Mythic Discourse Analysis

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Mythic discourse refers to mythology as it is used, transmitted, and manipulated in a society, whether referring to such discourse in society generally or to a specific instantiation of discourse. This chapter outlines an approach to mythic discourse and how to analyze it in Old Norse sources. Rather than only considering mythology of cosmological scope, such as gods and their deeds in mythic time, mythology is here broadly considered to include models of knowing the world and things in it. It thus includes imaginal understandings of the world inside a burial mound, the workings of *seiðr* or the evil eye, as well as things that we might not see as supernatural, such as iron (conceived as having a potential to cut that can be taken away, independent of sharpness), birds (conceived as having language), or the human body (not conceived through modern scientific epistemologies). Mythology is here approached as constituted of signs that are emotionally invested by people within a society as models for knowing the world. When mythology is defined in terms of systems of signs (often referred to as symbols in cultural research), it can be approached in analysis according to what I describe as a *symbolic matrix*, which is constituted of the available mythic signs in a given milieu and the conventions for their combination (see further Frog 2015; 2018). This approach has advantages of providing a consistent framework for addressing narratives of different genres, rituals, taboos, and so on. By defining the symbolic matrix in terms of signs available in a given environment, it also provides a model for exploring the dynamics of how mythologies are engaged and manipulated in encounters between representatives of different "religions". The present chapter concentrates on formal differences between types of signs constitutive of mythology and how these combine and vary, which provides a platform for exploring what happens when mythologies are manipulated, when they interact in contact situations, and when they develop in historical change.

Background

Beginning especially around 1990, the turn to mythic discourse took shape in research on mythology. This development aligned with contemporary shifts of attention toward people-centered meaning-making that was occurring in a number of fields of cultural research.

Rather than a unified movement or any single scholar acting as a driving force, the turn emerged independently among diverse researchers at a time when discourse was a trending term that provided a new lens through which to look at cultural phenomena.[1] A significant aspect of this development was that it shifted attention from "myths" as stories to how people referenced and engaged with these or their constituents. The seemingly endless variation in traditional narrative was described as "kaleidoscope-like" already by Theodor Benfey (1859: xxvi; also e.g. Anderson 1923: 406; Siikala 2012b: 19). The turn to mythic discourse shifted attention from variation in particular stories to the elements of mythology that were continuously rearranged within and across them, naturally extending to their broader networks of use (cf. Siikala 2002; Frog et al. 2012).

This trajectory of development was richly pursued in Finnish folklore studies. In Finland, folklore studies was originally defined through the Historical-Geographic or "Finnish" Method (HGM), an approach which was characterized by the formal reconstruction of folklore "texts" without interest in either meanings or the people who used them (e.g. Krohn 1926; Frog 2021c; Lindow, this volume). The HGM's whole text-centered paradigm was aggressively overthrown and stigmatized in the so-called performance-oriented turn (see Frog 2013a), which gained momentum across the 1970s.[2] Disciplines tend to be structured by national needs (Klein 2006). Folklore studies was elsewhere assimilated into other disciplines, dissolved or transformed in the expulsion of comparative research and any use of archival sources in a wave of "angry, intolerant housecleaning" (Dégh 1986: 80). In Finland, the rich and vast archival corpora of oral poetry collections were tied to the national epic *Kalevala* (Lönnrot 1835; 1849), and they were much more strongly linked to national heritage discourse than folklore in nations with a medieval literature or a rich archaeological record of a pre-Christian past. This helped buoy archival folklore research across those decades and also affected how the turn to performance took shape (Frog 2021c). Alongside fieldwork-based research, this led to the

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[1] E.g. O'Leary & McFarland 1989; Rowland 1990; Urban 1991; Siikala 1992; Goodman 1993; cf. the turn to meanings and uses of mythology in society in Old Norse studies: e.g. Clunies Ross 1994; McKinnell 1994; see also the introduction to this volume.

[2] Lauri Honko (1979) sees the performance-oriented turn already beginning in the 1950s, but the watershed came in the 1970s with transformative impacts on thinking about traditions and associated theoretical perspectives (see e.g. Bauman 1975; Ben Amos & Goldstein 1975; see also Lindow, this volume).

development of corpus-based research that would today be described as working with "big data", and that was kept in dialogue with detailed studies on individual cases.

