

Glaðr Eggþér: Loki's finest hour, or an outcast's relief?

Notes on the imagery of Vsp. 42-43

- 42 Sat þar á haugi
 ok sló hǫrpo
 gýgiar hirðir,
 glaðr Eggþér [H *Egðir*];
 gól um hánom
 í gaglviði
 fagrrauðr hani,
 sá er Fialarr heitir.
- 43 Gól um ásom
 Gullinkambi,
 sá vekr hǫlda
 at Heriafoðrs;
 en annarr gelr
 fyr iðrð neðan,
 sótrauðr hani
 at sǫlom Heljar.

The problem of these stanzas is one of context, and can be summarized thus: How do the harpplaying figure and the crowing rooster(s) relate to the scenes of world destruction in which they are embedded? In the following, I will look into the background and, by extension, the possible referential meanings of the motifs occurring in Vsp. 42-43. As point of departure I take the crowing of the rooster(s), which, it will be argued, can be seen as a reference to Christian resurrection being immanent. In the second part of this paper, an attempt will be made to reconcile this interpretation with the joyful figure plucking the harp on the hill.

In the Middle Ages the motif of the crowing cock manifests itself on various planes, with various metaphorical and epic connotations attached to it. For obvious reasons -the cock crows at daybreak, when darkness is about to retreat-, the crowing of the bird was widely counted as the start of a new day. This notion is wide-spread. We find it in the *Avesta*, where a rooster announces daybreak, as well as in *Gulaþingslög*, ch. 16 of which stipulates that sabbath lasts until Monday 'when the cock crows' (*tíll hana óttu*). Alongside this basic notion of the cock as the messenger of the new day, which is never entirely absent, we find the derivative belief that the crowing of the bird dispels the evil creatures of the night, such as robbers and demons. This belief in the cockcrow's protective quality traces back to Antiquity. Ambrosius (340-397) calls the cock the traveller's solace, and in his *Liber Cathamerinon* (37-40) Prudentius says : *ferunt vagantes daemonas / laetos tenebris noctium / gallo canente exterritos / sparsim timere et cedere* 'It is said that evil spirits which roam happily in the darkness of night are terrified when the cock crows, and scatter and flee in fear' (Thomson 1949, 8). As the word *ferunt* shows, the notion was a traditional one already then. It was frowned upon by the medieval clergy, and Burchard of Worms stipulated in his *Corrector* (150) a ten days fast on water and bread for persons believing in it (Boudriot 1928, 45), but such penances hardly sorted much effect. In the mid-sixteenth century Olavs Magnus reports

(*Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus* XIX, 12) that in Sweden nightly travellers loose their fear of demons and robbers when the cock crows. Sometimes the motif is combined with the Lenore motif, as happens in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 49, where the dead Helgi must depart from his beloved *ádr Salgofnir sigrþjóð vekir* 'before Salgofnir [= a cock] wakes the *sigrþjóð* [= lucky, blessed people?]. In Danish and Norwegian ballads a loving ghost from the dead hurries back to the grave on hearing the cock crow.

