

## The Search for Identity: A Problem after the Conversion\*

Freud's discoveries in psychoanalysis have been developed in many ways since the time of their first publication, but his principal terms still retain their validity, if not always in their full or exact meaning. His terminology is known and used by nearly every educated person, although most often this knowledge has been acquired by reading not Freud but secondary literature or through oral mediation. These words are often used in a broad sense, with the consequent danger of subjective interpretation. I must admit that — for my own purposes in the present article — I will be using Freudian terms in this way and that I am unable to participate in the highly specialized discourse on the subject.<sup>1</sup> I am also aware that it is necessary to proceed from individual to social psychoanalysis. The Frankfurt School has been instrumental in this further development of Freudian principles, which preferably have been applied to modern social phenomena. To my knowledge, no attempt has been made to apply these principles to a medieval social phenomenon. Old Norse literature lends itself to such an attempt since in its highly developed state in the thirteenth century it was imbued with Christian culture but retained reminiscences of the heathen past. The full impact of Christianity, realized after two hundred years of gradual internalization, was experienced as a break and a threat to continuity. Christian ideology did not accord with pagan ethics and belief.

When the texts which I examined revealed these problems to me, I was faced with another difficulty. Most of them — the so-called þættir — have been transmitted only in late compilations from the fourteenth century. That many of them originate from the time before circa 1220 and existed in independent form is a

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\* This was the title of a paper which I presented at the Sixty-Eighth Annual Meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study, 5–6 May 1978, in Amherst, Massachusetts. The main ideas which I tentatively proposed were taken up again in Heinrichs 1989. For the present publication the original paper has been reworked and considerably expanded. I am very grateful to Mark Nevins and Donald Tuckwiller for a revision of my English style, and especially to the latter for help with reworking the article, for discussion of the problems, and for many improvements.

1. Works consulted include Elliot 1992, chap. 1; Laplanche and Pontalis [1967] 1973.

commonly held scholarly opinion, but only in a few cases has this been proved.<sup>2</sup> My chief witness, the *Óláfs þátr Geirstaðaálfs*, has been analyzed in Heinrichs 1989, and I believe that I have collected sufficient arguments to establish the early existence of an independent þátr in this case. It is germane to my argumentation that the examples which I cite can be traced back to this particular juncture in literary and religious history, but I cannot prove it in all instances. What I am undertaking is, after all, just an attempt.

### The *Óláfs þátr Geirstaðaálfs*

In order to provide a basis for speculation on the problem of personal and collective cultural identity in medieval Icelandic literature, I shall begin with a textual analysis of a þátr which belongs to the *Óláfs sögur helga*, sagas about St. Óláfr, the missionary-king of Norway from 1015 until 1030. The þátr is called *Óláfs þátr Geirstaðaálfs* and is extant in six versions. One of these is contained in the *Legendary saga* of Óláfr helgi from circa 1200; four are included in late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth century manuscript versions of Snorri Sturluson's *Independent* or *Separate saga* of St. Óláfr; and the sixth version is a separate þátr written down in the fifteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Snorri did not make direct use of *Óláfs þátr Geirstaðaálfs*, although there is reason to believe that he was familiar with it.

On the basis of a comparative analysis of the six versions of the þátr, I have concluded that the late separate þátr of Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr in AM 75 e fol. (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:727–35) most accurately reflects the archetype or youngest common ancestor of the preserved versions (Heinrichs 1989), even though the version in the *Legendary saga* is preserved in a very old manuscript. I believe that all the versions contained in late *Óláfs sögur* derive from works which were extant in the late twelfth century. Even if this does not hold in all cases, the story ultimately derives from the second half of the twelfth century, and this is important for my later deductions. The version of the þátr contained in Flateyjarbók is the one which has been known to most scholars, and it is from Flateyjarbók that the title *Óláfs þátr Geirstaðaálfs* is derived, although according to the separate þátr it should be entitled *Óláfs þátr digrbeins*.

The story — which I believe was “invented” by its first author — deals with the circumstances of St. Óláfr's birth and focuses on how Óláfr was given his name. A wide-ranging background is provided for this seemingly small but very significant event in terms of the history of salvation. The þátr begins by narrating events which occurred over a hundred years before St. Óláfr's time. At the end of

2. These two premises are separate problems; for a discussion see Harris 1988.

3. The version of *Óláfs þátr Geirstaðaálfs* contained in the *Legendary saga* is published in Johnsen 1922, 1–4, and in Heinrichs et al. 1982, 30.14 (meaning p. 30, line 14) to 36.8. The other five versions of the þátr are published in Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:715–35.

the ninth century, when Þjóðólfr ór Hvini composed *Ynglingatal*, the penultimate king of a branch of the Norwegian Yngling-rulers died at his residence in Geirstaðir and was buried nearby in a *haugr* (barrow). The king's name was Óláfr, and he carried the nickname *digrbeinn*. Shortly before his death, a severe pestilence decimated his country, Vestfold, and many of his followers were buried by his side, together with a vast amount of grave-gifts. The king himself was seated on a chair, clad in his splendid regalia, including a sword, a belt with a knife, and a gold bracelet. He had prophesied these events — which were revealed to him in a dream — and had requested his people not to make sacrifice to him. But after his death, when crops failed and famine followed pestilence, his order was disobeyed. His subjects sacrificed to him “til árs sér” [for bountiful harvest], and so his nickname was changed to *Geirstaðaálfr*, the “Elf of Geirstaðir.”

The second part of the narrative reports another dream, this one experienced by Hrani near the ancient site. Old King Óláfr appears to him, ordering him to break open the *haugr* and remove the regalia from the body, which he is to decapitate with the king's own sword. Hrani is afraid to break the taboo of the holy place, but the apparition promises him the help of Jarl Sveinn Hákonarson, who happens to be in the area and in need of money. Together they carry out the dead king's commands. Against Sveinn's will, Hrani takes possession of the three treasured objects — sword, belt, and bracelet — and goes to Ásta Guðbrandsdóttir, St. Óláfr's mother, who is in labor and cannot give birth. Hrani uses the belt from the *haugr* to assist her. After the child is born, Hrani performs the pagan rite of “*ausa vatni*” and names the boy Óláfr after his ancestor Óláfr *digrbeinn*. Later the bracelet and sword are given to the boy.

Although the þáttr is rather fantastic and utilizes much folkloristic material, it displays a definite purpose and tendency with regard to historical views of the twelfth century. Its primary aim is to legitimize Óláfr's rule as a *fylikonungur* of Vestfold, which would be the legal basis for his claim to sovereignty over all of Norway, like his ancestor Haraldr hárfagri. The story clearly establishes that Óláfr could trace his ancestry back to *haugr* and *heiðni*,<sup>4</sup> that Vestfold was his *óðal*, and that he had been expressly chosen by his ancestor to be the owner of the regalia which symbolize his legitimate reign.

