Baldrs draumar: literally and literarily

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Baldrs draumar has more than once provoked scholars trying to use the poem as a source of Old Norse mythology. It has often been considered not only self-contradictory but also 'a bad poem' although such evaluations will be rare nowadays.[1] Modern and systematical examinations involving the poem have been made primarily by John Lindow in his book on the Baldr myth, and by Judy Quinn in her studies on prophetic poetry and the vǫlva character.[2]

In only 14 stanzas the poem presents events concerning the death of Baldr, but in a condensed and puzzling way. Óðinn asks a vǫlva in Hel about the future of Baldr, i.e. the future of the gods, but the reasons for Óðinn's asking are obscure. Because of Baldr's bad dreams Óðinn's first question is who will die, but he obviously knows the answer since he journeys to Hel. There, he does

[1]E.g. Schröder 1964, 337: "sicher ist jedenfalls, daß es ein schwaches Lied der isländischen Spätzeit des ausgehenden 12. Jahrhunderts ist". As a recent contrast, see the positive evaluation on ethical grounds given by Pàroli 1992.

This paper is a result of my attending the fruitful and inspiring meetings of the Frankfurt Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda on *Baldrs draumar*—which should not be held responsible for my propositions. For a fundamental commentary, I refer to its forthcoming part 1.

[2]Lindow 1997; Quinn (forthc.); cf. Quinn 1990; 1998.

not visit Hel herself, but a vǫlva, who first answers his questions in her capacity of being present in the realm of the dead but then in her capacity of seeress. The vǫlva seems particularly dead: she not only resides in Hel but is also buried in a grave within the realm of the dead, and still she is exposed to snow, dew and rain. The rather abrupt ending further underlines the elusiveness of the poem, which thus may appear not only less useful as a source of mythology but also less valuable aesthetically.

If read literally—with the intention of bringing order to the events and identities within the poem and thus finding 'facts' of Northern mythology—the poem seems too enigmatic or possibly too confused to provide clear information. On the other hand *Baldrs draumar* exploits exactly these 'disadvantages' to its own advantage. Its poetic effect is based precisely on scantiness and obscurity, to enhance the receivers' associations and stimulate attempts at interpretation. The situation is one of oral delivery or at least one of transmission and impact on the receiver. What I will try to elaborate in the following is the means by which this work of art uses tradition and expectations precisely by suggesting without pronouncing.

The notion of Óðinn descending to Hel in order to ask about Baldr's dreams is unknown elsewhere, but the poem in several respects corresponds to *Vǫluspá* 31–35 (the Codex Regius version[3]): *Baldrs draumar* 11 is practically identical to *Vǫluspá* 32.5–33.4.[4] The dating of the poems is complicated,[5] and there may have been other poems treating the death of Baldr.[6] The only assumption I will make here, is that *Baldrs draumar* and *Vǫluspá* reflect a more or less common tradition. The reminiscent description of Hermóðr, not Óðinn, attempting to bring Baldr back to life in *Gylfaginning* ch. 49 is not necessarily younger than *Baldrs draumar*, since *Málsháttakvæði* 9 mentions Hermóðr as the one trying to make Baldr's life longer.[7]

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[3]The *Hauksbók* version, which lacks str. 31, 32, 33 and 35 according to Neckel-Kuhns's numbering, does not mention the death of Baldr at all, and the Váli mentioned seems more in correspondence with the one described as Loki's, not Óðinn's son in *Gylfaginning* ch. 50. Generally on the versions of *Vǫluspá*, see Quinn 1990.

[4]The description of the mistletoe in *Vǫluspá* may be correspondent to *Baldrs draumar* 9; but only on the condition that *hróðrbarm* there is interpreted as mistletoe (so, e.g., Dronke 1997). A rather more convincing interpretation of *hróðrbarm* is Baldr himself (so, e.g., Lindow 1997, 43–44).

[5]For example, Jónas Kristjánsson 1990 and Pàroli 1992, 150–151 n. 48. *Vǫluspá* seems to have existed in one form or another at least by the middle of the 11th century, since Árnorr Jarlaskáld uses pieces of it in *Þórsdrápa* (Simek 1993, 336). The question of whether and to what extent *Vǫluspá* reflects pre-Christian beliefs (see Kragerud 1974) is not an issue here, since what is at stake are specific notions of the 11th and 12th centuries.

