in Benfey's time.

Benfey considered that folk-stories known in western Europe had not reached the region much before the Middle Ages and then as translations of Oriental originals; anything that had appeared before the tenth century, however had come by oral transmission. Little regard was paid to Benfey's cautious approach and his disciples generally assumed that transmission occurred after about AD 1000, and then mostly by literary means. Joseph Bédier opposed this view in *Les fabliaux* (1898). He showed that the translations of Oriental books came too late to provide the originals of French *fabliaux*, and maintained that as many arguments could be adduced to show that the stories were of Western origin and had been transmitted eastwards, as for the opposite view. Such stories, he thought, could originate anywhere at all.

If one looks at the Icelandic evidence, one may learn to be circumspect in approaching the problem of the age of folk-stories in western

Europe. I shall come back to this topic. The same Icelandic evidence should also deter one from believing too firmly in literary influence from India in the period before AD 1000.

British anthropologists led the opposition to Benfey's theories that the beliefs or superstitions of the wonder-tale were peculiarly Indian. In the van were Andrew Lang and E. B. Tylor, who were specialists in the culture of primitive peoples, history of religions and folklore. In their view, anthropological research demonstrated that the way of thought of primitive people all over the world was very similar and that their principal ideas were all pretty much the same. They described and accounted for the characteristic outlook of primitive people as animism, which sees everything in nature as possessed of a life-force. From this, they maintained, came every idea about magical objects, spirits and taboos, the psyche and its life, spells and witchcraft. They pointed out that there are numerous elements in wonder-tales that are explained by reference to popular beliefs, the beliefs of peoples ancient and uncivilised. All these elements in the content of the stories which Benfey thought of as particularly Buddhist were, in fact, known all over the world. Transmigration of souls is known in popular belief far more widely than just in India. Moreover, there are other elements that cannot be understood at all unless the Buddhist explanation is abandoned.

Anthropologists have been of inestimable service to folk-story study by their researches into remnants of ancient beliefs in wonder-tales. They have demonstrated that many kinds of strange marvels and exaggerations, which at first sight appear to be the work of the caprice of a fertile imagination, are in reality a kind of fossil, memories of ancient belief and custom that are themselves now no longer understood by the story-tellers. The contribution of anthropologists to the discussion of the home of wonder-tales was to establish that the ground of ancient belief from which they sprang was everywhere. They argued that they could have sprung from this ground anywhere in the world, so that the same story could have originated independently in more places than one.

In the twentieth century Scandinavian scholars, Axel Olrik prominent among them, have made a great contribution to the study of the evolution of folk-stories. Finnish scholars have led the way and others have learned much from their methods and results. The pioneers of

the Finnish school were Kaarle Krohn and Antti Aarne. The latter's work on methodology, *Leitfaden der vergleichenden Märchenforschung*, 1913 (*FFC* 13), is a classic of its kind.

The Finns denied the doctrine of the Grimms that wonder-tales were the especial property of the Indo-European race. How could they be when they were found among so many other peoples? They agreed with Benfey inasmuch as they firmly believed that folk-stories had travelled between nations. On the other hand they set far less store by literary transmission than Benfey and his followers. They pointed out that oral folk-stories often stand quite apart and differ from written versions, even when the oral versions are found in places far apart from each other. From this they drew two conclusions: that written versions had little impact on oral ones, and that folk-stories told at the present time will often be more original in content than the stories available even in ancient written sources.

They objected to the anthropologists' theory of the simultaneous origin of stories in different places, and pointed out that they did not distinguish clearly enough between a motif and a complete story. An individual motif may indeed originate independently in several places as a result of common belief or circumstances, but it is out of the question that a complete story, composed of several characteristic motifs in a specific sequence, should come into being in several places. On the other hand, these long stories were doubtless put together rather late in time, and the archaic religious concepts reflected in them must have been derived from ancient ideas and customs with which the folk-story authors themselves can hardly have had any real engagement. For the rest, it is only by investigation of each individual story that its age and origin can be determined. There may be some difference between the abilities of peoples to create such stories—while the Hindus clearly had an exceptional capacity to do so, they had no monopoly of the gift, for it is easy to point to folk-stories not known in India.

Finnish scholars called their method historical and geographical, and thought that an exact and methodical examination of all known variants of any story from its earliest appearance would enable them to determine its first form, its country of origin and the paths of its migration. I have no doubt that they were following a trail which leads to a greater body of evidence than it was possible to find by earlier methods. Sometimes they may really have come upon the true answer,

but I think that their results must often be counted dubious, primarily because of our ignorance of earlier sources. They assume that the original version of a story would have been a logical and consistent whole, but the truth is that it is quite uncertain whether one may trust this assumption. A good narrative thread may only emerge after a long period of retelling. I honestly admit that to my mind the origin and transmission of many folk-stories will remain for ever an unsolved mystery.

As time went by the number of supporters of the Aryan theory grew smaller. On the other hand, the other three theories gained ground, usually with scholars trying to pick the best out of each one. Overall, however, the Finnish school gained most adherents, and their methods spread and improved the work of others. People learned to take a firmer grip on the material, differentiated more clearly between a motif and a story (composed of several motifs), and learned to define each single story, each species—to use a term from natural history—much better, and to differentiate it from related species.

All this came to the aid of the Swedish folklorist Carl von Sydow, who revived the Aryan doctrine in a revised form. His arguments appeared in his articles 'Folksagan såsom indoeuropeisk tradition' and 'Folksagoforskningen'.¹

Von Sydow tried first of all to dispose of the Grimms' theory that the wonder-tales are descended from divine and heroic myths which have decayed and lost their ancient splendour. He maintained, on the contrary, that heroic myths may commonly be seen to have been affected by wonder-tales. He thought this was evident in many of the Greek heroic legends, and from that it was a straightforward deduction that wonder-tales must have been common among the Greeks around 1000 BC—and many of them the same as those still in circulation in Europe today.

Von Sydow does not really dispute much else in the old doctrine of the Grimms, but he tries to tidy it up in various ways and brings forward new arguments. He makes use of the classification of stories already made and develops it further. He thought that animal stories, many of which are exempla, and comic stories could have travelled between countries (if conditions were favourable), since they are easily remembered and could be made to feel at home in a number of

¹ *AfnF* XLII (1926), 1–19; *Folkminnen och folktankar* XIV (1927), 105–37.

places with only minor adjustment. But it is another matter with the longer stories, the real wonder-tales, which are more complex and harder to remember. Von Sydow did not wish to deny the migration of such stories entirely (for this would not be easy, as will presently appear), but he placed more emphasis on the other argument of the Grimms, that these stories are an ancient heritage which was originally the exclusive property of the Indo-European peoples.

Von Sydow says that research has shown that wonder-tales, long stories of supernatural content, are to be found among all the Indo-European nations, and that the same stories are usually found among many or all of them. Sometimes these stories may also be found among other peoples, but this can easily be explained by transmission from a neighbouring Indo-European nation. On the other hand he thinks that other races may well have had different kinds of narrative treasures—for instance the Semitic nations, among whom quite long *Novellen* were common, though with much less marvellous matter and with looser narrative threads than in the Indo-European wonder-tales, which are often superbly constructed. Stories illustrating wisdom and perspicuity (as in the judgments of Solomon) have been common among Semitic peoples since the earliest times, as have pure exempla. Of course any race may have received stories from another, but wonder-tales are the most outstanding type among Indo-European oral stories, while *Novellen* are the outstanding type among those of the Semitic peoples. And when works such as *The Thousand and One Nights*, which contain many wonder-tales, turn up in Semitic literature, then he suggests that they may be derived from the Persians.

On the age of the wonder-tales von Sydow has similar opinions to those of the Grimms. He does admit that it is wrong to regard them all as of equal age, but he thinks that the bulk of the stories most commonly found, and the genre as a whole, are very old indeed, from the time when the Indo-European peoples inhabited a smaller area than they have subsequently. He hints at the Bronze Age or even the Neolithic. He considers the great majority of wonder-tales to be the ancient heritage of these nations, which survived among them and spread with their migrations.

The arguments in favour of such great age depend on the ancient Indian sources, the Greek heroic legends, which in von Sydow's view drew heavily on wonder-tales, and the Egyptian story of Anpu and

Bata. Indo-European origin would thus have to be imputed to this last, which according to von Sydow was brought to Egypt by foreign mercenaries or merchants.

Von Sydow expounds his thesis skilfully, but nearly every point he uses to buttress it is open to a different interpretation. When he propounds such a far-reaching theory, and one so contrary to the views of most contemporary scholars, readers would have liked him to provide more detailed support for them from his extensive knowledge of folk-story and legend. We would have liked fuller evidence to back the assertion that wonder-tales did not travel between unrelated nations, and a much closer examination of the oldest variants of wonder-tales, especially of their position in relation to myths and heroic legends. In connection with the problem of the dissemination of stories among nations, it must be counted strange that von Sydow considers that the story of Anpu and Bata, which has sometimes been called the oldest wonder-tale, must have been brought to Egypt from Indo-European sources. The fact is that among the Indo-European stories, the Egyptian specimen looks very much like an intruder, and scholars long ago pointed out its particular links with Egyptian myths. Moreover this story is far from being the only ancient story known from an early civilisation which has a parallel in some form among the wonder-tales of Indo-European peoples of later times. The situation appears similar in the case of some Babylonian stories, many of which can be traced back to the Sumerians, a people who are thought to be as unrelated to the Egyptians as to the Indo-Europeans. The Greek myths are closely related to Greek religious practice, but much of that is in turn related to the pantheon of peoples beyond the Aegean and the Bosphorus.

Now it is difficult to understand why folk-stories which it is acknowledged sometimes travelled from one country to another, should not have done so consistently, and it is hard to accept that the world's earliest recorded wonder-tale should be found, not in the country of its origin, but in a distant land to which it had been taken by some traveller. As for the age of the wonder-tales, we cannot *a priori* be sure that it was they that influenced myths of gods and heroes; it could just as well be the other way round. But more of that later.

Thus I cannot accept that von Sydow has succeeded in proving his Aryan theory. On the other hand, his ideas about 'ecotypes' are worthy of note, for when a story is preserved for a long time in one particular

country it must inevitably be influenced by the religion and outlook of the people, and by their songs and other stories, whether oral or written.

It may finally be said that the claim that there are essential differences between the stories of the Indo-Europeans and those of other races is far from adequately supported. Is there not ample supernatural matter in the myths and stories of magicians from Egypt? And the same is true of Babylonian myths and heroic legends. Skilful workmanship could turn the Gilgamesh epic into a wonder-tale. Moreover, Indo-European languages are now spoken in many countries where people speaking other tongues used to live, and it is hard to tell whether the oldest surviving narratives in such places originated with the indigenous population or with the invaders. It is also difficult to imagine that the armies which spread Indo-European languages over the earth would remember their *fabliaux* better than the religious stories in which they believed. Yet anyone who goes hunting after Pan-Aryan myths has little to work on. By contrast, the religious stories of the Greeks contain not a few elements that are closely related to those found among the non-Aryan peoples of western Asia.

Before I conclude this summary survey of scholarly opinion, I must mention a book by a German folklorist, Albert Wesselski, *Versuch einer Theorie des Märchens*, 1931. Wesselski was an exceptionally widely-read man and especially skilful at exhuming variants from sources ancient and medieval, European and exotic. It seems to me that he hardly touched a subject without illuminating it in some way. He was, however, extremely sceptical of the notion of oral narrative. 'The "folk" does not create' was his motto, 'it receives and reshapes.' He did not completely deny that stories can be preserved and transmitted orally, but he underrated by far too much this factor in the survival and dissemination of stories. In consequence scholars who have lived where oral tradition has flourished may have tended to overlook the merits of his work. Like most modern scholars in the field, he laid great stress on differentiating the multifarious classes of narrative and attempting to understand the nature of each individual one, and relied there on the observations of Naumann and Jolles.¹ Here we need only

¹Hans Naumann, *Primitive Gemeinschaftskultur. Beiträge zur Volkskunde und mythologie*, 1921; *Grundzüge der deutschen Volkskunde*, 1929; André Jolles, *Einfache Formen*, 1930.

examine his conclusions about wonder-tales. He regards them as fictitious stories, i.e. stories that no one believes, told only for amusement; but they are descended from stories which were once matters of faith, from myths of gods and legends of heroes and from other stories which everybody believed to be true. Wonder-tales then came into existence just in the period when people were ceasing to take them seriously. The Hindus really have no wonder-tales—they believe their tall stories. Nor did the Greeks and Romans possess any wonder-tales as we understand the term. This may seem a somewhat perverse conclusion, but it seems to me to contain a large element of truth and may well lead to an improved understanding of the history of wonder-tales. I shall discuss it a little further in Part IV. There are several other matters in Wesselski's book which, though he doubtless thought them important, do not seem to warrant discussion here.

In the foregoing pages I have examined various theories about the origins of wonder-tales. The scholars I have mentioned were not the only ones who have done sterling work in the field. These others were men of their times, but they put their main effort into the collection of sources and analogues. I have already mentioned the emphasis the brothers Grimm laid on finding old or new variants of this and that story. This search has continued to the present day, and the work of collection has borne much fruit. Even in countries where collection started very late the result has sometimes been astounding. I need only mention the example of Ireland, where since 1920 an immense harvest of stories has been garnered by Séamus Ó Duilearga (J. H. Delargy). Also, as time passed, recording of oral stories became more accurate. Here it is not possible to go deeper into this matter, or to rehearse the names of the very many great collectors. The time was ripe, however, for the foundation of institutions to organise the work of collecting and the archival preservation of the material, as well as to support research on it.

In Benfey's day the investigation of ancient sources, both eastern and western, became a matter of lively concern and a great deal of material was gradually made available. Highly valuable helps to study were published, one example of which may be mentioned here. The Danish scholar, H. F. Feilberg, compiled a dictionary of the Jutland dialect (*Ordbog over det jyske almuesmål* I–IV, 1886–1914). Because he was immensely widely read and extremely energetic, he gathered

such a mass of material into his four volumes that it became a veritable cornucopia of folklore. On his death Feilberg left a huge collection of material on slips. This has unfortunately never been printed, though many later scholars, including Stith Thompson, have had great benefit from it.

Inevitably, the *Anmerkungen* of the brothers Grimm were expanded and became one of the most solid and useful source-books in the field of wonder-tale research. Two scholars, Johannes Bolte and Georg Polívka, compiled an index of all variants and analogues of the Grimm stories, which was published in five massive volumes (*Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- u. Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*, 1913–32; = BP). The last two volumes contain a survey of folk-story collection and research in various countries, for which material was contributed by a number of other scholars. The value of this compilation cannot be overestimated.

We now return to the 'Finnish school'. It was mentioned earlier that Antti Aarne wrote on the methodology of folk-story research. He also produced a survey of folk-stories old and new among various nations, and there listed both earlier and more recent collections (*Leitfaden der vergleichenden Märchenforschung*, 1913 (FFC 13); *Übersicht der Märchenliteratur*, 1914 (FFC 14)). He also compiled an index of the principal types of folk-story, based largely on European material (*Verzeichnis der Märchentypen*, 1910 (FFC 3)). Finally he and K. Krohn made numerous investigations in which they demonstrated how a mass of folk-story variants could be studied so as to provide a fairly comprehensive overall view of them (K. Krohn, *Die folkloristische Arbeitsmethode*, 1926). These studies were mostly published in the *Folklore Fellows Communications* (FFC), a Finnish series that has since become a depository for the work of numerous scholars. Particular mention may be made of the indexes published there of types of stories in individual countries along with enumerations of variants; and also of the monographs on individual stories in which all known variants, wherever they might be found, are registered and examined.

In any work on Icelandic folk-stories it is especially necessary to draw attention to Reidar Th. Christiansen's *Norske eventyr, en systematisk fortegnelse*, 1921; Örnulf Hodne, *The Types of the Norwegian Folktale*, 1984; and Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Verzeichnis isländischer Märchenvarianten*, 1929 (FFC 83; hereafter *Verz.*). The most weighty

works in the *FFC* series, however, are the great motif-indexes, Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *Types of the Folktale*, 1928 (*FFC* 74; revised and enlarged edition 1961, *FFC* 184; AT) and the latter's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, 1932–36 (*FFC* 106–09, 116–17; revised and enlarged edition in 6 vols, 1955–58). Another work by Stith Thompson which ought to be mentioned, though it is not otherwise referred to in this book, is *The Folktale*, 1951. We also have a *Motif Index of Early Irish Literature* by T. P. Cross, 1952, and a *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature* by Inger Boberg, 1966 (*BA* XXVII). The latter was unfortunately published posthumously without the additions and final revision which would have added much to its value.

On the relationship of Icelandic folk-stories to Scandinavian and Irish ones, one should note especially BP V, which has a good survey of the Scandinavian material, and also Reidar Th. Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends. A proposed list of types with a systematic catalogue of the Norwegian variants*, 1958 (*FFC* 175), and *Studies in Irish and Scandinavian Folk-tales*, 1959; Seán Ó Súilleabháin and Reidar Th. Christiansen, *The Types of the Irish Folktale*, 1967 (*FFC* 188); Alan Bruford, *Gaelic Folkstories and Romances (Béaloides 34)*, 1966; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Celtic Elements in Icelandic Tradition (Béaloides 25)*, 1957) and *Löng er för*, 1975; *Íslensk þjóðmenning* V and VI, 1988 and 1989; Waldemar Liungman, *Das wahrscheinliche Alter des Folksmärchens in Schweden*, 1955 (*FFC* 156).

IX

The layman may have little interest in the above survey of scholarly opinion, and may feel that one scholar proclaims this and another that, and a solution is no nearer in the end. I am, however, confident that a number of things can be learned from the discussion, and I should like to offer a brief appraisal of what seems to me to be the outcome.

No objection, it seems, can possibly be raised against the assertion that in favourable conditions wonder-tales migrate from country to country (the same is true of certain folk-legends). All attempts to prove the opposite have failed. This migration of stories is no singular thing. Many elements of human culture spiritual and practical have spread through the world in the same way, including religious notions and even such customs and habits as are usually counted firm fixtures in

the folklore of a particular society.¹ Difference of language is no barrier to such migration.

It is not necessary to describe the migration of stories more closely. The better the intercourse between nations, the easier it becomes, easiest of all when people move between countries and stay abroad for long periods, though this is not an essential pre-condition. It is worth observing that in cultural exchanges a more highly developed nation is generally the donor, and is looked up to with respect. It is easy to find examples of such connections in nearly every cultural sphere. One may not, of course, believe every instance blindly, but to ignore them completely can have grievous consequences.

There is a by no means unbridgeable gulf between written stories and oral folk-stories. If the written story is well adapted for it, it can easily enter the oral repertoire, and there are many examples of this happening. I once attempted to see how this applied to Icelandic folk-stories. I found that *fabliaux* and stories of religious import seemed to show most traces of literary influence. The romantic *Novelle* came next in this respect, while literary influence was much less noticeable in the more fantastic wonder-tales, though even there the examples were far from few. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the stories spread through the country in manuscript or printed form. It may be that the common people of Iceland were in former times more literate than those of other countries, though many think that the transition from literary form to oral version was also pretty frequent abroad.²

It repeatedly happens that a story which is noted down from a contemporary story-teller turns up in a written source hundreds and even thousands of years old. Many folklorists have consequently been tempted to assume a very great age for these stories generally, and to go on as if time did not exist. Some refer to the stories as if they have been preserved unaltered from remote antiquity, and consider them forthwith as more informative sources about an early period than any other surviving evidence. But if this were true it would mean that the stories were quite unlike anything else in the human world, where

¹ See Waldemar Liungman, *Traditionswanderungen Euphrat-Rhein*, 1937 (FFC 118–19).

² See for example Jan de Vries, *Die Märchen von klugen Rätsellösern*, 1928 (FFC 73), 426–27.

everything is subject to change—emergence, maturity and decay. New things grow up at the expense of the old; evolution means that one physical organ or one species develops and another atrophies, and the gain is greater than the loss. Who would now suspect that our ferns and horsetails were great forest-trees in the Devonian period? In the same way ancient kinds of story shrink or disappear as new kinds grow. What is old must receive new blood or undergo a transformation if it is to live; unchanged, it will not survive.

While the doctrine of evolution was at the height of its popularity many traced everything automatically from the primitive to the sophisticated—but forgot the process of decay. If two related stories existed, the less elaborate version was regarded as older and belonging to a less advanced culture. This is doubtless often so, but it works perhaps as often the other way. The religious stories began among the best-educated class of the Middle Ages, and spread from them to the common folk. The ballads were originally composed for the nobility, but later became popular songs. It is common to find the fruits of upper-class culture later transferred to the lower classes, often after the upper echelons have begun to follow a new fashion. It is similarly common (as I said earlier) to find that stories, like other things, are transferred from a more advanced culture to one lower down the scale. In both instances it is likely that the stories will be changed to suit the recipients' cultural circumstances. There is even nothing to stop a story, created in an environment of high culture and bearing the marks of that origin, being transferred into a more ordinary milieu by someone who himself belongs to the superior culture, whether a more advanced nation or a more highly cultivated class.

I have already intimated that the popular religious folk-stories of latter-day Europe are descended from the clergy, the upper class in the Christian world of the Middle Ages. Some of these stories are admittedly older, and many are of Eastern origin, but they bear the marks of genesis among a people with a high culture. We saw too that many of the *fabliaux* and *Novellen* were probably born in an urban culture, but their ages vary considerably.

A fact to be stated at the outset is that the more fanciful wonder-tales of the present-day peoples of western Europe are fictional. Everyone knows that they are made up, and no one believes the wonders they describe. They are intended to entertain and amuse, and because

they are blatant fictions they are not rated as highly as stories where the issue hangs on a matter of folk-belief. The humorous stories and *Novellen* get audiences everywhere because they are either funny or exciting. Poets take material from them or retell them. The wonder-tales on the other hand are relegated more and more firmly to the nursery.

The exaggerations of the wonder-tales are not, however, mere unbridled fantasy. They may also represent remnants of ancient belief. Let us look at the wonder-tales preserved from classical times. Apuleius's story of Cupid and Psyche deals mainly with gods, and many of its motifs have a prehistory which shows that the story is closely bound up with pagan religion, whatever one makes of the story itself (cf. BP II 267–68). One may therefore regard the story as a parallel to many of the medieval stories of religious content. The principal characters in the Egyptian story of Anpu and Bata also have the names of gods, as has already been noted (p. 34 above), and the Hathors who foretell the prince's fate also contribute to making the narrative myth-like. These stories clearly show a close connection between wonder-tale and myth, the most highly regarded kind of narrative of those days. There are also stories in Indian folklore which have a very similar narrative thread to European wonder-tales. In their homeland these stories are not regarded as fictitious, but as true stories of divine powers. The gods are very active in them, in the manner of the saints in the religious stories of Europe, and the wonders fit in with the faith of the people. Scholars regard it as impossible to distinguish between wonder-tale, myth and folk-legend in them. These stories are not the particular property of the common people, but are current everywhere, and survive as upper-class literature in the ancient collections of wonder-tales. They live there as happily in written as in oral form, which is, as has been observed earlier, one of the most promising conditions for the survival of a story (cf. BP IV 286–314).

There is therefore a great gulf fixed between these stories of the fantastic, Greek, Egyptian, Indian, and the wonder-tales of modern Europe. The latter have no ties with popular religion. We can see it already in seventeenth-century Iceland when a man as steeped in superstition as Jón lærði Guðmundsson (1574–1658) does not bolster his beliefs with the evidence of wonder-tales, even though otherwise he is capable of swallowing the largest of camels. He mentions the story of

Viðfinna Völufegri,¹ for instance, but is quite ready to agree that it is pure fiction.

It is not advisable to quarrel over words, but it is certainly advisable to differentiate between ancient myths and fictitious stories, 'wonder-tales' as we are calling them here. These appear when belief grows shadowy. Undoubtedly this came about in various ways; each wonder-tale has its own history and the same story is held to be true by some while others in the same locality do not believe it. There can be a wide no-man's land between belief and disbelief in the same mind. Before we reach the stage when a story is regarded as pure fiction there is undoubtedly a period in which there is a neutral attitude towards truthfulness, and it may well be imagined that that period is sometimes a long one.

The first edition of this book appeared in Icelandic in 1940. Since then I have sometimes tried to explain my view of the history of our wonder-tales by the simplified series: myth—mythical story—wonder-tale (*ævintýri*). The first item in this series would generally be connected with the cult of a deity, a hero, a saint or a sage, and many of the motifs would belong to the supernatural. But the essential condition would be that people believed in the story. As time passed the old, serious cult legends were often expanded; at the same time primitive, often naive ideas about gods and heroes were altered, extraneous entertainment was introduced, and sometimes romantic or lyrical touches. We come to the no-man's land mentioned above, and soon a strange game is played between belief and unbelief, though the old motifs remained in the story. Behind the development lie cultural and social changes, urbanisation, and in due time enlightenment of some kind, rationalism and in some civilisations the advance of scientific thought. Then comes the third stage, when people no longer believe at all in these stories and regard them as a pure play of fantasy. This may coincide with a time when people liked the thought of going back to nature, when romanticism, nostalgia for the primitive, childhood and youth and the dayspring of the world, was in the air. Then 'contes des fées' become fashionable, and 'Märchen' offered themes dear to poets. If the evolution described above may seem to be simple, reality can certainly make things more complex. Changes of religion, upheavals in society, sudden alterations of ideology could lead to all kinds of confusion.

¹ AT 709; *Verz.* 100; JGÍ *Um Íslands aðskiljanlegar náttúrur*, 15–16 and 39.

Stories that have been brought from foreign countries may also be alien to the ways of the people of the new country. Foreign wonder-tales may still be linked with folk-belief in their new locality, or they may be seen as pure stories of fantasy, and changes may result from mixing of motifs.

Let us take an example. A fantastic story from India (where its truth is not doubted) reaches western Europe during the Middle Ages. It may be that its religious content is not so different from folk-belief in Europe, and on that basis it could become a folk-legend, told with full belief. One can easily imagine a story in which the individual motifs were regarded as in themselves not incredible, while there was something about the story as a whole that made people draw back from an absolute judgment on its truthfulness. The attitudes and customs revealed in it might well, for instance, appear strange in the host country, and that could be a reason why it was never assimilated, not, at least, without total reconstruction, to the native folk-story stock.

Many of the wonder-tales that exist in present-day Europe are undoubtedly of European origin, or come from the Middle East. The change they have undergone in time has proved better for them than the change in environment. The stories of Anpu and Bata and Cupid and Psyche are narrative wholes, created and developed in countries where people believed in the reality of their principal personages. In consequence they have a more or less religious content. One could well imagine a conversion of the story of Cupid and Psyche into a Norse myth, but where polytheistic religion gives way to Christianity, such a narrative runs the risk of turning into a wonder-tale. Some other similar stories may have become attached to Christian saints and so kept their credibility longer; others may have been changed into folk-legends, and it is by no means rare for stories to move from one group or type to another.

It is likely that many European wonder-tales originated as compositions primarily for entertainment, made up of a variety of individual motifs drawn from stories already well known, myths and legends, heroic and otherwise. If such motifs were not simply taken over, they could be imitated. This of course could also happen while the beliefs on which the ancient stories depended still flourished (examples can be found in the medieval *Perceval* poems).

The 'original stories' which I have thought of as the sources of the wonder-tales of western Europe were respected and their veracity

trusted. It is not at all unlikely that many of them came from the great civilisations of the Mediterranean basin or western Asia. This theory may be thought an empty one, for in the case of many wonder-tale types we have no evidence to prove it, but those civilisations possess many qualities to favour such a contention. They had a level of culture that made them likely to be givers rather than takers in this sphere. They had an overwhelming regard for all manner of supernatural forces and influences which might explain much that is marvellous in our stories, and they were of great antiquity, which may account for the wide distribution of the wonder-tale type. On the other hand, the peoples who lived to the north of those countries doubtless also had their own store of ancient motifs (in stories founded on beliefs which were held in honour there), though these are almost totally forgotten or now found only as remnants commingled with what has been introduced from elsewhere. Even so, I do not consider that there is much likelihood that the pall of mystery that hangs over the origins and pre-history of our wonder-tales will ever lift completely.

X

It has already been said that a principal source of the folk-story (whatever class it may belong to) lies in beliefs held by human beings. Folk-stories arise persistently from folk-belief and as this, their source of being, alters its character, so they alter theirs. In the following pages I shall endeavour to expound this further (see also Part III of this book). Motifs occasionally occur in folk-stories that point to a belief which is now obsolete, and this is frequently the case in wonder-tales. Let me give a few examples.

All kinds of taboos and bans figure largely in the superstition of later centuries, and stories concerning them are common (cf. *JÁ*² II 668 (*bann*), 703 (*varúð*)). The root of this is primeval man's belief that all nature was endowed with a power which could bring both good and ill to human beings. The whole outlook of men who had to exercise intense caution in dealing with anything particularly endowed with such power was characterised by deep fear. Men guarded their own life-force with anxious care, especially from strangers or enemies. Their whole existence was fenced about with precautions and taboos. This is so well known that there is no need to amplify it or give references to other writings on the subject.

I will mention one example here of an ancient precaution which is undoubtedly the mainstay of a story, though in its present form the original meaning has clearly begun to fade. It occurs in the story of the church-builder at Reynir (JÁ I 58).

A man lived at Reynir in Mýrdalur. He was having a church built, but he was late in getting timber and could not find a carpenter because the haymaking season was near. Once when he was walking about in a melancholy state he met a man who offered to build the church for him. In return the farmer was to tell him his name before the building was finished, or else hand over to him his only son, then five years old. They agreed on this, and the builder set to work. He worked with alarming speed, and the farmer began to grow uneasy, though he could do nothing about it. One day when the building was nearly completed, he was wandering about the meadow until he lay down near a hillock. He then heard a voice from inside the hillock, and a mother sang to her child:

<i>Senn kemur hann Finnur</i>	Soon Finnur your father
<i>faðir þinn frá Reyn</i>	comes home again
<i>með þinn litla leiksvein.</i>	with a small playmate
	for you from Reyn.

The farmer was cheered by this, and went along to the church. The builder was just nailing the last plank into place over the altar. At that the farmer said, 'You'll soon be finished, Finnur,' and at that the builder was so taken by surprise that he let the plank fall from his hands and disappeared, and he has not been seen since.

This story exists all over Scandinavia. In Iceland it is reckoned among stories of elves, but in continental Scandinavia, Finnur is a giant. The mainland version is fuller inasmuch as St Olaf or St Lawrence, or whoever it is, offers the giant the sun and the moon and his head or his eyes if he cannot tell him his name. This is clearly an supernatural element since a mere human being can have no disposal of the heavenly bodies, but it also gives the story's origin away. It is descended from the pagan story about the citadel built for the Æsir. Snorri Sturluson tells this story in *Gylfaginning* ch. 42. A giant is promised the sun, the moon and the goddess Freyja if he can build a fortification around Ásgarðr in a single winter—and the Æsir were entitled to promise the sun and the moon, for these were their own handiwork.

Thus one principal element of the story can be traced back to a pagan myth—but the other is sprung from a superstition which is doubtless older still. This is the requirement that the farmer must name the

builder's name. On the surface this appears to be nothing very significant, merely that the builder does not think the farmer has a hope of finding it, so that when the farmer does come out with it he is so disturbed that he vanishes. This story-element has long been understood in this way and the analogous story of the giantess Gilitrutt will have been similarly understood (JÁ I 181–82).

But there is a deeper undercurrent. A man's name is now only a sound in the air and letters on a sheet of paper, but in earlier times an extensive and varied belief was centred on it. A man's name was a vital part of him, a part of his soul. To know a man's name was thus to gain a certain power over him. Many things point to this belief as a hidden force in the story. Various examples can be cited to show that such a belief in names was by no means extinct in Iceland in earlier times any more than elsewhere.

There has survived a medieval Icelandic prose romance called *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs*. There we are told that Vilhjálmr plays chess with a giant three times, and when he loses for the third time the giant imposes a duty on him to return within three years to the giant's cave and to name by name ninety trolls who dwell there. Later it turns out that 'their lives are at stake, if any man is able to name them all,' and when Vilhjálmr rehearses the names, the trolls all die (*LMIR* IV 66). Similar incidents occur in numerous Icelandic sources, and I shall do no more than recall that the water-spirit in horse-shape, the *nykur* or kelpy, cannot bear to hear his name. In *Elenarljóð*, an Icelandic ballad surviving in a seventeenth-century manuscript, a *nykur* in the guise of a young man is said to have caught little Elen, as she was going for water, and was going to take her down into the lake with him. When he asked her to marry him she answered, 'Eg því ekki nenni' (lit. 'I have no mind for that'; 'nennir' is a name for a kelpy) and with that he vanished. Later folk-stories about kelpies have similar endings (*Íslensk fornkvæði* VIII 152 and references; JÁ I 137, JÞork 365).

There is another example in the Poetic Edda. When Sigurðr Fáfnisbani had wounded Fáfnir, the dragon asked him his name, but 'Sigurðr concealed his name, because it was the belief of men of old that a dying man's word had great power if he cursed his enemy by name' (*Fáfnismál*, prose after st.1). One need hardly emphasise the point that there is a vast body of superstition among many nations connected with names, and all manner of precautions concerning them. Nor is

this merely among ‘primitive’ people but among ‘civilised’ nations as well. One thinks of the Romans as having gained their mastery of the world by their vigour and toughness, political acuteness and military ability, with the other qualities that lead to dominance. But they did not consider these all-sufficient. They took the greatest care to keep the name of Rome’s tutelary deity a secret so that their enemies could not contact him and get a hold over him—and so could not win power over the Romans themselves.¹

Before leaving superstition to do with names, I should like to mention two things. Both in ancient and more recent stories we commonly find that some being of great power tells someone to name his name in his hour of need, and when this happens he comes to his rescue. Nowadays the motif occurs largely (or perhaps only) in wonder-tales (e.g. JÁ II 390, 414, 447), but earlier it appeared in stories that had close associations with folk-belief. Conversely it can be dangerous to name evil beings or any creatures so imbued with magical power that they are too much to face. At sea, it was perilous to name anything which might suggest monstrous fish; and it was not safe to speak of evil spirits or trolls, since ‘talk of the Devil, and there he is’.² An amusing example of this is in one of the manuscripts of *Vilhjálm’s saga sjóðs* where alongside the versified list of trolls’ names the scribe added the words ‘ora pro nobis’—he had clearly become nervous. The Rev. Jón Erlendsson says of the same list that these hateful names should not be read out to any frivolous audience.³

The idea that a man’s soul can leave his body during sleep and learn many things in distant lands appears in many stories. This belief must have gone hand in hand with belief in shape-shifting and the two must have grown and dwindled together. Yet the wonder-tales contain even stranger ideas about the soul’s ‘travels’. Such is the very popular notion of a *fjöregg*, ‘life-egg’, where the vital force of a being is thought to reside in an egg, an object outside the body. One of the oldest Icelandic instances of this is in *Sigrarðs saga frækna*, a story of the fourteenth

¹ On all kinds of superstitions about names, see for example E. Clodd, *Tomtit tot*, 1898. A great deal has been written on this topic.

² Cf. *Orvar-Odds saga*, Fas. II 254.

³ See ÓDav. *Pulur* 109. For superstitions about names in folk-stories see JÁ² II 691–92; further Magnús Finnbogason, ‘Máttur nafnsins í þjóðtrúnni’, *Skírnir* 1933, 97–116.

or fifteenth century (*LMIR* V, 39–107). Other instances from before 1800 are in *Sveins rímur Múkssonar* and the younger version of *Bósa saga* (both from the sixteenth to seventeenth century) and Eiríkur Laxdal's *Ólands saga* (late eighteenth century), and the theme is common in nineteenth-century stories. The word *fföregg* itself first appears in *Bósa saga*.¹ One wonder-tale, recorded in the nineteenth century, tells how a certain Sigurður comes to a giant's cave and meets the princess whom the giant had carried off and wanted to marry. When the giant's return draws near Sigurður successfully hides. Following the advice he has given her, the princess now pretends to want to marry the giant, and tricks him by flattery into showing her his life-egg, which is a deadly blue in colour and so poisonous that it may not be touched with the bare hands (this seems to be rare in Icelandic stories about life-eggs, but originally must have been an indication of its power, which made it dangerous to handle). It is kept wrapped in a cloth which is locked in a casket which in turn is locked inside a chest. The next day Sigurður breaks open the chest and smashes the egg against the giant's forehead, whereupon he dies immediately (the story is printed in *JÁ*³ V 112–14). There are similar stories in western European folklore, with the egg concealed in similarly elaborate ways. It may, for instance, be inside a bird which is inside an ox which is on an island in the middle of the ocean. There is this sort of complexity in the story of the Red Bull (*JÁ*³ IV 529–55) and many other wonder-tales. When the story appears in Asia, the soul or life-force of the giant is often preserved in a living animal, and if the latter comes to harm, loses a leg, perhaps, the giant undergoes the same mishap.

The word *fföregg* indicates that these stories are very old in Scandinavia, for *fför* is used here with its now archaic meaning 'life' or 'life-force'. There is also one fairly old instance in Icelandic of a 'life-stone'. I cannot on the other hand find any trace in Scandinavia of the belief with which these concepts are associated. It is, however, a belief that is very common among peoples on a more primitive cultural level. They, for instance, customarily deposit an individual's soul (or part of it) in animals or inanimate objects, and do so through magic ritual and incantation. This is doubtless done principally as a precaution to ensure the safety of the person's life—as is implied in the wonder-tales. We may note that this belief is not unknown among the

¹ *Bósa saga in zwei Fassungen*, ed. Otto Luitpold Jiriczek, 1893, 108.

Jews. Thus Abigail says to the outlawed David, ‘Should men set out to hunt you down and try to take your life, my lord’s life will be kept close in the satchel of life with Yahweh your God, while as for the lives of your enemies, he will fling them away as from a sling’ (1 Sam. [1 Kings] 25: 29; Jerusalem version). The story of Samson and Delilah is also quite similar to our wonder-tale about a giant and his *fföregg*, though Samson’s life-force is not hidden in an object outside his body but in his hair (known, of course, both as an ancient and a modern superstition). Further, the fact that in the Egyptian story of Anpu and Bata, the latter keeps his heart in a cedar tree, shows that similar stories of an externalised soul were known in the Middle East.

Often two or more giants share the same ‘life-egg’. It was also thought that human lives could be tied closely together in a similar way. We recall the story in *Morkinskinna*, preserved in a thirteenth-century manuscript, of King Haraldr harðráði’s daughter, who died in the same hour as her father was killed in battle far away, ‘and men say that they shared a single life’.¹

I would like to make two more points. In the story of Princess Kisa (see *Verz.* no. 711) we are told that a certain queen drank from a brook at the suggestion of a witch or sibyl. As she had been led to expect, a white trout swam into her mouth, but what she had been warned against also happened: a black trout held onto the tail of the white one with its mouth and so went down the same way. The queen gave birth to a fair daughter but also to a black cat. After many adventures the cat was finally freed from the spell that had been put on it and turned into a beautiful princess. Originally, of course, they were both princesses who had been put under a spell by their stepmother and turned into trout. It must be admitted that this story has not been thoroughly studied and little is known about its dissemination. Even so, as far as we can see, it does not appear to have enjoyed a wide circulation. There are various parallels to the sibyl’s counsel to the queen, to mention a common motif (T548.2). The story appears to reflect in a fragmentary fashion the ignorance of some primitive people about the physiological processes of procreation.

The second point to notice is the belief in metempsychosis. In the story it is recast as a belief in the power of magic spells to transform human beings into other creatures, but there is no doubt as to its origin.

¹ *Morkinskinna*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (1932), 232.

Here one princess is turned into a trout, then into a cat, and finally back into human shape. The belief in transmigration of souls is very common among primitive peoples. The soul may lodge in a beast, bird, plant or even a stone on the death of the human being, but returns to be reborn into its original caste. A similar belief may be observed in more advanced societies. It is the mainstay of the story of Anpu and Bata. It is common among the people of the Indian sub-continent and was well known to the Greeks, for Plato has much to say about it. It is often reflected in early Irish legends and the people of pre-historic Scandinavia were familiar with it too. In a prose passage in the Poetic Edda (at the end of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*) it says, 'It was an ancient belief that men were reborn, though this is now called an old wives' tale. Helgi and Sigrún were said to be reborn. He was then called Helgi Haddingjaskati and she was called Kára Hálfðanardóttir.' But when such belief in reincarnation had died out in Europe, the story had to be recomposed and its principal points re-explained, and so the new tellers of the story fell back on the well-known spell-binding motif.

Lastly, I would mention one other motif, which mirrors part of an ancient ritual. It is very common in *lygisögur* written in Iceland from about 1300 onwards and then in subsequent ballads and stories. In time this motif appears less frequently—it must have been found offensive to prevailing ideas of good taste. The motif is this: a princess has a spell put on her by her stepmother, who transforms her into an ogress or an ugly old hag and lays it down that she shall never be released from this enchantment until a man kisses her, sleeps with her or marries her. Unlikely as this is, it does, however happen, and she is released from the spell. This occurs, for example, in *Gríms saga loðinkinna*, *Þorsteins saga Víkingssonar* (c.1300), and thereafter in numerous other texts. Thus in *Sveins rímur Múkssonar* we are told that the woman under the spell was named *Forráð* 'Rule' or 'Sovereignty' and we may note that the *rímur* poet was following a prose original which was written before 1569. Such stories were fairly common elsewhere in Europe, sometimes in this form, sometimes with the woman changed by the spell into the shape of an animal or monster (cf. the Scottish ballad of Kemp Owyne); in a Mediterranean variant she is changed into a snake or a worm. Let us however look solely at the first variant, transformation into an ogress or ugly hag. This is very common in medieval versions, not least in Britain (e.g. in

Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*), and sometimes the word 'sovereignty' floats like a wandering sub-motif into the story. There are also ancient Irish stories with this motif, where it is connected with the High Kingship of Ireland. One such is *The Adventures of the Sons of Eochaidh Muigl Mheadhoin*. In this story the sons of King Eochaidh were hunting in the forest and had found a place to rest, but lacked water. One after another they went in search of it. By a spring in the wood they met a hideous old woman who guarded the water. She offered the water to any of them who would kiss her. Only one, Niall, was willing to sleep with her, whereupon she changed into a most beautiful maiden and said she was the 'Sovereignty' (*flaith*) of the land. Shortly afterwards Niall became king. In this enactment we are probably witnessing part of a ritual associated with the king's wedding to his kingdom. His queen will then have signified his sovereignty, and the rite was intended to rejuvenate the king's power, his land and his people.

XI

How do localised and historical folk-legends come into being? Certainly in more ways than one. The first thing is the event itself, reports of which are made and repeated. A great part of the story is lost or forgotten. The stories fight, so to speak, for their lives, and their survival depends on whether they are found amusing, exciting or affecting, or are connected with the things which sustain them and make them matters of interest. Thus an unremarkable place-name legend can be preserved in its locality, but how far it is disseminated will depend on the fame of the place. If the story itself is thought to have something worthwhile in it, it can fly around like a butterfly and settle somewhere else. The same applies to anecdotes and jokes about individuals, whether known or unknown, named or unnamed. Entertainment value carries the stories round the world and preserves them from oblivion.

It is a special bonus for a story if it contains some supernatural element which appeals to people's credulity, for the secrets of hidden worlds attract men's minds and rouse fear or excitement. Such stories are better fitted than most to be retained in popular memory, and the greater part of recorded folk-stories undoubtedly contain such subject-matter. Less essential ingredients tend, understandably, to sink into oblivion.

But a story is not preserved orally for long without alteration. It takes on the customary form of oral stories, and the incidents on which it is based are changed. In Part V.I, I shall draw attention to a number of stories concerning hidden people or elves from Eiríkur Ólafsson of Brúnir's narrative, in which we may see how the material alters imperceptibly through the unconscious workmanship of the story-tellers. It is only necessary for one of them to have a slightly different understanding of some small point, and the story takes a new direction and is drastically altered before one is aware of it. Folk-beliefs and folk-legends are readily absorbed in it, and the new story is influenced by them and takes on their tone. It also seems that a story often possesses a tendency to develop in one direction and not in another, and if the cause of the story, the original events, do not suit this development, the chances are that it will depart from them in accordance with this inherent tendency. Everyone who has told a joke will recognise this tendency. Then there are also negative causes of alterations, of which forgetfulness is the most obvious. If it leads to the omission of individual small points, or even of whole events, the story-teller will then endeavour to fill the gap, and will insert into what he remembers a plausible replacement, or what he feels is most in keeping, and then the story does not take long to change its character.

As here described, the creation and subsequent modification of folk-stories were an unconscious process. An account of a true event turns bit by bit into a folk-story, and it is not easy to determine when the transformation actually occurs. Thus anyone and everyone is part-author of the story, and all who tell it contribute to its eventual shape. It is then the work of ordinary people, a folk-story in the fullest sense of the term.

Yet this is far from being the only way in which a folk-story grows. It may be regarded as certain that many a story is the work of one man or at best of a limited number, so that even though a story has been told by many and its details affected by frequent re-telling, its basic structure will have been created by one person, or sometimes perhaps in just a few 'stages'. It is, for instance, obvious that most exempla or other stories of ethical or religious import have a literary origin, and were composed at one go. When a story says that an ogress was turned into a particular crag, even though the rock has no discernible features, then this is an explanation, whether put forward in fun or seriously,

which stems from one man's imagination. Simple stories about specific localities may be interesting when one is close to the spot, but their interest may fade at a distance from it. On the other hand, a short anecdote may become longer and more detailed and so acquire new motifs and further appeal.

Although folk-belief is the primary source of many folk-stories, it should nevertheless be observed that the wishes of story-tellers and audiences are of great importance. Many folk-stories may be justly called wish-fulfilment fantasies, and in large part draw more on people's desires or dreams than on actual experience, whether of this world or the next. The most obvious examples are stories of successful hunting and fishing or superlative prowess, which are often pure fiction of the most blatant kind, but the same spirit animates many stories of how men overcome or trick evil beings who are otherwise too powerful for humanity, in the way that Sæmundur the Wise and other master-magicians beat the Devil at his own game, for instance (see *JÁ I* 485–502). I shall return to this theme in more detail later on. A good story-teller cannot keep quiet when he has a spirited tall story on the tip of his tongue, one he knows will send cold shivers down the spines of his audience. Goethe's 'die Lust zum Fabulieren' is a very strong factor in the human make-up. To tell a story is a primitive human urge, especially when the story is entertaining, and grips the audience, so that they are fascinated or frightened, intent or on edge. While this is in progress, there is total suspension of disbelief.

There can be no disguising the fact that deliberate fiction is created not only when a story is invented from beginning to end, but also when old stories are retold. I named just now one important reason for change: forgetfulness—because if a story-teller knew that he had forgotten something, he tried as best he could to make up for it. Many other factors, however, come into play, too. An old story may have contained some motifs that were at odds with new manners and modes of thought, and so coarse or brutal incidents were excised or bowdlerised. There is no doubt that as the wonder-tales became more and more the preserve of the nursery they lost many characteristics which were not thought proper for children's ears. Thus in the story of Phaedra the queen tries to seduce her stepson, and though this motif exists in some of the earliest Icelandic stepmother stories, I do not think it occurs in a single wonder-tale of the nineteenth century. Nor is it uncommon

for the main trend of a story to be altered, and in the process for it to become necessary to change a great many of its elements—a necessity which occurs most often when a story moves from one country to another or from one genre to another.

It is common for individual motifs or incidents to be added to other stories, especially at the beginning or end, and it is by no means rare to find wonder-tales joined together. Thus the story of Mjaðveig Mánadóttir sometimes deals only with Mjaðveig, her stepmother and step-sister, and ends when the prince finds the right owner of the golden shoe, but sometimes it is augmented by the story of the troll-wife in the boat of stone to explain how Mjaðveig fell into the hands of the trolls. This can be clearly seen from the variants among the recorded narratives (*Verz.* no. 510; cf. no. 403). Nor is there any doubt that many of the ancient wonder-tales were composed by accretion in a similar way, while others are the result of a story-teller taking some old story and inventing a new one on the basis of its principal motifs. Though their material may be old, wonder-tales commonly develop in stages or leaps.

The individual's part in the making and alteration of folk-stories has become more obvious in late years. One approach, for instance, has been to compare all the stories recorded from certain good story-tellers, and from this it has become clear that each narrator has his own leanings and peculiarities. One lays stress on telling a story as nearly as possible in the way he heard it, another treats his originals freely, sets more store by lively narration, even perhaps acts the dialogues. Taste, ways of thought and the accidents of a story-teller's life can lead him to leave some things out or to amplify the detail or to add fresh matter. With such a narrator everything is lively and capable of variation, subject to his temperament and artistic ability.¹

The story-teller is tied to his audience in every way as much as a poet to his readers, or even more, in that he stands face to face with them, and they either dampen his enthusiasm or excite it. He sees the smiles on their faces, hears their laughter when he says something funny. Apprehension or excited attention in their looks urges him on to use his power to impress to its fullest extent. He also sees the bored expression or the sour look if the audience do not like the story. Thus he receives pretty well instantly their judgment on the story and its telling.

¹ On this see Mark Asadowskij, *Eine sibirische Märchenerzählerin*, 1926 (*FFC* 68); further Knut Liestøl, *The Origin of the Icelandic Family sagas*, 1930, ch. IV.

All this can be seen even today, though oral narration has shrunk to slight proportions since papers and books and schools began to fill even rural areas and noise and bustle to cut into the quiet hours of leisure. In former ages country folk on their scattered farms had ample time to listen and learn, ideal conditions for the survival of the folk-story.

Otherwise the native ground of folk-stories can be very varied, and to some extent it conditions their nature and length. A story can become a common proverb: 'He eats everything, just like the Bakki brothers' cat'—and we get the point of the reference straight away (see JA II 526–30). Humorous anecdotes can belong anywhere. Place-name stories come to life when the place-names come under discussion or when one sees the places. Shorter stories of this sort take little time in the telling.

But longer stories, whether folk-legends, *fabliaux* or wonder-tales, need greater leisure and a more special occasion. From the earliest times children have been the best and most eager listeners to that sort of story, and an old woman surrounded by the small folk was seen in every home. St Paul spoke of old wives' fables (1 Tim. 4: 7), and these have not decreased in number since his day. It was thought an excellent diversion to have a story told when many people were gathered together and there was no other activity, or when the work was of a kind which permitted one to listen while busy at it. In the East men told stories while sitting in coffee-houses or in caravanserais on desert journeys. It has been the custom in many places to have stories told while people sat round the fire. It must have been restful and refreshing after the day's labour to let the mind range through a world of fantasy while staring into the glow of the fire. An early French poem tells how it is the custom in Normandy for a guest to repay the night's hospitality by telling stories to his hosts.¹ Under such conditions it was better to have a good stock to draw on, and there are many examples of story-tellers going from one place to another and making a livelihood by telling their stories or reciting poems.

¹ This poem has not been traced, but cf. Stith Thompson, M231, and the story of Math son of Mathonwy in *The Mabinogion*, tr. G. Jones and T. Jones, 1974, 56–57. (We are grateful to Annalee Rejhon, lecturer in Celtic Studies at the University of California at Berkeley, USA, for this reference.)

Stories were regarded as excellent entertainment where many people got together for work that did not make much noise. This was, for instance, common in houses in Denmark and Germany where wool-carders or knitters foregathered, as may be seen from St. Steensen Blicher's collection of Jutland peasant stories, *E Bindstouw* (1882; reprinted in *Hosekræmmeren og andre noveller*, 1985, 159–95).

A storytelling session is often mentioned in Old Icelandic literature, at weddings or assemblies or in ships at evening, but the references are to other kinds of stories than folk-stories. The monk Oddr Snorrason (c.1190) says that shepherd boys tell stepmother stories—though he does not specify whether this was while watching over their flocks or at home in the evening. There is ample evidence of story-telling sessions from later times, and I shall mention just two examples. In the evening work-hour (*vaka*) it was usual to read sagas or to chant the long narrative poems called *rímur*, while the time for telling folk-stories was in the dusk, after the outdoor work was over but before the lights were lit for the evening's indoor work. The Rev. Jónas Jónasson gives the following description of the dusk-hour stories (*JJ Íþ* 245):

‘Where it was customary to sleep during the dusk-hour, there was little activity, as may be expected, but where it was not so, people made what use they could of the time. The principal amusement was to talk, to tell stories, recite verse epigrams, chant *rímur*, or cap verses. It is incredible what a vast store of stories the people had, especially stories of outlaws and wonder-tales of kings and queens in their palaces and old men and old wives in their cottages. Then there were the stories about ghosts or fairy folk, and of those there was an inexhaustible store. I knew one old man who was able to tell three stories a night all through the winter fishing season, 2 February to 12 May, and had still not reached the end of his repertoire.’

It was the same when a body of people met for some specific task, such as the annual herb-gatherings. Jóhannes Friðlaugsson describes them as follows: ‘We did not invariably go to sleep after our evening meal, but sat down and started to sing songs and recite poetry . . . nor was it uncommon for stories to be told of outlaws, trolls and elves, or wonder-tales.’¹ It was doubtless the same in fishing huts and when men were out gathering sheep and so on.

¹ Jóhannes Friðlaugsson, ‘Grasaferðir’, *Eimreiðin* 1929, 275.

In such a company anyone who wishes can tell a story. But not everyone is equally skilful in the art, any more than at anything else; the power of memory is variable and men differ in their ability to learn folk-stories. There is no doubt that the stories owe their existence and quality not a little to a band of exceptional story-tellers who were better than others at remembering and making the most of them. There are references to distinguished *rímur*-chanters in Iceland, and some vagrants were good story-tellers, but their livelihood did not depend on it and I know of no instance of anyone who ever made story-telling his profession.

As is to be expected, old people often have a larger store of folk-stories than younger ones, and *sögukarl* and *sögukerling* ('an old man or old-wife full of stories') are well-known words in the Icelandic language. If one wanted to divide the honours between the sexes, I suspect that women would come out better than men. At any rate, I am certain that in later centuries women have been far more active than men in the preservation of wonder-tales. Unfortunately, the name of the teller of a story is rarely recorded, so that in 265 variants of wonder-tales that I once collated from manuscripts, only 92 were attributed to known story-tellers—80 of whom were women.

As I leave this subject I would like to mention one example of a woman who was such a storehouse of stories. In the National Library of Iceland there is a manuscript (Lbs 536 4to) written during the years 1862 and 1863–64 by Páll Pálsson of Árkvörn, then a boy below confirmation age. It contains stories told by an old parish pauper Guðríður Eyjólfsdóttir. There are 60 in all, of which 26 are wonder-tales and humorous stories, many of them rare and hard to find elsewhere. The narrative is of the most laconic kind and fairly poor in style, probably because little Páll was so slow a scribe. But as a whole the manuscript bears good witness to this old woman's knowledge of stories.

XII

Although I have referred to a good number of Icelandic examples in the foregoing sections, my main aim has been to give a general picture of folk-stories, their external and internal characteristics and their dissemination, irrespective of nationality. We now come to the point where we turn completely to Iceland, and consider in greater detail how Icelandic folk-stories originated, from what materials they were built and

in what way they were transmitted. As we have noted, the main origin of the stories is to be sought in folk-belief and folk-life, but in Section X a further element was demonstrated: beliefs which have disappeared but are preserved in fictitious stories born out of old myths. We will return to this point later, but first the reader must be given as reliable a survey as possible of the sources old and new on which our known body of Icelandic popular stories depends.

PART II

SOURCES

I

The oldest Icelandic sources are in verse, poems composed before the age of writing began. We already find in them material related to the stories and legends of later ages. Icelanders began to write manuscript books in the twelfth century, and from then on men recorded on vellum stories, poems and miscellaneous lore of many kinds. Some of this was new, but some of the poems were old and written down from an oral informant, one or more. Many stories and anecdotes in the sagas were similarly derived from what people had passed on by word of mouth.

If we divided up this early period according to the surviving source-material, it would be proper to let the beginning of the age of writing mark the arrival of a new era. In the present survey, however, it is more practical to make Period I begin with the settlement of Iceland *c.* 900 and let the victory of Christianity over paganism in about AD 1000 mark the beginning of Period II. This then ends late in the thirteenth century, with the social and literary changes that followed from the Icelanders' surrender of political independence in 1262–64. Period III then stretches to the beginnings of the Reformation in the early sixteenth century, a time when sources that provide insight into popular beliefs begin once more to multiply.

The various kinds of folk-story cannot be distinguished as clearly in Period I as in later periods. If each category of nineteenth-century story is represented by a circle, then each circle could be shown as overlapping one or more of the others, but not necessarily having large areas in common. But in the tenth century the centres of the circles would fall much closer together, and the circles would be much larger and overlap much more. In the following discussion we must therefore constantly bear in mind that all stories from this period in effect occupy the same ground. We can give the principal categories names, such as 'myths', 'heroic legends' (mainly in verse), 'viking stories', 'anecdotes and longer accounts of actual events', 'folk-legends', 'fantastic stories of Celtic origin' and 'stories that have motifs in common

with international wonder-tales of modern times', but the overlap between them is such that clear-cut classification is hardly feasible.

It seems likely that there were innumerable stories of ghosts and wizards in heathen Iceland, stories that is that depended on folk-beliefs and told of individual men and women; as such they corresponded to the folk-legends of later times. The end of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* points to the existence of ghost stories, and many other things in the heroic poems of the Poetic Edda point to stories of magic. Yet would people at that period have considered their stories about elves to be myths or folk-stories? Stories about the dealings of gods and giants, the beginning and end of the world and other cosmological matter might be counted myths, while those that concern dealings between men and giants, especially those connected with particular places, might be counted folk-stories. The place-name *Gýgjarsporsá*, 'River of the ogress's footprint', in *Landnámabók* points to a troll-story of the most primitive kind. Among the Eddic poems, *Alvíssmál* tells of a dwarf Alvið who came to Þórr and demanded his daughter Þrúðr in marriage. Þórr prevaricated and started to ask the dwarf all manner of questions until the sun rose and Alvið was turned to stone. *Hrímgerðarmál*, which is interpolated into *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar*, tells how Helgi slew the giant Hati, who had abducted men's wives, and how Hati's daughter Hrímgærðr sought atonement for her father's death. Atli, who is keeping watch in the bow of Helgi's ship, answers her and keeps her talking until day breaks. She is then turned to stone and stands there still as a harbour mark. The same basic motif—a monster delayed till sunrise—is at the root of these poems and of later folk-stories, even though *Alvíssmál* belongs to the mythical and *Hrímgerðarmál* to the heroic sphere, and both exist in different conditions from the folk-stories of modern times.

A second example of similar material in a myth and a folk-story is the motif common to the giant builder of Ásgarðr in the Prose Edda and the church-builder at Reynir. As I mentioned earlier, it is probable that the latter has grown out of the former but under the influence of other sources.¹ Here, therefore, a story has been brought down to a

¹ This is also the opinion of C. W. von Sydow in his article 'Studier i Finnsägner', *Fataburen* 1907–08, 19–27, but I do not agree with his further conclusions. He thinks that the story of the gods' builder ended with the builder turning to stone. But if the end of the story as it appears in the sources (Þórr

lower level. But of course there were other stories of giants which have been less altered. *Grottasöngur* tells of the giantesses, Fenja and Menja, who helped the good Guttormr, and were then sold to Fróði; the poem is counted among the heroic lays, but in Snorri's version in his Edda of how Bragi and an ogress capped verses, both matter and treatment are at folk-story level.¹

Various things appear in the mythical and heroic poems of the Edda which are related to the wonder-tales of later ages, the swan-maidens in *Völundarkviða*, for example, and the quern which grinds out gold in *Grottasöngur*. We shall look more closely at these and others in Part IV of this book.

The Celtic stories that were brought to Iceland were doubtless very diverse in character, some most likely brief anecdotes, others some form of romantic heroic stories, still others belonging to legends of saints. Those that survived in Iceland have ended up in various classes of narrative, but they are all imbued with a curious imaginative power and with wonders that make them stand out among Icelandic stories. In pagan times some of them may have been given the status of myths, but in later compositions they were absorbed into the 'sagas of ancient times' (*fornaldar sögur*), also called 'mythical-heroic sagas', and other hyperbolic stories (see Section III below). In general it has been the fate of legends from the Heroic Age and the Viking Age to come closer together and include more and more fantastic and far-fetched matter.

Some, perhaps many, of the poems that tell us something about the folk-stories of the pre-Christian period are certainly Icelandic, but others may equally well be Norwegian or from even farther afield. We must be on our guard, however. I said earlier that in Norse mythology

kills the giant in *Völuspá*, a mare (Loki) seduces the horse in *Gylfaginning*) is not acceptable, all we can do is admit that we do not know how it ended originally. *Alvíssmál* and *Hrímgerðarmál* of course say nothing about it.

¹ The kernel of the story is presumably that the supernatural creature will have power over the human being unless he is able to answer immediately. Cf. JÞork. 27, ÓDav. 32–34, ÓDav.⁵ II 55–56; Feilberg, *Ordbog* IV s.v. *gab*, O. Nicolaissen, *Sagn og eventyr fra Nordland*, 1879, I 85, Ivar Aasen, *Prøver af Landsmaalet i Norge*, 1853, 6, Skar *GS* II 109. Hostile encounters between men and giants are also indicated by *Hárbarðsljóð* 23, *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 19, and the giant(ess)-names Greip ('she who grips'), Hrossþjófr ('horse-thief') and Búseyra ('homestead-plunderer'; perhaps a sort of personification?).

motifs similar to those of wonder-tales are to be found, but it may be doubted whether the poems that are our sources provide any direct evidence of the existence of wonder-tales in Iceland, a country settled only at the outset of the last century or so of heathendom in the West Norse world. The subject-matter of the mythology may often be very old and depend on archaic beliefs and religious practices; but many myths may have migrated from the traditions of other nations.

II

Equal importance was certainly not attached to every story told in the pagan past. A myth was far more important than a place-name story, and it may be that the favourite stories of master and slave were not the same. Yet it was all one unbroken whole. Christianity broke it. The myths lost their prestige, and would have been forgotten altogether if the poets had not needed them. The nature-spirits believed in by the people lived on, but their status fell because in the Christian system they could only be found a place as demons. That was not how the common people saw them, however, and they did their best to keep them outside the church's world of ideas. So ancient belief in spirits, dreams, apparitions and ghosts continued, without ever being assimilated into the Christian scheme of things. The divinities who had enjoyed public cult disappeared, while those supernatural beings related more closely to particular places and families survived; mythological stories vanished, though not entirely. There must always have been a considerable contrast between the worship of the gods and the practice of magic, and many other dichotomies must have existed side by side in tolerable comfort. With Christianity came full hostility between the new faith and the old. The Church further introduced a whole new world, teaching the existence of Satan and devils and Hell, and a great deal of new magic came with these concepts from the European mainland. The old beliefs and the darker Christian superstitions entered into partnership, each influencing the other, but they did not coalesce until much later, and then only in part. Gradually the power of the old superstitions faded and in some cases were quite forgotten, though they may perhaps have left traces in the more fantastic kind of story, in wonder-tales for example. But there was a glow in the embers which lasted a long time.

Christianity brought to Iceland its own stock of stories to replace

the myths and related stories it drove out: stories of angels, of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the apostles and other saints, of their miracles and glorious acts. There is no need to emphasise how enormous and disparate this material is, both in colour and quality. The shorter miracle stories have had most influence on popular legend, and some of them have been naturalised, such as the story of the imp on the church-beam (AT 826).¹

Some of this material may have reached Iceland through oral transmission, as is likely in the case of the story of how Sæmundr the Wise escaped from his master.² One story is referred to the authority of Bishop Páll of Skálholt (1156–1211), who heard Archbishop Absalon of Lund (c.1120–1202) tell it when Páll went to Lund to be consecrated in 1195.³ Finally, reports of miracles attributed to the intercession of the Icelandic saints Bishop Þorlákr and Bishop Jón and the saintly but uncanonised Bishop Guðmundr sprang from the same roots. They are shaped by local conditions and local people. Many of them have a childlike beauty, reflecting as they do the daily life, joy and sorrow of the ordinary man and woman.⁴

¹ JÁ II 4–5, *MS* 174–80. Other examples: Unborn child given to the Devil, *MS* 325–31, cf. JÁ II 13–14; *Verz.* nos 810–14; Man makes a contract with the Devil, *MS* 65–69 etc., common in folk-stories; comradeship of souls after death, see *Verz.* no. 759* I; traces of vision-legends have also been preserved down to recent times; talking piece of meat *MS* 154, cf. JÁ I 549, *Skrif Ólafs gamla* (Jón Eggertsson), *BE Munnmælasögur* 16–17; old man understands the words of the priest literally, that people will be rewarded for their gifts a hundred-fold, *MS* 955–56, 1049–54; this motif found its way into the story of Grámann, JÁ II 511, *Verz.* no. 1525 A, probably before it reached Iceland; the Polyphemus story appears in *MS* and many other medieval Icelandic sources, see Lagerholm *DL* xxxii–xxxiv, but since then only in the story of Surtla in Blálandseyjar, JÁ II 348, *Verz.* no. 327 A; woman disguises herself by stretching a membrane or fish-skin over her face, *Clemens saga*, *Postola sögur* 129, cf. *Þáttur af Játvarði ok Ermíngá* in *Mágus saga*, more recently in the wonder-tale of Tístram and Ísól, JÁ II 320 (derived from *Mágus saga*); child put in a tarred chest and pushed out to sea (Júdas), *Postola sögur* 153, cf. JÁ II 321 n.; man summons spirits by cutting a square of turf is both in *MS* 147–48 and *Færeyinga saga*, tr. George Johnston (Thrand of Gata), 1994, 93–94; cf. JÁ² II 694 (*reitir*).

² See Halldór Hermannsson, *Sæmund Sigfússon and the Oddaverjar*, 1932 (*Islandica* XXII), 51–52; *BS* I 227–29; JÁ I 485, 492–94.

³ *MS* 153.

⁴ See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ‘Jarteiknir’, *Skírnir* 1936, 23–48.

Various stories with a supernatural content, telling of the acceptance of Christianity and how the heathen deities reacted to it, must largely have had clerical origins. Most of them are connected with the missionary kings of Norway, Óláfr Tryggvason and St Óláfr Haraldsson. In them we meet heathen gods, trolls and other malevolent beings all lumped together with devils, while Óðinn has become the Prince of Darkness himself. The Icelandic monk Oddr Snorrason, in a life of Óláfr Tryggvason which he wrote in Latin about 1190, tells of Eyvindr kinnrifa—doubtless a very religious man by heathen standards, and acquainted with sorcery—that he was an evil spirit who entered the womb of his ‘mother’ to be born in man’s shape.¹ Oddr clearly did not know the revolting ecclesiastical theories of incubi and succubi which were current in the thirteenth century, but his story is none too pleasant even so. (In the Middle Ages such notions were common. One of the most famous examples is the story of the prophet-magician Merlin, who was the son of an evil spirit and a pure maid—a clear parallel to the birth of Christ, the son of God and the Virgin Mary).

One of the most pathetic of the stories dealing with the conversion of Iceland is the twelfth- or thirteenth-century story of Þiðrandi, son of Hallr of Síða, who was killed by supernatural beings. He went outside into the moonlight to see who had knocked at the door. Then seven dark-clad women came from the north of the home-field and seven white-clad women from the south; the dark ones attacked him, and though the others tried to shield him, the former had the better of it and left Þiðrandi mortally wounded.²

One of the last stories of heathen gods that I recall is from the south of Norway. A blacksmith undertook to forge horseshoes for an unknown guest, but it was only when he gave up trying to control it that the forging was successful, and the horseshoes turned out to be amazingly large. The guest named the places where he had stopped; he had been travelling more than a week’s journey in a day. He said he was on his way to Sweden and, finally, jumped his horse over a fourteen-foot wall and named himself as he vanished: ‘Have you heard tell of the name of Óðinn?’ Four days later there was a battle in Sweden.

¹ Oddr Snorrason, *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 1932, 140.

² *ÓTM* II 145–50. Cf. Dag Strömbäck, ‘Berättelsen om Tidrande och diserna’, *Forhandlingar paa det ottende nordiske Filologmøde i København den 12–14 August 1935* (1936), 65. Though the story is highly coloured by saints’ legends, I can hardly believe there is not some ancient kernel to it.

This story is an unspoiled folk-story, for the smith himself told it to Jarl Fillippus (fl. c.1210) when he was in Túnsberg that same winter, and 'a man who was there listening told us'.¹

'Folk-legends' i.e. oral stories about specific men or families, or about major events in national life, must also have been in circulation in this post-conversion period. More or less accurate accounts from participants or witnesses must have been quickly altered, in the same way as other stories carried in men's memories. Poetry and superstition got mixed in with them, if they were not already in them from the start. As at other times, what people thought they experienced will have been shaped by popular belief. Apparitions, ghosts and supernatural beings are seen by people who believe in them.

Numerous regular folk-legends, not least place-name anecdotes, some of them going back to heathen times, have survived independently. Many of them might also be combined or incorporated into narratives of specific individuals or families. Some scholars are tempted to think of such local legends as much larger and more clearly shaped unities than they actually were. Oral stories have then been conceived as very like the written sagas, while the great and vital part that the writers, the authors, have in the latter has tended to be forgotten.

Most of the early Icelandic local and historical legends were undoubtedly woven into the written sagas; they will generally have been shaped in saga-style and can now only be distinguished by their content. As is to be expected, not every kind of folk-legend would have fitted easily into the sagas. Their inclusion and adaptation would depend very much on their subject-matter. Thus the sagas have very many stories of ghosts, dreams and sorcery, but other classes would be scantily represented, were it not for their appearance, in typical guise, in *Landnámabók* and the Sagas of Bishops. If we gather the examples together we can get a reasonable idea of the folk-legends of the period, and it is clear that they flourished as freely then as later on. I shall deal with them in more detail later on,² but at this point I shall quote two short complete stories from *Guðmundar saga biskups*. The first is about a fowler saved from a cliff-troll (*BS* I 599, II 111).

¹ *Fms.* IX 55–56 (*Hákonar saga Sverrissonar*). Cf. Carl J. S. Marstrander, *Ranbemerkingar til det norsk-irske spørsmål*, 1928.

² The chief discussions of this material are Dehmer 1927; Dag Strömbäck, *Sejd*, 2000; Henzen 1890; Kelchner 1935.

There was a man named Eiríkr, son of Árni; he was a great hunter and catcher. He went to the rock-cleft known as Gráhnakkaskor ('Greyneck's cleft')—a great place for birds, but no one should go to take them there before mid-morning, nor stay there later than evening. Eiríkr went there and spent the day catching birds, eight hundred or more, and this made him tarry on the cliff and start to leave later than he should have done. Then, when he went to haul himself up, a huge hand holding a cleaving-knife came out of the cliff-face and cut through eight strands of his climbing-rope; those fell down over his head but one stayed unsevered, the one that Bishop Guðmundr had blessed, and this one saved his life.

Folk-legends must have been told in the some such way as this. A particular phrase or remark in a story could also turn into a proverb, as commonly happened in later times. In an account of Bishop Guðmundr's miracles, we are told that he spent most of one summer at Eiði in Kerlingarfjörður.¹

It was uninhabited and isolated and so horribly haunted that no one could stay there before the bishop and his men pitched their tents there. One night when the bishop and his party had gone to bed, they heard great crashes and many kinds of frightful noise and the sound of a violent struggle. One of the monsters then spoke:

<i>Hér sofa drengir</i>	'Here lads sleep
<i>ok hér sofa drengir</i>	And here lads sleep.'

The bishop went out with his sacred relics and put an end to the visitations of these ogres.

Those who had most say in Icelandic literature during the early medi-
eval period were rather austere men. They looked for truth or at least
verisimilitude in the stories that were composed, and whether as patrons
or authors they would not allow their desire to entertain to lead them
into narratives that were at odds with their notion of the possible. They
believed in dreams, portents, apparitions, ghosts, second sight and
magic (the beliefs may vary in intensity, but they are generally present)
and that is why they had no objection to manifestations of these in the
sagas that were written then. On the other hand, there were doubtless
some people who were more judicious and had some aversion to belief
in trolls and nature-spirits. In Sagas of Icelanders these are conse-

¹ BS I 598. Here it speaks of hauntings, and this can refer both to trolls or troll-wives (*flagðagangr*) and ghosts. Cf. *Grettis saga* and JÁ I 154, 156–57, 166; further the story of St Óláfr in *Hkr, Óláfs saga helga* ch. 179.

quently less prominent, though they abound in *Landnámabók* and in clerical writings; as noted earlier, however, clerical authors tended to turn the trolls of folk-belief into demons. But when we turn from such stories which have some basis in folk-belief and look for sheer fiction of the fantastic and wonder-tale kind, the sources are meagre, for the simple reason that no one thought it worth while at that time to spend precious vellum on them. Admittedly, King Sverrir of Norway (1152–1202) declared that ‘lying stories’ were the most entertaining of all, and must to some extent have been voicing the popular opinion of his time. On the other hand he was a remarkable and unconventional man, and it may be that this statement of his was remembered and recorded because it was typical only of his bold and independent attitudes. We can guess it was Sverrir himself who inspired, or perhaps even uttered, the words in *Sverris saga*, which compared his journey through the wilds of Värmland to ‘what we are told in ancient stories happened when royal children had spells put on them by stepmothers’.¹ It is easy to conjecture that this refers to wonder-tales Sverrir had heard in Norway or the Faroes.

In Iceland there are no examples of chieftains or literary men comparing themselves to the heroes of wonder-tales. Still less were they willing to record wonder-tales or other fantastic stories. Snorri Sturluson put myths, some of them at folk-story level, into his Edda, but this was for the instruction of poets. As far as we know, *fornaldar sögur* (mythical-heroic sagas) were not committed to vellum to speak of until after the middle of the thirteenth century. There are very few wonder-tale motifs in the extended narratives we have, though we cannot conclude from this that such stories were particularly rare; stepmothers, ‘male Cinderellas’, and magic spells are after all commonplace story materials. I shall come back to this subject in Part IV of this book.

