

**Recognizing Mythic Images in Fantastic Literature:  
Reading *Baldrs draumar* 12-14**

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The 14 stanzas of *Baldrs draumar* are a curiosity in Baldr research. The text of the poem provides some of the easiest reading in the eddic corpus. Óðinn journeys to the realm of the dead and poses a series of three questions describing the Baldr-Höðr-Váli revenge cycle but then stanza 12, however clear its language, sends our understanding into a tailspin. The bewildering conclusion of the narrative has led to responses ranging from Franz Schröder's dismissal of the poem as 'ein schwaches Lied' (Schröder, 337) to Mats Malm's conclusion that it is simply intended 'to trigger the imagination of the receiver and suggest a great complex of mythological associations.' (Malm, 288) While the former blames our difficulties on the skills of the poet, the latter sidesteps the issue, treating its author as a medieval Kafka or James Joyce. Most of us are satisfied with the information about the revenge cycle, shrug and move on. Although the ending of the poem may strike us as clumsy and abrupt or leave us scratching our heads, it seems prudent to assume that the poet thought his ending reasonable and clear. The fact that the initial eleven stanzas offer no challenge to interpretation emphasizes the possibility that we may simply be missing the point.

The poem opens with the gods at Thing discussing why Baldr was having bad dreams. Óðinn hops on Sleipnir, rides to Niflhel until he comes to Hel's hall and *þá reið Óðinn fyr austan dyrr, þar er hann vissi vǫlva leiði*—'then rode Óðinn east from the door, there where he knew of a vǫlva's grave.' Óðinn summons the vǫlva, she complains, and he begins a series of inquiries. First: For whom is Hel's hall prepared? Baldr. Second: Who will slay Baldr? Höðr. Third: Who will take revenge on Höðr? Váli, begotten on Rindr by Óðinn. Finally: *hverjar ro þær meyjar er at muni gráta oc á himin verpa hálsa scautom?*—'Who are those maidens who weep as they are wont and to heaven throw the kerchiefs/hats of their necks?' We plunge into confusion. The question does not make sense to us. The vǫlva's response is to identify Óðinn, who then accuses the vǫlva of not being a vǫlva at all, calls her the mother of three giants and the interview abruptly concludes with the vǫlva telling Óðinn off.

Our difficulties begin with Óðinn's fourth question. Either we do not understand the question or we do not understand its relevance. The vǫlva's identification of Óðinn seems unexpected and arbitrary. The identity of the vǫlva is so far from firm footing that we lose sight of the significance of Óðinn's accusation. The concluding stanza seems no more than a nasty remark. Our difficulties with the poem stem from three problems: *a)* our failure as modern readers to recognize the mythic image implicit in Óðinn's fourth question; *b)* the convolutions of scholarship which have led us to attempt to understand Óðinn's fourth question through his identification by the vǫlva rather than to understand this identification through his question; *c)* Snorri Sturluson's representation of the mythology which imbues us with presuppositions. This paper will show that the answer to Óðinn's fourth question is clear—*waves*—and that this answer would be understandable to a contemporary audience as the

metonymic use of a mythic image in reference to a mythological event—*Ragnarök*. Understanding this question and its implicit answer reveals how the *vǫlva* identifies Óðinn, at which point the identity of the *vǫlva* can be addressed and a coherent and comprehensive reading of the poem becomes possible.