These fairly basic notions of the cock and its crow persisted throughout the Middle Ages, but on a higher plane they were superseded, or marginalised, by more elaborate, culturally defined interpretations. These different, yet related notions existed alongside each other, though we may reasonably assume that these secondary interpretations were initially confined to the learned and educated -in the Middle Ages the clergy-, from where they spread to the other classes of society. Of this, the cock-crowing of Vsp. 42-43 appears to be an example. One might of course argue that the crowing merely indicates the arrival of a new day. Battles usually start at sunrise and, as st. 52 shows, *Vǫluspá* is no exception,¹ but such interpretation does not explain the emphasis which the poet attached to it on it by extending the motif over one and half a stanza. Also, the cock crowing at *sǫlom Heljar* cannot very well signify 'a waking to war', since the great last battle described in Vsp. 47-56 does not comprise any participants from hell (Boer 1904, 320). It seems, therefore, that the cock motif as used in Vsp. 42-43 is indicative of more than just a new day. What, then, does it signify? To find out we must first establish whether the motif, as argued by Schoning and Steinsland, has a footing in paganism. Referring to Vsp. 42-43, Schoning (1903, 24) claims that in the pagan north the cock symbol was inextricably linked to the underworld (*ufravigelig røber et dødsrige*).² Steinsland (1999, 62) expresses herself more moderately, but she, too, suggests that the motif might be genuinely pagan. The rooster, she says, was an ancient symbol of death in the pre-Christian north (*et dødsymbol i den førkristne, nordiske kulturen*). She gives no arguments for sustaining this view, but perhaps she was thinking of the occasionally reported killings of cocks at mass meetings. The most prominent of these accounts (on which see Schlütte 1917, 34) is that of Thietmar of Merseburg (*Chronicon* I,17), according to whom the Danes assembled once every nine years 'to sacrifice to their gods ninety-nine men and the same number of horses, together with dogs and cocks instead of hawks, feeling assured that these would render them services with the gods of the lower world, and appease the gods for the crimes which they had committed' (Trillmilch 1957, 20). The wording suggests expiation rather than a commemoration of the dead, and the great intervals at which these meetings were held makes it also slightly awkward to view these cocks as *Totenopfer*, if that is what Steinsland has in mind. No traces of poultry have come to light from pre-conversion graves or Scandinavian bog-finds (Müller-Wille 1989, 44), which is hardly wholly due to poor preservation, since remains of poultry have been found in waste deposits from Trelleborg (Stensberg 1959, 387), and Old Norse literature, too, mentions horses, dogs and, more rarely, cows and falcons as animals sacrificed at burials, but no cocks (Uecker 1966, 110). Nor does the cock figure on the Gotland picture stones, which abound in scenes connected with death and burial. Of some interest, perhaps, is Ibn Fadlan's description of the burial of a chieftain of

¹ This seem to be the opinion of Dronke (1997, 143), who, however, takes the two motifs as one by calling the cockcrows of Vsp. 42-43 "a waking to war", which motif, she says, was known in the pre-Christian north. Perhaps so, but evidence for this is not compelling, since both *Bjarkamál* st. 1 and Hfl. II 49 may postdate the introduction of Christianity.

² Refuted already by von Sydow (1920, 4): "Vad tuppen beträffar, finns inget skäl att betrakta honom som en döda-rikesfågel i detta sammanhang".

the Rus, according to which a cock, along with many other animals, was killed as part of the funeral ceremony (Birkeland 1954, 22). It is uncertain whether the description represents genuinely nordic customs (Foote & Wilson 1970, 408), but even if we, on the strength of Ibn Fadlan's account, view the cock as a symbol of death in pre-Christian Scandinavia, it would not prove much, since Vsp. 42-43 mention the crowing of roosters, not the killing of them.³ This lack of any indication for a mythological pagan background suggests that the origin of the motif must be sought elsewhere, medieval Christianity being a natural candidate.