[6]For example, Schröder 1964, 330 and Lindow 1997, 102; 117; 125. The alliterating parts of the dialogue between Frigg and Loki in *Gylfaginning* do not necessarily prove that the prose is based on models in verse: as Lindow points out, Snorri may have arranged them thus in order to resemble a traditional dialogue form (Lindow 1997, 59).

[7] Friggjar þótti sviðr at syni,
sá var taldr ór miklu kyni,
Hermóðr vildi auka aldr,

Thus, *Baldrs draumar* naturally invites us to reconstruct the death of Baldr also using the evidence of mainly *Gylfaginning* ch. 49–50 and *Vǫluspá*. Further incitement to a 'factual', literal interpretation is the fact that *Baldrs draumar* calls for being interpreted according to the riddle genre. As in *Vafþrúðnismál*, Óðinn crosses boundaries to visit a being of another world, hides his identity and poses questions in the form of riddles. In *Vafþrúðnismál*, as also in the *Gátur Gestumblinda* of *Hervarar saga*, Óðinn finally defeats his adversary by asking: "What did Óðinn whisper in the ear of Baldr on the funeral pyre? " Since that is obviously a question only Óðinn can answer, Óðinn has revealed his identity and the questioning is finished. *Baldrs draumar* takes an end in similar fashion. After asking who is awaited in Hel—answer: Baldr—, who kills Baldr—answer: Hǫðr—, who avenges Baldr—answer: Váli or at least the son of Rind[8]—, he puts to her the 'impossible' question which can receive no answer yet reveals his identity, thus causing the end of the dialogue as well as the poem.

1 Senn vóro æsir allir á þingi
oc ásynior allar á máli,
oc um þat réðo, ríkir tívar,
hví væri Baldri ballir draumar.

2 Upp reis Óðinn, alda gautr,
oc hann á Sleipni sǫðul um lagði;
reið hann niðr þaðan Niflheliar til,
mœtti hann hvelpi, þeim er ór helio kom.

3 Sá var blóðugr um brióst framan,
oc galdrs fǫður gó um lengi;
fram reið Óðinn, foldvegr dunði,
hann kom at hávo Heliar ranni.

4 Þá reið Óðinn fyr austan dyrr,
þar er hann vissi vǫlo leiði;
nam hann vittugri valgaldr qveða,
unz nauðig reis, nás orð um qvað:

5 'Hvat er manna þat, mér ókunnra,
er mér hefir aukit erfit sinni?
var ec snivin snióvi oc slegin regni
oc drífin dǫggo, dauð var ec lengi.'

6 Vegtamr ec heiti, sonr em ec Valtams;
segðu mér ór helio — ec man ór heimi —:
hveim ero beccir baugom sánir,
flet fagrliga flóð gulli?

Éljúðnir vann sólginn Baldr,
ǫll grétu þau eptir hann,
aukit var þeim hlátrar bann,
heyrinkunn er frá h_num saga,
hvat þarf ek of slíkt at jaga.

(*Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* B II, 140; see Lindow 1997, 115.)

[8]The name Váli is missing in the manuscript, but the verse requires an emendation and 'Váli' is an option that makes the allitteration correct.

7 ‘Hér stendr Baldri of brugginn miǫðr,
scírar veigar, liggr sciǫldr yfir,
enn ásmegir í ofvæni.
Nauðug sagðac, nú mun ec þegia.’

8 ‘Þegiattu, vǫlva! þic vil ec fregna,
unz alkunna, vil ec enn vita:
hverr man Baldri at bana verða
oc Óðins son aldri ræna?’

9 ‘Hǫðr berr hávan hróðrbarm þinig;
hann man Baldri at bana verða
oc Óðins son aldri rœna.
Nauðug sagðac, nú mun ec þegia.’

10 ‘Þegiattu, vǫlva! þic vil ec fregna,
unz alkunna, vil ec enn vita:
hverr man heipt Heði hefnt of vinna,
eða Baldrs bana á bál vega?’

11 ‘Rindr berr Vála í vestrsǫlom,
sá man Óðins sonr einnættr vega;
hǫnd um þvær né hǫfuð kembir,
áðr á bal um berr Baldrs andscota.
Nauðug sagðac, nú mun ec þegia.’

