

GRÝLA, GRÝLUR, GRØLEKS AND SKEKLERS:
FOLK DRAMA IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC
IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES¹

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One of the oldest Icelandic folk traditions - if not the oldest - is that connected with the figure of Grýla, the ugly, ever-ravenous mother of the Icelandic *jólasveinar*, who, in league with the dreaded *jólaköttur*, annually terrorises the under-six year-olds when she descends from the mountains at Christmas in search of badly-behaved children to bundle into her sack (*Íslenzkar þjóðsögur* 1861-1864, I, 218-219; Árni Björnsson 1961, 113-119). Despite the recent efforts of certain parties to ease the fears of the young by announcing Grýla's death, the ancient ogress seems to hang on interminably. She is not so easily persuaded to give up the ghost.

Considering the fact that the some of the earliest references to Grýla are found in the thirteenth century in *Íslendinga saga* and *Sverris saga* (the first part of which is named after Grýla), it is fitting to re-examine the background of this slightly enigmatic figure at this present conference. Indeed, the case of Grýla is one of many examples that should remind us to be wary of imagining that even the contemporary sagas provide a trustworthy overall view of early medieval Scandinavian society. There is a great deal that they do not tell us. As other scholars have pointed out, the things that tend to be placed on record are those things which are out of the ordinary, or play an important role in the narrative. Daily activities and those stories and beliefs known to everybody are commonly taken for granted, as can be seen, for example in the scarcity of accounts of spinning in the sagas (cf. Opland 1980, 97; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1991). With regard to Grýla, the number of extant thirteenth-century references stress that the associations of her name must have been well-known to most people, yet no record was ever made of what these associations were. So exactly who or what *was* the original Grýla that people knew in the thirteenth century, and why, of all figures, should her name have been given to a book

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written about a male king?

Two different explanations exist for why the first part of *Sverris saga* was called "Grýla". According to the prologue of the saga contained in *AM 327 4°* (c.1300), "Oc sua sem a liðr bokina vex hans (Sverris) styrkr. oc segir sa hinn sami styrkr fyr[ir] hina meiri luti. kalloðu þeir þaN lut bocar fyrir þui Grylu" (*Sverris saga* 1920, 1). These words sound uncertain, and as will be shown below, this explanation is extremely odd in the light of all the other references to Grýla during this period, none of which ever states anything about the old lady's strength. The explanation for the title given in the *Flatteyjarbók* version of the prologue (c.1390) makes much more sense: "Kölluðu men þui enn fyrra lut bokarinnar grylu at margir menn toloðu at þa efnadiz nockurr ottiedr hræðzla sakir mikils strids ok bardaga enn mundi skiott nidrfalla ok allz eingu verða" (*Flatteyjarbók* 1860-1868, II, 534).

Whatever Grýla was, there seems little question that in Iceland at this time, her name was synonymous with something threatening. This can be seen in the expression "að gera grýla" ("sýna fjandskap, glettast til við": Jón Jóhannesson et al. 1946, II, 307), as in the statement in *Porgils saga skarða* that "Sturla ... þótti þeir (Porgils Bððvarsson and Þorvarðr Þórarinnsson) gört hafa sér grýlur um sumarit" (*Sturlunga saga* 1878, II, 213). The same meaning applies in *Þórðar saga hreðu* (1959, 188), when Ormr Þorsteinsson says to Sigríðr Þórðardóttir, "Ekki hirði ek um grýlur yðrar", the "grýlur" in this case being the threat of Sigríðr's brothers. A third reference of the same type occurs in *Michaels saga (Heilagra manna sögur* 1877, I, 683): "Her hia fram kostar uvinrinn aa ... at maðrinn ... teli þat sem optaz i huginn, at kristnir menn ok skirðir meggi ekki firirfaraz, þo at læ(r)ðir menn geyri grylur afheimis ok sege slikt, er þeim likar". It is worth noting that in all three cases, the word *grýla* is used in the plural.

In general terms, there would seem little question that the same general association is implied in *Íslendinga saga* when Loftr Pálsson quotes a verse about Grýla while riding to attack Björn Þorvaldsson and his associates at Breiðabólstaðir in 1221 (*Sturlunga saga* 1878, I, 246). Loftr, however, is referring to one particular figure rather than a breed:

Hér ferr Grýla í garð ofan
ok hefir á sér hala fimmtán.