Christian connotations

Of the various culturally defined manifestations of the motif in the medieval West, three traditions can be distinguished. The most prominent of these traces back to the iconography of Antiquity and involves a transformation of the originally epic picture of the crowing cock mentioned in *Matthew 26*, *Mark 14* and *Luke 22*, where it is told that after Christ's nightly arrest Petrus fails to testify his faith in Christ, and does so thrice, upon which, as foretold, the cock crows. The episode occurs with some frequency in early Christian art, for instance on the lid of an early fifth-century ivory reliquary from Brescia (the so-called Lipsanotek). Particularly interesting are the Christian sarcophagi of the early fourth century, on which the cock is depicted in the company of both Petrus and Christ, which, strictly speaking, does not accord with the text of the Gospel. In these scenes the cock still serves as an iconographic pointer to the purpose of identifying Petrus, but there is a clear tendency to identify the bird with Christ, as can be seen from the bird's position to the side of Christ, opposite Petrus. Simultaneously, the scene is enriched with details from other episodes of the Gospel, notably the roll or scripture held by Christ, which attribute turns the scene into a *traditio legis*. This transformation marks a shift from a narrative value -the biblical cock in Caiaphas courtyard- to a new, metaphorical value of the motif: the crowing cock as a *figura Christi* (Stommel 1954, 103; Gerke 1967, 109). This symbolism was not confined to art. In the same fourth century, Prudentius compares the cock which announces daybreak to Christ, whose coming dispels darkness: *Ales diei nuntius / lucem propinquam praecinit; nos excitator mentium / iam Christus ad vitam vocat* 'The bird that heralds day forewarns that dawn is at hand; now Christ the awakener of our souls calls us to life' (Thomson 1949, 7). One might say that, in a way, the ancient notion of the cock as the messenger of the new day was adopted by Christianity, and imposed on the originally epically motivated occurrence of the cock in Christian iconography. What facilitated the reinterpretation was the light imagery, which, from the third century onwards, was used to characterize the *adventus Christi*, the coming of Christ in majesty (Rahner 1957, 91; Gerke 1967, 59). The image of the cock as the herald of the Youngest Day enjoyed considerable diffusion in the Early Middle Ages. It found expression in the habit of erecting bronze cocks on church-towers -an elevated position that made it catch the first light of the rising sun- attested in the ninth century, when a cock crowned Brescia Cathedral. An Anglo-Saxon manuscript from ca. 980 AD depicts a cock on top of the church's bell-tower (Salvén 1923, 83) and a cock reportedly crowned Winchester Cathedral in the tenth century (Timmers 1974, 209). The ancient Scandinavians were perfectly familiar with this

³ The cock figures also in the folkloristic customs enlisted by nineteenth century scholars as Jahn (1884) and Mannhardt (1868), who report several instances of cocks being killed to celebrate a successful threshing, reaping, etc. The cock, it was claimed, personified the fertility spirit of the corn, which was released and subsequently killed to ascertain the spirit's return the following year. As late as 1924 Knudsen claimed that *hænestagning*, a rural game in which a cock was beaten to death for popular amusement, harks back to pagan sacrifices. As I see it, such customs do not prove anything for the status of the cock in pagan Scandinavia.

symbolism, as can be seen from the cock's appearance on Viking Age picture stones from the Isle of Man (Kernode 1907, 143,191; Cubbon 1971, 24; Margeson 1983, 96). On these Manx slab-stones commissioned by the Christian Norse colonists, the cock image features seven times, often in the upper left part of the composition, which makes it the iconographical equivalent of the hornblowing figure on the Jurby stone (Cubbon 1971, 31). It is likely that the two motifs convey the same message: a hope of future life and resurrection in Christ at the Youngest Day (cf. Kolsrud 1952, 27:11-12). This is definitely the case on the Kirk Michael Crucifixion cross-slab, the composition of which echoes the early Christian picture of the cross with a pair of birds -doves or peacocks- symmetrically positioned on the limbs, an artistic tradition which, with various modifications, probably reached Britain by way of Merovingian France.⁴

The cock image gave rise to yet another metaphor in that the bird was compared to the preacher of the True Faith who wakes up the people for moral edification. What distinguishes this metaphor from the former is that its *tertium comparationis* is not the cock's crowing, but what precedes it: the cock's flapping of its wings. On this, Gregory the Great remarks in *Moralia in Iob*:

There is something else about the cock to which we should give skilful consideration: before it prepares to utter its crow, it first beats its wings, and by striking itself makes itself more alert. We can see this clearly if we look closely at the lives of holy preachers. Before they instruct us with a sermon, they exercise themselves in holy conduct, unwilling to urge others on by voice while they themselves are sluggish in action. First, they give themselves a shake by performing lofty deeds, then they impart to others the desire to act well. First they beat themselves with the wings of thought, in the sense that they detect whatever is uselessly sluggish within themselves

This metaphorical aspect of the cock image, although less conspicuous than the one mentioned above, enjoyed considerable diffusion through Gregory's work, from where it found its way to such works as Hugh of Fouilloy's *Aviarium* and the medieval bestiaries. An echo of it may be heard in the Old Norse *Bjarkamál*, the beginning of which invokes, not the cock's crowing, but the flapping of its wings, the tacit inference being that the missionary King Olaf met his death as a preacher of the true faith.