The turn to mythic discourse was led by Anna-Leena Siikala. Rather than focusing on particular texts or a genre, her seminal study (1992; English trans. 2002) centered on a ritual specialist institution and explored the variety of genres, practices, and discourses surrounding it. She avoided the volatile topic of narrative plots and focused on images and motifs across especially incantations, mythological epics, and also the objects used and things done in ritual performances. This work established a new framework for studying elements of tradition and their patterns of use across genres (e.g. Tarkka 2005; rev. English trans. 2013; Ahola 2014). It also steered the direction of research on mythology to reconceive it in terms of knowledge (Tarkka 2005; 2013; Siikala 2012a; Stepanova 2014; see also Frog 2018: 31–32).

The approach outlined here has taken shape at the intersection of several interests and concerns. My doctoral dissertation research was a return to the old question of historical relationships between mythological narrative traditions – those of Baldr as the Scandinavian dying god and Lemminkäinen as a potential Finno-Karelian counterpart (2010). Surveying around 400 examples and fragments of the kalevalaic epic *The Song of Lemminkäinen* necessitated getting to grips with kaleidoscopic variation of the constitutive elements of the tradition. The data not only revealed numerous local variations of the epic but also unique adaptations, uses of the epic and elements associated with it in ritual incantations, and uses in non-ritual genres. The Old Norse material related to Baldr is completely different. For Old Norse mythology, this is quite rich, with long prose tellings by both Snorri Sturluson and Saxo Grammaticus, and in the sheer quantity of other source material, which includes everything from eddic and skaldic poetry to the iconography of Migration Period bracteates. However, most of these sources only refer to agents and events without narrating them. Rather than a coherent, linear plot, there appeared to be complementary cycles of events – one centering on preventing Baldr's death; the other presuming it was unavoidable. The events seemed less significant as stories than as a nexus linked to meaning-making in other contexts, such as the ring Draupnir returning to Óðinn's possession after accompanying Baldr on the pyre, Óðinn's unanswerable question in the wisdom contest with the giant Vafþrúðnir (i.e. concerning what he whispered to the deceased Baldr), and the anticipated return of Baldr at *ragna rǫk*. In the course of this

research, I became fascinated by what appeared to be intertextual engagements with mythology in the sagas and eddic and skaldic poetry, which also tended to be at the level of smaller units than whole plots, as were the units that came into focus in cross-cultural comparisons. The more I worked with the stratification of traditions (2011; 2013b) and the materiality of ritual (2009; 2014a), the clearer the significance of these smaller units became for analysis. My dissertation thus rapidly began to feel like four studies: studies of traditions of Lemminkäinen and Baldr, a study that compared them in long-term perspective, and the development of a unified framework that could manage the different sorts of sources and questions surrounding each of these.

From that point, things seemed only to become more complicated. New studies were revealing that mythology is bound up with practices and varies between them rather than forming a regular and homogeneous system, highlighting that, in many practices, mythology may never be told as "stories" (Il'ina & Uljašev 2012; Stepanova 2012; Frog 2013b). At the same time, I wrestled with the tendency to view non-modernized and religious "myths" as unique events told as stories whereas "myths" of modern secular societies are often abstract event-types that happen to lots of people (often synonymous with "beliefs"), like the American dream of rags-to-riches success, the supernatural healing properties of certain foods, or any number of motifs associated with UFOs (Frog 2014b). I sought to reconcile theories of mythology with what I observed in both non-modern and modern mythic discourse.

The developments in research across the 1990s (e.g. Foley 1991; 1995; Urban 1991) made it natural to approach the constitutive elements of mythology as socially recognizable signs, which aligned with semiotic approaches to mythology (see also the introduction to this volume). The potential for such signs to operate across media had already been integrated into the study of mythic discourse, as had the potential for the same traditional element to be a component of narration, ritual performance, or linked to taboos as an outcome to be avoided. The myriad ways in which elements could vary and replace one another within and across traditions had been a longstanding concern of folklore research, yet there was no framework for examining how these operated as a system. For example, the concept of *motif* (or *motive*) has a long history in the study of folklore and especially in

folktale research, and it became a key concept in the Classic HGM.[3] However, it was not as an analytical category; it emerged as a very flexible concept for more or less any constituent of traditional narratives that might be interesting for comparative research (e.g. Thompson 1932–1936; cf. Propp 1968 [1928]: 12–13; see further Ben Amos 2020: ch. 7; Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, this volume).