That Grýla must have been a recognised ogress in early medieval Icelandic folk belief is clear from the fact that her name appears alongside those of other "trollkvinna" in a *pula* attached to the AM 748 version of *Skáldskaparmál* (*Edda* 1926, 197). Nonetheless, the verse fragment quoted by Loftir Pálsson contains the only description of this figure in early medieval sources.

What is interesting about the above references is that they all show men putting themselves or other men in the role of Grýla/ grýlur (cf. the name Grýlu-Brandr in *Sturlunga saga* 1878, II, 171), yet nowhere is there any intimation of unmanliness in this comparison. That is certainly not what Loftir Pálsson had in mind when he used the verse. Furthermore, as has been mentioned above, *grýlur* were obviously imagined to exist in the plural. Grýla herself, however, did not just exist. She came from *outside* the farm and was also associated with deliberate movement. This is not only indicated by Loftir's verse, but also by another odd Grýla verse from *Íslendinga saga* apparently uttered by Guðmundr Galtason before he and Jón sterki rode off to visit Brandr Jónsson at Staðar in Hrutafjörðr, where they maimed Brandr's follower, Vandrábr:

Hvat er um? hví kveðum sæta? heim gengr sterkr af verki?
Vitu rekkar nú nökkut nýlegs um för Grýlu?"
(*Sturlunga saga* 1878, I, 283).

Even more interesting is the fact that one of Loftir's main targets at Breiðabólstaðir is a man from Ísafjörðr named Steingrímur Skinngryluson (*Sturlunga saga*, 1878, I, 244-247). Steingrímur was almost certainly one of the Breiðbrælingar who previously "færðu ... Lopt í flimtan, ok gördu um hann danza marga, ok margs-konar spott annat" (*ibid*, 245), especially since later at Oddi on Nicholas-messa, when "sló ... í orða-hendingar með þeim Lopti ok Birni, ok vinum hans ... Var mest fyrir því Steingrímur Ísfirðingr" (*ibid*, 246). The name Skinngryla is particularly intriguing because, apart from providing another example of a man using a female name (cf. Grýlu-Brandr above), it points to an association between Grýla and animal skins. Furthermore, when attached to Steingrímur it raises the possibility of links with public entertainment. In general, it can be no coincidence that Loftir Pálsson uses the Grýla verse when going to attack the son of Skinngryla. The verse and the name must have been associated in some way.

In very general terms, considering Steingrímur Skinngryfluson's probable associations with the "danza marga" at Breiðabólstaðir, it is tempting to consider the possibility of a link between the two verse fragments uttered by Loftr Pálsson and Guðmundr Galtason and the verse accompanying the so-called "Theoderik version" of the cursed dance at Kölbígg as it is described in the *Old Swedish Legendarium* from c.1340-1350 (*Et forn-svenskt Legendarium* 1847-1858, II, 876-880). The Kölbígg tale is based on events that supposedly took place in Germany in the eleventh century (cf. Strömbäck 1961 and 1970), but in the *Legendarium*, the setting is transferred to Orkney. In brief, the account tells of how a group of young men lured the daughter of the priest at St. Magnus' church in "Celoberka" to dance with them outside the church at Christmas. They ignored the priest's orders to stop dancing, and "Síðan the vildo honom ey lydha tha sagðhe han swa gudh ok sancte magnus læti idher ey j aare atir vænda aff thenna danz ok ængin fra androm skilias". This curse then immediately took effect, thus demonstrating Magnús' power.

In the *Legendarium*, the verse sung by the group to accompany their linked dance runs as follows:

Redh(u) kompana redhobone jwer thiokka skogha
 Oc gildo mz synd venisto jomfrw.
 Hwi standom vi hwi gangom vi ey.

Loosely translated, this means "The prepared company rode over (through) thick forest/ and banqueted (?) with their loveliest of maidens./ Why do we stand? Why do we not move?" (In the *Legendarium* the verse is written as prose.) The original Latin verse contained in the twelfth-century account on which the *Legendarium* was based reads:

Equitabat Bovo per silvam frondosam,
 Ducebat sibi Merswinden formosam,
 Quid stamus? cur non imus?
 (Strömbäck 1961, 9.)