But there is another aspect of the story connected with the name-giving. Whether or not Óláfr really *was* named after his great-great-great-granduncle is finally less important than the fact that it accords well with the medieval Scandinavian custom of naming a child after a deceased ancestor, quite often the grandfather. Possibly this custom originated in the belief that the newborn child was in some sense an image of its ancestor. There are several instances in Old Norse

4. In Norse law, a “*réttarbót*” by King Hákon Magnússon from 1316 stipulated that to secure one's *óðal*, or patrimonial estate, one had to be able to trace one's ancestors back “*til haugs ok til heiðni*” (Keyser et al. 1846–95, 3:121). A discussion of the importance of this law in connection with Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr and Óláfr helgi may be found in Heinrichs 1989, 109, and in See 1988, 105.

literature which attest the popular belief in reincarnation, including the *Óláfs þáttir Geirstaðaálfs*.<sup>5</sup> Near the end of the *Separate þáttir* as preserved in AM 75 e fol., after events following Hrani's dream have been recounted, we find the striking statement:

ok geck þad alltt eptter er hann [Hrani] hafde dreymtt til ok er frændr Olafs ok magar heyrdur þetta þa trudu þeir þui at ande Olafs digrbeins munde nu borenn i likam þessa Olafs til þess at hann mætte skirn taka enn þenna trunad braut hann sialfr raun miog nidr þa er hann uar kongr yfer Norege. (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:735.7–11)

[and everything went as he (Hrani) had dreamed it would, and when Óláfr's close relatives and inlaws heard this, they believed that Óláfr digrbeinn's soul had now been born in the body of this Óláfr so that he could receive baptism, but he himself (St. Óláfr) verily destroyed this belief when he was king of Norway.]

The *Separate þáttir* goes on to report another episode which elaborates on this belief in reincarnation. The episode is said to take place during Óláfr's reign as king of Norway and forms the concluding passage of the *Separate þáttir*.<sup>6</sup>

þat er sagtt at eitthuertt sinn bar suo til at hann reid ok foronautar hans hia haugnum Olafs Geirstada alfs at eirnhuer af hans monnum mælte til kongsens nær uarttu hier heygdr kongrenn suarade alldregi hafde aund min ·ij· likame ok eigi mun hun hafa ok eigi á upprisun degenum þa seger madren þad hafa sagtt nockurer menn þa er þu komtt hier fyr at þu hafer suo mælltt hier uorum ok hiedan forum kongrenn suarar þad hefe ek alldre sagtt ok alldrege mun eg þetta mæla (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:735.11–18)

[It is said that one day when King Óláfr passed the barrow of Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr, one of his followers asked him, "When were you buried here?" The king answered, "Never did my soul have two bodies, and never will it have, and not on Resurrection Day." But the man insisted and said, "Some people have said that when you came to this place before, you stated, 'Here we were and from here we started!'" The king said, "I never said that and I never will."]

Although the Christian author allows his figures to give at least indirect expression to a pagan belief in reincarnation, he himself leaves no doubt that he rejects such belief. He even adds, in the version preserved in *Flateyjarbók*, the comment: "ok uar þat audfundit at Olafur konungr uillde þessa uillu ok uan tru med öllu eyda ok af ma" [It was easy to see that King Óláfr wished to uproot and blot out this heretical superstition] (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:773.7–8). But the described effect of this verbal exchange on Óláfr is less unambiguous: "ok komztt hann uid kongrenn i hugnum ok laust þegar hestenn sporum ok flyde sem skiotazt þann stadenn" [The king was deeply disturbed at heart; he pricked his

5. On mythic and folkloristic aspects of *Óláfs þáttir Geirstaðaálfs* see Storm 1893, 202; Unwerth 1911, 159–67; Turville-Petre 1964, 193–95; Paasche 1958, 106–7; Höfler 1954, 43–46; Schramm 1956, 779–80.

6. It is also transmitted in *Flateyjarbók*, inserted at a point later in the *Óláfs saga helga* where the compiler deemed it appropriate (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:772.33–773.8; Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68, 2:6–9). The description and language are nearly identical in the two versions, which could indicate that *Flateyjarbók* used the *Separate þáttir* (cf. Heinrichs 1989, 190, table 15).

horse and sped from the place as fast as he could] (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:735.18–20). What could have motivated the author to portray this psychophysical effect? The Flateyjarbók-version contains a further remark which helps to elucidate the author's standpoint: “þuiat guds leynda doma visse hann fullkomliga fyrer bodit vera at foruitnnaðst frammar en uile Iesu Christi stendr til þa liosa at gera” [Óláfr knew that it is strictly forbidden to men to search out God's secrets further than Jesus Christ intends to reveal them] (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:773. 8–10). I think the author meant to imply that Óláfr himself felt the wish to identify with his long-dead ancestor and that such identification, though not in accord with Christian dogma, could be construed as pertaining to God's deeper secrets. Óláfr vigorously rejects the insinuation that he is the reborn Óláfr *digrbeinn*; to agree would have been dreadful heresy according to Christian dogma.<sup>7</sup> But his denial of a physical splitting of himself into two bodies could be interpreted psychoanalytically as a defensive reaction against a threatened splitting of *himself* — his ego — into two conflicting attitudes.

### Noble Heathen and Demonology

A similar sort of splitting combined with unconscious heresy can be detected in other aspects of *Óláfs þáttr Geirstaðaálfs*. The author takes pains to establish an identity between the old and the new king while at the same time avoiding conflict with Christian belief. Thus he splits the personality of the elder Óláfr through the use of nicknames. Óláfr *digrbeinn* represents the noble existence of the ancient king, loved by his people and responsible for their welfare and for good crops. Óláfr *Geirstaðaálfr* is a supernatural being who exists only in the people's imagination. Just the *Separate þáttr* of Óláfr *digrbeinn* gives a detailed account of this change, whereas the other versions merely mention it without using the byname *digrbeinn*, only noting the change as such. After Óláfr *digrbeinn* has prophesied great disaster for his country, culminating in his own death, he warns his people not to offer sacrifices to him and his deceased retinue:

Sa hlutur er enn seiger kǫnnur er eg vil ydur wið vara að þier takit ei þau ræð er suma kann hennda. Að þeir blöta þa menn annaða er þeim þotte sier traust að vera meðann þeir lifðu. (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:728.43–729.2)

[“There is one more thing,” says the king, “about which I want to warn you, that you do not adopt that expedient which some people would, that they offer sacrifices to deceased persons whom they regarded as their protectors while they were living.”]