The third and last category harks back to an episode in the apocryphal *Evangelium Nicodemi*, where Judas wants to hang himself. His wife tries to talk him out of it, saying: "Don't say so: for as well as this cock that is roasting on the fire can crow, just as well shall Jesus rise again" (James 1953, 116). The next moment, the cock crows. In Western Europe the motif became attached to the Nativity and the figure of Herod. In the Old French *Ogier le Danois* Herod is informed by the magi, whereas in Scandinavia and England the messenger of Christ's birth is the proto-martyr Stephan/Staffan, a stable-lad converted to Christianity after seeing the horses' reaction to a new brilliant star. Brought to King Herod, Staffan confesses

⁴ In the early Middle Ages the pair of birds could be reduced to one, which was then often confined to left upper position, but we find it also on top of the cross, as on the seventh-century Merovingian *mensa* from St Victor du Castel, Bagnols (Pruss 158). A similar configuration occurs on Anglo-Saxon sceattas (Richard 1912 pl. III.7; Boeles 1951, 371), and it may well be a composition of this kind which, through various intermediary stages, gave rise to the iconography of the Kirk Michael Crucifixion cross-slab. At what stage the cock was substituted is difficult to say. On a Merovingian coin minted at Lyon (?) we see a cross underneath what judging from its comb might be the image of a cock (Dahn 1883 pl. p. 93 no. 16), which would suggest that the substitution occurred in Merovingian France, helped, perhaps, by a wordplay of *Gallus* 'Gallic' and *gallus* 'cock'.

his trust in the new-born Child as the Saviour. To deride his words, Herod points to the roasted cock on his table, saying: "Sooner will this rooster rise and crow, than that allmighty king of yours be born". On this, the roasted cock rises from its plate and flaps its wings, crowing: *Christus natus est*. In medieval Scandinavia the story must have been quite popular. Several pictures of the cock miracle have been preserved, among which the Broddetorp altar front (now in SHM) and a sculpture in Skara Cathedral, both dating from the mid-twelfth century. An early familiarity with the legend may be indicated by the iconography of two eleventh-century rune-stones from Gästrikland, and knowledge of it possibly coloured Saxo's description of the crowing cock experienced by Hadingus in the underworld.

In *Völuspá*, the use of the motif falls into the first category: the crowing cock as the messenger of the Youngest Day, which accords well with the subsequent scenes of destruction. It need not disturb us that in Vsp. 42-43 three cocks make themselves heard, since these are largely mere different manifestations of the same theme. Epic triads and triple variation do occur elsewhere in the poem (Vsp. 8, 20, 21), and the triple use of the cockcrow clearly serves a stylistic purpose. In this case, the triplication is particularly well chosen. To emphasize its significance, the poet lets the cockcrow be heard from up *l gaglviði* to deep down (*fyr iqrð nedan*) in the abodes of Hel, and by doing so gives it a universal dimension, making it seem a signal that no-one can escape from. Justified as the repetition may be, it does raise a question: is the variation simply rhetorical, or does the down-earth shift of focus also imply a different emphasis? It may well do so. Gregory of Tours records (*Historia Francorum* V, 41) that a cock crowing in the early hours of the night was regarded a nasty omen, presumably because its crow announced, not the coming of light (and, symbolically, eternal bliss), but lasting darkness, a feature associated with hell. The superstition recorded by Gregory of Tours may reflect an early manifestation of what, with shift of gender to emphasize the fearful nature of the message, is to become the *Höllenhuhn* of later folklore. This, however, is not what we have here. A cock crowing in hell announces the Youngest Day no less than anywhere else, but, given the audience, it is conceivable that here (Vsp. 43/5-8) the emphasis is on the eternal torments awaiting accursed transgressors. It is instructive to compare this with Gregory the Great's words in *Moralia in Iob* concerning the cock's power of understanding:

We should, however, consider something else in the context of the cock's power of understanding. It has the habit of crowing very loudly and deeply in the darkest hours of the night, but produces, as dawn approaches, a softer and less forceful sound. In this case, the thoughtful judgement of preachers shows what the understanding of the cock should signify to us. When they preach to minds which have hitherto been evil, they evoke the terrors of eternal judgement at the top of their voice, as if they were cocks crowing in the darkest hours of the night.