As Steenstrup points out (1918-1920, 242), the first line in the *Legendarium* account probably should have been translated as "Redh(u) Bovi og kompana jwer thiokka skogha" (cf. Mannyng's translation of the same line in *Handlyng Synne* in the thirteenth century: "By the leved wode rode Bevolyne"; Tydeman 1984, 15).

The parallels between this verse and those to do with Gryfla are faint,

but cannot be totally ignored, since both sets of verses not only include the motive of a devilish figure (Grýla and Bovi, the leader of the dance) travelling through the countryside, but also two rhetorical questions about the lack of movement. Furthermore, the *Legendarium* proves that oral versions of the Kölbígg tale must have put down firm roots in Orkney, if not further north, before the end of the thirteenth century. Regarding the figure of Bovi, it is also worth considering another possibly related thirteenth-century account given by a Danish Franciscan monk named Petrus in Dublin. According to Petrus, the name Bovi was given to a "possessed" straw figure that was carried by certain Danish women as part of a ring-dance which had been designed to entertain a pregnant friend (Olrik and Olrik 1907, 175-176). Petrus' account, which has a different verse ("Canta Boui, canta Boui, quid faceret"), must have also existed within the oral tradition, since the same motif later reappears in several folk legends from Denmark and Sweden. In one of these, the possessed "Bovmand" danced with by a farm-girl has become a straw *Julebuk* (cf. Olrik and Ellekilde 1951, 932-933). Is it possible then that both the Grýla figure and the Grýla verse go back to a popular dance song from the early thirteenth century (cf. Tydeman 1984, 15, on the possibility that the Kölbígg story was enacted in dances), or even to sermons that were preached against the growing dance traditions in Scandinavia at this time?

The "Celoberka" parallel is challenging, but it is far from proven, and does not explain why Grýla should have been more threatening than any other troll. Nor does it explain her "fór", why men were associated with her, why she had fifteen tails, or the context for the name "Skinngryla", which, as Finnur Jónsson has pointed out, must mean a form of "skind-uhyre" or "skind-skræmsel" (Finnur Jónsson 1907, 347).

More interesting is the fact that several other variants of the Grýla verse uttered by Loftr Pálsson seem to be well known on the Faroe Islands, while yet another was recorded on Foula in Shetland (Jón Samsonarson 1991, 48-54). One version of the Faroese verse runs as follows:

Oman kemur grýla frá gördum
við fjöruti hölum,
bjálg á baki, skálm í hendi,
kemur at krivja búkin úr börnum
ið gráta eftir kjöti í föstu.

(Hammershaimb 1949-1951, 308; cf. Thuren 1908, 65.)

Another variant reads: "Oman kemur grýla av gördum/ við fjöruti hölum,/ bjölg á baki, skölm í hendi./ kemur at skera bákin burtur úr börnum/ ið gráta eftir kjöti í föstu" (Rasmussen 1985, 140, cf. Williamson 1948, 247-248). Most recently, in the Faroese television programme *Manna millum* (17 February 1991) the violent fourth line runs "kemur at skera tungum úr börnunum".

The less common, but no less important Shetland variant from Foula reads as follows:

Skekla komena rina tuna
swarta hæsta blæta bruna
fo'mtena (fjo'mtan) hala
and fo'mtena (fjo'mtan) hjadnis a kwara hala.
(Jakobsen 1897, 19.)

Loosely translated, this means "Skekla (an ogress) rides into the homefield/ on a black horse with a white patch on its brow,/ with fifteen tails/ and fifteen children on each tail." The connection between the above verses almost certainly goes back to before 1500, since after that time, Shetland's direct connections with the Faroes and Iceland broke down (Jón Samsonarson 1975, 428; Smith 1978, 23-25; Manson 1983, 13-15).