Óðinn goes to confer with the dead *vǫlva* because of Baldr's dreams. Confering with the *vǫlva* is necessary because Baldr's fate is *fólginn*—'hidden'—as we are told in *Vǫluspá* 31. The significance of dreams and dream interpretation in medieval Norse culture is difficult for the modern reader to appreciate. (Turville-Petre 1958) John Lindow (Lindow, 39ff.) has shown that what is dreamed is done: we may quibble over interpretations or take preventative measures against a foretold future, but the dream *will* come true. This is comparable to the inescapability of a *vǫlva*'s prophecy although she may have some choice in what she prophesies (Price, 229), and the fixed fate in *Skirnismál* 13. Baldr has dreamed his dreams, now it is only to sort out the details of what is to come. Lindow declares, 'Odin's mission here, like that of the wise dream interpreters of the sagas, is to provide precision.' (Lindow, 43)

Through a reference to preparations in Hel's hall, Óðinn's first question anticipates that someone is going to die. There is never any clear reference to Baldr's dreams in either Óðinn's questions or the *vǫlva*'s responses. Reference to the interior of Hel's hall indicates that either the hall was standing open or this question derives from the dream or its interpretation. Hel's gates do not stand open in other sources. Her hall is more likely a topographical reference on the journey similar to the hound of stanzas 2 and 3. The question implies that Óðinn does not know Baldr's *orlog* *fólginn*. The first and fourth questions offer the only indications of Óðinn's knowledge prior to the journey. Óðinn's second question follows directly on the first to identify Baldr's bane. Óðinn's third question follows directly on his second to identify Váli, Óðinn's unborn son begotten on Rindr, as the avenger. This question assumes that Baldr will die and Høðr will kill him, implying that these events are unavoidable. There is no indication that Óðinn is attempting to avoid, alter or otherwise influence this series of events, which sets his journey in sharp opposition to Hermóðr's. This attitude accords with beliefs about prophetic dreams noted above. Óðinn's fourth question is generally understood as a non sequitur if not an intentional termination of the interview.

This question is an obvious variation of a wave-riddle which would be familiar to a contemporary audience. Óðinn poses multiple variations on this riddle in his competition with king Heiðrekr (cf. Fleck, 24-25) as well as with the giant Vafþrúðnir (*Vafþrúðnismál* 48). Jere Fleck has offered the most effective argument against the wave-riddle on the basis that the first line is too generic to identify the riddle, citing its use in *Fjǫlsvinnsmál* 37 (Fleck, 24-26), although that verse can be interpreted as a wave-riddle with an answer comparable to *Vafþrúðnismál* 48. Fleck's treatment rapidly dismisses the other elements of Óðinn's question, reducing his comparison to 'Who are those maidens'. However, weeping or widowhood and casting something in the air identifiable with spray are both components appropriate to the wave-riddle (cf. von See et al., 455-56), and Fleck fails to appreciate other associations of Baldr's death with effusions of water (Saxo, 73 & 75) which, however opaque, indicate a potential contextual relevance which might anticipate a 'water'-question.

The wave-riddle is both unanswered and familiar from wisdom competitions which conclude with an unanswerable question. Óðinn travels in disguise in these

wisdom competitions and *Vafþrúðnismál* involves crossing to an otherworldly location. The wave-riddle is therefore sometimes treated as equivalent to: 'What did Óðinn whisper to Baldr on the pyre?' This reading treats Óðinn's fourth question as in some way unanswerable because we do not understand the answer or how it reveals Óðinn's identity. This reading confounds the nature of the exchange, conflating wisdom competitions and *vǫlva* encounters, and must be addressed.

In wisdom competitions, Óðinn is not out to accumulate knowledge but to test it. He must test his knowledge just as he must test Sleipnir against Gulltoppr and Þórr's hammer must be tried against Hrungrnir's hone. The gods must continuously demonstrate their superiority in order to affirm the natural order of the universe and assure themselves and their audiences that their superiority remains unassailable. To defeat *Vafþrúðnir*, Óðinn is *reduced* to playing his ultimate trump of esoteric wisdom, itself a tribute to his adversary. This affirms the order of the universe, showing that the gods have the best knowledge right along with the best weapon, best horse, best ship, etc. The trump question reveals Óðinn's identity because only Óðinn can ask it, and Óðinn only asks it because he has no other question which he can answer while his opponent cannot. The fact that the question cannot be answered proves Óðinn's victory by demonstrating his superior occult knowledge.