In the first tale type system, Johann Georg von Hahn had described motifs as *Märchenwörter* ('tale words') that form the equivalent of sentences, whereby he dubbed traditional plots *Formeln* ('formulae') (1864: 41–42). Nevertheless, this metaphor was never developed to consider formal differences between types of motifs and the syntagmatics of their combination (cf. Dundes 1962). The term *mythologem* was used already in the nineteenth century for an abstract mythological plot and underwent renewal through the work of K. Kerényi. Kerényi linked mythologem to Jungian theory as mythology's equivalent of archetypes, including agents, motifs, and systems of elements linked to agent types (1940a; 1940b; Jung & Kerényi 1951 [1941]). Although Kerényi occasionally distinguishes *mythologem* from *image* and *ceremony* (e.g. 1951 [1941]: 26), these were not defined in relation to one another and seem to converge, especially in subsequent research. What later became called *themes* in Oral-Formulaic Theory (OFT) were conceived like motifs in folklore; they were distinguished as tradition-specific rather than universal, but with little more specification (Lord 1960: 68–98; Foley 1990: 240–245, 279–284, 329–335; cf. Propp 1968 [1928]: 12–13). There were attempts to define *motif*, *theme*, and *type-scene* as complementary categories in OFT research (Fry 1968), but the interest was simply taxonomic and never advanced to a systemic model for their interaction (cf. Foley 1995). Siikala introduced the concept of *mythic image*, extended from the concept of *mental image*, linked to her work with cognitive approaches to shamanism and similar ritual practices. However, I suspect the new term mainly held an appeal of avoiding the baggage of *motif*. She occasionally pairs the terms *image* and *motif* or *image* and *theme*, but she was not concerned with formally distinguishing these and they tend to blur together (2002 [1992]).

Vladimir Propp had rejected the analysis of tales in terms of motifs and developed instead a morphology of Russian folktales in which the constituents of a tale fill *functions*

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[3] On the HGM, see further Frog 2013a; see also the introduction and Lindow, this volume.

within the syntagmatics of a plot (1958 [1928]). Although he distinguished between, for example, character types, and actions, he was not interested in these as signs but rather in their relations to the whole; thus Óðinn might be identified with the role of hero, villain, or magical helper depending on his particular actions and how they fit into a story. Claude Lévi-Strauss developed a structuralist approach to constitutive units of narrative myths that should be looked for "on the sentence level" (1955: 431). He examined these in terms of their arrangements and alternation as units that could be abstracted to a phrase or clause. He described the units as *mythemes* (1958: 233) in the same year that Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* was translated into English (1958). Alan Dundes coined the term *motifeme* for particular motifs that could fill a Proppian functional slot and *allomotif* for motifs capable of being exchanged within such a slot (1962: 101). However, mytheme, motifeme, and allomotif remained vague and inclusive categories insofar as they were not defined as formal units interacting with formal units of other types.

Approaches to narrative grammar in Russian research explored the syntagmatics of how elements are combined into (motif-like) units of narration, but without concern for whether or not the constituents were socially circulating signs (see Hoppál 2010a).[4] Consequently, the discussion seems not to have advanced to looking at the formal units of different types as forming a sort of lexicon recombinable through the grammar; research seems to have been advancing in that direction without fully reaching a critical mass of development.[5] Eleazar Meletinsky developed this into a new approach to motif indexing and analysis, illustrated through mythological narratives (1984). He conceived a motif as a predicate and its arguments, such as "the hero extracts the water" or "the gods name the water" (1984: 27), and uses *archimotif* to describe the different manifestations of a more abstract pattern, like "[agent] creates [object]".[6] However, Meletinsky's interest was in how such motifs could be reproduced with variations within a narrative, undergo inversion,

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[4] These approaches are complementary to Lévi-Straussian paradigms like structural oppositions that, in themselves, are non-narrative (e.g. Greimas 1987).