12 ‘Þegiattu, vǫlva! þic vil ec fregna,
unz alkunna, vil ec enn vita:
hveriar ro þær meyiar, er at muni gráta
oc á himin verpa hálsa scautom?’

13 ‘Ertattu Vegtamr, sem ec hugða,
heldr ertu Óðinn, aldinn gautr.’
‘Ertattu vǫlva, né vís kona,
heldr ertu þriggia þursa móðir.’

14 ‘Heim ríð þú, Óðinn, oc ver hróðigr!
Svá komit manna meirr aptr á vit,
er lauss Loki líðr ór bǫndum
oc ragna rǫc riúfendr koma.’

Formally, Óðinn’s goal is thus to gather information. In essence, though, the questions posed should be seen as a probing of the power balance between æsir and giants just as in *Vafþrúðnismál*. We can also suppose that the goal is not only to probe but also, if possible, to influence the coming events. This is not only a universal idea of underworld visits, such as in *Gilgamesh* and the Orpheus myth, but is also apparent in Hermóðr’s corresponding journey. The imminent destruction of order is pronounced already in the first stanza—which is also used when the hammer of Þórr is missing in *Þrymskviða*—and reflected in the antagonism of the poem. While information from giants is generally structured by questions put to them, information from a vǫlva is as a rule more independently presented (see Quinn forthc.). Both in its structure of question—answer and in its antagonism, *Baldrs draumar* thus brings to the fore Óðinn’s confrontations with giants. As a transgression of borders can

principally be described as a question of power,[9] I think it safe to presume that the question of knowledge is subordinated the question of power.[10]

The crucial point, to my mind, comes in the twelfth stanza: regardless whether *at muni* is interpreted as 'at their will' or 'over their beloved', Baldr appears to be the relevant cause and the question really implies: 'who will not weep?'. The question is directly connected to the riddles of *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Gátur Gestumblinda* through its wording: *hveriar ro þær meyiar* occurs several times in *Gátur Gestumblinda* and once in *Vafþrúðnismál*. In those poems, each question has a specific answer, and in *Baldrs draumar* the answer to be expected is the waves. However, the question in itself is of less importance than its function. An answer is not given, nor is the status of the answer commented upon as in *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Gátur Gestumblinda*. Within the poem, the function of the question is to be unanswerable—just as in *Gátur Gestumblinda* and *Vafþrúðnismál* the whole questioning is put to an end by one single question (Holtsmark 1964, 102). It also seems that the function of the question is similar in the respect that just as no one but Óðinn could know what was whispered to him, so he here reveals something that Óðinn would be one of very few to know: which then would prove that he has arrived in Hel not to gather information but to test the balance of power. What reveals Óðinn's identity might also be a "code slippage " that introduces the Odinic voice from such riddle contests as the one in *Vafþrúðnismál*, as Margaret Clunies Ross has pointed out (1990, 225). This would be in accordance with the increasing animosity.

However, the ambiguity of the present riddle merely inaugurates the problems. We do not receive the answer, we cannot be sure in what way it reveals Óðinn, and we also do not know if his answer—you are neither a vǫlva nor wise, but the mother of three giants—is merely an insult or if it should be understood as a definition of identity. Since there seems to have been an understanding that vǫlur and giants were related, the comment does not seem very insulting—cf. *Hyndluljóð* 4 where Hyndla is called 'bride of giants' without any offense[11]—, and since the structure of the poem requires that also Óðinn's counterpart be revealed, it seems reasonable to assume that Óðinn's statement should be understood as more than a simple insult. Thus, the question might be described as intended to be meaningless, but only within the logic of the fiction. When the poetic effect of the poem as a whole is considered, the question is by contrast of great meaning and serves to overdetermine the text. The receiver has been incited to ponder upon a variety of options of

[9]See the extensive discussion of Clunies Ross 1994.

[10]As Lindow has shown in this connection, the search for knowledge is in many respects vital and has important analogues (Lindow 1997, 39–43). Still, the structure of the discussion makes the question of power primary, not least since the journey into another world in itself generally embodies the struggle for power. In this vein, see also McKinnell 1994, 102; cf. Quinn (forthc.).