*Baldrs draumar* is more akin to *Vǫluspá* and *Hyndlolióð*, in which knowledge is acquired rather than demonstrated. Óðinn's demanding refrain (*vil ec enn vita*) even mirrors the *vǫlva*'s refrains of *Vǫluspá* (*vitoð ér enn, eða hva?*) and *Hyndlolióð* (*vǫrumz, at vita svá, viltu enn fleira?*). No trump question is necessary in these encounters, and it would be counterproductive unless the interview were over. The only information contained in *Baldrs draumar* which is not contained in any other eddic source is the name of Váli's mother, Rindr, the rest being familiar from *Vǫluspá* and *Hyndlolióð*. Treating this information as the crux of the poem assumes that the mythological corpus consisted of only twenty or so poems and the three *vǫlva*-poems must be read as a set rather than variations or registries of tradition. Snorri notes Rindr is Váli's mother although he makes no references to the verses of *Baldrs draumar* or its narrative. Saxo identifies 'Rinda', although his avenger bears another name, and the skald Kormákr refers to the myth of Rindr's seduction. (Lindow, 152) *Vǫluspá* and *Hyndlolióð* present Baldr's death as a central point and conclude their prophecies with Ragnarøk. Treated as a parallel tradition in the Baldr-cycle, we might anticipate more, but it would not be unreasonable for the poem to only be concerned with the victim-murderer-avenger trine. Lindow suggests that the extra line in stanza 11 is intended to weight the conclusion of this sequence of information. (Lindow, 45) However, an intentional revelation remains highly problematic.

In wisdom competitions the unanswerable question reveals Óðinn's identity, but the fact that it is unanswerable proves his victory over his opponent as a demonstration of his superior occult knowledge. In *Baldrs draumar*, Óðinn has come to increase his occult knowledge, not to demonstrate its superiority. The *vǫlva* appears compelled to speak until she identifies Óðinn. This identification appears to liberate her from his control. She never 'answers' the fourth question, Óðinn's response is either a weak insult or indicates that he too has been deceived, and the *vǫlva*'s closing declarations seem both mocking and threatening. If Óðinn actively terminates the interview by posing an unanswerable question, he is allowing the *vǫlva* to liberate

herself—he is actively empowering her and allowing her to stand beyond his control. Irrespective of intent, Óðinn loses control of the situation as soon as he is identified. It seems inconsistent with his character to assume that Óðinn lost control of the situation intentionally, particularly when we fail to see how the question gave him away.

Interpreting the fourth question as valid has led to a broad range of interpretations (reviewed by von See et al., 452-53), most of which fail to correlate the question with the identification of Óðinn. Lindow argues that the wave-riddle makes direct reference to Angrboða on the proposed etymology of her name as ‘fjord-breaker, sea wave’: Óðinn’s question identifies Angrboða, she recognizes him, he calls her the ‘mother of three giants’ and the exchange makes sense. (Lindow, 47-48) The *vǫlva*’s prophecy will necessarily come to pass and she has some power over what she prophesies (Price, 229), hence the power of prophecy was viewed as threatening (Quinn, 30). Identifying the *vǫlva* as a hostile adversary could be grounds for terminating the interview. The *foraldarsögur* show that although *vǫlur* are magically compelled to respond to questions (Quinn, 40), they can also force their prophecies on unwilling audiences (Quinn, 35). This weakens the possibility that Óðinn revealed his identity and empowered his opponent when she could continue to prophesy following the termination of the interview. In addition, if Angrboða is identified in stanza 12, we must fall back to stanza 11 for some clue as to *how* Óðinn identifies her. Stanza 11 is only suspect in similarities to *Vǫluspá* 32-33 and an extra line of content: neither provides grounds to identify the *vǫlva*, removing identification from textual evidence.