[5] E.g. Mihály Hoppál was working with the approaches to narrative grammar in the 1970s (manuscript published 2010) and he was approaching "Mythology as a System of Signs" in the same period (2010 [1976]), but never advanced these into a full model. Such a model might also have first been created in literature studies by integrating mythic formal analysis of units of different types in a model of narrative grammar with Bakhtin's approach to the meaningfulness of constituents in literary compositions (e.g. 1981).

[6] Meletinsky (1984: 23) presents *archimotif* as Claude Bremond's term without citation, but also presents *motifeme* as Claude Lévi-Strauss's term in the same sentence, so he seems to be citing from memory.

semantic transformations, and other variation. He was not interested in distinguishing types of signs and their use in combination *per se*.

Formal units of different types had become transparent in my work with variation. Kalevalaic epic in particular made the workings of units of different scope and complexity salient. On the one hand, agents could be traded in narrative roles by transposing the relevant formulae in the respective lines and passages. Thus, minor lexical choices are all that is needed to change the destination of Lemminkäinen's journey and make the host with whom he duels the demiurge Väinämöinen. On the other hand, narrative units of whatever scope tend to be expressed in continuous sequences of verse, and to be reorganized, omitted, or transposed as coherent sequences. In retrospect, I think that, at an early stage, I got the impression from Siikala's work that *image* and *motif* referred to different things. I made sense of that difference through the impression that images are static, such as agents like gods and inhabitants of the otherworld, whereas motifs are narrative and dynamic.

Approaching such units through the analogy of language was already present in von Hahn's *Märchenwörter* ('tale words'), and he also abstracted these, reducing them to verbal phrases in his description of tale types. My work with formulaic language invited approaching motifs on a spectrum of fixity, described as a degree of *crystallization*,[7] and as potentially having slots that must be completed in use. This allowed seeing a motif as a distinct, meaningful unit of tradition used in combination with different images, including referential use when a human hero completes an act otherwise identified with a god or a cosmogonic motif is ritually enacted by a living person (e.g. Frog 2014a; 2015). It was also necessary to consider units of larger scope of which images and motifs were constitutive (cf. Meletinsky 1984: 23). To describe them, I drew on the term *theme*, which had become well established in OFT, and occasionally distinguished from *motif* (e.g. Fry 1968). These larger units appear to operate at a higher order of syntagmatic relations, with still higher orders distinguishable above them (Frog 2015; 2017a). Once distinctions between types of units had come into focus, they became convenient working tools for both synchronic and diachronic analysis (e.g. Frog 2019a; 2019b), and working with them has led to refining them.

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[7] The concept of crystallization was developed by Anna-Leena Siikala, initially to describe how phraseology gets linked to the narration of semantically significant units of content in the minds of performers of prose traditions (1990 [1984]: 80–86). Its use has extended to relative fixity in any element of tradition, also at a social level. Crystallization is now a basic concept in Finnish Folklore Studies.

The turn to mythic discourse reconstructs ways of looking at mythology through its focus on constituent units and their combinations both with one another and with other things. This led to critically reassessing the modern term *myth* and deconstructing the background and problems of defining it as a type of "story" (Frog 2018; see also the introduction to this volume).[8] Related to this is the issue that stories identified as myths become seen as collectively belonging together, grouped according to their identification with a linguistic-cultural heritage or religion, with implications of some sort of coherence. Such thinking easily renders invisible internal diversity, which might, for example, involve competing cosmological models linked to different types of specialists' practices. It also inclines toward interpreting cross-culturally shared elements in terms of historical influence rather than synchronic networks. Today, deconstructing these ways of thinking has yet to liberate the term *myth* from people thinking through the word's historical usage, so I tend not to use the word in order to avoid misunderstanding.

In the present approach, *mythology* is distinguished in terms of a quality of signs rather than in terms of signs' formal properties. Following William Doty (2000: 55–58; see also Lotman & Uspenskii 1976), I approach in terms of emotional investment as true models for the empirical, social or unseen world capable of producing convictions, which may then be engaged from different perspectives (Frog 2015; 2018). The framework for formal analysis is not dependent on this quality and therefore equally applicable to other tradition-based narrative and non-narrative discourse. The approach is calibratable, so that the researcher can delimit what is or is not included in mythology as is practical and relevant to the particular investigation. For instance, mythology can be limited geographically, temporally, through linguistic-cultural heritage, religion, or transcultural network; it may be considered at the broadest level of ontology or restricted to mythology of cosmological