The cocks in Gregory's exposition differ from those in Vsp. 42-43 in that the latter crow in rapid succession, or even simultaneously, but basically these cocks are all manifestations of one and the same theme: the cock as the messenger of the Youngest Day.

II

It leaves us, however, with an intriguing problem: the relation between the crowing rooster(s) and the happily harping Eggþér on the hill. Are we dealing with an opposition here, or do the harp and the cocks sound in harmony with each other, in that they, on a higher plane, convey the same message?

One possibility is to follow H in reading the harpist's name as *Egðir*, and regard this as a deverbative nomen agentis deriving from **agidijaz* 'one who gauds, incites' (cf. ON *eggja* 'to incite'). The reference might be to Loki, who in Old Norse mythology figures as the cause of all evil (*flestu illu væðr*), just as in *Mariu saga* the devil is called *áeggjari allra glæpa*

'inciter/instigator of all crime'. The words *gýgiar hirðir*, then, might refer to Loki's liaison with the giantess Angrboða (= Vsp. 40 in *aldna*), with whom he fathered the wolf Fenrir, the world-serpent and Hel. The picture we get would be that of Loki celebrating the destruction of the gods' world by plucking the harp. On the surface this sounds a plausible explanation, but unfortunately this solution is not without shortcomings. To start with, Loki pursues his goal through cunning rather than egging. Second, a nomen agentis *Egðir* 'inciter' assumes a semantic derivation (by means of the suffix Gmc. **-uðjalidja*) from **agjōn* 'to make sharp' (hence 'incite'). This is problematic insofar as *egdir* also occurs as a heiti for wolf or eagle, which word, however, is regarded as a denominative derivation 'one (equipped) with sharp (edge/hook, beak, claws)'.⁵ It would be remarkable if there were two homonymous words *egðir*, one deverbative, the other denominative. If, on the other hand, we regard the two as identical, we must probably discard the meaning 'inciter', which provided the basis for the whole identification *Egðir* = Loki. It does not help to assume instead a meaning 'one with sharp mind' (for Loki), since this accords badly with the epithet *gláðr*. For even if it is true that the Æsir's cause is lost, their progeny will live on in the new world, whereas all elements of evil are wiped out, or confined to hell. No prospect for joy, unless, of course, we assume that Loki/Egðir is nothing but the devil's handmaid.⁶ My main reason for questioning any such interpretation is the positive status of the harp in Germanic tradition, where the instrument appears associated with wisdom, insight and, in another connection, power over death, rather than with evil and destruction. In *Beowulf* King Hroðgar, the most outstanding example of an *anima spiritualiter christiana* in Germanic heroic epic, is described as himself composing verses to the harp's accompaniment. It is possible that harp and cocks are in opposition, but it would be more satisfying if they somehow sound in harmony.