All of these issues are resolved by accepting the fourth question as a wave-riddle and understanding the answer as a metonymic reference to Ragnarøk through the mythic image of waves washing over the earth. Metonymic identification is essential to Norse kennings or the implications of a one-eyed stranger. Metonymic identification through mythic images is familiar to eddic poetry, as founding Ásgarðr’s walls is referred to in *Vǫluspá* 25. Óðinn’s questions in *Baldrs draumar* describe a progression of relationships through time projecting outward from a single figure—the victim. Baldr shares a mutual present with Høðr. Baldr’s present ends with his death while Høðr’s continues. Váli’s birth is exclusively dependent on Baldr’s death, emphasized by Óðinn’s difficulty impregnating Rindr. Váli and Baldr never share a mutual present as opposed to Høðr and Váli. Høðr’s present ends with his death while Váli’s continues, describing the progression. Váli will exist exclusively to become a destructive force in the universe, a force which will bring destruction and death to the Æsir by slaying one of them. Váli is comparable to Loki’s children Jörmungandr, who slays Þórr, Hel, who keeps Baldr, and Fenrisúlfr, who slays Óðinn himself. It may not be coincidence that Snorri and the *Hauksbók Vǫluspá* both attribute a son Váli to Loki. This son is transformed into a wolf like Fenrir and tears apart his brother as Høðr must be slain. With his third question Óðinn learns that he will engender a son for the express purpose of slaying Høðr. Subsequently someone will have to take revenge on Váli. Óðinn’s fourth question asks whether this cycle of vengeance will culminate in Ragnarøk, of which he appears to have prior knowledge.

*Vǫluspá*, *Hyndluljóð* and *Gylfaginning* all offer a description of Ragnarøk as the ultimate consequence of Baldr’s death. In his survey of all sources relating to Ragnarøk, eddic, skaldic and otherwise, Axel Olrik found: ‘The destruction of the earth through sinking into the sea is not, like *fimbulvetr*, limited to a few sources. It

is... the most well-known form of the end of the world' (Olrík, 22). The image of water raging tumultuously skyward is intrinsic to the description of this scene. *Vǫluspá* 57 offers: *sigr fold i mar... geisar eimi við aldrnara, leicr hár hiti við himin siálfan*—'earth sinks into the sea... steam geysers with age-nourisher [fire], high flames leap to heaven itself'. Snorri offers the same verse with slight lexical variation. In this description the earth sinks and the tumult of the sea is due to fire. The waves are jets of steam which are equally applicable to the weeping maidens who 'to heaven throw the kerchiefs of their necks'. Olrík found that the burning of the world was developed in *Vǫluspá* and carried into Snorri (Olrík, 43). He shows that this final contest of fire and water is actually a Celtic image which can be traced back at least as far as Strabo (Olrík, 31). Fire was not an essential element of Norse visions of the end of the world (Olrík, 43). In *Hyndlolióð* 42 we find: *Haf gengr hríðom við himin siálfan, líðr lǫnd yfer, enn lopt bilar*—'The sea goes with tempests against heaven itself, sweeps over the lands and the sky gives way.' In this description the sea is active, running over the land and the waves are from tempestuous action rather than a commingling of water and fire. Both verses include the line *við himin siálfan* while *á himin* is a clue to Óðinn's riddle. The maidens throw their *skaut*, a *skaut* being a piece of cloth or corner thereof—a kerchief or head-covering when attributed to a woman. This is appropriate to both the image of geysers and capping waves or spray in agitated motion and can be compared to the compelled dance and agitated motion of *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* ch. 12 in which the *faldar* of the women go shooting into the air and dance among the rafters. A *faldr* ('fold') is a similar cloth head-covering or hood for a woman while 'white-faldr-wearing' is used for the caps of the waves in one of the simpler versions of the wave-riddle (von See et al., 455). The word 'waves' need not be stated in *Baldrs draumar* because they are understood through the description as they are in *Vǫluspá*, *Hyndlolióð* and even *Vafþrúðnismál* where the wave-riddle is posed in the context of questions concerning Ragnarök (von See et al., 455).