III

Towards the end of the thirteenth century it seems that Icelandic saga-writers cease to be content with reality as it is, and become more ready

¹ *Sverris saga (The Saga of King Sverri of Norway)*, tr. J. Sephton, 1899, repr. 1994, 7.

to listen to the promptings of their own hearts (and those of others) which demand more consolatory subjects. A tendency towards entertainment was already noticeable in the early sagas, and this now becomes more dominant. The people's taste for exaggerated stories does not meet the same opposition as before, and in any case the writings of ecclesiastics had from the beginning dealt with supernatural material. Now that was supplemented by the chivalric romances, full of fantastic marvels and wonderful adventures. At this time a new kind of literature begins, which indeed had ancient roots in oral narratives, though it had not been thought worth expending parchment on. These are the *fornaldar sögur* ('sagas of ancient times'). To begin with they deal with old heroic material, but very soon the elements of fiction and fantasy grow, till they predominate. They are generally set in the Scandinavian countries, but sometimes more distant lands are mentioned, and they show considerable knowledge of geography, especially of areas the Vikings had been to. As time passed the invented and fantastic elements grew in importance, and these sagas began to show influences from translations of French romances; they infected both their style and their subject-matter. From this mixture a new genre came into being; it has sometimes been called *lygisögur* ('lying sagas'), and these then predominated in Icelandic prose fiction for many centuries. Sometimes elements from the *fornaldar sögur* are stronger in them, sometimes elements from the romances. In many of them we meet motifs or even series of motifs of the sort integral to wonder-tales. These sagas are generally set in distant, suitably vaguely located lands and treat time and space, and indeed everything else, very freely; they are fantasies of wish-fulfilment that always end happily. The heroes are usually kings or princes, though poor peasants or peasant lads often turn up, and the whole tenor of these later sagas is much more fantastic than that of the earlier, more realistic ones. The plots are pure fiction, put together using all kinds of motifs which are largely already fully developed, and from older narratives; some of them are just escapist fantasies, and others originally derive from superstitions which may once have been seriously believed in, but by now no longer reflected contemporary popular belief. Many of the motifs are common to *fornaldar sögur*, *lygisögur* and wonder-tales of later times, and there is no doubt that much in the first two types is derived from contemporary stories which we may safely call wonder-tales.

On the other hand, local and historical legends or their influences are now hardly evident. Yet at the beginning of this period there were composed two Icelandic sagas which lean directly or indirectly on folk-legends to some extent—indeed, on the very ones to which earlier authors objected most, namely, stories about trolls and giants. These are *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga*. We find trolls also described in *Brandkrossa þáttur* and *Fljótsdæla saga*; elves are barely touched on anywhere, though serpents in seas and lakes are mentioned.¹

The influence of wonder-tales is far stronger in the literature of this period. Even the style of the wonder-tale greets us in some places, as in *Bjarka þáttur* (in *Hrólf's saga kraka*) and *Hjálmþérs saga ok Qlvis*, which are worth their weight in gold for that reason. Sometimes the plot is similar to that of wonder-tales of later times, while wonder-tale motifs abound. Here is the stepmother, here are spells, here is the sending on dangerous missions, here are the hind in the wood, the life-egg, the girdle of power, the flying cloth, witches and stolen princesses, and here appears for the first time north of the Alps the motif of Cinderella's shoes (see further Part IV below).

International stories more or less free of supernatural content (*Novellen* and various anecdotes) are often found in these writings, and I name a few specific examples. In *Flóamanna saga* comes the story of the cockerel who rules over his hen (and so is an example to husbands; cf. AT 670). In the episode of Spes and Þorsteinn in *Grettis saga* we find the motif of the equivocal oath (AT 1418) similar to that in one version of the Tristram and Iseult story. Good counsel appears in *Hervarar saga* and *Hákonar þáttur Hárekssonar* (*Fms.* XI; cf. AT 910–15); one could go on for a long time. All these story-elements appear to have reached Iceland by word of mouth; their contents are entertaining and the stories well adapted for dissemination. Then there are other stories, which have travelled in books. Saints' lives went on being translated as in earlier years, but the *exempla* so popular as sermon-material with itinerant monks, friars and other clerics (witness Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*) also began to be turned into Icelandic. These were in fact all manner of stories which had as a common factor the possibility of theological or moral lessons being derived from them.

¹ See *Skálholts annáll* 1345 (*Islandske annaler indtil 1578*, 211); *BS* II 129 (Norwegian).

Huge collections of these *exempla* are found in Europe, and the moral is often merely tagged on to them. Completely secular stories could be used for this purpose, and if the moral was taken away, there was often no trace of ecclesiasticism left in them. One man, Bishop Jón Halldórsson of Skálholt (died 1339), is known to have used such stories, and from the centuries after his time there exist large collections of such material, which are extremely varied in content. There we find for instance the story of the man who learned the physician's art from Death (one of the earliest recordings of this story, type AT 332). Subsequently translation of entertaining anecdotes continued, and there is a vast store of them in Icelandic manuscript collections. Those edited by Gering were identified by Reinhold Köhler¹ and editions and studies of others have since been published.² It is interesting to note that fragments of an English collection of *exempla* not known to Gering have been brought to light by Einar G. Pétursson.³ The story of Jonathas in *Gesta Romanorum* was translated into Icelandic and later turned into *rímur*. From these is derived an Icelandic version of AT 566.⁴

Jón Halldórsson's name is also associated with the translation of *Clári saga*, a French story which had been made into a Latin poem.⁵ Hans Christian Andersen used a similar subject for his story of the Swineherd. Thus such stories go by various routes and could provide inspiration for great writers at various times and of various nations. In Iceland the fate of this story was that someone who heard it read out, or else heard a *ríma* chanted that was based on it, retold it, and so it got into the stream of oral transmission (AT 900).⁶

IV

Fifteenth-century sources for Icelandic folk-stories, folk-beliefs and wonder-tales are scanty and one-sided; they are almost entirely prose romances in the style of older *fornaldar sögur* and *riddara sögur* (chiv-

¹ *Íslendzk æventýri*, ed. H. Gering, II, *Anmerkungen und Glossar mit Beiträgen von Reinhold Köhler*, 1883.

² See Einar G. Pétursson, 'Einn atburður og leiðsla um ódáinsakur', *Gripla* IV, 1980, 138–39.

³ *Miðaldaævintýri þýdd úr ensku*, 1976.

⁴ See Peter A. Jorgensen, *The Story of Jonatas in Iceland*, 1997.

⁵ Ed. G. Cederschiöld, 1907 (*ASB* 12).

⁶ On wonder-tales in older Icelandic sources see the introduction to *Verz*.

alric romances), or *rímur* on similar subjects. In the sixteenth century the sources become more varied, and more things come to light than have appeared for some time previously, and these sources become still more plentiful in the seventeenth century, when several separate brief treatises are added which deal very largely with popular lore, and are full of stories connected with folk-belief. We also have evidence of wonder-tales, but no complete ones were recorded before 1700.

Descriptions of Iceland and anecdotes about events in Iceland begin to multiply in books on geography in the sixteenth century, and towards the end of the century quite a considerable literature on Iceland had sprung up, by both Icelanders and others. On the whole, narratives by foreigners tend to be imperfect and unreliable, full of ignorant anecdotes of Icelanders and old wives' tales and superstitions about hell-fire under Hekla, but this sold the books. Still, there is some information to be had from them on folk-belief and folk-legends, and with care one can make some use of this material.

I would like to mention some points in these foreign geographies which may be based on Icelandic legends. In 1532 Jacob Ziegler published his book *Schondia*, which contains a chapter on Iceland. Among many other stories we find the following: 'It is said that spirits walk there in broad daylight, because the ghosts of those who have drowned or died violently in some other way come so openly to meet their acquaintances that those who do not know of their death receive them as if they were alive and shake hands with them, nor do they perceive their error until the ghosts are vanished. The people [of Iceland] often know beforehand what will happen to their great men (the ghosts tell them).'¹ Laurits Benedict's maritime chart has a note that there are whalebones on Hestfjall by Hestfjörður, and such legends are known in Iceland from that time.²

The Icelandic contributions to this subject all belong to the last years of the century. Firstly, oddly enough, we must mention the map of

¹ After Ólafur Davíðsson, 'Ísland and Íslendingar', *Tímarit hins íslenska Bókmenntafélags* VIII, 1887, 122. This essay and *Lfrs.* are the chief sources of this section. Similar ghost stories derived from Ziegler are found in other geographical treatises, such as those of Olaus Magnus (1555), Gemma Frisius (Regnier; 1550) and Hieronymus Cardanus (1540) (*Lfrs.* I 131, 136, 151, 152).

² *Lfrs.* I 254, II 179 (Jens Lauritzsøn Wolf, *Norrigia illustrata* (1651), 165); *De mirab.* 68 (Icelandic translation 113).

Iceland drawn by Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson of Hólar (1542–1627) and first printed in Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* in 1595, though drawn at least a decade earlier. This map has here and there illustrations and annotations, and some of these touch on folk-beliefs. Lómagnúpur is illustrated with birds and foxes which bite each others' tails, with this explanatory note: 'astuta vulpecularum venatio, in nidis volucrum investigandis atque diripiendis' (a cunning method of hunting by little foxes for finding and plundering birds' nests); this is the same story as Eggert Ólafsson tells of the fox.¹ There is a picture of a cow under Eyjafjöll with the legend 'Vaccae marinae'. Presumably Bishop Guðbrandur had heard from that district some stories of fine cows that came from under the sea, such as are common in later lore. Above Stafholt in Borgarfjörður is marked a natural hot spring that moved because of a man's covetousness, the monstrous serpent in the river Lagarfljót is mentioned, and Áradalur, 'Demon Dale', is drawn on the north side of Vatnajökull. Ortelius's geographical treatise, which his map accompanied, mentions trolls in Iceland.²

The Latin treatise *Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae (QDI)*, written about 1588, probably by Bishop Oddur Einarsson,³ contains various items of folklore. It tells of both trolls and 'hidden folk', i.e. elves. Trolls dwell in fearful lonely places, and the troll-wives are often seen, 'therefore do old women say that male trolls are nearly extinct and so that race increases rather little'. Of elves it states that they live in hills and are seen by people with second sight. They are like humans and have many dealings with them. Men have been known to beget children by their females, and their males to have intercourse with women, or else they carry off children or young people; some return safe and sound after a few days or perhaps weeks, but some are never seen again, while others return with distracted minds. The author does

¹ Eggert Ólafsson, *Reise* 354 (1975, 123). Also in *De mirab.* 60 (Icelandic translation 99–100).

² *Lfrs.* I 158.

³ Oddur Einarsson, *Íslandslýsing. Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae*, tr. Sveinn Pálsson. Introduction by Jakob Benediktsson: 'Nokkur orð um Íslandslýsingu eftir Sigurð Þórarinsson'. 1971 (= *QDI*). See Jakob Benediktsson, 'Hver samdi Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae?' *Nordæla*, 1956, 97–109; repr. *Lærdómslistir*, 1987, 87–97; Jón Samsonarson, 'Nokkur rit frá 16. og 17. öld um íslensk efni', *Opuscula* 3, 1967 (*BA XXIX*), 229–38.

not know whether they are the Devil's delusions or whether these beings are in some way mixed in their nature, intermediate between physical beings and spirits. These two explanations often reappear after this, the second among those who are more fixed in folk-belief and the first from those whose faith is more orthodox. We can see here that the stories of elves are in full flower, and similar in character to those which were written down later. The treatise also mentions a water-monster (this is undoubtedly the Lagarfljót serpent), poets whose verse has supernatural power, and the curious case of *rauðaundur*.¹

Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648) does not have much superstitious matter in his writings, and he is rather suspicious of such things. He objects to the stories current about ghosts in Iceland, but in a letter to Ole Worm he expresses certain beliefs in the influences of ebb and flood tides.² In his *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta*, written in 1596, he mentions elves in connection with the name *Álfr* in old stories. He states that they show themselves occasionally, but make themselves invisible at will, that they pass through rocks and hillocks and live in them, and that their way of life is like that of humans.

People come upon elf-women while they are washing clothes or doing other domestic chores. Thus one of my workmen, a truthful person, saw their clothes spread out to dry on a large stone in an uninhabited area, but he was afraid to touch them, and when he turned round they had vanished. They speak a strange language, go out to sea to fish, and understand the winds and tides and other things. It is therefore said in eastern Iceland that one boat was saved when others perished in a violent sea because it followed an elf-crew who were fishing there, whom no one except the skipper saw as they rowed for the shore in calm weather during the first or second hour of the day. They spoke these words of warning to the skipper: 'Wind in your lines, Glove-friend. There will be many a widow tonight.' He was called 'Glove-friend' because he had given gloves to the elves. Elves often steal human babies or young children; some return and some do not, and those who return (especially the older ones) can tell many things about the elves, but some of them remain more or less out of their minds for the rest of their lives. Elves take on the parents' likenesses and imitate their speech, and so find it easier to lure them away. It is a

¹ *QDI* 14–15, 20, 70, 86 (Icelandic translation 48–49, 57, 134–35, 158). On *rauðaundur* see *KS* 21; *De mirab.* 69 (Icelandic translation 116).

² *Lfrs.* I 233, 235; *Ole Worm's Correspondence with Icelanders*, ed. Jakob Benediktsson, 1948 (*BA* VII), 56–59 (nos 25–26); *Breve fra og til Ole Worm* II, 1637–1643, tr. H. D. Schepele, 1967, 91–92 and 132–33.

fact that elf-women have intercourse with men; they then make great efforts to have the offspring of such unions baptized, carrying them to church on major feast-days. They place the child in the churchyard or some other place where everyone will see it, and wrap it in costly cloth (such as priests' chasubles are made of), which is intended as a fee to the priest for the service. The mother does not appear herself, but she will nonetheless ask the human father to see to the child's baptism; when he refuses she removes the child in anger and lays a curse on the father. This men say and believe, but I cannot believe it, though there are many witnesses to it.¹

The belief in elves described here corresponds closely to that of the nineteenth century, and the content of the stories is similar. The story of Glove-friend is rare in Iceland, but very common in other countries.² Down to the nineteenth century there is an unbroken tradition of stories about the elf-woman who brings her child to be baptized (cf. pp. 178–79 below).

We now come to a number of events of the sixteenth century which point to beliefs current among the people. A number of witchcraft troubles arose, such as the cases of Þorleifur Björnsson of Reykhólar (1546) and Oddur Þorsteinsson of Tröllatunga (1554), the forged letters about Jón Magnússon's practice of magic (1593) and Bishop Oddur Einarsson's decrees on defensive magic (1592). There is also from the time of Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson (though this is not actually from this century), the accusation of witchcraft against Einar Þorvaldsson which the bishop prevented from going to court in 1617–18, and Guðbrandur's letter concerning Jón of Helgavatn (1612).³ In this he states that this Jón goes in for dreams, visions and prophecies, which some take to be divine revelations, and that Jón has intercourse with elves or 'hidden folk', which is not in accord with the teaching of God's word, wherefore Jón should unequivocally leave the society of Christian people and join the elves. All this shows that Bishop Guðbrandur regarded such accusations as rather silly.⁴

¹ *Aarb.* 1894, 130–31 n.; BA IX 461–62 and XII 260.

² It is found in the *þáttr* of Þorbjörg Kólka in Laxdal *ÓsÞ* (IV 15 (14)), and part of the verse in JÞork. 244; for other countries see Feilberg *Ordbog* s.v. *vante*.

³ PEÓ *Menn og menntir* II 418–20, III 605, 733–36.

⁴ Cf. Jón Samsonarson, 'Fjandafæla Gísla Jónssonar lærða í Melrakkadal', *Gripla* III, 1979, 40–70.

The story of Gvendur loki, who returned as a ghost because he was not allowed to go on the parish in Hjaltadalur, killed cows at Hólar and attacked a girl there, is more serious. It ended in his body being exhumed and beheaded and the girl being made to walk between his head and body before the remains were burned. Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá (1574–1655) tells the story in his *Annals*, and it must be close to the truth, since in 1609 a royal letter was published which sternly forbade the exhumation, beheading and burning of dead bodies.¹

All that has so far been mentioned points to folk-belief and folk-stories as they passed from person to person. But the sixteenth century is also peculiar in that it possessed poets who wrought from such materials fine and noteworthy poems. Their contents are usually most nearly related to elf-stories and wonder-tales. They are composed in *fornyrðislag*. *Kötludraumur*, ‘Katla’s dream’, appears to be one of the earliest. It tells of the extremely intense love of a man of the hidden folk for a mortal woman, and his grief when she leaves him to return to the dwellings of men. *Snjáskvæði*, *Kringilnefjukvæði*, *Vambarljóð*, *Hyndluljóð*, *Gullkársljóð*, *Bryngerðarljóð* and *Póru ljóð* are all wonder-tales in content.² *Snjáskvæði* tells of an elf-woman who has had a spell cast on her by her stepmother which has made her forsake her husband and child and go to the human world in man’s clothing. She must become a wolf and live among wild animals after ten years unless someone can tell her what is the matter with her and where she goes at night (at which time she is allowed to dwell in the world of elves). There is an atmosphere of deep grief and a pleasurable mystery in the narrative of this poem, the relationship of which with the nineteenth-century folk-story of Una (Úlfhildur) the Elf-queen is obvious.³ *Gullkársljóð*, which tells of a princess whose lover is a man of the hidden

¹ *Annálar 1400–1800* I 182–83; *Alþingisbækur Íslands* IV 116; *PEÓ Menn og menntir* IV 619–20.

² Printed in ÓDav. *Þulur*.

³ For related stories and variants see *Verz.* no. 306 I–III, *JÁ* I 440. Doubtless the foreign wonder-tale AT 306 is also related. On the basis of the poem, *Snækóngrímur* were composed late in the seventeenth century by Steinunn Finnsdóttir of Höfn (*Hyndlu rímur og Snækóngr rímur* eftir Steinunni Finnsdóttur, ed. Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 1950, *Rit Rímnafélagsins* III). There are also *Snjárímur* by Guðrún Jónsdóttir of Stapadalur, see Páll E. Ólason, *Skrá um handritasöfn Landsbókasafnsins* III, 1935–37, 577b. It may be mentioned that in one version of the folk-story in *JÁ* I 116 there appears a *ríma* stanza

people, has an elf-story flavour about it; the story is probably from a wonder-tale, though somewhat altered.¹

Finally, *Vambarljóð*, the heroine of which is transformed into a cow's stomach, but magically forces a prince to marry her and is thus disenchanting, seems to have been composed from a wonder-tale which was current at the time, even though most of the more recent versions of the story are influenced by the poem. I once heard the story of Rolling Belly told, and in it there came this remark: 'Often have I seen a sad bride, but I have never before seen a bridegroom weep.' This appears in st. 53 of the poem.² *Bryngerðarljóð* contains this stanza, known to many in Iceland:

<i>Jafnt er okkar</i>	Such is our love now,
<i>ást í milli</i>	you and I,
<i>sem hús standi</i>	as a house on the hillside
<i>hallt á brekku.</i>	that stands awry.
<i>Svigni súlur,</i>	The walls are sinking,
<i>sjatni veggur.</i>	warped is the frame.
<i>Sé vanviðað,</i>	If it now crumbles,
<i>völdum bæði.</i>	we both are to blame.

As well as these narrative poems one should also mention *Ljúflingsljóð*, a cradle song sung by a man of the hidden folk to send his son by a mortal woman to sleep; this poem has become very popular in Iceland, so much so that its metre, *fornyrðislag*, has been renamed *ljúflingslag* after it (ÓDav. *Pulur* 254–58; cf. pp. 182–83 below).

Besides such poems composed in simple metres, *rímur* were also made on similar topics at this time. *Móðars rímur* is made from a mournfully sad elf-story, while *Hermóðs rímur* is composed from wonder-tale motifs and is, as one might expect, somewhat in the

similar to stanzas 26 and 36 of *Snjáskvæði* but not from Steinunn's *rímur*. Which is older?

¹ Cf. AT 432. Further *Jonetsljóð* in *Strengleikar*, ed. R. Keyser and C. R. Unger, 1850, 74; *Strengleikar. An old Norse translation of twenty-one old French lais*, ed. Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane, 1979, 229–45.

² Cf. *Verz.* 38–39; further *JÁ* I ix, n.; *JÁ*³ II xviii, n. 1. I believe *Hyndluljóð* to be based on *Vambarljóð*; Steinunn Finnsdóttir of Höfn also composed *rímur* based on it.

fornaldar saga style. A wonder-tale which was current in oral form in the mid-nineteenth century is descended from it.¹

One can learn a great deal about the wonder-tales current in the sixteenth century from such *rímur*, and there can be no doubt that they did flourish then; they appear also to be behind a refrain in a poem by Jón Pétursson.²

<i>Skemman gullinu glæst</i>	See the bower, bedecked with gold,
<i>glóir hún öll að sjá;</i>	glittering to behold;
<i>þar leikur jafnan minn hugurinn á.</i>	thereon ever plays my desire.

Besides all this evidence of the existence of Icelandic folk-stories and wonder-tales, there is ample evidence that a vast number of exempla, fables, *Novellen* and humorous stories reached Iceland from abroad during this period. In contemporary manuscripts such literature is called simply *ævintýri*, and they are a direct continuation of the medieval importations in this category. Whole collections of this kind of translation exist from about 1600 down to our own times, and certain individual stories are scattered in manuscripts in various places.³ Large numbers of *rímur* and other poems were composed on such subjects.

¹ *Móðars rímur* are edited in *ÍRSA* 5. See *Verz.* no. 443*. On these *rímur* see also *Verz.* lxiv, and especially *BKP Rímur* 509–12. The author of the latter work clearly believes that *Hermóðsrímur* were based on a written saga, and that may well be. One might also mention here *Ásmundar rímur flagðagæfu*, which are certainly based on a much older (medieval) saga). See *BE Munnmælasögur* clvi–clxi, 92–104.

² *PEÓ Menn og menntir* IV 625.

³ Cf. *Verz.* lxvi–lxxi. There is more recent research especially in *Opuscula* IV–V (*BA* XXX–XXXI, 1970, 1975). In the second of these Vésteinn Ólason (among others) has shown that some ballads (*fornkvæði*) were derived from translated stories; see also the same writer's *The Traditional Ballads of Iceland*, 1982. Exempla translated into Icelandic from Middle English in the late fifteenth century have been edited in *Miðaldaævintýri þýdd úr ensku*, ed. Einar G. Pétursson (1976); some had also been printed by Gering, see Peter A. Jorgensen, 'Ten Icelandic exempla and their Middle English source', *Opuscula* IV, 1970 (*BA* XXX), 177–207; 'The Icelandic translations from Middle English', *Studies for Einar Haugen*, 1972, 305–20; 'Four Æventýri', *Opuscula* V, 1975 (*BA* XXXI), 295–328. Besides these there are translated stories of this type to be found widely in manuscripts and they have had varied influence on folk-stories, especially those of a religious kind, but the manuscripts are numerous and the stories usually rather short, so that they have not always been noted in manuscript catalogues. Collections of such stories went on being

From the sixteenth century we have *Þjófa rímur*, *Skógar-Krists rímur* and *Jónatas rímur* (as well as the corresponding prose story of *Jónatas*).¹ In a large manuscript note-book of miscellanea (*Syrpa*) made by the Rev. Gottskálk Jónsson of Glaumbær there are three such poems, all composed from non-Icelandic materials.² One of his stories is found in *The Thousand and One Nights* (the story of the little cripple), and other of his poems are derived from foreign stories and exempla. His *Syrpa* is a highly varied miscellany, containing many other poems and odd stanzas, some riddles and number games.³

We have attempted to give a survey of what folk-legends there are traces of in the sixteenth century, and a great deal has had to be mentioned, even though much of it is of slight importance. It is clear that at that time all the categories of story which are found later existed already then, though it is not until the next century that the sources become full enough for us to be able to make a serious comparison of earlier and later stories. If one wanted to pick out one major characteristic kind of source during this period, it would be the poetry that grew out of elf-stories and wonder-tales. Some of this material is, however, altered under the influence of ancient literary forms or later fantasy stories, or else it takes on the style and rhetoric of the *rímur*, while some manages to keep more of its folk-story character, is less tied by ancient conventions and has a more natural heartbeat. These are the narrative poems most closely based on folk-beliefs. It is as if the subjects are brightened and filled with a kind of lyric strength. It is a matter of opinion whether these poems were not the first growth of a new spring in Icelandic poetry—even though this growth was stunted by a later frost.

translated right on into the nineteenth century; see Mariane Overgaard, *Opuscula* VII, 1979 (BA XXXIV); one motif is examined by Agnete Loth, 'Utroskabs hævn. Motivet Stith Thompson Q 478.1.4 i nogle islandske kilder', *Gripla* V, 1982, 216–56. All this illustrates how difficult it is to distinguish between oral tradition and literary tradition, folklore and booklore, in Iceland.

¹ BKP *Rímur* 453, 465, 457; on the third of these see Peter A. Jorgensen, ed., *The Story of Jonatas in Iceland*, 1997.

² Ed. Jón Helgason, *Gamall kveðskapur*, ÍRSA 7, 1979. This work includes other poems derived from similar sources.

³ See Jón Þorkelsson, 'Séra Gottskálk Jónsson í Glaumbæ og syrpa hans', *AfnF* XII (1896), 47–73.

V

Evidence of folk-stories appears in far more sources in the seventeenth century than in earlier periods, and they are sometimes told well and clearly. There are even complete collections of them from this time and the evidence for wonder-tales is also more widespread. Considerations of space make it necessary to deal with this period more rapidly, and so we shall linger only over the more extensive sources.¹

First then, we look to works of geographical description that contain bits and pieces of a folk-legend nature. The treatise *Qualiscunque descriptio Islandiae* mentioned above was used by Bishop Gísli Oddsson (1593–1638) in his *De mirabilibus Islandiae* (1637) and by P. H. Resen in his *Nova descriptio Islandiae* (c.1680) (though Resen also drew on other sources). Then there are the works of Jón Guðmundsson lærði in this field, written before the middle of the century, and Bishop Þórður Þorláksson's (1637–97) master's degree thesis *Dissertatio Chorographica* (Wittenberg, 1666), an essay by Hannes Þorleifsson (died 1682) on the *óskabjörn* 'wish-bear' (the crab *oniscus*) and another by Jón Eggertsson (died 1689) on the development of Iceland, to which we may add Jens Lauritzsøn Wolf, *Norrigia illustrata* (1651) and various smaller items in other non-Icelandic writings.²

There is a good deal of superstitious matter in the annals of both recent and earlier times. *Skarðsárannáll* and especially *Fitjaannáll* contain a number of outright folk-legends that had been transmitted in oral tradition over a long period,³ and there is also Bishop Gísli's hotch-potch of preternatural annal entries *Ann. farr.* (1637).

Superstition developed rapidly in Iceland in the seventeenth century. People suspected of dealing in witchcraft were now dealt with more severely, fear of it grew and spread, and many were burned at

¹ One of the most important sources for the study of writings about folklore in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Iceland is BE *Munnmælasögur*.

² Bishop Gísli's writings are printed in *Islandica* X and translated by Jónas Rafnar, *Íslensk annálabrot og undur Íslands* (1942), Jón lærði's *Um Íslands aðskiljanlegar náttúrur* in *Islandica* XV; Peder Hansen Resen's in *Íslandslýsing*, tr. Jakob Benediktsson, 1991 (see *Aarb.* 1934); Þórður Þorláksson's in *Ísland, Stutt landlýsing og söguyfirlit*, 1982 (photographic reprint of the original edition, with a translation into Icelandic). On Jón Eggertsson's essay see BE *Munnmælasögur* lvii–lxii. For the others see *Lfrs.* II.

³ *Annálar 1400–1800* I–II.

the stake. There were precedents enough for this from abroad and the church was not backward in proclaiming the danger. Even though their conceptual world was largely non-Icelandic, much Icelandic folk-legend material and folk-belief is found in the writings of Icelandic churchmen. The first of the theological polemics against witchcraft is found in *Hugrás*, 'Mind's free run', by the Rev. Guðmundur Einarsson of Staðastaður (1627). Ari Magnússon, sheriff in Ögur, wrote a reply to this to defend the sheriffs from blame. The Rev. Páll Björnsson of Selárdalur (1620–1706) and others also wrote about witchcraft.¹ Both here and elsewhere we can see the contrast between the attitudes sprung from folk-belief and those of learned people derived from foreign Christian writings. The Rev. Jón Daðason's *Gandreið*, 'Magic ride', contains various things connected with folklore which he regards as white magic—and we may mention that the Rev. Eiríkur Magnússon of Vogsósar (1638–1716), one of the master magicians of later legends, was brought up by Jón.²

We can get some insight into the ideas of the magicians themselves by studying documents relating to witchcraft trials. We can learn even more from some of their poetry that conveys a strong impression of the supernatural power they believed lay in their verse, in charms against evil spirits, sickness, dangers, piracy, etc., such as Jón lærði's *Snjáfjallavísur*, composed to lay the Snjáfjöll ghost and the Rev. Magnús Pétursson (died 1686) of Hörgsland's *Tyrkjasvæfa*, 'Charm against Turkish pirates'.³ It may well be that on occasion people really did let fly with little spells, as folk-legends say. Not a few of the persons who are associated with witchcraft in later legends appear to have believed in the supernatural power of their verse, and have written about such matters or even indulged in a little white magic.

We turn next to those who have written specific treatises on elves, ghosts, second sight etc. The first of these is Jón lærði, whom we shall consider later. The Rev. Einar Guðmundsson of Staður (died 1650) wrote a treatise on elves which is now lost, but a fragment of it is preserved in the preface to Þormóður Torfason's translation of *Hrólfs*

¹ On these writings see EGP *Eddurit* I 111–17 and *Lfrs.* II.

² On *Gandreið* see *Lfrs.* II.

³ For the first of these, see *Huld* V 22–31, *Huld*² II 85–94; for the second, JÞork. 274–75 and Jón Þorkelsson, *Tyrkjaránið á Íslandi 1627* (1906–09), 515–23.

saga kraka, which contains a description of elves and the substance of some folk-stories.¹ In the seventh decade of the century Gísli Vigfússon, Rector of Hólar Cathedral School, wrote a tract on spirits and ghosts, of which a summary appears in Resen's *Nova descriptio*.² About the same time the Rev. Þorsteinn Björnsson of Setberg (died 1675) composed his Latin poem *Noctes Setbergenses* on the beginning of the world and the creation of the earth, chronology, etc., ending with a diatribe against an unjust judge. The second section of the poem deals with elves, the third is about men endowed with second-sight, though in fact both topics are mixed together in both sections, together with other matter from folk-belief and folk-legend. Some relevant items from the poem are listed here, as the work has never been described before. The following is based on the copy in Lbs 1652 4to.

The whinny of the water-horse (*nykur*) is heard in lakes and rivers, especially when they are covered with ice, while it is sometimes seen on dry land. A story is told of its use as a hay-carrier from 'our annals' (probably *Landnámabók*). Sometimes it is in the shape of a bull and its bellowing is heard in lakes. From this one lake in eastern Iceland (Sænautavatn on Möðrudalsheiði?) takes its name.

Since water-horses whinny in lakes, why should there not be mermaids in the sea, as there are stories about them 'in our ancient writings'?

There are monsters in lakes, and when they stick up their heads or some other part of them is visible it forebodes plagues and other disasters, while rivers are inhabited by strange fish (skate) and monsters.

Hot-spring birds are sometimes seen in Ölfus at night, swimming on the boiling water; they dive when they are approached, but do not fly upwards. They are the same size as crows, black as ravens and like them in appearance, though the author makes no attempt to decide whether they are evil spirits in bird-shape or actual birds.

It is said that rocks are trolls turned to stone, while the author appears to know of dwarves only from ancient written sources.

Elves are similar to men in size and appearance, but their bodies are made of a light, fine-grained matter, for they are neither men nor spirits, but half-way

¹ ÞT *HHrkr*, Preface. The passage was translated by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and printed in *Blanda* VII, 251–57.

² See note 2 on p. 91 above and *Aarb.* 1934, 176–79. Little is really known about the writings of Einar Guðmundsson and Gísli Vigfússon, since they are largely lost; see Jón Samsonarson, 'Nokkur rit frá 16. og 17. öld um íslenskt efni', *Opuscula* III, 1967 (*BA* XXIX), 238–61.

beings. It is said that they die like humans. Those who have seen them say that they have no division between their nostrils. They live in hillocks and rocks.

Things often disappear and are yet found again on the same spot; sometimes new-born calves are found in the mangers. Both are the work of elves.

Elves appear to humans in three ways: they are heard, seen or dreamed of. It is reliably reported that two shepherds went to see to their sheep and heard a terrible voice say, 'Now cover the hill-tops, Grímur, as quick as you can' and in that instant a thick fog covered everything.

Not far from here lived a serving-woman known to me by name, a virtuous and truthful person, now very old. Some years since she told me this story: 'I was once watching over the sheep in a meadow near a hillock; I was worn out and had laid down in the grass to rest. Then I heard the sound of butter churning from inside the hillock. I leant towards it and said: "Bring the butter out here." And what happened? A woman came suddenly out of the tump carrying a jug in her hand. I was amazed and frightened, ran off as quick as I could and took it to my masters.'

A similar story is told of a woman milking a cow and unable to get anything out of her, whereupon she was going to leave her to her own devices. Then a bit of a woman appeared and patted the cow and spoke thus to it in elf-verse:

<i>Ló, ló mín Lappa,¹</i>	Lully, my Lappa, lee,
<i>Votir eru tappar,</i>	Wet now your dugs be,
<i>Illa gerði konan</i>	The woman here
<i>til ljúfrar Lappar.</i>	Did ill-treat thee,
	Löpp my dear.

It happened in our time at the farm called Reykjavík that serving-women spread clothes out to dry on two rocks that stand out in the open there. In the evening the farmer's wife gathered up the washing and took it home. She was sitting in the entrance to the farm busy with something when an unknown woman appeared suddenly, out of breath with running, and asked: 'You haven't seen my child's drawers, have you? They were hanging out on the rocks.' The wife was taken aback and could not get a word out. The strange woman rooted about in the washing, found the drawers, went out to the rocks and vanished there.

A man from Grímsnes told the same woman a dream that a man had come running to him and told him to drive his animals away, and pointed out to him the grazing-land and the animals he meant, and the road he was to take; 'because,' he said, 'there is a great herd grazing there and they are eating all my meadow-land bare'. The farmer did not, however feel up to carrying out the order, and so did not move at all.

It can happen that men who lack second-sight suffer loss or run into danger or even lose their lives, if they do a forbidden thing unwittingly. Near Setberg here a green, flowering branch grew out of a rock. A man chopped it down in

¹ The text of this line is adapted from *JÁ* I 39.

our own time, but he went mad and threw himself in the lake and drowned the same year. Something similar happened in the north, a man lopping off a branch broke his leg. 'The man had often carried a lighted candle to this thicket when he had met with some misfortune, and no wind could blow out the light until it had burned out. So he made a vow for himself and his household, and thereupon was finally freed (i.e. from his distress).'

In some places it is forbidden to fish in the brooks either with nets or with hooks, and similarly some spots on rocks and skerries are avoided, and men are wary of taking birds or eggs there. Those who break these rules suffer harm, either bodily or in respect of their property.

Iceland has numerous stories of second sight and of people with second sight who see ghosts and spirits—and not only people, but also dogs and horses. This may partly be because the ground is more sulphurous here than in many other countries. Besides, people with second sight do not see what they see because of the sharpness of their eyes, but beings appear when they wish to; people with second sight see even with their eyes shut or with a cloth over their face, especially in the dark.

A person with second sight can let others see his visions. 'If you go forward before the person with second sight takes away the arm he has held over your head, then you must beware of the apparitions you wanted to see. A man will see with second sight it if he walks forward under the outstretched arms, and then he will be afraid of the apparitions afterwards. But if he walks backwards from where he stood he will no longer see them.' As confirmation of this I will tell a story that took place in our own time. A man who knew some magic was indoors, working at carpentry. He worked through the night and until morning, as he wanted to finish his job. Suddenly the light went out just as he was cutting the wood into shape. He went to relight it, and as he hurried as fast as he could with the lamp, a vision appeared before him every time he looked towards the door. The man tried to get outside, but the ghost stood in the way and prevented him from going past. There was a young lad in the house with the carpenter who couldn't see the apparition and he ran out. The boy was unafraid and knew nothing of ghosts or magic, but he passed under the carpenter's outstretched arms, and then he saw the ghost with his own eyes and let out a cry, after which he ran wildly to and fro, and now has second sight. He has often been frightened when he has seen apparitions, but later he became a parson and after that he was never left in peace by them. Then his second sight became second nature to him, and he could see, without being upset by it, elvish people both at a distance and nearby as they played happily, in beautiful clothing, handsome and fine-limbed.'

There is no record of Þorsteinn composing anything other than this poem, but Jón Þorkelsson the younger has surmised that it was he who wrote down the accounts of the Rev. Þorkell Guðbjartsson preserved in Stockholm Papp. fol. nr 60 and 64 in the Royal Library in Stockholm,

which were copied in 1686–87 by Jón Eggertsson from one of the Rev. Þorsteinn's books.¹ This narrative is closely connected with *Skrif Ólafs gamla*, 'Old Ólafur's writings', which are also in Stockholm Papp. fol. nr 64, and there is scarcely any doubt that both these works were originally by the same person.² I doubt, however, whether *Skrif Ólafs* is by a man from the south of Iceland, because the stories in it are from the north or west of Iceland. *Skrif Ólafs* can be dated by a reference to a war between Sweden and Denmark which has peacefully ended, though Christian IV, the Danish king, had had to 'cede sundry lands to Sweden'. This could refer to the Peace of Brömsebro in 1645, three years before Christian IV's death. The duration of the war in the text does not, however, tally with that of this particular war.

Apart from those discussed above, the authors who give most information on folk-belief and folk-stories are Bishop Gísli Oddsson and Jón lærði. We have already mentioned Bishop Gísli's works, which are a veritable gold-mine to the folklorist. As they are easily available in print, and well commented on by their editor, I shall not use up space here on recapitulating their contents.³

We now come to Jón lærði. Much has been written about him, both in English and Icelandic, and some recent research has caused us to

¹ See *Huld* IV 22–35, *Huld*² II 19–32, where these accounts are printed, and BE *Munnmælasögur* lxxvi–lxxxii, 3–11.

² In *Skrif Ólafs* appears the following (BE *Munnmælasögur* 16): 'Many accounts have circulated about the Rev. Þorkell Guðbjartsson's various magic doings, not least when he contended with the bishop at Hólar (about this has already been written, so it is omitted here, and can be read in the previous book)' and then other material follows. Here the scribe himself omits matter and says so. One may therefore assume that originally the passage about the Rev. Þorkell came in this place. On the other hand it is clear that the separate account has been expanded by the addition of genealogical information about the people of Svalbarð both at the beginning and end, and perhaps by further interpolations. One may guess at who added the genealogical material: it was actually the scribe, Jón Eggertsson himself, who was descended from Magnús prúði and his wife Ragnheiðr Eggertsdóttir. It is not surprising if he should boast about this family and copy out lawman Eggert's title to nobility.—Bjarni Einarsson, in his edition of *Skrif Ólafs gamla* in BE *Munnmælasögur* 11–22, suggested that Ólafur gamli was Jón Eggertsson. Cf. pp. 114–15 below.

³ They are edited in *Islandica* X (see note 2 on p. 91 above). Eight passages from them are translated into Icelandic by Jón Þorkelsson in *Huld* VI 37–51, *Huld*² II 185–200.

change our attitudes to him considerably from the stance taken in the Icelandic edition of this book.¹

Jón Guðmundsson was born in 1574, and is thought to have died in 1658. He was born and brought up in Strandasýsla (north-west Iceland) and lived there throughout his youth, and then moved to the Breiðafjörður area. He also travelled widely throughout Iceland, and even spent the winter of 1636–37 in Copenhagen. In the conventional sense Jón was not learned, for instance, in the Greek and Latin of the grammar schools, but he had an insatiable thirst for books, whether old or new, and was never tired of talking with knowledgeable people. Some Icelandic manuscripts must have passed through his hands, and he must have tried to discover their contents, while equally, he must have had access to some of the European literature on geography and world history. He certainly refers on more than one occasion to German works.² He must also have had access to either manuscript or printed maps, as he himself made a map of the northern seas.

It is clear from his writings that all his miscellaneous knowledge of ancient Icelandic stories and Norse translations of Latin saints' lives, wonder-tales and *rímur*, native superstitions about ghosts, elves, spirits, magic and so on, and beliefs from many sources about animals, ran together in his mind, and that he tried to form a syncretic whole from it, making tremendous efforts to provide a classified system for this miscellaneous material. Unfortunately, his credulity was great and his critical sense small (defects which he shared with many of his contemporaries), but his capacity for observation was tremendous, and it is difficult to avoid the feeling that he knew something of what are nowadays known as parapsychological phenomena. In this context I refer to the following section from Jón's work on the Prose Edda (EGP

¹ The principal earlier discussion of Jón and his work are in Icelandic PEÓ *Menn og menntir* IV, 315–49, 695–98, and Jón's own verse autobiography *Fjölmóðr*, ed. Páll Eggert Ólason, *Safn* V. See also (in Danish) Jón Helgason, 'Til Hauksbóks historie i det 17. århundrede', *Opuscula* I, 1960 (BA XX), 1–48, and (in English) Halldór Hermannsson, *Jón Guðmundsson and his Natural History of Iceland*, 1924 (*Islandica* XV). More recent scholarly investigation is especially that in EGP *Eddurit*; BE *Munmmælasögur*, Introduction; EGP *Rit*.

² There is a *Heims Historia* (*Welt Historia*, 1612) by Hermann Fabronius in a seventeenth-century Icelandic translation, thought to be by Jón, the manuscript of which (AM 201 8vo) is also supposed to be in his hand. On this book see EGP *Eddurit* I 134–36.

Eddurit II 53–54, see the notes in I 346–48; the manuscript is Stockholm Papp. fol. nr 38).

For example, people here are said to have second sight, even though they might be of small intellect and entirely unlearned (though not all such are unlearned) and one may receive this gift from another. The gift may also be controlled if the visions become too excessive in force. How much greater must have been the spirit-inspired desire for knowledge of heathen sages, or the Trojan men of Asia! Some folk here have also had the power to see distant contemporary events, not as if in visions, but as if in a kind of daze or paralysis.

One such man, a poor, pious, unlearned one, lived in my home district. He died in the year of the great loss of life, 1602. He was shown important happenings from all over the country, such as fatal accidents, loss of shipping and men's deaths, how they came about, sometimes four months before they took place; one such was the murders at Öxl.¹ Every day, while awake and standing up, he also saw a certain sign over every person's head, which he interpreted as warnings and signs of the future. Other folk see or hear of good and spiritual things, such as when the shocking drumming and banging of unclean spirits warns of their approach, or on the other hand when sweet pleasurable song and blowing of trumpets by good angels proclaim their coming. Yet none hear this except such as are of that nature and are given this gift [of hearing], nor yet do they see who contacts or has dealings with whom, etc. The ancients have recorded very many examples of such and many [other] kinds of strange visions; not least the most learned master Johannes Herolt, who lived in the period between Johann Huss and Dr Martin Luther,² which book is, like all my others, lost to me since 1616, about which there is no point in speaking.

We hear and read in very many old histories about the arts known to the Gautish and Lappish people, in Gandvík, Malanger and Varanger, no less than of the blackest kind of magic practised in Finnmark, and the miraculous effects of their spells and their escaping from their bodily shapes and returning to them, so that [the magician] is in two places at once, also being in the shape of beasts or birds; though they do not do this according to the Neapolitan Greek learning or by anointing but rather according to the arts of Óðinn and the people of Asia, which he also left here to his men of the North.

Jón's erudition must soon have been noted, and he acquired his by-name 'lærði' (we may guess he was first so named by ordinary people,

¹ The farmer Björn of Öxl in Snæfellssýsla was involved in 1596 in the most gruesome murder cases of Reformation Iceland; see *Annálar 1400–1800* I 180.

² Johann Huss was burned for heresy at the Council of Constance in 1415; Martin Luther was born in 1483 and died in 1546. Johannes Herolt (died ca. 1468) was a voluminous writer on many subjects. The book referred to here has not been identified.

and the name later became fixed as a surname). He is also, however, called ‘painter’ and *tannsmiður* ‘tooth-worker’ (probably this referred to his carving of walrus and other teeth or tusks; certainly, some artistic inclinations may be noted in his written work). It is not surprising that in his curiosity and undisciplined search for ideas Jón should have clashed with the views of the local clergy and other persons who had received formal schooling. As a result, he was involved in lawsuits involving charges of magic, imprisoned and driven far across the country. The persecutions began when he composed three poems against a ghost on Snæfjallaströnd which was supposed to have done much damage there, for these compositions collided sharply with contemporary clerical attitudes.¹ He also made the tactical error of being an apologist for the Spanish (or rather Basque) sailors who were brutally executed by the local district judge in Ísafjörður.² Many threads became entangled here, and Jón was driven to flee around the country, and even to Copenhagen, as we have already mentioned. In the end he was taken under the protection of Brynjólfur Sveinsson, Bishop of Skálholt (1638–74), and lived peaceably in eastern Iceland until his death, writing a number of works at the bishop’s behest.

Some of Jón’s works have survived in autograph, but we may well question whether he wrote them out only once, or perhaps, having no printer to disseminate his work, made multiple copies himself for distribution.³ And, we may ask further, did he then confine himself to precise transcripts or did he alter each copy as he made it, putting in and taking out material as his preferences of the moment suggested? I would like to draw attention to two stylistic characteristics in works attributed to Jón, as indicators of the nature of the problem.

1) Some of his narratives are laconic in their brevity, the main points barely adumbrated, while when the same story is told in another work of his, it is much more detailed.

¹ See PEÓ *Menn og menntir* IV, 324–33; EGP *Eddurit* I 60–99.

² This was Ari Magnússon; see Ólafur Davíðsson, *Víg Spánverja á Vestfjörðum 1615* and ‘Spönsku vísur’ by the Rev. Ólafur á Söndum, *Tímarit hins íslenska Bókmenntafélags* 16 (1895), 88–163; also Jónas Kristjánsson (ed.), *Spánverjavígin 1615 (ÍRSA 4)*, 1950.

³ It is not out of place here to mention how this habit of Jón’s resembles that of his younger English contemporary John Aubrey (see the textual arrangement in Aubrey’s *Brief Lives*, ed. A. Clark, 1898).

2) It often happens that Jón does not mention a particular person's name in one autograph, though he will state that he knows it (this was of course sometimes a necessary act of prudence), while in another version he sometimes gives the name outright, even in the context of the same story.

There is of course a further point to be remembered: we do not always have Jón's autograph of a work, only a copy made by some other person, and in such cases we must necessarily investigate whether the copyist(s) altered the substance of the text, or whether an intermediate copyist departed from the holograph—and, if so, in what way.¹

Some of Jón's work has reached print. These editions will be noted as they become relevant in this account. Unfortunately, however, very little text-critical work was done by the editors, and it cannot be stressed too strongly that it is absolutely necessary to provide texts of Jón's work which have been prepared according to today's strictest editorial standards. Jón Helgason has laid down the lines which need to be followed.² As will become obvious to the reader, Jón lærði's works are a rich mine of pure gold for the student of the folklore and folk-belief of Iceland in the seventeenth century. For the purpose of the present study, most attention will be paid to matter which can be seen to be popular stories, for Jón's writings abound in these.

The principal surviving works are:

First, three items in verse: 1) The poems concerning the Ghost of Snjáfjöll.³ 2) *Fjölmóður*, 'The Much-Wearied One'. 3) *Armanns rímur*,

¹ We may note, as an example of such textual uncertainty, that Gísli Konráðsson states in his story of Landa-Hrólfur that he (Hrólfur) had sought and found *Nýjaland* 'Newland', and that his wife had there helped a woman of the hidden people to bear a child (*Huld*² II 15–18). Gísli refers to a narrative by Jón lærði, though this is nowhere to be found in Jón's existing works, as far as they are known at present. It is of course possible that Gísli's story is from some lost note or reference by Jón about the northern seas, for which he had a great enthusiasm, though it must also be regarded as possible that Gísli inserted a spurious reference to Jón to make his account more plausible.

² Jón Helgason, 'Til Hauksbóks historie i det 17. århundrede', *Opuscula* I, 1960 (*BA* XX), 25: 'I det 17. århs. Island, hvor udbredelsen af ikke-religiøse bøger normalt foregik på meddelalderlig vis gennem afskrivning, må den mulighed, at flere og muligvis også indbyrdes noget afvigende autografer har eksisteret, altid tages under overvejelse.'

³ The second part of them is printed is printed in *Huld* V 22–31, *Huld*² II

'The Epic of Ármann'. No. 3 was composed in 1637; it is in the form of *rímur*, i.e. an epic-scale narrative in fits in a variety of metrical forms, which became a popular way of versifying the older prose sagas, where pure metrical skill often outweighed all consideration of intelligibility.¹ In this medium Jón's diction is usually fairly simple and comprehensible, if not very sophisticated (the same criticism applies to the newly discovered poems which can be attributed to him, not least the Bjarnarey poem, which deals with the island where Jón dwelt for a while in a kind of outlawry, even if content enough with his habitation).² Sometimes his poems suggest that he is visualising a drawing or a painting, particularly when he is writing of landscapes.

The first part of *Ármanns rímur* takes place at Þingvellir and in the mountains to the north (Ármannsfell, etc.). This narrative bears considerable resemblance to folk-legends, and tells of Þorsteinn, a farmer's son, his dealings with troll-women and the assistance given him by his helper Ármann (originally the guardian spirit of the fell).³ Thereafter the narrative turns into a fairly straightforward wonder-tale: Þorsteinn is sent on an enforced journey to northern Norway and Bjarmaland (F110, Wonder Journey) and receives assistance there from Ármann's brother Grámann, who transports him on a flying cloth (D1155, 'Magic Carpet') to a queen who is under a spell: she gets him to perform three great deeds for her, completely in the wonder-tale manner (H900–1199). We should note here that two prose stories have been composed from these *rímur*, and that chs 35–37 of Eiríkur Laxdal's *Ólands saga* draws on them.⁴ In some places in the *rímur*

85–94 and in Ólafur Davíðsson, *Galdur og galdramál á Íslandi*, 1940–43, 120–21. More of Jón's verse (*Áradalsóður*) is printed in *Huld* IV and *Huld*² II. See PEÓ *Menn og menntir* IV, 695–96.

¹ JGÍ *Ármanns rímur*. The introduction deals in great detail with the folk-story material.

² See 'Vænt er úti Bjarnarey að búa,' *Mímir* 2, 1963, 6–11; further on these poems, see EGP *Eddurit* I 143–44.

³ Jón Helgason notes the words of the Old Man's Daughter of the wonder-tales 'Live happy in your hill, good man' (JGÍ *Ármanns rímur*, Introduction, x); we can add to this the reply by Ólafur muður (mouth) to the troll-woman's greeting (JÁ I 158).

⁴ The oldest version of *Ármanns saga* composed from the *rímur* is published in the 1948 edition, and in GJ *Íslendinga sögur* XII. It was probably written in deliberate close imitation of the Old Icelandic sagas, in order to be

there seem to be references to older poems, and the name of the eponymous hero does not appear to be Jón's invention. So Jón's poem may well be a mere reworking of a lost narrative poem on this subject.

Um Íslands aðskiljanlegar náttúru, 'The various natures (of things) in Iceland'. This is Jón's greatest scientific work, as well as the first description of Iceland in Icelandic.¹ It contains a certain amount of superstitious matter, such as the story of the *mjaldur* (a kind of whale, Delphinapterus leucas or white whale) and beliefs about bears, and is the work that contains the most material concerning folk-beliefs about the natural world. We also find there part of the wonder-tale of Viðfinna Völufegri (AT 709, the Icelandic equivalent of 'Snow White'), which is the earliest fragment of an actual wonder-tale to survive in Icelandic literature (poems or sagas composed on the basis of wonder-tales, or from wonder-tale motifs, being another matter). It may have a rival as far as age is concerned in the fragment in AM 119 b 8vo, which Kålund maintains is from the seventeenth century, but this manuscript is probably later than those of *Íslands aðskiljanlegar náttúru*.²

Samantektir um skilning á Eddu, 'Collectanea towards an understanding of the Edda'. This accumulation of notes, intended to assist readers of the Prose Edda, contains a great deal of material for the student of folklore. Here occurs the first variant known to the present author of the story of the 'seal-maiden', and because of its wide popularity in north-western Europe, it is well worth while translating it here.³

accepted as one. The younger version (possibly by Halldór Jakobsson) was printed at Hráppsey, 1782, reprinted in Akureyri, 1858 and in *GJ Íslendinga sögur* XII. On the *Ólands saga* version, see *JGI Ármanns rímur*, Introduction, xxxi–xxxiii, and also K. Maurer, 'Über isländische Apokrypha', *Germania* XIII (1868), 63–79. It should be noted that the younger version is very well written; the author was clearly well versed in the Sagas of the Icelanders and the influence of *Bárðar saga* is particularly strong. There is also some indebtedness to oral wonder-tales, especially in the formally worded exchanges in dialogues, though these are treated freely, and we have older and better sources for most of the examples.

¹ Edited by Halldór Hermannsson in *Islandica* XV (1924).

² See *Verz.* 50. The fragment is printed in BE *Munnmælasögur* 106.

³ Edited from Stockholm Papp. fol. nr 38 in EGP *Eddurit* II 55–56; see also the notes in I 352–54. On variants of the story see *Verz.* no. 400, I (p. 35), *JÁ*³ I 629, cf. also 697, IV 10–12, cf. also 663; also Þorsteinn Erlingsson, *Þjóðsögur*,

Many strange happenings have been told us by old men (which may be true), relating to elves, the nature of the polar bear, seals, whales, sea-cows and other such beasts. Some old, truthful men have told me that a certain Parson Jón of Laufás¹ (in Eyjafjörður), who lived shortly after the time of Bishop Jón,² proved in writing by solid proofs such a wondrous story as hereafter follows. A certain unmarried man in the north was on his way to attend church at Christmas tide—it is not certain whether on Christmas Eve or New-Year's Eve. He was delayed on his way, night fell while he was journeying, and his route lay along the seashore. Out ahead, in a great cave above the shore, he heard the sound of feasting. Secretly he drew near and saw great sealskins lying on the shore like empty bags, near the people who were feasting and dancing, about the same number as there seemed to him to be people. At length he seized a sealskin which did not appear to be too great in size, folded it up and hid it under his clothes in his armpit. But as soon as the merrymakers saw him, they were shocked and all ran with much noise and crashing, each into his skin, and fled out to sea, except for a young woman who remained behind. She attacked the man to recover her skin, but he defended himself and held on to it, so that in the end she had to go with him whether she wished to or not. He was said to have lived with her for twelve years and had a son and

1954, 277 and SS *Íþ* VI 26–27 and SS *Íþ*² IV 187–88; for non-Icelandic examples, see Reidar Th. Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 1958 (FFC 175), 4080; Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index*, 1932–36, B81–82; also S. O'Duilearga (ed.), *Leabhar Shéajín í Cornell*, 1948, 438–39; Bo Almqvist, 'Of mermaids and marriages', *Béaloideas* 58 (1990), 1–10. It should also be mentioned that in *ÍB* 85 4to, a manuscript reckoned to be from c.1600, there is a note that 'Luther states that a sea-monster in a woman's shape was once caught from a ship; one of the fishermen took her for his wife and had a child by her, but before three years were over, she went with him to the same fishing grounds and jumped overboard into the sea'. Such a story, told with the authority of Luther, might well be considered 'written authority and true' for the view that the seal-maiden was a true phenomenon, and ample subject matter for an academic dissertation. The seal-maiden is, of course, an ancient thread in the weave of Celtic folklore, and has even been brought into twentieth-century literature and music. See M. Kennedy-Fraser and G. Bantock's opera *The Seal-Woman* (1906).—A number of stories in *JÁ* are derived from *Tíðfordrif*, and Jón lærði is the earliest writer used in that collection. Of course the trustworthiness of a source is greatly dependent on the age of the earliest manuscript that contains it.

¹ The 'Parson Jón of Laufás' probably meant the Rev. Jón Sigurðsson (incumbent at Laufás 1559–1615), see Sveinn Níelsson, *Prestatal og prófesta á Íslandi*, 2nd edn., 1949–51, 292.

² Probably Jón Arason, 1524–50.

a daughter by her. All that time a single seal was seen in the sea by their home (he was supposed to have been the maid's fiancé). Then, at the end of the twelve years, once when the man was not at home, the woman searched out her skin, found it and vanished at once out to sea. People have made many guesses in their arguments as to what this story is about. To me it seems most likely that these people were sea-people in seal-shape, who kept their night of rejoicing at Christmas in imitation of land-people and elves, who greatly enjoy good moderate entertainment, especially that of good singers.

This book also contains the story of a vessel which went through the air as ships travel the sea, and its anchor got caught for a while in the ground.¹ The commentary to the Edda itself is followed by the story of a Norwegian farmer's daughter who got lost in a fog and stayed in a hidden valley (in Svafadalir) with a people who slept all winter; she married a farmer's son and had a son and a daughter by him; later her son woke up his father [during the winter], whereupon all the people of the valley went mad, the woman fled and made contact with 'King Olaf's [St Óláfr's?] men' 'and so this story found its way into Norwegian books and stories'.²

Um ættir og slekti, 'On families', was probably written by Jón to show his neighbours in eastern Iceland that he had many eminent men in his ancestry,³ though even in a work of such dry-as-dust nature there is folklore material concerning the magician Ólafur tóni, the prophecies of Bishop Sveinn (Pétursson, of Skálholt, 1465–76) and other soothsayers. Jón's works on herbs and medical lore also contain miscellaneous superstitions, though there is no cause to investigate them here, as much of the material is copied from other medical manuals and originates for the most part outside Iceland.

This brings us to the one of Jón's books that is of most value to the student of folklore. *Tíðfordrif*, 'Pastime', was written in 1644. It is an extraordinary farrago of material, some of it of no particular value, but much of it very interesting, dedicated to Bishop Brynjólfur, and it is clear from the book that the bishop had encouraged its composition.

¹ Cf. *KS* 26; *BP* III 273; *EGP Eddurit* II 60 and notes in I 363–64.

² *EGP Eddurit* II 88, cf. notes in I 382–83. The 'Land of Sleepers', where the people sleep all through the winter, is also mentioned in the wonder-tale about Döggvar in *Lbs* 417 8vo (see *Verz.* 44). Bishop Gísli Oddsson refers to the stories that birds sleep all the winter in *Áradalur* (*De mirab.* ch. 14).

³ *Um ættir og slekti* is edited by Hannes Þorsteinsson in *Safn* III, 5, 701–28.

To judge by the form in which it is arranged, Bishop Brynjólfur must have written to Jón, sending him a series of questions (possibly not unconnected with enquiries arising from the bishop's reading of S. J. Stephanius's *Notæ uberiores*¹). The bishop's request may have arisen from his intention to write a book about ancient religion and elves.² Jón's endeavour to cram in everything he knew in order to please his great patron would then account for the formlessness of the tract. The manuscript that was thought to be his autograph of this work is now not thought to be in his hand, though it is the oldest and best, while in other copies various points are considerably expanded in a way which suggests that the interpolations are the work of the copyists, probably most often Jón Eggertsson. Some of the divergencies could of course be Jón lærði's own later additions and alterations. The most notable of such additions is the one on Drangey and bird-catching there in Papp. fol. nr 64 in the Royal Library, Stockholm. This manuscript is largely written by Jón Eggertsson; there is also later in it a section on the world of elves underground, and on how one goes about opening the earth to gain entrance to their homes (see pp. 273–74 below). If this part is not composed by Jón lærði it is the work of a man with no mean talent for imitating his style, and it is most likely to have been Jón Eggertsson.

It is obvious even from this brief survey that those sections of *Tíðfordrif* that survive only in Stockholm Papp. fol. nr 64 are less trustworthy than those whose text is supported by other sources as well. Nonetheless, this is still an unsettled question, which may possibly be solved by a rigorously edited text being made available, so that textual comparisons may be made. It should also be noted that these are not the only sections of the Stockholm manuscript which have been thought to be additions by Jón Eggertsson. Other sections, which will be discussed presently, are also suspect.

An account of the contents of *Tíðfordrif* is now necessary. After the dedication Jón discusses ancient books which dealt with various arcane matters, such as angels, spirits of the air and demons, in all of which the author believes (he had seen fragments of one such book at Laufás:

¹ See S. J. Stephanius, *Notæ uberiores*, 1645; cf. J. Benediktsson, 'Íslenzkar heimildir í Saxo-skýringum Stephaniusar', *Árbók Landsbókasafns Íslands*, 1946–47, 104–14.

² See EGP *Eddurit* I 37 and 338. On *Tíðfordrif* in general see EGP *Eddurit* I 52–54 and 122–27.

'I think that the Rev. Þorkell Guðbjartsson had also seen it and other such works, and had studied it'); he also refers here to having read *Postula sögur* and *Basíliús saga*, and believes implicitly in the accounts of spiritual beings in them. In connection with angels Jón refers to visions. It is clear that he knew contemporary accounts of people in visionary states, and that his own experiences and those described in written stories about supernatural events correspond so closely that he regards each as throwing light on the other (cf. EGP *Eddurit* I 386–87). This section is outstandingly noteworthy, closing as it does with Jón's paean of praise to the glory of creation which no one can understand or describe in its fullness.

Now come a few words on 'our land' (i.e. Iceland) and its various properties, which are followed by a long passage dealing with magic stones, in which Jón names various people as owners of them. Without further preamble there follows the story of the merman,¹ and it is succeeded by a short note about the properties of plants. Almost at once, however, the narrative returns to stones; here Jón inserts an anecdote of how his wife Sigríður found a magic stone in a gravel heap by the sea, and how, when she placed it in water, it looked as if a great crowd of men entered the water. Here are also observations on Ólafur Pétursson's attempts to obtain stones from birds, in among which is added the story of St Peter and the Jewish fisherman.² Then follow questions (included in the text) about *igða* 'nuthatch', *hlébarði* 'leopard', *ylgr* 'she-wolf', *finngálpn* (a monster similar to a centaur) and

¹ Jón's text of the merman story in *Tíðfordrif* is printed in JÁ³ I 126–27. The story is widely found in numerous variant forms: the unexpected laughter (usually threefold) is a principal theme, but who the laughing creature is varies, and also what he laughs at. The oldest Icelandic example of this creature is in the thirteenth-century *Hálfs saga*, ch. 7; then we have Jón's story; otherwise see *Verz.* 113–14 and Laxdal *Ósþ* III 19, 25. There are innumerable non-Icelandic versions, cf. J. D. Bruce, *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, 1928, I 138–49; R. S. Loomis (ed.), *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages*, 91–92; BP IV, 181; Jan de Vries, *Die Märchen von klugen Rätsellösern*, 1928 (FFC 73), 42–44; AT 875D, also D1318.2.1 and N456.

² The story of St Peter and the Jewish fisherman is in JÁ I 634; II 25. The Gospels stress St Peter's skill as a fisherman, and various stories about this are gathered in O. Dähnhardt, *Natursagen*, 1909, II 180–83, though this story is not there, nor have I found it in any European sources, though it is likely to be of non-Icelandic origin.

hjassi (another fabulous beast most notable for its longevity).¹ Jón goes on to discuss *Jotunheimar* ‘the world of giants’ and other mythical geographical locations, and then he moves on further to the underground land of the elves, in which we find his fullest discussion of that race. After referring to sea-dwellers and sea-cattle Jón then goes on to discuss contacts between elves and men, beginning with written sources such as *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns* (especially the passage about the journey to the subterranean world), *Völuspá* and more recent works such as *Móðars rímur*,² and the tragic story of Bergþór and the elf-woman Bergljót,³ after which we come to what are by our definition folk-stories.

At this point in the book the manuscripts of *Tíðfordrif* begin to diverge more substantially than before; this may be the result of variants in Jón’s autograph copies. One has to determine whether any copy not in Jón’s hand is the sole authority for its type of text before Jón’s authorship can be demonstrated; we shall discuss some of the most doubtful passages a little later on. In *Tíðfordrif*, we next encounter mention of certain folk-stories telling of contacts between elves and men. First we have a brief version of the story of the farmer of Stóra-Fjarðarhorn in the parish of Fell, who had a wife from the race of elves and had children by her. Because of her origin she could not endure any of the rituals of the Christian religion, and died because of this.⁴ This is followed by the story of Sigurður of ‘Hóll á Fjalli’ (an older form of the name Vðirhóll á Fjöllum (Hólsfjöllum), perhaps used deliberately to mislead). All the people of the farm died of a plague, but the hidden folk came and helped with the farm work, though they remained invisible to men.⁵ In some manuscripts the names in

¹ For *hjassi* see Lagerholm *DL* 4–5 and note.

² See *Móðars rímur og Móðars þáttur*, ed. Jón Helgason, 1950 (*ÍRSA* 5).

³ I do not know of any version of this story except Jón lærði’s retelling.

⁴ The story of the farmer in Fjarðarhorn and the elfwoman he married is printed in *JÁ* I 104–05; it is related to a narrative printed in Gering *ÍÆ* I 246–54, with a German translation and notes (II 185–92 and 396). It is unquestionably of non-Icelandic origin and may perhaps have spread from the ‘great book of Sauðafell’ which Jón lærði called ‘Mother of Sagas’.

⁵ The story of Sigurður, the farmer of Hóll on Fjall, is preserved separately in some manuscripts (e.g. Lbs 724 4to, p. 155; ÍB 250 4to, p. 14; Lbs 1565 4to, p. 65) and also in *Setbergsannáll* 1397 (*Annálar 1400–1800* IV 35–36); there and elsewhere it is combined with the story referred to in the previous note.

this story are very confused, while in some the story of the parson of Möðrudalur is included here (it is substantially the same story as that of Sigurður of 'Hóll á Fjalli', but more powerfully told).¹ It may of course be possible, though it is perhaps not all that likely, that these are two variants of the same basic story, and that Jón lærði himself heard the one about the parson of Möðrudalur after he had started his work, which was all written in eastern Iceland, and inserted it in one of his copies at what seemed to him an appropriate point.

Jón now comes to *Snjásljóð* and *Gullkársljóð*, notes two half-stanzas from them and goes on to write of elf-kings and of the forms of justice practised by elves, of stones on desolate heaths which are the sarcophagi of the elf-kings, and of books from the elves. Here he also comments: 'It has happened that some of the elf-people wanted their half-caste children to be baptized, so as to enable them to obtain immortal souls, and they have also sometimes stipulated that a child should enter the religious life.'² He now cites the tragic story of Móðar, from which, he maintains, we can see that elves are not a race of demonic origin, as some have declared. There follows a stanza from Jón's poem *Fjandafæla* in the style of a hymn, 'Careful folk keep their laws', and a clause from the law of the hidden folk with which most manuscripts of *Tíðfordríf* conclude their account of elves. At this point, however, Stockholm Papp. fol. nr 64 continues with discussion of poetry attributed to elves, and a long section on the island Drangey in Skagafjörður with a description of bird-catching activities there. This is followed by the story of the Drangey cliff-dweller who tried to cut through a bird-catcher's rope and succeeded in cutting all the strands except the one blessed by Bishop Guðmundr the Good (cf. *BS* I 599). The cliff where this is supposed to have happened is named *Skálmabjarg*, 'Swordcliff', and a similar story is told of *Skálmabjarg* in Eyjafjörður.³ There follows in this version a longish chapter on how

¹ The story of the priest of Möðrudalur is printed in ÓDav. 1–3; ÓDav.³ I 232–37; ÓDav.⁵ I 40–42 and 93–97; and in *Setbergsannáll* 1463 (*Annálar 1400–1800* IV 47–49), and is also preserved independently in the manuscripts listed in the previous note. It is related to the story referred to on p. 107, note 4.

² For parallels see *JÁ*³ VI 300, under *skírn*.

³ It is of course perfectly possible that this entire passage may be explained by the fact that it was written by an observant traveller, who drew on the narrative of a reliable, locally knowledgeable man. The words 'Two men once talked together; their names were well known, though they are not noted here'

people entered rocks and hillocks to ask the elves for news, all very interesting material to the student of folklore (see pp. 273–74 below).

The next main section of *Tíðfordríf* deals with Indian kings, the tower of Babel, the journey of Zeth, the Fields of the Undying¹ and the Gospel of Nicodemus. These are followed by explanations of some words and island-names ('referred to in the letter'; presumably Bishop Brynjólfur's lost letter containing his enquiries to Jón), and by the poem *Kortmál*, 'Brief Verse' (possibly a deliberate misnomer, as the whole poem is 70 stanzas; or perhaps the title means the same as 'skemmtun', something to shorten a long working-session of an evening, a pastime). After these comes a sequence of stories; one about the ship *Trékyllir* (after which *Trékyllisvík*, an inlet in *Strandasýsla*, is supposed to have been named), others about ghosts walking after the sea-battle of Flói (cf. *JÁ I* 259), *Skáld-Helgi*'s fight with the revenant *Porgils*, other examples of the efficacy of axes against revenants (e.g. against *Jóra* of *Jórukleif*), and an account of the event in the days of Bishop *Árni Þorláksson* of *Skálholt* (1269–98), when a grave-dweller chanted 'Thick blood, Weary men' (*JÁ I* 424), and of the crowing hen, to which last Jón adds the comment: 'The book that I call *Sagnamóðir* ('Mother of Stories'), because many stories were copied from it, explains all this; it belonged to *Ólafur Hannesson* of *Sauðafell*.'

The last section of the book includes stories of church robberies in England in the days of St Anselm and St Thomas Becket, stories of Duke Robert of Normandy, of the 'Emperor' Quintilian² and Master Perus—these are stories of trickery—some magic numbers, 'St Anselm's Prayer', notes on 'Ireland the Good', a list of episcopal sees in various places in the world, and a note on *Ásólfur* the Christian who settled at *Kirkjubólstaðir* (*Innri Hólmur*) on *Akranes* in south-west Iceland in the ninth to tenth centuries. There are stories of Greenland and a glance at genealogies from western Iceland (including Jón's own, which appears here in this farrago of miscellaneous knowledge, as it

have been pointed to as evidence of such caution in Jón Eggertsson's works, but such a remark is frequently found in the work of his older namesake, and the phrase will therefore be of his composition.

¹ Cf. *The History of the Cross-tree down to Christ's Passion*, ed. Mariane Overgaard, 1968 (*EA B* 26), 59–85.

² See Gering *ÍÆ I* 51–67 (nos xvi–xvii); *Miðaldaævintýri þýdd úr ensku*, ed. Einar G. Pétursson, 1976, 9–11.

does in *Um ættir og slekti*). Right at the end comes another piece about *finngálpn* and a few disparate verses. Some manuscripts also add at the end the story of how St Óláfr of Norway and an ogress exchanged verses, she pouring out curses on the people, ‘Come sickness, let the people groan, come down snow, and make hunger widespread’, which he turns instantly into blessings: ‘Come rain, come calm, come good catches and men to take them’ (JÁ I 164).

This takes us to Jón’s best-known poem, *Áradalsóður* ‘The Chant of Demon Valley’.¹ It deals with outlaws who, the poet maintains, are descended from ancient Icelandic settlers who could not get on with ordinary people, went up into the highland interior and by their magic arts cast a spell of concealment over the valleys they inhabited.² He also connects these men who lived in the wastelands with Grettir and other ‘woodsmen’ (i.e. outlaws, Icelandic *skógarmenn*) of the medieval sagas, and seems to think that the outlaw habitation of the uplands has been continuous down to his own time.³ The place-name *Áradalur*, ‘Valley of the Demons’, is not Jón’s invention, as it occurs on the map of Iceland drawn by Bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson of Hólar (1571–1627), published by Ortelius in 1595. There the valley is on the north side of Vatnajökull, but Jón, who knew his *Grettis saga*, has been influential in the place-name’s being transferred to the western uplands of Iceland. The valley is also mentioned before Jón’s time in Bishop Gísli Oddsson’s *De Mirabilibus Islandiae*, where it is stated that birds sleep there on the first day of winter.⁴ *Áradalsóður* is composed in a simple metre and a simple style such as is frequently found in many of Jón’s other verse compositions (e.g. *Ármanns rímur*), but

¹ *Áradalsóður* was first printed in *Huld* IV (1894), 53–69, by Ólafur Davíðsson; reprinted from this edition in *Huld*² II 48–62 and by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Fagrar heyrði eg raddirnar*, 1942 (repr. 1974), 267–80.

² Cf. *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and Jón’s own *Ármanns rímur*.

³ It is interesting that the name *Áradalur* occurs in a verse epistle by Bjarni Gizurarson, addressed to Stefán Ólafsson and preserved in Thott 473 4to and Bodleian Library 78, on Atli and Dulur the Brave. These two rave about the abundance of grass in the mountains and talk the local people into trusting their livestock to the winter-grazing there — with, of course, disastrous results. It is not impossible that Bjarni is making fun of Jón lærði’s marvellous pastures in *Áradalur*.

⁴ *De mirab.* 52 (ch. 14). On *Áradalur* see Haraldur Sigurðsson, *Kortasaga Íslands frá lokum 16. aldar til 1848*, 1978, 13.

Jón adds a refrain to each stanza in the manner of the dances known as *vikivakar*. *Áradalsóður* consists of five stories in verse, many of which are known in nineteenth-century oral versions. These stories concern:

- I. The ancient settlers who moved into the uplands.
- II. The outlaw who fetched his wether from a pen in one of the ordinary settlements.
- III. A girl who loses her way, stumbles on a habitation of outlaws and lives with them for a year (this is supposed to have happened in the poet's grandmother's youth).
- IV. Steinku-Varði (i.e. Steinunn's Þorvarður), who seems to have been a shepherd, and who comes to Áradalur in a dream and accepts the hospitality of the Lord of the Valley. This Lord gives him a young wether and describes its ownership mark; then Varði wakes up by the side of his Steinka, but the wether, a big, handsome one, is there to prove his journey was true.