The king's prohibition of sacrifices comprises the first part of his long speech

7. Anne Holtmark (1969), who evidently overlooked the *Separate þáttr*, interprets the difference between the versions in Flateyjarbók and in AM 61 fol. in terms of an opposition between Neoplatonic philosophy in the High Middle Ages, which allowed for the concept of reincarnation, and the dogma of *fides catholica* which condemned Neoplatonic ideas as heresy. Why a revenant (*aptrganga*) could be accepted from folklore as less harmless, is not made quite clear by her. Compare also Heinrichs 1989, 140–41, Anm. 23.

at the assembly. In the second part the king predicts what will happen if there are bad harvests and people ignore his prohibition. The consequences, contradictory as it may seem, will be twofold:

- (1) As soon as people worship him with sacrifices, the king and his retinue will turn into demons and apparitions:

So kann enn stunddumm að verða ef menn taka þau orð sem eg gat áður að þeir blota mennina þá frammlidnu að ei ljíða lanngar stunder áður þeir somu eru tryllder er áður voru blötader og eru það iafnann kallader reymleikar edur annar trollskapur (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:729.3–7)

[Sometimes this also occurs — if people adopt that ill-advised expedient which I just mentioned, that they worship those departed persons with sacrifices, that a short time later these same persons are turned into trolls, and that is always called hauntings or trolldom.]

The people's behaviour is grounded in the belief that these demons can sometimes cause benefit — in the present case, good harvests — and sometimes harm (e.g., frightening people to death). Paradoxically, this is also the king's belief:

Enn eg ætla það þó seiger hann að þessar hinar sömu illvættir sijnízt stunddumm gagn gíaura, enn stunddumm meyn, j þúi er víð ber. (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:729.7–9)

["I believe however," he says, "that these same evil beings seem sometimes to wreak benefit, sometimes harm in that which occurs."]

This is the doctrine of the Church and must therefore be true.

- (2) But there is another truth not incompatible with the Church, situated in the deep structure. The king in death cannot be made responsible for either good or bad:

Enn vær munum þó hvorugu vallda. Wier munumm ecke betrad fáá arferdina, ennda munum vier ei aptturgännga, nie tryllazt þó að oss verde slijkt kiennnt. Og mun helldur suo vera sem eg sagda yður áður ener somu ovetter munu vallda huorotueggju þó að suo verde að wmm huorutueggia þíke nockud til vera haft. Enn vær munumm liggia kyrrer og gíaura ecke mein, enn mega og ecke til gagns gíora (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:729.14–19)

[But nevertheless we will cause neither of these. We will not be able to improve the harvest, nor will we be revenants or turn into trolls, even if such things are attributed to us. Rather it will be as I said to you before: those same evil beings will cause either of these, if it so happens that in either regard there is thought to be something to it. But we will lie quietly and wreak no harm, but neither will we be able to wreak benefit.]

When after the king's death bad harvests do occur, the people ignore his prohibition, worship him, and call him *Geirstaðaálfr*: i.e., they turn him into a troll. Shortly afterwards, the harvests are fine, and they believe this to be the result of their sacrifices. When consequently they stop bringing sacrifices — the author explains — the evil spirits become angered, it being the demons who received the sacrifices, not the *haugbúir* (barrow-dwellers): "þá þottust þeir hiner illu

vættir missa sinnar sæmmdar” [then those evil spirits felt shorted in the respect paid them] (Johnsen and Helgason 1941, 2:730.9–10). The hauntings around the barrow begin, continue for some time, and then abate.

It is obvious that the author of the þáttr tries to combine, rather clumsily, two conflicting Christian theories: demonology and the theorem of the noble heathen.<sup>8</sup> He never indicates that the demons only exist in the people’s imagination; but on the whole, he uses folkloristic conceptions (*reimleikr*, *apturganga*, trolls, etc.) to circumscribe Christian demonology. He even makes a joke of his conception when the barrow is penetrated by Hrani: the demons become noisy and Hrani’s horrified assistants run away. On the other hand, the noble heathen in his grave is supposed to keep his royal dignity in death. In utilizing this ambiguity, the author is able to articulate a deep-structural, unconscious feeling of loss of identity. By splitting the heathen existence represented by the *álfr* from the noble existence of the ancient prince of peace, the author paved the way for identifying the Christian saint with his heathen ancestor. St. Óláfr, who bears the nickname *hinn digri* during his kingship, has preexisted as Óláfr *digrbeinn*. I shall come back to the significance of names and nicknames as symbols for identification.

### Problems Referring to *siðaskipti*

Many of the preceding ideas have been developed in my monograph on *Óláfs þáttr Geirstaðaálfs*, in the section entitled “Identität” (1989, 93–104), as one of the main messages of the þáttr, and I wish to emphasize that my conclusions derive from a close reading and comparative analysis of the texts involved, not from psychoanalytic theory. As a second step, I consulted Freudian and post-Freudian texts and found much corroboration.

The *Óláfs þáttr Geirstaðaálfs* may be categorized as one of the þættir which serve as a transition from *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* to the “large” *Óláfs saga helga* as transmitted in Flateyjarbók and AM 61 fol. These late compilations contain many interpolated þættir (cf. Würth 1991, 34–37), one group of which was coined “conversion þættir” by Joseph Harris (1988; 1980, 162–67). Most of these are inserted into the *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, since Óláfr’s function as missionary king is heavily emphasized in his saga. Besides actual þættir, whether designated as such or not, some smaller episodes and narrative pieces are of special interest for my purpose. It is important for my thesis that all of these narrative pieces may be attributed to the period in which the archaic *Óláfs sögur* were written: *Óláfs sögur Tryggvasonar* by Oddr munkr and Gunnlaugr and the *Oldest or Legendary Óláfs saga helga*. Why a late compilation such as Flateyjarbók would draw on these early sources, remains an open question.

8. Gerd Wolfgang Weber (1986), who traces demonology in various branches of Old Norse literature including Snorri’s *Edda* and *Ynglinga saga*, did not notice this example which might have supported his theory, based on Augustinus’ *De civitate Dei*: cultus post mortem, sacrifices received by demons, supply of gold and silver (310–11). See also See 1988, 106–7.

All conversion þættir are concerned with the crucial question of how to reconcile pagan beliefs with Christian doctrine. In the Christianization of the pagan peoples of northern and eastern Europe in the High Middle Ages use was made of theories developed by theologians in Hellenistic times, who had to adapt Graeco-Roman and Eastern mythologies to early Christian ideology (cf. See 1988, 69–79). I have touched on the theorems of natural religion (the noble heathen) and demonology. A third theorem is euhemerism, often combined with idolatry, which states that the heathen deities were in reality men who pretended to be gods. Our special interest is how these well-known theorems were applied to the Scandinavian mythological past, which had extended so far into the Middle Ages. The fact is that in all conversion þættir the narrative descriptions of paganism—phantastic though they may be—are far more interesting than their Christian goals: baptism and some stock phrases. The question of whether this reflects a cultural break or, on the contrary, a continuity with past culture, is only relevant to the problem of identity insofar as the break gives rise to an unconscious wish to recover the past.