Such solution, however, confronts us with an entirely different problem, namely the referential meaning of *gýgiar hirðir*. Is the reference is to one particular giantess (such as in *aldna*), and if so, do the words imply a close personal relationship (like in the above identification of *Egðir* with Loki)?⁸ Is *Egðir/Eggþér* her superior, or is he, as argued by Salus and Beekman Taylor (1969, 80), a wolf-herder employed by her? Or is the relation is of a hostile kind, in that *gýgiar hirðir* refers to the shepherd's rôle as a sentinel against the *gýgr* and her ilk. In that case, the words might have a kind of parallel in OE *eoton-weard* 'watchman against a giant/monster', an epithet used for Beowulf. The syntactical construction is admittedly not the same, but the runic phrase *vikika vorþr* 'sentinel/watchman against Vikings' on the Swedish runic stone from Bro (U 617) shows that the genitive construction is principally feasible, and the connotation 'watchman' occurs in *Skárnismál* 11. In Old Norse mythology death was personified as a female of giant stock (Steinsland 1992). The problem is that as a watchman against the giantess' *Egðir/Eggþér* would have no reason for joy, in view the following scenes of world destruction. The alternative is to assume that *gýgr* has been used generally, without specific reference to any particular giantess: 'shepherd of a giantess', or, with singular used for plural, 'shepherd of giantesses'. Such an

⁵ So Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon (1989), who, however, has no difficulty in deriving the name *Sveigðir* deverbatively from **svaigjōn* (ON *sveigja*): 'one who bends'.

⁶ If we follow Ásgeir Blöndal in etymologizing *Egðir* as 'one equipped with sharp (hook or crook)' the name would make an appropriate nick-name for the devil, who figures equipped with various sharp utensils in Christian visionary lore. If so, the figure gained an independent mythological status after its Christian origin had faded, a process that can also be observed in such names as Surtr, Muspell and, possibly, Fenrir.

⁷ Remarkably enough, Gregory in *Moralia* does compare the crowing of the cock with plucking the strings of the harp, but this is probably coincidence.

⁸ That our *gýgr* is no other than the *in aldna* mentioned in Vsp. 40 derives some support from Snorri, who calls the latter a *gýgr*, but this identification may have been inferred from the word *aust*, traditionally associated with the abodes of giants.

interpretation is actually rather interesting, since it links the happy harpist on the hill to the world of the giants and the world of myth and imagination they represent. In *Beowulf* (111-115) giants are viewed on a level with elves, ogres and other unholy brood, whose plight it is to dwell in uplands, fens, marshes and other impenetrable places. As the Old English *Maxims* II (42-43) puts it *þyrs sceal on fenne geuunian ana innan lande* 'The giant shall live in a fen, alone in the land'.⁹ This is the desolate world of wilderness, the inhabitants of which are cast out from God's mercy.¹⁰ According to medieval view the supernatural inhabitants of nature descended from angels, who, because of their failure to resist Satan, for nine days fell from Heaven in the form of devils until God in his mercy put an end to it. Not all these angels ended in the depth of hell. Those who were less guilty than the rest of the rebellious angels remained in the air or on earth, which was thought to explain the origin of sylphs (in the air), gnomes (in the earth), and nymphs (in streams and woods). In Icelandic folktales (JÁ I,7) the *álfar* are said to descend from those angels who had put their faith in Satan. They were exiled not only from heaven, but also from the Christian human community on earth, in the shadow of which they live.¹¹ The eighth-century Life of St Gall (*Vita vetustissima*) records (ch. 12) how the arrival of the saint (c. 550-645) caused certain water-nymphs to desert a pool they were wont to visit. They take to a hill, whence their lamentations were heard that they could not enter into men: 'Alas! What shall we do? Wither shall we go?' (Joynt 1927, 81). The author refers to these water-nymphs as demons, but some later writers give more friendly glimpses of fairyland and its inhabitants, whom they do not always call demons (MacCulloch 1932, 30). Giants, too, were not always regarded as evil and dangerous, and some were thought to behave humanely.¹² Is Egðir/Eggþér, then, a giant? Probably not, playing the harp requires a musical skill not commonly associated with giants. In Germanic tradition the harp often conveys a sentiment of exile, whether from native land or vanished past, or for the earthly soul for the heavenly home. In the Middle Ages the Christian prototype of the harpist is David, to whom prophetic messages concerning the future salvation of mankind were inextricably linked. Images of the harping prophet are known from England, Scotland (Curle 1940, 107, 111), Isle of Man (Kermode 1907, 197) and Ireland. Particular interesting are the Irish high-crosses, such as the Muiredach cross at Monasterboice, on the east-side of which David is playing the harp amidst scenes from the Last Judgement (Veelenturf 1995, 53; Henry 1967 Pl. 83, 98). On medieval Scandinavian baptismal fonts we find images of Gunnar playing the harp, and although the