[11]See Quinn (forthc.).

interpretation. Even in order to decide that "mother of three giants" is only an insult, the receiver must evoke all of his/her previous knowledge of the myth. Attempting a literal understanding, the receiver is urged to try to find the answer that the poem laboriously withholds. The associations and attempts at interpretation constitute the beginning of a literary understanding—if the sudden changes from str. 12 are understood not as a clumsy way of ending things but as a consistent way of upholding concentration and suggestiveness.

The only 'mother of three giants' mentioned in the tradition is Angrboða, who in *Gylfaginning* is presented as the mother of Loki's children, the Fenris wolf, the Miðgarð serpent and Hel—all of whom take important places in the scenario of Ragnarǫk. Other than this and in *Hyndluslóð* 40, where Loki is said to have begotten the wolf with her, Angrboða is not much mentioned, but her name, 'the one who announces grief', is congenial with the role of the vǫlva in *Baldrs draumar*. John Lindow, who argues convincingly for this interpretation, has connected this with the question of the waves in str. 12 through an alternative understanding of the name: Angrboða could mean 'fjord-breaker' or 'sea-wave'. This interpretation requires a feminine form *boða* that cannot be verified, but it results in a very tempting structural correspondence between Óðinn and Loki in the myth.[12] The meaning of the name would thus be transformed from 'announcer of grief' into something connected with the waves of the sea. Thus, the question the answer of which should be the waves reveals the identity of the vǫlva. And in reverse: the vǫlva realises Óðinn's identity because of her close connection with Loki and the forces of Ragnarǫk. If one interpretation must be chosen, this one seems the best. But others might be considered.

The vǫlva has, a long time ago, been identified as Þǫkk, the giantess who in *Gylfaginning* refuses to take part in weeping Baldr out of Hel (Rudolf 1887, 73). The strength of this interpretation lies in the mention of weeping in st. 12: the vǫlva then realises that Óðinn knows not only her identity but also of the important rôle she is assigned in the future events. In *Gylfaginning*, Þǫkk is found in a cave, reminiscent of her placement in *Baldrs draumar* and, for that matter, in *Hyndluljóð*. In effect, the stanza of *Gylfaginning* where she refuses to weep would be the perfect answer to Óðinn's question in *Baldrs draumar* as to who will not weep over Baldr (were it not that it is in fornyrðislag). The answer, given by the vǫlva/giantess would then be:

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[12]Lindow 1997, 46–47; 59–60: "Just as Odin learns from the seeress Angrboða, Loki's mate, the details of the death, killer, and avenger of Baldr, so Loki learns from Frigg, Odin's mate, the details to be used for the slaying of Baldr. Indeed, the parallel runs even deeper, for just as Loki will depose Odin's son by his interlocutor, Frigg, so Odin has deposed three of Loki's offspring with *his* interlocutor, Angrboða, by binding the wolf, casting the Midgard serpent into the sea, and banishing Hel to preside over the realm of the dead. As the focus of these three, especially the sons, is on the end of the world, we may wonder whether Baldr's focus, too, is there."

Þǫkk mun gráta
þurrum tárum
Baldrs bálfarar.
Kyks né dauðs
nautka ek karls sonar:
haldi Hel því er hefir. [13]

The origin of the stanza is unknown, but if Snorri did not produce it himself, it can be considered part of the tradition of *Baldrs draumar* and thus relevant to the expectations of the receiver that fills stanza 12 with signification: it would be impossible *not* to think of Þǫkk. If the vǫlva is understood as Þǫkk, the tension of the poem seems even more increased, since it is already clear that Baldr will be killed and avenged, while the implicit information here is that he will also be prevented from returning to the living because of Þǫkk. This interpretation presupposes the existence of a tradition of weeping Baldr out of hel before *Gylfaginning*: evidence of such a tradition are *Málsháttakvæði* 9 ('they [the æsir] all wept over him')[14] and *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, ch. 3 ('Baldr among the aesir, over whom the godly powers wept'). These pieces of evidence are not foolproof, and against Þǫkk speaks that she is mentioned only in *Gylfaginning* and there not as the mother of three children. But if the story of *Gylfaginning* is traditional, she fills a very important function at exactly this junction in the structure of events: the one who fulfills the murder of Baldr, thus enabling the events of Ragnarǫk as outlined in stanza 14.