Saxo also associates Baldr with water. Baldr's spring to parch his troops is ambiguous (Saxo, 73): it could relate to an attribute of the god or merely explain a place name. However, an attempt to raid Baldr's mound results in a flooding torrent: 'For the summit of the tumulus split and there apparently burst forth with a stupendous roar an unexpected flood of torrential waters, a rushing mountain which poured with lightning speed over the plain beneath and engulfed everything in its path. The excavators were routed by this... believing they must be caught up in the whirling force of the tide....' (Saxo, 75). Baldr has no mound in Snorri and the god's mound would probably not be in Denmark. The threatening element associated with burial mounds is not water, but fire (Ellis, 175ff.). An illusion of fire erupting from a burial mound would be natural to a Norse text, but a flood sweeping over the plain (*líðr lǫnd yfer?*) implies that rather than adapting a raid on a burial mound from another source, Saxo is adapting Baldr-associations to a raid on a mound. Visually the scene may accord with the Ragnarök-related Danish folklore which leaves a single church as the high point above a final flood (Olrík, 24-30). Baldr's mound would be the high point on the flooded plain and the image may even be related to *Fáfnismál* 14-15, where the battle of Ragnarök is on an island. Baldr's death is consistently identified with Ragnarök. Ragnarök is described through a mythic image of the world vanishing into

water. The anomalous flood from Baldr's mound is most likely associated with this mythic image, which is itself a reflection of the creation-flood of Ymir's murder.

Articulating Óðinn's fourth question as a familiar riddle is a literary device which makes the answer obvious to the audience while allowing the *vǫlva* to respond to Óðinn's identity rather than his question. By recognizing the mythic image behind the wave-riddle we can understand how Óðinn has betrayed his identity. In a wisdom competition Óðinn reveals himself by posing a question which only he can ask. Óðinn may or may not have known that Baldr's *erlog fölgir* was to die; he probably did not know the identity of the slayer, but the identity of the avenger establishes the pattern of a revenge cycle within Óðinn's family and the community of the gods. Óðinn must possess a profound knowledge of future events in order to inquire whether this revenge cycle leads to Ragnarök as its ultimate consequence. Like Óðinn's trump question in a wisdom competition, the fourth question betrays his identity, not because the question is 'unanswerable', but because it is a question which only Óðinn is wise enough to ask.

Óðinn's fourth question inadvertently terminates the interview. His response to being identified is startling and unexpected: *Ertattu vǫlva, né vís kona, heldr ertu þriggja þursa móðir!*—'You are not a *vǫlva* nor wise woman, rather are you the mother of three giants!' As an insult without specific relevance to the *vǫlva*'s identity, it seems Óðinn was swift enough to identify Ragnarök as the necessary consequence of the revenge cycle but not swift enough for a witty retort—the statement does not even qualify as much of an insult when compared to the exchange in *Hyndlolióð*. (Malm, 281) It would be more in character for Óðinn to counter his opponent with his own display of insight rooted in the *vǫlva*'s ability to identify him through his question. The *vǫlva* may even be betraying her identity in the very act of terminating the interview. If a *vǫlva*'s prophecies on the divine plane function as they do among men, we anticipate that she would be compelled to answer in her trance-state. This compulsion to answer is used to create dramatic tension in the *fornaldarsögur* (cf. Quinn, 40), and the lack of compulsion may reveal that she is not a *vǫlva* here.