The close textual relationship between the Grýla verses quoted above does not constitute their only interest. An even more intriguing question is what kept them alive for so long. Indeed, the Grýla verses in the Faroes and Shetland are never associated with Loftr Pálsson or Iceland, although the mentions of Grýla riding a horse (Foula) and carrying a "skálm" (Faroes) might help to explain why Loftr chose to quote the verse while riding to attack Björn and Steingrímur. The variants prove that the Grýla verse must have lived within the oral traditions of the North Atlantic Scandinavian settlements, and altered in accordance with local vocabulary and traditions. It was no learned literary phenomenon, but was firmly rooted in popular culture. Yet a verse of this kind needs some form of context to survive. Since this verse was not closely connected to any historical context and has no gnomic value, it must have had other associations. Was it related perhaps to a weather belief, the "hala fimmtán" that Grýla "hefir á sér" being fifteen days of similar weather that tended to follow a particular date? Considering the thirteenth century evidence, this seems highly unlikely. The only answer would seem to be a

shared myth of some kind relating to an adult-created bugbear that in later times (in Iceland and the Faroes) was used to frighten children. Yet such figures also tend to be related to a specific date, and as will be shown below there is little agreement about the precise time of arrival in the *Gryla* and *Skekla* beliefs of the Faroes, Shetland and Iceland. Certainly Loftr Pálsson does not seem to link his verse to any particular *date*. It was the figure itself that was important. So, what other context might have kept these verses alive?

Something that has not been noted previously is the fact that both the Shetland and the Faroese verses are closely associated with popular costumed traditions involving female "monsters" which, disguised in tattered animal skins, straw or seaweed, used to visit farms and villages on varying dates during the winter period to demand offerings (originally in the form of meat).

The Faroese *grýtur*, which are well-known even today, usually appear on *grýlukvöld*, the first Tuesday in Lent (Rasmussen 1985, 140), although this Christian association must be regarded as a later development (Thuren 1908, 66; Joensen 1987, 204). Nonetheless, on the evidence of Svabo's *Dictionarium Færoense*, the present tradition was well known in the late-eighteenth century, at which time the costumed figure was also simply known as "Lengefæsta"/"langafæsta"/"Lengefaste" (Svabo 1966, 491). The same dictionary describes a "grujla", like Lengefæsta as a "Bussemand hvormed man skræmmer Børn i Fasten. Manducus", a related word being the adjective "grúliur", meaning "abominable" (Svabo 1966, 290). In one early account from 1821, the figure of "Lengefasten" is described as having a "stor Tangstakke, som slæbe bag after hende som Halen og en rustet sort Krog i hver Haand", and "paa Bagen en stor Skindpose, som hun rasler med" (Thuren 1908, 67-68). This description closely parallels that of the costumes used by two poverty-stricken young children from Miðvágur who, at the turn of this century, used to dress up as *grýtur* as a means of collecting food: "Tari varð hongdur uttan á tær spjarrarnar, tey vóru í, nakað tvörtur um herðarnar, og nakað upp á eitt sterkt beltisband. Um hálsin hövdu tey ein bleytan skinnlepa, og upp á skövnungarnar vóru drignir fiskamagar til muffur. Reipatari og hoytari varð vavdur upp á hövdið til hár. Gekkaskort hövdu tey ikki, men vóru málað svört við kjønnroyki, og sfóst fingur tey ein tongul til hala" (Rasmussen 1985, 140).

The most interesting description, however, is that given of the traditions

on Svinoy by William Heinesen in his short story "Grylen" (1957), which was based on an account Heinesen heard from Esmar Hansen, a wholesale merchant from Svinoy (letter from Professor Jóan Pauli Joensen, dated 20 January 1994). The single Grýla in this tale seems to be a predominantly feminine being, but is enormous, "som en tøvrestak at se, en lang, raslende hale slæber hun efter sig, den runger og skramler som af tomme kedler og kasseroller" (Heinesen 1970, 38). "Hun er meget lådden og bærer horn og hale" (*ibid.*, 33), and a large, wooden phallus ("standaren") which supposedly has the quality of being able to bestow fertility on barren women (*ibid.*, 39). There is little doubt that Heinesen's account has been fictionalised to some extent, but a recent television interview with certain older inhabitants of Svinoy has confirmed that the basic features of the costume described by Heinesen were correct, at least as regards the use of a wooden mask, animal skins, and a bag for offerings. These informants also agreed that on Svinoy, Gryla was usually played by the same man (*Manna millum*; see above).