The interpretations of the vǫlva as Angrboða or Þǫkk seem to exclude each other, but are both tempting. In different ways, they both suggest the events of Ragnarǫk as a climactic dramatic curve. Óðinn, as the receiver within the fiction, helplessly experiences the coming defeat of the gods as does the receiver of the poem. Now the common denominator of Angrboða and Þǫkk is of course Loki. He is obviously the father of the three most threatening giants, and in *Gylfaginning* it is actually suggested that Þǫkk *is* Loki in disguise. The only scholar I know of who has accepted the possibility of identifying the vǫlva as Loki is Hilda Ellis Davidson, and she did so only in passing.[15] We do not know whether the identification of Þǫkk as Loki is original, but it is obvious that Loki might well be named 'mother' instead of 'father' of the three giants. He is well-known for being the mother of Sleipnir according to *Gylfaginning*

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[13] *Snorri Sturluson. Edda. Prologue and Gylfaginning*, ed. Anthony Faulkes 1982, 48.

[14] Friggjar þótti svipr at syni,
sá var taldr ór miklu kyni,
Hermóðr vildi auka aldr,
Éljúðnir vann sólginn Baldr,
ǫll grétu þau eptir hann,
aukit var þeim hlátrar bann,
heyrinkunn er frá h_num saga,
hvat þarf ek of slíkt at jaga.

Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning B II, 140; see Lindow 1997, 115—admitting the possibility of such a tradition: Lindow 1997, 128.

[15] Davidson 1979, 9; cf. Lindow 1997, 46-47.

and *Hyndluljóð*, but in *Hyndluljóð* he is also mentioned as having been made pregnant with 'every evil creature'.[16] In the situation of antagonism in *Baldrs draumar* it would also seem a natural form of *nið* for Óðinn to call Loki 'mother': highly reminiscent of *Lokasenna* 23, where Óðinn mocks Loki for having given birth to children. In both cases, Loki constitutes a considerable threat to the world order of the æsir.[17] If the epithet 'mother of three giants' is to be considered an insult, the defamation thus lies in the state of motherhood rather than in the connection with giants—Óðinn has also garnered suspicioun of *ergi* by using *galdrar*.[18]

According to *Vǫluspá* 31, Baldr's fate was hidden[19]—the notion is also prevalent in *Gylfaginning*. The only one with influence on Baldr's fate is Loki, and the only one with knowledge of Baldr's fate is the vǫlva in *Baldrs draumar*. And this is a peculiarly secretive vǫlva. "The predisposition to answer any question asked of her seems to be another aspect of the female mind as it is represented in myth", Judy Quinn has asserted (1998, 31). The vǫlva in *Baldrs draumar* knows more than even a vǫlva should know, and is more reluctant to disclose her knowledge than a vǫlva should be. Still, while identification of the vǫlva as Loki has certain problems to it, there is one more support. In *Gylfaginning*, Loki is not only said to possibly be Þǫkk, but the whole story of Baldr's death begins with his disguising as a woman in order to find out from Frigg what may harm Baldr. Thus, in *Gylfaginning*, the murder of Baldr is first made possible by Loki's appearing as a female. The murder is then reinforced when Baldr is prevented from returning from the dead—again by Loki acting as a woman. In the structure of an original tradition, one might expect the number of three instead of two occurences of Loki preparing Ragnarǫk in female guise. The third occurence might have been connected to Óðinn's final attempt at re-establishing the power balance. The extant poem *Baldrs draumar* might then be viewed as a very deliberate evocation of all sequences of Baldr's death: to practically any receiver it must have been nearly impossible not to see Loki—either in disguise or represented by Angrboða and Þǫkk—in the vǫlva. Thus, the two foster-brothers and adversaries meet in the last decision of which side is the stronger. The whole eschatology is conjured within a few

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40 Ól úlf Loki við Angrboðo,
enn Sleipni gat við Svaðilfara;
eitt þótti skass allra feiknast,
þat var bróður frá Býleistz komit.
41 Loki át af hiarta lindi brendo,
fann hann hálfsviðinn hugstein kono;
varð Loptr qviðugr af kono illri,
þaðan er á foldo flagð hvert komit.

[17]On *Lokasenna* in this respect, see Meulengracht Sørensen 1988 and Klingenberg 1983. The *nið* aspect, if this interpretation were accepted, is commented upon by Lindow 1997, 46-47.

[18]On *nið* and *galdrar*, see Quinn forthc.