V. A man from Snæfellsnes who went up to Hvítársíða to look for work and met an outlaw who hired him. The section goes on to tell of the enormous wages which he received at the end of his period of service, and how he lost part of them because his horse bolted. It is worth noting that the poem is written in a light, humorous tone (especially the last two sections), and that Section IV shows some affinity with the fifteenth-century humorous poem *Skíðaríma*.¹

An essay entitled 'On hidden places and overshadowed (or secret) valleys in Iceland' contains much material related to *Áradalsóður*. This composition is preserved only in Stockholm Papp. fol. nr 64, where it is in two parts, though originally there was probably only a single essay.² The scribe, Jón Eggertsson, states that it is by Jón lærði, and in spite of everything scholars in recent times have said about Jón Eggertsson, it is likely that direct attributions by him to his learned namesake

¹ See also Finnur Jónsson, *Rímnasafn*, 1905–22, I 10–42; BKÞ *Rímur* 366–90; *Skíðaríma* is also in *Kvæðasafn eftir nafngreinda íslenska menn frá miðöld*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson and Sigurður Nordal, 1922–27, 161–215, and there is also a separate edition of this poem by Th. Homan, *Skíðaríma: An Enquiry into the Written and Printed Texts*, 1975.

² In the original preface to *JÁ I Guðbrandur Vigfússon* speaks of two essays with similar names by Jón lærði ('On hidden places and shadow-covered valleys' and 'On places of hidden-folk and secret dales'), but these are two names for the same essay, cf. Halldór Hermannsson in *Islandica* XV, xix. It should

are reliable (his interpolations into Jón lærði's work are of course another matter). It cannot be denied that there are considerable differences between the poem and the essay, but it is doubtful whether these are so great as to make it certain that they are by different authors.

Finally we come to a brief narrative containing two stories of the Rev. Árni of Látrar, who talked with ravens. The first tells how a raven croaked at the church window while Árni was preaching and would not stop until the parson said, 'Oh, eat it', whereupon it flew away. When people asked Árni what this had meant, he answered that the raven had told him that there were sheep in the island Höskuldsey, and among them a dead ram belonging to himself. The raven had wanted to eat the ram's eyes and had nagged on about it until the parson gave him permission to do so. The second tells how the Rev. Árni discovered a man who had stolen fish from his fishing-nets with the aid of a chess-piece.

Jón lærði refers thus to this priest in *Tíðfordríf*: 'When I was young I heard and saw on my own an old parson talking to a raven. I reckon that the scraps and stones are now rotten which were formerly hidden at Tunga with the good parson Árni Jónsson, who thereafter went to his own property Látrar above Flatey.'¹ This curious narrative phraseology, which is peculiar to Jón, presumably means that when he himself was young, he met this elderly parson and overheard him talking

also be noted that there is an extract from this work at the end of Jón Eggertsson's *Adskilligt om Islands Beskaffenhed og Vilkaar* (Thott 1738 4to). *Lítið ágríp um hulin pláss* is printed in BE *Munnmælasögur* 24–36, cf. lvii–lxii, xciii–xcv. The work is preserved in only the one manuscript, in the hand of Jón Eggertsson, and it has been suggested that he composed it and attributed it to Jón lærði to shift responsibility onto him. See EGP *Rit* 42–52; EGP *Eddurit* I 138–40.

¹ These narratives are printed with some notes in Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Sagnir um séra Árna á Látrum,' *Blanda* VII (1941), 189–92; BE *Munnmælasögur* 23–24 (Notes xci–xcii); see also EGP *Rit* 52–53. See also Gísli Konráðsson, 'Páttur Árna prests Jónssonar í Látrum', *Syrpa úr handritum* II, *Sagnaþættir*, 1980, 24–35, printed from Lbs 1128 4to (cf. *Sunnudagsblað Vísis*, 1940, no. 17; 1292 4to, 281–85 and Lbs 1770 4to, 49–58). There are stories of other Icelandic churchmen who understood the speech of ravens, such as Bishop Sveinn Pétursson the Wise of Skálholt (cf. *Biskupa annálar* in *Safn* I 37–38) and Oddur Gottskálksson (see *Annálar 1400–1800* II 65). The Rev. Friðrik Eggerz mentions that the Rev. Guðmundur Jónsson (died 1716) was another so endowed, see JPork. 15.

with a raven. He is, however, curiously reticent about his own first-hand knowledge, only making the one brief reference to it, though he happily retells old stories about Ární.

The works which we have considered here can all be attributed to Jón with some certainty. On the other hand, the curious collection of verse prophecies commonly known as *Krukksþá*, ‘The prophecy of (Jón) Krukkur’, which has been attributed to him by some writers,¹ cannot possibly be his work. For one thing, the compiler of the prophecies was well acquainted with West Skaftafellssýsla in south-eastern Iceland, where Jón never went in his whole life. This point alone is sufficient to rebut the attribution absolutely.²

After considering Jón lærði and his work, we must pause for a note on the two Stockholm manuscripts Papp. fol. nr 60 and 64. As already stated, these are largely in the hand of Jón Eggertsson, and it is therefore necessary to consider how much of their contents may be attributed to his authorship. First a few biographical details.

Jón Eggertsson was born in 1643 and died in 1689. He was from a distinguished family, a quarrelsome, difficult man who was for much of his life at loggerheads with numerous Icelandic officials. In the end he entered the service of the Swedish government, and bought some old manuscripts in Iceland on their behalf in the summer of 1682. He went to Copenhagen in 1683, was arrested for debt in 1684 and spent the next three years in prison, where during the winter of 1686–87 he wrote the two manuscripts relevant to this book, subsequently selling them to the Swedish College of Antiquities (*Collegium Antiquitatum*).

Only parts of these manuscripts contain material such as folk-stories relating to this study. The rest is copies of ancient literature, translations of European chap-books and *Novellen* and (something which the scribe will have felt to be even more important) tables of Jón Eggertsson’s own genealogy and the patents of knighthood or nobility of his forebears. He no doubt thought that these were good things to show both to his patrons and to his enemies, as being able to prove

¹ *Krukksþá* is printed (but not with a critical text) in JÞork. 213–27.

² It may be added that Ólafur Halldórsson, *Grænland í miðaldaritum*, 1978, maintains that Jón lærði was the main author of *Grænlandsannál*, rather than Björn of Skarðsá, as formerly thought. This work has little relevance to folk-stories, however. But it is likely that many attributions of works of this period may sooner or later have to be revised.

such descent could be of help to him in his various dealings with the authorities. When Jón Eggertsson took the trouble to copy long extracts from *Tíðfordríf*, it doubtless shows that he had discovered them to be of interest to people who mattered. On the whole this copying is done with apparently scrupulous acknowledgement of authorship, but there is a long collection of stories, especially about parsons who practised various kinds of magic, which are attributed to *Ólafur gamli*, 'Old Ólafur'. Jón Þorkelsson the younger thought that this was a pseudonym for the Rev. Þorsteinn Björnsson, the author of the already discussed *Noctes Setbergenses* (see pp. 93–95), and it is easy to see what gave him the idea. In the genealogical part of Jón Eggertsson's manuscript we are told that he is following a book by the Rev. Þorsteinn of Útskálar.¹ This is not a valid argument for the authorship of the stories, however, as the reference is only to the genealogical material, which has nothing to do with folk-stories. It was pointed out in the original Icelandic edition of this book that the viewpoint of the compiler of the stories is northern Icelandic, while the Rev. Þorsteinn spent his life in the south of Iceland. It may therefore be surmised that Jón Eggertsson himself was the author, and this has been the opinion of Bjarni Einarsson and Einar G. Pétursson (cf. p. 96 above). There are, however, the following reasons to doubt this view.

Although the attributions of the scribe, Jón Eggertsson, to the Rev. Þorsteinn and Old Ólafur ('who was so named') of the essays *Um ætt Magnúsar Jónssonar* and *Um rúnakonstina* 'On the art of runes', as well as of the collection of stories of magic, may be an invention, there are at least two powerful arguments against his being the real author of these pieces. Firstly, there is a reference to a *myrkviðarskógur* 'deep forest' near Laufás in Eyjafjörður.² I find it quite inconceivable that a man who knew deep forests in other countries could have used that word of any Icelandic woodland whatever; on the other hand, a man who had never seen forests on the European mainland could easily have taken the word *myrkviðarskógr* from *Mágus saga*³ to make

¹ Jón Þorkelsson published *Um ætt Magnúsar Jónssonar* in *Huld* IV 22–35, *Huld*² II 19–32. A full critical text has been published, with a detailed examination, of this and *Um rúnakonstina* (*Skrif Ólafs gamla*) in *BE Munnmælasögur*, 3–22; see also lxxvi–xc.

² *Um ætt Magnúsar Jónssonar*, *BE Munnmælasögur*, 6.

³ See *Mágus saga* 19. I am of the opinion that the difficulties the Bishop of

his story as impressive as possible, as he would not realise how inappropriate such a word is in such a context. Jón Eggertsson, on the other hand, was well acquainted with the difference between Icelandic and European forests. Secondly, there is the statement that the king of Denmark had to give up ‘various lands’ to the king of Sweden (*Skrif Ólafs gamla* 19). The former Administrator of the Möðruvellir lands (and servant of the Swedish government) would never have used so loose a phrase; he must have known very well how great was the loss to Denmark and gain to Sweden. From these and other lesser points it seems likely that Jón Eggertsson was basing his account on an older one written by a man who did not know the affairs of the great world outside Iceland as well as he himself did. How far this original would have been altered by Jón is difficult to say, except that he has taken the section on the Rev. Þorkell Guðbjartsson and the Bishop of Hólar from its proper place and attached it to the end of his own genealogy. He made an effort to make a single unit out of the two, but the lack of real continuity between the parts is nonetheless perfectly clear. The contents of the manuscript have also been further muddled through sheets being misplaced when the book was bound. Moreover resemblances can be detected between ‘Old Ólafur’s writings’ and those of Jón lærði, however these may have come about. Here are a few examples of such resemblance.

‘Old Ólafur’s writings’ is an entertaining work with an individual character. Even though it was composed at the time of the witchcraft persecutions (1625–90), and the consequent fear of accusations of witchcraft, there is a curious late-medieval tone about the narration; there are motifs that are easily found in stories from the late Middle Ages when such stories were told for entertainment without any note of fear or psychological stress. Thus the Rev. Hálfðan draws ale from the corner-post of a house, horse-thieves get stuck to the backs of stolen horses, a fox comes hurrying to obtain the parson’s forgiveness for attacking his sheep, a stolen sheep bleats inside the thief who has

Hólar encountered on his journey to see the parson of Laufás are the rationalisation of a non-Icelandic medieval story of magic, in which the magician was a weather-worker, by an Icelander who tried to find natural explanations of the episcopal misadventures. In another context, that of the parson’s journey to Hólar, the chronicler realised that he must not omit the episode of *smellilegur* (the Devil), since otherwise this story would have lost its point.

eaten it, and so on. Many of these motifs can be found in European literature (Faust and Mephistopheles drawing wine from a beam, the sheep bleating in the thief's inside, etc.).

The similarities between 'Old Ólafur's Writing' and Jón lærði's works are of this type. Jón knows of the two parsons of Laufás, Þorkell Guðbjartsson (mentioned in *Tíðfordríf* and *Um ættir og slekti*) and Jón Sigurðsson (see EGP *Eddurit* I 353 and II 56), though 'Ólafur' seems more knowledgeable about the churches served by the latter during his ministry. 'Ólafur' knows that Parson Hálfðan drew ale from a beam in his house, and Bishop Sveinn of Skálholt drew ale from the shaft of a spear. Jón has such a story about Ólafur tóni (he was said to have drawn ale from a rock near Hvoll in Saurbær, though this ale was the property of Governor (*hirdstjóri*) Björn Þorleifsson's fierce widow Ólöf the Powerful). 'Ólafur', like Jón, mentions Straumfjarðar-Halla. Both tell of contests between her and Ólafur tóni, with Halla getting the better of it (Jón uses a specific formal phrase of this contest). Both state that Ólafur made spirits take stones from Tónavör near Skarð; both refer to magicians opening the ground and entering hillocks.

It could well be that these similarities are to be explained by one of the two works being the source for the other. Even if one writer had only a cursory acquaintance with the other's work, or if they had just talked together, this would suffice to explain the similarities, though some connection appears undeniable. Who then is the real 'Old Ólafur'? The name can hardly be a pseudonym for Jón Eggertsson, he being the author of the section of stories of magic. Even if he was an inaccurate copyist, that does not make him a liar. In such a case I follow the Latin rule: *in dubio pro reo*. We have in Jón Eggertsson's hand the words: 'The writings of Old Ólafur, who was so named'. One might respond, *Si non e vero e ben trovato*, for it looks highly likely that the scribe may unwittingly have been telling the truth. Unbiased interpretation of these words suggests that the author was really called 'the Old' by some group of people. The name Ólafur has of course always been a popular one in Iceland, no less in Skagafjörður than elsewhere, and naturally some bearers of the name will have lived to a ripe age. That the writer had lived in Skagafjörður for a while could be argued from Bjarni Einarsson's suggestion that his 'writings' were written as a kind of continuation of Björn Jónsson of Skarðsá's essay on runes. But whether the real 'Old Ólafur' will ever be tracked down with certainty must remain an open question (cf. p. 96, note 2 above).

VI

Descriptions of Iceland in general, and of individual parts in particular, continued to be compiled in the eighteenth century, as were essays on Icelandic fauna and annals concerning both Icelandic and foreign events. All these sources provide much material for the folklorist. Thus we find the story of the Island-dweller of Súlnasker in a description of the Westman Islands by the Rev. Gizur Pétursson from the beginning of the century, stories of mad Jóra and of Ingólfr Arnarson's burial-mound in a description of Ölfus,¹ and an anonymous essay dealing with robbers in Surtshellir and Grettistök (huge stones popularly believed to have been lifted off the ground by the outlaw Grettir).² Páll Bjarnason Vídalín (1728–59) writes of outlaws,³ Jón Þorkelsson (Thorhillius) (1697–1759) writes of the Turkish piracies of 1627,⁴ and the learned if ill-tempered Jón Marteinsson (died 1771) has much to say about backward-finned fish, waterhorses, water-monsters and wrestling-spells (these last are contemporary with the writer).⁵ Johann Anderson, Mayor of Hamburg, has a good deal of folklore material in his book,⁶ and Eggert Ólafsson (1726–68) and Bjarni Pálsson (1719–79) have a great deal in theirs,⁷ as has, later, Ólafur Olavíus (1741–88).⁸ There is some material on water-horses, water-snakes and hidden folk in an essay by Sæmundur Hólm (1749–1821) which mentions the rock Systrastapi.⁹ Among annals and historical works it is

¹ These works have been published respectively in ÞJ *Örnefni* 93–108, and *Landnám Ingólfs III* (1937–39; also *Árnessýsla. Sýslu- og sóknalýsingar Hins íslenska bókmenntafélags*, 1979; see Indexes under *Jórukleif* and *Jórutindur*).

² For *Grettistök* see *Lfrs.* II 295–96.

³ See *Lfrs.* II 304.

⁴ *Lfrs.* II 313; Jón Þorkelsson (Thorhillius), *Æfisaða*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson (the younger), 1910, I 324–25.

⁵ Jón Marteinsson, *Íslands nærværende Tilstand* (Thott 961 fol.; there is another piece by Jón Marteinsson in Thott 953 fol.). See *Lfrs.* II 328–31.

⁶ Johann Anderson, *Nachrichten von Island, Grönland und der Strasse Davis*, 1747, 1–144.

⁷ Eggert Ólafsson, *Reise* 6.

⁸ Olaus Olavíus, *Oeconomisk Reise igiennem de nordvestlige, nordlige, og nordostlige Kanter af Island*, 1780. Cf. the Icelandic translation in Ólafur Olavíus, *Ferðabók*, 1964–65.

⁹ In ÍB 333 4to. Previously mentioned in the Rev. Einar Hálfðanarson's *Gestur og garðbúi* (ÍB 130 4to, cf. Steingrímur J. Þorsteinsson, *Upphaf leikritunar á Íslandi*, 1943, 9–10); also JÁ II 71–73.

proper to mention the writings of the Rev. Jón Halldórsson (1665–1736); his *Biskupa sögur* have an account of outlaws in *Ódádahraun*.¹ The Rev. Jón Steingrímsson's writings also contain folklore material, both in his autobiography and in his work on the eruption of Katla.² There is a curious document, *Árnaskjal*, which exists in numerous manuscripts from a date not much later than the events involving men and elves that it purports to relate. This short work appears most likely to be a fairly accurate description of a madman's fantasies.³

There is particular reason to mention here three men who provide information on the folk-stories of the period. Two, Árni Magnússon and Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík, are from the first half of the century, the third, Eiríkur Laxdal, from the second half.

Árni Magnússon had a profound contempt for superstition and made-up stories, for he was by nature the most accurate and clear-headed of men, fully in harmony with his times with their emphasis on reason and level-headedness. He was, however, the keenest and most knowledgeable collector of both ancient and more recent manuscripts, and

¹ Jón Halldórsson *BS* I 190–93; also *JÁ* II 251–53.

² See especially *Safn* IV, 1907–15. The latter work is reprinted in Jón Steingrímsson, *Ævisaga og önnur rit*, 1973, 393–403. *JÁ* I 185 gives as a source for Jón Steingrímsson's work a manuscript miscellany containing various stories gathered by District Judge Einar Þorsteinsson (d. c. 1691, not to be confused with the Bishop of Hólar of the same name, d. 1696). Folklore materials directly relating to Jón Steingrímsson are to be found in his *Æfisaga*³, 191–93.

³ This document is printed in *JÁ* I 93–100 and *JÁ*³ VI 12–18. It should be pointed out that another version of *Árnaskjal* was translated into Danish, and printed as an item of great curiosity: *En kort dog fuldstændig Historie af en Islænder ved Navn Arne Joensen, som Anno 1747 kom i Laug med et underjordiskt Fruentimmer og derefter blev lykkeligen frelset af Hendes Snare*. Trykt i Dette Aar, 8vo, 16 pp., Copenhagen (eighteenth century); there are also Norwegian, Danish and German translations of the text in *JÁ* (Norwegian in *Islandske Folkesagn efter Arnason, Maurer og Fleere*, Christiania 1863, 24–34; Danish in *Islandske Folkesagn*. Paa Dansk ved Carl Andersen, Copenhagen 1862, 17–31, and 1877, 14–25; German in *Central-Organ für die Interessen des Realschulwesens* XXI (1893), 593–602). The story has turned up in Færoese oral tradition (see Jakob Jakobsen, *Færøske Folkesagn og Æventyr*, 1898–1901, 629–30). Bibliographical information about the Norwegian and German versions was kindly communicated by the late Professor Pétur Sigurðsson. See Einar G. Pétursson, 'Um sögur af Álfa-Árna', *Úr manna minnum*, ed. Baldur Hafstað and Haraldur Bessason, 2002, 127–56.

could not resist the lure of old written stories or *rímur* which were not yet found in manuscript, but which people remembered, and which he caused to be noted down. As a result of his keenness there was preserved all that has survived of the *Rímur of Þorgeirr stjakarhöfði* and the contents of the story of Vestfjarða-Grímr and Grímr Skeljungsbani; moreover the Rev. Eyjólfur Jónsson of Vellir copied out a summary of a story (or *rímur*) about Ásmundr flagðagæfa and King Jón of Upplönd (derived from *Dámusta saga*)¹ at Árni's request. Árni had a great interest in Icelandic archæology and place-name history, and so could not help gathering legends which were told in connection with actual sites, such as those of Jóra of Jórkleif and Þorleifr beiskaldi, and recording references to such people as Gullbrá of Hvammur.² His collector's urge also forbade Árni to stop there, and he had stories of Sæmundr the Wise gathered together,³ and even some stories without place-name connections, such as the wonder-tales of Finna the Wise, Mærþöll, Brjám⁴ and Himinbjörg,⁵ and he gathered up the surviving fragments about Vilfríður Völufegri.⁶ Some of these stories are better written than most other literature of the century, and they are a most valuable source for the folklorist. They are the earliest examples of wonder-tales written down in their oral form, since previously they were usually dressed up in an antiquarian 'saga-style' or some other literary costume, and considerably altered in the process. All the four stories mentioned here have some important elements. The stories of

¹ JÁ I 167–79; also I 245–56 and 284–85; *Huld* I 19–21, *Huld*² I 16–18; BE *Munnmælasögur*, Introduction and pp. 48–59 and 81–104.

² Árni Magnússon, *Brevveksling med Torfæus*, ed. K. Kálund, 1916, 66; BE *Munnmælasögur* 59–60. There is also AM 213 8vo (printed in Árni Magnússon, 'Chorographia Islandica', *Safn til sögu Íslands, Annar flokkur* I (1955), 2), which refers to the outlawing of Torfi of Klofi.

³ Printed in JÁ I 485–90 and in BE *Munnmælasögur* 39–48; cf. Árni Magnússon, 'Vita Sæmundi multiscii', *Edda Sæmundar hins fróða*, 1787–1828, I i–xxvii (repr. in Finnur Jónsson, *Árni Magnússons Levned og Skrifter*, 1930, II 89–108); also Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Folksögner om isländska häxmästare', *Arv* 1946, 111–24 and Benedikt S. Benedikz, 'The Master Magician in Icelandic Folk-Legend', *Durham University Journal* LVII (1964), 22–34.

⁴ JÁ II 383–86, 424–27, 505–08; see also *Gráskinna* I 41, *Gráskinna*² I 37; Nordal *Íl*, 80–86; BE *Munnmælasögur* 61–63, 64–67, 68–72.

⁵ *Gráskinna* I 29–41; *Gráskinna*² I 26–37; BE *Munnmælasögur* 72–81.

⁶ JÁ II 399–407; BE *Munnmælasögur* 67–68.

Mærþöll and Himinbjörg are pure wonder-tales, found only in this collection, though wonder-tales related to *Himinbjargar saga* are found both earlier and later. We will examine this point later. The name *Mærþöll* is a corruption of *Mardöll*, a name given to the princess because she weeps gold like Freyja (cf. *Gylfaginning* ch. 35). The stories all show a relationship to literary poems written from the sixteenth century onwards and of which traces can be seen in Icelandic wonder-tales of the nineteenth century, though this influence shows some signs of decline. *Brjáms saga*, which was written down from the narrative of Hildur Arngrímsdóttir (d. 1724), the daughter of Arngrímur Jónsson lærði, and mother of the poet Lawman Páll Vídalín, is really two stories joined together. One is a comic story of a boy who follows his mother's advice on what to do literally, but always at the wrong moment (AT 1696; 'What should I have said, mother?'); the other is a half-remembered version of the story of Hamlet.¹ The story of Finna forvitra blends motifs typical of elf-stories and wonder-tales in much the same way as the narrative poems of the sixteenth century, and in a very melancholy tone, just like them.²

¹ Besides the brief version given to Árni by Hildur Arngrímsdóttir we have other forms of the Hamlet-legend in later Icelandic recensions. The oldest of these is probably Páll Bjarnason's *Ambáles rímur*, written late in the seventeenth century (ed. Hermann Pálsson, *Rit rímnafélagssins* V, 1952). The author states (*Ríma* XXI 5–8) that he has never seen this story in his mother-tongue and that he owned it once in a German book which somebody then stole from him, so that he now has to rely on his memory, which is not as good as it once was. Besides these *rímur* there is a prose version, *Ambáles saga* (first printed by Einar Þórðarson, 1886, and then edited in full state by Israel Gollancz, see below). This prose version is usually thought to derive from the *rímur*, and may even be by the same author. It is obviously derived ultimately from Saxo Grammaticus, though the intermediate links are now unknown. See I. Gollancz, *Hamlet in Iceland*, 1898, lxviii–lxxv and 247–49. Both prose and verse versions show the influence of an Icelandic oral tradition as well as a 'German book'; the length of this tradition may be seen from the existence of a stanza mentioning 'Amlóði' in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 25. See further Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Íslenzkar bókmenntir í fornöld*, 1962, 446–47; P. Herrmann, *Die Heldensagen des Saxo Grammaticus*, 1922; BE *Munnamælasögur* cxxvii–cxl, 61–63.

² The story of Finna is obviously related to the Sigríður Eyjafjarðarsól type of story (patient Griselda), e.g. JÁ II 204, where we also meet the motif 'Who owns this? You and I and no one else'. Cf. *Verz.* 45–46.

Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík was Árni Magnússon's private secretary for many years, and subsequently the holder of the fellowship set up from the income from his estate, and so lived the greater part of his life in Árni's shadow. He was however very unlike his master, being highly superstitious and very uncritical, though he possessed an enormous fund of knowledge. Though he was endowed with a capacious memory, he became sadly confused in his later years.¹ He had an incredibly wide knowledge of Icelandic popular lore, and this can be seen in his writings. Though he rarely tells actual stories, he often indicates their essential features or refers to some motif by which one may be identified. This is a very valuable thing, as Jón lived a century before his namesake Jón Árnason, the first editor of Iceland's folk-stories. We can thus find references in full or in part to the following stories in his writings:²

Ólafur muður (*Contractismus*, JH 312; *Dictionary*, under *bláfell*; cf. JÁ I 158); The ogress given a ride by a man, hence the proverbs 'Let me ride with you, fellow' and 'Each knows his own problems, I bore a child yesterday' (*Dictionary*, under *kenna*; cf. Jón Sigurðsson's excerpts); The man who fought an ogress at Tröllkonugil by Uxahryggjavegur (*Book on Giants*, JH 216); The girl at Hólar who walked into a wall (*Dictionary*, under *álfur*; JH 113; JÁ I 583); The man at Staður in Grunnavík who walked through a wall (*Dictionary*, under *álfur*; JH 113, cf. the story of Galdra-Loftur, and that of a man who according to an addition made by Jón Eggertsson in a manuscript of *Tíðfordrif* (cf. pp. 273–74 below) walks through a wall); Ghosts sent to attack Páll Vídalín (JH 11), and Páll the magician's sorcery against Páll's grandfather (*Lfrs.* II, 227); The verse composed by Víga-Styrr, *Horfinn er fagur farfi* (*Heiðarvíga saga*, *ÍF* III 234; cf. JÁ I 242); The story of Þórgunna's burial (in some younger manuscripts of *Eyrbyggja saga*, cf. *ÍF* IV 145, cf. JÁ I 227; *Dictionary*, under *Þórgunna*; JH 115); Jón flak (*Dictionary*, under *flak*, *kórbak*; JH 114; cf. JÁ I 233); The voice that chanted the verse *Vögum við og vögum við* (*Dictionary* under *vaga*; JH 115; also found in *Fitjaannáll* under 1707 and *Setbergsannáll* under 1347);³ Þorleifr the magician and Ölvir the ghost (*Treatise on ancient funeral mounds*, 1753; cf. JH 264); Sea-cows (JH 176); The story of Völustakkr,

¹ The outstanding study of this pitiable man is JH. There is a brilliant, if somewhat farcical portrait of him as Joannes Grinvicensis in Halldór Kiljan Laxness's novel *Íslandsklukkan*, 1943–45.

² The original of Jón Ólafsson's *Dictionary* is in *Stofnun Árna Magnússonar* in Reykjavík. There is a copy in Landsbókasafn Íslands and the work has been excerpted by *Orðabók Háskólans*.

³ *Annálar 1400–1800* II 372 and IV.

about outlaws in the mountain Hengill (*Dictionary*, under *vala*; JH 115; cf. JÁ II 302); The dance at Hruni (*Dictionary*, under *duna, fljóð, kast*; JH 114); The sneezing-sickness (*Dictionary*, under *hnerri*; JH 115); The death of the people at Kaldrani from eating a backward-finned fish—Jón says that an elf-woman chanted the verse (*Dictionary*, under *vana, andvana*; JH 114; cf. also Jón Ólafsson's *Book of fishes*, JH 175; JÁ I 636); The Monster of Kúðafljót (*Dictionary*, under *kúði*; JH 115; JÁ I 638) and other sea and water beasts (JH 115, 166, 175; *Lfrs.* II, 318, 321, 324–25). Jón also refers to the seers' ritual known as 'sitting out' (see p. 192 below), and to methods of raising ghosts (JH 280), to superstitions about lings' heads (as objects of sorcery), cauls and 'lock-grass' (a herb reputed to open locks) (*Dictionary*, under *höfuðsmaður, kufl, lás*; JH 115); he refers to the custom of letting the elves take over one's house on New-Year's Eve and the formula of invitation to them: 'Let them stay who wish to stay' or 'Those who wish for the land may stay, those who wish may go away'. He mentions in the same place the custom of 'breaking up fuel in the kitchen on New-Year's Eve to let any elves who are moving house warm themselves if they are cold' (*Dictionary*, under *álfur*).

VII

Eiríkur Laxdal (1743–1816) was the son of the Rev. Eiríkur Jónsson, Rector of Hvammur in Laxárdalur and later of Hof on Skagaströnd (died 1779). He attended Hólar Cathedral School from 1760 to 1765, and was parish clerk at Reynistaður and later at Munkaþverá, but he had to give up his post, having had a child out of wedlock by the beautiful but ignorant Elín, daughter of Halldór Brynjólfsson (bishop of Hólar 1746–52). After this Eiríkur went to Denmark and matriculated at Copenhagen University in 1769. It is recorded that his preceptor at the University was Chr. Kratzenstein¹ whose interests were markedly scientific, and it is likely that the interest in the natural sciences which is widely found in Eiríkur's writings is due in part to the inspiration of his former teacher. He had an adventurous time in his student days and was for a while a naval rating, which experience turned him forever from the path of an official career. Though he stayed in Copenhagen until 1775 (or according to some 1777) and accumulated much learning, this did him no benefit when he returned to Iceland, even though his wit and learning were praised by his contemporaries; he was said to be fluent in Danish, German and Latin. He was, however,

¹ See Bjarni Jónsson frá Unnarholti, *Íslenzkir Hafnarstúdentar*, 1949, 116.

a singular and eccentric person, said to be an obstinate debater¹ and he seems to have preferred freedom to all else. He married Ólöf Guðmundsdóttir, a widow from Sléttuhlíð, and struggled at farming with her at Neðranes and then at Kelduvík on Skagi, but was said to have little aptitude for farming, though he was a good fisherman (for a while he owned his own fishing-boat), and finally his farming came to grief, his household broke up, and Eiríkur trudged around as a beggar for his remaining years, and died at Stokkahlaðir in Eyjafjörður on 24th July 1816.

Eiríkur was a versifier, and composed both short lyrics and hymns as well as some sets of *rímur*, of which we may mention here *Hermóðs rímur* (1777) and *Ingibjargar rímur alvænu* (1778; from stories in Laxdal Ós). His two prose works are *Ólands saga* (The story of Noland; = Laxdal Ós) and *Ólafs saga Þórhallasonar* (= Laxdal ÓsP).

Ólands saga is now preserved in only one manuscript, Lbs 554 4to, written probably around 1820 by two scribes, the first of whom was Þorsteinn Þorsteinsson of Heiði. The manuscript ends abruptly at the beginning of Book III, ch. 6 (ch. 187 of the entire work), and it is not possible to know whether Eiríkur ever completed the work. The content is mostly wonder-tales, each woven with great skill into others, though it cannot be denied that this method of composition makes great demands upon the reader's attention and memory. There is no doubt as to Eiríkur's models, which are such collections of stories as *The Thousand and One Nights*, *Thousand and One Days*, etc., both of which were available in Danish translation in Eiríkur's Copenhagen years (there are also Icelandic translations of portions of both collections from the eighteenth century). Eiríkur also reworked his stories in the manner of the *fornaldar sögur* and other Icelandic written stories, and the genealogical material, which is much used to link the various stories, is clearly based on these models. Though the style is partly based on older sagas, European influence is even more obvious; the verbosity and pomposity—in short, the periwig style that is so very prominent throughout the book—spoil the story. Natural descriptions and other such things are probably copied from contemporary European models, but some, such as the descriptions of cities and orchards,

¹ For the type of ridiculous, ultra-logical, obstinate, hair-splitting debating which was the normal procedure at Copenhagen University in the eighteenth century, see Holberg's *Erasmus Montanus* and G. Brandes, *Ludvig Holberg. Et Festskrift*, 1884, 98–101.

are based on Eiríkur's own observation; thus in one place a crowd cheers their queen in a way that suggests a Danish royal event. As to general ideas and attitudes, the book is a true product of the Age of Enlightenment. The author tries everywhere to offer rationalistic interpretations of supernatural matter in the wonder-tales, and this often has curious results. As mentioned earlier, Eiríkur's enthusiasm for natural history is widely evident. In one place he describes how life developed on earth: first after the great flood there was only rock, and then lichen grew on it, and from it came more developed organisms, and so on until the earth was covered with plants as it is now. From the plants there then evolved simple animal species which gradually developed until man was reached. The first men used stones and burnt sticks, and then they began to dig metals from the earth. Eiríkur also says that the dead live on in the stars.

Eiríkur's political ideas are those of a man dedicated to enlightened monarchy. 'Virtue' is preached in and out of season, as is characteristic of the time. On the other hand, the subject-matter of the book is apt to be earthy, and Eiríkur clearly had the uninhibited views on sexuality common in his day—his own love-life may indeed have been somewhat disorderly.

The subject-matter of *Ólands saga* comes from every imaginable source. In the last section the Bible is followed at first, and there are also long narratives based on *Ármanns rímur* and *Hermóðs rímur*. Other parts are more or less Eiríkur's own invention, or else adapted from foreign sources (such as the story of Goðfreður the Lucky and Forgetful, chs 126–32). Eiríkur often combines wonder-tale motifs into fairly complete stories, and his narratives cannot be trusted without a check. *Ólands saga* contains more or less reliable variants of the following wonder-tales:

1.–3. *Þáttur af Helgu hinni vænu* and *Rauðs þáttur* (chs 1–19, 20–34 and 111–16); two variants of AT 706 (*Björn bragðastakkur* and *Lauphöfða*), one of them poor.

4. Chs 35–47 are derived from Jón lærði's *Ármanns rímur*, with changes.

5. *Þáttur af Jarprúði og Hvít* (chs 48–66); [L425 or] AT 517.

6. Chs 67–75 are derived from *Hermóðs rímur*.

7. *Ingibjargar þáttur alvænu*, chs 76–84 deals with the patience of women (AT 887); Griselda might be behind it. Possibly mainly the work of Eiríkur Laxdal himself.

8. *Páttur af Ingibjörgu Signýjarfóstru og dætrum hennar* (chs 85–89), on the inquisitiveness and obstinacy of a princess; see no. 20 below and *Verz.* 710.
- 9–10. *Páttur af Hríngerði og Signýju* (chs 90–104); princesses make game of princes, cf. AT 900. Chs 100–03 are inserted, in which a princess is enclosed in the burial mound of a ghost (cf. *Hermóðs rímur*).
11. *Páttur af Ólafi og Eysteini* (chs 105–10); king and queen lose their child and find it again. Only one remarkable motif is found here: their son has a golden arrow on his left arm. Cf. *Ála flekks saga* (Lagerholm *DL* 87, note).
12. *Risinn á Gullskógalandi* (chs 117–23), AT 425. The search for the lost husband, a specific version, and the last half of the type is left out.
13. The story of *Döggar* (chs 124–26, 132–34). Another version of AT 425, and this time the latter half of the type is kept. Chs 126–32, here the story of *Goðfreður* (see above p. 124) is inserted.
14. The twelve Princes in the shape of oxen (chs 135–40), AT 471; see *Saga af Þorsteini karlssyni*, *JÁ* II 422.
15. A giantess steals from the treasury of the king, then fosters his son (ch. 141), cf. the story of *Dofri* and King *Haraldr hárfagri*.
16. *Kisu saga* (chs 142–48), a poor and muddled version of AT 711.
17. *Hrómundar þáttur* (chs 149–54, 178–81), AT 510 + 403, the Icelandic version (*Mjaðveig*).
18. *Páttur af Vilfríði Völufegri* (chs 155–58, 162–63, 169), AT 709 (Snow White).
19. *Sigröðarþáttur* (chs 159–62, 177), an altered form of *Björn bragðastakkur*, cf. nos 1–3.

Finally mention should be made of:

20. *Páttur af Hlini og Sólbjörtu spöku* (chs 164–70); here is a summary:

When Prince Hlinur was young his aunts (who envied his mother) laid a spell on him that he should never be at ease until he came to the ogress *Kolfrosta* in *Tröllabotnar* and married her. At this a voice (his mother's) interrupted, 'unless a woman should release him by being silent for three days'. Hlinur now spent over three years with the ogresses, but no woman could pass this test. Then, one day, a king was sailing by when his ship sprang a leak in a storm and stuck fast on a nearby shallows. Hlinur now came swimming alongside and offered to release the ship in return for the hand of the king's daughter *Sólbjört*. The king agreed to this on the third day. The princess and Hlinur then went ashore in his boat, together with her dog, and came to *Tröllabotnar*, where *Sólbjört* was to undergo the silence test. The ogresses tried to tempt her with a great casket of gems, but failed. Then, on the third day, when *Kolfrosta* killed her dog, she could not keep silence, and Hlinur had to go to the ogress. He pretended to want to marry her, but *Sólbjört* was present (invisible, thanks

to a magic stone). Hlinur tempted the ogress to show him her most precious things, including a nest of caskets in which she kept her life-egg. Kolfrosta then went to invite the other giants to her wedding, at which Sólbjört and Hlinur met them and Hlinur hurled the life-egg between Kolfrosta's eyes and blinded her. She accused the other trolls of causing this mishap, and they quarrelled and the quarrel led to a fight. Finally only Kolfrosta survived, and contrived to put a spell on Sólbjört and Hlinur before she died—which leads to the start of a new wonder-tale.¹

The final episode is a story of a curious woman which can be summarised as follows: the Princess Ingibjörg is captured by the ogress Króknefja, who leaves her in her cave and forbids her to look under her bed-curtain. Naturally, curiosity overpowers her fear of the taboo, and she looks and finds a young man there, playing chess with himself. The ogress returns and accuses Ingibjörg of having looked, but she denies it. Króknefja thereupon pretends that she will kill her unless she confesses it, and first prepares to chop off her head, then to burn her alive, and on the third day to throw her over a cliff, but all in vain. When Ingibjörg returns home to her bower she is visited by the young man whom she found under the bed-curtain, and has two children by him. The ogress takes the children away from her, but the princess still refuses to confess. In the end Króknefja is allowed to spend a night in Ingibjörg's bower, and so be released from her own enchantment.

Verz. 710 is a narrative not unrelated to this *Ólands saga* story, and a not dissimilar variant has turned up in a recently recorded Icelandic oral version.² It should also be mentioned that similar motifs are in story no. 6 in *ÍB* 160 8vo, and the story of Hlinur is one of those listed by the Rev. Friðrik Eggerz as 'historiae fabulosae' (Lbs 939 4to). The story is in some ways related to the German *Marienkind* story and we may add here Bolte's observations on this wonder-tale (BP I, 14).³

In diesen und den verwandten Märchen handelt es sich teils um eine dem Mädchen auferlegte Prüfung des Gehorsams oder der Geduld im Leiden, teils um die Erlösung eines verzauberten Wesens durch standhaftes Schweigen, obwohl der Grundgedanke nicht immer klar entwickelt ist. Wir können drei Gruppen unterscheiden; entweder ist es die Jungfrau *Maria*, die ihrem Paten- oder Pflegekinde die Probe des verbotenen Zimmers (oder der verbotenden

¹ Cf. *Verz.* 425, I* and *ÓDav.*³ II 321–26; *ÓDav.*⁵ IV 84–88.

² This story is on a record preserved in the Folklore Department of Stofnun Árna Magnússonar in Reykjavík.

³ For the classic version of this see J. and W. Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 1913–18, I 13–21 (no. 3); cf. also Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index*, 1932–36, C911.

Rosenstockes oder das Hühnelein hüten) auferlegt, oder wie in unsrer zweiten Erzählung eine geheimnisvolle *schwarze Frau*, die wie Melusine zu gewissen Zeiten Tiergestalt annehmen muß oder der Erlösung harret, oder drittens ein *Mann*.

In Stith Thompson's epitome of the type (AT 710) there is also sometimes a witch or an evil stepmother involved.

Ólands saga can be dated by comparison with *Hermóðs rímur* and *Ingibjargar rímur*, whose dates of composition are known (*Hermóðs rímur* 1777, *Ingibjargar rímur* 1778) and which are only versifications of the relevant portions of the saga. Moreover, the *rímur* refer in passing to longer narratives about the children of the principal personages, which is in accord with the contents of *Ólands saga*.¹ It may well be that the version alluded to in the *rímur* was not identical with the text of the saga which survives (some of the names of the participants, for instance, are different in the two versions).²

Ólaf's saga Þórhallasonar (Laxdal *ÓsÞ*) exists for the most part in the author's autograph (Lbs 152 fol.), though some early chapters are missing, and it has no ending (it is impossible to tell whether this is

¹ Thus, at the end of *Hermóðs rímur* it is stated that Hermóðr and Háðvör have a son named Þorsteinn; *Ævisaga er hans löng / Ei þó ritist núna*, 'The story of his life is long / Though not recorded here'. At the end of *Ingibjargar rímur* it is stated that her sister married Þorsteinn Hermóðsson, *Kom sízt við sögu þessa / Segir önnur af þeim meir*, 'They do not concern this story / As another one tells more of them' (cf. Laxdal *Ós*, chs 82–84). Finally we may note a reference to Ingivör, the daughter of Ingibjörg alvæna, and her sons, *af þeim meira innir saga* 'a story tells more of them', which also refers to longer accounts in Laxdal *Ós*.

² Thus Hlaðvör's parents are called Hringur of Bornholm and Dagmær in *Hermóðs rímur*, but Hálfván and Svanhvít in the saga. Hermóðr's father is Earl Hárekr of Skáney in the *rímur*, and Þorsteinn Hreiðarsson in the saga. The evil counsellor is named *Rauðr* in both (though occasionally, perhaps from oversight, *Úlfur* in the saga). The *rímur* state that the mist before Ingibjörg's bower was a magical illusion, but the saga does not mention this. There are two points in the manuscript of *Ólands saga* where short chapters (chs 117 and 134) have been crossed out and replaced by longer ones. This is probably Eiríkur's doing; he wrote the replacement chapters in his original manuscript, but forgot to cross out the first version, which was copied out by the copyist of Lbs 554 4to, who then discovered that the latter version superseded the former, and crossed the shorter one out.

because the author left it incomplete, or whether the ending is lost).¹ From the note of the year 1788 on pp. 3 and 5 of the autograph we can be sure that it was certainly begun by then, though the manuscript could of course be a copy of a work written earlier.

Ólafs saga is much more entertaining reading than *Ólands saga*, mainly because the narrative is mostly plainer and briefer. There are rhetorical expansions and speechifications in some places, but the style is often vigorous and effective. The story is also much enriched by descriptions of folk customs and folk life, of people's work and leisure activities, and there are also some descriptions of nature, for instance those from Skagi, which make entertaining reading.

The story takes place in the homes of elves and in the habitations of men, as well as partly in outlaws' hideouts in the mountains. Eiríkur's invention provides most of the matter, though he often bases it on folk-belief, especially belief in hidden folk, but in some parts he has put in fairly complete folk-legends. The story may be analysed into two parts, the frame and the insertions. The latter are narratives about men and women who cross Ólafur's path, one story being set Chinese-puzzle fashion inside another, but there is much more to the frame than in *Ólands saga*. It consists of the life of Ólafur, his love affairs, and all the troubles he has to endure because of them. He spends half his time among elves, and is persecuted and laid under spells by them—though some of the elves themselves are also under spells.

The story contains a great many folk-story motifs and some fairly complete folk-legends; the following are the most noteworthy:²

1. The outlaw stories. These have been carefully summarised by Jan Spoelstra, and so do not need to be repeated here. I cannot, however, resist the temptation to mention the motif 'recurrent fight'.³

¹ The beginning can be supplied from Lbs 151 fol., a copy by 'student' Ólafur Ólafsson (d. 1882) who copied chs 1–54 from the autograph (none too accurately for the most part) while it was still intact. The remainder of the saga in this copy is a much more accurate continuation by Guðmundur Þorláksson (1850–1910) made in 1899. A few chapters (I 60, I 14, III 20 in that order) are also copied out in ÍB 51 8vo.

² In all references to Laxdal *ÓsÞ* the Roman numeral refers to the 'Evening' (or 'Section'), the Arabic numeral to the chapter.

³ Spoelstra 1938. The 'recurrent fight' motif is handled on pp. 135–37.

2. The elf story ‘The Girl at the Shieling’ (JÁ I 64–70) appears in a narrative of Kjartan and Guðrún (II, 25–37) and even more plainly in one of Ólafur and Dvalin (II, 48–55).

3. An elf-woman in labour is helped by a mortal (II, 50).

4. A girl is kidnapped by outlaws (III, 8–11). This story contains the beautiful stanza:

<i>Hjartað mitt er harmslegið,</i>	Now my heart is struck with pain,
<i>hvergi finn ég skammdegið,</i>	the winter nights I crave in vain,
<i>síðan eg fór úr miðfirði í síðasta sinni,</i>	since that day which never leaves my mind,
<i>mér líður aldrei dagur sá úr minni;</i>	the day I last left Midfirth behind.
<i>seg það minni</i>	Tell this to my mother dear,
<i>seg það móður minni.</i>	tell this to my mother. ¹

5. The farm Gullkinn on Skagi is deserted because of ghosts (I, 3).

6. Elves take over the farm at Gauksstaðir while the people go to church on Christmas Eve, and the house-minders suffer various fates (I, 23 and 32).

7. Ólafur muður (I, 36).

8. Pirates (Turks) in Krýsuvík (I, 43; cf. JÁ I 577).

9. Portents of shipwrecks. Ship launched in the name of all devils (I, 47–48).

10. A corpse washed up by the sea used for bait—loss of the ship (I, 54–58).

11. The story of Krýs and Herdís, told by Álfbjörg the elf-woman (cf. JÁ I 476–77).

12. Hallowing of the bird-rocks on Drangey (III, 16–17); naming the unhal-
lowed part Heiðnavík (Heathen cove).

13. The story of the merman (III, 19–25).

14. Changeling story (‘There is a lot of difference between your mother and me: she beats my child and I dandle yours’) (III, 26).

15. The story of Grímur of Grímsborg (III, 27–41, 43) is somewhat longer than Jón Árnason’s version (JÁ I 27) but has the same verses.

16. Backfin-eating on Kaldrani (III, 33–34).²

17. A story of a tremendous catch of fish in Aravatn with an elvish fish-
hook (III, 35–37).

18. The giant Gassi on Digramúli turned to stone by daylight (III, 42).

19. The story of Þorbjörg kólka (IV, 3–17). This contains many notable poems and verses, including *Sé eg suður til eyja* (‘I look south to the islands’, cf. p. 180 below), fishing-ground verses about Sporðagrunn, ‘Fishtail Shal-
lows’,³ fishing-verses, etc. Here is the verse about *Vattavinur*, ‘Glove Friend’:

¹ This story, and the verse, are printed in BBJ. II 94–96.

² *Öfuguggi*, ‘backfin’, is a mythical fish whose fins all face the wrong way, and is deadly poisonous if eaten.

³ Cf. *Blanda* I 203, 289–90; also Gísli Konráðsson, *Sögubáttur Skagstrendinga og Skagamanna* in JS 302 4to, 43–44, printed in *Saga Skagstrendinga og Skagamanna*, 1941, 55–56 (a longer version).

*Drögum, vinur vatta,
af veðri fjöllin hatta;
mönnnum þykir mannskaðaöld,
of mörg verður ekkja á Skagaströnd í kvöld.*

The hilltops have their storm-caps on,
good glove-friend, pull to land;
tonight there'll be men lost at sea,
and too many widows made on Skagaströnd.

And these rules for making and baiting a fishhook in *öfugmæli* (verses with a reverse meaning):

*Ónýtan hefur þú
öngul á færi
[annan skalt] smíða
úr ísmola-stáli,
troðið járn og tuggið
temprað . . . við,
líkkistunagla
láttu á oddinn,
við lárníð og árnið
láttu hann sorfinn,
fægðu hann vel,
sem fagran spegil.
Aldrei sól skíni
á öngul þinn beran
eður það brúkar
agn til fiskjar.
Efst skaltu hafa
á öngli þínum
fóhorn nýtt
og flyðrugarnir,
máskjöt á miðju
mús á oddi;
feigur ert þú,
ef fiskar ekki.*

The hook you have is useless,
another you must make:
made from an ice-floe
is the steel you must take;
steel chewed and trodden [by horses],
tempered with [piss];
a coffin's nail's the only barb
for a hook like this;
file where you hear the sound
at once of sea and stream.
Burnish it as best you may,
like a mirror's gleam;
never let bright sunshine
upon your bare hook fall,
nor, when you go a-fishing,
upon your bait at all.
Just you put upon your hook
fresh gizzard, flounder's gut,
put gull's flesh in the middle,
at the tip a mouse you put.
And when you've each single thing,
yes, everything, I've said,
if you still can catch no fish,
you'll very soon be dead.

20. A woman at Litli-Bakki brings up a she-bear on milk, and receives in return numerous seals (IV, 32–33).

21. Ghost-story of Eindriði of Hlöðuvík (IV, 58–61, 66–67). This is a very powerful narrative, splendidly told; in it we find this rhyme:

*Set eg fót
efst við rót
en hinn ofan í fjalamót.¹*

I set one of my feet
up against the rafter,
and the other where the floor-boards
meet.

¹ The whole story is printed in *Sópdýngja, þjóðsögur, alþýðlegur fróðleikur og skemmtan*, ed. Bragi Sveinsson and Jóhann Sveinsson frá Flögu, 1944–51, II 69–84, with notes by Einar Ól. Sveinsson; cf. ÓDav. *Pulur* 226.

22. 'You needn't dig deep: I won't lie long.'¹

23. Finally there is the story that goes with *Ljúflingsljóð* and the poem itself (cf. ÓDav. *Þulur* 254–57).

It is not possible here to illustrate Eiríkur's narrative manner, but his *Ólafs saga* is now available in print (Laxdal *ÓsÞ*). It is much to be desired that *Ólands saga* should also be printed in part or in full. I suspect that many readers would find both of these rich treasure-trove (especially *Ólafs saga*). Steingrímur J. Þorsteinsson, in *Jón Thoroddsen og skáldsögur hans* (1943), counts Eiríkur Laxdal as the first Icelandic novelist on account of his *Ólands saga* and *Ólafs saga Þórhallasonar*. But his works may be said to have been lost sight of, since even though their existence was known, few people appear to have read them, and only very little of their contents are to be found in oral or written folk-stories. Nonetheless, the poet Bólu-Hjálmar (Jónsson, 1796–1875) compiled a narrative of Þorbjörg kólka, which he patched together from Laxdal's stories of Þorbjörg, Borgar-Grímur and the backfin-eating,² while the story which Björn Bjarnason printed about Ólafr muður is probably the product of a story-teller who had some knowledge of the version in *Ólafs saga* (BBj. 7–20).

VIII

As was to be expected, the wave of interest in folklore which arose in Europe in the early nineteenth century reached Iceland in due course, and we shall now give an account of the result of this interest. First, however, we should mention the principal sources of those folk-stories that cannot be directly traced to this European movement, but may nevertheless be connected with it, even if the links have now vanished.

The first such source is the work of the annalist Jón Espólín (1769–1836). His *Árbækur*, 'Annals' (12 vols, 1821–55, repr. 1943–47) contain much material connected with folk-stories which he had copied from older annals and similar works, and we may refer here to Jón Árnason's use of material from his writings (for details, see the references to him in the indexes to *JÁ*² and *JÁ*³). In his last years, however, he composed a kind of picaresque novel, *Saga Árna ljúflings*, which exists in autograph in Lbs. 3501 8vo, and in a single manuscript copy

¹ See *JÁ* I 578; Guðmundur G. Hagalín, *Saga Eldeyjar-Hjalta*, 1939, I 68.

² See Hjálmar Jónsson frá Bólu, *Ritsafn* V, 1949, 140–59; cf. *JÁ* II 128.

in Lbs 2304 4to. This contains much folklore; elves are mentioned there, as are a chasuble laid on a man to enable him to die, a signing with the cross that inhibited elves from stealing a child, a horse-rune to cure horse-disease (glanders?), the idea that elves are descended from the children whom Eve hid from God (chs 6–7), the dance of the sun on Easter Day, Midsummer Night's dew and *búrdrifa* 'pantry snow' (i.e. hoar-frost), the days used by elves for flitting, sitting out, magic stones, second sight, the prophecies of Jón krukku (ch. 11), Höfðabrekku-Jóka, the belief that making verses, especially hymns, might bring misfortune to the poet, water-rails, 'tidemice',¹ thieves' root (four-leaved grass, Paris quadrifolia, or Mountain Avens, ch. 14), dreams and their interpretation (ch. 15 and beginning of ch. 16), Finnish breeches, charms to attract money (ch. 19), spells laid on people or things (ch. 28), three-headed giants, seals (as Pharaoh's army—here is found the story of the seal-maiden, ch. 28), the Black School (of necromancy), magicians in west Iceland and elsewhere (chs 31 and 33), the putting down of ghosts (ch. 33), swans (as holy birds, ch. 34) and an excavation into an ancient Icelandic burial mound (ch. 39).

A short list of wonder-tales written by the Rev. Friðrik Eggerz of Ballará (1802–94) exists, dated 1822. It is of much interest.²

There exists a work on elves by Ólafur Sveinsson of Purkey, written at the instigation of Lárus Sigurðsson of Geitareyjar around 1830, though what prompted Lárus to ask for it is not obvious. Ólafur clearly told him of his belief in the hidden folk, and in the book he tells a host of stories to prove their existence. This book is available in two autograph manuscripts, with somewhat differing contents.³ The belief in elves is probably found at its liveliest in Ólafur's booklet; here, cheek by jowl, are old stories and accounts of recent events which occurred in Ólafur's neighbourhood. The tone of his stories is appealingly simple, and his belief in the existence of elves engagingly frank; each

¹ Supernatural mice that bring their owners money from the sea.

² The list is published in German translation in *Verz.* lxxv–lxxvi. Eggerz also made a huge compilation of folk-stories, Lbs 2005 4to (begun before 1854), though some of his material is derived from Gísli Konráðsson, and is difficult to distinguish. The compilation was used by Jón Þorkelsson and others, but Friðrik was remarkably enough not one of Jón Árnason's informants, though he left a lot of notable records of various kinds.

³ Ólafur's work is printed in full in JÁ³ VI 3–33, with commentary by the editors. There exists a third manuscript of the work, but it was not used in JÁ³.

element is organically integrated with the whole, embracing the lives and daily work of human beings, the nature of their world, and the activities of their neighbours of the hidden world. The bulk of Ólafur's work is from oral sources, but he knew some of Jón Guðmundsson's writing, and he knew *Köttludraumur*.

Next come some single stories in manuscript, the origin of which is not easily discovered. *The Waking Man's Dream*, or *Story of Steinn of Þrúðuvangur*, which exists in several manuscripts from the early or mid-nineteenth century, is related to legends of saints.¹ One story printed by Jón Árnason is derived from it.² The story of Hafliði in Grindavík reads like a carefully written *Novelle*.³ A story exists from about 1830 of Ólafur of Skútustaðir.⁴ There are popular stories from about 1840 in the hands of Ólafur Eyjólfsson of Laugaland and Runólfur Runólfsson of Kirkjuból,⁵ and for the fifth decade of the century, down to 1853, a manuscript by Björn Jónsson of Bæjarstaðir.⁶ Beyond this date we have no reason to go at the moment.

It is now time to mention the efforts made during the period to collect folk-stories. Firstly, the Commission for the Preservation of Antiquities in Copenhagen sent out in 1817 a demand to officials in Iceland to send them reports of all kinds of antiquities, among which old stories and such-like matter were specified. There is a good deal of folk-legend material buried in the replies received by the Commission.⁷ In 1839

¹ Lbs 681 4to, Lbs 1440 4to, Lbs 1319 8vo, Lbs 1415 8vo, Lbs 1790 8vo (early nineteenth century), Lbs 2636 8vo (about 1810), JS 300 8vo (early nineteenth century), ÍB 184 8vo (eighteenth or nineteenth century).

² JÁ I 128–29; see also SS *Íþ* IV 181–96, SS *Íþ*² III 198–213; ÍB 161 8vo, pp. 30–32 (from 1845–53) and ÍBR 42 8vo, pp. 405–09. There are many other stories of apparitions in manuscript, both of Icelandic and non-Icelandic origin (see JÁ II 34).

³ ÍB 605 8vo; ÍB 250 4to (1834–38); Lbs 2636 8vo (about 1810); it is printed in *Huld* IV 36–41 and *Huld*² II 32–37.

⁴ Lbs 672 4to; printed in *Gráskinna* II 95, *Gráskinna*² I 172–74; cf. also JÞork. 33–36. There is a story of the devil as advocate in the same manuscript, cf. *Véz.* 119.

⁵ ÍB 37 8vo and ÍB 215 8vo.

⁶ ÍB 160–62 8vo. Stories are printed from these in ÓDav. 18–20, 112–16, 116–20; ÓDav.⁵ I 157–59, III 286–88, 271–74.

⁷ The letter is printed in *Lovsamling for Island* VII (1857), 658–61. A prayer for cows at grass from one of the replies is printed in *Gráskinna* III 95, *Gráskinna*² I 259–60. The report of the Commission, *Frásögur um fornaldarleifar 1817–1823*, was published by Stofnun Árna Magnússonar in Reykjavík in 1983.

the Icelandic Literary Society began to gather materials for a description of Iceland, and sent out a questionnaire to all incumbents of parishes, asking each one to compile a description of his parish. These descriptions are a rich mine for the cultural history of Iceland, and a great deal of folklore is to be found in them, most of which is now published.¹ The manuscripts given to the Society by various people also included a good deal of folk-story material.²

In 1845 the runologist George Stephens got the Royal Northern Antiquarian Society to make a collection of old stories and all kinds of folklore, whether stories or beliefs, as well as all kinds of folk verse. As a result, the society acquired a fair number of manuscripts, including a collection of folk-stories, superstitions and popular games made by Magnús Grímsson (this collection is now AM 968 4to), folk-stories and other matter from Guðmundur Sigurðsson from Loftstaðir (AM 969 4to) and a collection of stories and poems made by Gísli Konráðsson (now AM 276 and 277 8vo). I do not know whether this collection overlaps at all with Lbs 1292–93 4to, which he wrote ‘at the request of the Northern Antiquarian Society (draft)’.³

IX

A much more important event, which was to have a far greater influence on the study of Icelandic folklore, took place in the same year that the Antiquarian Society sent out its circular. Two young men combined to begin the collection of folklore materials in Iceland in earnest. They were Jón Árnason and Magnús Grímsson. Jón was a parson’s son, from Hof on Skagaströnd in northern Iceland. Born in 1819, he matriculated from Bessastaðir School in 1843, and became domestic tutor to the children of the poet and schoolmaster Sveinbjörn

¹ JÁ I xxvi–xxvii, *Huld*² I 231–32; *Huld* VI 2–42, *Huld*² II 148–71; *Lfrs.* III 202; ÞJ *Örnefni* 109; *Landnám Ingólfs* III; ÓDav.³ Descriptions from the following districts have now been published as a whole in editions of varied quality (*Sóknalýsingar Bókmenntafélagsins frá 1839* etc.): Rangárvallasýsla, Árnessýsla, Snæfells- og Hnappadalssýsla, Barðastrandarsýsla, Ísafjarðarsýsla, Strandarsýsla, Húnavatnssýsla, Skagafjarðarsýsla, Eyjafjarðarsýsla, Þingeyjar-sýslur, Múlasýslur, Skaptafellssýslur.

² We may add to the manuscripts already cited ÍBR 46 8vo and ÍBR 113 8vo.

³ Cf. also *ÍGSVP* II 2–3; *Antiquarisk Tidsskrift* 1843–45, *passim*; 1846–48, 169–72; 1849–51, 24–27.

Egilsson, in 1848 Librarian of the Provincial (later National) Library in Reykjavík, then part-time teacher and later Inspector of Dormitories in Reykjavík Latin School, and was secretary to two successive bishops of Iceland. He died in 1888. Magnús was a farmer's son from Borgarfjörður. Born in 1825 and matriculated from Reykjavík Latin School in 1848, he took his degree in theology from Reykjavík Theological College in 1850 and worked for some years at various jobs in and around Reykjavík until he was ordained to the living of Mosfell in 1855, where he died in 1860. Magnús was a man of many parts, enjoyed many things, and scattered his energies in a variety of activities, while Jón continued steadily at his work as scholar, teacher and librarian, remaining connected with the places where it was possible to study. Both men had had formal schooling, but Jón was to remain in contact with schoolboys, which was to be of great help to their collecting activity, since many of the pupils afterwards held offices (especially in the church) all over the country, and so had excellent opportunities to get to know good and knowledgeable story-tellers (male and female alike). Very little is known of the collecting activities of Magnús and Jón in the early years. The initial idea had come to them through reading the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, which had aroused them to emulation, and they knew also of the rise in status which this form of popular literature had won in Scandinavia and elsewhere. The fourth volume of the periodical *Fjölur* has an essay on its value,¹ and the works of the poet Jónas Hallgrímsson (1807–45) and, later, the novels of Jón Thoroddsen (1818–68) demonstrate how much interest in this kind of material was in the air in this period. It is very likely that Magnús, with his many interests and lively mind, may have set Jón going (whichever one of them it was that had first noticed the field waiting for workers). They divided the labour at first so that the stories were to be Magnús's business and customs, rhymes, chants and verses Jón's, 'but each collected for the other and pointed out to him places where things were to be found'. In 1852 they published a little specimen of their catch, naming it *Íslensk æfintýri*, 'Icelandic folk-stories'. These are mostly folk-legends, the sources for which are not mentioned, but it is clear that Magnús provided the larger number.² It may

¹ *Fjölur* IV (1836), 11–14.

² Most of the contents of *Íslensk æfintýri* was absorbed into *JÁ*, and Jón Árnason's list of attributions makes it possible to see what derives from whom.

be that at first (as Ólafur Davíðsson has maintained) Magnús wanted to put stories in a literary dress, but he soon adopted Jón's attitude that it was better to keep them as near as possible to the oral narrative.¹ It would then appear that the two partners did not collect much material for a while after 1852, as they had no hope of getting any more printed. In the summer of 1858, however, the German scholar Konrad Maurer (1823–1902) made an exploratory journey to Iceland and became acquainted with the material which the two had in their possession, and he also travelled extensively round the country and discovered that this sort of folklore was to be found in abundance everywhere. He noted down everything that came his way and published it in his book *Isländische Volkssagen der Gegenwart* (Leipzig 1860). Maurer's visit put new heart into the partners, for he offered to get a publisher in Leipzig to bring out a collection of their folk-materials. Maurer had also told Jón Árnason about various knowledgeable men and women whom he had met on his travels, while the partners knew many others. Jón Árnason now composed (in the autumn of 1858) an 'exhortation' in which he gave a list of several categories of folklore about which he wanted to obtain knowledge or to receive written reports. This he sent to some 40 people.² He soon received a large quantity of material, to which he added steadily. It must be considered doubtful, however, whether Magnús can have collected a great deal more during the two

Magnús has contributed the following (the numeration is that of *Íslensk æfintýri*): 24; 5 'from Borgarfjörður'; 6, 14, 15 'through north-country Latin-School boys'; 19 'from schoolboys from East Iceland'; 4, 8, 9a–e, i, 17 are said to be 'from a story common in Borgarfjörður'. All these are most probably from Magnús Grímsson, as well as 10 and 9h ('from the Rev. Búi Jónsson') and possibly 25 and 26 (cf. *JÁ* I 158). 12 is also from his collection (cf. *Antiquarisk Tidsskrift* 1849, 24). The sources of the others are uncertain. Except for no. 2, they may be from Jón Árnason. See Nordal *SMG* for a clear account of the contributions of the two great pioneers. This study also reveals that 1, which gave subsequent folklorists such trouble, is in fact a pastiche by Jón Thoroddsen, playing a similar trick to the one played by the antiquary Robert Surtees on Sir Walter Scott.

¹ Ólafur Davíðsson, 'Magnús Grímsson', *Sunnanfari* V, no. 8, 1–3; but see Nordal *SMG* 13–22.

² Printed in *Norðri*, 1859, nos 13–14, over the name of Jón Borgfirðingur the bibliographer; in a longer form in *Íslendingur* II, 1861, no. 12; and in *JÁ* I xxix; see Jón Samsonarson, *Ljóðmál: Fornir þjóðlífsþættir*, 2002, 1–20.

remaining years before his death, and he can hardly have contributed much more to the book than his old collections and his enthusiasm.¹ The book which they were preparing, *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og æfintýri*, is therefore rightly attributed to Jón alone, as *Íslensk æfintýri* is rightly attributed to both (with Magnús's name first), for Magnús had no greater share in the former than Maurer, to whom no one has dreamed of attributing it.

This is not the place to trace how Jón's collecting proceeded; the collection grew and grew, and the edition was delayed until 1862, when the first volume appeared. In the period after its appearance Jón

¹ Jón writes in a letter to Maurer (20th June 1859; Lbs 2655 8vo, now partly printed in Finnur Sigmundsson (ed.), *Úr fórum Jóns Árnasonar*, 1950–51, I 125–29): 'I now come to the point that I do not expect that a press manuscript of 20–30 sheets [i.e. 320–480 pp.] will be got ready by sr. Magnús and myself until next spring. Sr. Magnús is in very difficult circumstances at the moment, and I cannot expect much assistance from him for the present. I regret to have to tell you this, the more so as he is my good friend, though it is my duty to both him and yourself to tell you that, as far as I know, his entire property is pledged to others for debts, and Heaven only knows when a creditor (or several creditors) may foreclose his mortgage and demand their rights. You will gather from this there is a considerable bar to the likelihood of the press manuscript to vol. I being ready this autumn. I grant you that if, as I expect, I receive all the materials for which I have asked, I shall have enough stories to be able to print a volume of up to 30 sheets, but it will have to be fair-copied, and there are so few people (here) whom I can trust to do it. If sr. Magnús can clear up (for press) the part that he has collected (which you saw at my house last autumn) I shall regard this as a good thing, but it will not go far towards 30 sheets.' In order to determine sr. Magnús's share of *JÁ* we must base our calculations on Jón Árnason's own preface (*JÁ*³ I xvii–xxiii; but see Nordal *SMG*), which states that Magnús's initials are printed with most of the stories obtained from him (cf. *JÁ*³ I xxi, n.), and not on Guðbrandur Vigfússon's statement in the first printed Introduction (*JÁ* I xxvii); though the footnote shows that these initials have been omitted from one or more stories (as from some of the stories from *Íslensk æfintýri*). Einar Ól. Sveinsson also thought that wherever the caption states 'Common story in Borgarfjörður' or something similar, one should investigate whether it comes from Magnús, while 'story from Borgarfjörður' means something else (cf. *JÁ*² II 718–19). The whole problem was reopened in Nordal *SMG* and in his Introduction to vol. I of his collection *Þjóðsagnabókin* (1971). The most recent contribution to the debate is Ögmundur Helgason, 'Þjóðsagnasmásögur', *Þjóðlíf og þjóðtrú, ritgerðir helgaðar Jóni Hnefli Aðalsteinssyni*, 1998, 406.

acquired much new material. The second volume then appeared in 1864. It had been difficult to supervise the printing, as this took place far from Reykjavík and communications between Reykjavík and Leipzig were sparse. Maurer and Guðbrandur Vigfússon came to the rescue, however, and did their work with zeal and fidelity. Guðbrandur was obliged to compose an introduction to the work, as Jón's manuscript for his own, as far as I know, did not arrive until too late for printing (it was first published in the second edition (1937–39) and reprinted in the third (1954–61)). Guðbrandur's introduction is an excellent and scholarly piece of work, written with vigour and sparkling wit. It should also be mentioned that there exists a postscript to *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* by Jón from which it can be seen that not everyone appreciated Jón's work, though this attitude soon changed.

The contents of *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* are divided into ten categories. Stories make up the bulk of the material, but superstitions, folk-beliefs and customs also have their sections. Initially Jón had intended to have fourteen categories, but games, rhymes, riddles and poems were not ready in time, which is a great pity, since they would have been better treated had they been published by Jón while he was still in his prime, even if the size of the contents of these classes would have been smaller than they eventually became. Time passed, however, and it was only in 1885 that the Copenhagen division of the Literary Society undertook to sponsor their publication. Unfortunately, Jón was by then in very indifferent health, his sight partly gone and his hands so afflicted with trembling that he could not prepare the manuscript for the press. At this point his young cousin Ólafur Davíðsson (1862–1903) came to his aid and became his partner in the enterprise. Jón edited the volume containing riddles, but Ólafur took over and dealt in due course with popular poetry and dances, games, rhymes and so on. Ólafur was an energetic collector, and enlarged the contents of these classes enormously from additional oral and written sources, but when several manuscripts had to be taken into account to establish the text of a poem his editorial technique was inadequate. The whole work appeared from 1887 to 1903 in four volumes under the title *Íslenzkar gátur, skemmtanir, vikivakar og þulur*, 'Icelandic riddles, entertainments, dances and rhymes.'¹

¹ Biographical details of the Rev. Magnús Grímsson are to be found in the preface by Hallgrímur Hallgrímsson to his edition of the *Úrvalsrit* ('Selected

Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri is one of the outstanding master-works of Icelandic literature. It is an immensely rich and varied collection of folk-legends and folk-stories, together with long chapters on superstitions and customs. Even though large and valuable additions have been made since then, this work remains the foundation-stone of all our knowledge of this remarkable imaginative work of the common people, the most comprehensive and clearest overall view of it. The vast majority of the best and most important stories in every field of Icelandic folklore were included in it. Here this literature appeared in all its great variety and power, warmth and ruggedness, wit and seriousness; here the bright and the ghostly, the wing-beat of a vigorous imagination and the languor of introspective dream-life, take their turns. Icelanders recognised their relationship to it and acknowledged this mirror to their land and people, their life and work, the desires and visions of Iceland.

What makes Jón's work more varied than many another national collection of folk-stories is that the stories are not tailored by a single man to a single style, but are taken from manuscripts written by people scattered all over Iceland. Jón was lucky enough to obtain the services of men who were exceptionally good at setting stories down on paper, and had a good understanding of their content and characteristics. *Íslenzk æfintýri* had set the tone, and the scribes copied their stories down in the same spirit. The most famous of these scribes was the Rev. Skúli Gíslason of Breiðabólstaður (1825–88), in whom an admirable story-teller's gift went together with a love of powerful and odd subjects. Others rightly singled out are Þorvarður Ólafsson, Jón Sigurðsson of Gaultönd, the Rev. Sveinbjörn Guðmundsson, the painter Sigurður Guðmundsson, the Rev. Benedikt Þórðarson and Brynjólfur

Works'), 1926, in P. E. Ólason, *Íslenzkar æviskrár* III (1950), 423–24, and in Nordal *SMG*. Details of Jón Árnason's life are to be found in an essay by Pálmi Pálsson in *Andvari* XVII (1892; reprinted in *Merkir Íslendingar*, 1947, I 201–20), in Guðbrandur Vigfússon's Introduction to *JÁ* and Jón's own Introduction, printed in *JÁ*² and *JÁ*³. There is also an autobiographical fragment by Jón in Lbs 2087 4to; his letters to Maurer are in Lbs 2655 8vo, and his letters to Guðbrandur Vigfússon are in Oxford, Bodley Icel. d. 1. See also *Ferðabók Magnúsar Grímssonar fyrir sumarið 1848*, ed. Sveinn Jakobsson and Ögmundur Helgason, 1988. To this should be added the entry in P. E. Ólason, *Íslenzkar æviskrár* III (1950), 48–49, and the discussion of Jón and his great work in *Þjóðsagnabókin* (see previous note).

Jónsson from Minni-Núpur. Jón did not alter the narratives of the best narrators, though he sometimes changed a word here and there, making the words and phrases clearer, stronger and more Icelandic in character. He was very anxious to retain any real peculiarity of expression, odd phrases and so on. Like most of his contemporaries, he had an aversion to the clumsy, Danicised style of the eighteenth century, and he cleansed the language of his stories of such blemishes. He was also averse to an artificially antiquated style, which probably explains why *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* contain so little of the work of Gísli Konráðsson—though the fact that Gísli put together narrative histories in which he welded various sources into large units must have been an equally powerful objection to Jón. In this respect Gísli was the disciple of Espólin and he in turn influenced others who came later, such as Brynjólfur of Minni-Núpur, who wrote long composite narratives as well as folk-stories. Jón was not given to conflating sources—when he did so it was mostly in the folk-legends.¹

In *Íslensk æfintýri* there is a description of the recommended method for writing down folk-stories. This insists that the written story should be as close to the oral narrative as possible. Jón Sigurðsson, in his review of *Isländische Volkssagen*, says of the style of the wonder-tales: 'Some of these stories are very beautiful, especially where they managed to be written down verbatim from the best story-tellers, rather than being written up in an antiquated saga-style. A good example is the story of Prince Linus and the old man's daughter, which Maurer has written down from the narration of old Ebenezer in Flatey (277–80) who is the best teller of such stories that we have heard.'² About the same time Jón Árnason was exhorting Brynjólfur Jónsson to find good story-tellers, either men or women, who could tell a story with life and vigour, and to write the stories down as close to the way they tell them as he can. Yet I think it is safe to say that this happened but seldom; the writers normally gave a style to the stories, though peculiarities of word and phrase used by the narrators will normally have been retained. It has to be remembered that in rural Iceland both story-

¹ Three fairly recent studies of Jón Árnason's work are Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Jón Árnason', *Arv* 25–26, 1969–70, 419–55, J. Simpson, *Icelandic Folk Tales and Legends*, 1972, Introduction, and B. S. Benedikz, 'Basic themes in Icelandic folklore and legend', *Folklore* 84, 1973, 1–26.