Neither the Svinoy Grýla or the costumed children described by Rasmussen spoke in their normal voices. Instead, they tended to make animal noises and use "reverse speech" like the disguised *julebukker* in Norway (Heinesen 1970, 33-35, 38 and 43; *Manna millum*; and Rasmussen 1985, 141). Heinesen's "Grylen", however, occasionally "kvæder gamle rim og forblommede omkvæd" (Heinesen 1970, 33-34). These "gamle rim" probably refer to the fact that in earlier times the *langefaste* is said to have introduced herself with the Faroese Grýla verse, albeit spoken with a "fordrejet mæle". Other direct associations between the Faroese Grýla verse and the costumed tradition are seen in the features of the ragged, tailed costume, the regular use of a staff and bag, and the appearance of the costumed figures from outside the farm.

Unlike the Faroese Grýla verse, there is no evidence that the variant from Foula in Shetland was ever spoken by a costumed figure. Yet in spite of this, the connections between the Foula verse and seasonal disguised house visits in Shetland are just as intimate as those in the Faroes. One of the most interesting features of the Shetland verse is the fact that the name Grýla has been substituted with that of "Skekla", a name that was used for a bogey figure not only on the island of Unst, but also in the Faroes and northern Norway where the term *skekel* or *jólaskekill* *joleskjekel* is known to have been

applied to the same sort of being (Jakobsen 1897, 53; and 1928-1932, II, 778-779; and Lid, 1928, 62). So why was the name altered? And how did the verse come to exist in Shetland in the first place?

In the Shetlands, before the days of Up-Helly-A', there seems to have been a more widespread tradition in which groups of costumed figures, wholly disguised in straw and sometimes also in white shirts or petticoats, used to visit houses (go "hoosamylla") on "Winter Sunday" (14 October), around All Saints' Day (1 November) and Martinmas, during the Christmas period, and at Shrovetide. On the islands of Unst and Mainland, these figures were known as *grøleks* (*grølek* being spelled variously as *grøli/ grølik/ grulek/ gruli/ grulick/ grulja/ grulik* and *grillock*); in other words, *grylur*.² On Yell and Fetlar, however, the same figures went under the name of *skeklers* or *skekels*, a name that seems to have become more common in recent times. Both groups appear to have been led by a leader known as the *skudler* (*skudlar/ skuddler/ scuddler*) especially on those occasions when they appeared to bless weddings (Marwick 1975, 91). Like the Norwegian *julebukker*, and the Faroese *grylur*, the Shetland *grøleks* and *skeklers* did not speak in a normal fashion when visiting in the night. Instead, they went out of their way to avoid recognition, making animal-like grunting noises, or (more recently) using "reversed speech", in other words, speaking while inhaling (Marwick 1975, 116, and 91). It is also noteworthy that, like the Faroese *grylur* and mainland Scandinavian *julebukker* (Weiser-Aall 1954, 24 and 76), the *skeklers* used to demand some form of offering when they made their visits, most particularly meat (Marwick 1975, 116).

As with the *grylur*, there are no early records of the *skekler* and *grølek* traditions. The first description of them appears in 1822 in Hibbert's *A description of the Shetland Islands* (1931, 289 and 293). In general, it seems likely that certain features of these particular costumed traditions, such as the straw costumes and the wedding visits, belong to a Gaelic tradition known on the west coast of Ireland where similarly dressed "strawmen" or "straw-boys" used to visit weddings to bestow "luck" by dancing with the bride and other

² Regarding the general features of the customs involving the *grøleks*, *skeklers* and *skudler*, see, for example, Hibbert 1931, 289 and 293; Jakobsen 1928-1932, I, 271 and 274-275; and II, pp.778-779; Saxby 1982, 77 and 86; Marwick 1975, 81, 106-107 and 115-117; and Newall 1978, 42-44. Concerning the etymological links with *Grýla*, see Jakobsen 1897, 104; and Asgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, 284.