[19]If the words *ørlǫg fólgin* are interpreted in that way (see Quinn 1998, 31).

stanzas—first explicitly and then, when the god/giant responsible is revealed, implicitly, through suggestion. This, then, would mean that the mention of Loki in str. 14 is not merely a definition of time, but an organic end to a detailed sequence of events.

Now the structure of the poem might seem to contradict an interpretation of this kind. As Lindow has shown, in many Old Norse sources a threefold structure of the motif emerges: victim—murderer—avenger (Lindow 1997, 130). This structure is certainly a strong one, and it is highly relevant to the death of Baldr. If one were to judge *Baldrs draumar* according to this structure, the three elements have been completed already by str. 11, and str. 12 might then seem to be a (possibly unelegant) strategy of finishing the poem. Lindow—and Ruggerini—make a better interpretation of str. 12 connecting the question of who weeps with the burial of Baldr by the sea (Lindow 1997, 45; Ruggerini 1994, 184–185). But the threefold structure of the murder of Baldr is unusually complicated.

The victim, of course, is easy to define. And apart from the account in *Gylfaginning*, Hǫðr is generally pointed out as the single murderer, Váli being the single avenger. Thus, one can say that the threefold structure is implemented. In *Baldrs draumar* the victim is obviously rendered in str. 6–7, the murderer in str. 8–9 and the avenger in str.10–11. The presence of Loki, though, seems to be stronger than that. If he is considered responsible for the death of Baldr, he should be present. On the explicit level, he is so only in stanza 14 as a symbol of the final Ragnarǫk. Implicitly, though, str. 12 puts the question of Baldr's second killer: the one that prevents him from returning from the dead, i.e. Loki or one of his female representatives. The structure can be understood in accordance with *Gylfaginning*, where there is not one murderer but two: Loki is the one who has Hǫðr shoot Baldr. And the avenging party is evident: the æsir together. *Gylfaginning* thus differs from other traditions, but still implements the threefold structure. *Baldrs draumar* not only implements one of the structures: it deploys both. The question gives Óðinn's demonstration of his knowledge and thus power, and its answer cannot be uttered though it is strongly actualised: Loki or one of his female representatives. If the murderer has been doubled, so also the avenger should be doubled. And in stanza 13, the would-be avenger certainly is presented: just as Óðinn revealed the identity of the 'real' murderer, so the vǫlva now discloses the identity of the 'real' avenger, the one who logically should exact revenge—the mention of Loki in fetters str. 14 is in effect a description of the revenge. A threat is thus being posed, and the conversation must be ended. The request of the vǫlva in (str. 14), that she wants to rest until Loki's return and the end of the world is then important precisely through the definition of time: Nothing can be changed, the not threefold but fivefold scheme will be fulfilled. After that, Loki will free himself and defeat

his foster-brother.[20] Loki and Óðinn are the representatives of the two sides at Ragnarǫk: the former foster-brothers are now adversaries. Also in this respect, preparations have been made. Fratricide is the Leit-motif: Hǫðr kills Baldr, Váli kills Hǫðr; Loki has Baldr killed as a means of waging war within which he and his foster-brother are the main protagonists.

If this interpretation is valid, *Baldrs draumar* builds up a tension that increases to the very end. It is done mainly by evoking the whole scenario of Baldr's death in the mind of the receiver first explicitly, but then implicitly, through suggestion. But in order to think of the poem as so well-structured, one must accept that the threefold scheme is here enlarged into a fivefold one where Loki is strongly but implicitly present in str. 12–13. The question is thus whether the notion of Baldr having two killers, as well as the notion of all but one trying to weep him back to life, were in the minds of men before *Gylfaginning*. In regard to the weeping motif, the scant evidence that exists has been mentioned. Regarding the two killers, it is easier to establish the notion. *Lokasenna* 28 suggests a tradition of Loki being responsible for Baldr's absence before *Gylfaginning*, albeit vaguely. *Hyndluljóð* 29, in turn, explicitly defines Hǫðr as the one who did *not* plan the murder:

Vóro ellifo æsir talðir,
Baldr er hné við banaþúfo;
þess léz Váli verðr at hefna,
síns bróður sló hann handbana;
alt er þat ætt þín, Óttar heimski