### Conversion þættir and Episodes

The scene of King Óláfr at Geirstaðir is preceded in *Flateyjarbók* by a narrative piece which carries the heading “Óðinn kom til Olafs konungs með dul ok prettum” [Óðinn came to King Óláfr in disguise and planning mischief]. Here Óðinn enters the king’s hall as a stranger, calling himself Gestr and in his usual disguise, a low-brimmed hat which conceals his face. The king is reluctant to receive him, but later in the night he bids Gestr to his bedside to entertain him with tales about ancient kings and their deeds. Finally they engage in the following dialogue:

Gestr spurde konung. huerr uilldir þu herra hellzst fornkonungr verit (hafa) ef þu ættir vm þat at kiosa. Konungr suarar. ek villde æingi hæidinn madr vera huarke konungr ne annarr madr. Gestr mællti. þat er liost at þu munt ecki annarr madr vera en þu ert en at hinu spyr ek huerium þu uilldir likazstr fornkonungi uera ef þu skylldir nockurum. nu er en sem adan segir konungr at ek villda ongum fornkonungi likr vera. en ef (ek) skyllda nockut þar vm tala þa villda ek hellzst hafa atferd ok hofdingskap Hrolfs kraka þess þo at ek hellda allri kristni of tru minne. Gestr mællti. hui uilld(i)r þu hellzst vera sem Hrolfr kraki sem ecki at manni matti hæita hia þui sem annarr konungr sa er verit hefir. edr hui villdir þu æigi vera sem sa konungr er sigr hafde vid huernn sem hann atti bardaga ok suo var vænn ok uel at jþrottum buinn at æingi uar hans like a Nordrlondum. ok suo matti odrum sigr gefa j soknum sem sialfum ser ok suo kringr skalldskapr sem odrum monnum mal sitt. (Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68, 2:134–35)

[Gestr asked the king, “Which ancient king would you most wish to have been if you had the right to choose?” The king answers, “I would not wish to be any heathen man, neither a king nor any other man.” Gestr said, “It is obvious that you won’t be any man other than you are, but what I am asking is this: which ancient king would you wish to be most similar to, if you had to choose one?” “It is the same now as before,” says the king, “that I wouldn’t want to be like any ancient king, but if I had to say something about it, then I would prefer to have the conduct and nobility of Hrólfr kraki — on the



condition that I maintain all Christian observance and my faith.” Gestr said, “Why do you prefer to be like Hrólfr kraki who might be called a nobody compared with another king who lived, — and why would you not wish to be like that king who had victory over anyone he had a battle with—and who was so handsome and accomplished in skills that no one was his equal in the North — and who could give victory in fights to others as to himself, — and poetry surrounds him like ordinary speech does others.”]

The qualities which Gestr attributes to this unnamed king are applicable only to Óðinn — as euhemeristic hero and, implicitly, as heathen god. Similar qualities of the euhemeristic Óðinn are referred to in Snorri’s *Ynglinga saga*, especially in chapter 6, but with no verbal agreement; e.g., that he won every battle (chap. 2), that he was endowed with exceptional beauty, that he was trained in *iþróttir* (all sorts of skills), and that he was perfect in producing poetry. In contrast with Snorri’s historic-mythical intentions, this passage in the *Flateyjarbók*-tale sounds like a cult praise of the mythic god comparable to eulogies of heroes or gods of antiquity.<sup>9</sup> Óláfr recognizes the tempter in Óðinn’s epiphany, throws his prayerbook at him, and exclaims, “Þu uillda ek sizst vera hinn ille Odinn” [Least of all would I wish to be you, evil Óðinn!]. The Christian commentator explains that Óðinn was the devil, and that Óláfr, of course, won a splendid victory over the devil spirit, termed as “vhræinn ande er syndizst j liking hins illa Odins” [the unclean spirit which revealed itself in the form of the evil Óðinn] (Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68, 2:135).

Accordingly, we must proceed through several layers, i.e., through Óðinn’s various shapes—he is the mythical shape-shifter!—and identities in order to reach the core of the matter: he is Gestr, the stranger and guest; he is Óðinn, the wise king of old, the god of victory and poetry; he is the devil according to Christian interpretation. Óláfr, on the other hand, first leans towards Hrólfr kraki, but then is tempted toward the perilous identification with Óðinn, the paradigm of paganism. That he resists this temptation is less important than the nature of the temptation itself: the wish to identify with the chief exponent of the lost pagan culture.

Óláfr’s admiration of Hrólfr kraki is also expressed in *Tóka þáttur Tókasonar*, although Tóki, the storyteller of ancient times, prefers the Norwegian king Hálfir (Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68, 2:137). The highly significant scene of Óláfr at Geirstaðir (see above) and the episode of Óðinn visiting the king are combined into one chapter in *Flateyjarbók*, followed by *Tóka þáttur Tókasonar* (Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68, 2:135–38). This cluster of thematically related narrative units could indicate that the scene at Geirstaðir, which originally formed part of the *Separate þáttur* (Heinrichs 1989), was deliberately inserted by the author/compiler at this point to highlight a deep-structural wish to identify with the past culture. In psychoanalytic terms, Óláfr’s ego contains the repressed values of the past, a diagnosis given by the author/compiler more than 250 years after the fact.

9. Edith Marold briefly discusses three instances in skaldic poetry where similar praise is used referring to Þórr; she considers the possible influence of Christian liturgy (Marold 1992, 689–90).

In an article on another of the conversion þættir, *Norna-Gests þáttr*, Harris and Hill (1989) construct what they call “the developmental history of the story.” The central theme is the epiphany of Óðinn, going back to a time that is characterized as completely heathen (*Grímnismál*, *Heiðreks saga*) and appearing in episodes centered around the two missionary kings: A guest (Gestr) visits the king, entertains him during the night with tales of ancient kings, and in the end reveals himself to be Óðinn. The intention to construct parallel episodes between the sagas of the two missionary kings is evident in *Flateyjarbók*. This is the case with *Norna-Gests þáttr* and *Tóka þáttr Tókasonar*, which are not concerned with Óðinn himself but with “Odinic” figures, heroes who lived long lives in heathendom and die after baptism in the missionary period (cf. Harris and Hill 1989). Whereas *Tóka þáttr*, about Óláfr helgi, seems like an attenuated version of *Norna-Gests þáttr* in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, the tale of Óðinn’s visit to Óláfr helgi is more sophisticated than the corresponding tale attached to Óláfr Tryggvason. Here the idea of identification is not applied to the king himself, nor is it merely implicit in the tale, but rather it is directly expressed by Óláfr himself in a long, theologizing speech which identifies man (guest), god (Óðinn), and demon (the devil):

hefir þetta reyndar verit æingi madr þo at sua hafui synnzst helldr hefir ouin allz mannkyns sealf fr feandinn brugdit a sig like hins uesta Odins þess er hæidnir menn hafa langan tima truat a ok ser firir gud haft (Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68, 1:376)

[This was not really a human being, even though it seemed to be. Rather, the enemy of all mankind, the devil himself, has assumed the shape of the most evil Óðinn, whom pagan people believed in for a long time and regarded as their god.]