² This review is in *Ný Félagsrit* XX, 1860, 193–94.

tellers and story-writers had been brought up with the narrative manner and writers' skill of the ancient, written sagas, and this could not fail to have its effect. A new folk-story style was created, composed of many elements, both old and new. It has a simple everyday quality and an even, supple flow, but it is smoother and less wrinkled than oral narrative style usually is, more dignified and powerful. In it are blended the features of both written and oral tradition. This was a tremendous achievement, and it has had a powerful effect on Icelandic prose style ever since. It is another matter that though *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* come closer to oral tradition than the custom was in Europe, scholars would wish to have many more folk-stories which are indisputably copied down verbatim from the speech of the people. One could speculate further that those scholars who followed Jón Árnason might well have increased the artistic value of the stories if they had taken more note of the peculiarities, inequalities and sudden leaps in the narrators' stories, though there is no doubt that it is more difficult to control so uneven a style than one that is known and tried.

X

In the original edition of 1940 the author provided a short list of folklore collections etc. to indicate the state of the subject at the outbreak of the Second World War. In the latter part of the twentieth century an enormous amount of scholarly and popular work appeared and the following extended list is now supplied as a guide to the reader who wishes to investigate the field further using more recent material.

A. Collections of Folk-stories and Folklore

- 1) *Íslenzk æfintýri*. Söfnuð af M. Grímssyni og J. Árnasyni, 1852.
 - 1a) same. Photo-reprint, 1942.
 - 1b) same. 2nd edition, enlarged, 1945. The additions to this edition are almost all from Magnús Grímsson's work.
- 2) *Isländische Volkssagen der Gegenwart*, vorwiegend nach mundlicher Überlieferung gesammelt und verdeutscht von Konrad Maurer, 1860.
- 3) *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*. Safnað hefur Jón Árnason. 2 vols, 1862–64.
 - 3a) same. 2nd edition (a photo-reprint of the text, with subject-index

added by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and full indexes by Guðni Jónsson). 2 vols, 1925–39.

- 3b) same. 3rd edition, supervised by Árni Böðvarsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson. 6 vols, 1954–61. Vols I–II are a reprint of no. 3; vols III–VI contain new material from Jón Árnason's collections not previously published by him, critical notes and indexes.

Excerpts from JÁ have been published in numerous collections, and his manuscript collections have also been quarried for further material to print. It is quite pointless to refer to most of these, except for two major selections of stories.

- 4) *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 1944 (2nd edition 1951; 3rd edition 1986).

- 5) *Þjóðsagnabókin: sýnisbók íslenzkra þjóðsagnasafna*, ed. Sigurður Nordal. 3 vols, 1971–73.

For information on Icelandic folk-stories translated into other languages before 1970 it is sufficient to refer to:

- 6) P. M. Mitchell and K. H. Ober, *Bibliography of Modern Icelandic Literature in Translation*, 1975 (*Islandica* XL).

- 6a) Kenneth H. Ober, *Bibliography of Modern Icelandic Literature in Translation*, 1990 (*Islandica* XLVII).

Subsequent publications of interest are (cf. p. 319 below):

- 7) J. Simpson, *Icelandic Folk Tales and Legends*, 1972, pbk. repr. 1979.

- 8) J. Simpson, *Legends of Icelandic Magicians*, 1975. Each story (in translation) is fully annotated as to source, parallels and motifs.

- 9) *Icelandic Folktales* tr. A. E. Boucher. 3 vols, 1977.

- 10) Heinz Barüske, *Isländische Märchen*, 1994.

- 11) *Märchen aus Island*, ed. and tr. Kurt Schier, 1983, repr. 1996.

Major collections after JÁ:

- 12) *Huld: safn alþýðlegra fræða íslenzkra*, ed. Hannes Þorsteinsson, Jón Þorkelsson, Ólafur Davíðsson, Pálmi Pálsson, Valdimar Ásmundsson. 6 vols, 1890–98.

- 12a) same. 2nd edition in 2 vols, 1935–36. Vol. I has an introductory essay on the original editors.

- 13) *Íslenzkar sögur*, 1891 (*Sögusafn Ísafoldar* IV).

- 13a) same. Printed as pp. 156–370 of *Sögur Ísafoldar* I, 1947.

- 14) *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur*, ed. Ólafur Davíðsson, 1895 (reprinted 1899).

- 14a) same. 3rd (more properly 2nd) edition. 2 vols, 1935–39.
- 14b) same. 4th (more properly 3rd) edition. 3 vols, 1945.
- 14c) same. 5th edition. Ed. Þorsteinn M. Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, 1978–80.
- 15) *Þjóðsögur og munnmæli. Nýtt safn*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson, 1899.
- 15a) same. 2nd edition, 1956.
- 16) *Sagnakver*, ed. Björn Bjarnason. 2 vols, 1900–03.
- 16a) same. 2nd edition, 1935.
- 17) Adeline Rittershaus, *Die neuisländische Volksmärchen*, 1902.
- 18) *Ferðamannsóður. Fjallabúasaga*, 1905.
- 19) *Íslenskar sögur og sagnir*, ed. Þorsteinn Erlingsson, 1906 (*Fylgirit Ingólfs*).
- 19a) same. 2nd edition. *Þjóðsögur Þorsteins Erlingssonar*, 1954. (This contains a reissue of the 1906 volume, together with folklore materials provided by Þorsteinn for *Huld*, Ólafur Davíðsson's *Þjóðsögur* and the newspapers *Bjarki* and *Arnfirðingur*; as well as some from his unpublished papers. These additions comprise more than half this enlarged volume.)
- 20) Þorsteinn Erlingsson, *Sagnir Jakobs gamla*, 1933.
- 21) *Dulrænar smásögur*, ed. Brynjólfur Jónsson frá Minna-Núpi, 1907.
- 21a) same. 2nd edition, 2 vols, 1955. The second portion is printed for the first time.
- 22) Brynjólfur Jónsson, *Tillag til alþýðlegra fornfræða*, 1953. All except two of the stories in this collection are reprinted in *JÁ*³.
- 23) *Þjóðtrú og þjóðsagnir I*, collected by Oddur Björnsson, ed. Jónas Jónasson, 1908. No more parts were issued.
- 23a) same. 2nd edition, augmented, ed. Steindór Steindórsson, 1977. This edition contains 251 items, against 176 in the original volume.
- 24) *Vestfirzkar þjóðsögur*, ed. Arngrímur Bjarnason and Oddur Gíslason. 3 vols, 1909–59.
- 25) *Sýslumaðurinn í Svartárbotnum*, 1950. Previously printed in *Tvær sögur*, ed. Jón Helgason and Karl H. Bjarnason, 1910.
- 26) *Sögur af ýmsu tagi*, ed. S. J. Austmann, 1915.
- 27) *Dulrúnir*, ed. Sigfús Sigfússon. 2 vols, 1915–30.
- 28) *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og -sagnir*, ed. Sigfús Sigfússon. 16 vols, 1922–58. The collection is unindexed. There are two forms of the text of this collection, both in the collector's autograph, in the manuscript section of the National Library of Iceland.

- 28a) same. New edition, 11 vols, 1982–93 [Index in final volume]. A different and earlier collection by the same compiler, containing more stories than the earlier edition.
- 29) Theodóra Thoroddsen, *Íslandsk Folketru*, tr. F. Paasche, 1924. Reprinted, together with more folk-material, in *Ritsafn*, 1960.
- 30) *Sex Þjóðsögur*, ed. Björn R. Stefánsson, 1926.
- 31) *Gráskinna*, ed. Sigurður Nordal and Þorbergur Þórðarson. 4 vols, 1928–36.
- 31a) same. 2nd edition. *Gráskinna hin meiri*. 2 vols, 1962. In this edition vol. I is a reprint of the old edition, vol. II contains previously unpublished material.
- 32) Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Verzeichnis isländischer Märchenvarianten*, 1929 (*FFC* 83).
- 33) *Gríma*, ed. Þorsteinn M. Jónsson. 5 vols (in 25 fascicules), 1929–50.
- 33a) same. 2nd edition. *Gríma hin nýja*. 5 vols, 1964–65. In the revised edition the stories are in classified order, much additional material is included, and a general index of the entire collection is provided.
- 34) *Rauðskinna*, ed. Jón Thorarensen. 12 vols, 1929–61.
- 34a) same. 2nd edition. *Rauðskinna hinn nýrri*. 3 vols, 1971. The new edition has much additional material and a general index.
- 35) *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur*, ed. Einar Guðmundsson. 5 vols, 1932–47.
- 36) Einar Guðmundsson, *Gambanteinar: Þjóðsögur og þættir*, 1955.
- 37) Einar Guðmundsson, *Nýtt sagnakver: Þjóðsögur og þættir*, 1957.
- 38) Einar Guðmundsson, *Dulheimar: Þjóðsögur og þættir*, 1963.
- 39) Einar Guðmundsson, *Þjóðsögur og þættir*. 2 vols, 1981–82. A complete edition of this author's previous books with index.
- 40) *Vestfirskar sagnir*, ed. Helgi Guðmundsson and Arngrímur Fr. Bjarnason. 3 vols, 1933–49.
- 41) Elínborg Lárusdóttir, *Úr djúpi þagnarinnar*, 1936.
- 42) Elínborg Lárusdóttir, *Úr síðustu leit*, 1944.
- 43) *Sögur og sagnir úr Vestmannaeyjum*, ed. Jóhann Gunnar Ólafsson. 2 vols, 1938–39.
- 43a) same. 2nd edition, 1966. This edition is slightly altered by minor excisions and additions and has an index of names.
- 44) *Íslenzkir sagnaþættir og þjóðsögur*, ed. Guðni Jónsson. 12 vols, 1940–54. Indexes of names are in vols III, VI, IX and XII.
- 45) *Skyggvir, alþýðlegur fróðleikur og skemmtan*, ed. Guðni Jónsson. 2 vols, 1960–62.

- 46) *Sópyngja, þjóðsögur, alþýðlegur fróðleikur og skemmtan*, ed. Bragi Sveinsson and Jóhann Sveinsson. 2 vols, 1944–51.
- 47) Guðmundur Jónsson Hoffell, *Skaftfellskar þjóðsögur og sagnir*, ed. M. Skaftfells, 1946.
- 48) *Menn og minjar*, ed. Finnur Sigmundsson. 9 vols, 1946–60.
- 49) *Æfintýri og sögur*, ed. Ásmundur Helgason, 1947.
- 50) Skúli Gíslason, *Sagnakver*, ed. Sigurður Nordal, 1947.
- 51) *Að vestan*, ed. Árni Bjarnarson. 4 vols, 1949–55.
- 51a) same. 2nd edition, 5 vols (the fifth was new), 1983.
- 52) *Skrudda: Sögur, sagnir og kveðskapur*, ed. Ragnar Ásgeirsson. 3 vols, 1957–59.
- 52a) same. 2nd edition, 3 vols, 1972–74. This edition has further material and an improved index.
- 53) *Þjóðsögur og sagnir*, ed. Torfhildur Þorsteinsdóttir Holm, 1962.
- 54) Halldór Pétursson, *Ævisaga Eyjasels-Móra*, 1962.
- 55) *Sögur og sagnir úr Bolungarvík*, ed. Finnbogi Bernóðusson, 1969.
- 56) *Refskinna*, ed. Bragi Jónsson ('Refur bóndi'). 2 vols, 1971–73.
- 57) *Þjóðlegar sagnir og ævintýri*, ed. Ingólfur Jónsson. 2 vols, 1974–75.
- 58) Guðrún Guðmundsdóttir, *Minningar úr Hornafirði*, with annotations and a supplement by Vilmundur Jónsson, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson, 1975.
- 59) Jónas Rafnar, *Eyfirzkar sagnir*, 1977.
- 60) Halldór Pétursson, *Bjarna-Dísa og Móri. Tveir austfirskir draugar sem enn blíva*, 1977. Some reprints, but also some more recent stories collected by the compiler.
- 61) *Sagan af Loðinbarða*. Skrásett af Pétri Benediktssyni, 1964.
- 62) Árni Óla, *Reimleikar*, 1964.
- 63) Árni Óla, *Álög og bannhelgi*, 1968.
- 64) Árni Óla, *Huldufólk*, 1973.
- 65) Árni Óla, *Dulheimar Íslands*, 1975.
- 66) Árni Óla, *Ekki einleikið*, 1978.
- 67) Eiríkur Ísfeld, *Skodað í skrínu Eiríks á Hesteyri. Þjóðsögur, ævintýri, dularfull fyrirbrigði o. fl.* With explanations and notes by the author, Sigurður Helgason and Jón Kr. Ísfeld. Ed. Jón Kr. Ísfeld, 1978.
- 68) Gísli Konráðsson, *Syrpa úr handritum*. 2 vols, 1979–80.
- 69) Björn J. Blöndal, *Sagnir og sögur*, 1980.
- 70) Eyjólfur Guðmundsson, *Þjóðsögur og þættir úr Mýrdal*. Ed. Þórður Tómasson í Skógum, 1981.

71) *Leiftur frá liðnum árum. Frásagnir af mannraunum, slysförum, dulrænum atburðum og skyggnu fólki*. Collected by Jón Kr. Ísfeld. 3 vols, 1981–83.

72) Þorkell Björnsson, *Af Jökuldalsmönnum og fleira fólki*, 1981.

73) Jón Gíslason, *Úr farvegi aldanna*. 2 vols, 1973–74.

This section is intended to show something of the sheer volume and quality of folk-stories that have emanated from the consciousness of a small nation. All collections which either are clearly indicated as regional or have been made on an extensive, nationwide scale, have been included. It should also be remembered that Icelandic newspapers and popular periodicals, both old and new, have been rich harvesters of such material; many provincial papers have also gathered folklore and legend.

B. A selective list of works largely derived from oral tradition

1) *Amma*, ed. Finnur Sigmundsson. 2 vols, 1935–42.

1a) same. 2nd edition, 1960.

1b) same. 3rd edition, 1961.

2) *Sögur og sagnir úr Breiðafirði*, ed. Bergsveinn Skúlason, 1950.

3) *Breiðfirzkar sagnir*, ed. Bergsveinn Skúlason. 3 vols, 1959–66.

3a) same. 2nd edition, enlarged, 1982.

4) Gils Guðmundsson, *Frá yztu nesjum*. 6 vols, 1942–53.

4a) same. 2nd enlarged edition. 3 vols, 1980–83.

5) *Íslenzkir sagnaþættir*. 4 vols, 1900–11.

5a) same. 2nd edition (by Gils Guðmundsson). *Sagnaþættir Þjóðólfs*, 1947.

6) Jón Pálsson, *Austantórur*. 3 vols, 1945–52.

7) Kristleifur Þorsteinsson, *Úr byggðum Borgarfjarðar*. 3 vols, 1944–60.

7a) same. 2nd, enlarged edition of vols. I–II only, 1971–72.

8) Magnús Gestsson, *Mannlíf og Mórar í Dölum*, 1972.

9) Magnús Gestsson, *Úr vesturbyggðum Barðastrandarsýslu*, 1973.

10) *Sagnaþættir Fjallkonunnar*, ed. Jón Guðnason, 1953.

11) Vigfús Kristjánsson, *Sagnaþættir*. 2 vols, 1945–46. With Addenda to vol. II, 1951.

12) Þórður Tómasson, *Eyfellskar sagnir*. 3 vols, 1948–51.

13) Þórður Tómasson, *Sagnagestur*. 3 vols, 1953–58.

14) Þórður Tómasson, *Þjóðhættir og þjóðtrú, skráð eftir Sigurði Þórðarsyni frá Brunnhól*, 1988.

- 15) Þórleifur Bjarnason, *Hornstrendingabók*, 1943.
 15a) same. 2nd enlarged edition, 1976.

C. Bibliography and Scholarly Study

Up to the year 1964 there is a curiously laid out, but reasonably comprehensive bibliography of things pertaining to Icelandic folklore and legend:

- 1) Steindór Steindórsson, *Skrá yfir íslenskar þjóðsögur og skyld rit*, 1964.
- 2) Bo Almqvist, 'Steindór Steindórsson frá Hlöðum: Skrá um íslenskar þjóðsögur og skyld rit' [review], *Skírnir* 1965.

Some very useful information, especially in respect of the rural way of life, may be found in:

- 3) Jónas Jónasson, *Íslenskir þjóðhættir*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 1934.
- 3a) same, 3rd edition, 1961.
- 4) Lúðvík Kristjánsson, *Íslenskir sjávarhættir I–V*, 1980–86.
- 5) Árni Björnsson, *Saga daganna*, 1993.
- 6) Árni Björnsson, *Merkisdagar á mannsævinni*, 1996.

There are many useful articles on folk-belief in:

- 7) *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid*. 22 vols, 1956–78. The following is a list of entries that are relevant to folk-belief:

Alv, Amulettar, Avgudsbilete, Basilisk, Berserk, Biletmagi, Byting, De tacksamma döda, De tre levande och tre döda, Djævel, Drake, Draug, Draumar, Dverger, Dyrehistorier, Döden o. de döda, Enhörning, Ergi, Eventyr, Fabel, Fabeldjur och -människor, Falloskult, Fornaldarsögur Norðrlanda, Fylgja, Förfäderskult, Galder, Gand, Gengångare, Grýla I, Hamingja, Ham(n)skifte, Helskor, Helvete, Himmelsbrev, Hug, Husdyrsygdomme, Hår, Ild, Jotnar, Jätteben, Kjærlighetsmagi, Kors, Korstecken, Kveldrida, Kyrkobyggnadssägner, Kyrkogårdsdans, Källa, Landvette, Legendeeventyr, Magi, Magiske merke, Malstraum, Maning, Mannbjörn, Mara, Maria, Misteltein, Motsols, Musikmagi, Negl, Nid, Novelleeventyr, Näcken, Offer, Olav den hellige, Ondt øye, Ordsprog, Ormkult, Ovund, Petrus, Runemagi, Rævebogen, Sagn, Sagnmotiver i kunsten, Samisk trolldom, Seierhue, Sejd, Selham, Sending, Sjal och kropp, Sjøvette, Skjebnetro, Skæmtehistorie, Soldyrkelse, Spådom, Surtr, Syndfloden, Sömmagi, Tabu, Talmagi, Torden, Torshamrar,

Troll, Trolldom, Trolldomsbøker, Trollformlar, Trollkar og -kvinne, Trollkatt, Tryllemidler, ond Tunge, Varsel, Varulv, Venskap, Vetter, Vildmand, Vindmagi, Visionsdiktning, Vær og vind, Vølundr, Vølva, Ymir, Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr, Þórr, Aar och fred, Änglaböner.

The following have dealt with individual concepts and motifs in folk-belief and folk-stories:

- 8) Else Mundal, *Fylgemotiva i norrön litteratur*, 1974.
- 9) Robert James Glendinning, *Träume und Vorbedeutung in der Islendinga Saga Sturla Thordarsons, Eine Form- und Stiluntersuchung*, 1974.
- 10) Bo Almqvist, *Norrön niddiktning*, 1965–74.
- 11) Dag Strömbäck, *Sejd*, 1934; new edition with a contribution by Bo Almqvist, 2000.
- 12) John Lindow, *Scandinavian mythology. An annotated bibliography*, 1988.
- 13) For recent writings on folk-stories see *Íslensk bókmenntasaga III*, 1996, 947–54.

PART III

FOLK-BELIEF AND FOLK-LEGENDS¹

I

The settlers of Iceland came from lands which had been inhabited since the earliest times. People who had had to adapt themselves to the land and the land to themselves had lived there since the Stone Age. From the beginning they had lived partly by hunting, though in later times they cleared forests and cultivated fields. But always they had been closely connected with nature and its hidden powers, and though men's thinking gradually drew away from the all-embracing magical concept of ancient animist religion, many ancient taboos and customs, superstitions and old wives' tales remained, and people's success in hunting and agriculture was greatly dependent on the support of magical practices. The land was full of powers that were dangerous to handle, except according to customs which were based on ancient precedent. There were supernatural beings in the woods, the mountains and the lakes; the people knew of springs and rivers which had their own various natures, of burial-mounds with the living dead in them, of ghosts of exposed infants, of trees and stones used in sacrifice. I shall only refer briefly here to the innumerable wells and springs that have been regarded as sacred down to our times, from which people have sought healing in accordance with ancient custom, and to which they have often brought offerings.² This belief must have been much stronger in earlier times, and it may be that some springs were not to be handled by everyone, any more than other powerful things, for such things could have both good and bad consequences, just as the Ark of the Covenant could strike men down with diseases. We may mention here a spring in Scotland which was so dangerous that men who washed in it became lame or stricken with sores until St

¹ For the folk-beliefs that underlie the stories in the following sections see Sluijter 1936.

² On such springs in Norway see A. Chr. Bang, *Norges hellige Kilder efter Reformationen*, 1885 (*Forhandlinger i Videnskabs-selskabet i Christiania* 1885, nr. 6); in Denmark, A. Schmidt, *Danmarks Helligkilder*, 1926; in Scotland, Banks I 125–170.

Columba blessed it. In the same country there was also a spring which had to be entered backwards by those who wished to wash there, after which they had to offer it a coin and go back up out of the spring without looking back.¹

Some settlers came directly to Iceland from ancestral homelands rich in folklore, though not all from one district, and their folk-beliefs must have been very varied in character. Many had also been out on viking expeditions, and had learned to put their trust in their own strength alone. These men now came to an uninhabited country, not knowing its guardian spirits or any superstitions that might be helpful there. They approached it with caution; the first Icelandic law was a ban on sailing towards the land with figureheads with gaping mouths, as these might upset the guardian spirits (*Landnámabók* 313). The gods were entrusted with finding new homes for the settlers by their images or the pillars of the high seats brought from the hall of the old homestead being flung overboard; Orlygr the Old, who was a Christian, flung iron bells into the sea and made a vow to Bishop Patrick. Sel-Pórir's method was even odder, for he, following the advice of a merman, let the mare Skálm choose his residence by noting where she lay down under her burden. This legend must rest on some very ancient superstition, since many European ecclesiastical stories are very similar.² Others went round their property with fire and performed other magical rites.³ Much of this had doubtless been used with good effect before the settlement of Iceland, and some of these activities were considered so sacred and beneficial that people were sure of their excellence (e.g. the use of high-seat pillars).

Superstition would doubtless have lost much of its power during the upheaval of the migration. People must have discovered that the new country was not as bound by superstitions as the old one, and it would be worth researching what effect all this had on Icelandic folk-belief. It is, for instance, noteworthy how belief in the evil eye evidently dwindled in Iceland in the course of time, though considerable traces

¹ Adamnan, *Vita Sancti Columbae* 1857, 119; Banks I 164.

² *Landnámabók* 96–97; cf. EÓŠ *If* 189 and note 13; Dag Strömbäck, 'En kyrkbyggnadssägen från Hälsingland och en notis i Islands Landnámabók', *Gammal Hälsingekultur* 1931, 44–52.

³ See Dag Strömbäck, 'Att helga land', *Festskrift tillägnad Axel Hägerström*, 1928, 198–220; reprinted in *Folklore och Filologi*, 1970, 135–65.

of it may be detected in the Middle Ages.¹ Much of the primitive superstition which was linked with particular places in the settlers' former homelands must also have faded away. Who knows but that Icelandic rationalism began with their arrival in a new, uninhabited country?

Even so, superstition took root in many areas, and attached itself to various individual places. Þorsteinn rauðnefr took to worshipping a waterfall, and Koðrán of Giljá believed in a *genius loci* who lived in a rock. Þórólfr Mostrarskegg declared Helgafell to be a sacred hill, and his kin soon began to believe that after death they would pass into it. Þórhaddr goði laid a spell of sanctity (*Mærina-helgi*, a sanctity comparable to that of Mærin in Norway) on Stoðvarfjörður. This kind of reverence diminished with the coming of Christianity, though there remained a persistent faith in the sanctity of Helgafell. The sacredness of other places may also have dwindled without belief in them having wholly disappeared, and it may have blended with belief in spirits, which doubtless also changed after the coming of Christianity. There are few taboos or accounts of dangerous places that relate to the earliest period of the Icelandic settlement, though it is said that no one dared to set up house at Hjörleifshöfði for fear of its guardian spirits, and in the saga of St Jón Ögmundarson (Bishop of Hólar 1106–21) there is a story of a stall in a cowshed in which a cow could not be tied, or it would be found dead the next morning, though St Jón overcame this problem by his steadfastness.² The number of places to which superstition became attached must certainly have increased in time; their number is legion by the seventeenth century. It would be difficult to compile a list of such stories and even more difficult to account with certainty for all the superstitious notions that appear in them, so that as yet caution bids one say little about them. Explanations of these superstitions are varied; sometimes a place is called 'unclean', affected by some undetermined evil powers, and sometimes by a specific ghost or spirit. In a meadow in one place are taboo spots where people are forbidden to scythe.³ In another place there is a house that may not be

¹ See H. F. Feilberg, 'Der böse Blick in nordischer Überlieferung', *ZdVfV* 1901, 304–30; B. Kahle, 'Noch einiges vom bösen Blick', *ZdVfV* 1903, 213–16; Lagerholm *DL* 57.

² *BSI* 38–39 and 244–45; cf. ÓDav.³ II 71–72, ÓDav.⁵ II 285–86; *Landnámabók* 125, 307, 333.

³ Árni Óla, *Álög og bannhelgi*, 1968.

locked up, or a tree that may not be cut, a stretch of water that may not be fished or a farm that the same person might not inhabit for more than twenty successive years.¹ There are usually stories of the misfortunes that followed disregard of such taboos. Alternatively, people had to say prayers in specific places or else throw stones at mounds or unhallowed graves and so on.² The oddest such ‘sacrifice’ was the custom whereby a man who came to Íleppsdalur (‘Insole Valley’) had to leave the insole from his shoe if he wanted to get away from there (JÁ I 665).

In some places, particularly on islands, mice could not survive.³ More significantly, Bishop Gísli Oddsson states that ewes have lambs sired by elvish rams on Álfsey (‘Elf-Isle’ in the Westman Islands), while any ram belonging to humans died if it was put with the ewes there. For a long time it was impossible to keep a bull on Rúfeyjar, for it would be killed, since an elf-bull served the cows there.⁴ Such legends are of considerable antiquity, for *Landnámabók* (330) tells how a rock-dwellers’ billy-goat served Hafir-Björn’s nanny-goats in Grindavík.

Stories are often formed around places where accidents occur, and the disasters are then normally attributed to spells or curses.⁵ Sometimes, however, there are only oral legends or prophecies attached to such a place. Thus the Rev. Einar Hálfðánarson (c.1695–1753), in *Gestur og garðbúi*, ‘Gestur and the farm dweller’, tells about Dufþekja, a cliff in the Westman Islands: ‘It is said that twenty people must fall from it, this is in the prophecy . . . while no one as far as I can remember is to fall from Jappi.’ The Rev. Jón Austmann states that the river Jökulsá on Sólheimasandur and Dufþekja ‘call one to another’, and that as many will drown in Jökulsá as fall from Dufþekja.⁶

¹ On this and similar things see JÁ² II 703 (*varúðir*), 685 (*kirkja*); JPork. 68; forbidden to lock sheepshed at Elliði, *Lfrs.* II 180 (Jens Lauritzson Wolf, *Norrígia illustrata*); forbidden to cut trees or fish, *Noctes Setbergenses* III 209.

² See JÁ² II 703 and 699 (*varúðir* and *steinkast*); JJ Íþ 396.

³ *De mirab.* 59, Icelandic translation 98 (ch. 19); *Lfrs.* II 138 (Bishop Þórður), 180 (Jens Lauritzson Wolf, *Norrígia illustrata*), 351 (Anderson); Eggert Ólafsson, *Reise* 218–19, 528 (*Lfrs.* III 54–55); *Lfrs.* III 112; JPork. 9–10 (*Öræfi*).

⁴ *De mirab.* 57, Icelandic translation 96 (ch. 18); JÁ I 36.

⁵ See JÁ² II 665 (*ákvæði*).

⁶ ÞJ *Örnefni*, 115–16; Steingrímur J. Þorsteinsson, *Upphaf leikritunar á Íslandi*, 1943, 9–10.

It is probable that a good many Icelandic places became taboo at a fairly late date, though it is also evident that some of them existed very early on. There cannot really be said to have been much early superstition attached to wells in Iceland; this is to do with the late date at which Iceland was settled. I know of one example of it being forbidden to close a well, and Bishop Guðmundr the Good blessed several wells and springs; these were considered to have healthy properties in pre-Reformation times, but subsequently belief in them gradually dwindled, though their names still bear witness to the old ideas.¹

On the other hand, legends sprang up about burial mounds and hidden treasure as soon as the country was settled; later on we also hear about graves of seeresses. We are told in ch. 20 of *Hænsa-Póris saga* (which was compiled in the thirteenth century) that Tungu-Oddr had himself buried on Skáneyjarfjall, as he wanted to be able to see over the district after his death. There is a multitude of stories from later times about such funerary dispositions by early Icelanders, some of which are both strange and entertaining, such as the common desire to be buried where the sun was first seen in the morning and last seen at night; a similar story is told of hidden treasure in Sætesdal in Norway (Skar *GS* III 138, 139, 141). Later stories variously assume that treasure is hidden in mounds, in inaccessible places, on crags and under waterfalls, wherever it would be difficult for people to get at it. There is great host of such stories, filled with taboos and precautions that have been ignored, and similar stories are found in Scandinavia.²

These examples suffice to show how ancient superstition became attached to individual spots in Iceland and grew and developed there. The settlers also encountered various novel phenomena which surprised them not a little. Their wonder at the colour of rivers running turbid with silt from glaciers appears in the river-name *Hvítá*, 'White

¹ On the tabu see *JÁ* I 661; *JÁ* II 26–27 (*Gvendarbrunnar*); *Lfrs.* II 228 (Jón Eggertsson); *JÞork.* 199.

² Icelandic examples in *JÁ*² II 678 (*greftrun*), 688 (*leiði*), 675 (*fólgið fé*); *Landnámabók* 156, 386; *Lfrs.* II 96 (*Gullkista*); *Fitjaannáll* 1610 (*Annálar 1400–1800* II 97), Olaus Olavius, *Oeconomisk Reise igiennem de nordvestlige, nordlige, og nordostlige Kanter af Island*, 1780, 155 (Ólafur Olavius, *Ferðabók*, 1964–65, I 242); Hálfðan Jónsson in *Ölfuslýsing 1703 (Landnám Ingólfs* III 14), Eggert Ólafsson, *Reise* 859; *JÞork.* 67, *BBj.* II 111–12. Burial of a seeress is first mentioned in *Laxdæla saga* (*ÍF* V 224).

River', and the steam rising from geysers and hot pools must have seemed even stranger to them. Nonetheless they seem to have regarded all these things with a fairly rational eye, for there are very few folk-legends of geysers, and none of these is found in early sources. Later on there are some stories of pools or geysers that remove themselves from unseemly behaviour or punish it. *Konungsskuggsjá* (compiled around 1250) says of mineral (carbonated) springs that they cannot be enclosed in a building, otherwise they move away. The Ortelius map (drawn c.1585) indicates that there was one above Stafholt that moved because of a farmer's greed.¹ Some legends say that ghosts are relegated to geysers, and from AD 1600 onwards there are numerous stories of 'geyser fowl'. Some describe them as black, the size of crows, others as small and red, but all agree that they dive into the geyser when approached.²

Because of their terrible awesomeness, volcanic eruptions had a far greater impact on the imagination of early Icelanders. They began so suddenly, and the sources of eruption then lay dormant for decades or even centuries. All this was inexplicable, and ideally suited to produce folk-legends as explanations. *Kristni saga* (ed. B. Kahle, 1905, *ASB* 11, 39) tells us that in the year 999–1000, when the Icelanders accepted Christianity as a nation, an eruption took place which was attributed by some to the wrath of the gods, to which Snorri goði was supposed to have replied: 'What then were the gods angry about when the lava-field we are standing on ran?' His words are a good specimen of the sceptical outlook that was about at the time. Many however, turned to superstition. *Landnámabók* tells of Þorvaldr kolbarki, who composed a poem in honour of the giant Surtr, and went up to Surtr's Cave (which is in the middle of a lava-field) and delivered it there

¹ Cf. *JÁ* II 113. In other countries there are legends about springs that are dirtied or troubled, see A. Schmidt, *Danmarks Helligkilder*, 1926, 94–96; Banks I 134, 142, 169.

² First mentioned by Blefken (Ólafur Davíðsson, 'Ísland og Íslendingar, eptir því sem segir í gömlum bókum, útlendum', *Tímarit hins íslenska bókmenntafélags* VIII (1887), 144), next by Þorsteinn Björnsson in *Noctes Setbergenses*; then Hálfðan Jónsson in *Ölfuslýsing 1703 (Landnám Ingólfs* II 10–11, see references there; see also *Lfrs.* II 310; Brynjólfur Jónsson, *Dulrænar smásögur*, 1907, 117–20). Further on hot springs and warm pools *JÁ*² II 683 (*hver*), 688 (*laug*); *Andvari* XVII (1892), 39, 45–46.

(*Landnámabók* 240). The fire-giant of *Vqluspá* is therefore probably older than the settlement of Iceland, but was transferred and attached to the volcanic fire and lava there (*PE* 11, 12). There is another story which connects an eruption with a giant, also told in *Landnámabók*. When Sel-Þórir was old and blind he saw a great and evil-looking man row an iron boat into the mouth of the river Kaldá, and then walk over to the farm at Hrip and dig into the ground in the entrance to the dairy there. In the night an eruption began at that spot, and the lava-field Borgarhraun ran from there (*Landnámabók* 97–99). These notions became a topic of verse for one poet who, probably late in the thirteenth century, described a volcanic eruption with dark inspiration, and attributed it to no mean giant (*Bergbúaljóð*).¹ Another explanation of eruptions is that they were caused by magic, as when the settlers Prasi in Skógar and Loðmundr in Sólheimar each directed the water from the glacier to the other's land.² Later legends (from the seventeenth century) tell how Katla, housekeeper in the abbey at Þykkvibær, went wild and flung herself into the gorge now named after her, and so caused the eruptions there. Various other late legends relate how ghosts were exorcised and laid to rest in craters, and there is also a story of a girl and a dog who were inside a farm house when an eruption covered it. Some time later the dog was heard to bark by passers-by, and they were saved. This story existed in the eighteenth century.³

The clergy of those days did not, however, approve of the explanations offered by popular belief, which attributed volcanic fire to trolls, and they linked them to evil spirits and the torments of Hell. The earliest such connection that I know of is in a book of miracles by the Cistercian monk Herbert of Clairvaux,⁴ who obtained a description of an eruption from Archbishop Áskell of Lund (died 1181), and this must have given rise to the idea among the clerks of southern Europe that it was a fire from Hell. Saxo Grammaticus gives some description

¹ Cf. Guðmundur Finnbogason, 'Hallmundarkviða', *Skírnir* 1935, 172–81; See *Bergbúa þáttur* and *Kumblúa þáttur*, *ÍF* XIII, 439–55.

² *Landnámabók* 304–05; Sigurður Þórarinnsson, 'Jarðvísindi og Landnáma', *Sjötú ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni* 1977, 665–76.

³ Cf. JÁ² II 683 (*jarðeldur*), 681 (*hraun*), 684 (*jökulhlaup*); *Safn* IV 192, 199; Markús Loptsson, *Rit um jarðelda á Íslandi*, 1880, 5–7, 10–12; JÞork. 126–27.

⁴ Sigurður Þórarinnsson, 'Herbert múnkur og Heklufell', *Náttúrufræðingurinn* 1952, 49–61; Sigurður Þórarinnsson, *Heklueldar*, 1968, 25–29.

of volcanoes. He thought that the souls of the ungodly were tormented by cold among the glaciers. Albéric des Trois Fontaines tells of Icelandic shepherds who saw the souls of the departed flying into the Icelandic Hell in the shape of ravens. He claims to have this from one such shepherd who afterwards joined the Cistercians.¹ After this one writer reproduces another's absurdities and this continues down the ages until it begins to look as if even Icelanders themselves were beginning to believe in this nonsense; this process was further encouraged by the fact that the Norwegian *Konungs skuggsjá*, which was known everywhere in Iceland, took it for granted that the departed were tormented in the fire and ice of Iceland. People thought they saw both large and small birds flying about in the flames of the eruption of Hekla in 1341. They thought these birds were human souls (*Flateyjarannáll* 1341, *Islandske annaler indtil 1578*, 401). It was certainly very necessary in the time of Eggert Ólafsson to examine Hekla with one's own eyes and describe it as it really was. European folklore spoke of black masses celebrated in Hekla, but this is quite unknown in Icelandic legend. As evidence of Hekla's fame abroad, we may mention that it appears in the Norwegian *Ståleferd*, which was a Christmas journey of trolls and witches. Stories have come down about this from Sættesdal (Skar GS III 21).

The sea and lakes were sufficiently mysterious and frightening to lead to superstitions about them and the monsters living in them to take root immediately. The section on whales in *Konungs skuggsjá* has to be considered as natural history for our purposes, yet superstitions about 'great fish' occur not infrequently in it, and such traditions did not by any means diminish during the following centuries. Precautions that seamen took to avoid mentioning the names of the 'great fish', or suggesting anything that would bring them to mind, are noteworthy (*Konungs skuggsjá*, 1983, 18–20). Sea serpents are known from heathen times (the Miðgarðsormr of *Snorra Edda*), and a *marmennill* 'merman' is mentioned in *Landnámabók* (96–97). The story of the Laughing Merman appears already in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* (ch.3; 1981, 173–75; a work probably from the second half of the thirteenth

¹ *Scandia* IV (1931), 289–90; *Lfrs.* I 65–69, 239–42; Konrad Maurer, 'Die Hölle auf Island', *ZdVfV* 1894, 256–69 and Konrad Maurer, 'Weiteres über die Hölle auf Island', *ZdVfV* 1898, 452–54.

century) and then in Jón lærði's *Tíðfordríf* (see p. 106 above), and is later common in Iceland. Sea-cows and sea-bulls are not mentioned in early literature, unless their existence is to be inferred from the dapple-grey bull, father of Glæsir, referred to in the episode of Þórólfr bægifótr's hauntings in *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 63), but they appear as soon as our later sources take over.¹ I am afraid that mermaids have never really become rooted in Icelandic folk-belief, though stories have been told about them.² A somewhat suspicious seal with human eyes appears in *Laxdæla saga* (ch. 18), but this is most likely a ghost, as is Selkolla in *Guðmundar saga biskups* (BS I 604–08)—she has a seal's head—and in later times seals had a powerful impact on popular imagination. There is considerable evidence to show that people were apt to think of them as human, a piece of anthropomorphism best seen in the legend of the seal-maiden who marries a human.³ Oddly enough, the first instance of this story in Icelandic seems to be no earlier than from the eighteenth century. The very common idea that seals are Pharaoh's army, drowned in the Red Sea, also turns up in Icelandic folklore.⁴ Later on sea-monsters, shore-beasts and similar horrors become more common; long dark nights and fear of the dark must have been instrumental in the creation of these shell-covered and slimy monstrosities. I do not know their history, but I suspect that their growth escalated in the same period as the stories of magic developed, as will be mentioned later.⁵ Water-horses and water-serpents were doubtless quick to come and live in the waters of Iceland, and both must have been known in legends brought by the settlers. A water-horse is mentioned in *Landnámabók* and frequently thereafter.⁶ In the southernmost places of Iceland, in the mountains where the sea comes roaring against the

¹ The Ortelius map; JH 176; JÁ² II 692 (*nautgripir*); cf. P. Herrmann, *Erläuterungen zu den ersten neun Büchern des Saxo Grammaticus* II, 1922, 382.

² Cf. Reidar Th. Christiansen, 'Til de norske sjøvetters historie', *Maal og minne* 1935, 1–25.

³ JÁ I xiii, 632–33; *Verz.* 35; *Saga Árna ljúflings*.

⁴ See Oskar Loorits, *Pharaos Heer in der Volksüberlieferung* I, 1935. Also mentioned in *Saga Árna ljúflings*.

⁵ There are surveys of sea- and lake-monsters in *Tímarit hins íslenska Bókmenntafélags* XIV 98; XXII 127; XXIII 29.

⁶ *Landnámabók* 120–21; *Íslensk fornkvæði* no. 3; *De mirab.* 40–4, Icelandic translation 68–69 (ch. 6); *Noctes Setbergenses* II 17–69; *Skrif Ólafs gamla*

cliffs, roaring sea-bulls were sometimes heard in the nineteenth century. The Serpent of Lagarfljót is the oldest water-serpent that I know of in Iceland; it first appears in the annals in 1345, and thereafter times without number. Huge skates and other giant water-beasts appear in later times in lakes and rivers, though I do not know how old such things are. The notion of various huge animals known as ‘mother of seals’, ‘mother of flounders’, ‘mother of trout’, ‘mother of salmon’ or ‘mother of skates’, is very curious; I know of no Icelandic example earlier than the seventeenth century, but I find it hard to believe that it is not very ancient.¹ I do not know whether such concepts exist outside Iceland, though in the Shiant Islands (in the Hebrides) vague stories of a giant seal, a ‘father of seals’, are found.²

I shall not say much about land-creatures, but would mention that the belief that cows talk on Christmas Night or Twelfth Night is also known as a folk-legend in Denmark.³ A curious superstition also existed about the skins of polar bears, which were believed to have the property that if a woman bore a child while lying on one, the child would never feel cold; the word *bjarnylr* ‘bear’s warmth’ is already found in Old Icelandic writings, and the concept is clearly stated by Jón lærði in the seventeenth century and has probably had very little added to it since. I think that an echo of totemism can be discerned in this idea, and the frequency with which the ‘guardian spirits’ of early

(i.e. Jón Eggertsson, see BE *Munnmælasögur* 13–14, about Jón of Svalbarð and Hálfðán of Fell); Peder Hansen Resen, *Íslandslýsing*, 1991, 138 (*Lfrs.* II 183–92); Jón Marteinsson (*Lfrs.* II 329); Eggert Ólafsson, *Reise*, 55–56, 711–12; Sæmundur Hólm (ÍB 333 4to, 26v: ‘In Hrótsvatn, Oddnýjartjörn, Blönduvatn, Víkurtjörn they say and hold it to be true that there is a water-horse or hippopotamus, also in Nauthúsvatn.’); JÁ² II 393 (water-horse); JÞork. 44–45, 364–65, OÞj. 203–05; cf. Finnur Jónsson, *Norsk-islandske Kultur- og Sprogforhold i 9. og 10. Årh.*, 1921, 103; C. W. von Sydow, ‘Folkminnesforskning och Filologi’, *Folkminnen och folktanker* VIII (1922), 114–20.

¹ Mother of skates in *Ann. farr.* 8 (1603; Icelandic translation 21), Þórður Þorlákssyni, *Ísland, Stutt landlýsing og söguyfirlit*, 1982, [D4v], 40 (*Lfrs.* II 139), Peder Hansen Resen, *Íslandslýsing*, 1991, 162 (*Lfrs.* II 187), Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík (*Lfrs.* II 324, JH 175); mother of trout in Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík (*Lfrs.* II 321); probably also in Laxdal *ÓsÞ* III 35–37; JÁ I 632, 634–36.

² Donald A. Mackenzie, *Scottish folk-lore and folk life*, 1935, 87.

³ JÁ I 611; *Gamle danske Minder i Folkemunde*, 1854, 14.

Icelanders were in bear-shape seems to support this assumption. The seal and fish ‘mothers’ mentioned above may also, I think, spring from some such root.¹

II

An Icelander who reads Norwegian, Danish or Swedish folk-legends is likely to notice first the differences, and only then the resemblances they bear to his own folk-legends. This is particularly true of those beings of folk-belief that are in human shape and live in and on land. All such beings are clearly categorised in Iceland, so that one is rarely in doubt about what creature one is dealing with. In Scandinavia the categories are far less distinct, so that it is very seldom possible to distinguish one class or ‘people’ from another. Even the terms cannot be trusted, as they are apt to have different meanings in different districts, and are very prone to confusion. Thus the words *jutul*, *gjygr*, *rise*, *troll*, *tusse*, which were all at one time used for gigantic beings in Iceland and Norway, still survive in Norway, but *tusse* is now used in Sætødal for those smaller, elf-like beings which are called ‘hidden folk’ in Iceland, and in other places in Norway for earth-dwellers of more or less the same kind. Norwegian scholars regard the first three of these words as referring to a single class of beings (giants), while Swedish scholars regard ‘trolls’ as more allied to earth-dwellers or hidden folk, and ‘troll’ is often a rather inclusive term in Norwegian. Earth-dwellers in Scandinavia, not least in Denmark and Sweden, are often a kind of dwarf, or of approximately human size. Many terms beside those just listed are used in these countries, and there is no point in going further into the matter here, as it would only add to the confusion. But besides the beings paralleled in Iceland, there are others in continental Scandinavia not known here. The Swedish *Skogsrå* (sometimes called *huldre* in Denmark and Norway) is a female being haunting the forests, who lures travellers from the path and sends them astray. Some have suggested that the *stafró* of the Icelandic poem of that name is a corruption of *skogsrå*, but this being is otherwise unknown in Iceland. The Norwegian *fossegrim*, an elf who haunts waterfalls and who has taught many a man to play the fiddle (relative of the

¹ Further details about Icelandic legends about the natural world in *EÓs If* 189–90; see also especially JÁ.

Swedish *forskarl*; cf. Strindberg's *Kronbruden*), is also unknown in Iceland, and though *nykur*, the Icelandic name for a water-horse, and *näck*, the Swedish name for a human-shaped water-spirit, are the same word, the Icelandic creature is never in human shape. The *nisse* (Swedish *tomte*, also called *gaardbo* in Denmark), a type of brownie who is a popular figure in Danish and Swedish folk-stories, is not found in Icelandic stories, and the *skibsnisse*, 'ship-brownie', only reached Iceland in very recent times, though probably very old legends exist of ships understanding human speech and conversing with one another.¹

I shall not go into the age of the Scandinavian beings not known in Iceland, though it is certain that waterfalls were worshipped there in early times and medieval stories of wood-nymphs abound in Europe. Whenever these beings reached Iceland from across the sea, they never managed to settle; this is understandable in the case of the forest-dwelling *skogsrá*, because of the lack of woodland in Iceland, but the absence of the brownie-type 'farm-elf' is due to the late settlement and rapid change of religion, both of which were fatal to many an ancient local belief.

Next we come to beings that vanished early from folk-belief, such as dwarves, who were certainly known in heathen Iceland, but seem to have hardly settled there. Remnants of this belief are more widespread on the continent, but it is likely to have diminished soon after the coming of Christianity. The idea of dwarves—or at least the part of it relating to their size—lived on in the little people of folk-legends of later times in those parts. The appearance of dwarves (or dwarvish beings) in Icelandic folk-legends of later times is, however, exceptional, though they are more common in romances and wonder-tales, both oral and written.²

I would regard it as very rash to assume that the meanings at present attached to the names of various types of beings have remained unaltered down the centuries. Indeed, the history of the Norwegian word *tusse* shows that this is not so. On the other hand I reckon that the vague characterisation and categorisation of Scandinavian folklore

¹ Cf. *Flóamanna saga* ch. 26 (*ÍF* XIII, 307–08); *JÁ* II 8–9, *JÞork* 74–75; cf. also Laxdal *ÓsÞ* I 48–49.

² See *JÁ*² II 672 (*dvergar*); *SS Íþ* IV 166–73; *SS Íþ*² III 186–90; Hellmut de Boor, 'Der Zwerg in Skandinavien', *Festschrift Eugen Mogk*, 1924, 536–57.

beings is an ancient characteristic. I think that originally things were the same in Iceland, but as time went on two main types absorbed all the others. There were doubtless many reasons for this, and I will mention the three most important ones. The settlers came to an uninhabited new land; superstitions about creatures that inhabit definite locations tend to be enfeebled when this happens. Early poets and mythographers made belief in various gods into a theology; their critical, schematising thinking must also have affected the lower myths. Thirdly, Christianity arrived at a time when belief in these creatures was young and rootless, and reduced its spread and its vigour even further.

The word *landvættir*, 'land-spirits', appears to have had a very wide meaning in early Icelandic, and covered every kind of supernatural being that dwelt in the land when the settlers first arrived. It does not appear to have been extended to cover the shades of the dead buried within the land, as may often have happened elsewhere in Europe, ages after their burial. The Icelandic *landvættir* were simply the nature-spirits attached to and guarding the land itself.

At first people may not have known what the land-spirits were like, but bit by bit they must have come to know them, and ideas about them must naturally have been coloured by superstitions brought from their ancestral homelands, though they will have been reshaped by the new country. The ancient sources we have about popular notions are few, but they suggest a considerable variety of ideas. In *Heimskringla*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (ch. 33), Snorri Sturluson tells of a magician who went in a magical shape to Iceland and saw that 'hills and fells were full of land-spirits, some great, some small'. A great dragon was accompanied by toads and snakes; a great bird had such mighty wings that they stretched right across Eyjafjörðr, and it was supported by many lesser birds; there was a great bull that waded out into the sea, and a rock-giant with an iron staff in his hand who had many other giants with him (*Hkr* I 270–72). The spirits seen by the prophet Þórhallr through the window at Þvottá appear to have been equally varied in character. 'Many a mound opens, and every being, great and small, is packing its bags and preparing to flit' (*ÓTM* II 150). The rock-dweller who offered to be Hafr-Björn's partner is more unmistakably in human form, and so were presumably the land-spirits who escorted him to the assembly (*Landnámabók* 330–31).

Land-spirits must have been worshipped, like the rock-dweller who guarded Koðrán of Giljá. A sermon speaks thus of them: 'Some women are so foolish and blind as to their needs that they take food and carry it out into the open and put it under rocks, consecrate it to land-spirits and eat it afterwards, so as to make the spirits look with favour on them, and to make their households more prosperous' (*Hauksbók* 167). I do not know to what extent this is a translation, or whether the passage is Norwegian or Icelandic in origin, but the nick-names of certain Icelandic legendary characters such as *Svínfellsáss*, 'god of Svínafell' and *Snæfellsáss*, 'god of Snæfell' imply worship; the latter, according to *Bárðar saga* (written c.1300), was invoked during his lifetime by persons in danger; when he died he passed into the world of the spirits, where he probably met the 'Svínfellsáss'. This saga and many others show that people at that time were inclined to differentiate between good-natured land-spirits and trolls.¹

As time went on, presumably during the first centuries of Christianity in Iceland, these spirits began to separate into two clear groups, trolls and hidden folk. Yet there are stories which fall between the two, or are on one occasion told of one, and on another of the other kind. These I consider to be remnants of the older, more variable concepts. In the thirteenth century, *Guðmundar saga Arasonar* tells how Kolbeinn Tumason's wife was seized by spirits on Kjölur. This is of course a fictitious story, told to shame Kolbeinn and glorify Guðmundr. It is probably based on a folk-legend which is well known from the nineteenth century, and deals with the abduction of a woman by earth- or rock-dwellers who are variously thought of as trolls or hidden folk.² Sundry rock-dwellers also finish up outside both categories, being somewhat ogre-like in size, though like elves in temper and appearance. The legend in *Guðmundar saga* of the hand that cut the fowler's rope should perhaps be treated as a troll-story, though the nature of the being is not specified. In later stories of the blessing of bird-cliffs the supernatural cliff-dweller can be either a troll or an elf.³ Lastly there

¹ *Njáls saga* ch. 123 (where some manuscripts have 'Snæfellsáss'); *Bárðar saga*, *ÍF* XIII 119.

² *BS* I 560, II 32; *JÁ* I 56, 57–58, 526, 568–71, *BBj.* I 84, *Obj.* 115. In one of these stories there is a glass hall, as in the wonder-tale in *JÁ* II 311; cf. also *Jarlmanns saga og Hermanns*, ed. H. Rydberg, 1917, 39.

³ *BS* I 599, II 111; Jón Eggertsson in his additions to Jón lærði's *Tíðfordríf*;

are a few rock-dwellers who are given proper names, like the inhabitant of Súlnasker, who is also known as the Skerry-priest (he first appears around 1700),¹ and the Squire of Skrúður.² Borgar-Grímr is also reckoned to be an elf, but the verse in his story is also found in a troll-story (Laxdal *ÓsÞ*, JÁ I 27, 186). Ásmundr of Ásmundarnúpur and Jörundr of Jörundarfell, the guardians of Vatnsdalur, Bergþór of Bláfell and Ármann (originally *ármaðr*, ‘guardian’) of Ármannsfell have been created from place-names (JÁ I 212–13). The old greeting by passing sailors to the island of Drangey and its attendant rock stacks may also date from the golden age of belief in land-spirits, whether the formula itself is old or recent (JÁ I 210):

*Heil og sæl Drangey mín og allir þínir fylgjarar,
heil og sæl Kerling mín og allir þínir fylgjarar,
heill og sæll Karl minn og allir þínir fylgjarar.*

Greetings to you, Drangey, and to all your followers,
greetings to you, Old Woman, and to all your followers,
greetings to you, Old Man, and to all your followers.

III

The word *tröll* is now used in Icelandic as a synonym for *jötunn*, *þurs* (*þursi*), *risi*, *flagð*, *gýgur* and *skessa* (the last two only for females, and *flagð* is also mostly used of females), to refer to the same gigantic beings. Most of these terms are now used in transferred senses and in derivatives, and these reflect their original meanings, so there is no need to go into further into that. It is only necessary to examine one of these words, the commonest one, because it once had a very different meaning in Old Norse.

Tröll (*troll* or *tröll* in Old Norse) is related to the verb *trylla*, ‘to madden, to drive into a mighty rage, fill with furious power’, and in

Jens Lauritzson Wolf, *Norrígia illustrata* (*Lfrs.* II 180); JÁ² II 704 (*vígslur*); *Sögusafn Ísafoldar* 1891, repr. in *Sögur Ísafoldar* 1947; *Vestfirzkar sagnir*, 1933–37, I 164–67; cf. Laxdal *ÓsÞ* III 16–17.

¹The Rev. Gizur Pétursson and Jón Austmann, *Vestmannaeyjalýsing*, see ÞJ *Örnefni*, 104; JÁ II 45; Jóhann Gunnar Ólafsson, *Sögur og sagnir úr Vestmannaeyjum*, 1938–39, [I] 25–28; 2nd ed. 1966, 25–27.

²See Jónas Hallgrímsson, *Ritverk*, 1989, I 253, III 189–190; Jón Ólafsson, *Söngvar og kvæði*, 1877, 120.

Old Norse poetry *troll* means someone full of magic and dark power. It is frequently used of witches and of creatures raised from the dead. The curse 'may trolls take . . .' indicates unspecified evil beings. *Völuspá* describes the wolf that pursues the sun as being *í trolls hami*, 'in the form of a troll'. The term is used of evil beings (whether human or supernatural) insofar as they are evil, but does not necessarily mean 'giant'. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries the new meaning 'giant' appears in the kenning *trolls fákr*, since this refers to Hyrrokin who rode the wolf, and she, according to Snorri, was a giantess. In the sagas the meaning 'giant' is common, and the older one gradually disappears. Snorri always says of Þórr that he went to the East 'to batter trolls', and that he was the enemy of the females of that race. In *Njáls saga* (ch. 119) Skarpheðinn is described as looking 'as if he had come out of the sea-cliffs', and also as being troll-like. Thus *tröll* has become equivalent to *jötunn*, 'giant'. This meaning took over so completely that by the late fourteenth century the older one had disappeared.

In other parts of Scandinavia the word *troll* began to be used for nature spirits during the Middle Ages, but the change of meaning took place at different times in different places, as we have mentioned before. In Norway the result was rather similar to that in Iceland, and I think it not unlikely that the Icelandic *fornaldar sögur* that were read there played a considerable part in this development, for poems were based on them which were immensely popular and were known all over Norway and even in Sweden and Denmark. But the word *troll* did not become as completely interchangeable with 'giant' among Norwegians as it did with Icelanders, because their neighbours developed a very different conception of it.

From time to time stories from the late thirteenth century onwards differentiate between *risar* and *tröll* or *jötnar*. *Risar* come to be thought of as gentler, less ugly and less dangerous to humans. This appears, however, to have been only a temporary device of people who felt that ideas about giants were rather inconsistent, and wanted to make them more logical by this distinction. They particularly disliked telling of love-affairs between humans and daughters of repulsive giants, and so invented a separate race of *risar*.

There is no doubt that there were folk-legends about giants in mountains and rocks in heathen Iceland, linked with particular places, and about their dealings, both good and evil, with humans. But there were

also legends about the dealings between giants and gods, and these were naturally held in greater esteem. We know about these mostly from poems and verses in the two *Eddas*, and also from Snorri's prose narratives. The giants of folk-legend lived, as far as one can make out, mostly in solitude, sometimes in caves, sometimes in halls inside cliffs in particular places in Iceland. They were very ugly and lived like savages, dressed in goatskins, and carried iron staves or cutlasses in their hands, and could be turned to stone by daylight. The giants of mythology, on the other hand, lived in communities in *Jötunheimar*, 'the world of giants', owned halls and dwellings, rich clothes and fair jewels, were ruled by kings and had beautiful attractive daughters. It is of course unwise to make too much of this difference, as the whole concept was in a state of flux, but these are the most extreme forms of it. If we could investigate further back, I suspect that we would find the difference grew less, until we came to undifferentiated stories containing some elements of each type.¹

When Iceland was settled, people had various ideas about giants, and though the 'upper layer' (i.e. the aspects present in mythology) may be mingled to some extent with literary fiction, one may be sure that people believed in the bulk of what was in the myths.

Nor was the look of the country likely to alter the ideas of the settlers all that much. It was a land of wastes, high mountains, dark winter

¹ On the differences between the two 'layers' of development of these concepts see the perceptive article by Knut Liestøl, 'Jötnarne og jöli', *Maal og minne* 1911, 192–205. C. W. von Sydow, in 'Jättarna i mytologi och folktrö', *Folkminnen och folktankar* VI (1919), 52–96, lays great emphasis on the inventiveness of eddic poems when they treat of giants. He compares them with giant-stories of later times, though if one looks closely, one sees that nearly all his examples come from modern Swedish and Danish stories; there are only two references to Norwegian stories and none to Icelandic ones. This is unfortunate, since all skaldic poems and those eddic poems that are in question here are West Norse, and so ought to be compared with West Norse folk-stories. It is of course quite unlikely that beliefs about giants were ever the same in lowland Skåne and Sjælland on the one hand and in mountainous Norway and Iceland on the other. Moreover it is unwise to assume without comment that Danish-Swedish giant-stories give an accurate picture of beliefs about giants a thousand years earlier. They show clear signs that such beliefs died long ago (doubtless even earlier than in Norway and Iceland) and the stories are empty; their foundation in belief has gone.

nights, gales, landslides and avalanches—all phenomena familiar from Norway. As well as these familiar things were found volcanic fire, lava-fields and glacier-floods, and these features were therefore added to the phenomena ascribed to the activities of giants.

When the mythology comes to an end, the *fornaldar sögur* and other fictitious stories take over. These inherit to some extent the more imaginative features of the giant-stories, and are in that respect a continuation of the mythology, but their contents are thin by comparison, for they were now quite remote from people's beliefs. In the late thirteenth century there also come into the picture certain Sagas of Icelanders that include material from troll-stories, such as *Bárðar saga*, *Grettis saga* and *Kjalnesinga saga*. In some of these sagas it is clear that the size and strength of these creatures are admired, and so the race of *risar* (benevolent giants) are separated from *flögð* (ogres) and given good looks, strength, wealth and wisdom so that an element of wish-fulfilment enters into their portrayal. In late, fantastic sagas elements of savage wildness and polished elegance are combined in various ways. Along with all these narrative types there were also the oral wonder-tales, also not much concerned with folk-belief in this respect and, indeed, their depiction of giants is very different from that of folk-legends. One might assume that contact with these sagas would have had an effect on both folk-legends and folk-belief in this regard, and this may be so, but I am not prepared to go into this possibility.

Stories from later times tell of both friendly and hostile dealings between men and trolls. The mythology has a similar variety to offer, though there enmity predominates. Less can be said for certain about ancient folk-legends about trolls, as they are so little known, but most likely they were not very full of friendship between men and such beings.¹ But there must have been numerous land-spirits, fairly big and burly, with whom people became friends, and I believe that the majority of this very miscellaneous group must gradually have become more homogeneous and taken on a single aspect, that of trolls, during the first centuries of Christianity.

¹ This is implied by most of the early folk-stories about trolls. Consider for instance the troll-wife who attacked Snorri of Skálavík; the troll-wives who made Kerlingafjörður uninhabitable; Eydís járn saxa, who carried a woman off; the giant who was responsible for volcanic eruptions, cf. p. 155 above.

As time passed, real men from the early history of Iceland began to take larger than human shape in the legends that gathered around them, and eventually some of them became troll-like in appearance. Special attention is paid to Grettir's strength in *Grettis saga*, and the strength of the heroic figures in *Bárðar saga* and *Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar* is exaggerated to excess, while in later stories some of these men of ancient times become very troll-like, though some of them are known from no other ancient sources than place-names.¹ Some of these stories tell of men of former times who *trylltust*, that is went wild and turned into trolls, a phenomenon seen in *Bárðar saga*, in the story of Jóra who is connected with Jórúkleif (this story is known in the seventeenth century), and in later stories.² Parallels to this tendency to think of men of the distant past as giants are found outside Iceland. Thus Danish folk-stories have numerous *Kæmper*, 'heroic giants', who correspond closely to the big heroes of Iceland, and local legends of such British worthies as King Arthur and Robin Hood often exhibit the same tendencies. It is, after all, a common day-dream to think of people of the past as bigger, better and happier than those of the present.

Finally we must note how clerics tried to identify trolls with evil demons, and there are plenty of examples of this in the Bishops' Sagas. This was the more straightforward in that the word 'troll' had become vague in meaning around 1200, but the attempt had no effect on folk-belief, and it is difficult to see that it made much progress once land-spirits had been frankly absorbed into the ranks of either trolls or hidden folk, until the belief in trolls itself began to decay.

This appears to have happened around the year 1600. At that point writers begin to state that though old women believe in the existence of trolls, they reckon that their numbers do not increase much, the male trolls being all dead or past procreation.³ Moreover, the troll-

¹ In the time of Árni Magnússon there were stories about Gullbrá of Hvammur, *JÁ* I xxi, cf. I 146–50. There are a lot of nineteenth-century stories about the troll-like size and behaviour of people of ancient times, see *JÁ* I 211, II 95; *JÞork.* 32; in connection with place-names *JÁ* I 146, 150, 510, II 76–77, 91–92; *JÞork.* 380–81; *BBj.* II 31, 67.

² On Jóra see Jón lærði, *Tíðfordrif*; Hálfdan Jónsson in *Ölfuslýsing* 1703 (*Landnám Ingólfs* III 16, 18); Árni Magnússon in *JÁ* I xxii; *JÁ*² II 701 (*tryllast*); *ÓDav.*³ II 272–74, *ÓDav.*⁵ I 185–86.

³ See *QDI* 14 (Icelandic translation 47–48), *De mirab.* 74 (Icelandic

legends about events that are said to have happened after the Reformation are rather limited in number, and it is usually certain that motifs in them were taken from older stories and transferred to men of later times. Admittedly people went on thinking that trolls had once existed, though by then they were extinct, and it is also possible that belief in them did not disappear simultaneously throughout Iceland; it probably survived longest in the south-east.¹

Folk-legends can of course be created after folk-belief begins to fade, but I think it most likely that nearly all the stories about trolls are from before the Reformation. This view can be supported by various pieces of evidence, first the fact that quite a number of the troll-stories that are mentioned in writings from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries² are extant in many sharply-defined variants, which is a sign of their age. Then there are many similarities between stories of trolls from Norway and Iceland; they include the voices in the hills crying: 'Sister, lend me a pot!', a giant in a rage flinging a rock at a church, a troll who turns to stone when caught by the dawn. Such story-elements occur in both countries. There are also various factors that are relevant to this situation. Similar story-motifs can arise in places where there are similar folk-beliefs and rather similar terrain. The settlers of Iceland must also not merely have brought their beliefs, but brought them already formed into legends, and some of the motifs in Icelandic stories of trolls, such as the dawn-petrification motif, may well have come with the settlers. The ecclesiastical stories are more recent, and it is very likely that they drifted from one country to another. Some of the material of Icelandic stories has, I expect, come from Norway (though some may also have travelled the other way) and this could just as well have happened after the end of the Republic. Though belief in

translation 123), *Lfrs.* II 178. In folk-stories some words are used that suggest a dead belief (in trolls), *JÁ* I 191 (trolls on the move because of the acceptance of Christianity); *JPork.* 280.

¹ Cf. *JPork.* 21–23, 184, 198–99, *SS Íþ* IV 232–41, *SS Íþ*² III 256–63; for other stories linked to later times, see *JÁ* I 153, 179, *JPork.* 58, *Obj.* 134, 137.

² E.g. Jóra, Ólafur muður, *Veiðimanna þáttur* (*JÁ* I 179–80), see Páll Vídalín, *Recensus poetarum et scriptorum Islandorum hujus et superioris seculi*, 1985, 8–9; troll-wife asks a man to take her on horse-back; ogress drives, man rides behind her knees (*Safn* I 46, *Lfrs.* II 178); turning to stone (*Noctes Setbergenses* III 227–49; Páll Vídalín, *Skýringar yfir fornyrði lögbókar*, 1854, 67; Laxdal *ÓsÞ*).

giants has not altered greatly in Iceland, I am inclined to link the surviving Icelandic troll-stories with the Middle Ages.

Before we leave this topic we must refer briefly to the contents of troll-stories. Icelandic trolls are as clear nature-beings as any can be, always closely linked with rocks, towering cliffs, deep ravines and huge mountains; many of them turn to stone, together with their boats and their livestock. They are personifications of this side of the country's nature. The ideas associated with them are giant size and strength, ugliness, heathendom, violence and stupidity but also proverbial constancy. Sometimes the stories grow straight out of the landscape. Can we not see faces in the rocks in numerous places in Iceland? In some places there are great rocks that appear to have human shape, boulders shaped like boats or other common things, all gigantic and antiquated in form. In some places stones, stone columns or islands are found in unexpected places, as if giant beings had been playing at throwing them down from the high mountains. To explain these remarkable sights people seized on motifs in ancient stories about giants or other beings who were turned to stone by daylight, and thus innumerable stories were easily formed—and it is very likely that some of them were appreciated more for their entertainment value than for their probability. Nevertheless a different note is sometimes sounded in the troll-stories, one created not by the mind or the imagination, but by naked emotions, especially fear. A man is alone far up in the mountains, fishing, or merely travelling; he hears shouts ring among the hills; or else men are burning charcoal in a fog and hear great gales of laughter around them. Perhaps some men feel an uncontrollable desire to get away from others—into the hands of the trolls; then they are being lured by troll-wives who want to madden them, lie with them, or perhaps just eat them. Danger is close at hand among the cliffs of the high mountains, and it comes as no surprise to find that enmity between giants and men is a major theme in these stories. Some scholars have been fascinated by aetiological legends connected with giants, but it is not right to overlook other features in them which relate to human experience, and it is worth remembering that ancient troll-stories deal with it quite a lot.

Yet sometimes a frowning cliff can become friendly, and they are free from treachery and 'true as the trolls'. Fishermen, caught in a snowstorm, are glad of shelter in a cave, and happy to entertain the

master of the cave with song and poetry, even though his tastes are rather eccentric. He announces:

Andrarímur þykja mér finar I am fond of Andri's strain,
en Hallgrímsrímur vil eg ekki. but Hallgrímur's hymns give me pain.

It is not surprising that he has no interest in Christian teaching such as the Rev. Hallgrímur Pétursson's *Passion Hymns*, but it is curious that to his ears all poetry should, whatever its style, sound like *rímur*, since the style of these secular narrative poems is not particularly like verse composed in the style of continental Protestant hymns.¹

IV

The second major group of nature spirits in Icelandic folk-legends are *álfar* 'elves' or *huldufólk* 'hidden people'. The word *álf* is common in Old Norse, and it may still be regarded as a common word in Icelandic, though *huldufólk* is now more common in the spoken language.² The latter word does not occur in Old Norse writings, and in other parts of Scandinavia is only known in Norway and the Faroes (the Danish word *Huldefolk* is derived from the Norwegian, and the first element *huldre-* from *huldr*, 'hidden one'). We meet the word *huldumaðr*, however, in the fourteenth-century *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns*, where it says that Þorsteinn and a bald boy ride on a stick to the underworld. There they enter the king's palace. A man comes in, we are told, and says he has been sent to him (the king of the underworld) from the mountain called Lucanus, from the earl who ruled over it, and tells the King that he is a *huldumaðr*. *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts* is probably from the same century; it contains the word *jarðbúi* 'earth-dweller', which is frequently used by Jón lærði about elves, and is here used of somewhat similar beings.

Mythologists are very keen to demonstrate that the ancient belief in elves grew out of people's ideas about the life of the dead in burial-mounds. Despite Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr, a ninth-century local king in

¹ In a passage interpolated by Jón Eggertsson in Jón lærði's *Tíðfordríf*, it says that bird-catchers on Drangey recite *rímur* to entertain the rock-dweller, so it is not certain that this legend is as late as all that; moreover other variants speak of *Maríu rímur* rather than Hallgrímur's hymns.

² In the seventeenth century *álfar* is the word most often used, and the compounds *álfafólk* and *álfkona* are very common.

Norway, who figures in *Flateyjarbók*, and who gained his nickname because he was worshipped after his death, I have never been convinced by this theory—at least I consider it extremely doubtful whether the first settlers of Iceland saw any connection between elves and dead men. Belief in elves in the heathen period was clearly rather inconsistent, like the belief in giants. *Kormáks saga* tells of a hillock inhabited by elves, on which the blood of a bull was poured and a feast made of the offal for the elves; this was done to effect the cure of a sick man (ch. 22). It is worth noting that the saga speaks of a hillock and not a burial mound, and that the elves are nature spirits, not ghosts. Also, an act of worship takes place, and this is reminiscent of what was said earlier of land-spirits, and also of the later custom of making food-offerings to the hidden folk on New-Year's Eve, lighting the house and inviting the elves in. This food-offering, a custom which lasted into the nineteenth century, is of course nothing other than a sacrifice or indeed a communion (*JJ Íþ* 211–12). As for the custom of inviting elves into the home, it is mentioned by Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík in his dictionary early in the eighteenth century, where he speaks of 'lighting a fire in the house on the evening before New-Year's Day to let the elves who are moving house warm themselves if they are cold'.

Snorri Sturluson says in his *Edda* (*Gylfaginning* ch. 17), when naming the principal places of the gods, 'There is a place there called Álfheimr; there live the people called light elves, while the dark elves live down in the ground; they are unlike in appearance and much more unlike in nature. The light elves are fairer than the sun to see, and the dark elves blacker than pitch.' Without making too much of this distinction, since Snorri could be thinking of good and bad angels, it is worth our while to take note that the dark elves live in the ground, and correspond to that extent to the elves in *Kormáks saga*—and, doubtless, to the folk-legends current in Iceland at that time. But elves occupy a more honourable place in many mythological stories and poems. Over and over again they are mentioned in the same breath as the Æsir themselves: *Hvat er með ásum, hvat er með álfum?* ('What is the matter with the Æsir; what is the matter with the elves?') (*Völuspá* 48). According to *Grímnismál* 5, Freyr's home is Álfheimr, and *Alvíssmál* lists words from the language of elves, all of which relate to brightness and beauty (*PE* 12, 58, 124–29). And though Christianity brought elf-worship to an end (except for such vestiges as the New-Year food-offerings), these bright images remained in stories and poems, and I think it very likely

that this was an important factor in preserving their popularity when it was under threat, and also gave rise to beautiful verse in later times.

Unfortunately there are no early folk-legends available about elves which specify them by name. All I have to offer is a passage in *Guðmundar saga Arasonar*: ‘This winter was called the winter of wonders, because of the many remarkable things that were seen—two suns were seen in the sky at once; elves and other strange people were seen riding together in a group in Skagafjörður and they were seen by Ánn Bjarnarson’ (*BS* I 417). In the fourteenth century the author of *Göngu-Hrólfs saga*, which in other respects resembles a wonder-tale, incorporated certain motifs characteristic of elf legends. Göngu-Hrólfr undertakes the task of hunting down a stag in a forest, so that Vilhjálmr can win the Princess Gyða. He chases the stag into a clearing in the centre of which stood a hillock, high and wide. The clearing was beautiful and covered with thick grass. As Hrólfur was passing the hillock it opened and out of it walked a woman in a dark mantle, tied at the neck, rather elderly. She addressed Hrólfur and rebuked him for chasing the stag, which belonged to her, though she admitted that she had sent it out in order to be able to meet him. She offers to let Hrólfur have it to take to the king, but in return he is to enter the hillock with her.

For I have a daughter and she is under a spell so that she cannot give birth unless a human lays his hands on her; she has now been nineteen days in labour, and cannot be delivered.

Hrólfur agrees, and they enter the hillock. There were fine rooms in there and everything looked lovely, and he found many things in there were marvellous. He came to where the woman lay, and she was in a bad way, but as soon as Hrólfur passed his hands over her she was straightway delivered. The elf-women thanked him, gave him a gold ring and let him take the stag.

The heart of this narrative is a widespread legend based on folk-belief. An elf-woman is in labour and cannot give birth to her child unless human hands touch her. This is a common element in elf-stories of later times.¹

¹The earliest 1598, see *Ann. farr.* 6 (Icelandic translation 18–19), *Huld* VI 39–40, *Huld*² II 187–88; cf. the story said to be in works by Jón lærði (but not by him, see *EGP Eddurit* 149–50) in *Huld* IV 17–18, *Huld*² II 14–16; *JÁ*² II 668 (*barnsfæðing*).

The hidden folk are also thought to steal children, as the hillock-dwellers do in a miracle story about Guðmundr the Good (*BS* II 140), and they are associated with the belief in changelings which appears in early times in the word *skiptingr*, (or, in some translations, *víxlingr*), 'changeling', as they are also with the removal-day legend that appears first in *Þiðranda þáttur ok Þórhalls* (*ÓTM* II 145–50; cf. *JÁ* I 126–28). On the other hand, elves are not specified in these stories, and all kinds of creatures appear in the removal-day legend. Many kinds of beings must doubtless have been incorporated with the elves during this period; they must have reconciled themselves to losing the tail which is nearly always part of the anatomy of Norwegian hidden folk, and any other animal characteristics which they may have had, and must have brought new blood into the race of elves, and with it a great treasure of stories and superstitions. I shall turn later to the fact that it is possible to see from the evidence of later ages the mixed ancestry of modern elves. As we have noted already, a few individual creatures in folk-belief happened not to become attached to either of the two groups and appear in the stories sometimes as trolls, sometimes as hidden folk.