women present (Gailey 1969, 74-75 and 91-93). These Irish figures, however, were much less closely linked to seasonal festivals than the *grøleks* and *skeklers*, the names of which are also unquestionably Scandinavian. In general, the Shetland customs point to a blend of two dramatic folk traditions, one coming from Ireland or the Hebrides, the other from Scandinavia. Indeed, it should be noted that straw-clad figures similar to the *skeklers* also existed in Sweden as part of the *Halm-Staffan* tradition (Olrík and Ellekilde 1926-1951, II, 1079-1080; and Celander 1928, 274 and 277), and considering the account of Bovi given above, such "living" straw figures must have also appeared in Denmark at one time. Yet it is difficult to visualise any large straw figure like the fully-clad *skeklers* attempting to "rina tuna" ("ride onto the home-field"). The likelihood must be that the costumes connected with "Skekla" were originally simpler, and possibly even made of skin. Indeed, A. W. Johnston proposed that the word *skekler* might be related to the Old Icelandic word *skehill*, meaning the "shanks or legs of an animal's skin when stretched out" (*British calendar customs* 1946, 76; Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957, 543).

Of course, there is a six hundred year gap between the accounts in *Íslendinga saga* and Hibbert's description of the *skeklers* in Shetland. Yet it is probable that the annual reappearance of the *skeklers*, *grøleks* and *grýlur* provided a living context for the Grýla verses in Shetland and the Faroes and kept them alive. And since these variants of the Grýla verses were so closely associated with seasonal disguise traditions, all logic suggests that the same must have also applied in Iceland where the earliest example of the verse is found being uttered by a man who is obviously placing himself in the role of Grýla. Certainly, a tradition involving a horned, skin-clad being like that described by Heinesen would help explain the name "Skinngrýla", and why Grýla should have been visualised from the start as having so many tails. Furthermore, since men tended to act the *grýlur* elsewhere as part of a "custom or "game", this might answer why it was considered offensive for a man to be compared with such a figure.

There is no direct evidence that a costumed Grýla tradition has ever existed in Iceland. Yet it is interesting to note that when Þorsteinn Pétursson wrote his *Manducus edur leikfæla* attacking on the *vikivaki* games in the mid-

eighteenth century, he made use of the expressions "Grýlu andlit", "Grýlu maður" and "Grýlumynder" when referring to the disguises used in these games and to other devilish animal guises known to have been adopted in mainland Europe (*MS JS 113 8to*, 43[42]v, 47[46]v, and 48[47]v: the numbering of the pages is questionable; see also Jón Samsonarson 1964, I, xliii, and Ólafur Davíðsson 1894, 23): The words "Grýlu maður" are applied to a man in Europe acting a satyr ("skógvættur"), while the expression "grýlumynder" is used in a general sense for all such costumes. Séra Þorsteinn clearly saw Grýla in visual terms, associated her with animal disguises, and expected his readers to do the same. Furthermore, he associated her directly with the costumed figures of the *vikiwaki* dance games like the *þingálp* and *hjörtur*, the *hestur*, the *kelling* and *Háa-Þóra* (cf. Jón Samsonarson 1964, I).

Considering séra Þorsteinn's application of the expression "Grýlu maður" to *animal*-like guises, it is worth noting the earliest detailed descriptions of Grýla written by poets in the seventeenth century. In Stefán Ólafsson's "Grýlukvæði", which is contemporary with earlier accounts of the *vikiwaki* games, Grýla is described as being three-headed, and having a "hrútsnef", a beard, a "kjaftur eins og ták" and eyes like burning embers (Stefán Ólafsson 1948, 18-20). In Guðmundur Erlendsson's "Grýlukvæði" (1650) she has "horn eins og geit", "hár um hökuna/ sem hnýtt garn á vef", and "tennur í óhreinum kjapt", and goes about in "loðnu skinnstaks tetri", bearing "sína rauðbrota staung" (quoted in Ólafur Davíðsson 1898-1903, 114-115).

In the eyes of these particular poets, Grýla seems to have borne a very close resemblance to the Svinoy "Grylen", and the supernatural Faroese Grýla which is described as having "a sheep's body, but walking upright like a man" (Williamson 1948, 248). In very general terms, she looks less like a woman, and more like the figures of the earlier mentioned *julebukkk* and *julegeit* which were once well known all over Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Like the Faroese and Shetland *grýlur* and *grøleks*, the *julebukker* used to visit houses seasonally, terrify children and demand offerings. The archetypal *julebukkk* costume involved a pole topped with a horned goat's head (made of various materials) which had clacking jaws. The performer holding this would then be covered with a sheet or skins (Lid 1928, 34-55; Celander 1928, 305-309; Weiser-Aall 1954; and Eike 1980). Once again, records of such traditions do not go back much further than