### *Qgmundar þáttr dytts ok Gunnars helmings*

This conversion þáttr, transmitted in eight manuscripts, including *Flateyjarbók*, has also been treated by Joseph Harris (1975), and there are many parallels between his examination of literary figures and my observations on psychoanalytic structures.<sup>10</sup> As the longer title suggests, the þáttr consists of two parts, the first of which contains the Icelander Qgmundr’s story of a long-delayed revenge in Norway. My analysis begins with the passage which links the story of Gunnarr helmingr, a distinguished Norwegian, with Qgmundr’s final and successful journey to Norway. This takes place during the reign of Óláfr Tryggvason, who in the meantime had succeeded Hákon jarl inn ríki.

Various occurrences analyzable in narratological terms also deal with the idea of identification, at first glance in a superficial, rather playful manner, but

10. In this case, I mainly use the edition by Jónas Kristjánsson (1956, 99–115), with some attention paid to the version in *Flateyjarbók* (Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68, 1:332–39). The designation *þáttr* is not given in *Flateyjarbók*, which is why Stefanie Würth (1991, 52) terms the þáttr “unecht” (not genuine). For my part, I am convinced that *Qgmundar þáttr* contains all the qualities of a genuine þáttr (cf. my review of Würth 1991 in *alvissmál* 3 [1994]: 120–24). — The necessary background information on *Qgmundar þáttr*, including previous scholarship and literary qualities, is provided in Harris 1975.

gradually they reveal their deeper meaning. Thus, after Qgmundr has landed in Niðaróss he meets a man unknown to him who is termed *bœjarmaðr* ‘man from town’ or *heklumaðr* ‘man in a hooded frock’ as long as his identity is not specified. This is a frequent rhetorical device in saga narrative: a person is identified either by his dwelling place or by a certain attribute of his appearance. At the same time it also serves to conceal a personality.

A second stage is identification by name, usually by the first name and patronymic; the latter, surprisingly, is not used at this significant meeting, although both men belong to respected families. Instead we observe the transition to a third stage, identification by nicknames. Qgmundr’s nickname is *dyttr* ‘stroke, blow’, which is mentioned not by him, but by Gunnarr; this identification, certainly not a flattering one, refers to Qgmundr’s previous experiences in Norway. Gunnarr introduces himself as Gunnarr helmingr and explains his nickname: “ek em því svá kallaðr, at mér þykkir gaman at hafa háflit klæði” [I am called so because I take pleasure in wearing clothes of two colors] (Kristjánsson 1956, 109). Since *helmingr* only means “a half-one,” a deeper meaning is connoted, which will be revealed in the second part of the þáttur. But for the present situation, the clothing as an attribute of identification is more important than the nickname. The third person mentioned in their dialogue is Qgmundr’s victim Hallvarðr; he too is characterized by a nickname: *háls* ‘neck’, referring to a wound received in heroic battle. Three nicknames — three individual stories — and a combination of three fates point to problems of identity.

A fourth and most significant stage of identification is represented by the two protagonists’ clothing and their ensuing decisions: “Qgmundr tók yfir sik feld hálfskiptan ok hlöðum búinn um handveginn; var þat ágæta-gripur” [Qgmund put on a parti-coloured cloak with hand-worked gold embroidery at the seams—it was an object of great value] (Kristjánsson 1956, 109; trans. McKinnell 1987, 138); “[Gunnarr] var í heklu; hon var gør af skarlati ok saumuð ǫll brögðum” [(Gunnarr) was wearing a hooded mantle made of scarlet and embroidered all over] (Kristjánsson 1956, 109; trans. McKinnell 1987, 138). The author’s intentions are obvious: Qgmundr’s outfit (*hálfskipt*) appeals to Gunnarr’s clothing tastes. With magnanimous gestures they exchange clothing; there is an ironical tone when Gunnarr uses the pompous formula, “Gef þú manna heilstr!” [You most fortunate of all men, be blessed for your gift!] (Kristjánsson 1956, 110; my translation<sup>11</sup>). Through this exchange of clothing Qgmundr has acquired Gunnarr’s identity, and using this disguise he succeeds in killing his adversary. Before leaving the country he throws Gunnarr’s cloak, weighted with a stone, into the river. The identification with Gunnarr has served its purpose, and only now, as Harris observes (1975, 169), does he acquire his own social identity at home.

11. Heusler 1932 contains a concise survey of Old Icelandic syntax (“Zur Satzlehre,” 110–91) in which sentences of the type *Gef þú manna heilstr!* are categorized as “Wunschimperative, die auf eine schon vollzogene Handlung gehn (‘Imperativi perfecti’)” (see p. 133, § 425, for examples with German translations). The formula is used in saga style in emotionally charged situations and is nearly untranslatable in modern languages.

According to Laplanche and Pontalis, one stage of identification between two subjects is defined in the following manner: “Psychologischer Vorgang, durch den ein Subjekt einen Aspekt, eine Eigenschaft, ein Attribut des anderen assimiliert und sich vollständig oder teilweise nach dem Vorbild des anderen umwandelt” ([1967] 1973, 1:219). This psychoanalytical definition applies to the fateful encounter of the two subjects *Ögmundur* and *Gunnarr*: their assimilation by attributes (clothing) marks the high degree of identity-exchange. In narratological terms, the clothing-exchange heightens the fun of the game and contributes to the unity of the *þáttur*, but it also reshapes two subjects for the rest of their lives: it connotes shape-shifting at the deepest level.

The second part of the *þáttur* contains the story of *Gunnarr*’s further adventures, involving shape-shiftings of his personality which are more pertinent to my thesis than those discussed above. What happens to *Gunnarr* after *Ögmundur* has disposed of the attributes which marked *Gunnarr*’s identity? People believe that he killed *Hallvarðr*, and so he has to live with the false identity of a murderer. Whereas *Ögmundur* acquired his full identity in his social environment, *Gunnarr* is struck by the opposite fate: he is condemned to death, expelled from the community. One might say that he is left with a total loss of identity: he escapes into the woods “allt hulða höfði” [with his head all covered] — a formula emphasizing that his identity has been obliterated. The fact is reiterated on his arrival in Sweden. When he asks the priestess of *Freyr* for help and she inquires who he is [hverr hann væri], he responds by explaining that he is a nobody: “Hann kvezk vera brautingi einn lítils háttar ok útlendr” [He said he was a lone wayfarer of low station and a foreigner] (Kristjánsson 1956, 112; trans. Harris 1975, 172). The author points to *Gunnarr*’s exclusion from society in contrast with *Ögmundur*’s inclusion. But more revealing is the fact that the author makes *Gunnarr* hide his name. No name — no identity: that is the deeper meaning of *Gunnarr*’s behavior, even if on the narrative level it is necessary and useful for him. The priestess, also a nameless figure, rather reluctantly allows him to stay, although she discovers that *Freyr* disapproves of this.