In a miracle story of St Jón of Hólar we are told of a certain Sveinn Þorkelsson who went mad 'because of his love for a certain hallucinatory monster'. It appeared to him as a tall and beautiful woman. She led him so far astray that he would have nothing to do with other men, went about alone, and neglected all Christian duties (*BS* I 243). The description suggests that it was an elf-woman, though the monkish author preferred to attribute what happened to evil spirits. The cleric who wrote *Norna-Gests þáttur* says that King Óláfr Tryggvason saw an elf or a spirit. The clergy refused to accept folk-belief, placed elves on a par with fallen spirits and declared that any contacts which people thought that they had with them were deceptions of the Devil. This attitude continued well into the seventeenth century, but it had no effect on folk-belief, which continued to flourish and did not relinquish its power. There the hidden folk were corporeal beings, a brother race to mankind. This view was reinforced by a myth. It was said that the elves were children of Adam and Eve whom God had ordained should remain hidden because Eve did not want to show them to Him while they were unwashed.¹ That was the end of it, and ecclesiastical and

¹ The oldest example I know of this story in Iceland is in *Árnaskjal* (*JÁ* I 5, 99), after that *Saga Árna ljúflings*; it is well known in other countries, see

folk-belief reached no closer compromise. In the end, in the memory of people alive when the Icelandic edition of this book appeared (1940), the fallen angels ceased trying to conquer Iceland, for they were, no less than the hidden folk, under heavy attack from other influences.

Those supernatural beings who were darkest in character and least able to take on human shape have rather lowered the race of elves in human estimation, but various ameliorating factors have appeared from other directions. Irish people who came to Iceland during the settlement carried with them stories of Celtic origin, not least those of the Celtic fairies (*side*) who dwelt in the green hummocks and hills of Scotland and Ireland, in the 'otherworld' or 'land of youth'. There were plenty of stories about all this, many of them deeply poetic and very strange in character. Irish fairies seem to have been unequivocally in human shape (they could of course change into various forms, such as birds, but that is another matter), and the stories told of their kings and splendid dwellings. Those Icelandic elf-stories which may be reckoned to be of Irish origin long retained a special tone and style, though it is difficult to analyse it properly, and I think it likely that they and the ideas behind them survived without becoming fully integrated with native stories, at least for a while. The Eddic poem *Fjolsvinnsmál* appears to be based on a Celtic story, and Menglǫð and her maidens must have been elf-women; elf-wives' names were not known in Norse mythology, which is why the maidens acquired names from all sorts of sources. *Hlíf* and *Hlífþursa* probably derived from *Líf* and *Leifþrasir* (*Lífþrasir*); *Björt*, *Blíð* and *Fríður*, 'Bright', 'Blithe' and 'Fair' are personifications of the qualities they represent, *Eir* is the name of a goddess of healing, and *Aurbøða* that of an ogress (*PE* 53, 293; *Gylfaginning* chs 35, 37). The giant Guðmundr of Glæsisvellir 'glittering fields' (in *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns* and other *fornaldar sögur*) is described as a *rísi*, and his men are strictly differentiated from *jǫtnar*. Menglǫð in *Orms þáttur Stórolfssonar* is of mixed race, the daughter of a human woman and a giant. Brynjar and Oddr (in

Reidar Th. Christiansen and Knut Liestøl, 'Norske folkesegner', *NK IX B* 169; *BP III* 308–21. Jón lærði believed hidden people came to life from Adam's sperm, but Eiríkur Laxdal gives yet another explanation of their origin. In other countries the legend that they are the descendants of Adam's previous wife Lilith is not uncommon, cf. C. W. von Sydow, 'Sveriges och Finlands svenska folksägner', *NK IX B* 123.

Þorsteins þátr uxafóts) are 'earth dwellers', though otherwise un-categorised. It is specified in this latter story that Brynjar and his men are dressed in blue and Oddr and his men in red, which illustrates how the clear Celtic colours survived for a long time. There is something foreign to Norse folklore, something strange, brightly coloured and splendid in these legends. People immediately interpreted the Celtic otherworld as an underworld, if the fairies could not be comfortably accommodated in rocks and hillocks (there were plenty of worlds to choose from in Norse mythology, both above and below the ground, so that no great adaptation was necessary), but this alteration took place mainly in poetical fantasies and romantic stories and poems. I consider that these Irish stories have had their effect on Icelandic belief and fantasy about hidden folk no less than on other Icelandic stories (especially wonder-tales).¹

In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries various books reached Iceland from continental Europe, especially from France. Some of these were translated in Norway and some in Iceland.² This literature has a good deal to say about fairies of medieval romance (*fées*), though in fact the translations include rather little material about them, but it is quite possible that Icelanders came to know many more such stories than appeared in written translations. The little that did appear in writing was very soon common property. Everyone in Iceland knows the story of the magical mantle or shirt made by elf-women.³ The story of the knight who married an elf-woman became an oral story, and Jón lærði tells it as relating to a farmer of Fjarðarhorn and his wife.⁴ Also, if anyone in Iceland knew *Strengleikar*, the Norwegian translation of the *lais* of Marie de France, this must rather have raised the status of the hidden people than the contrary. Finally we may mention the late medieval ballads, such as the song of Ólafur Liljurós, still known to everyone alive in Iceland.

¹ Cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Keltnesk áhrif á íslenzkar ýkjusögur', *Skírnir* 1932, 100–23; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Celtic elements in Icelandic Tradition', *Béaloideas* 1957 (1959), 3–24.

² See *Strengleikar. An old Norse translation of twenty-one old French lais*, ed. Robert Cook and Mattias Tveitane, 1979.

³ *FSS* xxiv.

⁴ *JÁ* I 104–05, see Gering *ÍÆ*, I 246–54 (nos lxxxv A and B).

At most periods Icelanders had some notion of what was believed and told about elves among the other Scandinavian peoples, not least while their contacts with them were most frequent. Many stories like that of the 'Father of Eighteen in Elfland' are common to all four (this particular story is also known in several non-Scandinavian countries),¹ as are the story of a midwife to the elves who stole some of their eye-salve,² and the 'Church-builder at Reynir' (continental Scandinavian versions of this involve trolls rather than elves).³ Moreover, since the forms of these stories both in Iceland and elsewhere are so consistent, we can take it as certain that a vast number of motifs and concepts were shared. The *huldefolk* or *tussar* of Sætedal in Norway, who, like those in Iceland, are sometimes Christian and have a clergy of their own, and are generally speaking very human in their ways, are the people most like the Icelandic hidden folk.

Round about 1600 sources for hidden folk become so voluminous that we can readily define the beliefs and legends about them, and after that there is one source after another about them right down into the twentieth century. The elves largely mirror the human race, they are similar in size and appearance, living, it is true, in hillocks and rocks, but in dwellings furnished like human ones. Sometimes they are richer than their human counterparts, sometimes about equally well off, often even poor. They own cows and sheep and other domestic animals, row out to sea to fish and do various kinds of work. They have some skills that men don't have: they can open a rock wall—or is this hallucination, is the rock really the side of a farm-house? But then they can hide their doors and the fronts of their houses whenever they want to. They are also able to make themselves visible and invisible to humans, can strike people with illnesses, and can do many other things, it would appear by natural gifts rather than witchcraft (the spells they lay on people are powerful because of their spiritual nature). They are normally neither friendly nor hostile to men, they repay kindnesses generously but are extremely vengeful. Their love is

¹Hans Ellekilde, 'Danmarks folkesagn', *NK IX B 143*; Reidar Th. Christiansen and Knut Liestøl, 'Norske folkesegner', *NK IX B 171*; *BP I 367*.

²C. W. von Sydow, 'Sveriges och Finlands svenska folksägner', *NK IX B 122*; Reidar Th. Christiansen and Knut Liestøl, 'Norske folkesegner', *NK IX B 171*; *BP I 367*.

³Cf. p. 57 above; *BP I 195*.

therefore very dangerous. If it is returned, cohabitation begins between two incompatible beings; if it is rejected or broken off one can expect a fearful vengeance. This is all human and comprehensible except that the vengefulness is so much more intense than that of normal humanity. Thus elves can seem to fall into two classes, and it is natural for Bishop Gísli Oddsson to have tried to divide them up, the one class being evil and inimical to men (he calls these *huldufólk*, but there is no basis for this), the others being *ljúflingar*, 'the dear people'. In a modern story we are told how his successor, Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson, walked bare-headed round two elf-hillocks and then said: 'Good people in the small hillock, but not so good in the larger one.' 'It is as you say, my lord,' said the parson who was with him.

Now it is quite unjustifiable to divide the hidden people into classes in this way, but besides what we might call the orthodox ideas about them we may note traces of others. They have a kind of obsession about carrying people off; their falling in love is not an adequate explanation. They have a special desire for human children, and often take them in exchange for old dodderers from Elfland, and these aged folk are hideously ugly when seen as they really are. If a cradle has a cross above and below, this will prevent the elves from taking the child. 'You didn't have to cross it, you wretched brat,' said an elf-woman to a girl who made the sign of the cross over food she had been given in the other world. Nor will elf-lads kiss a girl who has just taken Communion. A kidnapped woman is black as Hel except for the white baptismal cross on her forehead. The sea-folk who dance in a farm-house on New-Year's Eve make everyone present go mad, but cannot themselves bear to hear the name of God. As well as being heathen, some elves are so ill-natured that they harm men and beasts for no reason. People who are not used to it who go into hillocks are filled with disgust when the elf-women try to get into bed with them. A child thinks food given to it in an elf-home is full of maggots, and one elf-woman licks her new-born baby herself (though only in one variant of the story, elsewhere the midwife bathes it).¹ Seventeenth century authors go in for many such things: sores on sheep are called burns from the smoke of elf-fires, elves do not have a partition between their nostrils, they talk a strange language, they have no immortal soul,

¹ All examples from JÁ.

they prefer *Trójumannasaga* (the story of Troy)¹ to the Bible, a mid-wife feels ill with what she is given to eat by elves, and a guest who spends the night at Möðrudalur on Fjöll is panicked and unable to react normally to girls who try to get into bed with him.

These examples contain a mixture of very disparate ideas. Many of them are bestial and revolting, some are savage and fiercely impressive, others dark and pagan in nature. Hillock-dwellers were undoubtedly regarded as rather dubious beings in pre-Christian times, but their reputation probably also degenerated with the coming of Christianity. One should bear in mind, however, that these are only vestiges of ancient times, and not the most widely held ideas about elves in later times, when very many forces united to enhance their character. They became a mirror of humanity—perhaps a touched up mirror-image. They still needed careful handling, were dangerous even, but there is a splendour and beauty about them. Their clothes are colourful and elaborate, they often possess rich and rare jewels. They are generally said to live in places where there is great natural beauty, where there are green slopes and hills, rocks and crags, beautiful smooth stone slabs. They do not live solitary lives like trolls, but are whole peoples ruled over by kings. They are also Christians, they have priests and bishops, compose poems and hymns which men know a bit about. On Sundays in good weather they can be seen speeding to church, or else people see a certain rock wall standing wide open, splendid lights shining inside and the elf-bishop in full vestments before the altar.

Elf-kings do not turn up in ordinary everyday stories, but in imaginative and romantic ones, and because Iceland has never been much of a place for kings, elf-kings are usually given realms in the underworld. Such stories are largely derived from the Celtic stories mentioned earlier. They are also strange in one respect, that they are more emotional compositions than folk-stories usually are, and they are much sadder and more moving than Norse stories generally are. Skar tells the story of a Norwegian elf who wooed a woman who rejected him. He thereupon seized her hair, tore half of it off and went mad.² There are many stories in Iceland of humans who reject the love of elves, and it often falls out that the elf (or elf-woman) pines away with melancholy and eventually dies of grief, and the tone of these stories is

¹ Ed. J. Louis-Jensen, 1963 and 1981 (*EA* A 8–9).

² Skar *GS* III 34 (Den hugsprengde Tussen, ‘The Crazy Giant’).

very different from that of the Norwegian story. One of the most beautiful elf-stories is that of a servant-girl at a shieling who loves an elf and bears him a child. He takes it to Elf-land, while a little later she is married to a man. Her old love then comes to them as a winter servant but she avoids him until her husband bids her say good-bye to him before they go to make their Communion. Their old wounds reopen and they die in each other's arms. This romantic story is entirely human in character, all is natural and kindly, there are no savage or violent emotions in it.¹ More powerful and passionate is the story of the man on Geirfuglasker who had a child by an elf-woman and refused to admit he was the father when it came to be baptized. The elf-woman then laid a spell on him and turned him into a savage whale. Other versions set the story in other places, and the elf-woman lays other spells on the man or causes other kinds of trouble for him. But the church is given a piece of red cloth which had been over the cradle and this is afterwards made into an altar-cloth or chasuble. One variant, 'The Elf-king of Seley' is by far the most splendid. In this we are told about the dance of the elves at great feasts. The elf-woman lays no evil on the man, but invisible hands take the cradle away, and a great weeping is heard which passes down into the sea.² The story of

¹ JÁ I 64–72; the first appearance of this story is in Eiríkur Laxdal.

² JÁ I 83–93; SS *Íp* IV 80–83, SS *Íp*² III 96–99. Earlier examples: Arngrímur lærði (see p. 86, note 1); Jón lærði, *Tíðfordrif* ('It has truly happened that some male or female elves have wanted to have their children baptized [which the history attests about the female who had the child with the one who was afterwards on Geirfuglasker, also many others]'; the words in brackets are in ÍB 84 8vo, which is not one of the main manuscripts of *Tíðfordrif*); the Rev. Einar Guðmundsson of Staður's essay on elves (relating to Sigurður fóstri of Hagi and Andrés Guðmundsson), see ÞT *HHrkr*, b5–b8 (Icelandic translation in Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Álfarit séra Einars á Stað', *Blanda* VII 251–57); 'Concerning a whale in Hvalvatn', Lbs 724 4to, p. 153, Lbs 1565 4to, p. 62, and *Fitjaannáll* under the year 1697 (*Annálar 1400–1800* II 329). There is a kind of forerunner of the story in the account in *Kjalnesinga saga* of Búi Andriðsson and his son Jökull (*ÍF* XIV 42–43), though there it is not a question of baptizing the child, but of the father acknowledging paternity. This is also the case in the folk-story, and it is possible that the outline of the Búi story was at the back of the mind of the originator of the folk-story; otherwise I think the baptism-motif (which is also in *Móðars rímur*) must be from a time when there were not so many priests among the elves as are reported in later stories.

Hildir the Elf-Queen, who is under a spell which exiles her to the world of men except on Christmas night, is even more romantic, and takes place partly in a festively brilliant underworld, but a deep melancholy pervades most of the story, until Hildir escapes from the spell.¹ We may also mention here the story of Sigríður Eyjafjarðarsól, which is probably an elf-story in origin, and various other wonder-tales or romantic stories which tell of a woman's mysterious wedding and how by her patience she overcomes her own and her husband's troubles. The earliest of these to be recorded is the story of Finna forvitra, which was written down for Árni Magnússon about 1700.² It once contained three verses, of which one only is preserved:

<i>Hér sit eg ein á stokki, af mér er gleðinnar þokki; tapað hefur seggurinn svinni sumarlangt gleðinni minni. Önnur fékk þann er ég unna, oft fellur sjór yfir hlunna.</i>	I sit alone beside my bed, my joy is gone, my beauty fled; all summer long I've known no joy. He stole it all, my handsome boy. Another won my love from me— over the gunwale floods the sea.
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The story of Finna, in its recorded form, cannot be counted as an elf-story, but it is that kind of story in spirit. The verse in it is reminiscent of a sequence of verses in *Ólafs saga Þórhallasonar* IV 8 (Laxdal *ÓsÞ* 286–87), which is supposed to be a lament by Þorbjörg kólka for her husband:

<i>1. Sá eg suður til eyja sá eg þar ljós á lampa ljúfan mann á leiki, í línskyrtu hvítri, hafði hár fyrir augum og horskan vænleik annan; þeim eina mundi eg manni mín til í huga segja.</i>	On the isles I saw the lamplight glow as south I gazed across the sea, and a man was there who took his joy, a man who once was dear to me. In linen fair, with flowing hair, he was a comely sight to see; and if I did as my thoughts would bid then his alone my heart would be.
<i>2. Ein sit eg úti grátin þá aðrar inn ganga sælar silfri búnar, sjáandi vin sinn inni. Eg veit minn í marflóði mann, þann er best eg unni, frjáls í farsælu byggir, fár veit hvað mig hryggir.</i>	I sit alone, and my tears run down, while other lasses walk in pride, in silver clad, their hearts are glad, each sees her own love stand inside. I know the man that I love best is far away in the midst of the sea, and none can tell what grief I feel while he lives free and merrily.

¹ JÁ I 105–16; ÓDav.³ I 253–61, ÓDav.⁵ I 98–104.

² Sigríður Eyjafjarðarsól: JÁ II 204, ÍBR 46 4to (there it is an elf-story);

3. *Mér verður fuglsins dæmi
er fjaðralaus kúrir,
skríður snart að skjóli,
skundar veðrum undan;
týnir söng og sundi,
sína gleðina missir.
Svo kveður mann hver þá morgnar,
Mæddur í raunum sínum.*
- I'm like a bird with its feathers plucked
that shrinks and cowers from the breeze.
It hastes away when the storm draws near
and to its rocky shelter flees.
Its song is dead, and its joy is fled,
no more it swims upon the sea.
So can each man say at the break of day,
when in his grief he is weary.
4. *Mér verður háttur hörpu
hinnar (er) á vegg hvolfir
stjórnarlaus og strengja,
stillarinn er frá fallinn.
Fellur á sót og sorti,
saknar manns úr ranni.
Svo kveður mann hver þá morgnar,
mæddur í raunum sínum.*
- I'm like a harp when its strings are gone,
against the wall it hangs unplayed,
and ne'er a strain will it sound again,
for the harper in his grave is laid.
The harp is black with soot and smoke,
and sorely longs its lord to see—
so can each man say at the break of day,
when in his grief he is weary.
5. *Held eg við hússins dæmi
hallri sem stár í brekku,
búið er brátt við falli;
bölið í skap er runnið.
Svigna súlur fornar,
salviðurinn dofnar,
svo kveður mann hver þá morgnar,
mæddur í raunum sínum.*
- I'm like a house that stands atilt
upon a steeply sloping hill;
the time draws near when it must fall,
and all its heart forebodes its ill.
Its aged pillars bend and creak,
its beams are strained most cruelly.
So can each man say at the break of day,
when in his grief he is weary.
6. *Skal hér til skipsins dæmi
skorðulaust er hvílir
autt við æginn kalda,
öngvan stað fær góðan;
rís við brattar báru,
á brimunum illa þrymur.
Svo kveður mann hver þá morgnar,
mæddur í raunum sínum.*
- I'm like a boat that's left to lie
unmoored and empty on the strand;
it finds no place where it may rest
between the cold sea and the land.
Tossed up and down where the breakers rise
in the surf it groans most bitterly.
So can each man say at the break of day,
when in his grief he is weary.

At the end the words 'some is missing' are added, as if Laxdal knew more than he wrote down. Another verse occurs later in the same story (IV, 68; *Laxdal ÓsÞ* 360):

Finna forvitra: JÁ II 383 (a better text in Nordal *Íl* and BE *Munnmælasögur* 64–67); cf. also *Verz.* 39–46, especially 43–44, and the story of Sigríður of Þingeyrar, ÍBR 46 4to; Oddur Björnsson, *Gríma* III (1930), 56–65; *Gríma hin nýja* V (1965), 209–16.

<p><i>Aldrei skyldi kvinna karlmanni vel unna fyr en fundið hefði fasta ást í brjósti; klók er karlmanns tunga, kann hún þig ginna, svanni, mörg verður tæld á táli, trúðu ekki gleðimáli.</i></p>	<p>No maid should ever love a man till she has proved his love is true, for men have tongues so full of craft and, maiden, they can cozen you. There's many whose hearts are filled with joy by hollow words of treachery, so never trust in merry talk, and never give your heart away.</p>
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All these verses appear to be related, though nos 3–6 clearly form a unit, and they (or three of them) are in the story of Fiddle-Björn, who is supposed to have heard elves chant them.¹ Much other verse is also attributed to the hidden folk,² and Jón Eggertsson in his additions to Jón lærði's *Tíðfordríf*, for example, gives this as one of theirs:

<p><i>Úti er hún við eyjar blár, eg er sestur að Dröngum. Blómínn fagur kvenna klár, kalla eg til hennar löngum.</i></p>	<p>She is in the islands blue, by the rocks I sit and sigh. 'Fairest flower of womankind' is my long and weary cry.</p>
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The best known poem of this kind is *Ljúflingsljóð*, a song supposed to be sung by an elf to his child (by a human mother) when it will not stop crying and people are impatient with it. The first half of it is sympathetic magic: night and sleep make all living things their children, everything sleeps, each in its place, child, do you the same.

<p><i>Sofi, sofi sonur minn, sefur selur í sjó, svanur á báru, már á hólmi, —manni þig svæfir— þorskur í djúpi. Sofðu, eg unni þér.</i></p>	<p>Sleep, sleep, my little son. on the billow sleeps the swan, out at sea the seal's asleep, the cod is sleeping in the deep, —but there's no one here to lull— on the island sleeps the gull. Sleep, son, I love you well.</p>
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This is the same sympathy with nature as in Jónas Hallgrímsson's stanza:

<p><i>Sofinn var þá fífill fagur í haga, mús undir mosa, már á báru.</i></p>	<p>The dandelion was asleep so lovely in the mead, slept the mouse beneath the moss, the seagull on the deep.</p>
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¹ Cf. also *Þorbjargar þáttr* by Bólu-Hjálmar, Lbs 528 4to; Maurer *IV* 136–37; JP *OmD* 200; BBJ. I 80–81; *Suðri* IV 16; ÓDav.³ II 244–47. Laxdal *ÓsP* seems to be the earliest source for these verses, and I do not know whether the others are independent of it or not.

² E.g. JÁ I 72–73, 77; 464 (cf. note); JÁ² II 686 (*kveðskapur*).

The latter part of *Ljúflingsljóð* contains good-luck verses.¹

Besides these songs, narrative poems were also composed from elf-stories (cf. pp. 87–88 above) and a certain melancholy pervades most of them. *Kötludraumar*, ‘Katla’s dreams’, is probably the oldest; it contains many memorable things, such as that Katla thought each word of the elf-woman was ‘like growing grass’. There is much splendour in the elf-world, the people finely dressed and the dwellings magnificent. But the main theme of the poem is sorrow and yearning. I can point to no parallels to these Icelandic elf-stories and poems except in Ireland. Scandinavian stories of earth-dwellers are more like the everyday Icelandic ones of hidden folk. This kind of poetry appears to have flourished most in the sixteenth century in Iceland and though belief in hidden folk shows no sign of abatement until the nineteenth century, I think there is good reason to regard the sixteenth century as its golden age. In that period love was mightier than fear and people had fertile imaginations, so that these ideas became the seeds of the most beautiful poetry that the nation possessed at the time. These elf-stories are the nation’s dreams while the long summer day’s sun shone on the sleek green slopes and mossy rocks, while the spring air and the brightness mingled actuality and wakefulness with day-dreams and visions.

V

But as the summer passes the nights grow longer, the heat-haze and its mirages (which are indeed not without their dangers to men’s spiritual health) disappear, the sun’s course grows shorter, and the autumn darkness slowly spreads. Then the powers of ghosts and goblins begin to get greater; those creatures are at their best when the days are short.

The settlers had to tread cautiously to begin with, while they did not know what sort of beings the country harboured, or what superstitions were tied to particular places, but they needed no convincing that as soon as people began to be buried in the land, ghosts would start to appear, just as they had done in the old homelands. Nor have I been able to find that there was any difference to begin with between Icelandic and Norwegian beliefs in ghosts. Attitudes to life after death

¹ Printed in ÓDav. *Þulur* 254–58, though this edition is unsatisfactory. The oldest text must be that in Jón Daðason’s *Gandreið*, and another slightly later one is printed in Jón Samsonarson, *Ljóðmál* 2002, 113–14; it is also in Laxdal *ÓsP*.

were equally varied and inconsistent in both countries. It was thought that the body lived on, after a fashion, especially while it had not begun to decay, and if anyone came back from the grave, it was in bodily form. It might also be that spirits of dead men were around, since souls of living people could get about outside the body. The destinations after death varied, however. Some went to dwell in mountains, some went to Hel, and others to Valhøll; all these notions lived alongside each other. Some tried to distinguish the functions of, for instance, Hel and Valhøll, but this was not really necessary, for the two concepts could exist happily side by side without any conflict.

The situation was fairly similar under Christianity. Valhøll and Hel were banned, but they were replaced by Heaven, Hell and Purgatory. Lutheranism abolished Purgatory, and the Lutheran ministers spoke in one breath of the dead sleeping until Doomsday, in another of them living with God in bliss. Not that these teachings were any hindrance to belief in ghosts—people continued to lead a sort of bodily life in the graves. Their feet got cold if someone dug a hole into their grave and forgot to fill it in. Revenants (zombies) were mostly in bodily form, and they had to stop playing their tricks if their bodies were burned or their heads were placed by their buttocks and so on. Yet there were also spirits of a sort, known as *svipir* ‘phantoms’, *vofur* ‘spectres’, *slæðingar* ‘emanations’. A host of practices and superstitions were connected with these folk-beliefs, such as curious taboos about corpses, funeral customs and so on, some of which are described in Jón Árnason’s sections on *Draugar* and *Venjur*. And all these miscellaneous notions about life after death lived on easily together side by side without getting in each other’s way.¹

The folk-legends of both pagan and Christian times sprang from primitive ideas about another life, from belief in revenants and ghosts. Under Catholicism there were, certainly, some saints’ lives and visions that told of experiences beyond this world, and these stories reached the common people. For instance, a woman in eastern Iceland called Rannveig saw into the next world, and other such revelations appeared to Icelanders, or else they knew clerical stories about them. After the Reformation Purgatory disappeared, as has been mentioned, but people went on seeing into the next world in dreams and visions—the purpose

¹ See Jónas Jónasson, ‘Ódauðleiki og annað líf’, *Skírnir* 1915, 44–62.

of such visions is always to preach repentance and penance, or else the Day of Judgment (cf. *JJ Íþ* 416–17). Some dream-legends circulated orally, such as that of Steinn of Þrúðuvangur (cf. p. 133 above). But all this stuff was alien to the stories of revenants which sprang as one might say from people's everyday experiences of the departed.

I cannot see that belief in revenants changed a great deal in Iceland from the beginning, if we exclude the belief in attendant spirits, which will be referred to later (pp. 187–88, 201). The main concepts are still the same, just as loosely linked, and superstitions and taboos seem not to have changed much either.¹ We hear of revenants in ancient times who were entirely physical and immensely powerful, such as Glámr in *Grettis saga* or Þórólfr Club-foot in *Eyrbyggja saga*. They try to smash everything they come in contact with. Þórólfr dies in an evil mood, with threats of causing harm which he fulfils only too well. We read in *Laxdæla saga* that Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttir saw the phantom of her fourth husband, Þorkell Eyjólfsson, when he was drowned in Hvammsfjörður, and I cannot see that there is any difference between this and later ghost stories. In the same saga a dead prophetess appears to Herdís in a dream, and complains about Guðrún's prayers. The ghosts of exposed children can be quite vindictive, as the story of Selkolla, the ghost put down by Bishop Guðmundr the Good, shows. It is immaterial that the story claims that an evil spirit entered the child; that was the ecclesiastical explanation, and ordinary people saw it quite differently.² I do not know any stories of the ghosts of exposed infants from pagan Iceland, but it is likely that they existed; there were plenty of children exposed in that period, and stories about them were common in Scandinavia later on.³ Ancient stories of revenants and their treasure are rather different from ones told in later times. Hidden treasure appears in various legends, but ghosts are not involved. Treasure was, however, often buried with people, for their benefit in the after-life, whether in the grave-mound or in Valhøll. As time passed these

¹ On what follows cf. Sluijter 1936, 61–94; Dehmer 1927, 26–50.

² *BS* I 604–08; cf. *Árna saga biskups*, *ÍF* XVII 23.

³ C. W. von Sydow, 'Sveriges och Finlands svenska folksägner', *NK* IX B 128; Reidar Th. Christiansen and Knut Liestøl, 'Norske folkesegner', *NK* IX B 164; Juha Pentikäinen, *The Nordic dead-child tradition, Nordic dead-child beings*, 1968 (*FFC* 202); Bo Almqvist, 'Niða(a)grísur. The Faroese dead-child being', *Arv* 1971, 112–14.

ideas faded rather. The mound-dweller of *fornaldar sögur* is very hostile and evil, but is not as pathetic as the ghosts of misers in later times (typified in English fictional ghost stories by Marley's ghost in *A Christmas Carol*). There are, also, in the sagas, legends of men who throw themselves and their money into waterfalls or into the sea, like Búi digri and Gull-Þórir. They turn into dragons. It is only in later times that the miser's ghost is miserable because of the treasure he has buried. This idea reflects the hostility of Christians and the objection of the community to money being withdrawn from its proper use in this world. It is against the law of nature for anyone to benefit from it after death, when it ought to pass to others. Poverty has made such behaviour seem contemptible, and at the same time given this motif a new lease of life as a secret desire.

Though there seems to be no evidence of a desire for novelty as far as a belief in revenants goes, and though notions about them seem to have been fairly static most of the time, yet it is possible that the number of ghosts and ghost stories was not always as high. How far people become aware of ghosts and what they are like may depend on pure chance (presumably the immediate environment of the ghost is the most important factor), but the volume of ghost stories and how powerful they are will be less a matter of chance. It will presumably depend on the spirit of the age and the power of belief in ghosts at the time. Many ghost-stories take place in heathen times, and though they were admittedly not written down until the thirteenth century, they obviously sprang from ancient roots. One cannot tell how far they have been exaggerated in the course of transmission. The fact that ghost stories could not be kept off the vellum by critically-minded men when the sagas were being written down shows the persistence of belief in ghosts, but I am afraid that it is largely an accident how few new ghost stories appear in eleventh- and twelfth-century sources. Selkolla (*BS I 604–08*, II 77–82) and the revenant at Svínafell (*BS I 467*) show that not everyone rested quietly at the time. Then there follows a great gap during which sources are so scanty that they mention only the merest traces of hauntings. It is not until around 1600 that historical documents become so extensive as to provide a sample large enough for serious testing. Non-Icelandic writers of the sixteenth century make a great deal of Icelanders' belief in revenants and ghosts, but only a limited number of ghost-stories turn up in Jón Egilsson's *Biskupaannálar*

(Didrik von Minden's posthumous tricks, the killing of horses and cows and the haunting by Severin of Kirkjuból; *Safn* I 72, 99). Jón lærði's little work *Um ættir og slekti* and the Rev. Jón Gizurarson's treatise on the Reformation (*Safn* I 640–701) contain no ghost stories, and this is significant. I presume from this that fear of ghosts was at a pretty low ebb in the last years of Catholicism in Iceland, and that it is likely that the Church's many remedies kept this fear at bay. This changed considerably with the advent of Lutheranism, as we shall see in what follows.¹

Contemporary sources from 1600 onwards bear witness to quite a lot of haunting, from Gvendur loki and the Snjáfjöll ghost (cf. pp. 87, 99–100 above) down to our own times. I am not sure, though, whether this incidence is unnaturally high, but everywhere a wild growth of legends sprouts all around with exceptional vitality, much of it deadly poisonous plants, endowed alternately with strange, fearful beauty and horrible or grotesque ugliness. There is no doubt that dark fear is at the root of most of these stories. Also, the dead roused up from the grave and attendant spirits play their tricks at this time so much that people find themselves defenceless in the face of them.

Gísli Vigfússon's work on ghosts and hauntings, written in the mid-seventeenth century but known only from what is preserved of it in Resen's *Nova Descriptio*, speaks of revenant trolls, who are people that die in an attack of rage and threaten to come back and cause harm to others and be their *fylgjur*, 'attendant spirits', from then on. It does not say that these 'attendant spirits' attach themselves to families² and I know of no examples of this until the eighteenth century, when the Rev. Jón Steingrímsson tells us in his *Æfisaga* that 'once a priest who was attended by a ghost called *Flugumýrarskotta* had occasion to visit the see, and was preceded by this spirit'³ and it went for Jón and flung him five fathoms down the aisle at Hólar. 'During the day a rumour went round the place that this evil spirit had attacked everyone and been very rough with some.' The belief in 'attendant spirits' is clearly no new thing here at this time, but it is unlikely that it was very

¹ Cf. PEÓ *Menn og menntir* IV 312.

² *Aarb.* 1934, 178; Peder Hansen Resen, *Íslandslýsing*, 1991, 289. The Rev. Einar of Staður writes that an elf-woman laid misfortune on a man and his descendants for nine generations, see ÞT *HHkr*, preface.

³ Jón Steingrímsson, *Æfisaga* 43, *Æfisaga*³ 67.

widespread until the late seventeenth century, or even until on in the next century, and it is certain that most *Mórar* ‘Rufuses’ and *Skottur* ‘Long-caps’ (male and female generic names for this kind of ghost) are from the eighteenth century. These ‘attendant spirits’ had one thing in common with the class of spirits known by the same name in ancient Iceland (*fylgjur*, ‘guardian spirits’), they went in front of the person to whom they were attached, but these did nothing but evil, both to that person and to others, while the ancient guardian spirits did no harm, unless their ‘owner’ was an evil person or in an evil mood, and then only to other people. The two types of spirit have thus little more than the name *fylgja* in common. The ancient belief in them is still not quite extinct (1940), though now they are mostly seen in dreams, and a few persons with second sight can still see them too.¹

‘Attendant spirits’ are people called up from the dead, ghosts raised by a magician—which brings us to a new topic, and it is best to look at belief in magic before we go into it.

VI

The difference between *ófreski* ‘ability to see and sense supernatural beings’, and *fjölkyngi* ‘knowing many things’ (i.e. knowledge of magic), is that the former is an innate gift, while the latter relies on learning and technique. Even so, it is quite difficult to distinguish the two absolutely since, as one might expect, the boundaries between them are ill-defined. It is perhaps best to say a little about the gift of *ófreski* before we go on to deal with magic.²

Much of the belief in the gift of *ófreski* seems to have continued quite unchanged in Iceland from the beginning. So it is, for example, with belief in dreams. In times of war people’s dreams are, naturally, different from in peace-time; the tone is partly, of course, set by the spirit of the age. But all the basic elements of belief in dreams appear to be constant, and stories about dreams, based on true experiences, run completely parallel in ancient and more recent times. Thus there appear in them people with symbolic names, people who utter verses, prophecies, second sight and so on.³

¹ JÁ² II 676 (*fylgja* (1)); Haraldur Niélssson, ‘Dulskygni-gáfa systranna í Fljótsdal’, *Morgunn* 1925, 164–87; cf. *JJ Íþ* 224, 261.

² On this in general see Sluijter 1936, 10–38; *JJ Íþ* 412–18.

³ Cf. Sluijter 1936, 39–60; *JJ Íþ* 414–18; Margeir Jónsson, *Draumaráðningar*,

‘We do not rely on dreams for most things,’ said Skarphéðinn, as if he thought his father Njáll had obtained some of his knowledge of the future from dreams. It is rarely possible to see where people with prophetic powers get their knowledge from—this can easily be substantiated from both ancient and modern sources. It often comes from a presentiment, sometimes from dreams, sometimes from some kind of vision.¹ It is impossible to see where Bishop Sveinn the Wise drew some of his prophecies from, or the namesakes Oddur Gottskálksson (c.1514–56) and Oddur Einarsson (1559–1630), though some things they are said to have known through understanding the language of birds.² Omens are very varied, and it is possible to get knowledge of the future from them, and, finally, there are special methods of finding out about the future which we shall come to presently (p. 192).

Second sight is mentioned in both early and late sources, and belief in it does not seem to have altered. The thirteenth-century *Orvar-Odds saga* says that men can get second sight by looking under the outstretched arm of a person with second sight and the Rev. Þorsteinn Björnsson says the same in *Noctes Setbergenses* in the middle of the seventeenth century; he also states that dogs and horses can have second sight.

There was a strong belief in the early days in shape-shifting. The power to change one’s shape was sometimes called *hamremmi*, literally ‘shape-power’, though this word was also used of the preternatural strength that could come upon men without their changing shape; ‘going berserk’ must have been a similar phenomenon to shape-changing. *Vatnsdæla saga* (ÍF VIII 33–36) speaks of two Lapps (*Finnar*) who travelled in changed shapes to Iceland while their bodies

1936. On symbolic names see particularly (besides Margeir Jónsson) Kelchner 1935, 113, 120, 121; Henzen 1890, 48–49 (and elsewhere); Jón Steingrímsson, *Æfisaga* 173, *Æfisaga*³ 192–93; JÁ I 415, 418–19; JJ *Íþ* 416. On dream verses see Kelchner 1935, 93–120; JÁ I 229–34, 238, 240–41; Theodóra Thoroddsen, ‘Draumljóð’, *Skírnir* 1916, 51–64.

¹ See JÁ I 405–28; further JÁ² II 675 (*forspá*; here all examples of prophecy in JÁ are collected).

² Cf. *Safn* I 37–38, III 725, JÁ I 412; *Annálar 1400–1800* II 65–66, 115, *Lfrs.* II 108, JÁ I 413. Jón lærði tells of a priest (the Rev. Árni of Látrar) who spoke with ravens; later on this seems to have become less common. Yet it is said that Þorleifur Skaftason understood the language of ravens. See further JÁ² II 676 (*fuglar*), 681 (*hrafnar*).

remained behind in a trance, and such accounts are common. There are folk-belief legends in Scandinavia of shape-shifters, werewolves¹ and the nightmare (*myrkriða*, supposed to be a female creature who rides around in the dark at night, injuring people).² In Iceland it was said that *hamremmi* departed from people if they were baptized, and now there are fewer folk-legends about it.³ The story known as ‘the king of silver coins’ is common in Iceland and elsewhere; it is a variant of the international legend no. 4000, ‘The Soul of a Sleeping person Wanders on its Own’, also known as ‘The Guntram legend’, and it has affinities with the ancient Icelandic belief in the *fylgja*, the ‘external soul’.⁴ But werewolves and nightmares are not found in Icelandic folklore, and there are no stories about them. There must accordingly have been a great narrowing of the range of Icelandic folk-belief at the end of the Settlement period, or, rather, with the advent of Christianity; and the evil eye and evil tongue seem to have disappeared early. On the other hand, people appear to have had great faith in the power of words spoken with inspiration or heat of spirit, whether for good or ill. There are stories of dangerous curses from later ages. Thus it is said that the poet Guðmundur Bergþórsson (1658–1705) became a cripple because of the maledictions of two old women who stood cursing each other over his cradle.⁵ Such powerful words are called *álög* ‘what is laid on’ in the wonder-tales, though they occur there in a rather special form, which will be discussed later (pp. 232–34, 246, 255). In folk-legends *ákvæði* is the commoner term. Those who were particularly able to utter these words were called *andheitir*, ‘fiery-spirited’, or, if poets, *kraftaskáld*, ‘poets of power’, from their gifts, the latter being especially pre-eminent in this group. There was belief in the supernatural power of poetry everywhere in ancient times, though there are not all that many stories about it. From 1600 on, however, the ‘poets of power’ become more frequent. Oddur Einarsson says that one called down strange and

¹ Werewolf = man-wolf, i.e. a man in the form of a wolf.

² R. Th. Christiansen and Knut Liestøl, ‘Norske folkesegner’, *NK IX B 163*.

³ *JÁ II*² 679 (*hamfarir*).

⁴ *JÁ I* 356–57, C. W. von Sydow, ‘Sveriges och Finlands svenska folksägner’, *NK IX B 131*; R. Th. Christiansen and Knut Liestøl, ‘Norske folkesegner’, *NK IX B 163*; R. Th. Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 1958 (*FFC 175*), no. 4000.

⁵ *Ann. farr.* 25 (1631; Icelandic translation 46); *JÁ II* 665 (*ákvæði*).

heavy illnesses on another, and the health and lives of children were endangered by such verses, ‘though there are few examples of it, and none from our day’. About the same time Hallur Magnússon wrote:

<i>Kveða má svo kíminn brag</i>	If men’s words grow harsh in strife,
<i>ef kappar málið herða,</i>	you can make so strong a lay
<i>annarra hvorra auðnulað</i>	that, for one, his future life
<i>ei má fagurt verða.</i>	will never hold one happy day.

He goes on to describe how both speech and hearing, success and health are destroyed by such poetry, and mentions a certain Eysteinn who chanted a bishop to death. A little later a rumour had spread all over the country that Hallur himself had laid leprosy on his fellow-poet Þórður of Strjúgur, while Þórður had laid misfortune on him; ‘whoever caused the misfortunes of Hallur Magnússon of the north country and the illness of Þórður of Strjúgur, will be revealed when Christ comes,’ says the Rev. Guðmundur Einarsson in his *Hugrás*.¹ He also speaks of magicians who by their incantations or verses could make foxes fall dead, and this later became common—it ought to be mentioned in passing that Bishop Guðmundr the Good killed a fox by cursing it, and the Rev. Hallgrímur Pétursson by flinging his stanza *Þú sem bitur bóndans fé* (‘You who bite the farmer’s sheep’) at it from the pulpit in anger.² The nineteenth century is crammed with stories of ‘poets of power’, and doubtless many of the verses in them are old, from the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries, which were the golden age of these poets.³

Many of these potent verses were uttered spontaneously in the heat of the moment, but poets sometimes composed more carefully devised poems, and it is not possible to differentiate them completely from incantations. In ancient times we hear of *galdr* or *ljóð*, mighty poems which were attributed to Óðinn, or were thought to be very old.

¹ *QDI*, 86 (Icelandic translation 158); *JP OmD* 341; *PEÓ*, *Menn og menntir* IV 530, 578; cf. *Aarb.* 1934, 178–79, *JÁ I* 471, Peder Hansen Resen, *Íslandslýsing*, 1991, 239–94.

² *BS I* 587; *JP OmD* 359; *Aarb.* 1934, 178–79; Peder Hansen Resen, *Íslandslýsing*, 1991, 293; *JÁ I* 466–67, cf. 573; according to *Skrif Ólafs gamla* (Jón Eggertsson) the Rev. Jón of Laufás enchanted a fox into his hand, but let it go (*BE Munnmælasögur* 16).

³ On this see Bo Almqvist, ‘Um ákvæðaskáldskap’, *Skírnir* 1961, 72–98; and his *Norrön niddiktning I–II*, 1965–74.

There were also formulas in prose, and some of these doubtless continued in use for a while, but then foreign material reached Iceland which probably superseded the native material. In the seventeenth century people wrote down or composed incantations in verse and prose, and it is evident that superstition was growing at the time, and people individually thought themselves capable of creating words and verses with magical power.

In ancient times there was great belief in runes and carved figures, which lasted a very long time. The runes were altered in various ways, made into *bandstafr* (lit. 'tied letters', forms of monogram) and so on, while all kinds of symbols came in from other countries, and all these were to a certain extent amalgamated. The documents of the court cases against magicians abound in references to such 'characters.' All sorts of ceremonies and practices were performed, all sorts of weird substances are used.

Seiðr, 'magical incantation' (possibly in connection with shamanistic trance), is mentioned in early written sources, but by the time that the Sagas of Icelanders came to be written it was clearly mostly known from legends, and the prophetesses must have disappeared soon after the nation accepted Christianity. Some other ancient practices, however, must have survived longer. *Völuspá* speaks of the sibyl's 'sitting out' (i.e. sitting all night at a cross-roads at a specified season to obtain prophetic visions or other supernatural knowledge), and laws and stories mention 'sitting out'.¹ This practice was also known later on, but it is very little mentioned in folk-legends apart from what is told of Jón krukur.² A source from about 1200 speaks of becoming 'wise under waterfalls', which clearly means that people sought inspiration there, and it is worth mentioning that there was a Krukur's Cave near Höfðabrekka, and that formerly a waterfall fell over its mouth, though sand has filled everything up since then.³ Jón krukur was a legendary

¹ See *Prjár ritgjörðir, sendar og tileinkaðar Herra Páli Melsted*, 1892, 10–11.

² Cf. *JÁ*² II 703 (*úttisetur*); *Saga Árna ljúflings*; JH 280; JJ *Íþ* 212–13.

³ *Jómsvíkingadrápa* 2 (*Skj* B II 1); cf. *NGL* II 308. On Krukshellir see Sæmundur Hólm in *ÍB* 333 4to, fol. 29: 'Krukshellir (Krukur's cave) is to the east of Kerlingadalsá, and can be found only by those who know the area well, for sand has blown up over the entrance. Inside there is still a fairly large waterfall, and the river goes underground but comes out as a strong current under Hjörleifshöfði. I was told this by the late Rev. Þorlákur Thorlacius who has been into the cave and seen the waterfall.'

seer, alleged to have lived early in the sixteenth century and to have obtained prophetic powers by encountering elves at the crossroads. Prophetic sayings attributed to him were no doubt current in the seventeenth century, and someone living about the middle of that century composed *Krukkspá* for his own amusement using these prophecies as models, but taking the opportunity to have a dig at one person or another. Oral prophecies relating to various localities were later attributed to Krukkur, though they can be found earlier attributed to Bishop Sveinn the Wise.¹

To judge from later legends, sitters-out seem to have expected to gain their knowledge (or treasure, though this is more recent and less realistic) from elves. Jón lærði mentions another method of making contact with them and learning from them and he firmly believed in the possibility of entering hillocks; doubtless this belief still flourished in his day and there were stories based on it, but I think it must have declined later, even though legends about it continued.

Next we come to belief in Finn-breeches (breeches made in order to gain wealth by making an agreement with a donor in his lifetime and, after his death, flaying his body from the waist downwards and stepping into the skin), in the *flæðarmús* 'shore-mouse' (actually a corruption of the German *Fledermaus*, 'bat'), *tilberi* 'carrier' (a magical being made from the ribs of a dead person and stolen wool, which rolled over the ground at great speed and stole milk from ewes and cows for his mistress), and *sagnarandi*, 'speaking (i.e. prophesying) spirit'. Of these I know no stories until very late in time. *Tilberi* appears first in Guðmundur Andr sson's dictionary (1683) and G sli Vigf sson's essay 'De geniis et spectris' (see p. 93 above); G sli states that a woman was burned around 1500 for possessing such a creature.

¹ *Safn* I 37–38; *Krukkspá*: J ork. 213–27, J  I 437–38, J  *OmD* 481–82; *Lfrs.* III 118 (S mundur H lm says that a bit fell off the mountain P tursey one time onto the farm), *Saga  rna lj flings*; in Einar H lf anarson, *Gestur og gar b i* a prophecy about Duf ekja is mentioned (see p. 152 above); in M rdalur it is said that J n krukkur prophesied that Hafur  would one day run into Dyrh la s, and its course would lie in front of Reynisfjall. J n  lafsson of Grunnav k speaks of the tradition that 'fimm ver i um f fuk tinn   d msdegi' (i.e. five men are needed to lift one cask of dandelions on doomsday [because men get weaker as time goes on]; JH 216). Cf. further J   II 699 (*sp *), *Ann lar 1400–1800* III 189–90.

In an old court charge (from 1281?) mention is made of *at villa . . . mjólk frá mönnum* 'to enchant . . . milk away from people';¹ this was (at least later on) done with a *tilberi*. These concepts are, for the most part, paralleled by Scandinavian ones. *Gandreið*, 'witch ride', was well known in the Middle Ages, but does not seem to have been practised in later times, even though it appears in stories.

Two motifs are very frequent in later stories of magic: waking up the dead and sending them to trouble others. These two activities are normally performed as one operation, the same departed person being awakened and sent: the sendings can, however, be some such object as a human bone, which is then invested with power. A related activity is sending animals to cause trouble by magic means, often mice or foxes. There exists much defensive magic against these pests, and seventeenth-century sources speak of magicians driving mice away, or even sealing them up in a cave.² Jón lærði speaks (in *Um Íslands aðskiljanlegar náttúrur*) of a fish he calls *rá*: 'It eats an amazing amount in a short time, and so it is used by sorcerers at sea to eat both nets and seals.' Magic flies are also very common, Jón calls them *gandaflugur*, perhaps through Norwegian influence. He also speaks of *galdrageigskot*, 'a magical danger-shot' (perhaps the same motif as in the legend behind Weber's *Der Freischütz*), and both he and others talk of various magic tricks to annoy, though they do not explain how these are done. Most of this has parallels in Scandinavia in later times, and it would be useful if both similarities and differences were investigated in detail. Niels Lid³ has written interestingly on *gandr* and magic shots, which already reveal certain parallels, but Icelandic sendings seem normally to have tended to be wakened dead, and this strikes me as a peculiarly Icelandic feature.

Medieval sagas make little mention of sendings, though one may assume that they were known. The *Historia Norwegiae*, which dates from the twelfth or thirteenth century, speaks of Finnish magic, and talks of *gandar* in a way that suggests that they were like the later sendings. But it has been assumed that much 'Finnish' magic is of

¹ *DI* II 224. See now Jan Wall, *Tjuvmjökande väsen* I–II, 1977–78.

² *De mirabil.* 59 (Icelandic translation 99); *Lfrs.* II 186, see Peder Hansen Resen, *Íslandslýsing*, 1991, 145.

³ See Nils Lid, 'Magiske fyrestellingar og bruk', *NK* XIX, 29–41, with references.

Norwegian origin. *Þorleifs þátr jarlaskálds* (a thirteenth–fourteenth-century text) speaks of a wooden man which was invested with magic power and sent to Iceland to kill Þorleifr.¹ It is often stated, on the other hand, that Óðinn (and indeed many others) woke up the dead, principally to obtain information about the future.² The law-codes speak of the waking of trolls, which could mean the same thing. In the seventeenth century the belief in waking up the dead is clearly widespread, and this art must be descended from the practices attributed to Óðinn.

VII

It looks as though people in heathen times found some magic practices repugnant. The shamanistic *seiðr* was clearly sometimes thought questionable (see the story of Rognvaldr réttilbeini, son of King Haraldr hárfagri, *Hkr* I 138–39). According to the ancient law, magic, when used to harm others, was unlawful. But it could also have a bad effect on the practitioner. In Christian times sacrifices or other worship of heathen spirits was considered equivalent to magic performed by men for their own or others' good, and both, if the accused was convicted, carried the penalty of lesser outlawry. On the other hand, *fordæðuskapr* was made subject to a full outlawry; as defined in *Grágás* (ed. V. Finsen, 1883, 27), '*fordæðuskapr* is if a man by words or magic practice causes disease or death to men or cattle'. *Jónsbók* (ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, 1970, 38), the post-republic law of Iceland, declared all *fordæðuskapr*, all *spáfarir* (expeditions to obtain prophecies) and sittings out, waking up of trolls and other heathen practices to be uncompensatable crimes. This was how the law-makers looked at it. On the other hand magic appears very little in sagas other than those that deal with the first century after the Settlement and the *fornaldar sögur* (which are, of course, very untrustworthy sources for folk-belief), but the Sagas of Icelanders suggest that white magic was not severely dealt with (see, for example, the Lapps (*Finnar*) and the prophetess Þórdís in *Vatnsdæla saga*, a work with a lot of superstition in it).

¹ *A History of Norway and the Passion and Miracles of the Blessed Óláfr*, tr. D. Kunin, 2001, 6–7; *ÍF* IX, 225–26.

² See Åke Ohlmarks, 'Totenerweckungen in Eddaliedern', *AfnF* LII (1936), 264–97.

In the early Christian period, very varied foreign influences begin to enter Iceland. First of all there are certain legends that became attached to famous men. There is already a story about Sæmundr the Wise (1056–1133) from about 1200, telling how he escaped from his astrologer master (*Jóns saga helga*, *BS* I 227–29). The Dominican monk, Bishop Jón Halldórsson, is the source of the story of how Jón took his master's magic book and read a chapter in it which caused a great storm to blow up, though luckily the master came along and at once read a second chapter which calmed the gale (*Sögubáttur af Jóni Halldórssyni biskupi*, *ÍF* XVII 446). There is also a whole narrative about Master Perus and the magical illusions that he could cause, and it is clear that stories of such illusions came to Iceland and were popular there.¹ Overall there is no doubt that a great many stories of magicians reached Iceland during the Middle Ages and later became the basis of seventeenth-century stories, and Icelanders did not take them too seriously. We are told that Laurentíus (Kálfsson, Bishop of Hólar 1322–31) had met a man in Norway called Þrándr fisiler 'and he told Laurentíus many things, for he (Laurentíus) was very desirous of acquiring knowledge while he was young, though he never practised magic or sorcery' (*BS* I 798).

Not that everyone was so tolerant. Heathen gods and less than benevolent creatures and evil spirits were often invoked in magic practices, and the magician had to have some dealings with such company. Belief in demons increased enormously in Europe during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and the idea became current that the basis of magic was a contract between the magician and the Devil. People gave themselves body and soul to the Devil, and so obtained the power to do extraordinary things, which were, of course, mainly intended to harm others. This concept of a contract with the Devil appears in accounts of Theophilus and others in *Maríu saga* (*MS* 65–69, 402–41, 1080–90, 1090–1104). All this miscellaneous belief in devils was codified by thirteenth-century theologians, and thenceforth dominated the church's teaching. It is as a result of this that a nun could be burned at Kirkjubær Abbey in 1343 for having pawned herself to the Devil (*Íslandske annaler indtil 1578*, 274, 402). In general, however, magic

¹ *BS* I 228; Gering *ÍÆ* I 84–86, 217–31; cf. *Clári saga*, *Klerkarímur* and the magical illusions in *Mágus saga* and *Dínus saga*.

is very rarely mentioned in the pre-Reformation period in Iceland, even though a good deal of witchcraft entered the country at that time, but probably the Church's various defensive rituals weakened people's fear of it. The contract with the Devil appears in stories from around 1700, but in them there reigns an unshakeable optimism about the cleverness and luckiness of the magician, and he always triumphs over the powers of evil. It is worth our while going into this more closely. For this purpose it will be convenient to divide the material into four groups: 1) Seventeenth-century folk-legends about magic in earlier times; 2) The stories about Sæmundr the Wise collected for Árni Magnússon around 1700; 3) Seventeenth-century accounts of contemporary events; 4) Legends from more recent sources.

1) *Stories of magicians in ancient times.*¹ As in later sources, there is a whole series of magicians dealt with under this head: the Rev. Porkell Guðbjartsson, Ólafur tóni, Halla from Straumfjörður, Oddur from Saurbær, Andrés, illegitimate son of Guðmundur Arason inn ríki (fl. c. 1480), the Rev. Þorleifur Björnsson, Jón of Svalbarð, Jón of Laufás, Oddur of Tröllatunga, the Rev. Hálfván Narfason of Fell and the Rev. Árni Jónsson of Látrar.² The Rev. Porkell was educated at the 'Black School', and there is a proverb about Ólafur tóni and Halla that 'he learned his magic in schools, but she in hillocks (i.e. from elves)'—which was why she was more advanced in the art than he. Books of magic are mentioned; the Rev. Porkell and Ólafur tóni both owned books of spells and Pétur Sveinsson a book of runes. Jón lærði mentions several books, including one of stories at Sauðafell (probably in fact a book of *Novellen* and the like, and therefore fairly innocent), and a book at Laufás in Eyjafjörður, which he thought contained much

¹ Sources: Jón lærði's writings, *Skrif Ólafs gamla*, Jón Egilsson's *Biskupa-annálar (Safn I)*, *Fitjaannáll (Annálar 1400–1800 II 22, 52, 65)*, *Hugrás* by the Rev. Guðmundur Einarsson (*Lfrs.* II 44), Ari Magnússon's writings (*Lfrs.* II 47–48), interpolations in Björn of Skarðsá's book on runes in JS 91 4to, pp. 87–90 (these are copied from Papp. fol. nr 64 and are by Jón Eggertsson and *Skrif Ólafs gamla* follows on the subsequent pages; now the interpolations are printed in BE *Munnmælasögur* lxxxii–lxxxiii). On these works by Guðmundur Einarsson and Ari Magnússon see also EGP *Eddurit* I 73–79 and 111–17.

² See pp. 190–91 above, on poets of power or power-poets. For sources relating to Árni Jónsson of Látrar see Einar G. Pétursson, 'Flateyjarbók og Þorláksbiblía í Árnastofnun', *Sagnaþing helgað Jónasi Kristjánssyni sjötugum*, 1994, I 152 n.

magic lore; also, like many others, he believed that quite important books existed at the schools of Skálholt and Hólar. But he may have overrated their importance. The Rev. Oddur and Ólafur tóni made a practice of entering hillocks. Stories of magical illusions were popular; the Rev. Porkell fooled the Bishop of Hólar in this way when he came to visit him, as the Bishop of Skálholt did Torfi of Klofi, and Ólafur tóni the English, making them see an invincible army where there were only rocks. The Rev. Hálfván drew ale out of a stick, as did Ólafur tóni and the servant of a bishop (and Mephistopheles in Goethe's *Faust*). The farmer Egill fished a black pudding out of the sea, the Rev. Hálfván caught fish through a gap in his cowshed floor, and magicked fish out of a shed on far-off Grímsey. The Rev. Árni of Látrar caught a thief by means of a chessman, a (stolen) sheep is made to bleat in the thief's belly, a horse-thief gets stuck to the horse's back. The Rev. Jón of Svalbarð (and the Rev. Hálfván) rode a water-horse across a fjord carrying a boy behind him; the Rev. Hálfván also transported turf on a water-horse, just as Auðun stoti got a water-horse to carry hay for him in the Settlement period (*Landnámabók* 120–21). A farmer got news from abroad from a man in grey, Oddur Gottskálksson showed Gísli Jónsson what was going on at Selárdalur by letting him look through some glass, Oddur of Saurbær wakened an ox from the dead. All these stories employ magic for good or harmless purposes. Jón lærði has stories of harmful magic: Andrés Guðmundsson made 'a *galdrageigskot* [magical danger-shot], as some now do in Iceland,' to be sent against the franklin Þorleifur Björnsson, but Þorleifur put a common churl in his saddle in place of himself, and he was the one who was hit. I do not know any other examples of malicious magic from seventeenth-century legends about earlier times. It is said that Bishop Ólafur Hjaltason (of Hólar, 1552–69) promised to marry a Norwegian widow and jilted her, and she used magic to avenge herself, making him impotent (Jón Halldórsson *BS* II 24–25). There are no stories from this time of contracts with the Devil, but goblins or spirits are mentioned. According to Jón lærði, Ólafur tóni had his 'lads' ('*demones credo*') clear the harbour Tónavör of rocks, and *Skrif Ólafs gamla* states in connection with this story that there is 'an ancient report that they could direct some kind of spirit, by means of the Art, to carry out various great works'—he is no more specific than that. The Rev. Porkell has someone he calls *smellilegur* 'bright fellow'

(perhaps 'good fellow', cf. the English Robin Goodfellow) pull a man down into the earth.¹

2) Only a few of the motifs found in the previous group are also found in the legends about Sæmundr the Wise collected around 1700 for Árni Magnússon.² Sæmundr attends the Black School, and there is an account of his departure from it rather like the ancient one in *Jóns saga helga*. He is also said to have promised some hag in Saxony marriage and when, like bishop Ólafur, he retracted his offer, she is supposed to have sent him a gilded casket with something nasty in it which Sæmundr took up into the mountains. This started an eruption on Hekla. Finally, as a parallel to the story about the harbour Tónavör we may mention the various odd jobs which Sæmundr makes the Devil do, such as carrying water in a gridded container, cutting and transporting timber and shovelling muck out of a cowshed. I think some of these stories must be derived from early European legends of saints and magicians, but this will not be pursued here. Contracts with the Devil are fairly prominent (sometimes by implication), but the tone is of unflinching optimism; there is never any doubt that Sæmundr will escape the Devil's clutches. He is sharp in argument, quick-witted and cunning, while the Devil is credulous, literal-minded and slow-thinking.³

3) There are countless witnesses to seventeenth-century belief in magic and it is easy to set out its main characteristics. The Church had from early on disseminated the doctrine that magicians had contracts with the Devil and that they entered his service already in this life. In the seventeenth century a mass of writings on magic that presented this view became available to the general public, and though magicians themselves may have seen the matter in a different light, the perception that magic was a diabolical art and that magicians had some relationship with the Devil must have become widespread.

¹ According to Blefken, Icelanders used to make devils serve them as workmen and so on (Ólafur Davíðsson, 'Ísland og Íslendingar, eptir því sem segir í gömlum bókum, útlendum', *Tímarit hins íslenska bókmenntafélags* VIII 140; *Lfrs.* I 183). This is not significant.

² See *JÁ* I 485–90; *BE Munnmælasögur* 39–48 and xcvi–cxix.

³ Sæmundur's name comes first in the account of sorcerers in the interpolation in Björn of Skarðsá's book on runes, but does not otherwise appear in seventeenth-century writings on magic. The explanation for this is probably that they originated in the west and north of Iceland.

Jón lærði lived in the first half of the century, before burnings for witchcraft reached their height, and he was always accusing his enemies of attacking him by magic and of directing sendings at him. In *Fjölmóður*, for instance, he tells of the troubles he suffered at the hands of the magician Bárður (if this was a man and not an evil spirit). Jón appears to regard him as responsible for his father's death, and for many of the sendings he himself received. Many strange things happened to Jón when he fled to the protection of the sheriff Steindór Gíslason of Stapi, and while he was there many sendings afflicted him when the wind blew towards Stapi from the Western Fjords. Shortly afterwards he was assailed by the magic of Ormur the Evil (Ormur Illugason), who killed Svartur of Hella by magic.¹ After this the 'so-called priest' (the Rev. Jón Böðvarsson) took over; he had made a contract with the Devil and promised him his soul if he made Jón's house sink into the earth. 'Flashes of light' came three times above the cottage. Jón accuses 'Night-Wolf' (Ólafur Pétursson of Bessastaðir) of 'black magic' (*fordæða*) and giving him poison to drink, and when Jón was at Ytri-Hólmur (near Akranes) 'fearful sendings and magic flies' assailed him. On his flight through northern Iceland a 'magical shot' (*kyngjaskeyti*) entered his calf. On his journey to Iceland his enemies played tricks on him, placing magic shackles on the ship so that it could move neither backwards nor forwards.

The affair of Jón Rögnvaldsson is also from the first half of the seventeenth century (1625). Björn Jónsson records it as follows about ten years after the event: 'Jón Rögnvaldsson from Svarfaðardalur burned to death after trial in Eyjafjörður for the practice of witchcraft. He had waked one from the dead, who then attacked a boy at Urðir, killed some horses there and did other mischief' (*Annálar 1400–1800* I 221).

The writings of the fanatical persecutors of magic, the Rev. Jón Magnússon (1610–96) and the Rev. Páll Björnsson (1620–1706), are from the middle and the latter part of the seventeenth century. The disease which the Rev. Jón caught and attributed to the activities of a father and son is powerfully depicted in his *Píslarsaga*, 'Story of martyrdom' (JM *Píslarsaga*³, 2001), and the affair ended tragically

¹ Cf. also *Um ættir og slekti*, *Safn* III 714; *Alþingisbækur Íslands* V 120 (1625).

with both father and son being burnt at the stake. The witchcraft-burnings reached their height in this period, and they must have made a deep impression on the people's minds. People began to take for granted that magicians were in league with the Devil and unscrupulousness, spite and malice became the main characteristics of the stories. The methods were now simpler to the extent that some particular magic procedures become predominant; these are the sendings—themselves very varied in character—and wakened dead. Moreover a single human lifetime can no longer contain the hatred—it lives on and the sending persecutes the family, generation after generation, and these 'attendant spirits' start walking in broad daylight.

That is how it is in eighteenth-century sources. The Rev. Jón Steingrímsson speaks of revenants and those awakened from the dead, and he is our earliest authority for a *skotta* (Jón Steingrímsson, *Æfisaga*³ 36, 67). Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík also tells of injuries caused by spells and sendings, and has spoken to people who were present when ghosts were raised (*Lfrs.* II 27; JH 11, 280–81). Eiríkur Laxdal refers to a fire-ball which was clearly a sending. One could go on multiplying examples.

4) So we come to nineteenth-century folk-stories, and a comprehensive picture of them can be gained from Jón Árnason's collection.¹ As one would expect, the older stories of magicians were not quite dead, though as the seventeenth century wore on they began to be reworked, but they did not entirely lose their character in the flood of eighteenth-century stories.

There are some stories of Ólafur tóni and Straumfjarðar-Halla, and the Rev. Guðbjartur flóki has replaced his son Þorkell. Hálfván of Fell and Sæmundr the Wise continue to gather stories round them, while the company is now joined by the Rev. Eiríkur Magnússon of Vogsósar (1638–1716). Stories about these have the gentler spirit of the older legends. Some of the old stories reappear in unaltered or only slightly altered form; we have Sæmundr's sojourn at the Black School and his departure thence, his journey on a seal's back to Iceland, the work he makes the Devil do (fetching water in a gridded container, fetching timber, shovelling out a cowshed; JÁ I 490–94, 497–98; cf. 515). Ólafur

¹Legends about Hálfván were circulating rather earlier, i.e. in the *Adversaria* of Halldór Hjálmarsson (c.1800), see JÞork. 356.

tóni makes the Devil clear Tónavör of rocks (JÁ I 513–14). Sæmundr and Eiríkur are said to ride strange grey horses (JÁ I 501, 567). Eiríkur enters hillocks and amuses himself by making thieves stick to what they have stolen and horse-thieves to the horses' backs (JÁ I 559, 560, 562–63). Hálfván now makes the Devil fetch him dried fish from Grímsey (JÁ I 518–19). There is also a huge number of stories of magical illusions, exactly in the old style: the Rev. Eiríkur even gives the visiting bishop coming to reprove him a reception similar to what the Rev. Þorkell had given him.¹ Then we have the motif of the magic book which the apprentice sorcerer looks into, thus rousing demons who demand to be set to work, though all goes well because of his quickwittedness—he sets the demons to make a rope out of sand (JÁ I 556–57, cf. 495). All the parsons are kindly and good-natured, help those who seek their assistance and punish ever so mildly those who do anything against them. They are all rather alike in these stories, and sometimes the same story is told of one after another of them.² They are all a little worried about their eventual salvation, and piously coloured stories exist on this theme (JÁ I 502, 505, 520, 580), but the Devil's role varies. He turns up most frequently in stories about Sæmundr; the great bulk of the stories about him relate how he tricks Satan by splitting hairs in agreements made, by deceiving him or by making use of sacred objects. It is quite in character for Sæmundr and his company to promise the Devil Kálfr (Árnason), and then give him a calf (Árni being the name of the bull that sired the calf). Originally these legends were formed in a spirit of religious optimism, and then just turned into merry stories. One might mention in passing that there is a great mass of European stories about a boy who tricks a being variously referred to as the Devil or a giant (e.g. AT 812 'The Devil's Riddle').

Nineteenth-century stories, however, give greater importance to more recent magicians, men who lived in the seventeenth century or later. These stories grew out of the attitudes that developed in the context of the witchcraft-burnings, but they undoubtedly came to full flower in

¹ JÁ I 566; other magical illusions: 503–04, 512, 557–59, 571, 576 etc. There is an account of the tricks played by Þorkell Guðbjartsson on the bishop of Hólar in BE *Munnmælasögur* 3–10 and lxxvi–lxxxii.

² E.g. JÁ I 494, 511, 519–20, cf. II 284–85; 497, 515, 516, 568.

the eighteenth century (I shall sometimes refer to them in what follows as the 'eighteenth-century stories'). A quite different spirit is dominant in these, and the best way to reveal it is to take as an example Jón Árnason's stories of Þormóður on Gvendareyjar.

Þormóður, who lived from c.1668 to c.1741, was a poet of power (*kraftaskáld*) as much as a magician, though at this time the difference was minimal. He did not attack others, but he helped many people. A girl from western Iceland is persecuted by an airy spirit sent against her by two men called Jón, father and son; the son wanted to marry her. Þormóður was asked to help and went to the west, catching a pike on the way and putting it in a bottle. It is made clear how poisonous this creature is and what precautions (using gloves made of human skin and so on) he had to take in handling it. He buried the pike under the girl's threshold, and it scared the airy spirit away from her. On his way back Þormóður got a sending from the two men, he caught it, put a new and stronger spell on it and sent it back. It was to kill the elder Jón and attack the younger, which it proceeded to do well and truly and did not give up until Þormóður was begged for mercy. But now a kinsman of these men, a mighty magician, comes into the story; he despatched a number of sendings to Þormóður, and eventually made his daughter go mad, so that she destroyed herself and returned to haunt. Þormóður was obliged to lay her ghost, and he took this very hard. Next Þormóður quarrelled with Gvendur of Hafnareyjar and sent a spirit against him, but Gvendur disposed of it and sent back one after another, any of which would have instantly killed Þormóður or his people if he had not got rid of it at once . . .

This may be said to be the usual type of 'eighteenth-century story'. Whenever there is a slight cooling of friendship between people they rush out to raise a spirit and send it to kill sheep and cattle and drive people mad or kill them. Nothing less will do, and if the recipient has any magical knowledge himself and escapes with his life, he instantly pays his attacker back in the same coin. Nor need there be anything more than the slightest of offences to spark off some enormity. As well as all the lesser sendings, the flies and the shots, there are all the awakened dead. The magician spends half his life among corpses, and uses the most disgusting procedures to wake them. He prefers to use corpses still half-warm, they make the most powerful sendings; and it seems it is not enough for the wakened corpse to persecute the culprit

alone, it has to be his family and his descendants to the ninth generation as well. He will haunt them, go out ahead of them to cause trouble, creep after them in the dark of night to attack them when a good opportunity arises, drive them mad, rob them of their health or life.

Of course these are by no means the only motifs that occur in the later stories of magic. There are many others, and in general these stories are more varied and more loosely shaped than the older ones, having been a shorter time in oral transmission. Yet though there is much variety, the motifs mentioned above are easily the most dominant, and the foundation of these legends is darkness, fear and spite.

These stories cannot be explained entirely by the ideology of the witchcraft-burning period (1625–85) because if so, when this had ended, different kinds of stories, sprung from new conditions in the succeeding period, would gradually have evolved. Yet a good deal of their ideology clearly is a survival from the witchcraft-burning period, and the reason for this long survival in so vast a profusion of stories must have been the grim economic and social condition of the Icelandic people in the eighteenth century. The commercial oppression and overall economic underdevelopment, starvation, disease, epidemics, exceptionally destructive volcanic eruptions and general wretchedness of the people—all this, together with poor harvests, is crystallised in these stories of witchcraft, transformed in accordance with an ideology of witchcraft formed by the burnings and prosecutions for sorcery of the preceding generations which had become engraved on people's minds. The terrible misery and wretchedness of the people was reflected in these ugly dreams.

VIII

The idea of the magician's contract with the Devil, which was made so much of by seventeenth-century clerics, may also be found in popular sources, and it is very prominent in stories about Sæmundr the Wise and other legends of the older type.¹ On the other hand there are rather few of the eighteenth-century stories that refer to it.² It is as if the contract motif went into a decline around the year 1700. It may be that

¹ Including JÁ II 13–17, *Verz.* 114–20, which ultimately derive from legends of saints.

² Note particularly JÁ II 18–19, 119; cf. I 429, 473.

people believed the magicians' own claim that it was only in the very blackest magic that people pawned themselves to the Devil. Certainly the vast majority of later stories of magic are entirely secular in outlook. They deal with the present life, and do not concern themselves with the fate of magicians in the next world.

In 1799 Mensalder Jónsson the Rich died at his manor on Papey, and the poverty of the people in the area must have given rise to the idea that he had amassed his wealth through possessing 'Finn-breeches', *Finnabuxur* (which consequently also came to be known as *Papeyjarbuxur* 'Papey-breeches'), and that when he could not get rid of them he went out of his mind. One fine day when he was out walking a sudden violent storm blew up, and Mensalder was never seen again (JÁ I 429). This story could easily be a much older one that became attached to him; the Icelandic version of the Faust-story similarly came to be attached to Galdra-Loftur. Its core is the attempt to gain possession of *Rauðskinna*, 'Red vellum', the book of magic which is the symbol in Icelandic stories of secret knowledge and mysterious power.

Jón lærði often speaks of ancient books of lore that he has seen, and mentions Ólafur tóni's 'principal book'; apart from this, books of magic were not yet really suffused with supernatural light. But as the authorities sought more energetically to get them on the fire, and they began to get fewer and farther between in the real world, so a curious magic glow began to emanate from them in the popular imagination. Now there emerged the stories of wondrous manuals of magic that probably never existed, Red vellum, Grey vellum, Yellow vellum and Silver vellum.¹ To judge from their names, these books must have been splendidly illuminated, and one might recall the stories of the

¹ It seems to me quite likely that these names are based on those of real manuscripts on other topics. Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson called two manuscripts of *Njáls saga* *Gráskinna* and *Gullskinna*, and Þormóður Torfason gave names to many vellums (*Jöfraskinna*, *Gullinskinna*, *Fagrskinna* etc.) about the same time as Jón Eggertsson wrote down for the first time the names of books of magic in Björn of Skarðsá's book on runes. *Rauðskinna* was the name of a law-book (see K. Kálund, *Katalog over den Arnemagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 1889–94, II 541). Jón Þorkelsson called Bishop Ólafur Rögnvaldsson's deed-book *Rauðskinna* (JP *OmD* 11, *DI* V 249), but I know of no evidence that this name is earlier than *JÁ*. Cf. Ólafur Davíðsson, *Galdur og galdramál á Íslandi*, 1940–43, 61–63.

fiery characters of the books in the Black School. On the other hand, the 'Grey vellums', said in nineteenth-century legend to have been at the schools of Skálholt and Hólar (Jón Steingrímsson states that in his schooldays at Hólar there was a treatise on magic going round the school), were perhaps much less elaborately decorated, and anyway far less advanced in character. The great books of magic belonged to the past, and were preferably buried with various magicians of days gone by, so students of magic were very eager to get hold of them. Various stories survive of such attempts; there is one from about 1700 about Sæmundr the Wise's friend Jón, and two from rather later on about the Rev. Eiríkur of Vogsósar.