Óðinn's identification of the *vǫlva* describes her in negative and positive terms: in terms of what she is not, and in terms of a fixed definition as the mother of three giants. She could be a figure of whom we know nothing except that she is the mother of three, like the mother of Þjazi, Iði and Gangr (Snorri, 1998, 3), or a figure like Gullveig (*Vǫluspá* 21) of whose descendents we know nothing. As a Ragnarök-related narrative, the three children are most probably the famous triad of monstrous beings who are all either major players in the Baldr-cycle or the battle of Ragnarök itself. Loki's three children by Angrboða are nowhere else referred to as 'three giants', but Angrboða remains generally, if grudgingly, accepted as the prime candidate for this role of 'mother', and therefore the *vǫlva*-impersonator, although we know little more about her than her name. Hilda Ellis Davidson is the only scholar who seriously considers Loki as a candidate for the *vǫlva* (Davidson, 9; Saxo, 76n.).

When we turn to the definition by negative terms, there is no reason that Angrboða could not be a *vǫlva* nor anything to make us assume that she would be. Fleck argues that *vǫlur* must be virgins (Fleck, 21-24), but his argument is speculative and weakened by a basis on this verse without treating the 'wise woman' element of Óðinn's statement (cf. Price, 117). As a female figure of serious import, we are inclined to suspect that even if she is not a *vǫlva*, she does possess occult knowledge

and qualifies as a 'wise woman'. It is possible that she is exclusively a creature of brute force and violence, so these points are inconclusive and ambiguous. Loki, for all of his occult knowledge, is decidedly not a woman, which simultaneously disqualifies him as a *vǫlva*. Although Malm (Malm, 283ff.) eventually dismisses Loki as a candidate in favour of an abstract thought-provoking figure, he offers several pages of meditation on the possibility. Both Malm and Davidson (Davidson, 9) stress Loki's repeated instances of gender transgression and accusations of *ergi*. Snorri twice describes Loki taking the form of a woman in the Baldr myth and Loki physically gives birth on more than one occasion. He gives birth to Sleipnir, but also gives birth after eating the half-burned heart of a wicked woman in *Hyndlolióð* 41. *Hyndlolióð* 40 mentions Loki's conception of the wolf with Angrboða, of Sleipnir with Svaðilfari, and announces that the worst of female monsters came from him, whom Lindow suggests could be Hel. (Lindow, 46) Rydberg has long since used this passage in an attempt to show that Loki was not the father but the mother of the serpent, Hel, and the wolf. (Rydberg, chapter 35) Rydberg's argument is too awash with speculation to receive much attention in our day, yet if we accept Hel as the worst of all female monsters (and things do not get much worse than a personification of death), all three Loki-myths mentioned in *Hyndlolióð* are myths about engendering supernatural beings, two of which are scenarios in which Loki is the one who gives birth. *Hyndlolióð* offers no indication which role Loki played in engendering monsters with Angrboða, nor even with Svaðilfari: the brief stanzas assume the audience is familiar with these myths. The Sleipnir-myth is anomalous in the poem because the horse has neither significant descendants nor a role in Ragnarök. Sleipnir is no more active than Þórr's goats and introduces a disparately positive figure into the Loki-stanzas. His inclusion in the stanza and the poem may be to complete a set of three *ergi*-conceptions. We will never know which role Loki played in the conception with Angrboða, but there seems a fair chance that he supplied the womb. The argument that Loki is elsewhere referred to as 'father' of these monsters (von See et al., 464-65) is moot: not being referred to as 'mother' elsewhere with reference to any birth does not make the reference any more nonsensical than 'three giants' applied to his malignant offspring—or even to a tradition in which Sleipnir, not the serpent, is the third 'giant'. In addition, Malm notes, 'it would also seem a natural form of *níð* for Óðinn to call Loki 'mother': highly reminiscent of *Lokasenna* 23, where Óðinn mocks Loki for having given birth to children' (Malm, 284), and all the more appropriate when Loki is appearing before him in the form of a woman. From this it seems Loki is at least as reasonable a candidate for the *vǫlva*-impersonator as Angrboða.