⁹ If Axel Kock (1911, 112) is right in identifying the first element of *gaglvíör* with OE *gagel* 'gale, sweet gale, bog-myrtle' (*Myrica gale*), which is admittedly uncertain, the name may be comparable with Middle Dutch place-names like *gagelland*, which denote, not so much land grown with bog-myrtle as low value marshy land difficult to cultivate etc. (cf. English *bog-myrtle*). Such appellative meaning of *gaglvíör* would assign the harpist to the waste borderlands which constituted territorial boundaries in primitive times, which accords well with the interpretation of Vsp. 42 discussed here.

¹⁰ This habitat calls to mind a curious note in the tenth or eleventh century Old Irish *Fis Adomnán* (15) that such of the world's inhabitants who do not attain to the heavenly city directly at the end of their lives, and to whom a dwelling-place therein is allotted after the Last Judgement, live, until Doomsday comes, in an unsettled and restless manner on heights and hilltops, and in marshes and uninhabited boglands (van Os 1932, 269). The wilderness of wood and marsh allotted to these souls in this interim state of afterlife coincides conspicuously with the above habitat of giants and other creatures of popular imagination.

¹¹ In Caesarius of Heisterbach (de Vooy 1926, 164) a repentant fallen angel tries to atone for his misstep by serving men and doing good, but is forced to leave when his identity is revealed.

¹² As *Heimlýsing* (Hb 165) puts it, some giants are *vár-eignar sem aðrir menn en sumir ero mannskæðir* 'peaceful as people normally, but some are dangerous'. In Irish tradition some giants are even called 'righteous in their ways', as happens to Fergus and Konall in *Visio Tnugdali* (Cahill 1983, 35). This has admittedly not kept the scribe from placing them in hell, but the fact that he takes care to justify this afterlife residence of theirs might indicate that opinions differed on this point (cf. Donahue 1950).

background of these pictures is entirely different, the message which they convey -resurrection in Christ as victory over earthly death (von See 1999, 191)- is not. Gunnar, it will be remembered, by his play neutralizes the snakes of the snake-pit, an environment reminiscent of the snake infested hell described in Vsp. 39. Egðir/Eggþér, of course, is not a Gunnar or a David, but the connotations of the latter's harpplay observed above give credence to the idea that *gláðr* refers to the feeling which the harpist experiences from the prospect of the Youngest Day drawing near. This derives support from Old Norse *feginsdagr* as a term for the Youngest Day in *Sverris saga* (ch. 38): *Magnús konungur mælti: "fimmumst á feginsdegi, faðir"* (Indrebø 1920, 42) and *Sólarljóð* st. 82 (Fidjestøl 1979, 71).

Whatever Eggþér/Egðir's identity, the phrase *gýgiar hirðir* links him to the giants' world of wood and marsh, an outlaw from the genial fellowship of men, estranged from the favour of God. He is delighted (*gláðr*) because he believes that the time has come that he will finally share in God's grace, in joyful expectation of which he manifests himself by making beautiful music. The motif is known from folklore. In Stagnelius' poem *Näcken*, the supernatural musician celebrating the coming of Judgement Day is a water-spirit, but in other reports he is said to be one of the *högfólk* 'folk living in hills' (ON *haugbjúar*). The motif occurs in a versified Danish version of the *Fifteen Signs of the Youngest Day* in a manuscript written 1509 AD (Gad 1961, 259). This is admittedly rather late, but the similarity does illuminate the *Völuspá* passage and, as suggested by Strömbäck (1970, 22), the motif may well be older.

So, Loki's finest hour, or an outcast's relief? I leave the question open. What I hope to have shown in this paper is that there is a case for arguing that the imagery of Vsp. 42-43 must be judged against the background of medieval Christian folklore.

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