The story about Jón describes how he found out about a book of magic buried in the churchyard at Skálholt. He woke up the dead by chanting verses, and eventually the owner of the book appeared carrying it. Jón went on chanting and the book opened, but at that moment his mistress, who had been hiding in the churchyard out of curiosity, let out a scream; the ghosts attacked her and broke her hip, and Jón was forced to ring the cathedral bell to put them down. So he lost his chance of the book, but was otherwise unharmed (JÁ I 489).

The first story about the Rev. Eiríkur tells how he, Bogi and Magnús, three students at Skálholt School, woke up a cottager who was buried with his book in Skálholt churchyard. They had filled the cathedral twice over with the dead before the old man came with the book and a heifer which had been buried with him. They went for the old man and got hold of part of the beginning of the book, but he wrestled with them until dawn came, when he had to return to his grave. From the pages they managed to save they compiled the manual Grey vellum, which was kept at Skálholt. According to the second story, a blind old man showed Eiríkur to a magician's grave in Selvogur churchyard, and he got hold of one leaf out of the magician's book (otherwise the details are similar to those of the first story). 'The parson said later that he had learned more magic from that one leaf than from everything he had studied before, and if he had got hold of the whole book it would have been too much for him' (that is, it would have lost him his soul) (JÁ I 554–56).

Jón got none of his book, Eiríkur only a small part of his—and such was his restraint that he was well content—and so these two went on all right. But the third person about whom a story of this kind is told had none of this restraint; his thirst for knowledge was unquenchable. This person was Galdra-Loftur.

This person, now known to every Icelander, was born soon after 1700 (he matriculated from Hólar Cathedral School in 1722), but beyond this we know virtually nothing about him for certain except his name, Loftur Þorsteinsson. All the available facts about him have been assembled by Hannes Þorsteinsson, and his results are followed here.¹

There are three sources for legends about Loftur: a short section in Espólín's *Íslands Árbækur*, Gísli Konráðsson's account of Þormóður of Gvendareyjar and a folk-story written down by the Rev. Skúli Gíslason. All three sources are from the nineteenth century; only the two latter have the story of the book of magic, but they all describe the mischief Loftur caused with his magic.

Espólín tells of Loftur's dealings with the Rev. Þorleifur Skaptason, at that time Dean of Hólar Cathedral. A man was supposed to have enticed the Rev. Þorleifur's fiancée to agree to marry him while Þorleifur was abroad, and when he got back to Hólar she was sitting in the bride's seat. Þorleifur asked her if she didn't remember her promise to him, but she said that she had had no choice in the matter. Þorleifur then moved in and married her, which angered the would-be bridegroom who sought Loftur's help. Loftur used his magic to try to cause some harm to the Rev. Þorleifur, but he invariably managed to escape it. This source has the stanza *Furðar mig á fréttum þeim*, 'I'm surprised at what I hear'.²

Gísli's account of Þormóður is thought to have been written on Flatey between 1850 and 1860. As far as I know, it exists in two versions, the one in a manuscript that Jón Árnason got from Brynjólfur Benediktsson of Flatey in 1861 (now Lbs 535 4to), the other in Gísli's *Söguþættir* based on three manuscripts. The principal difference between the two versions is that the second one adds Loftur's dealings with the Rev. Þorleifur, presumably based on Espólín's account, though it does not follow it in every detail. For instance, Gísli says that Loftur induced the girl to agree to marry the man by witchcraft.³ He also says that Loftur was son of a certain Gunnar, that his family came from the

¹ His work was printed in *Ísafold*, January 1915 (later reprinted separately); also in Gísli Konráðsson's *Söguþættir*, 1915–20, and *Huld*² II.

² Jón Espólín, *Íslands Árbækur í sögu-formi*, 1821–55, IX 40–41.

³ Other items that appear only in *Söguþættir* are here enclosed in brackets; otherwise the version in Jón Árnason's manuscript is followed.

islands of Breiðafjörður, and that he was fostered by Þormóður of Gvendareyjar, who composed this verse about him:

<i>Á hugann stríðir ærið oft</i>	To and fro my mind is tossed
<i>óróleiki nægur,</i>	by restlessness and grief;
<i>síðan eg missti hann litla Loft</i>	my little Loftur I have lost
<i>er löng mér stytta dægur.</i>	who made my long days brief.

From this Gísli assumed that Loftur was of small stature. All his other information about him he had from the Rev. Pétur Pétursson of Víðivellir (1754–1842), Rural Dean in Skagafjörður.

Gísli tells first of the dealings between Loftur and Jón Gunnlaugsson.¹ Loftur used to sit by some smaller boy in school and pinch him, but Jón stood by one such boy, and Loftur revenged himself by plaguing him with magic tricks. Once Jón was out on a trip during the Christmas holidays and got caught in a snowstorm. He wanted to cut his snowshoe off his foot, but it was as if the knife were snatched out of his hand, and he fell into a snowdrift and no one found him. The result was that Jón got frostbite in his foot. ‘He himself told Dean Pétur Pétursson about this . . . and shed tears when he spoke of it.’ (That he had dropped his knife with such disastrous results, and the storm too, were attributed to Loftur’s magic.)

The centrepiece of Gísli’s narrative is Loftur’s attempt to get hold of the book of magic. ‘It was common knowledge’ he says ‘that a certain magician was buried in Hólar churchyard’ and that the manual Grey vellum (‘named Red vellum by others’, JS 290 4to), which was bigger than any other book of magic, was buried with him. ‘Loftur thought night and day of getting hold of the book, and spent three nights waking up the dead from the churchyard; he raised a great crowd, but the book did not appear.’ It was said that Loftur pursued his search so far as to make a contract with the Devil. ‘He did this right inside the dormitory, and some of the schoolboys believed right up until the closure of the school (1802) that his footprints as deep as the ankles could constantly be seen in the dormitory floor, black as if burned into it.’ Later he got three boys, one Einar and his brother Ari, and one called Jóhann, to help him. ‘And the brothers proposed that they should say the mass in the Cathedral, saying everything backwards, since

¹ Gísli Konráðsson, *Sögubættir*, 1915–20, 174–78.

Grey vellum was buried with bishop Gottskálk Gottskálksson (sic!) under the floor of the choir, and there was no hope of its coming up outside the church. They said that they had heard that Gottskálk took it from Jón of Hvanndalir, and that his intention in having it buried with him was to ensure that it could no longer do anyone harm.' The three now took up their separate tasks; Einar stood before the altar, Loftur in the pulpit, and Jóhann and some unnamed person ready to ring the bells as soon as Loftur had got hold of the book. Loftur now began to conjure, and when about a third of the night was still to go a great surge of soil came up through the floor of the choir, then a hand wearing a ring, which held a half-open book by the spine; Loftur ran and seized the book, but Jóhann and his partner were too quick in pulling the bell-ropes, and the hand and book sank down, while Loftur kept hold of only three scraps of leaves. At this he fell down and said: 'There you rang away my soul.' People were awakened by the ringing and the matter came before Bishop Steinn (Jónsson, bishop 1711–38); he gave the boys a good talking to, but afterwards hushed it all up. After this Loftur went crazy and often said he would be dead before a year was out. 'There is also a story that he came into the kitchen when the fire was well stoked and said as if in jest that well did they stoke now, but he would be sitting at a greater fire next winter.' After this Loftur was sent to the Rev. Halldór Brynjólfsson, Rural Dean at Staðarstaður, who was thought to be a mighty man of prayer. He had a strong man watch over Loftur and go with him wherever he went. One fine day when the Dean was not at home, Loftur got his keeper to let him go rowing out to sea. He then flung himself overboard and never came up again. This was a year after he had pawned his soul in the Cathedral.

Gísli's account has a half-historical air about it. He names Loftur's contemporaries correctly. Yet the story is not a little mingled with folk-story motifs. Loftur, like the Rev. Eiríkur, obtains some leaves of the book, but they are of no use to him. He loses the book by accident, and the ghost is got rid of by bell-ringing, as in the story of Jón. But the main difference between Loftur and the older magicians is that he risks his soul—and loses.

Gísli follows his source, the Rev. Pétur, for the most part, but adds one incident. The Rev. Pétur's account, however, was probably compiled from various separate legends, because it has various inconsistencies: it places the waking of the dead in the churchyard first, then

the contract with the Devil (linked to a particular location), and finally Loftur's discovering about Grey vellum from his schoolfellows.¹ Gísli states that the Rev. Pétur heard the conjuration story at school, and the Galdra-Loftur story really is one of the best examples extant of a school-boy story. It must have developed in Hólar School by motifs from earlier stories of magicians becoming attached to this pupil on account of some actual incidents the nature of which cannot now be known for sure.

Gísli says that the story spread through the Skagafjörður district; it was 'as if it gained in power the further it spread, and various things were added to it'. This description fits precisely the version told by the Rev. Skúli Gíslason, where the folk-story reaches its culmination.² Skúli tells first, like Gísli, of Loftur's magic tricks in school, how he shod one of the servant-girls with horseshoes and rode a witch-ride on her to his home and back again over Christmas. Another time he got a girl there with child and made her walk in through a wall, carrying a tray of dishes (Jón Ólafsson tells a similar story which is probably older than the one about Loftur, see JH 113 (cf. p. 121 above); one wonders whether any scraps of Protestant propaganda from the Continent about 'wallings in' of nuns by the Spanish Inquisition were known at Hólar School!). Then come his dealings with Dean Porleifur, together with the verse; their enmity is here said to have been caused by Porleifur's criticism of Loftur, while the fiancée business is left out. (The reference to Espólín is not in the Rev. Skúli's original, but was added by Jón Árnason.)

¹ What is said here about Gráskinna corresponds to the account of Gísli by Jón sterki (ÓDav.³ II 114–18, ÓDav.⁵ II 156–59), but whether this originates with Gísli or comes from oral tradition I do not know.

² Skúli's autograph is in Lbs 534 4to, printed in JÁ I 583–86 (the stories collected by Skúli were edited separately in *Sagnakver Skúla Gíslasonar*, 1947, repr. 1984). In Maurer IV 102–03 there is a story about an unnamed school-boy at Hólar, and this presumably means Galdra-Loftur. The source is probably some unspecific remarks of the Rev. Skúli. A few of the details are different, for instance the grey hairy arm is lacking. It may be that this is due to Maurer's imprecise copying, but it could also be that Skúli left it out of his story on this occasion, and anyway it is a wandering motif which could belong everywhere and nowhere. It appears, for instance, in the story of Guðbjartur flóki and the bishop of Hólar, which comes earlier in the Rev. Skúli's manuscript (JÁ I 508–09); cf. further II 463 and Feilberg, *Ordbog* I 765, IV 240.

The main element in the Rev. Skúli's story is Loftur's attempt to get the book of magic and its consequences, and I do not think that anyone would do any good by trying improve on this account, one of the greatest masterpieces in Jón Árnason's collection. But it is clearly further away from the original than Gísli's version. The contemporaries (except Dean Þorleifur) are forgotten, and Loftur's footprints in the dormitory floor are not mentioned. Everything has become simpler and more consistent, in the manner of a developed folk-legend. There is only one assistant, who is to ring the bells. There is no fruitless labour for three nights and no contract with the Devil. The thread of the narrative is simple; Loftur knows what he is searching for. He has learned the whole of Grey vellum, and now wants to get hold of Bishop Gottskálk Nikulásson's Red vellum. It is a story-teller's instinct thus to combine similar narratives into a sequence. We may add that the prehistory of both these volumes is told by the Rev. Skúli just before the story of Galdra-Loftur in his manuscript (printed in JÁ I 514, 508 and 583).

The awakening from the dead scene is very different in the two versions. Gísli tells of three surges of soil up through the floor, and then a hand with a black-clad arm and a ring on one finger, and in the hand was the book. This is a fine and effective picture, but it is nothing compared with the Rev. Skúli's account where all bishops rise out of the floor one after another, wearing white surplices and pectoral crosses, the first, last and middle ones with crowns on their heads. Gently and gravely they warn Loftur of the danger he is about to engulf himself in, and over the whole scene the moon spreads its strange glitter. Bishop Gottskálk is not the good-natured man of God, who according to Gísli took the book of magic into his grave so that it could harm no one, but a monster of cruelty who grudges others the power and might that he had enjoyed; he stands there, jeering and grinning, and trying to provoke Loftur to go on with his blasphemy until the cathedral sinks into the ground. But this does not happen, and both versions end the same way: Loftur's companion rings the bells too soon.

The two accounts of Loftur's end are a good example of how a good story becomes a great one. Little details are added, but each individual incident is clarified and sharpened and made more interesting, and at the same time made to seem more like real life and less like a story. The contrasts are made sharper and the suspense lively.

The depiction of the magician is also very different in the two stories. With Gísli the only motive is the thirst for knowledge, powerful as an elemental force, and his Loftur is quite ruthless in his tricks, as is normal in 'eighteenth-century stories'. With Skúli, Loftur's spells also reveal recklessness and unscrupulousness, but in the conjuration episode his Loftur is more human than Gísli's; he has studied witchcraft so much that he can only use it for evil purposes, and has to commit suicide when he comes to die. Only by learning even more, like Sæmundr the Wise, could he gain power over the Devil, use the art of magic for good, and save his soul. But since the Black School no longer exists, he decides to try and get hold of Bishop Gottskálk's Red vellum. He does not seem at first to have intended to say the Mass backwards, but he gets into such difficulties that he has to take his conjurations further and further, until he has transferred God's Word to the Devil. Then in front of him stands Bishop Gottskálk, grinning. Loftur goes crazy, rushes further still into a frenzy of blasphemy, does not stop to think that at this point he needs a cool head and firm control, and in his frenzy tries to snatch the book from the dead man. But his assistant misunderstands him, and it all goes wrong.

In the Rev. Skúli's story of Galdra-Loftur it is as if a folk-legend is on the way to becoming something more sophisticated; one might perhaps call it a myth. Elsewhere one can see signs that while the Icelandic folk-stories were in oral transmission, they were handled by people who were participators in a remarkable literary and learned activity. The concepts underlying folk-belief and legend were brought together, and have acquired some kind of rational ordering. This is, of course, particularly noticeable in the case of the story of Galdra-Loftur—as one would expect, since many of its principal preservers were schoolboys and parsons. Here Christian ideology was combined with fragmented ideas from folk-stories about magicians and books of magic from days gone by, and from it emerges a coherent whole. In the story Loftur has to guess his way in his search with the help of legends about Sæmundr the Wise put side by side with legends of a later age. Doubtless the Rev. Skúli played the greatest part in raising the story of Loftur above the level of Gísli's narrative, which in any case should not be underestimated. Most of the local personal and place-names have dropped out as a result of oral transmission over distant parts of the country, and the legend itself has become more coherent

and powerful, but the Rev. Skúli has also given it a masterly form. With him everything that happens becomes visible and alive. He enjoys himself describing Loftur's violence and frenzy, but also knows how to use restraint when the narrative requires precision and care. But he does more for the story than this. The concepts that were inherent in it from the start, and have grown sharper rather than more diffuse in the hands of the schoolboys, grow even more clearly defined and more deeply etched with him, while the alteration in the hero's character gives the story at once a more human and sympathetic tone. It thus gains a more universal validity than Gísli's narrative, and the Rev. Skúli's alteration of the character of Loftur, who becomes rather more like a human being without losing anything of the wildness of his desires, contrasts with Gísli's Loftur, who is more like a blind force of nature than a human being. It is as if some gleam from the Faust story is cast over the Rev. Skúli's pages. He knows well how important the story is—it and the stories that relate to it stand at the beginning of his book of folk-stories.

The dramatist Jóhann Sigurjónsson wrote his play *Galdra-Loftur* (in Danish he called it *Ønsket*, 'the Wish') on the basis of the Rev. Skúli's version. But that takes us beyond the scope of this book, so we will not discuss that here. The play has, of course, made the Rev. Skúli's story even better known (it has been acted many times in Denmark and Iceland, and also in other countries; for instance, there have been several translations into English, including one by Jean Young and Eleanor Arkwright (1939, performed in Reading in the 1950s), and another by Benedikt Benedikz, which was performed in Durham and London in 1962). But though it is in many ways a fascinating work, there is a more perfect and transparent ideological structure in the parson's unostentatious but powerful folk-story.

IX

It was pointed out above how people of the distant past grew in stature in legends of later times, becoming gigantic in size and strength, and acquiring gifts of second sight and magical knowledge. In a similar way the golden light of legend sweeps over much else in the nation's history. Legends deal mostly with grand and memorable events, deadly plagues or Turkish pirates. The Black Death is naturally the most significant of the plagues, but it is doubtful whether folk-stories

preserve any actual memories of incidents connected with it. All that was known was that it had raged over the land, and so people linked various ideas to it, such as that a dark mist had hung in the air, or else pestiferous spirits, male and female, had gone riding across the country, or alternatively legends developed about survivors, or else stories were invented to explain place-names.¹

On the other hand there are some historical legends such as those about *Ólufarbylur* (the storm said to have raged when Ólöf the Rich, widow of Governor Björn Þorleifsson, died in 1479),² where the foundation of the story seems to have been a real event. The stories of the Turkish piracy appear to alternate between the two types: the actual misfortunes of the Icelanders were later on notoriously compensated for by the creation of glorious stories of magicians or men of great spiritual power driving the pirates away.³

There is a fair number of stories attached to churches, though I think they are less prominent than in some other countries, especially ones about the building of churches. It is often said that trolls flung rocks at them, as they usually didn't like them, especially the bell-ringing (which was thought a very powerful weapon against them), and there exist many stories of bells and the sounding of bells.⁴ The beautiful church treasure, such as chalices and vestments, quickened people's imaginations, for it seemed that it could hardly have been otherwise but that they originated in some miraculous way, coming from burial mounds or from the elves.⁵

Seen from the literary standpoint most of these church legends are very feeble, but there is among them one splendidly impressive story:

¹ *Ann. farr.* 3–4 (Icelandic translation 13–14), *Huld* V 38–39, *Huld*² II 186–87; *JÁ*² II 700 (*svartidaudi*); *JÞork.* 270.

² Jón lærði, *Tíðfordríf; Um ættir og slekti, Safn* III 718–19; *Biskupaannálar, Safn* I 58–59.

³ *Tyrkjaránið á Íslandi 1627*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson, 1906–09; Jón Þorkelsson, *Æfisaga*, 1910, I 324–25, *Lfrs.* II 313; Laxdal *Ósþ* 68–70; *JÁ*² II 695 (*ræningjar*); *Huld* II 48, *Huld*² I 119–20, *BBj.* II 111–12.

⁴ *JÁ*² II 684–85 (*kirkja, klukka*); Bishop Gísli says all sorts of things about bells ringing on their own, see *Ann. farr.* under the years 1610–12 and 1631.

⁵ *JH* 264; Arngrímur Jónsson, *Opera* I, 1950 (*BA IX*), 462, see Jakob Benediktsson's notes in Arngrímur Jónsson, *Opera* IV, 1957 (*BA XII*), 260; Einar Guðmundsson (see *ÞT HHRkr*, b5–b8; Icelandic translation in Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Álfarit séra Einars á Stað', *Blanda* VII 251–57); *JÁ*² II 665 (*álfar*).

the one about the dance at Hruni. The basis of this story is a dip in the ground at Hruni, which has been imagined in the past to be like a church floor. The story is by no means recent, as it is mentioned by Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík, complete with the verses that are essential to it. Jón states that it happened in pre-Reformation times, and it may well be that the story is that old.¹

When we come to legends about historical individuals, those are naturally best remembered that were impressive or eccentric people, those who had acquired great fame or infamy. Such people attracted to themselves legends and motifs which made them even more memorable, which were often derived from stories about less well-known people, who were then likely to be completely forgotten. Thus great series of legends gathered round the same person, such as those about Sæmundr the Wise, Hálfván of Fell and the Rev. Eiríkur of Vogsósar, or the series of anecdotes that have become linked with the name of Hallgrímur Pétursson. There is a great mass of bits of information about individual people, where the kernel may be historical, but everything has been twisted round as is the way of oral tradition, and much that is strange and supernatural has become mixed up with it. Gísli Konráðsson has put together an enormous number of such historical legends, compiled from a whole range of sources, both oral and written. He takes up individual legendary anecdotes or passages of writing and links them up with fuller narratives to make of them accounts as complete and exhaustive as the material would allow. I do not know whether anyone has investigated Gísli's sources or methods, though it would be a worthwhile project.² But one should be under no illusion that Gísli was the only person to have welded together unrelated

¹ JÁ II 6–8; Jón Ólafsson, Dictionary s.v. *duna, kast, fljóð* (see JH 114).

² A lot could be written about Gísli Konráðsson, but his literary work has been little studied and much is unpublished. He wrote a great deal based on the reports of others and sometimes compiled whole narratives in the style of the early sagas, though in many cases he based them on sources already available in print. There are often two or more autograph manuscripts of his compilations extant that vary in length, and then it is presumably generally best to choose his fullest version. All his writings ought to be studied as to their sources and evidence for folk-belief. It is difficult to track down all his printed works, but the main survey of his writings is in his *Ævisaga* (Autobiography), printed 1911–14. Some editions of his writings, for instance *Syrpa* I–II, 1979–80, are not very carefully done.

accounts and linked them together with passages from written records, since those who recorded and edited folk-legends have also sometimes done the same. In cases where sources are mixed up like this, the value of the account is diminished to the extent that it no longer mirrors oral tradition. It may happen that such blending results in a story that has greater artistic value than the fragments it was made out of had, as has probably often happened with Jón Árnason's stories, but this is not the case with all the stories that have been patched together since, and it is a pity if it turns out that one can neither trust the story nor enjoy it.

Very often it is impossible to distinguish truth from fiction in the folk-stories. Of course it can generally be assumed that when some peculiar story-motif, especially one with a supernatural element and one which also turns up all over the place, occurs in the story, it must be a later addition, though it can also happen that a false perception or a sight of something mysterious could shape itself in accordance with an account the person had heard about something else (cf. p. 275 below). In other cases it is possible to work out how far legends have departed from the original events when one knows a reasonable amount about the real life of the chief person in the story, but generally it is only possible to trace changes in the story in relation to its outline. We looked above at the legend of Galdra-Loftur in some detail, where in fact the 'elements' of the story existed long before Loftur's time, moreover already in narrative form. When they became attached to Loftur they blended into a whole, and it is then possible after a fashion to trace the development of the story. What is least clear is how these legendary motifs came to be attached to Loftur, but it must have happened at some stage between his time at Hólar School (c.1720) and when the Rev. Pétur heard the story (c.1770). The incidents in Loftur's life that gave rise to the story (that is, attracted the legendary motifs to his history) are now quite unknown, but it may be regarded as probable that he died quite soon after finishing his course at Hólar, since otherwise more would be known about his life than is the case. We may guess that he died suddenly, that he went mad, and, thirdly, that he was involved in witchcraft at Hólar. This would be sufficient to account for the story. But we must bear in mind that these guesses are not supported by any historical records, but are merely inferences derived from the folk-story itself. There are quite a number of cases

where individual incidents can be analysed to throw light on the relationship between folk-legends and historical sources.¹

X

A very large group of folk-stories deals with outlaws. In them historical events have given rise to a great deal of fiction in which there is not all that much supernatural material.²

In all countries where men become outlaws and take to robbery or theft, legends are formed about them. These often, as one might expect, deal with their cunning, shrewdness and daring. Such stories are well adapted for travelling from one country to another, and there is a considerable number of such international stories. Some of them have reached Iceland, but these have generally retained such clear signs of foreign conditions that they have ended up in the wonder-tale class, and there is really only one of them that has become so Icelandicised that it has been localised in Iceland and so become an Icelandic folk-story. This is the story of the eighteen outlaws called *Hellismenn* (AT 956B: 'The Clever Maiden at Home kills the Robbers').³

More like the outlaw stories are the stories about Norwegian brigands which occur in some Old Icelandic writings. The account in

¹ See JPork.; *Blanda*, passim; *Gráskinna* II, 52–59, *Gráskinna*² I 134–40; Margeir Jónsson, 'Merkilegt örnefni', *Skírnir* 1936, 133–50; Guðni Jónsson, 'Sannfræði íslenzkra þjóðsagna', *Skírnir* 1940, 25–57.

² On outlaw stories see EÓŠ *If* 195–96; H. Reykers, *Die isländische Ächtersage*, 1936; Spoelstra 1938; A. H. Krappe, *Études de mythologie et de folklore germaniques*, 1928, 128–35 (cf. *Skírnir* 1932, 120 n.). Nearly all the early sources are included in Spoelstra's book, though the following can supplement his material: Áradalur first appears on the Ortelius map, then in *De mirab.* ch. 14, Jón lærði's *Um Íslands aðskiljanlegar náttúrur* in *Islandica* XV, 1, Hallur, *Hornstrandakvæði* (*Lfrs.* II 300); Ódádahraun in *De mirab.* ch. 4, Jón Halldórsson *BS* I 190–93, cf. *JÁ* II 25; Árni Magnússon speaks of the outlawry of Torfi of Klofi (*Árbók hins íslenska Fornleifafélags* 1940, 78); the story of Völustakkur (cf. *JÁ* II 302) in *JH* 115, cf. *JM Píslarsaga* 145, *Píslarsaga*³ 166 (thieves' lair in Hengill). For other references to outlaws of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see *De mirab.* 73–74, Icelandic translation 122 (ch. 32); *Lfrs.* II (101), 159, 228–29, 304; Sveinn Pálsson, *Beskrivelser af íslandske Vulkaner og Bræer*, 1883, II 40 (*Den norske Turistforeningens Årbog for 1882*).

³ *JÁ* II 235–37; *Verz.* no. 956 B.

Hallfreðar saga of the Gautish brigand Qnundr seems to be very close to reality, but elsewhere evil-doers are more idealised, like Arnljótr gellini in *Ólafs saga helga* or the brigand Jökull in *Vatnsdæla saga*; it is as if they are suffused with the light of romance. The *fornaldar sögur* also tell of hut-dwellers, almost troll-like in stature—as indeed is the brigand Qnundr, but now beginning to be even bigger in accordance with the demands of romantic fiction. Icelanders enjoyed telling such stories, and clearly recognised the relationship of these men to Icelandic outlaws. There is no reason, however, to exaggerate the influence of all this on Icelandic outlaw legends; it is just that the living conditions were somewhat similar and the tendencies of the stories very like.

During the period of Icelandic independence there was always a number of condemned men living up in the mountains, or now and again in hiding with farmers who sympathised with them. Sometimes they joined together in bands, sometimes they stayed on their own. Stories about them were quite popular, especially those of outlawed heroes like Gísli Súrsson, Grettir the Strong or Hqrðr Grímkelsson. For a fairly long time they seem to have been realistic and not much different from other sagas, except that outlawry made conditions of life rather special. It is really only *Grettis saga* that has conspicuous elements of exaggeration and the supernatural in it.

These *skógarmenn*, ‘forest men’ (an expression derived from earlier times in forested countries like Norway), from time to time wandered about the same parts of the country as the outlaws of later on; both were banished from human habitations and their lives were always insecure. There are therefore considerable similarities between the ancient stories and the more factual legends of later on, but this similarity is thanks to reality and not to art. The ancient sagas have few of the fictional motifs which characterise later outlaw stories, and those that do occur are mostly in *Grettis saga*. I am not here talking about Grettir’s size and cleverness and other commonplace characteristics, but the account of Þórisdalr in ch. 61 is clearly related to later outlaw stories. Grettir went until he found a valley in the glacier [Geitlandsjökull], long and rather narrow, and enclosed by ice on all sides so that it overhung the valley. He got down in a certain place. He saw then fair slopes grown with grass and brushwood. There were hot springs there and he thought it must be because of the subterranean heat that the ice did not close in over the valley. A small river flowed along the valley with smooth gravel banks on both sides. There was not much sun there, but it seemed to him beyond counting how many sheep

there were there in the valley. These animals were much better and fatter than he had seen the like of before. Grettir now fixed himself up there and made himself a hut with the wood he found there. He used the sheep for food. One sheep provided more meat than two elsewhere. There was a fawn-coloured, hornless ewe with a lamb, which he thought most exceptional because of its size. He was very interested in catching the lamb, and he did this and then slaughtered the lamb. There was half a hundredweight of suet in the lamb and it was better than anything. But when Mókolla found her lamb gone, she went up onto Grettir's hut every night and bleated so that he could not sleep at all at night. Because of her distress he felt the greatest regret for having slaughtered the lamb. Every evening when it was half dark he heard calls up in the valley and then all the animals ran to the same place to sleep every evening. According to Grettir the valley belonged to a giant, half man, whose name was Þórir, and Grettir stayed there under his protection. Grettir named the valley after him and called it Þórisdalr. He said Þórir had daughters, and they provided Grettir with entertainment, and they were glad of this, for there was not much company there. And during the fasts Grettir made this observance that suet and liver should be eaten during Lent. Nothing noteworthy happened during the winter. Then Grettir found it was so dull there that he could stay no longer. He then went away from the valley and walked south straight across off the glacier and arrived on the north side of the middle of Skjaldbreiðr. He raised a slab of rock up and knocked a hole in it and said if you put your eye to the hole in the slab, that then you could see the gully that comes down from Þórisdalr.¹

Here we have the valley in the glacier with grassy slopes and a river running down the middle; here are great numbers of sheep, all bigger and fatter than those in inhabited parts. It may not be significant that the ewe is brownish like the sheep in the later outlaw verse (JÁ II 276):

Mórauður með mikinn lagð. Russet with a mighty fleece.

Here also is the valley-dweller with his daughters, with whom Grettir got on well. All this is just like what we find in later legends (we may note that it looks as if motifs have been included from more than one source; on the one hand we have the valley with sheep which Grettir finds boring, on the other Þórir and his daughters).

Nothing else in the ancient sagas has as close a resemblance to later outlaw stories as this part of *Grettis saga*. In ch. 57 there is also Hallmundr, and in *Bárðar saga* Bárðr Snæfellsáss, both mountain-dwellers with an air of the guardian spirit about them, though they are not troll-like; many who read these sagas will find the concepts of

¹ *Grettis saga*, tr. A. Faulkes, *Three Icelandic Outlaw Sagas*, 2001, 207–08.

these beings in them rather loose and nebulous, sometimes resembling what is said of outlaws in later legends, while sometimes other associations of ideas may predominate. One motif appears unchanged in the later outlaw stories: Bárðr creates a fog so that Tungu-Oddr gets lost in the lava-field at Drangar, and is separated from his men and does not know where he is until he meets the mountain-dweller.

It is thus not until after the loss of independence that fictitious motifs begin to appear in outlaw legends and shortly before that the word *útilegumaðr* turns up. *Útilega*, 'lying-out', *leggjast út*, 'to go into lying-out', *liggja úti*, 'to lie out', are common Icelandic expressions used in connection with all kinds of viking expeditions or living in the open on land, but the word *útilegumaðr* first appears in *Laxdæla saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Sturlunga saga* (which also has *útileguþjófr*, 'thief who hangs out in uninhabited places') and appears to have originated in thirteenth-century Icelandic. With the introduction of the authority of the Norwegian king all these terms changed their meaning somewhat. Previously *skóggangr*, 'going to the forest', referred to banishment as a penalty; now men took to the wastelands to avoid punishment. The execution of the law had before been arbitrary, condemned men found various refuges or stayed secretly in distant parts of the country, but now this was less easy except in the very remotest places, and then only for the briefest periods, for the whole land was under uniform control.

The early sagas have some examples of condemned men and others joining together in outlaw bands, like the Hólmverjar, the Hellismenn and the Kroppsmenn.¹ As one might expect, such stories also exist from later on, but though circumstances were bound to be similar (they are robbers in the same land), the details are different, except that there is a tendency to think of the robbers as eighteen in number. The earliest of the later legends is the one that turns up in *Gottskálksannáll* under the year 1454, obviously by guesswork (the date is a century before the time of the annalist), and reads 'Eighteen thieves seized at

¹ In *Vatnsdæla saga* ch. 41 we hear of outlaws close to a farming area in Vatnsdalr—or at least the story implies this. Until now it has been thought that the reference was to the Hellismenn (since there is a cave, *hellir*, referred to); thus Spoelstra 1938, 45–61. I forgot to mention it in my edition (*ÍF* VIII), but it seems to me that the author of the saga must mean a quite different band of robbers, though I do not wish to comment on the historicity of his account.

Staðaröxl and hanged on the gallows in the courtyard at Reynisnesstaðr. The farmers banded together and vowed to find them. They were found in Þjófagil. They had been stealing women and girls and other valuables including gear and weapons and taking them to their cave; but a shepherd from Staðr got into the cave while they were asleep, took away their weapons and told where they were. One of them was allowed to live; he was eighteen years old and the others had forced him to steal. They were buried under a cairn nearby. All they had, they had stolen.' Björn of Skarðsá includes this story in his annals about a hundred years later with a few changes that may be a sign of oral tradition in Skagafjörður.¹

Here we have some particular motifs that recur in later legends. With the outlaws is an innocent local inhabitant who had been frightened into joining them;² they carry off women³ and are betrayed (here their weapons are taken away, in other versions their clothes are half turned inside out).

The story next turns up in the mid-eighteenth century, in Jón Ólafsson of Grunnavík's writings. He tells of a band of robbers in the mountain Hengill (a century earlier the Rev. Jón Magnússon had called Hengill 'a den of thieves'). Jón Ólafsson's version has the expression 'Defend yourself, Völustakkur'; this is well known from the more modern story of the Hellismenn, referred to in an eighteenth-century geographical treatise and most fully recorded in the nineteenth century, when the story of the outlaws in Þjófahellir in Mýrdalur was also put into writing.⁴

From what has been said it may be inferred that in the late thirteenth century various heterogeneous ideas were associated with the mountains and mountain-dwellers, but during the first centuries of royal power in Iceland those concepts that were least linked with other creatures of Icelandic folk-belief began to drop out, and the modern outlaw stories gradually took shape. Their basis was historical fact. It

¹ *Íslandske annaler indtil 1578*, 371; *Annálar 1400–1800* I 63.

² Laxdal *ÓsP* 220–29, JÁ² I 695 (*sakleysi*).

³ Laxdal *ÓsP*, 220–29, JÁ² I 689 (*mannahvörf*).

⁴ JÁ II 104, 300. *Hellismannasaga*, which was printed in both Winnipeg and Ísafjörður in 1889 (reprinted in GJ *Íslendinga sögur* II 399–466), was compiled by Gísli Konráðsson and based on *Landnámabók* and other sources, with the folk-story also taken into account; see Jón Samsonarson, 'Byltinga-sinnað skáld í þjóðfræðaham', *Gripla* X, 1998, 167–96.

was widely known that men frequently took to the wastelands, at least in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the links with real events were bound to keep in check the tendency to exaggerate. Thus for instance outlaws never turn into pure trolls, though they do tend to be somewhat large of build (this same balance between realism and exaggeration can already be seen in the references to *blendingar*, 'half men, half giants' in *Grettis saga*). But, as normally happens in 'historical folk-stories', real events take on a rosy glow or halo in legend; by the time they reach remote parts of the country, legends about real events have become exaggerated, and ancient fictional motifs get attached to them, such as those of the secret valley and all that goes with it. There is a temptation to increase the size of the valley and turn it into a colony, since it was also known that outlaws sometimes formed bands, and the hidden people were a whole nation.

Also, in some cases a distinction is made between two kinds of inhabitant in an outlaws' valley, good ones and evil ones. Thus Jón lærði says in *Áradalsóður* that one person was lucky enough to get into the valley without encountering *verri dalsins lýðir*, 'the worser inhabitants of the valley'.

We have touched above on most of the earlier sources for outlaws, and dealt in general with accounts of them. Now that Ólafur Briem's work has appeared,¹ it seems unnecessary to go into them in any more detail, so we will instead look rather more closely at the characteristics of the legends themselves.

First there is the historical situation, the fact that people did go into outlawry, either of their own volition or because they were made outlaws. It may be presumed that under such circumstances they would often have received secret help from someone in their home district, especially where farms were few and far between or when they were able to establish themselves in places that were hard to find and easy to defend. Yet if they were on their own, even if they had some help from people down in the settled districts, their lives must have been sad ones.

Groups of outlaws who formed themselves into bands are already heard of from the earliest times in Iceland. These were more difficult to control, for they would always have got hold of weapons, and they could take turns on guard and find quarters in inaccessible places, like the Hólmverjar of *Harðar saga*.

¹ Ólafur Briem, *Útilegumenn og auðar tóttir*, 2nd edn., 1983.

We need not doubt that bodily vigour and physical courage were in high esteem with such men, and that few of them were very polished in their behaviour.

Then there is the dream-quality which enters these legends. This also clearly appears in stories of Norwegian outlaws, for example the accounts of Arnljótr gellini in the Kings' Sagas. Enough has already been said on this topic above. Among Icelanders the cult of bodily vigour is very strong, as in the case of Grettir, but in *Grettis saga* we also have the outlaw's dream of the fertile valley rich in sheep up in the mountains which inhabitants of settled districts seldom or never visited. Secondly there are stories of men who avoided ordinary people of their own choice, like Bárðr Snæfellsáss with his cave in the Snæfell glacier. This hermit can be a helper of men he likes, can assist them in danger at sea and so on, and from time to time he may meet other spirits. He can also cover his dwelling-place with a mist. In this way offshoots from the ancient belief in guardian spirits could grow into the outlaw legends. Even so, the outlaw legends of later times may be described as realistic by nature, and I cannot see that one can deny that in most ways they are an entirely Icelandic phenomenon.

Magicians could create a fog in Old Norse stories, and it is therefore quite natural that some outlaws have the same ability. Sometimes the legends refer to a *hulda* (a state of invisibility) being laid on the outlaws' valleys, and there is no reason to think that this is the result of any non-Icelandic influence, such as is often found in other kinds of Icelandic oral story.

There is a combination of belief in guardian spirits and outlaw stories in *Bárðar saga*. Jón lærði looked for support for his outlaw stories in the ancient literature; naturally he thought *Bárðar saga* was an important source, as well as *Grettis saga*. One thing is curious: he takes Ávaldi in *Áradalsóður* up into the wastelands, even though neither *Hallfreðar saga* nor *Vatnsdæla saga* gives him any occasion to do so. But the name *Skegg-Ávaldi* occurs in both (and also *Skeggjavaldi*; cf. the name *Skuggavaldi* in Matthías Jochumsson's play *Skugga-Sveinn*, Act II, Scene 4). In *Áradalsóður*, *Skegg-Ávaldi* is addressed as a guardian spirit or a god, and thus Jón lærði tries to link outlaw stories with Old Icelandic texts.

Outlaw stories continue, however, to be firmly down-to-earth. Thus the *hulda* or mist which appears in some outlaw legends may be connected with normal mountain mist, though I will not deny that some-

times the Irish magic mist (*ceó druidechta*) may be meant, but I can see no special reason for so thinking. Of course one can discern a few influences from various quarters, such as the division of the valley between good and bad outlaws (this preferably by means of a brook running down the middle, a natural enough thing, as a brook runs along the bottom of most valleys in Iceland). Further, the grazing-land would perhaps change quality between different parts of the valley; one can point to real valleys in Iceland which run from east to west, so that the sun shines on the northern slopes and the southern slopes enjoy little sunshine and the growth of the grass is affected (though it is possible that there is influence from hagiographical legends in which one side of a land was green and fair and the other covered with ice or fire, but it is not necessary to invoke such an explanation). And even though magic may stray into these stories, their roots are generally firmly fixed in reality.

Different layers of material can be seen in stories of magicians, but, once the Old Icelandic literature has been taken into account, this can hardly be said of the outlaw legends. We should note, however, that very few really complete stories survive in writing from before Jón Árnason's time (though it is not all that certain that the passage of time has brought about any great changes in them anyway). The writings of Jón lærði, including *Um hulin pláss*,¹ will of course have influenced their own times. In the eighteenth century, however, the outlaw pair Fjalla-Eyvindur and his doxy Halla were well-known historical characters. It is not unlikely that men's knowledge of their existence in the wastelands will have strengthened the belief in outlaws, for it continued fairly unabated into the early part of the nineteenth century, but, as the wastelands were steadily explored in an orderly way by geographers, this belief eventually faded out entirely.

As we remarked earlier, supernatural matter is not very prominent in outlaw stories, though they are not devoid of it. What then is their principal subject-matter? Surely it is the actual outlawry of real people and the effect outlawry had upon them. The causes could be quite

¹ Printed in BE *Munnmælasögur* 24–36, see also xciii–xcvi. On the authorship see EGP *Rit* 42–52. Though it may have been Jón Eggertsson who compiled this work, rather than Jón lærði, it is still a good source for beliefs about outlaws in the seventeenth century, but since it existed only in a single copy in Stockholm, it may not have had much influence in Iceland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

diverse. Sometimes men went into outlawry because they had stolen, for Icelandic rural society of the times came down severely on thieves; sometimes people fled from human society for the sake of unlawful love (for example sexual love between brother and sister). The Rev. Jón Halldórsson of Hítardalur, Rural Dean of Mýrar (1665–1736), remarks in this connection that Bishop Oddur Einarsson (of Skálholt, 1589–1630) met a brother and sister in the wasteland Ódáðahraun, who had fled from the inhabited lands because of their love of one another, and Jón Árnason comments on this: ‘Those who have not wished to believe in any stories of outlaws have nonetheless believed this story in Jón Halldórsson’s *Biskupa sögur*, and it proves the old saying, I would believe so and so if Njáll said it.’¹ He considers that this account of a sober and truthful historian and men’s certainty over the outlawry of Eyvindur and Halla were the factors which most strengthened belief in outlaws.²

Besides theft and illicit love, love affairs of a non-incestuous kind appear quite frequently among the causes of outlawry in stories, and are indeed sometimes the kernel of such legends. Sometimes we are told that outlaws kidnapped a girl from an inhabited area, and this could lead to a complex series of events.

It is of course far from being the case that theft is the only cause of outlawry in stories. Other breaches of the law can also be involved. In the life and works of Jón lærði we can see how his misfortunes resulting from accusations of magical practices and heresy caused this much-harried man to create in his imagination a kind of beautiful wish-dream of a refuge in the mountains, which cannot be better described than by the refrain he made for *Áradalsóður*:

<i>Væri eg einn sauðurinn í hlíðum</i>	Were I a sheep upon the hill
<i>skyldi eg renna í Áradal,</i>	to Áradal I’d swiftly go,
<i>forða hríðum,</i>	save me from the snowfall,
<i>forða mér við hríðum.</i> ³	save me from the snow.

¹ Jón Halldórsson *BS* I 190–93; *JÁ* II 251–54.

² As is well known, the playwright Jóhann Sigurjónsson wrote a play on the couple (*Bjerg-Eyvind og hans hustru*, 1911) which has been widely performed.

³ There is not more poetry relating to Icelandic outlaws than one would expect. There is a certain amount in *Grettis saga*; then there is Jón lærði’s *Áradalsóður*. The poems in *Útilegumannakvæði* (JÞork. 108–115), and *Ferðamannsóður*. *Fjallabúasaga*, 1905 are probably younger. Other odd bits of verse turn up now and then in various outlaw stories.

PART IV
ICELANDIC WONDER-TALES

I

The word *ævintýr(i)* is derived from the Old French *aventure* (Latin *adventura*), which means ‘event’, especially a strange or romantic one, or a story of such an event. It seems to have come to Iceland in the late thirteenth century via Norway, and when used of narratives in Old Icelandic it is primarily of fairly short stories, more often fictional than true, generally foreign rather than Icelandic. The subject-matter may be either realistic or supernatural, but it tends more towards fantasy than everyday folk-belief.

This meaning lasted down to Jón Árnason’s time, when a word was needed to translate Maurer’s term *Märchen*. ‘Old wives’ tales’ or ‘old mens’ and old womens’ tales’ were thought too cumbersome, and Jón eventually decided to follow Jón Sigurðsson’s example,¹ and chose the word *ævintýri* as being close to the Danish and Norwegian term *Eventyr*, though he felt obliged to write a footnote at the beginning of the relevant section to defend his choice. He and Magnús Grímsson had used *ævintýri* earlier as a general term for ‘folk-story’ or ‘folk-legend’, though Jón Árnason usually called these *alþýðusögur* ‘stories of the common people’. It is presumed that Jón Sigurðsson and Guðbrandur Vigfússon were the actual coiners of the term *þjóðsaga* as a literal translation of the German word *Volkssage*.²

Since then the term has been used for the specific class of story which we tried to define earlier in this book (pp. 21–22 above), without, however, losing its older meaning, which has of course a perfect right to continue. The reader can hardly have failed to understand what is meant by the English term *wonder-tale*, and will also notice that when we have referred above to ‘archaic wonder-tales’ we mean ancient stories that resemble in character one of our modern wonder-

¹ See *Ný félagsrit* XX, 1860, 190–200, especially 193.

² Jón Sigurðsson, in his review of Maurer *IV* (*Ný Félagsrit* XX, 1860, 193–94), usually uses the term *alþýðusaga*, but also sometimes *þjóðsaga*.

tales, but which have not yet lost their connection with ancient beliefs and therefore are identical with what are normally called 'myths'.

To begin with we shall consider only the pure wonder-tale, not literary fantasies, saints' legends or humorous stories, which we will examine later.

II

In the late twelfth century the monk Oddr Snorrason at the abbey at Þingeyrar wrote a life of King Óláfr Tryggvason, and spoke in its preface of 'stepmother stories told by shepherd boys; no one knows whether they are true, and they always make the king the least important person in their narrative'. It was about the same time that his abbot, Karl Jónsson, compared King Sverrir's flight through the wilds to 'what we are told in ancient stories happened when royal children had spells put on them by stepmothers'. Even though this may be based on King Sverrir's own words, as we have remarked earlier (p. 79 above), the Icelandic abbot must have known such stories well.

Here we have reached a particular stage in the history of Icelandic wonder-tales. From now on sources become quite copious, but before this time they are not easily identifiable, especially since there is not much else to go on but verse, particularly heroic and mythological poems, the narratives of Snorri Sturluson and other scholarly writers that are based on now lost poems, and finally those of their stories that are related to early poems whether preserved or not, but whose content can fairly certainly be assumed to be ancient. But in this as in other things, it is best to pay more regard to what was certainly old than to what can only be assumed to have been so.

Many Old Norse heroic stories have also been preserved in variously altered forms among other Germanic peoples. The problem of the interrelationships of these versions is a highly complex one, and there is much disagreement about them. In general, however, the Eddic poems seem to have preserved more primitive forms of the legends than the continental sources, and we need therefore be less concerned with whatever wonder-tales may have got mixed up with those versions.

The story of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, who wakes the valkyrie Sigrdrífa from her sleep, has long been compared to the story of the Sleeping Beauty (AT 410), but is it easy to be so sure that the old idea was not right, that motifs from the Sigrdrífa legend were the basis of this rather late and not very widely diffused wonder-tale? Sigurðr kills the dragon

Fáfnir, rather as the heroes of wonder-tales do, but so also do the gods and heroes of antiquity. *Þrymskviða* is similar to an Estonian wonder-tale,¹ Þórr's journey to Útgardaloki resembles a Celtic hero legend, and though few will doubt the relationship between these stories, there is considerable uncertainty over which are the earlier.² There is an obvious connection between Snorri's account of the quern Grotti (and *Grottasongr*) and the wish-quern of the rhyme 'Grind me neither malt nor salt',³ but all the evidence suggests that the Grotti myth is the main foundation of the wonder-tale; and the myth itself might easily descend from some story told in ancient times by some worshipper of Nerthus (cf. Tacitus), where Grotti might have been a kind of hypostasis or symbolic realisation of a new invention, the grinding mill. Such a hypothesis suits excellently the mythical brightness of this gold-producing quern. The viking Mýsingr who steals the mill is probably an extension of the story dating from the time after the close of the Golden Age of peace and prosperity. Later still we find versions of the story influenced by Christian ideology (AT 565).

On the other hand, one of the sources used by the poet of *Völundarkviða* appears to have been a wonder-tale, probably of oriental origin: his story of the maidens who flew from the south in the form of swans and married Völundr and his brothers, but later flew off and left them. A similar wonder-tale is found in many countries (AT 400 'The man in search of his lost wife'). In India the ancient legends of Purū-ravas and Urvasī are clearly related to this, but these were divine or semi-divine beings, linked to some cult. In the Middle Ages we find kindred stories from the Muslim world (Hassan of Basra, Asem and the Queen of the Djinns in *The Thousand and One Nights*) that are very like the wonder-tales of later times. Maybe such a story, at some stage of its evolution, reached the ears of the poet of *Völundarkviða*. In Scandinavia such stories have been explained as originating in belief in valkyries or in Celtic legends of swan-maidens.⁴ Yet this strange, beautiful story would hardly have survived long in the North in Chris-

¹ See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Íslenzkar bókmennir í fornöld*, 1962, 283 and references.

² See Helgi Guðmundsson, *Um haf innan*, 1997, 136, 324–25.

³ See Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *Íslenzkar bókmennir í fornöld*, 1962, 447–53.

⁴ Cf. H. Holmström, *Studier över Svanjungfrumotivet i Volundarkviða och annorstädes*, 1919.

tian times if it had not become separated from folk-belief and transformed into a pure wonder-tale.

Some isolated motifs appear both in Old Norse heroic stories and in wonder-tales of later times. It is clear from *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* that Helgi was odd and backward in his youth, and had some of the characteristics of the 'coalbiter' or Cinderella-type hero. There are traces of this motif in other heroic stories, and it is also found in Sagas of Icelanders from the beginning, but such parallels are of course capable of various interpretations.¹

The ancient myths contain a large number of wonder-tale motifs. Heimdallr can hear grass grow on the ground and wool grow on sheep, Freyja weeps golden tears, Iðunn guards apples of eternal youth, and the ship Skíðblaðnir can be made as big or as small as one wants. Some are international motifs, and some are commonplaces of myth or heroic legend in other languages, such as Greek, or else have similarities to what is found in those without the story-line itself being very like.

There is one passage in Snorri which it is tempting to trace back to a wonder-tale.² He says of Freyja that her husband Óðr went far away leaving her weeping behind, and her tears were of red gold. Freyja has many names, and the reason is that she called herself by various of them as she travelled among strange peoples searching for Óðr (*Gylfaginning* ch. 35). It is an attractive idea that here we may have a version of the story Apuleius tells of Psyche searching for her lost husband Eros (AT 425, 'The search for the Lost Husband'), but I am inclined to believe that the story of Freyja belongs to a time before Psyche, and is a separate development of a myth of a goddess seeking her dead lover (as, for example, Isis).³

¹ See *Egils saga* ch. 25; Dehmer 1927, 6–16.

² Cf. F. von der Leyen, *Das Märchen in der Göttersagen der Edda*, 1899, 8–11 (the main study of this topic).

³ Cf. G. Schütte, 'En gammel kulturvej fra Lilleasien til Skandinavien', *Danske Studier*, 1922, 50; Freyja's by-name Sýr has been connected with *dea Syria*, her cats with Cybele's lion (G. Neckel, *Die Überlieferungen vom Gotte Balder*, 1920, 50–51). Isis was not completely unknown in the North, see Carl J. S. Marstrander, 'Om runene og runenavnenes oprindelse', *Norsk tidsskrift for sprogvidenskap* I, 1928, 161–63; Carl J. S. Marstrander, 'Isis chez les Germains du Nord', *Norsk tidsskrift for sprogvidenskap* III, 1929, 236–38.

III

The ground is much firmer when we come to *Grógaldr* and *Fjolsvinns-mál*, though even with them appearances are deceptive. These poems can scarcely be later than from the time of Oddr Snorrason and Abbot Karl, that is the late twelfth century. Their content is the same story. *Grógaldr* tells how a son comes to the grave of his mother Gróa as she had told him to do (presumably if he got into difficulties). He tells her that his stepmother has laid a spell on him forcing him to go and find Menglǫð, though this is not humanly possible, and he asks Gróa to chant spells to help him on his way. She does so and bids him farewell. Everything suggests that this is going to be a long and dangerous journey. In *Fjolsvinns-mál* it is apparent that the young man has reached Menglǫð's castle and is talking with the gate-keeper. First he will not reveal his name and says he is called Windcold, the son of Springcold. Then he asks the gate-keeper endless questions, first, who rules over the city? He also wants to know the details of the lattice that sticks to whoever wants to open it, the dogs that guard the gate, the one by day and the other by night, whether there is any way to quieten them and get in . . . all this stretches into a long dialogue, but all ways appear closed to Svipdagr. In the course of the conversation the tree Míma-meidr, the cockerel 'with a doubtful name' and several other things are mentioned; there is also mention of a hall surrounded by a flickering flame that quivers on the point of a spike, the Healing Rock which heals every woman who can climb it, and the nine maidens who sit at Menglǫð's knees. Does Menglǫð love any man? 'No man but Svipdagr for whom she was destined,' answers the gate-keeper. 'I am Svipdagr,' says the man at the gate. 'Open the gate!' Now the dogs are friendly, and the house opens of its own accord. He enters and tells Menglǫð his name and descent and she receives him with words of welcome.

The story is dressed up in the style of ancient Norse mythological poems, from which lines or half-lines are borrowed. There are large numbers of names of things and persons, and there appear here and there details from early Scandinavian myth. These were the first things scholars noticed; of course they were eager to find them. But as time went on, it became clearer that these poems did not contain genuine Norse mythology. The subject-matter was a magical spell, *álog*, uttered by a stepmother, reminding one of folk-stories. There was a difficult journey to a faraway princess, and a happy ending. Was not the story

then a simple creation of free fantasy? But that was also an unwarranted assumption. Comparison of the poems with various similar sources shows that there is considerable traditional material in them, not only motifs, but sometimes also expressions associated with the motifs.

There were important studies of these poems made about the middle of the nineteenth century. Svend Grundtvig and Sophus Bugge demonstrated significant similarities between them and various medieval texts such as Danish and Swedish ballads, the Icelandic *Hjálmþérs saga* and the Welsh story of *Culhwch and Olwen*. Later Hjalmar Falk drew attention to some Icelandic folk-stories, most of them written down about 1700 and later.¹

Everything pointed to the fact that much of the traditional matter of the poems was of Celtic origin, but blended with Norse material. More recently the present writer wrote an essay about all this, where he maintained that the ballads were derived from the two Eddic poems but that these originated in Celtic stories, and tried to show that their chief Celtic source was the Irish *Adventures of Art and the Courtship of Delbchaem* (in a manuscript of the fifteenth century). All this is discussed in his book *Löng er för*, 1975 (*Studia Islandica* 34), which also is provided with a bibliography.

The Icelandic source that has most similarity with the poems *Grógaldr* and *Fjölsvinnsmál* is *Hjálmþérs saga*. This was probably written about 1300, but is preserved in somewhat later versions, one in prose, the other in verse (*rímur*). Between this source and those mentioned above there is undoubtedly a relationship, but in *Hjálmþérs saga* the material is blended with other motifs, especially as we get further into the saga. But most of the motifs are genuine wonder-tale motifs, and the style is also largely that of the wonder-tale too.

As for the Icelandic wonder-tales that are related to these stories and poems, they are more variable and show influences from elsewhere, but their subject-matter is often interesting, and so is their general style.

¹ S. Grundtvig, *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, 1853–90, I 239, II 239, 648, 655, III 806, IV 742, 785; S. Bugge, *Forbindelsen mellem Grógaldr og Fjölsvinnsmál oplyst ved Sammenligning med den dansk-svenske Folkeviser om Sveidal*, 1861; Hj. Falk, 'Om Svipdagsmál', *AfnF* IX (1893), 311–62 and X (1894), 26–82.

Hjálmþérs saga resembles *Culhwch and Olwen* more closely than the story of *Svipdagr* does; for example, the suitor is given tests to pass.¹ The next time we meet this wonder-tale in written form is around 1700, in *Himinbjargar saga*, where there are numerous changes in the storyline, and in the nineteenth century it is found in a whole host of wonder-tales (*Verz.* no. 556 I–VII). Some of its motifs are also found in *Ála-Flekks saga* (written around 1400), and a board-game with a message on it is one of the principal motifs of *Vilhjálmss saga sjóðs*. Thus the Celtic stories had obviously penetrated Iceland to some extent by the fifteenth century.

A different kind of spell appears in *Hjálmþérs saga*. A man is turned (by his stepmother or some other person) into a monster (a troll or some animal), and this is of course much commoner than the other kind; it turns up in almost every other Icelandic wonder-tale. The *álög*, a spell that compels someone to do something, seems a peculiarly Celtic motif to me (Irish *geis*), but the transformation spell was known everywhere and could have come to Iceland from anywhere. Transformation spells are not always, of course, linked with the stepmother motif (any more than the *álög* type of spell), but the two often go together and have been exceptionally popular in Iceland. I have already mentioned evidence that the stepmother motif was common knowledge there by 1200, though Icelandic sources do not actually tell the story in full until c.1300. Its essential feature is that the stepmother is a troll who has taken on human shape; for the rest the variants are two, which we may designate A and B.

The A-variant is by far the commoner and fuller. A king and queen have one (or more) children. The queen falls ill and dies; she is placed in a mound, and the king sits constantly by it grieving. His counsellor advises him to marry again, so as to gain release from his grief. The king sends him away to find him a bride, and he sails off, only to run into a fog and lose his way at sea. At last he reaches an island where he encounters a woman who appears to be very beautiful, and whom he courts on his king's behalf. She agrees to marry the king, and goes with the counsellor; this time the journey is without incident, and the king marries her straight away.

¹ In *Eyrbyggja saga* ch. 28 Styr says that he was following the example of men of old in making the berserk Halli perform tasks to win the hand of his daughter. This can hardly mean anything other than wonder-tales.

The narrative is generally full of formulaic phrases, as we shall see later (Section VIII below), though some things may be omitted in individual versions; the basic form of the story is usually as I have summarised it. The B-variant is much less coherent. There it is said that while the king is grieving most deeply for his queen, a woman appears who changes his mood at once, so that he marries her in gratitude. This variant is, however, much less clearly formed and more variable, the account in *Himinbjargar saga* being the strangest, with the stepmother coming down on a cloud (and in this case she does not turn out to be a troll, though great mystery remains about her).

In both variants the story then continues with the stepchild refusing to do anything, showing no respect to the stepmother and so on, until the spell is laid on it.

The stepmother motif is known the world over: the stepmother is cruel to her stepchildren, she is sometimes a witch and casts spells on them (changes them into animals and so on). Both in Icelandic stories and in those from other countries she often has a daughter of her own. It is a short step from being a witch to being an ogress; this is a very frequent variation in Icelandic stories, and may have been invented in Iceland. But at this stage the Celtic stories come in with their peculiar motifs and characteristic style of narrative, and when this permeates the Norse stories they gain new life and popularity. Some story-teller invented the A-variant, and it swept over the country very quickly and was then included in half the wonder-tales that came to Iceland from abroad. I do not know of this variation anywhere except in Iceland, and all the signs are that it was invented here. The parallels that have been found in Norwegian ballads,¹ which lack one major item, the counsellor's journey, are likely to be degenerate offspring of Icelandic *fornaldar sögur*.²

Some curious stories have come to Iceland from Celtic sources besides that of *Svipdagr*, stories which never turned so obviously into wonder-tales.³ Icelandic wonder-tales of the nineteenth century have

¹ See Knut Liestøl, *Norske trollvisor og norrøne sogor*, 1915, 202–08.

² Things are expressed a little more clearly here than in *Verz.* xxvii–xxxiii; cf. H. Reykers, *Die isländische Ächtersage*, 1936, 1–3, where what was said in *Verz.* has been misunderstood.

³ Cf. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Keltnesk áhrif á íslenzkar ýkjusögur', *Skírnir* 1932, 100–23; Einar Ól. Sveinsson, 'Celtic elements in Icelandic Tradition', *Béaloideas* 1957 (1959), 3–24.

not been compared with those of neighbouring countries, so we cannot be sure where analogues are most likely to be found. The story of Red Bull has a parallel in Irish, which is perhaps closer than any other. The story of Wake-Well and his Brothers may with more certainty be regarded as of Celtic origin; if so, it probably reached Iceland early on.¹ Stories of people with special abilities are known all over the world (such as those classified in AT 513 'Six go through whole world'), and must have been very popular among the British and Irish; the latter have many stories of heroes who had various half-supernatural skills (*cless*). The skills of Wake-Well and his brothers must have seemed somewhat strange to Icelanders, for the story did not become a story linked with folk-belief but a wonder-tale.

Even though the Icelanders in early times travelled widely (and this must never be forgotten), their contacts with Norway were by far the closest of their cultural ties, and we may assume that Norway was the source of most of the international stories that reached them in the older period. The wonder-tales that came from Norway and had existed there for a while had been adapted to some degree to Norwegian narrative patterns, and when they reached Iceland, it was to be expected that they would be influenced by the popular stepmother-and-spell stories, which did not help to bring them closer to folk-belief. Those that had been only a short time in Norway, or came to Iceland directly from more distant countries, would have been so strange that they would be 'wonder-tales' from the start, that is, imaginative and entertaining fictions. How the one may have influenced the other cannot now be demonstrated in any detail. There is a story in the fourteenth-century *Hálfs saga* of a merman, which could have become a wonder-tale, but became instead a legend linked to folk-belief. *Egils saga ok Ásmundar*, a story from the same period, tells of a giant whom Egill blinds on the pretext of making him rich. This is the Polyphemus motif of the Odyssey (Book IX), but in a form very like what is current in Norway (Lagerholm *DL* xxxi–xli). In the same saga there are princesses stolen, one by a griffin, the other by a vulture, which were, however, really trolls. This has been thought to have most affinity with Norwegian wonder-tales, especially versions of AT 301 'The Three Stolen Princesses'.

¹ Cf. Heinz Dehmer, 'Die Grendelkämpfe Beowulfs im Lichte moderner Märchenforschung', *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 1928, 212–18.

Vilmundar saga víðutan seems to contain the first appearance of Cinderella in Iceland, and *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* that of the princess with the golden hair; this story is told in a very poetic and romantic manner.¹ *Sigrarðs saga frækna* is a stepmother story in which a life-egg also appears; it is clearly based on stories which had been around in Iceland for a long time. There is generally no doubt that there are numerous wonder-tales embedded in sagas like these, which were all composed in Iceland in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries, and from then on there was no danger of their being transformed and accepted into folk-belief.²

IV

Anyone who looks at Icelandic wonder-tales in folk-story collections of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries may well want to know how long these stories have been in Iceland. Just in case, therefore, I shall give some account of my views on this question. Icelandic wonder-tales appear to vary very considerably in age, some seem to have arrived only in the recent past, while others are of the remotest antiquity. It is as well to make the following points clear so as to account for this variation.

The most reliable evidence of age is literature of earlier centuries; this can determine whether this or that story existed at such and such a time. One must naturally exercise great care and precision in such investigations, both in observing the precautions mentioned earlier in this book and also in remembering that authors of written stories altered wonder-tale material to suit their own tastes and purposes.

We have assumed that written stories succeeded oral ones, but it also happens that written stories translated from foreign sources, or even Icelandic romances, later get into oral tradition. Examples are *Clári saga*, *Hermóðs saga ok Háðvarar*, some stories from *The Thousand and One Nights* (Peribanou, the Talking Bird) and Boccaccio's

¹ J. Dünninger, 'Untersuchungen zur Göngu-Hrólfs Saga', *AfnF* XLVII (1931), 309–46 and *AfnF* XLVIII (1932), 31–60.

² Cf. *Verz.* xii–xvi, *EÓs Folkeævntyr* 285–88. The reader may notice that some things are taken differently here from in those writings, and that the nature of these stories is analysed in greater detail here.

story of Patient Griselda.¹ This provides good evidence about the age of the oral versions, which will usually have been coloured by contemporary wonder-tales.²

When we know that an Icelandic version of a wonder-tale is closely related to one in a specific country, this gives an indication, but no more, of its date. It is most likely to have come to Iceland while contacts between the two countries were strongest. Thus Danish stories are most likely to have come to Iceland after the Reformation and Norwegian ones before it. Those that have come from other countries can be assigned to a particular period with less certainty, because contacts with them were intermittent (those with England were at their height in the late Middle Ages, those with Germany during the same period and a little longer, until the eventual expulsion of German merchants by Danish ones around 1600, and those with the Netherlands rather later than that). As for Celtic stories, one is most inclined to think of them as having been brought over during the Settlement period, for it is probable that in all quite a large number of Irish came to Iceland then. Their folk-stories would then have lived on in their new home, though overshadowed by the remarkable flowering of medieval Scandinavian literature in Iceland.

Something can be gleaned from the language of wonder-tales. Nearly all the variants of one story (*Verz.* 126–28) retain the names *Tístram* and *Ísól* and these names (and hence this wonder-tale in its present Icelandic form) must be from the time when they were known and made popular by *Tristans saga*. Names, however, seldom witness so clearly to the age of a story. The style of a wonder-tale is also well worth noting. The extent to which it has been formalised, the frequency of fixed formulaic expressions in the majority of a story's variants and the recurrence of the same story-material as in other stories can all suggest that a story is older than one whose style is less formalised and where the variants show that tellers have been less bound by tradition. The story of the cow *Búkolla* is one that has highly formalised

¹ On Griselda, see Halldór Hermannsson, 'The story of Griselda in Iceland', *Islandica* VII, 1914.

² In the Griselda story, for instance, the detail about the candle has been added: 'The fingers burn painfully, but the heart burns more painfully.' There is also a parallel in Saxo Grammaticus, cf. A. Olrik, 'Märchen in Saxo Grammaticus', *ZdVfV* 1892, 252–58.

variants (see pp. 242, 251–53, 307 below), and I do not think they are very recent. Some stories have become rhyme-like, their key-phrases turned into verse. One such, the story of Tístram and Ísól, is full of verses, and others are more or less full of set phrases and have the odd verse as well. Some of them may have quite a history, like the verse about Mjaðveig's paradise quoted at the beginning of this book, whose first two lines occur, for instance, in a Norwegian traditional rhyme:

<i>Tirr tirr i tara,</i>	Tirr, tirr, tirry-o!
<i>i morgo skal me fara</i>	Tomorrow I shall go
<i>langt burt i djupe dalar,</i>	to the deep dells far away,
<i>til elvekongens salar;</i>	to the elvenking's high halls;
<i>der er saa godt aa gjæta,</i>	there it is so sweet to stay,
<i>der fell ingi væta</i>	there no rain ever falls,
<i>der veks lauken</i>	there leeks do spring,
<i>der gjel gauken</i>	there cuckoos sing,
<i>der bygger svola</i>	there the swallow builds her nest
<i>högt upp i fura . . .</i>	in the fir-tree high to rest . . .

A medieval Danish poem first recorded in the sixteenth century has a man or spirit tempt a woman in these words:

<i>Jeg skal före dig til den Ö</i>	I will take you to an isle
<i>som du skal leve og aldrig dö,</i>	where you will live and never die,
<i>der synger ikke andre Fugle end Gög,</i>	where no bird but the cuckoo sings
<i>der gror ikke andet Græs end Lög.</i>	where no grass but the leek-grass springs.

These rhymes establish the age of the verses in the story of Mjaðveig, which must at least be medieval in origin.¹ Some unrhymed lines in wonder-tales could be medieval or even earlier (those whose metre resembles *fornyrðislag*), but they could of course also be of more recent origin. On the other hand, I think that those stanzas which are in metres

¹ For the Norwegian rhyme see B. Stöylen, *Norske börnerim og leikar*, 1899, 37 (nos 255–56), 54 (nos 358–61); M. B. Landstad, ed., *Norske Folkeviser*, 1853, 797, 800; S. H. Grundtvig, ed., *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, 1853–90, II 338–47, IV 1–32, 494–98; Feilberg *Ordbog, lög* (II and IV); cf. also J. Fritznér, *Ordbog over det gamle norske Sprog*, 1886–96, s.v. *laukr*. I would point out that in Mjaðveig's verse the ram is clearly a valuable animal. In Laxdal *Ós* it is said that the ram shed its fleece four times a year, and every season it changed colour; it was dark blue in spring, green in summer, red in autumn and yellow in winter. Cf. also the ram in *Samsons saga fagra* (ed. J. Wilson, 1953, 34) and the dog in *Tristrams saga og Ísöndar*, ch. 61 (*The Saga of Tristram and Ísönd*, tr. Paul Schach, 1973).

derived from *rímur*, or have in other ways the feel of *rímur*, will generally be of more recent origin, as the widespread popularity of this form of entertainment in Iceland is of post-Reformation growth.

Finally, I think that some conclusions can be drawn from the content of wonder-tales, and I will give some examples. The story of Helga Karlsdóttir in Ólafur Davíðsson's *Þjóðsögur* (ÓDav.⁵ IV 47–50) is clearly the Cinderella story with little alteration, and therefore of recent growth in Iceland. But the story of Mjaðveig Mánadóttir is another version of the same story, and it is greatly changed from what is found most other European languages and is very Icelandic in character. It must have been about in Iceland for a long time, and the fifteenth-century *Vilmundar saga víðutan* appears to be based on something like it.

Among the wonder-tales that seem to have acquired a particularly Icelandic character is a group with peculiarly stereotyped phraseology, in which verses sometimes occur. These are the 'cottage-stories', stories that generally describe a very primitive existence with very little romantic glow cast over it. Everything is clearly defined and realistic, much is coarse and earthy. Here the trolls do not change shape as in the stepmother-stories, and do not deceive with calculated cunning. They are ugly and grotesque, stupid and credulous, and often tricked by their would-be victims. They live barely a stone's throw from the cottage, just as in ordinary folk-stories about trolls, and generally resemble the trolls of folk-belief much more than is normal in wonder-tales. Many of these stories are rather short, and it is sometimes hard to see where one story ends and the next begins. The following stories belong to this group: Kolrassa krókríðandi (Coalarse Crookrider) (JÁ II 455–60), Fóa feykiróa (Tailsweeper) (JÁ³ V 168–70), Þúfukerling (The Tump-hag) (*Verz.* 327), Lupus (JÁ³ V 51–61), Kiðuvaldi (Kid-owner, referring to goats' kids; JÁ II 454–55), and also the Búkolla stories (JÁ II 467–71).¹ The lowliness of the settings is naturally no guide as to their age, nor is the common motif of 'the neglected child usually turns out the best', but to me much of the primary material of these stories appears to be ancient in character, and I believe that the earliest Icelandic wonder-tales are to be found in this group.

¹ See *Verz.* no. 311, 327 C and D, 328, 480; 323, cf. 425, 4.

V

It is claimed that wonder-tales are international, that the same stories are found all over the world. They originate in one place, and then travel from country to country.

Most Icelandic wonder-tales have parallels in other countries, though there are often extensive differences. When one can reckon to be dealing with the same story, it is natural to assume that it reached Iceland from abroad and then circulated there. One can of course, find exceptions to this. There is a Faroese wonder-tale about the dog Snati, which is undoubtedly derived from the Icelandic story of Prince Hringr, and the story of Kolrassa krókríðandi has influenced a Faroese version of the same legend and the name *Kola króka* in the Faroese story is moreover unquestionably an abbreviation of the Icelandic name. We should also mention that the story of Álfa-Árni exists in the Faroes, and that part of *Bárðar saga* was first of all made into a poem (*Seyðaríma*) there, and then into a wonder-tale.¹

It is not out of the question that some stories of the wonder-tale type may have travelled from Iceland to Norway, but it is safest not to be too dogmatic about it. The story of Hildir the Good Stepmother, which is known only in Iceland and Norway, is much fuller and more widespread in the Icelandic version, and, like some other Icelandic stories, it can be explained as having been made up as a counter to the numerous and repetitive stories of evil stepmothers. It is quite possible that this is an Icelandic story that travelled to Norway.²

Such cases, however, are exceptions, and most Icelandic wonder-tales must have come from other countries—but from where? This has never been investigated, but it may seem likely that most of them came from those countries that the Icelanders had most intercourse with, Norway and Denmark. We must not close our eyes, however, to the fact that Icelanders have travelled far and wide, and could have brought home stories from much more distant lands. But guesses cannot solve the problem, which can only be settled by careful research.

Iceland can be said to have occupied an outpost of the civilised world, far from the great nations, many days' journey away by sea over which

¹ For Snati, Kolrassa, Álfa-Árni, giant wedding, see J. Jakobsen, *Færøske Folkesagn og Æventyr*, 1898–1901, nos 2, 42, 153, 253 and pp. xxi, 629–30; JÁ II 360, 455–60.

² Cf. EÓŠ *Folkeæventyr* 290 and references.

comparatively few ships sailed. This situation cannot have failed to have had a great effect on the way legends came to Iceland, and on their development once they reached it.

Firstly we must consider the phenomena that become apparent when a story reaches the limit of its range of dissemination; we may perhaps call them 'periphery phenomena'. The story will very likely be an importation, its content and tone foreign to the natives of its new home, and it may be in danger of failing to attract the support of related legends or of native folk-belief. The chances will be that its spread will be more limited than nearer the centre of its area of dissemination, where it may be a common story so that one variant corrects another. Both these factors may lead to distortion. I consider that Icelandic stories suffer quite a lot from these destructive periphery phenomena. But the country's isolation can also have a beneficial effect on them. In isolated places, whether on the periphery or not, there is a greater chance that an ancient form of a story will be kept intact if it is fortunate enough not to get distorted, even though new forms of it may have developed closer to the centre of its area in countries with a dense population. I am convinced that this has often been the case in Iceland, though it can only be proved by extensive research.

Two kinds of dissemination of stories are sometimes distinguished, according to whether they spread gradually out in all directions from their places of origin or go in a leap with an individual traveller to a far-off place. For geographical reasons all movement of folk-stories to Iceland must have been by the second method apart from what was brought by the first settlers. It is easy to imagine how this might have turned out in practice. One man brings a story to Iceland. If he remembers it and tells it to many people, all will be well. But things can go wrong if he misremembers it or tells it wrongly, and even if he reproduces it accurately, if he tells it to only a few people, one or more of them may then leave out part of it, and then there is no telling when the same story will come again across the sea to correct the defective version, nor indeed whether the newly-imported version will be any improvement.