The Christian author’s description of the pagan cult in Sweden is the prerequisite for the ensuing events and for further comments on identity-exchanges:

Þar váru blót stór í þann tíma, ok hafði *Freyr* þar verit mest blótaðr lengi, ok svá var mjök magnat líkneski *Freys*, at fjándinn mælti við menn ór skurðgoðinu, ok *Frey* var fengin til þjónustu kona, ung ok fríð sýnum; var þat átrúnaðr landsmanna, at *Freyr* væri lifandi, sem sýndisk í sumu lagi, ok ætluðu, at hann myndi þurfa at eiga hjúskaparfar við konu sína; skyldi hon mest ráða með *Frey* fyrir hofstaðnum ok qllu því, er þar lá til (Kristjánsson 1956, 112)

[Great heathen sacrifices were held there at that time, and for a long while *Frey* had been the god who was worshipped most there — and so much power had been gained by *Frey*’s statue that the devil used to speak to people out of the mouth of the idol, and a young and beautiful woman had been obtained to serve *Frey*. It was the faith of the local people that *Frey* was alive, as seemed to some extent to be the case, and they thought he would need to have a sexual relationship with his wife; along with *Frey* she

was to have complete control over the temple settlement and all that belonged to it.] (McKinnell 1987, 141)

In several of the interpolated stories in *Flateyjarbók*, Sweden is the locus of paganism par excellence. Thus, not surprisingly, the author of *Qgmundar þáttr* uses theorems of euhemerism, idolatry, and demonology, combining them in a sophisticated and simultaneously gleeful way. From the point of view of identifications, we again recognize the technique of layering, similar to the treatment of Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr (see above, p. 47) and to Óðinn in his apparition to Óláfr helgi (see above, p. 51). In this þáttr it is applied to Freyr. In the people's belief, he is a god represented by a wooden idol and simultaneously a living person who needs daily care and a wife for his sexual needs. The author explains that through constant offerings to the idol, the devil gained the power to speak to the people, i.e., to strengthen their belief in Freyr. Freyr and the devil are identical, and this twin personage senses the foreigner's repressed Christianity with disapproval, whereas the priestess likes his charming personality. Gunnarr thus regains half of his identity and is ready to play the game of continued identity-changes. He is allowed to accompany the peripatetic "sacred couple" on their annual chariot tour to bestow fertility on the country. When they encounter terrible danger in a snowstorm, the rest of the followers run away, and Gunnarr has to lead the carthorse. Once again he is in a lowly and tiresome position. His attempt to take a rest as third man in the chariot is soon frustrated because "Freyr" the idol will not tolerate the situation and would rather attack the intruder. So Gunnarr resumes his former task until he is too tired and dares instead to stand up to Freyr's attack. Gunnarr "half" is too weak to fight paganism, he can merely respond to its attack, and only through spiritual help from Óláfr Tryggvason does he succeed in defeating the idol. The devil escapes — leaving an empty wooden figure which Gunnarr breaks to pieces. This signifies that the worst part of the tripartite identification pattern, the Christian demon of evil, has been eliminated. The story might have ended here, since the pattern of a conversion þáttr is sufficiently complete; the author gives a hint in that direction. But Gunnarr helmingr chooses differently: with the priestess's consent, he proposes to impersonate Freyr.

Two models for identification remain, which in the people's view are only one: Freyr, the living god. The author succeeds in evoking a perfect image of Freyr as god of fertility, behind which Gunnarr helmingr completely disappears after he has donned the garments of the idol — a first signal of identification: from now on the author designates Gunnarr only as "Freyr." The weather improves immediately, which according to his worshipers demonstrates Freyr's *mátt*, his divine power as god of fertility. So does the fact that his wife is pregnant. The people enjoy the feasts and bring their offerings: gold and silver, fine clothing, and other precious things, and they evidently do not mind that "Freyr" wants no sacrifices of animals (another hint by the author). The final judgment is: "þótti Svíum nú allvænt um þenna guð sinn; var ok veðrátta blíð ok allir hlutir svá árvænir, at engi maðr munði slíkt" [the Swedes were now highly delighted with this god of theirs;

also weather conditions were cheerful and everything so promising for good harvests, that nobody remembered anything like it] (Kristjánsson 1956, 114).

The fact that author and audience enjoy this episode as a humorous masquerade does not conflict with my thesis that identification with a pagan hero or god represents a defense mechanism against a threatening loss of identity. In an article on humor, Freud explains this mechanism as a shifting from reality to illusion in order to preserve the ego from pain (1948, 385–86). — Gunnarr is rescued from his ridiculous and potentially perilous situation through the intervention of Óláfr Tryggvason who seems to know the truth and wants to save his Christian soul. Gunnarr is rehabilitated and regains his full identity.

### Snorri's Euhemerism as a Medium of Identification

If, as I propose, the most sensitive and well-educated personalities were most apprehensive towards a menacing loss of identity, then surely Snorri Sturluson must be counted among them. As author of the *Prose Edda* and *Heimskringla*, he developed two strategies of integrating Norse mythology into his own culture of the thirteenth century. In *Heimskringla* his aim was to establish a prehistoric base for his comprehensive history of the kings of Norway, and in *Snorra Edda*, a treatise on poetry for the benefit of young poets, he reports about pagan gods and mythological events as background for developing his own views. In both cases, the Christian theorem of euhemerism guides the narrative; in *Heimskringla* and in *Snorra Edda*–Prologue it is combined with the medieval legend of Trojan migration from Asia to Europe, here Scandinavia, vindicated by the etymology *æsir-Ásiá*. During the last decades much scholarly work has focused on the issue of whether Snorri's interest in the culture of the Icelandic and Norwegian past ought to be interpreted as influenced by learned Christian theory, or rather by a genuine concern to prevent the loss of the ancient culture.<sup>12</sup>

If most of the conversion þættir antedate Snorri's work, it is conspicuous that Snorri eliminates idolatry and demonology from his conception of euhemerism. As I have pointed out in my book on *Óláfs þátrr Geirstaðaálfs* (1989, 133–34), Snorri probably knew this þátrr, but did not use it in his *Óláfs saga helga*. If he knew the þátrr in its independent version (see above, p. 47–49), his aversion to demonology might have motivated him to discard it.