Handbani is the legal term of the one who perpetrates a murder, while *ráðbani* is the term of the one who has planned it (Lindow 1997, 157–158). When *handbani* is used for Hǫðr in connection with Váli's revenge on him, this requires the existence of a *ráðbani*: i.e. Loki, though he is not mentioned. But the most striking evidence of a structure implying two murderers and two revenges is given by the *Codex Regius Vǫluspá*, stanzas 31–35:

31 Ek sá Baldri, blóðgom tívor,
Óðins barni, ørlǫg fólgin;
stóð um vaxinn, vǫllom hæri,
miór ok miok fagr, mistilteinn.

32 Varð af þeim meiði, er mær sýndiz,
harmflaug hættlig, Hǫðr nam skióta;
Baldrs bróðir var of borinn snemma,
sá nam Óðins sonr einnættr vega.

32 Varð af þeim meiði, er mær sýndiz,
harmflaug hættlig, Hǫðr nam skióta;
Baldrs bróðir var of borinn snemma,
sá nam Óðins sonr einnættr vega.

[20]The meaning and order of events in str. 14 cannot be treated here: see Allén 1961 and Lindow 1997, 46-47.

35 Hapt sá hon liggia undir hvera lundi,
lægiarn líki Loka áþekkian;
þar sitr Sigyn þeygi um sínom
ver velglýiuð — vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?[21]

The description of the central events concerning Baldr's death is parallel in both poems. Just like *Baldrs draumar*, *Vǫluspá* presents the victim (31), the murderer (32), and the avenging brother (32–33: practically the same verses as in *Baldrs draumar* 11), the 'real' murderer (35) and the revenge meted out on him (35). Also, just as in *Baldrs draumar*, weeping over Baldr is mentioned between Váli's revenge and the mention of Loki: that is, an extra reminder of the deed and the victim. In neither poem is it said that Loki is fettered because of Baldr's death, yet in both poems the description of Loki is so closely connected to the preceding that the stanzas must arguably be understood together.[22]

Fratricide is of course an important part of the Baldr myth and Ragnarǫk, and above all it is essential in the relationship between Loki and Óðinn. In *Lokasenna*, Loki reminds Óðinn that they are foster-brothers, once inseparable, and Lindow demonstrates the overriding consequences of their conflict (Lindow 1997, 131–163). What happens at Ragnarǫk is that the foster-brothers finally fight each other, each representing one side. As *Vǫluspá* 45 has it: *Brœðr muno beriaz*. *Baldrs draumar* seems to epitomize precisely this: by way of Hǫðr's and Váli's fratricide, the brothers Óðinn and Loki are evoked in close contact, representing their respective sides and testing the balance of power one final time. We do not have to visualize them meeting each other in the underworld: they are evoked regardless of what might be (considered) the identity of the vǫlva, since the receiver is urged to ponder all possibilities of the mythological scenario.

Reading literally, we are impelled to seek a definitive identity of the vǫlva. But *Baldrs draumar* is not a didactic poem; its force is maintained by suggestion. The poem evokes an array of associations and mythological conceptions, and this constitutes its literary impact. Reading literarily would thus be interpreting the poem as part of an oral culture. It might seem paradoxical to connect literariness with orality in this way, but the central issue is the effect of the poem and its impact on the reader in a specific cultural context. The poem viewed, that is, not as a source of history or religion but as a

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[21]The stanza numbering follows Neckel/Kuhn. Stanza 34 is omitted here, since it exists only in *Hauksbók* (where it reads):

Þá kná Vála vígbǫnd snúa,
heldr vóro harðgor hǫpt, ór þǫrmom.

See also the separate editions of Bugge in *Norrœn fornkvæði*.

[22]Cf. Quinn 1990, 312–313; Lindow 1997, 22. Boyer views stanzas 31–35 as part of a greater section describing "the final causes of *ragnarǫc*," which includes the stanzas up to 39 (Neckel-Kuhn's numbers: Boyer 1983, 125–126). Since stanzas 36–39 treat places associated with Ragnarǫk such as Sindri and Nástrǫnd, they differ from the preceding ones which deal with the causes or preparations of Ragnarǫk.

historical document.

Or, to put it differently: identifying the vǫlva as Loki seems impossible although a great many features point in his direction. Precisely this somewhat confusing overdetermination, I would propose, serves to trigger the imagination of the receiver and suggest a great complex of mythological associations. From the apparently self-contradictory first stanzas and onwards, the anomaly is functional.

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