the mid-sixteenth century (Gunnell 1991, 130-131). Nonetheless, it seems that the same being and same costume were probably already known at this time in Iceland, albeit under a different name. This is suggested by Jón lærði Guðmundsson's brief account of the "Fingálpn" monster that he saw in his youth in the late-sixteenth century (Jón Samsonarson 1964, I, clxxiv). Jón never describes this costumed creature in detail, but the *pingálp* described as appearing at *vikivaki* gatherings during the seventeenth-eighteenth century is not only equipped with two ram's horns, but also has sheep-skin cheeks and clacking jaws (*Nidurráðan* quoted in Jón Samsonarson 1964, lv). The fact that the *pingálp* had its own name, and is never compared to a *julebukk* by contemporary commentators suggests that while they share the same roots, both traditions must have existed separately for some time. The same applies to yet another figure with clacking-jaws, known as the *jólhestur*, which seems to have appeared at Faroese Christmas dances at one time (Joensen 1987, 197-198). The roots of all of these disguises have to be old. Indeed, it might also be noted that, just as the enacted *Grýlur* supposedly had supernatural counterparts that lived in the mountains, so too did the *julebukk* and the "Fingálpn" which apparently lived for the rest of the year "á heidum og skógum" (Jón Samsonarson 1964, clxxiv; and Bø 1970, 146).

Returning to the naming of the first part of *Sverris saga*, it should now be a little clearer why somebody should have chosen to compare the first part of Sverrir's life to that of a fearful figure like the ragged supernatural "Fingálpn" or *julebukk* which lived in the mountain wilderness for most of the year, and periodically descended, inspiring terror and demanding offerings. The appearance of *Grýla's* name in connection with *Sverris saga* on the surface suggests that the beliefs and/ or traditions related to *Grýla* must also existed in Norway at one time (if they did not stem from there), although the dispute about the name in the two versions of the prologue must raise doubts about this. Nonetheless, as other scholars have shown, vague similarities do exist between the modern image of *Grýla* as a female troll and the Norwegian folk figures of Guro Rysserøver, Stallo and Lussia (Árni Björnsson 1961, 117; Lid 1928, 60-61; Lid 1933, 44-63; Weiser-Aall 1954, 32-33; and Eike 1980, 265-269). Considering the Shetland form of the word, *grølek*, it might also be noted that the term *grøkle* used to be applied to a *julebukk* or *jolegeit* in Kviteseid,

Telemark (Weiser-Aall, 1954, 80, note 100).

Returning to Lofur Pálsson, Steingrímur Skinngryluson, and the other references to Grýla in *Íslendinga saga* and other contemporary accounts from this period, there is little question that such a costumed tradition would help explain the various references to Grýla's threatening nature, her "für", and her ragged tails. Indeed, both Steingrímur and the later Faroese *jólhestur* find interesting parallels in a document from Bergen dated 1307 which refers to a man known as Arnaldus Jolahest (*Diplomatorium Norvegicum*, VIII, 29)

As I have shown elsewhere, figures dressed in horns and/ or animal skins appear to have played a central role in Scandinavian pagan ritual as late as the time of the Oseberg burial (c.850), and two full-sized, tenth-century animal masks have recently been found in the harbour in Hedeby (Gunnell 1991, 65-99; Hägg 1984, 69-72). Furthermore, it seems likely that some of the dialogic poems of the Edda were still being presented in an elementary dramatic fashion somewhere in Scandinavia as late as the early thirteenth century (Gunnell 1993). Even though the sagas are silent on the subject of such activities, it is highly unlikely that the thirteenth century Scandinavians were so unique that they lacked all forms of dramatic tradition. Considering the information given above, a custom involving mid-winter house-visits by a masked "Grýla" figure (or a group of *grylur* on horseback like the later Staffan riders in Norway: Eike 1980) would make much sense. If this was so, the likelihood is that while the traditions further south continued, the Icelandic Grýla moved indoors as the weather worsened, and eventually became part of the *vikivaki* games. Such an argument can never be anything more than hypothesis, but if it has any basis in fact, then *Íslendinga saga* and *Sverris saga* provide us with some of the earliest references to popular dramatic "games" known in northern Europe.

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