Another example may be taken from the episode describing Óðinn's apparition at Óláfr Tryggvason's Christmas feast disguised as old, one-eyed man, which Snorri found in Oddr's *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* (chap. 43 in A, chap. 33 in S). Oddr introduces Óðinn at the beginning of the chapter as the devil who appears in human form. In the end, when the king discovers that he has been tricked, he

12. For a convenient summary of the scholarly debate on this subject, I refer to Beck 1993. In an earlier survey, Klaus von See offers several ideas which belong to my thesis (See 1988, 105–6; cf. Heinrichs 1989, 93–111), which I first presented in my paper from 1978 (see note above on page 43).

says: “Þat hygg ec at sia diofull havi verit með asionu Óðins” [I imagine that this devil was in the shape of Óðinn] (Jónsson 1932, 134). Snorri, after having told the same story in a much better style and without a theological introduction, alters the king’s words: “segir, at þetta myndi engi maðr verit hafa ok þar myndi verit hafa Óðinn, sá er heiðnir menn höfðu lengi á trúat” [he says that this will not have been a human being and that it will have been Óðinn, in whom pagan people believed for a long time] (*Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* chap. 64; Aðalbjarnarson 1941, 314). Oddr’s tripartite identification — man/guest, Óðinn, the devil — is reduced, in Snorri’s case, to the dual appearance of Óðinn as a human guest and as a truly worshiped god, but not as a demon. Snorri’s euhemerism may be characterized as purely “human(e)” and essentially “Scandinavian” — in this assessment I agree with Andreas Heusler ([1908] 1969, 150–52).

My reflections on Snorri’s search for identity will focus on the frame story of *Gylfaginning* and related comments in *Snorra Edda*. But beforehand I would like to discuss a very interesting commentary on Óðinn’s names in *Flateyjarbók*. It closes a small episode in the *þáttur Hálfðanar svartar*, in which Hálfðan’s son Haraldr (the later hárfagri) spends the Yule feast with an unnamed nobleman:

Nu skal segia af huerium rökum heidnir helldu iol sin þuiat þat er miog sundrleitt ok kristnir menn gera. þui at þeir hallda sin iol af hingatburd uars herra Jesu Cristi en heidnir menn gerdu ser samkundu j hæidr ok tignn vit hinn illa Odin. en Odinn heitir morgum nöfnum. hann heitir Uidrir ok Hárr ok Þride ok Jolnir. þui er hann kalladr Uidrir at þeir sogdu hann uedrum rada. Harr af þui at þeir sogdu at huerr yrde hárr af honum. Jolnir af þui at þeir drogu þat af iolunum. Þride af þui at þeir hofdu auita ordit at sa er einn ok þrir er bazstr er ok höfdu þa spurnn af þrenningunne ok sneru þui j uillu. (Vigfússon and Unger 1860–68, 1:564)

[Now it will be told for what reason pagan people held their yule feast because that is much different from the manner of Christians, because they hold their Yule feast because of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ; but the pagans arranged their festive meal with the evil Óðinn in honor and dignity. Óðinn, however, is called by many names. He is called Viðrir and Hár and Þriði and Jólnir. He was called Viðrir because they said that he ruled over the weather; Hár because they said that everybody was heightened by him; Jólnir because they derived that from Yule; Þriði because they had become aware that He who is best is one and three and then received knowledge of the Trinity and turned that into heresy.]

This is a rather awkward attempt at syncretism; Óðinn seems not to be a human being, but is evidently demonized by the attribute “evil” [hinn illa]. The pagans celebrated Yule in community with Óðinn which the Christians replaced by the feast of Christ’s birth. Among Óðinn’s many names (!) the commentator selects *Jólnir* as a learned derivation from *Jól* ‘Yule’. *Viðrir* may have a tenuous connection with the god of heaven and earth. But most surprising is the fact that the two names *Hár* and *Þriði* coincide with two of the names of Snorri’s trinity of Óðinn and that a Christian interpretation is offered which, if applied to Snorri, would denounce him as a blasphemer. Snorri himself, as far as I am aware, never uses the term *villa* ‘heresy, false doctrine’ in connection with Old Norse

mythology and pagan beliefs. Modern scholars have rediscovered this type of Christian interpretation and analyzed it in different ways. It is difficult to decide whether the passage in Flateyjarbók stems from a pre-Snorronian period, e.g., from a theologically influenced person like Gunnlaugr the monk — or whether it represents a late-medieval reception of Snorri's *Gylfaginning*. In either case, this important theological statement reflects opposition to, as well as agreement with, Snorri's intentions.

Snorri mentions more than fifty names for the god Óðinn in *Gylfaginning*, most of which he quotes from *Grímnismál* (Jónsson 1931, str. 28; *Grímnismál* 46–50, 54). From this source he chose three names to construct his heathen trinity: *Hár* 'High', *Jafnhár* 'Just-as-High', and *Þriði* 'Third', presented as majestically seated on three vertically arranged thrones. According to the text, *Hár* sits on the lowest throne, next comes *Jafnhár*, and at the top is *Þriði*: "sa, er ienv nezta hasæti sat, var konvng, 'ok heitir *Hár*, en þar næst sa, er h(eitir) *Jafnhár*, en sa ofarst, er *Þriði* h(eitir)'" (Jónsson 1931, 10.1–3). These names, so carefully chosen from the rich material, immediately evoke the parallel to the Christian Trinity; it is noteworthy that all three names denote abstract qualities and that only *Hár* is designated as an earthly king. If viewed in Christian terms, *Þriði* would be analogous to the Holy Ghost. In the Uppsala manuscript (DG 11, fol. 26v) there is an often-reproduced drawing of *Gylfi* and the heathen trinity. Heinz Klingenberg treats the text in *Snorra Edda* and the drawing as two corresponding images of the same idea (1986, 640). This cannot be corroborated in all respects; the drawing must be considered a later interpretation, one of the vehicles of medieval Snorronian reception. When Klingenberg compares the drawing with the iconographic representation of the Trinity as "Gnadenstuhl," he discovers many analogues, but the drawing, unlike the verbal description, arranges the three figures from top to bottom: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. God Father cannot be identical with "Third," who occupies the top. Snorri's own arrangement is even more ingenious than the drawing's interpretation. Óðinn's "highest" identity is an abstract concept which might possibly be identified with the unknown god of natural religion.

On the subject of identifications connected with names of Óðinn, it should be observed that *Gylfi*, the Swedish king, who is instructed in mythical lore by the three impostors of Óðinn, also conceals himself under one of Óðinn's names: *Gangleri* — "Gangleri komin af refilstigvm" [coming from trackless ways] (Jónsson 1931, 9.11) — the lowest stage of Óðinn's personifications. Does it suggest that in deep-structural terms Óðinn wants to acquire knowledge of himself through himself (cf. *Hávamál* 138)? Or that the person who is trying to find the truth is already in possession of the truth? From this perspective it is not surprising that the higher personifications of the god know about *Gylfi*'s plans. The game of the contest of knowledge in which *Gylfi* pretends to represent the naive, ignorant people can begin.