There can be both positive and negative effects when stories are altered, as I tried to demonstrate earlier (pp. 65–66 above). It is not always right to suppress deliberate corrections by a story-teller, and in this connection there is particular reason to bear in mind the possible

benefits of changes that bring stories closer to the shape of native stories.

Let us look at some examples to help us see more clearly how many things could happen to a story brought into Iceland. *Gongu-Hrólf's saga* follows a wonder-tale about a princess with golden hair, obviously quite a good variant. This no longer exists in Iceland, as far as is known. The widespread Polyphemus legend is well known in medieval Icelandic writings, but has not survived as an independent folk-story as far as I know, though it has become a part of the story of Surtla in Blálandseyjar (JÁ II 355–58).

One has to remember such misadventures when comparing Icelandic and non-Icelandic wonder-tales. It is interesting how many of the stories most widespread in Europe are not found in Iceland. The sea may have hindered many of them from reaching the country, or odd variants may well have got here and then disappeared. I admit, however, that these considerations have not entirely dispersed my doubts about whether some of the wonder-tales that are now so widespread elsewhere in Europe were quite as popular earlier on, and whether this would not explain why they are not known from oral tradition in Iceland.

Distortion and omissions are very common in Icelandic wonder-tales, as can easily be seen by taking a recent story and comparing its variants. It is, however, much more interesting to look at more archaic stories, where the differences from foreign wonder-tales are more complex; they can result from omission and distortion or the influence of an earlier version, or from Icelandicisation of the story, or from a story-teller's improvements. It is quite interesting to look at this a little more closely.

Many wonder-tales tell of flight from a troll or other supernatural being, and the flight can be miraculous since the human either escapes by flinging some object down behind him which turns into a lake, a mountain, a forest or a fire, for example, or else he changes shape so as not to be recognised by his pursuer. This flight motif first appears in a Japanese heroic story from about AD 700 (Isaghi and Isanami), in a story of magic in Book V of Saxo's *Historia* (about 1200) and a little earlier in an Indian adventure story (Somadeva's *Kathā Sarit Sāgara* (*The Ocean of Story*), c.1100)¹ that tells how a man fled from a monster with the aid of the monster's daughter, a well-known and widely-

¹ Tr. C. H. Tawney, 10 vols, 1924–28.

diffused kind of story (Stith Thompson *G 530.2; it appears in JÁ II (379–83) in the story of Geirlaug and Græðari, etc.); then there is also the story of a boy with golden hair who flees on the monster's horse.¹ And in Iceland there is the story of Búkolla and the boy, which is archaic in content and style, and is a well-constructed, logical unity. Is it based on the wonder-tales (and, more particularly, on the one about the boy with golden hair)? Or is it independent of them, an ancient comic story (like Kolrassa krókríðandi) based on a serious ancient myth about this kind of miraculous escape?

We have another example, quite unlike the first, but also quite interesting. Jón Árnason has a second Búkolla-story, told by Þorvarður Ólafsson, about Helga Old Man's Daughter, who performs hard tasks for an ogress with the aid of the hideously ugly Dordingull (JÁ II 467–70). The story is not well-formed, because Búkolla drops out of it once Helga reaches the ogress's home, and the account of the tasks replaces the end of the Búkolla legend. Doubtless the explanation is that the story is a composite of two stories, neither of them complete; the Búkolla motif is from the Búkolla story, the tasks are from another wonder-tale, and it is interesting to look carefully at all this, as Þorvarður's narrative has a very archaic feel. I do not think that there can be any doubt that the second wonder-tale is a variant of the story of Cupid and Psyche.² This story is found all over the world, at all periods and in numerous versions. It is known all over Iceland and there are many variants of it there (see *Verz.* nos 425 and 425 I). The mythological elements have naturally disappeared and an ogress (or an ogress's daughter) who wants to have the husband of the young woman for her husband has taken the place of Venus, the young man is under a spell of some kind or other, which his wife has to release him from, while he is bound to the ogress by a promise if this fails. The wife cannot complete her tasks unaided, and is helped by her (disguised) husband. Thus the story gains a new cohesion, but, because this second Búkolla-story is a composite story, there is no connection between the ogress and Dordingull, nor between him and Helga, and he appears simply as some unnamed prince under a spell, but is otherwise very strange and mysterious. The tasks are imposed on Helga for

¹ See Antti Aarne, *Die magische Flucht*, 1930 (FFC 92).

² Jan-Öjvind Swahn, *The Tale of Cupid and Psyche* (Aarne-Thompson 425 & 428), 1955.

no other reason than troll-like ill nature, and they are apt to vary according to the story-teller's taste. In some Icelandic stories that include such tasks, one of them is to dry corn in the open (the earliest of these is from the seventeenth century), but the usual demand is that she put bedclothes and eiderdown out to air or, as in the *Búkolla*-story, that she make the bed.¹ The task of fetching water from a spring is rare in Icelandic stories,² and as one might expect, the spring is, when it is found, but a pale shadow in comparison with the source of the River Styx in the Classical version. Helga's most difficult task is to go to the Queen of the Dales (the name gives a slight indication of the origin of this task, though who would dare to guess from that alone that these dales were the dark Underworld, and the ogress none other than Proserpine, the queen of the realm of the dead?). Wolves do not usually appear in troll-stories (they are extremely rare there), but here they replace the great hound Cerberus. Psyche must not eat Proserpine's food, or else she would never be able to escape from Hades, but this has been forgotten in the wonder-tale, where the food is merely poisoned, and Helga throws it to the wolves, who are killed by it, and the narrative so gains in logical coherence. The Queen of the Dales retains some (though only the most memorable) of the attributes of the queen of Hades, because these add some tension to the story. They are therefore kept, though their meaning is forgotten. Her sister, however, loses all the attributes of Venus and retains only her role as a hostile force, which she performs as an ogress, complete with a cave and all the appropriate primitive and troll-like characteristics. The enchanted prince keeps his curious skin (the mantle), which was already there at the time of the *fornaldar sögur*. All this gives a good impression of how variously ancient scraps of treasure can be hidden in wonder-tales, how often they are recast, and how thoroughly they are Icelandicised.

VI

Between *Grógaldr* and *Hjálmþérs saga* there is very likely one further source about the ancient stepmother stories, and that is *Bjarka þáttur*, reckoned to be from about 1300, but now preserved in two some-

¹ Corn: see JGÍ *Ármannsrímur*, *Verz.* 556* II; down and bedclothes: *Ármannsþáttur* in Laxdal *Ós* (ch. 47); *Verz.* 71, 77, 78.

² See *Verz.* 16; 84 (from *The Thousand and One Nights*).

what later sources, *Bjarkarímur* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*.¹ There are considerable differences between these two, but this does not matter all that much for the moment, and we shall mainly follow the saga. The *þáttur* begins as a stepmother story of the Icelandic type, with an envoy sent to find a bride, losing his bearings at sea, and coming across a woman north in Finnmark—a modern wonder-tale would probably not have named a particular country, but would have made the story take place in a far-off, nameless land, and I think it most likely that this detail in the *þáttur* is a more ancient feature of the narrative, and that the lack of place-names came in later with foreign wonder-tales. Next comes the main substance of the story. The queen tries to entice her stepson, Björn, into adultery with her, but he gives her a slap on the face, and she loses her temper and strikes him with a wolf-skin glove and lays a spell on him, turning him into a bear.²

Next it tells about Bera (Hildir), the old man's daughter who meets the bear and stays with him in his cave. He then turns back into his proper form (apparently only at night). He tells her before they part that he will be killed the next day, and bids her beware of eating any of his meat, but she is to keep what she finds under his shoulder. He also tells her that she is with child, and will bear three sons. He tells her to send them to his cave as soon as they are old enough, and then they will each get the weapon meant for them. The next day the bear is killed, and Bera (Hildir) gets what is under his shoulder, which is a ring. The Queen forces her to eat some of the bear's meat, and her sons suffer the consequences of this. The eldest, Fróði, becomes an elk (*elgr*) from the waist down, Þórir, the next one, has dog's feet, and only the youngest, Bøðvarr, is unaffected. One by one the sons leave their mother, and each takes his proper weapon from the cave. Elgróði then becomes a bandit, Þórir becomes king in Gautland, while Bøðvarr finds out from his mother about the fate of his father and avenges him by killing the Queen. He now sets off to find his brothers and has many adventures; he drinks from the blood of his brother Elgróði's

¹ See *Hrólfs saga kraka og Bjarkarímur*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, 1904; *Hrólfs saga kraka*, ed. D. Slay, 1960 (EA B 1).

² The reasons for their falling out are different in the various treatments of the story (cf. pp. 232–33 above), but this version is also found in *Hjálmþérs saga* etc. and can be traced back to Homer's account of Bellerophon (*Iliad*, Book VI). It is no longer used in Icelandic wonder-tales.

calf, thus gaining great physical strength. Then Elgfróði steps with his foot on a rock in his cave and says that his footprint will fill with blood if Bǫðvarr is killed by weapons, with earth if he dies of sickness, and with water if he is drowned. After this there is a long story about Bǫðvarr himself, how he comes to the court of King Hrólfr kraki at Lejre and kills a monster there.¹

This is the core of *Bjarka þátr*, to which various motifs have been added, apparently at random, and we will not go into these here. The main theme of the story is related to ancient stories from northern Europe which tell of a woman who became the wife of a forest-bear. In Saxo Grammaticus (*Gesta Danorum* X.xv.2–4) the story goes like this: a farmer's daughter and her maids went out to play and got lost. A bear wandered by and the maids fled, but the bear took the farmer's daughter to his den and kept her there until he was hunted down and killed. The girl bore a son and called him Björn. When he was just grown up his mother told him about his father's death, and he avenged him. Björn's son was Þorgils sprakaleggr.² This bear's son motif has also got into a widespread wonder-tale, chiefly in north-west Europe, and I know of no reason to think that this did not happen fairly late.³

The main features of *Bjarka þátr* are in Saxo's narrative, which is in other ways less elaborate. I have no doubt that, for instance, the taboo on eating the bear's flesh is ancient. I believe that we have here an early story from a time when animals were very important in religious belief, but I leave it to more learned men to decide whether it has to do with totemism or something else.⁴

¹ On *Bjarka þátr*, for comparison with what follows, I shall just refer to A. Olrik, *Danmarks gamle Heltedigtning*, 1903–10, I 134–43, 215–17; C. W. von Sydow, *Beowulf och Bjarke*, 1923 (*Studier i nordisk filologi* XIV:3). A great deal has been written about all this.

² Cf. Axel Olrik, 'Sivard den digre, en vikingesaga fra de danske i Nord-england', *AfnF* XIX (1903), 199–223; C. E. Wright, *The Cultivation of Saga in Anglo-Saxon England*, 1939, 129–43; cf. also Albert Wesselski, *Märchen des Mittelalters*, 1925, no. 57 (a man married to a she-bear).

³ It may be mentioned that the Faroese poem *Hindin* (S. H. Grundtvig, ed., *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, 1853–90, IV 894) is probably derived from *Bjarka þátr*.

⁴ In passing I will draw attention to the strong superstitions about bears that have existed in Iceland; see Jón lærði's *Um Íslands aðskiljanlegar náttúrur* in *Islandica* XV, 14–15; JÞork. 304; Ólafur Halldórsson, *Grænland í miðaldarritum*, 1978, 45, 288.

Motifs from other ancient stories based on beliefs about animals have been attracted into this old bear-legend. Belief in the magic power of elks is reflected in the figure of Elgfróði, and in that of dogs in the figure of Þórir hundsfótr. But the magical aspect is weakened by making the animal descent (and nature) come out in Elgfróði being only half an elk, and Þórir just having dog's feet. The author of the *þáttur* has further modified the figure of Elgfróði by making the dark forces of his animal nature contend with the human side of his nature.

The actual main theme of the bear-story has, however, been changed in the *þáttur* by making the bear into a man under a spell, who loses his bear's shape at night. As a result the story has become more meaningful and acceptable to the standards of later ages, though at the same time it has moved further away from religious belief and become more of a fantasy. It has caused it to become closely associated with werewolf legends, which had become detached from folk-belief in Iceland about this time, and changed through the influence of written (or maybe oral) western European stories into stories of enchantment.¹ By the same process, reinterpretation as stories of enchantment, many of the marvels of foreign stories were made more acceptable to Icelandic audiences. Birds and beasts often appear in wonder-tales, and talk or do things which need human intelligence to perform. Icelanders explain these things to themselves by saying that they are people under spells. When human beings and trolls (or other monsters) are described as falling in love, these latter are also said to be people under spells. This motif thus solved many difficulties, relating both to native stories based on early religious belief and to foreign stories of marvels, and I guess that spells are much commoner in Icelandic wonder-tales than in those of other countries.

Spells require an account of what led to their being cast. *Bjarka þáttur* provides for this in exactly the same way as so many Icelandic story-tellers did later, by using the stepmother motif, one of the most popular motifs of romance of the time, which was available everywhere when such a need arose.

The extensive use of this story-motif as a solution for various difficulties, together with its great effectiveness, made it extraordinarily

¹ Among other motifs deriving from European stories about spells are probably the wolf-skin glove and the ring under the bear's shoulder in *Bjarka þáttur*.

common in Iceland in earlier times, as early written stories clearly demonstrate. It is evident that this went so far that people began to feel that enough was enough, and someone set to work and made up a story about a good stepmother—and perhaps also one about a bad natural mother. We find this variation in some of the later wonder-tales that are related to the story of Svipdagr. The stepmother is the cause of all the evil in *Grógaldr* and *Hjálmþérs saga*, but in *Himnibjargar saga* (c.1700) it is the mother who puts the spell on her son while the stepmother makes things easier for him, though the story is somewhat ambivalent, as it says at the end that she had caused all the trouble in order to save her kinsmen. In nineteenth-century stories of this type it alternates; stepmother and stepson are usually on good terms, but sometimes she is the unwitting cause of the troubles that afflict him; sometimes he resorts to her in the difficulties he gets into because of his mother. Another wonder-tale that illustrates the same development is the story of Hildur the Good Stepmother.¹ In some versions of *Vilfríðar saga* the mother persecutes her daughter, and the same variation appears in versions of the foreign wonder-tale related to it (Snow-White).

Many other things besides the stepmother and the enchantment motifs have been widespread and popular in wonder-tales told in Iceland, but none has had as great an influence. The stepmother motif is more obvious at first sight and there is more about it in the stories, but actually it is the changes that result from spells that are more fundamental.

VII

I have touched earlier on proper names in wonder-tales. Names of countries have become rather rare, though they were more common earlier on. Then names of far-off places were normally used, sometimes derived from written sources, like *Blálandseyjar*, 'Blue Land Islands' (cf. Lagerholm *DL* 141).

Personal names are very varied. Some are as stereotyped as those of characters in Holberg's comedies, where the maid is called *Pernille* and the master *Jeronimus*. These are associated with type or class. The prince is often called *Sigurður*, the princess *Ingibjörg*, the old

¹ *Verz.* no. 728; English translation in *European Folk Tales*, ed. Laurits Bødker, Christina Hole, G. D'Arconco, 1963, 56–63. Cf. pp. 239 above and 302 below.

cottager's son *Þorsteinn*, his daughters *Ása*, *Signý* and *Helga*; the wicked counsellor is *Rauður*. Some names are attached to particular stories, like *Bragðastakkur*, *Vilfríður*, *Tístram* and *Ísól*. Trolls' names are on the whole more varied, but usually of the same type as those in ancient sources, such as *Blávör* and *Járnhaus*. Human women under spells or other mysterious beings are called *Blákápa*, *Grænkápa* or *Rauðkápa* and so on.

Not that the story-tellers were content with this. They adorn their stories with all kinds of curious or strange names, as do the authors of the courtly romances and the *rímur* of later times. A prince is called *Græðari*, *Jónides* or *Agnedíus*, and it can be very difficult to work out the origins of these names. *Vísijómfrú* is adapted from the foreign names *Miseria*, *Miserimø* and *Mestermø*. But what of *Kiðhús* the hillock-dweller and *Kiðuvaldi* the mountain-dweller? And what is Prince *Hlini* or *Hlinur*? Hardly the tree-name *hlynur*, 'maple'. *Líneik* is a 'kenning' for a woman, which occurs among other places in Loftur Guttormsson's *Háttalykill* (c.1410–20). *Mærþöll* is undoubtedly a corruption of *Mardöll*, one of Freyja's names. *Mjaðveig* is known only from the folk-story, and I would not be surprised to find that it was corruption of some other (possibly Celtic) name (cf. pp. 174–75 above). The names *Ísól bjarta* and *Ísól svarta* remind us of the true and false Guinever in Arthurian Poems, as well as, of course, the two Iseults in the romance of Tristan. Overall the personal names in wonder-tales are not lacking in oddness and variety.

It is sometimes possible to trace names some way back in time. Many of the names that are firmly attached to specific nineteenth-century stories are found in *Ólands saga* in the 1780s. *Viðfinna* or *Vilfríður Völufegri* was known in the time of Jón lærði. There is a King *Máni* in *Bryngerðarljóð* (a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century composition), and the counsellor *Rauður* is an ancient international villain. Cinderella (*Öskubuska*) appears for the first time in Icelandic sources in *Vilmundar saga viðutan* in the fourteenth century. Finally there is a stepdaughter called *Króka* in one folk-story, while in Faroese and Norwegian wonder-tales she is called *Krákudóttir* and the stepmother *Kráka*. The stepmother of Eiríkr málspaki also bore this name according to Saxo Grammaticus, which means it was probably well known around 1200. It was also the name used by Áslaug in *Ragnars saga Loðbrókar* while she was concealing her identity.

VIII

As has been said earlier, it is likely that Icelandic written versions of wonder-tales (and other folk-stories) that are verbatim transcripts of oral renderings are very few. This is a great pity, and as a result much remains obscure about the style of Icelandic folk-stories. Some things, however, we can be fairly certain of. The style of folk-stories in oral tradition is stereotyped to a varied degree. As has been said, there is less of a fixed rhythm and fewer set phrases in later stories than in earlier ones. There is least of such features in ghost stories, and not a great deal more in stories of trolls. The wonder-tales are the most formulaic, though there is a lot of variation.

I do not think it was common for people to learn wonder-tales word for word from others, though examples can be cited of it happening. Written versions testify against it, and in any case the bulk of wonder-tales are such long stories that this in itself makes it improbable. Even so, there is much in the presentation of wonder-tales that has been preserved through many generations of story-tellers and remained when they were written down by a reasonably good recorder. I am referring to numerous minor details that often do not affect the main plot, but are the result of the acuteness of good story-tellers. They include narrative-motifs, turns of phrase, formulas, and sometimes verses, and very often a particular turn of phrase and a particular kind of incident go together. This can sometimes be linked to specific stories, but it more often happens that they accompany the central story-elements of wonder-tales, such as the stepmother motif, spells, tasks and so on. Many of them are wandering motifs, passing from one story to another, present in one version, absent in another. As will be shown later on, much of this material goes back to very ancient wonder-tale narrative.

Narrative formulas are most frequent in stories where the same situations recur, and that is very common in wonder-tales (cf. p. 28 above). Repetitions (or parallelisms) are therefore one of the most conspicuous features of the style of wonder-tales. When it is a question of a more or less fixed phraseology, it is generally powerful and compressed, but at the same time smooth and polished by passing through many generations of story-tellers, and comes to have a quite regular rhythm.

Stories usually begin with the same words. Sometimes, though rather rarely, the opening words are a rhyme, such as this:

<i>Hvorki bar til títtla né tíðinda,</i>	There was neither headline nor tidings,
<i>frétta né frásagna,</i>	news nor story,
<i>nema logið væri</i>	but it was a lie
<i>eða stolið væri . . .</i>	or it was stolen . . .

Here lines 1 and 2 have similar rhythms, as do lines 3 and 4. It is particularly worth noticing that *logið* and *stolið* have to be pronounced with short root syllables, though with stronger accent than *væri*, and this seems to me to imply a date when the ancient system of vowel length still applied.¹ The same system of accentuation and syllable length obtains in the last words of the usual opening sentence of stories about the old man and old woman in their cottage, *Það var einu sinni karl og kerling í koti sínu*, and this is reminiscent of the ‘cursus’, the rule governing the rhythm of the final words of sentences in medieval Latin clerical writings.²

¹ The formula is the same in *Brjámssaga* (1707) which was written from the account of Hildr Arngrímsdóttir: ‘There was neither headline nor tidings, news nor story at that time, but it was a lie’ (JÁ II 505). Cf. BE *Munnmælasögur* 61.

² Before we leave the topic of opening formulas in wonder-tales, it should be mentioned that folk-stories in most countries also have concluding formulas of varying lengths (cf. BP IV 24–36). In Iceland the concluding formula is very variable, the same verse lines in all kinds of combinations. Sometimes it describes the wedding feast (JÁ II 319):

<i>Þar var á borðum</i>	There on the tables
<i>pipraðir páfuglar</i>	were peppered peafowl,
<i>saltaðir sjófiskar</i>	salted sea-fish
<i>mimjam og timjam</i>	mimjam and timjam
<i>og multum salve.</i>	and multum salve.
<i>Þar var drukkit</i>	There they drank
<i>primet og klet</i>	primet and claret,
<i>og vínið Garganus,</i>	and Garganus wine,
<i>gullkistur um gólf dregnar</i>	gold chests were dragged across the floor
<i>og gjafir mönnum gefnar.</i>	and gifts given to men.
<i>Þeir fóru þaðan fullríkir</i>	They left there much enriched
<i>sem þangað komu fátækir.</i>	who arrived there poor.

The food sounds rather medieval, and there is wine as in courtly romances (‘piment og klare og hið bezta vín’, ‘piment and claret and the best wine’, *Karlamagnús saga* 1860, 60; *Flóventssaga*, FSS 124, 171; *Jökuls þátr*, ÍF XIV, 58); the gifts are strange and splendid (‘engi kom þar svo fátækur að eigi færi fullsæll í brott’, ‘no one came there so poor that he did not leave in great wealth’, *Partalópa saga* (ed. L. Præstgaard Andersen, 1983, EA B 28) 126, *Karlamagnús saga* 1860, 167; ‘Þar voru gullkistur / á gólf dregnar, / og gefnar háfur /

The story now continues. An old man and old woman 'had three daughters, who were called *Sigríður*, *Signý* and *Helga*. The old couple were fond of *Sigríður* and *Signý*, but had no affection for *Helga*, who spent her time in the *ashes*.' It was said that the old couple had only one domestic animal, a cow named *Búkolla*. She was such a noble animal that even if she was milked three times a day she gave no less than five gallons at each milking. The old man rowed out to sea to fish every day, always *rowing* in a *tub*, and every day his daughter *Sigríður* brought him food to the fishing grounds, also using a tub. It happened one day at the *cottage* (*garðshorn*) that the cow *Búkolla* disappeared, and no one knew what had become of her. The old couple now discussed what to do, and in the end *Sigríður* was sent off to look for her, and given *nesti og nýja skó*, 'food and new shoes'. She walked a long way (in other stories the phrase is nearly always at this point *lengi lengi* 'a long long way', or possibly *yfir fjöll og firnindi* 'over mountains and wilderness') until she came to a hillock. *There she ate and said: 'Low now, cow Búkolla, if I am to find you.'* But the cow did not low. *Now she walked to another hillock, ate there and said: 'Low now, cow Búkolla, if I am to find you.'* But the cow still did not low. *She walked to a third hillock, ate there and then said: 'Low now, cow Búkolla, if I am to find you.'* Then the cow lowed far up the mountain. *Sigríður* now went up into the mountain until she came to the mouth of a cave. She went into the cave. There she saw that *a fire burned on sticks, a pot of meat was over the fire, and cakes were in the embers*. There also was *Búkolla*, standing at a manger, and she was fastened with iron chains. *Sigríður* took a cake from the embers and a piece of meat from the pot and *ate them*. She was going to unfasten the cow but could not, so she sat down under her throat and scratched her. After a little while *the cave began to tremble* (in other stories she

hverjum einum, / en kötturinn hljóp ofan í mýri, / upp setti hann stýri, / úti er ævintýri', 'there were gold chests dragged onto the floor and fine gifts given to each person, and the tom-cat ran down into the mire, he set up his rudder, the adventure is done', *Kringilnefjukvæði* 36 (ÓDav. *Pulur*, 44); in *JÁ* II 319 we find the variant lines 'smérið rann / roðið brann', 'the butter ran, the fish-skin burned', and in Norway there is a long concluding formula which includes 'aa brøue brann, / aa smøre rann' (R. Berge, 'Norsk eventyrstil', *Norsk folkekultur* 1918, IV 75). In most conclusions, however, it says that the young couple 'átti börn og buru, / grófu rætur og murur', 'they had children and sons, dug up roots and goose-grass', and that is pure Icelandic in tone and springs from Icelandic peasant life.

heard rumbling and thumping) and a huge ogress came into the cave. She said: '*So you are here, Sigríður Old Man's Daughter. You shall not live long, you have stolen from me.*' The ogress seizes her, wrings her neck, and flings the body into a hole in the cave.

Now begins a new section, about Signý, which repeats what happens to Sigríður, though it is often told in fewer words. Then comes the account of Helga. 'Now Helga asked the old couple to let her search for Búkolla, but *they did not think that there was much point*, since their good *golden daughters* were not able to find her and were now most likely dead.' But it turns out in the end that Helga is allowed to go. She gets *sharkskin shoes* for her feet, and for her food dripping, *fish-skin, fins and pot-scrapings*. She walks for a long [*long*] time, until she comes to a certain *hillock*. Then she says: '*Here my sisters have eaten, and here shall I eat also.*' Then it goes on, the same as with the others, mostly without any shortening. But she *adjusts the cakes, stirs up the fire under the pot, but takes nothing*. When the ogress comes she says: '*So you are here, Helga Old Man's Daughter: you shall now live, for you have stolen nothing from me.*'

The main theme of the story so far is Helga's arrival at the ogress's cave, after which a completely new episode begins. The Búkolla motif is introduced to account for Helga's going there: the ogress has stolen the old man's cow. In other variants it may be that the fire in the cottage goes out. Another important theme is based on the Cinderella motif. The youngest daughter receives no affection from her parents, but does not steal from the ogress (though the others do) and this honesty saves her life, while the ogress kills off the others, who would have been superfluous in the rest of the story. Belonging with the Cinderella motif are the names of the old couple's daughters, the words *öskustó* 'ash-pit under the fire' and *gulldætur* 'golden daughters', and the description of the equipment given for the journey, *nesti og nýja skó*, 'food and new shoes', for the first two daughters and *roð og skófir*, 'fish-skins and pot-scrapings', for the third. Thus each theme is accompanied by words and phrases that are peculiar to it. The old man's fishing in his tub is put in for entertainment (a description of primitive habits) but otherwise belongs to stories where a grey hand holds onto the vessel. The narrative of Sigríður's journey is composed of a series of similar incidents that are narrated in similar phrases, Signý's journey has identical incidents and phraseology to her sister's, and Helga's

journey is parallel, but also has several variations of detail. This section of the story is the one most rigidly fixed in form and most ordered like a rhyme; the rhythm of it is regular, and everything is smooth and straightforward. Everything is depicted simply in a few clear strokes and there is no context or background. The girl walks a long, long way; this arouses the audience's imagination, and the distance is emphasised by the repetition of the description of the journey, and the impression that it takes place though an unpeopled waste is mirrored by the silences that are introduced: still the cow doesn't low, there is a hush before and after. At long last the girl on her lonely journey hears the cow's lowing and joy floods the narrative. The loneliness vanishes.

The description of the cave gives a picture that listeners can fill in according to their own preferences, but it is also necessary for the development of the story. *Búkolla* has to be seen, because her disappearance is the cause of the journey. The ogress's food will be life or death for the girl. The thunderous sound of the ogress's approach, and her insight, realising who her unknown visitor is, make it clear who we are dealing with, and here too the simple incidents of the story kindle the imagination of the audience.

I will now give some examples illustrating that many small narrative details can be traced far back in time, or parallels to them found in legends of other countries. (For the Icelandic examples I shall normally take one from nineteenth-century wonder-tales, and another from the oldest Icelandic source that shows the element clearly. The foreign examples are culled pretty well at random, and it would be most interesting for someone to trace them more systematically and with more learning and critical ability than is done here.)

The A-version of the stepmother story appears in the following sources before 1700: *Bjarka þátr*, *Hjálmþérs saga*, *Hyndluljóð* (*ÓDav. Þulur* 65–76), *Hermóðs rímur* and *Hermóðs saga*. All of them are very like the nineteenth-century stories in that the overall pattern is the same in them all, though minor incidents vary from one variant to another.

1) After the queen's death the king sits on her grave-mound. *Hjálmþérs saga* (*Fas.* III 456): 'The king had a seat placed on the queen's grave-mound and sat there day and night, in grief and distress for the loss of his queen.'¹

¹ Cf. *Hjálmþérs rímur* I 63 (and X 35): 'Men raised a mound on the earth'.

2) The king's counsellor begs him to marry again. *Bjarkarímur* (I 24): 'Björn was Bjór's steward named / Begged he the jarl to wed.'¹

3) The king says that he does not want a wife from the remote headlands, the outer islands, or the forest. *Bjarkarímur* (I 29): 'Island wives or out-cape women / I will not have.'²

4) The messengers get lost at sea. *Bjarkarímur* (I 30–31): 'Fog fell on the god of clasps (man) / Thereupon he lost his way / A hundred days he wandered round / Scatterer of the snake's sand (gold, i.e. generous man) / Never saw he a clear sky / Never reached he land.'³

5) The land they reach is an island. *Hjálmþérs rímur* (I 63): 'The man steered the bear of flags (ship) / To a fair isle.'⁴

6) They meet the women in a farmhouse. *Hjálmþérs rímur* (I 38): 'There the men saw a fair house / And a wearer of caps (woman).'⁵

7) The woman (one of them) says that her husband had been a great king whose land had been invaded and he slain, but she had fled. *Hjálmþérs saga* (*Fas.* III 457): 'Lucartus, my own king, who ruled the city of Bóósia, was slain in his own kingdom by the king of the Saracens . . . The next night I escaped secretly from my bower.'⁶

8) The woman feigns reluctance to marry the king: *Bjarkarímur* I 47: 'No willing answer would she give / To what the others asked.'⁷

9) The prince refuses to meet his stepmother or show her any courtesy. *Hjálmþérs rímur*: 'Still sit Hjálmpér and Ölver / In the earl's hall / Neither goes he out to meet his father / Nor the tree of coifs (lady).'⁸

10) The prince says that his stepmother is an ogress. *Hjálmþérs rímur* (I 79): 'Hjálmpér showed his enmity / To the ground of rings (woman) / He told men that the king's wife / Was an ogress of the rocks.'⁹

11) One courtier vanishes every night. *Hjálmþérs saga* (*Fas.* III 458):

¹ In other sources it is the council or the people.

² *Hjálmþérs rímur* I 66: 'I want neither headland woman nor island lady'; cf. *Hyndluljóð* 7, *ÓDav. Þulur* 65.

³ Cf. *Hrólfs saga*.

⁴ *Bjarkarímur* I 32: Vargey.

⁵ Cf. *Bjarka þáttur*.

⁶ Cf. *Bjarka þáttur*.

⁷ Cf. *Hrólfs saga*.

⁸ Cf. *Bjarkarímur*, *Valdimars saga*, *Vambarljóð*, *Hyndluljóð*. According to *Hjálmþérs saga* it is the queen who has not met Hjálmpér, and she asks one morning whether the king has no heir; cf. *Culhwch and Olwen*.

⁹ Similarly *Vambarljóð*, *Hyndluljóð*; cf. *Sigrarðs saga*.

'It was not long before a man vanished every night, and many found this strange.' *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra* (*Fas.* III 656): 'It happened in the kingdom after Grímhildr had come, that a man vanished every night.'

Spells are sometimes referred to as *sköp* 'fated things', *ósköp* 'ill-fated things' or *ánaudir*, 'enforced things'; but the commonest word for this concept is *álög* 'thing laid on (another)', and it was gradually transferred from legends based on folk-belief (where it originated) to wonder-tales. The spells are very varied in content, but the phraseology tends to be constant, and is pretty well formulaic. In early written sources the words are usually *Það mæli ég um*, 'This is my pronouncement', or *Það legg ég á*, 'This I lay upon (you)'. Later, the two are often combined. When the details of the spells are given, the conditions of release from them are usually also declared, often followed by the words *og mun það seint verða*, 'but it will be a long time before that happens'. In *Ála-Flekks saga* (Lagerholm *DL* 99) the ogress Glóðarauga puts a spell on Áli, and tells him how he can escape from it, but adds *en þat mun aldri verða*, 'but that will never be'.

When a spell takes effect, the person put under it becomes able to lay one on his enchanter in turn, which often leads to curious conversations. Thus a hillock-dweller dressed in red puts a spell on the farmer's son Þorsteinn: 'This is my pronouncement and this I lay upon you that you shall leave your father's house and go into a forest where you will meet birds who will try to kill you.' Then further dangers to be encountered on the journey are described, and then it goes on: 'You will come into a cave where my twelve sisters dwell, and they will take care of you.' Þorsteinn replies: 'This is my pronouncement and this I lay upon you that you shall stand with one foot on your hillock and the other on a chain of mountain' (to which he points), 'and executioners will come and light a fire under you so that you burn below and freeze above; but if I die or escape from your spells, then you shall fall into the fire and be burned up.' She: 'Let us take off our spells.' He: 'Let them stand as they are.'¹

In *Hjálmþérs saga* the conversation goes as follows. Stepmother: 'This I lay upon you that you shall not be able to rest anywhere, neither by day nor by night, until you see Hervör Hundingr's daughter, except at sea or in your tent.' Hjálmpér: 'You shall lay upon me no more, for

¹ Lbs 536 4to, from the narration of Guðríðr Eyjólfsdóttir of Árvör, 1865.

your mouth shall be fixed wide open . . . High cliffs stand down either side of the harbour; you shall stand on them with a foot on each, and my father's four slaves shall light a fire beneath you; you shall have nothing to live on but what the ravens bring you until I return.' In the *rímur* Hjálmpér's words are rather different, and the exchange is longer: 'On a great shed and the king's hall / Stand with one foot on each / A fire beneath the tree of the rocks / Shall burn in the middle of the street / From below by the flames be you burned / Evil and nasty woman / On top, you hag, you freeze / And let no one save you.' Stepmother: 'You know mighty spells, / and I will not betray the hero, / Let neither spell take now / Folly it is to speak thus.' Hjálmpér: 'There, accursed hag of the rocks / Swollen must you stand / But if I am released from the long suffering / Then life will desert you.'¹

Scottish folk-stories have the dialogue in this form. Stepmother: 'I am setting it as crosses, and as spells, and as the decay of the year on thee, that thou be not without a pool in thy shoe, and that thou be wet, cold, and soiled, until thou gettest for me the bird from which that feather came.' Stepson: 'I am setting it as crosses and as spells and as the decay of the year on thee, that thou be standing with the one foot on the great house, and the other foot on the castle, and that thy face be to the tempest whatever wind blows, until I return back.' In another story the formula is rather longer, but the dialogue otherwise very similar, except that it adds the following. Enchanter: 'Raise thy spells from off me, and I will raise them from him.' Answer: 'Neither will I lift nor lay down, but so; howsoever we may be, thou comest not.'²

In Irish we find the following. Queen: 'I put you and your brothers under sentence not to sleep two nights in the same house nor eat twice off the same table, till you bring me the three steeds of King Conal.' . . . 'I might as well give you sentence now,' said the eldest brother. 'I put you under bonds of enchantment to stand on the top of the castle and stay there without coming down and watch for us till we come back with the horses.' She: 'Remove from me your sentence; I will remove mine.' (The brother refuses.)³

¹ *Fas.* III 479, *Hjálmpérs rímur* II 47–50. For other examples of mutual spell-binding see Lagerholm *DL* lx–lxii, 89, 99; *Hyndluljóð*, *Hermóðssaga* (and *Laxdal Ós*, ch. 69).

² Campbell 1860–62, II 328–29, 420.

³ J. Curtin, *Hero-Tales of Ireland*, 1894, 96.

It needs a specialist to trace the Celtic formulas back in time, but to me the Icelandic ones seem little more than translations of them.

Finally I shall mention some small incidents from various sources.

1) A king has lost his daughters. 'Whoever would earn my daughters' hands by searching for them, he who finds them shall wed them and receive a third part of my kingdom.' So *Egils saga ok Ásmundar* (fourteenth century), but the wording is commonplace in a variety of stories.

2) A man or a woman meets an animal, or some unimpressive being who asks: 'Would you rather have me with you or against you?' The answers divide the fey from the fortunate. As the saying goes, 'Nothing is so humble that it is not better to have it for one than against one.' So in *Valdimars saga* (c.1400). Kollur: 'I will not tell my name, but I ask this; will you have my counsel and my service?' Valdimar: 'I shall go by the counsel I was taught, and accept your help.'¹ Whether the dialogue follows this pattern, or the human gives the humble being food (or shows him some other kindness), it often says: 'Name me if you are in any small trouble.' Then when the hero is in difficulty, he says: 'Trítill, my friend, come now,' or 'When will I need my ravens more . . . than now?' In *Hjálmþérs saga* Skinnhúfa bids the foster-brothers name her 'if they need any small service'. Later, when they are in difficulty, Hjálmpér says: 'When shall I again have greater need of Skinnhúfa and Vargeisa to come and help us than now?' (*Fas.* III 473, 507). There is no need to give further examples; this is very common in Icelandic stories right from the Middle Ages down to the present.

3) A troll sits in his cave and mumbles that these pestilential brats his sister Goðrún has promised him are a long time coming. The giant in *Hjálmþérs saga* says: 'They seem a long time coming, those fellows my sister promised me for this evening' (*Fas.* III 472).

4) When a troll comes into a cave where a man is present, it says: 'There is a smell of men in my cave.' Similar words are spoken by trolls almost the world over; cf. the English 'Fee fi fo fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman.'

5) Trolls and their likes know the identity of human beings, even if they have never seen them before, and address them by name: 'So you

¹ *Fjórar riddarasögur*, ed. H. Erlendsson and E. Þórðarson, 1852, 102. Compare the words of Vargeisa in *Hjálmþérs saga* (*Fas.* III 474): 'Do you wish that I myself should accompany you?'

are here, Helga Old Man's Daughter.' In *Bárðar saga*: 'and when they met, this fiend greeted Þórðr by name. Þórðr saluted him back and asked what his name was' (*ÍF* XIII 148). *The Mabinogion* has it thus: 'How knowest thou, hag, that I am Peredur?' 'It was fated and foreseen that I should suffer affliction from thee.'¹

6) The ogress sets Helga Old Man's Daughter a task: 'You shall do some work today' or 'I have a job for you today.' In *Hjálmþérs saga*: '. . . and you have to perform a small feat for it, fetch me two horns from my calf, from which I shall drink on the eighth day of Christmas, or else you shall lose your life' (*Fas.* III 495). This may be compared with one of the tasks set Culhwch by Ysbaddaden: 'Though thou get that, there is that thou wilt not get. There is no comb and shears in the world wherewith my hair will be dressed, so exceeding stiff it is, save the comb and shears that are between the two ears of Twrch Trwyth [a wild boar] son of Taredd Wledig. He will not give them of his own free will, nor canst thou compel him.' And an Irish task is introduced by the formula 'There is a great work for you today.'²

7) Helga asks where the Queen of the Dales is. 'You must work that out for yourself,' said the ogress, 'and if you do not bring the chess set back, I shall kill you.' *Hjálmþérs saga* has a similar exchange: 'That will take some doing,' said Hjálmpér. 'Where am I to look for this calf?' 'You must work that out for yourself,' said the king. A Danish story has the phrase: 'You must find the way yourself.'³ And an Irish one: 'There are four quarters of the world, I am sure it is in one of them he lives.'⁴

8) One of the tasks in wonder-tales is to clean out a cave or a cowshed, or to find a needle on the floor of the cave. Dordingull charges the tools to set to work themselves: 'Dig, spade; clear, shovel.' In a Scottish story a boy has to clean out the giant's cowsheds. The giant's daughter helps him and says: 'Gather, oh shovel, and put out, oh grape.'⁵

9) When the job is done the ogress says: 'Well done, but you will hardly have done this by yourself.' In *Ármanns rímur* (seventeenth

¹ *The Mabinogion*, tr. G. Jones and T. Jones, 1974, 199.

² *The Mabinogion*, tr. G. Jones and T. Jones, 1974, 117; J. Curtin, *Myths and Folklore of Ireland*, 1890, 40, 42.

³ *Gamle danske Minder i Folkemunde*, 1854, 103.

⁴ J. Curtin, *Myths and Folklore of Ireland*, 1890, 96.

⁵ Campbell 1860-62, I 47.

century) she says, 'Fire-place fool, not you have now / Done so fine a job. / Still, you're let off for now,' and a Norwegian giant remarks, 'You must have talked to my mastermaid, for this you never thought up in your own head,'¹ and an Irish story has, 'Oh then,' said the giant, 'either the Devil or my daughter has helped you to do that work, for I know that you never did it alone.'²

That this kind of reply is very ancient can be seen from Venus's replies to Psyche when she has completed her tasks in Apuleius, *The Golden Ass* (VI 11): 'This is not your work, vile creature, nor the accomplishment of those hands of yours, but rather his, the boy who fell in love with you, to your misfortune, and his too,' and again (VI 13), 'I am well aware of the illicit prompter of this accomplishment too.'

In these little incidents one can see fragments of very ancient wonder-tale narrative; in some cases they originated in Iceland, in others beyond the seas. I have no doubt that much of it is older than some of the most widespread and common wonder-tales in Europe; some may well be from romances and heroic stories that flourished in Celtic lands, and we may assume that that is where the spell-formulas came from. Many things point to ancient European wonder-tales and it is worth noticing how many of these odd little narrative details there are that appear in connection with tasks, which are an important feature in the story of Eros and Psyche, and were popular in Greek heroic stories (Bellerophon, Jason, Hercules), and from them there must have been an unbroken series of supernatural stories about difficult tasks right down to the present day.

IX

Wonder-tales take place in distant lands, which puts the story-teller into a certain difficulty when he has to describe them. The landscape was the easiest part. The sea can be seen in most stories; there are islands within sight of the shore, others far beyond the horizon. The country itself is extensive, with scattered habitations and uninhabited waste between them, and with hills and mountains and high cliffs being very frequent indeed as obstacles to a character's travels. In other words, the landscape is rather like that of Iceland. There is one

¹ P. C. Asbjörnson and J. Moe, *Norske folkeeventyr*², 1852, 283.

² J. Curtin, *Myths and Folklore of Ireland*, 1890, 42, 43.

difference, however: there are trees, groves and forests everywhere in the stories. The king's messengers meet a woman playing a harp in a clearing; the ogresses sit beneath oaks and throw their life-egg from one to the other; trolls spend the day out hunting in the forest; felling of trees is mentioned; the prince amuses himself riding out into the forest to hunt birds and animals, loses his way while chasing a hind, and so is separated from his companions. One story tells of two trees, one green, the other red, which are hollow inside so that there is room for Líneik and Sigurður each to get inside one of them (JÁ II 328). The old story-women learnt from oral and written stories that foreign parts were covered with woodlands and so the wonder-tales are full of dreams about forests.

Herbs are far less prominent in Icelandic wonder-tales, I suspect, than in those of many other countries, and this cannot entirely be explained by romantic influences on the recorders of non-Icelandic stories. The story-teller, wanting to describe Mjaðveig's haven of peace, has recourse to the verse 'There cuckoos sing / and leeks do spring', and the word *laukur* has numerous associations in early Icelandic language, especially in poetry (JÁ II 306–12). Other stories speak of pleasure-gardens and orchards, but do not describe them further, and the boy Tístram has an apple in his mouth. The story-tellers here speak of things they have never seen, and when they refer to them the tone of the story becomes exotic.

Bears and wolves, which were known in northern Europe, are the commonest non-Icelandic animals in wonder-tales. Harts and hinds are romantic creatures, as is also the lion, the king of the animals. Written stories have also introduced dragons, vultures and other monsters into Icelandic folklore. The most notable Icelandic creatures are perhaps the ogresses' swans who rouse Prince Hlini and make him fall asleep with their song.

The wonder-tales are on much more familiar ground in the old man's cottage, as one might expect. It is sometimes solitary, a long way from other human habitations, so there is a long way to go to fetch a flame if the fire goes out. Sometimes the old man lives in a *garðshorn* 'corner cottage of the manor'; the idea is obviously derived from the small tenant farms that frequently stood on the far side of the home meadow of a manor farm. *Garðshorn* with this meaning is found in *Illuga saga Gríðarfóstra* (fourteenth century) and later in *Ála-Flekks saga* and is

common in younger stories.¹ It is also a common farm-name in Iceland; a Karl of Garðshorn on Höfðaströnd is recorded around 1300.²

What we are told of the cottage is highly realistic; after all this is an easy one for the narrator. The Cinderella lies in the ashes by the fireplace and slaves away, while the other daughters sit up there in their finery like dolls; Cinderella gets fish-skins and pot-scrapings to eat on her journey, while her sisters get the best that the pantry can provide. Sometimes the narrator enjoys describing the primitive poverty of the cottage; the old man goes out fishing in a tub, and other things are in the same style. He is hardly ever said to own any other livestock than cattle, and of that he usually has only one cow, though indeed this is always an exceptionally fine animal.

In the ogresses' cave it is rather like the cottage, except that everything there is larger and coarser. A pot is on the fire and cakes are in the embers, the ogresses' beds have bedding and feather mattresses. One of the jobs that the old man's son sometimes has to do for the troll is to shovel the dirt from the floor of the cave. Though trolls are mentioned as owning oxen and horses, they do not on the whole go in for farming, but catch birds and animals and eat the flesh of men and horses. Sometimes the story-teller makes fun of the dirtiness of the giants. Surtla of Blálandseyjar 'sat with her legs stretched out on either side of the fire, and had the pot-strap round her neck and a full pot on the ground between her legs and was cooking meat in it'; and one giant wears a leather over-garment that reaches to the ground in front, but barely covers the shoulders at the back, though this costume is usually reserved for human beings under a spell, such as Dordingull.

Even though the cottage and cave are generally rather simply furnished, nevertheless the greatest treasures can sometimes be found

¹ *Fas.* III 648; Lagerholm *DL* 101, cf. 85; Otto L. Jiriczek, 'Zur mittelisländischen Volkskunde', *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* XXVII 17; *Brjáms saga* (c.1700), *JÁ* II 506; BE *Munmælasögur* 61–63.

² I know of these places called Garðshorn in Iceland: on Höfðaströnd (*BS* I 388–89, *DI* III 411, 1388); near Borg in Víðidalur (*Finnboga saga* ch. 29, *ÍF* XIV 299–300); under Eyjafjöll (*DI* II no. 33, c.1270; no. 423 (also called Ormskot)); in Fúlukinn (Kaldakinn) (*DI* III no. 582, 1405); in Svarfaðardalur (Tjarnargarðshorn, Grundar-Garðshorn or Ytra-Garðshorn and the southerly Garðshorn); on Kræklingahlíð; in Hörgárdalur; in Eyrarsveit; in Súgandafjörður; on Tjörnes.

there. The old couple are certain to have a gold comb, a gold spindle-whorl or some such thing tucked away, and the ogresses usually have quite a lot of precious things, such as a fine golden chess-set, some gold that shines in the dark or a fine golden cloak. This direct confrontation between bleak, primitive poverty and these splendid treasures of gold and magic lends a very curious air to these stories. One story tells of a stone which can be commanded to open and close and go wherever one wants. In another story we hear of a precious, gold-woven carpet, with runic writing on it; it was only necessary to recite the verse so inscribed to make it take one wherever one wanted. Both objects serve the same purpose, but one is a black stone, the other a splendid work of art.

When female trolls change into human form to deceive someone, they are provided with all sorts of finery; they sit on a golden chair, play a harp, perhaps a golden harp, and comb their hair with a golden comb; their tent is made of silk, like those in courtly romances. They go to a lot of trouble, for they are on their way to the king's palace. Things become more difficult when they get there, as the story-tellers have not much frequented royal residences, and so cannot speak from experience, and the descriptions become diverse and contradictory.

Sometimes the term used is *kóngsgarður*, 'King's Manor House', and this term is clearly related to *garðshorn*: the *garðshorn* is the lodge, the *kóngsgarður* the manor house, merely enlarged and made more beautiful as the story-teller is best able to improve it. Another term for the royal residence is *borg*, 'city', which can also mean 'castle', and it will entirely depend upon the extent of the narrator's or writer's knowledge and mental horizon how clearly this building is envisaged, and which meaning he is inclined to attach to the word. The stories written down by Jón Sigurðsson of Gautlönd (1828–89) use *borg* in the usual modern meaning 'city', but most of the old story-tellers have most likely inclined towards the other, if they did not think of it in terms of *kóngsgarður*, a country manor house of the largest kind. The queen's burial mound is a little way from the residence, and the king sits there for long periods. The princesses (sometimes also the princes) have their private *skemma* ('bower' or 'chamber', which is often called 'castle'), just as in *fornaldar sögur*. It is often some distance away from the king's house, sometimes out in the forest. A house of healing is sometimes mentioned; this term appears in *Saga af Tístram og Ísól*

björtu (JA II 320) and may be derived from the Tristram story. The buildings are usually not described in any detail. Sometimes it is stated that the princess's bower is gilded; it does not seem to have occurred to anyone to decorate it in any other way. The king's activities are generally of a *fornaldar saga* kind: he goes out to make war, or to repel an invasion or, quite often, to collect his taxes. He has a minister with him, who takes part in the governing of the country with him; in later stories a royal secretary and a royal tailor are mentioned. Otherwise an old woman in a cottage may stitch his clothes. A bride-to-be is often made to make clothes for her future husband. A girl from a cottage is got in to wait at banquets. The queen and princesses carry laundry to the wash. The king entertains himself by hunting, and the queen or the princesses go out for walks in the woods or stroll along the sea-front for fun; one wonder-tale states specifically that things were dull and lonely in the castle/city. Fertram rides for amusement into the forest on the eve of his wedding. When the king leaves his residence to go on board ship (it never seems very far, the residence is near the sea) he rides in a carriage, sometimes a golden carriage. Gold is generally the mark of royalty; everything belonging to them that is mentioned is of gold. Ísól says of her exit from the pit, 'I came up on my mother's golden scissors.' The prince's clothes were of course gold-embroidered, and the fine golden chess-set and the gold that shines in the dark that we came across in the giant's cave really belonged to the king and had been stolen by the trolls. All this gold is, of course, intended to elevate the descriptions of the royal residence. Everything suggesting modernity is generally avoided, though some things slip in and soap is mentioned in one place, and a gun and gunpowder in another.

It is easy to recognise the principal models for life in the royal household as described in the wonder-tales. First there is the great manor house with the activities customary there that were thought to be appropriate; care was taken to avoid involving the royal family in too mundane tasks. When something has to be clearly shown to be royal, gold is brought in. Another source of inspiration available to the story-tellers was the early sagas, particularly *fornaldar sögur*, which gave abundant information about the activities of royalty, and it is from these that story-tellers got by far the most help in endowing these people with the dignity that differentiates them from the cottage people. Finally there are traces of foreign ways preserved in Icelandic stories,

especially later ones, and also odd pieces of information that had been picked up about foreign lands by the story-tellers. Descriptions of life derived from such sources were bound to be rather incoherent, and it was only too easy to parody them, as Jónas Hallgrímsson did in his comic letter describing a visit by Queen Victoria to Louis Philippe, and Benedikt Gröndal even more spectacularly in the account of imperial domesticity in *Sagan af Heljarlóðarorustu* (1861), by sharpening the contrasts and increasing the number of minor details. Wonder-tales had an advantage over more 'realistic' ones, in that everything in them is nicely vague and undefined.

X

Along with wonder-tales that described things supernatural and wondrous, comic stories, saints' legends and *Novellen* came to Iceland and entered oral tradition. Some of these were long and like wonder-tales consisted of a number of episodes; others were quite short. To a large extent, they had to survive under the same conditions as wonder-tales when they reached Iceland, but there were certain differences. In pre-Reformation times legends of saints were believed in and held in high regard. After the Reformation those that were thought to be particularly papistical, because they were associated with the worship of saints or the like, were in greatest danger of suppression, but otherwise they were very likely to be held in considerable respect and even full belief. The other kinds of story were generally free from supernatural elements, and so alterations or difficulties were not likely for that reason, and people believed them or not according to their disposition and how improbable they seemed to them, and doubtless did not bother themselves unduly about their truthfulness—and I suspect that in this respect the situations in Iceland and elsewhere were very similar. The main thing about these stories was how exciting or amusing they were; besides which, some of them were also deeply satirical, which people would of course always enjoy, provided that the satire was against things they disliked.

Other things could, however, be a greater threat to the survival of these stories. Many of them had originated in an urban culture which was sharply stratified and had clear occupational distinctions, and this affected their content and spirit, and so they could seem quite unfa-

miliar in an Icelandic rural environment where the population was scattered and there was little variation of occupation. What was a cobbler or a tailor to an old story-woman in Örafi in south-east Iceland? Undoubtedly people were eager to hear or read such stories, but for them to survive well in oral tradition they had to be somewhat adapted to what was familiar to the local people. This could be quite difficult in some cases, and a great many of these stories contained much that must have seemed foreign. Those stories that came by word of mouth from oral tradition in neighbouring countries were the most easily adapted, but some of them came to Iceland in written form, and many of these are rather odd.

There is no doubt that saints' legends were current all over the country, as one might expect. But the comic stories were also very popular; indeed they already bulk surprisingly large in early literature. *Ljósvetninga saga* tells of how someone tries to kill a fly on an old man's bald head with an axe, and of course the blow does more harm to the old man than to the fly (cf. AT 1586A 'Fatal killing of the Insect'). *Víga-Glúms saga* tells how a man tests his friend by telling him that he has killed a barn-calf (*hlöðukálfr*), and the friend thinks he means a man called Hlöðu-Kálfr and refuses his help (cf. AT 893, 'The Unreliable Friends', 'The Half-friend'). *Flóamanna saga* tells how a man takes the cockerel's rough treatment of the hen as an example and succeeds in controlling his wife (cf. AT 670, 'The Animal Languages'). An account of the court poets of King Haraldr hárfagri tells how they were fooled by a pretty woman (cf. AT 502 and 709); *Ragnars saga Loðbrókar* tells of the task that Ragnarr imposed upon Áslaug, to come to him neither dressed nor undressed, neither fed nor unfed, not alone, yet not accompanied by any person (cf. AT 875, 'The Clever Peasant Girl'). *Hákonar þátr Hárekssonar* (*Fms.* XI) and *Heiðreks saga* both tell of the giving of good counsels. Hákon follows those given him and escapes difficulty and deadly danger; Heiðrekr goes contrary to those given to him, and gets into no little trouble as a result (cf. AT 910A, 'Wise through Experience'). Hrói the Stupid is a traveller who comes to Sweden and falls into the hands of villains who trick him and treat him roughly, though it all comes out all right in the end (*Flateyjarbók* 1945, II 149–58).

We could quote many more stories of this kind. The models are usually foreign, as can sometimes be seen from the contents, though

they have often been given an Icelandic feel. There are also other stories of a similar kind in manuscripts which are direct translations, with little or no alteration, from foreign sources. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the number of these stories rises steeply, and poets then composed *rímur* and other kinds of poetry out of them. Some of this material then gets into oral tradition. But many of these kinds of story as told by the old women story-tellers in the nineteenth century cannot be traced directly to any of these translations or their literary derivatives, and we must suppose that many such were brought into the country in oral form. In these cases we often find that the same stories exist in the oral tradition of neighbouring countries, sometimes in very similar forms, and it is probable that that is where much of this material comes from. It was so entertaining that everyone wanted to hear it.

Some stories tell of the incredible stupidity of old men and women, and among these the stories of the brothers of Bakki form a separate group. Most countries have such characters (in Denmark the people of Mols, in Germany the Schildbürgers, in England the Wise Men of Gotham and so on), and the stories about them travel from one country to another. Icelanders must have picked up some knowledge of them, and some foreign material appears in stories about the three idiot brothers Gísli, Eiríkur and Helgi, but most of what is told of them is totally Icelandic, grown in Icelandic soil and based on the Icelandic way of life. It is anyway pretty well impossible to distinguish such comic stories from other anecdotes about old people.

PART V

THE WORLD OF MEN AND THE HIDDEN WORLD

I

Eiríkur Ólafsson of Brúnir (1826–1900) tells the following stories about hidden folk whom he himself had seen or heard about in the district near Eyjafjöll where he spent his childhood (JPork. 98–100).

When I was in my twelfth year, I was walking on a fine day near the farm Hlíð by Eyjafjöll, I think in February, late in the day. I then saw a boy with a little broom in his hand driving three cows and a dirty heifer down to the brook just above the home-meadow. The cows and the heifer stood in a row by the stream, drinking, and the boy stood over them with the broom in his hand, some two hundred yards or so away from me. It immediately struck my mind that these cows must belong to elves. They were the same size as our cows, one pied red, one with a grey neck and one with black flanks. At length the cows stopped drinking and the boy drove them back a little way to a stone wall with a gate in it, and two of the cows had gone through the gate. Then one of the farm-people called to me and said: ‘What are you staring at?’ I looked round at him, but when I looked back to see what had become of the cows I could see nothing, and I much regretted having taken my eyes off the cows, because I wanted to see what became of them. Just beyond the gate or wall there was a great stone, covered with grass, with a big hollow in under it. We children were strictly forbidden to go in under the stone, or to make any noise near it; we were told that it would be the worse for us if we did, because there were elves there.

Another time I saw a woman driving four ewes over the rocks known as Húshamrar, above the farm at Hlíð; then she drove them across to another rock and vanished there. I did not know her, she did not belong to Hlíð or to any of the farms round about, and so she must have been an elf-woman.

I remember well from my youth that I and all the congregation, and the parson, the Rev. Ólafur (I think it was the Rev. Ólafur Pálsson),¹ used to arrive at [Steinar] church on the morning of the festivals before dawn. He would begin to ring the bell and hold the service at dawn, starting with the hymn ‘The day that we should keep holy’ and so on. At that time there were no clocks or watches. We used to get up about midnight, feed all the animals, read the Christmas-Eve lection from Vídalín’s Homilies, eat and get ready, all before dawn, and in those days we had no coffee to wake ourselves up with. One New-Year’s morning before dawn I remember that I was dressed for church and standing in the doorway of the farm-house. There was a clear sky

¹ Ólafur Pálsson, parson in Austur Eyjafjöll 1797–1835, d. 1839; see JPork. 98.

and the Northern Lights were shining, but there was no moon. I then saw a great crowd of people walking westwards across the meadow below the farm. I went into the farm-house and told everyone that there were a lot of people walking westwards across the meadow. Some came out, but no one saw anything except the farmer's wife, who saw the same as me and said they were all hidden folk making for their church. No one was at all surprised at this, as it was generally said that there were great numbers of them about. There were in all some twenty to thirty of them, men, women and children of all ages.

There is a great pillar of rock in the meadow at Drangshlíð by Eyjafjöll, nearly a hundred feet high [Drangurinn]. On one side of it there are caves and great hollows in underneath it, and the farmers there use them to keep all their hay and their cows in. No lamp would ever stay alight there where the cows were kept, however hard one tried to keep it burning. It was never necessary to stay awake over a cow in labour there; if a cow gave birth there at night, as often happened, the calf would be in the stall with her in the morning, and the cows never miscarried. But if a new farmer came to Drangshlíð and had a cow watched over as usual, something would go wrong with it, and the watchers could never stay through the night in the dark there because of various things they saw and heard. One man in my youth had been working at Skarðshlíð and gone missing for days at a time. He had been with elves in the Drangur and said an elf-girl had been trying to get him to marry her. He said that there were many people in the Drangur, and that it was good to be with them. They were well-behaved and orderly, and just as nice people as we were. He said their parish church was at Skóganúpur. There was a large church there, and there was another church in the valley, because there were a lot of people here and there. He said they had sheep, cows, horses and fishing-boats, and the men often went fishing; they were as good at fishing as we were, and brought their catches home on horses. Altogether their whole way of life was very like ours. They had lamps and candles. Then when the year was up and his job came to an end (he had been a farm-worker) it was rumoured that he had vanished and he was never seen again. There was no search for him, because everyone knew where he had gone, even though he had not told anyone where he was going.

There was a farmer at Skógar called Ísleifur, grandfather of Ólafur, the goldsmith in Reykjavík. He was going down to the sea-shore one time as he often did by moonlight and in good weather, and when he came to the ridge of pebbles he saw that a boat was coming ashore and that men were unloading it onto the beach, first the oars, and then cod and flounder, up the sand. He said he got off his horse and watched for a while and thought to himself, 'These are elves and their boats are elf-boats,' and he thought he would go and talk to the men, and so started to walk down the beach. And when he got down to the pile of fish the horse pulled the reins out of his hands, so that he had to turn and grab them again; when he turned back he saw nothing, neither fish nor boat nor people. This had been on the shore below Skóganúpur, where the man had said that the hidden folk's great church was. This Ísleifur was a steady man, not given to idle talk.

It was also generally said that some people had on various occasions seen many boats on the sea out from Eyvindarhólar, though there were no humans out then. And it is certain that everyone could always see a great break in the surf, as if there was a kind of harbour there. But if humans took their boats out to fish from that shore, something always happened; the boats filled with water, sometimes they broke up, and the men's lives were in danger. People were seen to lead horses laden with fish from this harbour up to Hrutafellsfjall and vanish there.

There is a hillock by Eyjafjöll called Hafurshóll, and there are great crags on it. A light shining in one of them was seen from Nýibær every winter. This light appeared at dusk and burned until 11–12 every evening, and could only have been an elf-light.

These stories of Eiríkur's give a good idea of what experiences people can have, and what they used to say when belief in elves was strong. The most striking feature of this legend is its straightforwardness, in it the 'supernatural' is a matter of course and natural, experience and explanation fit together, there is no doubt involved. These stories breathe a rural calm, their world is coherent and whole. After all, since people have these neighbours all around them, why should they not become aware of them from time to time?

Most of Eiríkur's stories are about what he himself saw, or are derived with few intermediate links from eye-witnesses, and they give a good picture of the normal contacts between elves and men. Only the workman at Skarðshlíð has more extensive dealings with them and this source is of course less trustworthy; it is only a child's understanding of a rumour. It so happens that Eiríkur's account deals almost exclusively with sightings, but it would be easy to point to other reliable elf-stories in which people become aware of hidden folk in other ways, in a dream, through hearing or through touch. Sometimes people get their knowledge of them in a trance or through the gift of second sight, which is otherwise by no means limited to seeing elves. It is children who have most often become aware of them, and many a man might have said as did the author of this verse:

<i>Þessar klappir þekkti' eg fyr</i>	These rocks were known of old to me
<i>þegar eg var ungur;</i>	when I was a little boy;
<i>átti' eg víða á þeim dyr,</i>	to all their doors I held the key,
<i>eru þar skápar fallegir.¹</i>	their cupboards hid many a marvellous toy.

¹ On human and elvish children playing together see *Æfisaga Sigurðar Ingjaldssonar frá Balaskarði*, 1911, I 11. For further examples see Einar G. Pétursson, 'Þjóðtrú á Íslandi', *Frændafundur*, 1997, 63.

Leaving aside legends about elves appearing to people in dreams, the core of those elf-stories which have been obtained from eyewitnesses, and have not been altered in oral transmission, is what may be defined as extra-sensory perception, that is perception which is of a different kind from the normal waking perception of a person who is not in any way psychic. This same vision into hidden worlds is doubtless in one way or another the root of most elf-stories which are preserved from earlier times. It is therefore worth while examining the matter a little further.

II

In his book *Íslendingar* ('Icelanders'), Guðmundur Finnbogason has discussed the 'vision' which certain people have into hidden worlds. He concludes that this is the same phenomenon both in ancient and more recent legends, and that folk-legends in general are largely sprung from such phenomena, 'for there can be no doubt that dreams, visions and uncanny sounds are the basis of stories about the dead appearing to people in dreams and when they are awake, of stories of elves, ghosts, attendant spirits and various premonitions of things to come. The same thing has usually been behind it when people have a reputation for prophetic powers, and there have been a good many such people in this country.'¹

The interpretation of dreams has been much practised in Iceland, and belief in the supernatural has been greatly stimulated by dreams, for in them people saw all sorts of beings whom they understood (often only afterwards) to be the creatures of folk-belief; people associated with the dead, and sometimes dreamt of things to come or events which happened in distant places. Most of these visions are remarkably simple; people see lights, for instance, or some beings in human shape who they thought (perhaps later) were apparitions, ghosts or spirits; unnatural-looking animals are attendant spirits, and sometimes people see sendings. Visions of events at a distance, visions of the future or seeing through solid matter (such as into hillocks) are stranger. Many uncanny sounds are very straightforward; people hear unexpected noises, the sound of church bells or footsteps, the sound of walking about or the slamming of a door, and are quick to find explanations for them. It is a different matter when people hear complete sentences

¹ Guðmundur Finnbogason, *Íslendingar*, 1933, 117.

with definite meaning, such as prophecy or information about distant events, or about the dead; it is even quite a common thing for people to hear whole stanzas of poetry. It is much less common for sight and hearing to go together, except when people are in some kind of abnormal state or in a trance. There are accounts given by truthful men who thought they had wrestled with ghosts.

The basis of these kinds of story is doubtless often something experienced by people when they are neither asleep nor awake, but in a kind of a trance. Witches and seeresses of old used to go into a kind of cataleptic state when they performed their rites, and those who 'sat out' undoubtedly also fell into some kind of trance. Jón lærði is very knowledgeable about the drowsiness or trance-like state into which those fall who have visions or visitations. He also says that 'one may hear and understand noteworthy things from the replies of people who are lying in a trance'.¹ He also remarks that he heard in his youth 'that some knew the art of making a sleeping man give them information, by holding the little finger of the person in question'. This suggests that a form of hypnosis was being practised.

Laxdal's *Óláfs saga Þórhallasonar* three times describes the particular moment when men go over into the elf-world. It is said to be like walking in the dark, being in a daze or between two worlds or floating through the air. Other sources also mention darkness, floating through the air, or going through smoke or water.² I am inclined to believe that behind all this are the experiences of people who went into hypnotic states or trances.³

¹ AM 727 II 4to, fol. 3v. This manuscript of *Tíðfordríf* was long thought to be Jón lærði's autograph, but probably is not.

² Laxdal *Ósþ* I, chs 13, 20, 58; JA I 107–15; ÓDav. *Þulur* 32; *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns*, *Fms.* III, 176.

³ Jón lærði has considerable knowledge of all kinds of trance and trance-like states; cf. EGP *Eddurit*, 53–54: 'We hear and read in very many old histories about the arts known to the Gautish and Lappish people, in Gandvík, Malanger and Varanger, no less than of the blackest kind of magic practised in Finnmark, and the miraculous effects of their spells and their escaping from their bodily shapes and returning to them, so that [the magician] is in two places at once, also being in the shape of beasts or birds; though they do not do this according to the Neapolitan Greek learning or by anointing but rather according to the arts of Óðinn and the people of Asia, which he also left here to his men of the North.' Cf. p. 98 above.

Much witchcraft is based on strange kinds of lore and the religious systems of past ages, and one suspects that the men who thought they could affect the elements by sorcery or spells, or put into effect sendings, influence wild animals to attack livestock or make goblins go and take the milk of cows, often had rather little contact with hidden worlds, except for those men who went mad by doing such things. When the ancient law-codes speak of the waking up of trolls there may have been some kind of spiritualism involved, but the art of ghost-raising described in Jón Árnason's stories looks more like the ravings of madmen. To the extent that spells, pronouncements and poems with magical power were directed at a person's mind and will, rather than at their body or at inanimate things, the stories may be near to the truth; it may all be done by suggestion. The basis of belief in the evil eye may also be derived from experience of the same phenomenon. Witch-rides and shape-shifting may to some extent be connected with accounts of shamanism. When they want to do something special the sorcerer or the person who wants to gain some particular knowledge often has to follow definite rules which are basically aimed at putting them into a state of auto-hypnosis, or can at least achieve something like it.

III

We will now consider certain things which have been thought to help people gain insight into hidden worlds.

For people to dream significant dreams they had to work at their dreaming, go through them in their minds, interpret them and examine how they were fulfilled. For this, it was thought to be a good thing not to be among crowds, to live a quiet, solitary life, where there was little to distract or disturb the mind.¹

When 'sitting out' the sorcerer should have an axe in his hands, stare at the edge and look neither to the right nor to the left, whatever appeared before him, and give no answer if anything was said to him. The departed or elves would then come to him and tell him what he wanted to know (JÁ I 436–37).

People could see distant places by staring into a piece of glass. They sat by waterfalls when they wanted to see into the future. Both are

¹ See Guðmundur Finnbogason, *Íslendingar*, 1933, 111–14; cf. Hermann Jónasson, *Draumar*, 1912, 130–31.

well-known techniques for inducing a trance-like state of mind. Lapps sit in a circle when performing magic, and song was used in sorcery in ancient times; both these practices have parallels in our own times in the methods of spiritualists.

A person who wanted to get hold of a prophetic spirit had to go on his own apart from other people where he could be sure that no one would come, as his life would be in danger if anyone spoke to him while he was conjuring the spirit to him (JÁ I 435). A prohibition about addressing or touching anyone conducting a magical ritual is very widespread.

In *Tíðfordrif* in Stockholm Papp. fol. nr 64, a long passage, formerly attributed to Jón lærði but actually by Jón Eggertsson, describes the art of opening the earth and walking down into it, talking with the inhabitants and so learning of hidden things. The author of this passage describes the method of contacting elves, taking the description from some earlier author now unknown:

First, one must recognise and know the ground or the hillocks where elves are likely to be living; there are many things to take into account, but the following is the most noticeable, being visible to the eye. There will be a low, green ten-leaved herb growing on top of the hillock, five leaves on each side [of the stem] and at its centre will be a small spike of grain. The same writer considers it infallible that where this herb grows, the hidden folk will live under it. He also says how one is to take [it] and shape it like this figure,¹ then engrave certain words on it and smear it with mouse's blood, and lay it in a particular hidden place for some nights. Item prepare a rod made of whalebone with certain characters on it; while these preparations are in progress the operator must keep right away from other people and read daily a prescribed chapter in the Proverbs of Solomon. When these preparations are complete he shall lay it [the figure] beneath his head (a bronze rod having previously been stuck in the ground next to the aforementioned herb), and then, he thinks, the guidance of the hidden folk dwelling beneath [in the hillock] will be revealed to him in his sleep, as will the hidden things which he desires to learn. Nonetheless only pious and well-conducted men, who constantly seek for the increase of wisdom in prayerful invocation, will succeed in this. The writer maintains in the same passage that a man can become as invisible as if he had a helmet of invisibility in the place where the bronze rod stands by the above-mentioned herb. He also mentions that one can make contact for the same purpose above the ground with the hidden folk beneath by the following means. You cut a circle in the ground around you with a knife, and a door [into it?] in a specified

¹ Here there is a drawing in the manuscript, perhaps a Þórr's hammer.

direction, with a man's and a woman's shape drawn within the circle, and helm-bands (as he calls them) cut there which shall be cut in the manner in which they are graven on women's brooches, item with these words inside the ring: *masculinum femininum*. He says that the same shall also stand with [the rune] *hagall* [H] together with prepared prayer-readings asking for wisdom and its increase, without any misuse of God's word. On the contrary, he thinks that piety, prayerfulness, fasting, pure and chaste living and deportment will serve to help one. He wants it to be understood that the hiddenness of the indwellers of the earth will then be lifted. No more of this here.

Thus emphasis is usually laid on concentrating the mind on something, or sometimes one has to stare at something. Solitude, silence and tranquillity are necessary, and finally fasting and pure living are also included in this place—these being, as is well known, one of the most infallible ways of inducing a trance-like or a hypnotic state of mind.

When people perceive mysterious sights or sounds or the like without any conscious effort on their own part, there are likely to be special factors involved. People usually became aware of trolls when on their own up in the mountains or near precipices; ghosts were most often perceived after sunset or in the dark. People who were much alone, preferably outside inhabited areas, were the ones most likely to see elves or have other contact with them. Thus people out tending sheep, or staying alone in shielings, often became aware of elves, for there one day would be much like the next, they would hear the murmur of the stream, but otherwise silence would reign, occasionally broken by the barking of a dog, which might give them a start. Unconsciously the mind would turn inwards. Everything around was unchanging, the world of nature still and silent; one would feel in its power, become as if a plant, rooted in the valley. The sight became sharp and the ear keen, noticing anything that might suggest the activity of living beings breaking the monotony of this mindless immensity of silence.

This monotony was often broken. People saw sights and heard voices that did not come from ordinary people or animals. Where did they come from? There were two possibilities. The mysterious phenomena were either caused by something outside the normal consciousness of the one seeing and hearing, as is the case with telepathy and prophecy, and maybe many other things that are beyond my understanding; or else they derived from the person's own sense perceptions, but through some misapprehension or false perception or hallucination emanating

from the depths of his soul, and this may very often have been what happened. It is very natural for a person in solitude and silence to hear his own thoughts and see his imaginings; and sometimes a person's nerves may have been upset or his mind disturbed and then all kinds of misperceptions could occur. The story of Álfa-Árni has all the hallmarks of being the story of a deranged person, and much else could be explained in the same way (cf. JÁ I 77).

The present author has little experience of supernatural phenomena; he has true dreams like most other people in Iceland, but otherwise has no psychic faculties and knows very little about them. He has therefore chosen to leave this topic at this point and hand it over to those who are more versed in such things.

IV

If a person can see into hidden worlds, or hear voices from them, it is as if he is looking through coloured glass. Many forces control what he sees and what it looks like. To start with there is his own psychological condition, his desires and his concerns. If what he sees originates outside his consciousness, that is where its content will come from, but if it has been shaped entirely in the hidden recesses of his mind, then that will have provided its actual original content. Secondly, it is bound to be influenced by his nationality and culture, the society in which he lives and his occupation. Thirdly, there are the influences from folk-belief; if a person sees cows being driven where he did not expect any humans to be he will assume it is an elf if belief in elves is current where he lives, and both what he sees and what he says about it will inevitably be affected by that interpretation. If he knows stories about elves, it is likely that his account of what he has seen will mould itself on their pattern.