We grow so bogged down in trying to understand Óðinn's fourth question and the identity of the *vǫlva* that we lose sight of the real implications of his accusation: this is not the *vǫlva* he came to consult. Stanza 4 informs us that Óðinn 'knows of a *vǫlva*'s grave' which is why he goes there. Is this the shamanic equivalent to dialling a wrong number? It is unlikely that Óðinn would know this was a *vǫlva*'s grave and not realize it was Angrboða's—he would, no doubt, know the time and circumstances of her death. The chances of Óðinn accidentally stumbling onto Loki's grave are nil. Either Óðinn made a mistake of the most startling magnitude, or he was intercepted. Sources are silent on Angrboða, but Loki is generally associated with journeys between worlds (Lieberman, 143). Saxo describes how king Gormo must sacrifice to

Útgarða-Loki in order to return to Miðgarðr from his otherworldly adventures (Saxo, 267). Loki is primarily associated with journeys to giantlands, but giantlands, especially in Saxo, blur into realms of the dead. Anatoly Liberman has shown that Loki, whatever else he may be, is a chthonic figure (Liberman, 141).

Snorri (1988, 37-43) offers one narrative which is relevant in this context. On Þórr's journey to Útgarðar, Þórr and his companions spend their first night in the infamous mitten. They wake to find Skrymir who offers Þórr a few more rounds of humiliation before coming to Útgarða-Loki's hall. Snorri informs us that Skrymir is Útgarða-Loki in disguise. This means that Útgarða-Loki was aware that Þórr crossed the boundary between worlds and instantly staged Þórr's humiliation by laying out the mitten and disguising himself as Skrymir. This is directly comparable to the incredible interception of Óðinn by a *vǫlva*-impersonator. The initial encounter with the hound in stanzas 2 and 3 may be more than a topographical reference to the threshold between worlds. The encounter with the hound may notify the audience that Óðinn's passage has been marked. Unlike Þórr, Óðinn made his journey in disguise and this disguise appears to have been effective. Óðinn is identified through his fourth question because it is a question which only Óðinn can ask. He identifies the *vǫlva*-impersonator because it is the only figure who could both identify Óðinn through the wisdom of his question and intercept him—who could be aware of his coming and be able to replace a known *vǫlva* on her grave. Comparisons with Útgarða-Loki's performance at Þórr's visit along with Loki's impersonation of multiple women in Snorri's Baldr myth make him the prime candidate for the *vǫlva*-impersonator.

In the final verse, it is then Loki who is giving orders: *Heim rið þú, Óðinn, oc ver hróðigr!*—'Ride home, Óðinn, and be triumphant!' This statement is clearly mocking when it is Óðinn who has been outdone and the prophecy not only informs him that there will be a sequence of killings within his own house, but this sequence will inevitably lead to Ragnarøk, the destruction of the present world order and even Óðinn himself. If there were any doubt, Loki continues: *Svá komit manna meirr aprt á vit, er lauss Loki liðr ór bændum ok ragna røk riúfendr koma.*—'Thus may not another man come back to visit when Loki passes free from bonds and Ragnarøk, destroyers come.' Óðinn's fourth question reveals that he anticipates both Ragnarøk and the answer to his final query. Loki identifies Óðinn, not to avoid verifying Óðinn's suspicions, but for the express purpose of mocking him and demonstrating his superior position in the exchange. That Loki refers to himself in the third person should not strike us as unusual: he does so more than once in *Lokasenna*. Loki identifies Óðinn, not to avoid the question, but in order to reveal himself and unveil the deception much as Útgarða-Loki reveals how Þórr has been outdone. Revelation is itself an insult.