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[8] The presumption of narrative has been reinforced on several fronts. Historical traditions preserved only in written documents often present knowledge in a fuller and more accessible way to their audiences, with the aim of being accessible to people who are unfamiliar with that knowledge. This makes it easy to infer that other knowledge, to which only references are preserved in fragmentary sources, has been presented in a similar way elsewhere. Folklore collection often involved a corresponding situation in live interaction: the informant would be communicating knowledge to a collector who was unfamiliar with it, and then the dialogic dimension of the interaction, in which the collector would attempt to get as much information as possible, would be erased from the preserved product. These factors are complemented by researchers' inclination to reproduce and spotlight sources that reflect their ideals of the most complete and well-organized sources in both editions and discussion. However, knowledge tends to be communicated in a much less linear fashion in social interaction, where narration may be secondary to descriptions, evaluations, and argumentation (Laudun 2021), and where much knowledge will only be referred to rather than narrated when interlocutors are assumed to already be familiar with it (Lehtipuro 1992: 173–174).

scope. Calibrated to the broadest level of inclusion allows for potentially any cultural category to entail a mythic level of thinking. Basically, apprehending a categorical identity, like recognizing something as a horse, activates all sorts of non-reflective understandings about what that thing is and how it relates to, and can interact with, other things in the world. This can be considered a mythic level of thinking and knowing irrespective of whether that understanding is considered fantastic from the perspective of science-based epistemologies (Lotman & Uspenskii 1976).

The broadest level of ontological inclusion makes the framework compatible with a semiotic approach to worldview (e.g. Niiniluoto 1984). Worldview, however, is often construed as a holistic and more or less unified structure that is then calibrated in scope according to the individual, group, or broad socio-historical context with which it is identified. Thus, worldview can be approached as a broadly inclusive approach to mythology *as engaged from a generalized individual or collective perspective*, and vice versa. Approaching mythology through mythic discourse brings into focus diversity, variation, and interactions of different perspectives. Mythic signs engaged positively by people with different religious alignments do not operate in isolation – i.e. people can know about others' gods, stories, understandings of thunder, and so on, and simply interpret them differently. Although beyond the scope of the present chapter, such social perspectives can be considered as characterized by ideologies that distinguish and evaluate sets and systems of mythic signs as linked to, for example, different groups, religions, temporalities, and so on, much as people's language ideologies distinguish words and structures as belonging to different languages or ways of speaking connected to categories of people, places, and times (cf. Gal & Irvien 2019). Approaching mythology in terms of all socially accessible mythic signs and rules for their combination in a given environment is thus analogous to all of the lexical and grammatical resources in such an environment, even where this is multilingual. Within this approach, focusing on mythology linked to one religion or another calibrates the framework to a type of social position and its perspective characterized by a respective ideology for engaging with mythic signs, an ideology integrated in an associated worldview. In an Iron Age or medieval milieu, the implications of exclusivity may be more reflective of researchers' ideologies than those of people in the environment.

Integers and Equations

The signs constitutive of mythology are here addressed in terms of unitary *integers*. This choice of terminology underscores that each element must be perceivable as a distinguishable unit (of whatever sort) in order for it to be recognized and interpreted as meaningful (see also Foley 1995). There are all sorts of units, but these all qualify as integers of mythology when they are socially recognizable and thus capable of socially distinct meanings, associations and interpretations. An indicator that something is an integer is precisely the ability to talk about it as a unit. Within a cultural environment, the different mythic integers are internalized as part of exposure to, and participation in, social practices. Such mythic signs operate centrally at the level of signifiers and their networks of association that develop through patterns of use. They may remain ambiguous and their significance may be contested, but they must be perceived as unitary signifiers for that package of immanent meanings, associations, interpretations, and emotional weight to operate (see also Foley 1991; 1995).