All these processes occur simultaneously, and these influences continue their work when other men and women begin talking about these strange events. The experiential core of the story shrinks or is obscured, and before long it becomes impossible to tell what really happened.

Eiríkur Ólafsson's stories give some idea about the first stage of the change. Eiríkur himself sees the boy driving the cows towards the stone, a woman driving sheep, people walking westwards over the meadow. They are just like ordinary people, but rational thought reveals

that they cannot be local. And according to folk-belief there were elves living in the stone and in fact everywhere round about. Next we have simple reports by eye-witnesses. Ísleifur sees people coming ashore to the south. They cannot be local men, cannot be human, because they disappear, and people connect them with legends of elves, their dwellings and activities. Then we have common talk in the district, without the name of the informant being given: the lights in Hafurshóll. The elves' fishing in the sea off Eyvindarhólar is more doubtful in that the date is not given, and here we seem to have a mixture of old and new reports. All these accounts are very simple. The story of the workman at Skarðshlíð has more to it, and it all seems more mysterious. The main point, the man's disappearance, is no more definite than 'it was rumoured'. But all through this story shines the belief in elves strong and clear: the farmers at Drangshlíð must not have their cows watched when they calve, and all goes well—the elves see to that.

One would not need to make many changes in the story of the workman of Skarðshlíð or alter the content in any fundamental way, to make it into a common type of elf-story, telling of the love of a man and an elf-woman which ends with the man disappearing into the world of elves.

V

As was mentioned earlier on in this book (pp. 15 and 63–65 above), by no means all folk-stories are based on mysterious occurrences, hallucinations or imaginings, and one only has to think of such obviously fictional stories as that of Grámann the Master-thief, humorous anecdotes or stories of outstanding people. It also happens quite often that an event in real life which has nothing supernatural about it attracts superstitious elements to itself so that stories result which are indistinguishable from those that arise from mystical experiences. The process can then become so totally reversed, that first there is a folk-story, and the event that it describes happens afterwards. The story of Galdra-Loftur (pp. 207–13 above) is an excellent example of this. While people had little understanding of the causes of diseases, many of them were blamed on elves or ghosts (see *JÁ*² II 703, *veikindi*), as they had been in earlier stories (in this Icelanders were following an old tradition of diagnosis: in ancient Babylon it was considered to be one of

the highest branches of knowledge to know what demons caused which diseases). Mental disease and apoplexy in particular were often attributed to a *Móri* or a *Skotta*, and when they ran in families it gave support to the belief in attendant spirits.¹ In the seventeenth century, when belief in sorcery was at its height, people were inclined to blame magicians and their activities for every kind of unknown sickness of men and animals, and for any unexpected accidents.

Thus the ways in which folk-legends came into existence were very varied, and it is pointless to expect to explain everything in the same way. Sometimes a story originates from a mysterious experience, sometimes the superstitious explanation is added afterwards, and many stories have come into being through deliberate invention.

VI

The poet who composed *Snjáskvæði* found he had a problem when he needed to describe the world of elves, though he managed it well enough: 'He saw green fields and numberless sheep, and all the woods in flower, splendid farms and strong fences, the sun shining on a hall roofed with silver' (ÓDav. *Pulur*, 32–33). In reality the poet had never seen halls roofed with silver, either in the human world or in any hidden world. That sort of thing is fiction. But generally the hidden worlds are a kind of reflection of the world of men. Eiríkur Ólafsson did not see elves riding in rich clothes with golden crowns on their heads, no, he saw a boy with a broom in his hand driving three cows, one pied red, one with a grey neck and one with black flanks, and a dirty heifer with them, and they all lined up by a stream to drink. Ísleifur of Skógar saw elves come ashore and unload from their boat oars, cod and flounder, and he had got right up to the pile of fish when his horse snatched the reins. The workman at Skarðshlíð said the elves lived just like men, had cows and horses, rowed out to sea to fish and used lamps and candles.

The folk-stories are packed full of such vignettes of peasant life, and this is one of their greatest glories. People indoors, weaving or carding wool, sewing or carpentering, people outside mowing or gathering the hay, tending the sheep, rounding them up, a shepherd at a sheepfold; all kinds of animals, wild or domestic, birds and fish and

¹ Cf. Árni Árnason, *Apoplexie und ihre Vererbung*, 1935, 130, 146.

the contacts of men with them for good and evil; men catching birds on cliffs or on the moors, fishing in the sea or on lakes. One gets glimpses of everything, boats and oilskins, fishermen in their huts and at meals, or travelling over the wastes in snowstorms. Long trains of packhorses carry stockfish along narrow, winding bridle-paths, and make their way at a steady trot all the long spring day, under the Icelandic rain and sun, which does not differentiate between the rich and the poor, the just and the unjust. Sometimes, too, we see people put all their work aside and try their mounts to the utmost, riding to church, racing along to a wedding or a party, and there will be the scrape of the knee-fiddle, the sound of singing and the beat of the dancers' feet.

The picture of Icelandic peasant life given by folk-stories is enormously varied and entertaining, and there is no other source richer in such material. Much of what is described there is now changed. Villages and towns have grown up since, and their culture is very different. Even rural life has changed. Herb-gathering trips are no longer fashionable, people have stopped making charcoal, the shielings are just ruins, and stock-fish trains are seen no more.

All these human activities are alive, for the human heart beats in them. They are imbued with the joys and sorrows, hope and despair of human beings. Men everywhere labour at their tasks, fight for their existence, and try to snatch a few sunny days before their work is done.

Folk-stories are full of pictures of peasant life, of people's activities and customs, but not because that is what they are about. They are always about something 'story-worthy', memorable, rare or exciting events. But they must be clothed, so to speak, in people's daily lives. Some artists are in love with the tiny details and petty events of real life, as if they find a revelation in them. This may be because they long to escape from the world of their own thoughts, as the city-dweller longs for the natural beauty of the countryside. But the details of peasant life in folk-stories do not spring from that source. Their story material, the rural setting and the thought-processes of the story-teller are an indivisible whole. This unity and coherence works a strange magic on the listeners. Though these pictures of folk-life are inseparable from the stories that contain them, they take hold of their minds. People are like the grass on the ground that grows and withers, enjoys sun and dew, endures storm and cold, and though each blade of grass is different from every other, they share growth and decay, and in the

last resort it is as if 'all is one' and the wonder-tale names Sigríður and Þorsteinn contain the highest wisdom.

VII

Once upon a time a man died at Skálholt, and a neighbouring farmer, a master carpenter, was got to make his coffin. The time came to put the body in the coffin, and it turned out to be too narrow, as everyone thought. The bishop was present with other dignitaries; he sent for the carpenter and told him that he had made a bad blunder. The carpenter was not convinced and took a hammer in one hand and a sledge-hammer in the other. The dignitaries shook their heads at this procedure. Now the carpenter struck both ends of the coffin at the same time with the hammer and sledge-hammer, quite a light blow, and as the boards settled after the blow the body sank neatly into place. Then said the carpenter: 'What do you know about a craftsman's blows, you devils?'

The theme of this story is a craftsman's pride. He is aware of his skill and is confident of it, and this confidence gives him the strength to stand up against the mighty men who rank high above him in worldly dignity. He has his superiority no less than they have theirs, and so each class has its own resources.

If one were to search thoroughly, I suspect that more stories of craftsmen's skill would be found among Icelandic folk-stories. Yet I suspect too that they would be fewer than one might expect, and the reason is simple. There has never been very much division of labour in Iceland; everyone worked on the land, and the men went out fishing or worked on fishing-stations as circumstances permitted. Urban artisans come too late into Icelandic history to become part of folk-lore, so that apart from clerics, it is mainly carpenters that could have cause to regard themselves as superior to others because of their skill.

But then there is the division of the people into clerics and laymen, and this has had a far greater impact. There are a few stories that relate to pre-Reformation times, often rather anti-clerical in tone, and especially hostile to monks and nuns, who are accused of immorality, often in a very silly way, as in the stories of their having children at Helgafell Abbey, where the story-tellers overlooked the fact that there never was a nunnery anywhere near Helgafell. Some of the pre-Reformation bishops are accused of excessive greed, like Gottskálk the Second of

Hólar. Most of this comes from or is coloured by the hatred of the Lutherans for the Roman Church, though the story of the abbess who put the abbot's drawers on her head instead of her wimple (JÁ II 73) is an anti-clerical satire from much earlier times (it occurs for instance in the *Decameron*).

But many of the Catholic and most of the Lutheran bishops had a good reputation, and are the spiritual fathers of the people in stories.¹ The ordinary clergy stand closer to the common people, and have had a greater effect on their imaginations. The peasants looked up to the model farmer at the parsonage, the people of the parish respected their pastor, the unlearned had a kind of fearful veneration for the man learned in Latin and Theology. People came to think of them as having greater power than others in matters pertaining to the spiritual world, that they had spiritual, often magical, power. Most of the time they were the most reliable pillars of strength in men's dealings with dark powers, and it is rare for them to use their powers for doubtful purposes. Thus the name of priest provides a greater security than that of poet. Both had spiritual power and mighty skills, but poets were less to be relied on.

There are many more ideas associated with priests than these. They received their income from obligatory tithes which many must have resented having to pay, and so they often got a reputation for avarice. The Devil could not find an unavaricious priest to provide the last rites for Kálfr Árnason; there was only one in the world, he was away in Germany and protected by a blazing fire all round him, and the Devil could not get hold of him (JÁ I 504–05). In a more popular tone is the story of the parson at Múli who took the cow from the poor widow at Ingunnarsstaðir for his tithe, and on the way a great rock fell on him from the mountain (JÁ I 480). But though there are thus some traces of satire, emanating clearly from the payers of tithes, the trust placed in the parson because of his spiritual powers is a much more important and common element in folk-stories relating to clergy.

¹ Of the Catholic bishops 'Gvendur góði' (Guðmundr the Good) was of course best known among the people and he appears in some stories. In one story Luther saves a woman who had sold her soul to the Devil; Luther gives her a purse, which the Devil tries in vain to fill, and he gives it up with the words, 'No wonder I was not able to fill it: it is Luther's purse' (ÍB 160 8vo, p. 35). Cf. Ólafur Lárússon, 'Guðmundur góði í þjóðtrú Íslendinga', *Byggð og saga*, 1944, 244–79.

Some stories show signs of having originated in schools or among clerics, such as the anecdote of Sæmundr the Wise's rhyming contests in Latin with the Devil ('Nunc tibi deest gramen'; JÁ I 496) or the conversation between the devil and the ignorant priest ('Abi, male spirite'; JÁ II 23). The same applies to the story of Galdra-Loftur and many other stories of sorcerers. Others show the boys of the Latin schools through the eyes of the common folk, and they contain sometimes respect, sometimes antipathy.

Though secular officials appear a good deal in folk-stories, popular ideas about them are much less consistent. Merchants, who were mostly foreigners in Iceland, were the most clearly distinguished class, hated for their rapacity, insolence and vulgarity. Stories about them show a tendency to try to cut them down to size, and this is usually how the Icelandic peasant, often a proud and easily offended type, compensated himself for the humiliations he often had to endure from them. So we find popular heroes emerging among their opponents, such as the power-poets Þórður of Strjúgur and Þormóður of Gvendareyjar, who turned the tables on them and brought the Jacks-in-office down a peg or two. It may be that occasionally a peasant tried to frighten a trader by threats of magic, but for the most part these stories must have come about as verbal vengeance for insults which the unprotected Icelander had to suffer without being able to get his revenge on the spot. Thus the story of Jón the Strong¹ is fictitious, born of a burning hatred for traders and the need for a vicarious revenge; it tells how Jón repeatedly overcame a merchant's trickery and his attempts to bully through his sheer strength, defeating increasingly mighty opponents and eventually getting rid of the merchant himself. The stories of Halla of Straumfjörður's tricks, when she causes the merchant to see mice and stones as sheep and butter, or the one about Eiríkur of Vogsósar, who makes the figures of the trader's ledgers appear in the wrong column, are much more innocent. Thus would many a man have liked to pay out his trader for dear and defective goods. The story of the theft of trading-goods in Stykkishólmur is interesting. In *Grímsstaðaannáll* (under the year 1711) it is stated that many goods, especially cloth, were stolen from the warehouse during the winter, while the traders were in Denmark. 'This theft was rumoured to be the

¹ JÁ I 323, 574; ÓDav.³ II 114–18, ÓDav.⁵ II 156–59.

work of Þormóður Eiríksson, and he was acquitted at the Assembly, and so the crime was never solved' (*Annálar 1400–1800* II 546–47). According to folk-stories poor people of the neighbourhood became destitute and begged Þormóður to help them, saying that they were dying of hunger though there was plenty of food in the shop. Þormóður could not resist their pleas, opened the doors with a magic 'lock-herb' for these poor souls, but did not enter himself. Here it is not cloth that is stolen, but food, and the theft is interpreted in the best possible light. The story clearly originated among people who had no great concern for the merchant's property, but were in straitened circumstances themselves. The legends of Þormóður's ambiguous oath, and the innuendo in his verse addressed to the sheriff, 'Hafið þér séð hann Glugga-Gvönd, göfugi sýslumaður?' (Have you seen Gvendur-on-the-window, honourable Sheriff?), with its heavy imputation of judicial complicity in the crime, also take his side.

There is less differentiation than one might expect of Icelanders according to the part of the country they lived in, and little sign of hostility or unfavourable comparisons between districts. The people of Flói and Hornafjörður are generally made out to be not over-bright, the people of the Western Fjords and those from Snæfellsnes are most often linked with magic. Those of the north of Iceland are regarded as proud and stuck up (not unlike the popular northern English view of the southerners) and the story of *Hólamannahögg*, 'The men of Hólar's blows', is based on this attitude.¹

Apart from the traders, there is no great hostility to Danes on account of their nationality. The Danish governors-general are naturally seen in an ambiguous light, but folk-stories probably do not exaggerate about them unduly. People had a great dislike of Lapps because of their reputation for sorcery, and Muslims were hated and feared after the Algerian raid on Iceland of 1627, as a sort of revenge or compensation for which there sprang up a lot of stories about Icelandic magicians raising storms and so on against them. *Fitjaannáll* (under the year 1467; *Annálar 1400–1800* II 21–23) has older legends about Ólafur tóni leading English merchants astray, but their general tone is rather different. There is no bitter feeling of impotence underlying

¹ See JÁ II 127–28; Gestur [Guðmundur Björnsson], *Undir ljúfum lögum*, 1918, 26–31.

them. Relations with foreign fishermen varied; some were suspicious of the Dutch, but the worst of all were the foreigners drowned at sea. They had a tendency to return to haunt, especially if they were ill-treated in any way.

When a rich person behaves heartlessly towards the poor, or when a person with power treats the humble harshly, folk-stories are normally on the side of the poor and humble. They are well-disposed to the pauper who is cruelly treated. Sometimes they mention servants being kept hungry and driven hard at their work, though perhaps less often than one might expect when one considers how bad their conditions had been in earlier times (or perhaps this did not get out of hand much until the late eighteenth century, when Iceland's economic conditions were most wretched?).

Harshness to the poor is condemned in many stories, for instance when the destitute are turned from the door, vagrants and orphans ill-treated and people shown cruelty in hard times. Avarice and miserliness are vices which are both hated and despised. When a usurer's house burns a voice is heard from inside crying 'Never enough', and when avarice goes so far as to make someone swear an ambiguous oath or force his people to work on holy days, an angel strikes the mountain above his house with his rod and a landslide buries the ungodly (JÁ II 41–44).

But aside from avarice, miserliness and cruelty towards the destitute, there is not a great deal of direct satire in Icelandic folk-stories. Yet often the unremitting and hopeless misery appears to darken the spirit and waken suspicion, fear and general hatred of mankind, and there is nothing easier to find than examples of this in later stories of magicians ('eighteenth-century stories', see p. 203 above). With more introspective and inoffensive people the attitude is different, and their stories are about the fulfilment of poor men's wishes. Some of men's dealings with elves are to their advantage. Þórður of Þrastarstaðir gets lost on his way to the market town of Hofsóss and finds himself in the elves' market, where he is given better food and wine than he has ever tasted, and in the morning when he and the elf-merchant trade with each other, Þórður gets twice as high a price for his goods as he had come to expect, while the imported goods he buys in return are both cheaper and better quality than at Hofsóss. There are probably bitter experiences behind this story. And all the fat sheep that people find up

in the wastelands in the outlaw stories are their way of making up to themselves for the few scraggy sheep which were all they actually owned.

The epitome of all helpless people is the Cinderella-figure, the despised child of the wonder-tales. Usually this is the son or daughter of some old cottager, and this designation of social class is a very generalised one. The class-identity comes to be indefinite and unclear, and the figure comes to have a universal significance. Helplessness, inferiority, humiliation, poverty—all these things are combined in it. That is the exterior. Within we may behold a good heart, endurance, fortitude and sometimes resourcefulness—qualities which make Cinderella deserve a better fate, and which lead her in the wish-world of the wonder-tale to precisely the fate which ought always to accompany these qualities.

VIII

Much emphasis has been laid in this book on showing how folk-belief is one of the main sources of folk-stories. But this matter can also be looked at from another angle. We can look on folk-story motifs regardless of their origins as revealing the mental attitudes of the people who dealt in the stories. It may also be that some supernatural motifs which are outwardly not so very different from the motifs of folk-belief or ancient mythology are, in origin, just free fantasy. Some stories tell of a horse-machine that flies through the air, or of a man who makes wings from feathers and is able to fly. The core of these stories seems to have been the same wish as underlies the development of modern aeroplanes. Ships that always have favourable winds, the quern that grinds gold, and the ring Draupnir from which eight other gold rings drip, are very likely to have been created from people's wishes and the same may well be true of many other magical objects, though superstition may well have played a part (with jewels, amulets and so on). It is generally worth bearing in mind that a single motif may well have a composite origin and significance.

Most people will recognise the dream that they are flying through the air, or able to do other things that the mind desires or, on the other hand, that they are as if paralysed, so that they are fixed in their tracks and cannot move. Both these things are well-known in stories. Magical objects also can have their parallels in dreams, and it would be foolish to deny the relationship between these things. Some scholars

have therefore tried to trace the motifs in folk-stories (especially those in wonder-tales) to dreams. I do not wish to deny that this may sometimes be true, but I think that it is more likely that the 'dream-motifs' of supernatural stories have their origin in the same primitive stage of consciousness as dreams. Supernatural stories are thus a kind of waking dream and, to the extent that they belong to everyone, they are the common dreams of mankind. Of course folk-stories are not the only ones out of all the stories in the world that are closely related to the mother of dreams, the subconscious, for this is true of all kinds of creative writing and art, but folk-stories, along with mythology and other similarly imaginative narratives, show the clearest signs of kinship with it.

As well as supernatural motifs, folk-stories contain many realistic elements whose core is still desire or fear, no less than it is of the others. I would list as examples the story of Grámann the Master Thief, stories of luck and cunning, and many coarser stories, and need not dwell on what is fairly obvious to all in them.

Mythologists say that the effect of the sacred on human beings is of two kinds. On the one hand it is pleasant and attractive and inviting, but on the other it arouses fear and dread. If one wanted to identify the main forces in the psychology of folk-stories I think that they would be found to be similar: on the one hand desire and longing, on the other apprehension and fear.

The stories about Sæmundr the Wise are excellent examples of this. Sæmundr makes the Devil take him across the sea to Iceland in the form of a seal, hew wood and carry it in, take water to the cowshed, and do all kinds of work which one would like to have done without having the trouble and labour oneself. The stories describe what ought to be and what nowadays is done by machinery. In the mouths of some story-tellers the fulfilment of what is desired in the story is no more than a poetic extension of reality. The sailor adds a little to the speed of his ship, or the horseman makes his steed run as swiftly as it ought to. For an impatient person nothing that was available to the technology of former times was fast enough, and in such a case invention is an appropriate improvement on reality. People find the fundamental idea in reality but imperfectly realised, and in fiction they give it its complete form.

But much more often folk-stories depict compensation for reality by means of its opposite. The principal character in the story gains

blessings which the story-teller never got in real life. The story often begins with a stylised description of everyday life (in a cottage) and moves to its opposite, the wish-world (the king's palace). There is no doubt that here we find what is often called escapism, flight from the grey and harsh reality of everyday life, from poverty and toil.

If we compare these two kinds of wish-stories the first can be seen to be more positive, nearer to the fulfilment of desire; such are the daydreams of the man of action. The second kind has little connection with the urge to do. The imagination is at play here, seeking fulfilment of wishes in the play itself. This is the world of fantasy. Even so it is worth making the point that the same story can have different meanings for different people according to their temperaments.

Let us now give a few examples of the wish-pictures created by people in folk-stories. First of all it is right to note some motifs that bear witness to a passive attitude to the difficulties of life, to a longing for refuge from storm and stress, a world of beauty and peace where there is nothing to fear. *Mjaðveig's* paradise is one of the clearest examples of this (pp. 9 and 237 above), and I will give other examples of this motif later. But generally the human mind cannot conceive of a perfect sanctuary; usually wickedness creeps in somehow or other, as when Vala, bringing her evil valuables with her, gets to Vilfríður where she is living in a rock with dwarves. The meaning of the outlaws' valley is ambiguous. It is certainly a beautiful place with rich grass and fine animals, and *Jón lærði* thinks of it as a sanctuary where it is good to be and the people are more skilful and interesting than ordinary farmers. But he refers in passing to 'the worser inhabitants of the valley', that is, there are evidently bad people there too, and later stories demonstrate that one can never be certain what sort of reception one will get in the valley. If one were to look one would easily find other examples of there being somewhere close to the fulfilment of desire a hidden fear that can easily turn into blind terror.

A host of motifs bear witness to a more active attitude to reality. Stories of outstanding people, physically strong and agile, or clever and crafty, are easily understood. These people have desirable abilities, and the listener rejoices in their victories as if he had some part in them. The same applies to the gift of second sight, inasmuch as it is an advantage to people that have it. Most precious objects are tools created by the imagination to fulfil desires, such as the special posses-

sions of the wonder-tales, the bed or the carpet that flies through the air, the wish-stone, the stone granting invisibility (which has more affinity with amulets), the girdle that stops one from feeling hungry, the cloth that is always full of food, and numerous other magical objects. In Icelandic stories about magic the objects and their purposes are of a more everyday kind, such as a device to eke out the milk-supply by stealing milk from other people's animals and the like. There are plenty of expedients to obtain money which, considering the general poverty in pre-Second World War Iceland, is no surprise. On the other hand, not many Icelandic stories about robbery are sympathetic to the thief, though European stories of this kind were brought over, such as that of Grámann, in which the story-teller attempts to vindicate the thief or else turn the whole thing into a joke. Of supernatural motifs which have greed as their core, I shall mention only three. At the end of a wonder-tale, when someone has killed a troll in a cave, they usually take away a great deal of gold and silver. Much odder, however, is the story of the criminal who fled from justice into a cave, and walked for a long time through it, treading for a while (as he thought) in sea-sand, though when he emerged at the other end into a different area, he found he had gold-dust on his shoes, and with it he was able to purchase his freedom. I cannot find any folk-belief underlying this idea, which appears to me pure invention. It tells of redemption and being freed from guilt; could it be based on ancient ideas about rebirth?

Then there is the miserly ghost motif. A man hoards money and buries it in the ground to prevent it being dispersed after his death, and so that others cannot enjoy it. After death he returns and finds his nocturnal amusement in getting his hoard out and playing with it, pouring the coins over his head. I have earlier (pp. 185–86) indicated the various beliefs which have at one time or another been connected with buried treasure. In recent stories there is little left except people's objection and revulsion to the idea of the idiotic pleasure of the hoarder and miser in taking money out of the world of the living and entertaining himself by running his hands through it and playing with it. So the story then tells how someone frees it from the dead and the ghost and has a living use of it, and others after him.

Some of the clearest of all wish-stories are those of magicians and poets of power. We have already seen how the poets balanced accounts with the Turks and Danish merchants. They could often be a great

help to people, but were not easy to cope with if they were crossed. One central theme runs through all the stories of magicians, however diverse they may otherwise be: the yearning for the power to do things not possible to mortal men. Magic is not usually called in to do anything very exciting; the magicians do not demand from their assistants splendid halls, they do not live in sybaritic luxury, nor do they want to lord it over other people. They perhaps fish up a hot black pudding on the end of a line for chilly fishermen or, at most, draw beer, wine or spirits out of a staff (this motif occurs mostly in older stories). Love-spells exist, but to judge by the stories they never seem to have done anyone much good. Magic was much more use when the practitioner wanted to take vengeance for being rejected. Then he was sure to destroy the woman's health. In general the magician rarely failed to appease his hatred and thirst for vengeance, even if only later on. This illustrates negative psychological transference; when a person is unable to fulfil his desire in a natural and positive way at the proper time, there may spring up a blind hatred of the former object of his love and he dreams of taking his revenge—later. When it is not a case of these vehement passions, it is usually rather petty tasks that the magician gets his spirit servants to perform, which well illustrates the lowly background of these stories.

Stories of magicians show that it is by no means always safe to have one's wish fulfilled with the aid of magic. It is true that many stories seem to gloss over this side of the matter, but in others the danger adds interest. It increases the pleasure of the audience to find out how Sæmundr the Wise got his wish with the help of Devil and then cheated him of his reward. Many troll-stories, especially wonder-tales, deal with how a person plays with fire. Many comic stories are similarly about the mocking and tricking of the simple-minded by the crafty, though this is not always free from danger. And terror comes out with all its force in the story of Galdra-Loftur and in many other stories of magicians. It is also the principal motive force in stories of ghosts and monsters, in which there is often no wish or desire expressed. Such stories seem to have arisen from the fears of men who were at the mercy of wild forces of nature, storms, blizzards and rough seas, often living in loneliness and poverty and darkness, in poor housing in a remote northern land, perhaps living on bad and insufficient food. It is not to be wondered at that darkness and terror appear in the

stories of such people. They get a taste for the terrifying and huge, and demand that stories, even when quite restrained, should still be highly-coloured.

It is interesting to examine the many stories where desire and fear go together. In some of the optimistic stories, such as outlaw stories and wonder-tales which deal with love, there is something dangerous and fearful attached as a condition of the fulfilment of the wish, without the latter having anything evil about it, and everything turns out right in the end. In stories of magicians the procedure itself is unlawful and consequently dangerous, and so the story can end either happily or unhappily. The wish or its fulfilment is in some mysterious way linked to taboos, and they in turn are closely allied to fear. One of the most curious taboo-motifs is the one where a man wields a weapon to strike, and his arm goes rigid or becomes powerless, or where a man cannot move his feet or gets stuck to something and cannot get free. Things like this are common in dreams, and it is likely that the psychological explanation in both cases is the same. When rogues who stole horses got stuck to their backs it was known as *harðfjötur*, 'hard fetter', according to *Skrif Ólafs gamla* (i.e. probably Jón Eggertsson); the word is reminiscent of *herfjöturr*, a word which occurs in Old Icelandic and means a kind of paralysis in battle or in flight, and in its feminine form is also a name for a valkyrie (presumably a personification of this condition).

These phenomena depart very little from cold reality, but when humans fall into the hands of elves or evil spirits, and are seen returning to the world of men with a chain or bond running from their back to the hidden world, that symbolises spiritual bonds. But the bonds can also be so spiritual that they do not touch the person's body, only his will. This is the case with all spells where a person has to go somewhere willy-nilly at the bidding of the enchanter. 'You shall not be able to bear being still until you have found so-and-so,' 'You shall go to my brother in Giantland,' 'You shall turn into a monster and kill everyone who comes to you,' and so on. The person who is under a spell can only obey, however much it may be against his will, and he has to make it as difficult as possible for whoever releases him from the spell. In all this there is evident some remarkable psychological observation. The spells themselves reveal an understanding of hypnotic suggestion and hypnotic power, and the action of the person

under the spell gives a masterly picture of split personality and the unnatural behaviour that can accompany it.¹

Imprecations and curses are more straightforward, but they can also involve auto-suggestion, so that when something adverse happens, a person feels that the curse is beginning to work, and this perception weakens his resistance and attracts more trouble and misfortune, until ill-luck has entirely paralysed him, and he knows that he is done for.

Finally, the bonds can be transformed into a philosophy, a belief in fate. Generally their power is then broken, since few can see into the future, and a person who believes in fate will then go on as if he were completely free of responsibility for his actions, though afterwards he will realise that his longings have not had much effect on his bonds.

Let us now turn to examples which show more balance (and sometimes also more conflict) between positive and negative forces. In very many stories of the hidden folk it is as if loneliness and longing for the society of men cried out to nature until hillocks and rocks and hill-sides opened and were filled with hidden folk, as if monotony and poverty increased the thirst for the wealth and finery and splendour of the world of elves, and a frustrated desire for love had attracted beautiful elf-lads and elf-women to the human being. It is therefore not at all difficult to spot the wishes that lie at the core of these stories, while the fear comes out in accounts of the dangers, misfortunes, sickness and death that could result from association with hidden folk, in legends of changelings and other unpleasantnesses that appear in stories of elves (cf. pp. 176–77 above). In this way the mind wavers and everything about the elves is uncertain—splendid and desirable, and at the same time frightening.

Dark and repulsive elements are much more prominent in stories of trolls. Trolls are huge and frightful, they kill and eat people. And hunt them. They drive them crazy, so that they want to rush into their clutches, like the successive parsons of Mjólfjörður who shouted when the troll's spell summoned them (JÁ I 152–53):

Takið úr mér svangann og langann, You can pluck out my guts and my groins,
nú vil eg að gilinu ganga; to the gorge I long to go;

¹ Sometimes the absence of mind that is mentioned in stories derives from hypnosis, but sometimes there may be other causes (sickness, shock and the like). On the other hand the stories often attribute it to drink or other physical causes.

takið úr mér svilin og vilin, you can pluck out my spleen and my loins,
fram ætla eg í Mjóifjarðargilið. but to Mjóifjörður gully I go.

In other cases troll-wives use witchcraft to draw men to them, so as to make them mad and keep them to have intercourse with. The idea is abhorrent to humans, but troll-wives go after it like mad. In the symbolic language of the story, this means that the author is describing desires within himself that he loathes and struggles against. Thus these stories are manifestations of various psychological conditions, and their motifs symbolise many things, both elevated and beastly.

IX

Let us now look a little more closely at some individual motifs, and their roles and meanings in folk-stories, in other words at their symbolism.

How can we interpret this secret language? Doubtless the first step is to examine the role of the motif in the story itself and the intellectual and emotional content it has there, and then compare it with similar or related motifs elsewhere. Next we must bear in mind the symbolism which we know was familiar to ordinary people and appears in folk-belief, proverbs and popular verse; nor may we forget literary and Christian symbolism. Finally there is the symbolism of dreams, which are related to fantasy-stories and so of particular importance. In Iceland there has been among the people a whole symbolic system of dream interpretation from early times down to the present (in which names of persons and certain words play an important part, as also do certain particular natural phenomena; see *JJ Íþ* 414–16), which contains many elements derived from foreign dream-lore.¹ I need hardly say that I have also tried to take into account the ideas of modern psychologists, with their insights into the dark regions of the subconscious, but sometimes I accept the theories of Freud and Jung on the interpretation of individual symbols only with some reservations; generally I have not found it helpful to follow them more than to a limited extent. Many people will probably feel that I have not been very

¹G. Turville-Petre, 'An Icelandic Version of the Somniale Danielis,' *Nordica et Anglica: Studies in Honor of Stefán Einarsson*, 1968, 19–36 (Turville-Petre has shown that even the old Egyptian dream-book was known in Iceland); on dreams in Old Icelandic literature see also Kelchner 1935 and R. Perkins, 'The dreams of *Flóamanna saga*,' *Saga-Book XIX* (1974–77), 191–238.

adventurous; in that case the way is clear for them to advance further where I have held back.

Light and brightness have all kinds of associations with good fortune, joy, health and beauty. Sickness wanes at dawn, ghosts and evil spirits flee at the approach of light, there is an aura of light that accompanies good men, and it has, of course, also its Christian symbolism: it denotes the power of Christianity and the souls of the saved. Stars can also symbolise attendant spirits or souls. Icelanders have always loved sun and sunshine intensely, and its associations are always with beautiful and blessed things. Criminals cannot see the sun in the clear sky and evil beings cannot endure it. The moon is the sun of the ghosts in the story of the Deacon of Myrká, and similarly the flame that flickers above buried treasure and the will o' the wisp are strange and fearful things. Volcanic fire is associated with magic and evil creatures. A sending appears as a ball of fire, and a ghost is accompanied by flashes of fire. All these kinds of light contain something of the nature of darkness and night; these phenomena symbolise what is evil and of ill omen, or at least doubtful and ambivalent. This symbolism of light and darkness is of course known the world over, and is perfectly comprehensible. It is interesting that fire and light can be ambiguous, and that some flame partakes of the nature of darkness.

The colour white corresponds to brightness, is good and indicates good fortune, while black is of the same nature as darkness, though it can sometimes symbolise seriousness. Dark blue and grey are the colours of the hidden world; water-horses, sea-cows and hidden folk can be grey, and grey is closely associated with magic, and sometimes with ghosts. Elves are normally dressed in dark blue, the flame that flickers above buried treasure is blue, a man's soul appears as a blue vapour, and the vapour of pestilence is blue. Wanness is associated with the approach of death. Dark brown as the colour of a horse can have sinister associations; reddish brown is to some extent connected with magic, but is otherwise often the colour of outlaws and ghosts. Green has various associations but both it and red are linked with splendour and associated with joy and beauty; but red, as the colour of fire and blood, can also have a different meaning: red is associated with the blackest magic. The lettering of the books in the Black School was fiery red, the Devil is red-haired and has a red beard, the most terrible Icelandic book of magic was 'Red vellum' and red is also a

ghostly colour—one ghost appeared in the form of a red bull. Gold is the colour of brightness, splendour, wealth and joy.

Folk-stories reveal a great fondness for certain numbers, as is well known. The most highly regarded are the ancient magic numbers 3, 7, 9 and 12 or their multiples, as one might expect. Even so, there does not seem to be a great deal of symbolism attached to numbers. The ordinal 'first' generally involves, however, great power and vitality, and what happens first is always the most important. 'Three' (and 'third') is an important and powerful number, and now and then is a good omen (in popular belief; 'third time lucky'). As it says in Jóriðr of Miðjumdalr's dream in *Sturlunga saga*, 'Everything happens three times in antiquity (cf. also 'that's all, if there are three of them'); it is also true that the Holy Trinity is good.' A company of men is 18 (if not 12). 20 is used for the end of a series (for instance a period of time, such as years of outlawry; Höfðabrekku-Jóka lost her power over a man after 20 years and so on). 'Thirteen' appears to have no unlucky significance in Icelandic folk-belief or folk-stories.

As one might expect, time, the great mystery, has various beliefs associated with it. One time is more propitious than another and at the wish-hour all light is concentrated in one bright spot. The days of the week have their meanings in folk-belief, though I think in folk-stories only the holiness of the Sabbath is relevant. Feast-days, on the other hand, are quite important in them, especially Christmas, New-Year, Twelfth Night, the first day of summer and St John the Baptist's Day (Midsummer Day, 24 June). Christmas or Yule is the most significant of them, for then the shortness of the day and darkness have reached their culmination, and yet there is expectation of brightness and great gladness, and it has in addition the significance and holiness that the time acquired through Christianity. So it is nothing to be surprised at that Christmas has very varied associations. All sorts of beings are about then, ghosts, trolls, and elves, and in the past the twelve Christmas goblins (*jólasveinar*), and then it is not good to be the only person awake on the farm. On the other hand there is great rejoicing, and the church bells never do their work better than at Christmas. The rejoicing is entirely consistent with the Christian significance of the feast, though in some stories the rejoicing is purely secular and unchristian in sentiment, so that there is a conflict of ideologies; this lies behind the story of the dance at Hrúni and legends about 'Two Kings of

Diamonds' (if cards are played at Christmas there will be two kings of diamonds, one of whom is the Devil), for instance. Other feasts are much less dangerous, though mysteries and mystic knowledge are associated with them, especially New-Year's Eve, Twelfth Night and St John's Eve (midsummer eve). Midsummer eve, bright and beautiful, brings healing of all ills, seals come out of their enchanted shapes, cows talk and stoness dance. All life on this northern island becomes a fairy story.

Everything that goes clockwise or with the sun is natural, and much power goes with walking clockwise in a circle or round something, especially if you do it three times. Ogresses turn round three times when they change shape, ghosts try to go three times round someone so as to get power over them and so on. Turning round or walking in a circle is of the same nature as the course of the sun or the turning of a wheel, a quern, a fire-drill or an auger, and all these things have a mighty power. It is ill-omened and perilous to go widdershins or anti-clockwise, and there is great magic power in that too. There is not necessarily anything evil attached to it, but it is always something to beware of. The same applies to anything that is done backwards. All such actions are in themselves contrary to the law of nature, procedures that do not attract her powers, but like technology, force them into obedience to the extent that they are used as techniques.

You can defend yourself from evil spirits by cutting a circle in the ground round oneself. To conjure up evil beings, you cut out a plot in the turf which they stand on. This is the symbol of the delimited space, the lines of taboo that all must obey.

The ancient belief in man's life-force lives on in folk-stories, and is the kernel of numerous motifs of very diverse kinds. The life-force comes out in the words of men of spiritual power and power-poets, and in spells in wonder-tales; it can also be in men's eyes and glances, and no small power resides in spittle, excrement and piss, all of which are feared by evil beings, the more so as these things are repulsive to men. The main vital liquid is blood, and the main seat of life is the heart; it is said of a magician's heart that it would not burn in fire. Great precautions must be taken with hair and nails, and human skin has supernatural power in it. As one might expect, human sexual organs have great power in them; they have been objects of worship among many nations. In Iceland there are indications that ghosts are afraid of

seeing a man or a woman naked. There are various beliefs about the power of virginity; for instance, the Devil cannot approach an innocent virgin. People have had great faith in cauls and afterbirths and so on. Then some of a person's life-force resides in his name, as has been discussed earlier (pp. 58–59 above), and we have also referred to the 'life-egg' (pp. 59–61); in passing, it may be mentioned that if you find some birds' eggs, the number can tell you how many children you will have.

As death draws near the life-force diminishes, but then it can be transformed and turn into the demonic power with which revenants are endowed. In time, however, their strength abates and it will disappear entirely with burning or rotting.

The ideas attached by Icelanders to animals are very varied. Guðmundur Finnbogason has discussed them,¹ and so has Jónas Jónasson to some extent (*JJ Íþ* 146–203). The same ideas are found in folk-stories, and there is very little that is peculiar to them, though much is very nicely expressed. Thus the close links between human beings and dogs and horses can be seen in the fact that all three may have second-sight and can appear as revenants. When this occurs the man usually takes the lead and the other two follow him. It is even stranger, though, how cattle, especially bulls, are associated with haunting, and this should not be understood as them returning for the companionship of men; what happens most often is that they are raised up by magicians and given supernatural power, or else they are ghosts of human beings in the shape of cattle. People have obviously seen some affinity between the demonic power and supernatural strength of ghosts and the frenzy of mad bulls, so that the bull becomes a symbol of the evil, mad, perverted life-force. The bull is then usually half-flayed, dragging the ribbons of its hide behind it, while its red, bloody flesh glistens. Whatever else may be involved in all this (and many things could be), this ghastly, bloody image is clearly the creation of a sick mind.

I will just mention mice and foxes among land-animals, as both of these occur as sendings; the same is true of flies. A psychologist would probably see some sexual significance in people's horror of these small creatures, especially mice, and he might well be right. He would of

¹ Guðmundur Finnbogason, *Íslendingar*, 1933, 252–70 (ch. 12).

course also understand the trout that the lady swallows in one wonder-tale¹ in the same way. The cunning of the fox is well known everywhere; in Iceland the attendant spirits of men with a reputation for being crafty ('foxy') are in the shape of foxes.

Seals and bears are men under spells, and escape from their enchantment on midsummer eve. There are many other superstitions about these animals, and the basis for them is undoubtedly ancient, though some motifs may have originated later.² Whales could be either good or evil, and there is extensive folklore on this subject. Many other evil creatures also dwelt in the depths; sea-monsters in the ocean, water-horses and serpents in lakes and rivers. I expect that people's dread of these things can easily be explained by the fear of drowning, though fear of darkness and loneliness may also have played a part, and, as usual, other lesser influences will have come from here and there.

Among birds, the raven is the most interesting and is somewhat ambiguous. As in many other countries it can have rather sinister associations, and its black colouring and its connection with Óðinn will not have done anything to improve its reputation. We hear of monstrous and evil spirits in the shape of ravens and they prophesy people's deaths. In this its wisdom appears and it is a very prophetic bird, and various kinds of knowledge are associated with it. It repays kindnesses well, and is generally a good friend to men, to whom much is forgiven. The falcon and the ptarmigan are brother and sister, and are respectively the symbols of fierceness and gentleness. There is something feminine about the ptarmigan, and her eggs, if one finds them, will denote the number of children one will have, while the hawk is associated with prowess and manliness, like the eagle. Strange is the belief that it is very lucky to help an eagle, especially if it is battling with a salmon. Here the human sides with the bold, nimble in flight, warm-blooded denizen of the air against the cold, scaly water-dweller (their battle may be a kind of Icelandic version of the battle between St Michael and the Dragon (Rev. 12: 7–9)). Another curious motif linked

¹ The story of Mærþöll, JÁ II 424–27; BE *Munnmælasögur* 68–72. Cf. p. 61 above.

² Lúðvík Kristjánsson, 'Selur í þjóðtrú og leikjum', *Íslenzkir sjávarhættir*, 1980–86, I 433–40.

with the eagle is the attempt of the wren to get underneath it and hurt it (cf. Aesop). The water rail was thought to creep into the ground, and so is believed to be an evil spirit, while the wheatear causes inflammation in the udders of cows and sheep. The swan is a sacred bird. One side of its sanctity appears in the belief that its breath is dangerous. On the other hand it is regarded as a beautiful and poetic bird, and it appears in wonder-tales. The ogresses in the story of Prince Hlini have swans which wake him and put him to sleep with their song. This magical quality of their song is worth noting.

There are many beliefs of various kinds attached to plants. For example there are love-herbs (orchids), healing herbs, thieves' root (Mountain Avens) and the lock-opening herb (Paris quadrifolia, four-leaved grass), though there are few legends of any of them. The rowan has the most legends about it; it is a sacred tree, that is it has great powers, and it can be very dangerous for instance for people to cut it down or use it in boats, while on the other hand it will grow on the graves of an innocent brother and sister who have been wrongly accused of incest and killed. A fire on a rowan-bush signified the coming of Christianity and lights burned on a rowan tree's branches on New-Year's Eve. Trees are often mentioned in wonder-tales, such as the red and green trees in which Sigurður and Líneik hid from persecution (JA II 328). Forests are also very important in them, and a frequent activity was going riding in the forest to hunt animals and birds. It often happens that the prince or king loses his way until he comes into contact with some supernatural beings such as trolls or humans under spells. Thus the forest, dark and easy to get lost in, forms the border between the world of men and the other-world, as water or mist sometimes lies between the world of men and the world of elves (the underworld), or a fog lies between the world of men and the hidden valley of the outlaws. The main point of the forest and the fog, however, is making people go astray; the person does not know where he is going, and the beings on the other side of the forest or the fog usually draw or bewitch him to them (the fog that makes people lose their way also appears in stories of elves and wonder-tales). Sometimes this is done in a particular way. The prince will see a hind or a hart and chases it. This is a very ancient motif, which has undergone many changes. It first appears in the pagan mythology of southern Europe, where it is presumably related to animal worship. Next it was

Christianised and adapted to legends of saints. The hart becomes a symbol of Christ, and the stories relate to conversion, building of churches and so on. In the Middle Ages it gets into chivalric or courtly romances and is then used to symbolise love-longing, lovers' deceptions, pursuits of lovers—everything implied in the Icelandic ballad-formula 'The knight hunts a hind in the wood.'¹ This symbolism was well known in Iceland in the past, as the 'hind-game' in the *vikivakar*, 'mumming dances', suggests. The love element fades in the wonder-tales, but the drawing and the bewitching remain—only the other motifs in the story can reveal the meaning and the purpose of what happens. In stories of people getting lost these can be varied. Sometimes the human is required to help to release the dweller in the hidden world from a spell or to help outlaws out of a predicament, sometimes love is at the core of the story. The strangest accounts of people getting lost and bewitched are in stepmother stories. There the king's counsellor goes to seek a wife for him. They sail away and run into fog and contrary winds and are driven off course so that they do not know where they are going. At length the fog lifts and they come ashore. In some stories it says that when they get ashore they go through a forest, do not actually get lost, but make towards the sound of music and find themselves in a clearing where a woman is sitting outside a silken tent playing a harp. Here the harp-music is a symbol of the power to enchant of the woman who has drawn them there and intends to trick them and the king. And the gold and splendour are nothing but deceptive gilding. The whole account is a symbol of the love that beguiles and allures, but is based on deceit and betrayal.

The king had specifically given his counsellor a warning that he was not to bring a wife from headland, island or forest. Whatever the original reason may have been for this warning, the word *skógarkona* 'forest-woman' corresponds admirably to the symbolism of the forest in these stories. The word *eyjafljóð* 'island-woman' causes one to reflect on the role of islands in wonder-tales, and then one realises that they are nearly always associated with supernatural beings. Trolls and magicians live on islands, people under spells go out to islands, and finally islands are places of sanctuary, for Vilfríður stays on an island with dwarves and Queen Ingibjörg stays on an island with EINFÆTLA

¹ *Íslensk fornkvæði* VIII, 209 and IV, 6.

(Gorvömb). The symbol thus has two contrasting associations. Whatever else may be implied by it, it is natural to compare the water that separates the island from the mainland with the water between elf-land and the world of men. It also has in it some of the attributes of the hidden world.

There was an enormous amount of faith in stones and jewels both in Iceland and elsewhere, and it is therefore not surprising that magic stones and other precious things appear quite often in folk-stories. Whatever they mean, they are first of all symbols of power. The same applies to books of magic, which are a perfect symbol of the well-known proverb 'Knowledge is power'.

Iron, the point of a knife, needles, weapons and even sticks are a good defence against evil creatures and ghosts, even against the vaporous bodies of wraiths. There are many different concepts underlying this idea. Firstly, in this as in other things it is quite likely that people thought of ghosts as structured somewhat like people, and people did not want weapons stuck through their faces or iron spikes through their bodies or needles in the soles of their feet. Secondly, there was a great deal of superstition connected with iron or steel. Lastly, a psychologist would doubtless see some sexual significance in most of these objects.

Finally, some isolated points from here and there. A clew of thread is an ancient symbol of the ability to find one's way (cf. Theseus and Ariadne) and an apple signifies health and life (cf. Iðunn's apples, the apples of the Hesperides). Mjaðveig's shoe is a love-token, and so is a ring; the glove in *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar* has a similar meaning, but gloves are also objects of great power in folk-stories (cf. Þórr's gloves), as one might expect, since they are the covers of the human hand. The elf-queen Úlfhildur rubs her gloves and a bridge appears, so they are there clearly a symbol of power. Glass shines like precious stones and thus has a connection with the supernatural; its transparency makes it a symbol of mysterious wisdom, especially second sight. Treasure (= sunshine) is in or under waterfalls; so too are evil creatures, serpents and trolls (= fear of drowning?). The soul is like a vapour in appearance, and so are many ghosts, wraiths and sendings. But vapour is also a symbol of disease. Gold, or possessions made of gold, are symbols of wealth and bliss; gold is a royal metal. One of the staple treasures of wonder-tales is the fine gold chess-set; it is a symbol of

fashionable pleasure and has something of the aura of the chivalric romances. I do not propose to go on adding individual motifs here, but it is easy enough for anyone who cares to do so to carry on and find many more examples and to trace their associations in much greater detail.

In the previous section it was maintained that one of the principal motive powers of folk-stories was wish-fulfilment. But what was the direction and object of the wish? It seems to me on reflection to have been of three kinds. Schiller once said that the two main forces in human life were love and hunger. It is very easy to see the large part that love plays in folk-stories. One might say that love is the core of most wonder-tales and of a large number of outlaw-stories; it is very important in stories of hidden folk and comes in elsewhere too. Some not insignificant examples can easily be found in the previous section. One can see at a glance that many things in the stories are related to love, or arise from a psychological condition that has its basis in love, though ostensibly it may be called something else.

As is usual in love stories, forbidden fruit has a considerable part to play, as in stories of love between humans and elves or trolls, or even between living people and ghosts. Wonder-tales are full of accounts (sometimes rather indirectly expressed) about love between human beings and beings who are really human but are under spells, and appear in various forms, as monsters, wild animals or trolls. They are freed from their spells by love, symbolic or actual. Whatever may originally have been the root of this motif, it has become the symbol of liberating love, which releases people from many troubles, just as treacherous love appears in the story of the counsellor's journey in stepmother stories.

It may be that hunger, poverty and desire for wealth and prosperity are more rarely the actual foundation of stories than love, and that fewer motifs derive from them, but if we look carefully we can see that they are very important as well. I gave some examples of this earlier on (pp. 280–84), and others can be found elsewhere, so I will not elaborate further on this here.

The third important ingredient in stories is desire for power and dominion. Numerous motifs are generated by this, such as talismans, and stories of people gaining power over the Devil and other potent beings. The desire to fly, which must have been aroused in men's minds

by seeing birds in flight at the dawn of time, appears in stories of riding on broomsticks, flying in changed shape, magic carpets and beds that will travel wherever you want. I could list many more things, and some of them have already been mentioned above. One might regard all three desires as being fulfilled at the end of wonder-tales when the peasant's son finally gains princess and kingdom.

As we leave this topic I ought to mention that some psychologists would doubtless want to make much more of sexual motivation in folk-stories than I have done. They would, for instance, perhaps see the finding of treasure as a symbol of forbidden love, as Freud does. I do not doubt that Freud knew of actual cases where this motif had such a meaning in the dreams of his subjects. This is no more remote an image than the comparison of the Kingdom of Heaven to a pearl in the parable. In the same way one could explain the cloth that is always full of food as an image of compensatory wish-fulfilment resulting from sexual deprivation. And perhaps the precious objects that I have interpreted as symbols of power could be read in that way too. I am not denying the possibility of such interpretations when appropriate. But generally speaking I do not think that they are very likely in the case of Icelandic folk-stories. The people who created these stories were fighting hunger, and they had plenty to suffer as a result of their poverty and helplessness, and it would be a miracle if these basic needs of human life had not become topics of their stories and shaped them. It is another matter that it may seem likely that some motifs contain elements of two, or even all three, of the principal desires, and that perhaps the same motif will not have had the same meaning for different people, and this will depend on their temperaments and circumstances of life.

Before I finally leave this subject I want to add a few words about certain aspects of life that play an interesting part in folk-stories. These are all connected with family, origin and childhood, and the great problems these give rise to. Psychologists of recent times have paid much attention to them and consider that various motifs which are later worked out in dreams and fantasies, in literature and art, may be traced to them. Great pains have been taken to show how they become the bases of narratives and of motifs in stories.

The stepmother motif is exceptionally popular in wonder-tales in Iceland. Story-tellers and their audiences in recent times must, I think,

have understood it literally; the mother died, the father took another wife, she disliked his children and they disliked her. This was a commonplace in real life, which was exaggerated and raised to the level of fantasy. The stepmother became an ogress in human shape and all kinds of malice and wickedness were attributed to her. This is understandable; the basis is the jealousy between stepmother and stepchildren, always seen from the children's viewpoint. It is interesting how sharp the criticism of the king (father) is; he sits on the queen's grave in such deep grief that he is almost insensible, but no sooner has he seen his new bride than he forgets all that is past and cannot rest until he has married her. The whole business is described in a way that makes one shudder.

All this is comprehensible, but it is strange how enormously widespread this motif has become. Stepmothers have of course always been common, but the frequency of the motif is still extraordinary. One may well begin to wonder whether its spread was not assisted to some extent by association with feelings connected with other rather similar aspects of life. Some child psychologists speak of a 'stepmother-complex' that is born of the ambivalent feelings, if not antipathy and hostility, that can arise between a daughter and an over-strict mother. Such feelings can give rise to the idea that this severe person is not the girl's real mother, but a kind of false mother. Some psychologists would doubtless explain the popularity of the motif in such a way, but take it even further and attribute it to the daughter's jealousy (Electra-complex) or to inverted feelings caused by a son's Oedipus-complex.

The gap between mother and stepmother is, on the other hand, narrower in the story of Vilfríður Völufegri, since in the variants of the story Vala can be either; and the two exchange roles in the story of Hildur the Good Stepmother. The idea behind these stories is therefore clearly hostility on the daughter's part, and the emotions associated with such relationships are transformed into wonder-tale events. A psychologist would probably want to see a variant or extension of the Electra-complex in the story of Björn bragðastakkur and his attempts to seduce his daughter (JA II 407-08).

Vilfríður Völufegri flees from her mother or stepmother and finds a refuge on an island in a rock with two dwarves, and they free her from her distresses for quite a while, but when they eventually fail, the Prince of Saxony comes into the story, saves her and marries her. Other

wonder-tales in which a sanctuary features provide interesting parallels to this. Queen Ingibjörg escapes from Björn bragðastakkur's persecutions and finds sanctuary on an island with the she-monster Einfætla, until the king comes and takes her back. A third instance is the story of Mjaðveig. She flees from her stepmother into a wood, and gets guidance and help from her mother in a dream. The mother gives her a magic cloth of food and directs her to a sanctuary on a headland (or else she finds an invisible bower in a wood). Next comes the love-story of the golden shoe and the prince. The elements of this story are therefore three: first the persecution, then the sanctuary, and finally love. The sanctuary in the Mjaðveig story is the gift of the mother and a symbol of the peace and protection of the mother's arms. Einfætla, whatever else one may say of her, takes the place of mother for the queen, and it is perhaps not pure chance in this connection that she lives on an island. The Queen (or Princess) is there as if in a trance or hibernation, safe and free from anxiety; and yet it is as if she is waiting—for love. In the fourth wonder-tale that features a sanctuary, the story of Líneik and Laufey, it is in two trees that the prince and princess's father has told them about, and the motif is there transferred to the father-figure.

Brothers and sisters grow up like plants in the ground; they shelter one another and support each other, though sometimes they can come into conflict, or one overshadows another. Very often there is harmony in wonder-tales. In the story of Wake-Well and his brothers each has his own skill, and each supports the others as an arm does a leg. The contrary also often figures in stories, and usually in such cases two elder brothers (or sisters) overshadow the youngest. This is so common a motif that it almost equals the stepmother motif and spells in frequency. The parents support the elder children, barely regard the youngest as human, make it do all the hardest work, and feed it on scraps and scrapings. No commentary is required on this, nor on the fact that the Cinderella proves the best of the three and has the utmost success in the end. Wonder-tales do not normally mention any distinction between the attitudes of the two parents towards the Cinderella, but in the story of Hans karlsson (Hans the Peasant's Son; *JÁ* II 494–98) it looks as though the mother is particularly sympathetic to him. This is very clear in most of the older 'coal-biter' stories, and it may be that these are based on observation or experience, which corresponds to

what Freud says in one place, that he has observed that those who were specially favoured by their mothers were often endowed with a self-confidence that led them on to become outstanding people.¹

There is one other significant thing that happens with brothers and sisters, and that is sexual love between them. This is one of the main motifs in many outlaw stories. In the wonder-tale of Finna the Wise a spell is laid on a brother and a sister that they must have children together. On the other hand, other stories tell of brothers and sisters who are accused of incest and killed, but are innocent, and rowans grow up from their graves as a sign of their innocence. This topic became particularly prominent in Lutheran times after the promulgation of the so-called Stóridómur, 'Great Ordinance', which introduced savage penalties for various sexual offences, and people got to hear from time to time of brutal punishments imposed under this law, and popular imagination started to work on this.

X

Anyone who compares Icelandic and Danish folk-stories will soon notice a great difference, though it may not be all that easy to decide exactly where it lies. Alongside their Icelandic counterparts the Danish stories may well seem slight and unpretentious, psychologically precise and humane, while the Icelandic ones are wild and on a grand scale, rugged and highly coloured, and of greater imaginative power. The same would emerge from a comparison with central European stories, since looked at from the remoteness of Iceland these seem at a quick glance to be much like the Danish ones. I will just give a couple of examples to illustrate this.

One of these is the handling of the stepmother-motif. In the bulk of non-Icelandic stories the father marries a second time without any particular feature being made of it. The stepmother is cruel, and is violently harsh to the children. In other stories (are these not fewer?) the stepmother or her mother is a witch, and is it not unique when the Grimms' story of the six swans says that the king loses his way hunting in the forest and meets an old woman who will not show him the way out of the forest unless he marries her daughter (both mother and

¹ S. Freud, *Die Traumdeutung*, 1911, 209 n.; tr. James Strachey, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, The Pelican Freud Library 4, 1976, 522–23, n. 1.

daughter being witches)? This variant comes closest to the Icelandic version of the stepmother motif, but the latter is far more of a fantasy and also has much more detail. It is full of images from stories of trolls and shapeshifting, and is altogether on a much larger scale and more terrible.

The second example is from the story of Hansel and Gretel. The brother and sister get lost out in the wood, until they come to the old witch's house. It is made of bread, and the roof is tiled with pancakes and the window-panes are made of sugar. The children of course begin to eat, Hansel mainly from the roof and Gretel from the window-panes, and she gets so excited that the old woman notices them and comes out. This is one of the most straightforward children's stories imaginable. There is a parallel to the narrative elements—and thus descended from the same original—though the individual details are nearly all different, in the story of Surtla, the ogress of Blálandseyjar. There the king's children drift in their step-mother's chest over the sea until it reaches land on the ogress's island. The prince goes ashore to find food for them, so that they will not die of starvation, comes to the ogress's cave and is able to hook meat out of her pot because she is blind (other versions say that she keeps her eyes on a thread or hanging on the wall, which is an ancient motif, for something similar is said of the Graiae and Lamia in Greek legends). The ogress catches the children because of Ingibjörg's curiosity, as she insists on seeing the old woman, and then bursts into laughter when she sees how grotesque she is. There is no need to say anything about the differences between the two stories, for they are self-explanatory. Nor does it matter that everything that is peculiar to the Surtla story may not be of Icelandic origin.

'Strong colours' are very prominent in Icelandic folk-stories, whether describing good or evil. This is, of course, by no means uncommon in other countries. The story of the Eighteen (or Nineteen) Outlaws (AT 956B) is continental European in origin, and is one of the most horrific of folk-stories. The French wonder-tale of the wife-murderer Bluebeard and other continental murder-stories show that Icelandic versions are by no means exceptional in this respect. Savage punishments in Icelandic wonder-tales are only pale reflections of everyday events in earlier times in other countries. But when we come to the supernatural elements, then I feel that Icelandic stories are drawn in

much stronger colours than European ones usually are. Often when I read non-Icelandic stories I feel that it is as if the darker sorcery is toned down, while in Icelandic ones it does not seem that there is any attempt to do that, least of all in eighteenth-century stories, where the story-teller does not tire of laying black thick on black until one can hardly tell whether hatred of man or hatred of God is stronger. The eating of human flesh and other atrocities committed by trolls must also be more prominent in Icelandic stories of ogres and wonder-tales, and when we come to ghost-stories it is enough to mention the attendant spirits and sendings called up from the dead. The religious stories (about divine punishment, innocence and guilt and so on) presumably have close parallels in other countries, and one should remember that they can often be traced back to medieval saints' legends, in which we find a similar or even greater relish for strong colours than in Icelandic stories—the reader need only be referred to Chaucer's *Prioress's Tale* to see the point. Of course, saints' legends go to greater extremes in depicting the trials of men's sanctity, which is more firmly based and clearly conceived, but in the midst of all the darkness in Icelandic stories there are also many shining lights, people who have both the will and the power to help the distressed; whether they are magicians, poets of power, or holy men full of spiritual power, there is no dearth of resources. Light, brightness and beauty are thus everywhere around the darkness and horror. One man of old wanted to be buried where there was a wide view and the sun could be seen earliest in the morning and latest at night, while another wanted to be in the shade where the sun could be seen least.

Opposites are thus set up against each other. This is admittedly commonplace in non-Icelandic folk-stories too, but I feel that it is done in Icelandic stories with exceptional clarity, shrewdness and subtlety. I will give a few examples that illustrate various aspects of this. In step-mother stories the tellers never tire of sharpening the contrast between the outer and the inner, the appearance and the reality. It is as if the woman can never be too splendid, she is surrounded by gold and silk, and she takes a lot of persuading to marry the king, but it is all a façade. There is nothing she wants more than to marry him, and all the splendour is only a thin veneer over the revolting ogress beneath. The whole account has an artistry and skill which is quite unusual in folk-stories. Many stories about spells put on people show a tremendous

ingenuity in making everything as difficult for them as possible. It is specified that the human being must turn into a giant, an animal or a rolling belly, and not be freed until a human person kisses it or promises to marry it or the like. A great deal is made of the giant's or animal's ugliness so as to make the man or woman find it as difficult as possible to have anything to do with it. In one version of the story of *Búkolla Helga* cannot perform the task set her by the ogress and knows her death is imminent, but then a man comes into the story and offers to help her if she will kiss him, though this is not a very attractive idea, for he is horribly ugly and dressed to match. 'He wore a shrunken jerkin of skin, which went down to his feet in front, but barely covered his shoulders behind, and the snout hung down from his nostrils to his toes' (JA II 468). The last item is included because it is particularly repulsive. From stories about folk-belief I will mention the Rev. Skúli Gíslason's account of *Galdra-Loftur*, where holy writ is turned into blasphemy, and we note how at the same time the pace is carefully controlled so that the darkness and frenzy steadily increase together. The opposites are no less forcibly contrasted in the last section of the story of *Loftur*, but side by side with the tendency to use stronger and stronger colours there is also great precision shown in their use, and the opposites are made to interact in a most skilful way. Here, in this master story-teller, we can see a tendency that is widely found in Icelandic stories, though it does not always reach such artistic perfection: this is the taste for highly-flavoured story-matter, fondness for strong colours and enjoyment of stark oppositions, while at the same time one is continually aware from time to time of a certain precision and subtlety and ingenuity, not least in the way the story-teller makes his points, or clarifies the problem when there is one, and sometimes also in the skill with which he manages the interplay of the opposites.

XI

In a couple of Icelandic stories of outlaws we are told that an account of what happened written by one of the characters was found after his death, or that it was written in a letter. I suspect that we would have to search far and wide to find the equivalent of this device in the folk-stories of other countries. It is in other connections not all that uncommon to find mention of books and writing in Icelandic legends. They

tell of runes, elf-runes, magic signs to induce visionary dreams and magic characters. Letters are frequently mentioned in stories, books both sacred and secular are everywhere, and there are many accounts of books of magic (see pp. 205–06 above). It is therefore no surprise that both hymns and *rímur* are mentioned in stories. It is altogether quite apparent, as pointed out above (p. 16) that Icelandic folk-stories were created and handed down by people who were used to having books, pamphlets and letters everywhere round them, knew all about them and did not think of reading and writing as alien accomplishments, and there is no doubt that literacy was far more widespread among ordinary people in Iceland than was normal in other countries. From early times the nation had possessed a great literature which was accessible to everyone, and stories were read and *rímur* recited in the evening work-hour in every farm-house in the land. And if folk-stories were told in the dusk before the lamps were lit and work begun, how could the one kind of narrative fail to be influenced by the other?

So indeed it happened. The early sagas were from the beginning closely linked to oral narrative, and when romances succeeded them in the late thirteenth century, many motifs and narratives from oral tradition were taken up into them, as we have tried to show earlier in this book. People of all classes had a hand in the writing of these stories, or in turning them into *rímur*, so that the same person could quite easily have been the author of a chivalric romance as well as the transmitter of a folk-story.

It does not come as any surprise, therefore, that various things have been transferred from written sagas to folk-stories. I mentioned earlier that some wonder-tales, saints' legends and comic stories had first become known to Icelanders in written form, and then entered oral tradition, and that they had thus become fully-fledged folk-stories, and this gives an idea of how complete stories can be transferred from the one to the other.¹ Various legends, especially place-name stories, come into being from people's knowledge of Sagas of Icelanders; it is natural for people to elaborate on these where they find them wanting. It may well be that annals and other historical writings of later times played some role in the origins of nineteenth-century accounts of people

¹ On this see *Verz.* lxxxviii–xcii, where further details are given of this, but only insofar as it relates to wonder-tales.

prominent in the country's history, though I am unable to give any examples. And of course poems composed about creatures of folk-belief and Jón lærði's writings on elves and outlaws certainly gave a boost to belief in these creatures, though the stories about them were mostly pure folk-stories (that is, they were transmitted orally).

Motifs from written sagas and other literature slip now and again into folk-stories, especially the more supernatural and romantic ones. For example, wrestling with negroes, encounters with brigands and vikings, grateful and helpful dwarves, flying dragons, magic swords that are big or small as one likes, a stone that produces fire, snow or rain if it is chipped at—all these can easily be found in written sagas as well as in folk-stories.¹ I mentioned earlier that life in the king's palace was seen largely in terms of the *fornaldar sögur*, and the slaves who often accompany stepmothers are also derived from them.

The story-teller learned from the authors of written sagas how to handle his material fairly freely, especially when telling a romantic story. He would elaborate where he felt something was incomplete, for instance where the reasons for a spell being cast were not sufficiently explained; overall, since the spell motif is so handy, it comes to be used both in and out of season and, excellent as it is in itself, it often becomes rather hackneyed in these elaborations. Nor is the story-teller afraid to join together parts of different stories or even complete narratives, not to mention how he enjoys embellishing them all with names in the style of courtly romance, and linking the sections of his story together by inventing relationships by blood or marriage between the characters.

Anecdotes based on folk-belief were in less danger from these influences from written sagas, but whenever the material began to develop into a fully-fledged legend, the early sagas provided ready models to story-tellers, and the same applies to those who wrote legends down or linked together a number of short folk-stories to make them into larger entities.

Finally, there is the style. Like everything else in folk-stories it is first and foremost the product of oral story-telling, but here too we may assume the constant influence of written sagas on their narrative

¹ See JÁ II 320, 356 and note, 437 and note, 496 and note; also Adeline Rittershaus, *Die neuisländischen Volksmärchen*, 1902, xxix–xlvi.

art while the folk-stories were still in oral transmission. There is also the further point, which is widely acknowledged, that those who wrote folk-stories down obviously also knew all about the ancient saga-style, and as a result their narratives acquired a more cultured tone.

It would nevertheless be quite wrong to magnify the influence of written literature to such a degree as to deny the independence of folk-stories in the selection and shaping of material, and in mentality and style too, for that matter. Still, careful examination reveals that tellers of folk-stories never lost sight of their great and remarkable written literature, and consequently their stories could not fail to show some signs of this awareness. As is obvious, these signs could be either to the improvement or to the detriment of their stories, according to circumstances. The beauty and excellence of folk-stories, as of other cultural products, inheres precisely to some extent in what is peculiar to them and characteristic of them. The influence of written sagas on the content of wonder-tales has, I think, seldom been to their improvement, and sometimes folk-stories have become more sophisticated and lost the spring-like freshness of untouched oral stories. But on the other hand they have gained more thoughtfulness and a wider horizon.

XII

Hekla, a massive and impressive mountain, stands at the north-east corner of the southern plain of Iceland. People recognised that it must be female and named it after its snowy cape that dazzles the observer's eyes on a bright, sunny day. Sometimes the feet of this giant widow are covered in foggy veils so that she looks as if she is floating in air. But all will have found that she is a proud person, who often covers herself from top to toe with clouds, and then remains invisible to humans for weeks on end. Whoever comes closer and sees the distorted lava that lies around her feet will feel apprehensive, because this fair lady can easily turn into the most terrible ogress, and then she will try to destroy the habitations of men with fire and embers, molten lava and ash.

It has become a truism that a nation is marked by the land it lives in, though it is quite difficult to demonstrate this with solid evidence or to trace the influence in detail. Icelandic folk-stories are the product of the people and their characteristics unambiguously reveal their origin,

and I consider that they bear clear marks of the land from which they are sprung. Not only is the land obviously the stage on which the stories are set, but also the ideas in the stories correspond to the nature of the country; they reveal both the splendour of the eternal summer night and the darkness of the cruel winter day, both the mildness and the harshness of the land. The people themselves knew well how closely bound together were folk-belief, legends and land. Openings in the ice on lakes and patches of smooth sea were called 'elf-gaps', and every conceivable kind of natural feature was named after trolls, especially those that were large and spectacular. Sometimes the land did not even make demands on people's imagination, for the significance of the phenomenon was immediately obvious; one pillar of rock is clearly shaped like a man, another like a woman, and who has not seen faces in rock?

Icelandic folk-stories are like the country in their magnificence and ruggedness. Perhaps the contrast between the house in Hansel and Gretel with its pancake roof and Surtla's cave produces a rather exaggerated picture of how wonder-tales take a troll-like form in Iceland, but there is some substance in this. The most varied kinds of supernatural stories turn into stories of trolls in Icelandic versions. It may be there is too much sub-Arctic darkness in Icelandic stories, but one cannot truly say that there is any lack in them either of images of spring dew on the grass, or of wisps of valley-mist or of the haze of hot summer days. The contrasts of Hekla are also never far off. The gap between glorious beauty and fearful ugly desolation is very narrow.

There are homes of men by the roots of Hekla, scattered over the flat land between mountain and shore. They are not all very imposing, but they fit well into the landscape. There men have fought their hard battle for life and for the means of life, for much of the time deprived of freedom and fleeced by foreign merchants. These conditions are not calculated to promote vigour and beauty, humanity or poetic sensibility, but they increase the earthiness of folk-stories, and give them a wonderful, primitive magic. But there have also been many forces that tend in other directions. This poverty-stricken nation possessed a surprisingly high culture, a culture that all classes had access to. National life itself was homogeneous and very little stratified; at any rate in some places one can tell that Icelandic stories are not as obviously the products of a common people who stare up with wide,

ignorant eyes at the nobler classes as the folk-stories of some other nations are. Moreover, everyone in Iceland knew about the people's ancient culture and responded to it, and people kept up the composition of poetry and stories and various other arts. They took on new forms, in accordance with the spirit of the times, the conditions of life and all kinds of other influences, internal and external. And though the light of culture burned with varying brightness, all intellectual life in Iceland, including folk-stories, was different because of it. Adeline Rittershaus complains that Icelandic wonder-tales lack the child-like tone of German ones, where animals and inanimate objects have human speech, and a child-like sympathy with animals appears everywhere.¹ The bits of Icelandic animal verse, however, such as the fragment about the raven, *Hrafninn flýgur um aftaninn*, show that the Icelanders had no lack of feeling for wild creatures, though it is significant that animals with human intelligence and speech in Icelandic stories are usually people under a spell. This seems to me to arise from a kind of common-sense rationalism of which signs can be seen in many other places in Icelandic folk-stories and which can be traced back to very early times in Icelandic and Scandinavian intellectual life.

The poetic temperament turned to folk-stories to satisfy its longing to let the mind fly over land and sea, out beyond the narrow limits of reality, of which people had their fill in everyday life. The poet took his sorrows to the world of elf-stories and wonder-tales, and created poetry of tender beauty, and the influence of the first person to do so effectively flowed out all through the folk-stories it touched and lifted them to a higher plane. Thus folk-stories could acquire the spirit of romantic poetry. It was as when high, distant mountains late in the evening sometimes take on the colour of the blue heavens, so that land cannot be distinguished from sky. Lines from elf-poems and fragments of medieval ballads embrace each other, as in the stanza *Úti ert þú við eyjar blár* (cf. p. 182 above).

But in Iceland, people do not compose verse just to comfort themselves; they worship poetry and believe in it. In poetry is a power which rules men's lives and health, governs wind and sea. Icelanders have faith in hymns and sacred poems too, because of their content, but this happens all over the world. They also have faith in secular

¹ *Die neuisländischen Volksmärchen*, 1902, xlviii-1.

poetry composed by themselves, believing it to be no less able to move mountains than religious faith is. By this belief in their own culture they transfer it into the realm of mythology, and the glow of the super-human is shed over it.

The inclination of this nation towards common-sense rationalism was an antidote to the chaos of imagination. The elf-women lost their tails, and a host of heterogeneous species was sorted out into two classes of beings, trolls and elves. The habit of wrestling with arts of poetry, genealogies and other similar classificatory systems gave a boost to the mythologising and sorting tendencies of story-tellers, and inculcated in them the habit of clarifying items of folk-belief, distinguishing and linking them, filling gaps and harmonising as the occasion demanded. There was no danger that the stories would petrify because of this activity, because the creative fire that burned beneath was fierce and strong, and the power of imagination vigorous and rich.

Icelandic folk-stories show ample signs of the land and people they spring from, and in this distinguish themselves from folk-stories of other countries, so that they may be said to have individuality. They are the most truly Icelandic of all Icelandic things. This leads, however, to an odd paradox. Much of the content of Icelandic folk-stories is also found in foreign ones, and is unquestionably derived from abroad. This applies particularly to the wonder-tales, and to a lesser extent also to legends based on folk-belief. Even the oldest Icelandic stories have only been in the country for just over a thousand years, and they were derived from stories then current in other lands. All the non-Icelandic story-material and motifs in Icelandic stories bear witness to the eagerness of Icelanders to learn from other nations and their curiosity about them, while at the same time demonstrating an obstinate demand and successful endeavour to make all the foreign material conform to Icelandic cultural and social life, to Icelandicise it ruthlessly and transform it by Icelandic inventiveness until it can no longer be distinguished from what is Icelandic from its roots, until Icelandic people can recognise in it their own lives and dreams, their problems and sufferings, achievements and defeats. Thus folk-stories reflect the cultural commerce of Iceland with the outside world in general, insofar as it is a receiver, containing elements both common and individual. As a result of rigorous Icelandicisation, foreign influences have become the most beneficial and fruitful in Icelandic culture.

ABBREVIATED REFERENCES

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AfnF = *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*.
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