Malm has discussed the symbolic power of Óðinn encountering Loki, his blood-brother, as a contest which prefigures Ragnarøk (Malm, 287), where the two are the chief representatives of the armies in the final destruction of the world, a conflict sprung of brother slaying brother. What Malm does not address is the fact that if the *vǫlva* is identified as Loki, he and Óðinn have already had a falling out. Loki is already intent on Ragnarøk with the same dynamic hostility which seems so anomalous in *Lokasenna*. Snorri is the only source to describe Loki's binding as a direct consequence of Baldr's murder. The prose epilogue of *Lokasenna* associates the binding with the *senna* while *Vǫluspá* 35 merely depicts a bound Loki following the

Baldr verses. Adjacency is not indicative of a causal relation. *Vǫluspá* 35 introduces otherworldly horrors, developing the poem toward its description of Ragnarǫk. As the Baldr verses are absent from the *Hauksbók Vǫluspá*, Lindow suggests that the binding may have been a consequence of the war between the Æsir and the Vanir (Lindow, 160-163). *Hauksbók* actually places stanza 35 following the stanza about founding Ásgarðr's walls mentioned above, which could similarly be ascribed as a cause. The binding could even be based on prophecies as in the cases of Fenrisúlfr, Miðgarðsormr and Hel (Snorri, 1988, 37). We really do not know when or why Loki was bound. The hostility we find in *Baldrs draumar* could even derive from a tradition in which Loki is already bound and the *vǫlva* is like Hugi or Skrymir in *Gylfaginning* or Óðinn's soul-excursions of *Ynglinga saga*, a phenomenon of soul-projection familiar to Norse literature and even attributable to the dead in the mound (Frog, §7.2).

By recognizing the mythic image implicit in Óðinn's fourth question, the difficulties posed by stanzas 12-14 are easily resolved and the poem presents us with a complex and coherently intelligible narrative whole. Unlike *Vǫluspá* and *Hyndlolióð*, *Baldrs draumar* does not simply offer information about Baldr's murder and the cycle of vengeance leading to Ragnarǫk. *Baldrs draumar* reveals itself as an unanticipated conflict-encounter between the blood-brothers Óðinn and Loki, the leaders of the conflicting forces of Ragnarǫk. This conflict-encounter is unveiled in the very question which identifies that brother killing brother among the Æsir will lead to the destruction of the world order. The poem not only predicts Ragnarǫk, but foreshadows it, and Óðinn does not win. Numerous mythological encounters assure the Æsir and their audiences that they have the 'best' of everything. Baldr is himself the 'best' among the Æsir. (Snorri, 1988, 23) The Æsir ritually throw things at Baldr as a symbolic representative of their own invulnerability. The death of Baldr is a mythological event in which something that is the 'best' among the Æsir, perhaps the most important thing of all, has gone over to the other side, to Hel or Útgardar. Baldr's death indicates that the Æsir are vulnerable, and in some sense this means that they have already lost. Óðinn's encounter with Loki in *Baldrs draumar* indicates that the incontestable power of the Æsir is on the wane even before that death, because what is dreamed, is done: the future, Ragnarǫk, is already assured.

By recognizing mythic images we can see the coherent significance of otherwise perplexing features in Norse fantastic literature, much as we must recognize kennings to understand the poetry or understand the rudiments of a hall's construction in order to make sense of a description of heroic action. *Baldrs draumar* is an extreme case, which makes it an excellent example for the value of identifying mythic images. Intertextuality is intrinsic to studies of modern literature. Medieval Norse literature is orally rather than textually referential. The amount of variation acceptable in oral transmission means that reference is more likely visual than verbal, whether to a mythic image such as the wave-riddle or a one-eyed stranger, or a narrative motif as when Heiðrekr accidentally murders his brother with a blind cast in *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks* (*Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, 24-25) or the abduction of Edda in *Bósa saga ok Herraúðs* 13. These images are as symbolically charged in Norse literature as thirty pieces of silver or rolling a stone in Christian traditions. There are cases in which these references may be arbitrary, but in many they fulfil specific literary functions (Frog, §12.3-4). By recognizing these mythic images and understanding

them as 'loaded language', we can deepen our understanding of the literature in terms of how it was understood by its authors and their original audiences.

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