The divergent scholarly opinions show that *Snorra Edda* contains many ambiguities. This is also the case with Snorri's euhemerism. The persons of the heathen trinity are called "þrjú menn" (Jónsson 1931, 9.22), despite Christian and pagan connotations of their divine nature. Gylfi knows the æsir as an immigrant folk with exceptional abilities, and yet he is uncertain about their *eðli* (Jónsson 1931, 8.19), i.e., basically whether their nature is earthly or divine. On the surface their power derives from divine beings or from their own nature. Even in the inner part of *Gylfaginning* the gods appear sometimes as earthly æsir and sometimes as deities; object and subject of worship are never quite clear. Twice the æsir are defined as divine — "goðkunig ætt" (Jónsson 1931, 17.3) and "æsir goðkunigir" (Jónsson 1931, 27.11); but in the first-mentioned passage this definition is problematic:

ok af þeira ætt er sv kynsloð komin, er ver kállvm asa ættir, er bygt hafa Asgarþ hin forna ok þar ríki, er þar liggja til, ok er þat allt goðkvNig ætt. (Jónsson 1931, 17.1–3)

[and from them (Óðinn and Frigg) is descended the family line that we call the Æsir race, who have resided in Old Asgard and the realms that belong to it, and that whole line of descent is of divine origin.] (Faulkes 1987, 13)

Again it is ambiguous whether the æsir are earthly or divine. — At the end of *Gylfaginning* the earthly æsir decide that they will usurp the names of the divine æsir in order to make people believe that they are gods: "at menn skyldo ecki ifaz i, at allir væri einir þeir æsir, er nv var fra sagt, ok þesir, er þa voro þav somv nafn gefin" [so that . . . men should not doubt that they were all the same, those Æsir about whom stories were told above and those who were given the same names] (Jónsson 1931, 77, 2–4; trans. Faulkes 1987, 57).

Intimately connected with the procedure of identification through names is the question of truth (*sannendi*) and of true faith (*trúa*). The formula "þat veit trúa mín" echoes throughout *Gylfaginning*, and there are two passages in which these themes are explicitly debated. The first is:

Ok þat er mín trva, at sa Óþinn ok hans bræðr mvnv vera styrande himins ok iarþar; þat ættlvm ver, at hann mvni sva heita. Sva heitir sa maðr, er ver vitvm mestan ok agæztan, ok vel megv þer hann lata sva heita. (Jónsson 1931, 14.5–8)

[And it is my belief that this Odin and his brothers must be rulers of heaven and earth; it is our opinion that this must be what he is called. This is the name of the one who is the greatest and most glorious that we know, and you would do well to agree to call him that too.] (Faulkes 1987, 11)

The close tie established here between speakers (*vér*) and listener (*þér*) marks the identification of Óðinn with the ruler of heaven and earth as a matter of great import, a sort of religious truth, for this apotheosis of Óðinn places him in close proximity to the Christian God. — The second passage is the one in *Skáldskaparmál*:

En þetta er nv at segja vngvm skaldvm, þeim er girnaz at nema mal skaldskapar ok heyia ser orþfiolþa með fornvm heitvm eþa girnaz þeir at kuna skilia þat, er hvlit er qveþit, þa skili hann þesa bok til fropleiks ok skemtvmnar, en ecki er at gleyma eþa

osana sva þesar frasnir, at taka or skaldskapinvm fornar kenningar, þær er hæfvt-skald hafa ser lika latit, en eigi skvlo kristnir menn trva aheiþin goð ok eigin asanyndi þesa sagna anan veg en sva sem her finz ivphafi bokar. (Jónsson 1931, 86.11–18)

[But these things have now to be told to young poets who desire to learn the language of poetry and to furnish themselves with a wide vocabulary using traditional terms; or else they desire to be able to understand what is expressed obscurely. Then let such a one take this book as scholarly inquiry and entertainment. But these stories are not to be consigned to oblivion or demonstrated to be false, so as to deprive poetry of ancient kennings which major poets have been happy to use. Yet Christian people must not believe in heathen gods, nor in the truth of this account in any other way than that in which it is presented at the beginning of this book] (Faulkes 1987, 64–65)

Apart from stating the purpose of his book as a poetics for contemporary poets, Snorri is tentatively probing the theme of truth in this passage. On the one hand he stresses that the art of classic poets must not be forgotten: it is important “to understand what is expressed obscurely” — perhaps Snorri is pointing to a truth more profound than the veiled meanings of artistic kennings. On the other hand he warns his contemporaries not to believe in heathen gods, — although for him there is also a deeper truth in the mythic events and persons; but Snorri refrains from stating this clearly and directly, so that this passage is open to many interpretations.

When Hans Kuhn writes: “Wir müssen also damit rechnen, daß Snorri an einen zweifachen Odin geglaubt hat, an den Menschen, der einst die Einwanderung aus dem Orient geleitet hatte, seinen eigenen Ahn, und an den Gott, der immer noch leibhaftig unter die Menschen kam und in ihre Kriege eingriff” ([1942] 1971, 322), this sounds exaggerated, especially when scholars quote only the words “daß er an das meiste, was er da schrieb, geglaubt hat” (324). But the passage ends, “Glaube hat viele Grade” (324). I think that Kuhn’s approach is not far from my own conclusions. Snorri sought a means to save the belief in the old gods from the reproach of heresy, to bestow on them a share of truth, to purge them of the ridiculous atmosphere of demonism, a theorem which the previous generation had deemed true and necessary for the promulgation of Christian doctrine. Snorri chose to rationalize the old gods by identifying them with human beings, but rationalization alone could not satisfy the urge to recover the past.

According to this pattern of identification, the gods are, as gods, remote from the author’s own time, but as human beings available for him to identify with. That such identification actually occurred is demonstrated by an episode in *Sturlunga saga*. In a quarrel between Páll prestr and Hvamm-Sturla, Snorri’s powerful father, Páll’s wife Þorbjörg grabs a knife and attempts to stab Hvamm-Sturla’s eye, saying “Hvi skal ec eigi gera þic þeim licaztan, er þv vill licazstr vera, enn þar er Opinn” [Why shall I not make you most resemble him whom you wish to resemble most, namely Óðinn?] (Kålund 1906–11, 1:113). Hvamm-Sturla is injured in the attack and demands compensation, but probably he was not offended by her words. “Licazstr vera” is a figural equivalent for identity, and Þorbjörg

must have had knowledge of Hvamm-Sturla's wish to identify himself with Óðinn, the one-eyed god. Most likely Snorri was aware of this story about his father and capable of interpreting it psychologically.

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