Distinguishing formal types of signs enables the analysis of ways they may combine and interact, which is addressed in terms of equations. Presenting analysis through such equations is both a practical tool for analysis and also for explicating the methodology, but, for analysis, the method does not require using the system of representation through such equations any more than use of equations like "4×4=16" requires writing them out once the principles of basic mathematics have been grasped. In order to distinguish mythic signs from, for instance, language used to mediate them, they are presented in SMALL CAPITALS (e.g. *Þórr* as a name versus THOR as the image of the god). The presentation may be elaborate or concise, but the aim is to distinguish the integer of tradition, which involves abstracting it. Representation is streamlined by omitting articles like *a* and *the*. The number of syntagms – i.e. constituents – of an integer is an indicator of its complexity (Lamb 2022). A single syntagm may require several words to express, so a period links adjectives or adverbs expressing one such element, like SUPERNATURAL.AGENT, while a colon is used between prepositions and a noun or noun phase, like FROM:ODIN. This markup makes syntagms easier to count either manually or electronically. Additional features of markup will be introduced through the course of discussion as the different types of integers are introduced. The markup is fully presented here in order to illustrate it as a tool. Its complexity should be viewed in that light. In practice, such markup often remains in the background of studies or may be used in a simplified form.

Integers of Mythic Knowledge

In non-literate societies, mythology only maintains existence through social practices, without which it disappears. As a modelling system for understanding the world and interpreting experience, mythology is a system of representation. It might be compared to language, yet language is used to represent other things. In contrast, things are seen as representing or manifesting mythic signs, so that the sound of thunder gets interpreted as THUNDER, for instance as produced by a god; or a bear seen in the forest is interpreted as a BEAR, qualified by personhood, with the capacities to communicate non-verbally, to lust after human women, and to have children with them (Frog 2014a; Möllervärn 2021). Consequently, mythology can be described as "man's way of knowing the world" (Cassirer 1955–1957 [1923–1929] II: 3; also Doty 2000: 55–56) or "un mode de connaissance affective parallèle à notre mode de connaissance objective" ('an affective mode of knowing parallel to our objective mode of knowing') (Leenhardt 1971 [1947]: 306). Each integer thus equates to a unit of knowledge about that which it models.

This approach to mythology opens from the type of stories about gods, cosmogony, and eschatology commonly called "myths" to a much broader range of discourse. Within this broader range of discourse, legends appear significant as a lens for considering many of the saga sources. A legend is a short account about a specific encounter that is developed on a traditional motif or more complex integer of tradition that engages contestable beliefs about history or the supernatural. Although legends have historically been approached as "stories", many such accounts are non-linear and express evaluations and interpretations concerning a contestable integer of knowledge (i.e. the unit of tradition) linked to the specific encounter (Georges 1986: 95–96; Laudun 2021). From this perspective, much of saga literature is constituted of legend traditions of various sorts.

Although individual integers of mythology may be emblematic of a particular religion, religion formation or religiolect, they may also be interfaced with particular technologies or practices, such as iron-working, growing certain cereals, beer-brewing or securing a good catch of fish. As a consequence, they do not necessarily index or point to a religious or ethnic identity *per se*, but may instead be linked with the technology or with the power, authority, security, and benefits of individuals associated with the particular practices. Such mythic signs may therefore be communicated between individuals and groups with distinct

religious identities as non-religious knowledge exchange. Models for understanding, such as explanations for the rainbow or for the patterns seen on the moon, can similarly be communicated as non-religious knowledge exchange without necessarily being emblematic of religious or ethnic identity. Thus, Christian mythic discourse concerned with forms of "paganism" may provide evidence for signs emblematic of non-Christian religion, but there may have been a wide range of practices steeped in what we would today describe as mythology that remained largely or wholly invisible in those encounters (which is also potentially relevant when considering evidence of later practices).

Like language, it is possible to look at the operation of mythology as a system either abstractly or in situational practice, and it is equally possible to look at its constituent elements or the operation of the full system. Like words in language, integers of mythology can evolve formally and change their meanings. Although individual integers will have been subject to historical changes in a mythology as a system, they can also be exchanged individually across cultures and have distinct histories. When mythology is viewed as a variety of signification system, language can be used as a metaphor for considering formal types of mythic signs, their relationships to one another, and how they vary. A primary distinction is made here between minimal integers and complex integers that can be formed out of these. Minimal integers addressed are *image*, *motif*, *diagrammatic schema*, and *partial*; complex integers are *theme*, *narrative pattern*, and *plot*.

Mythic Image

An *image* is here considered a static integer corresponding to the grammatical category of a noun (cf. Siikala 2002: 43–70). Like a common noun, a mythic image may be quite general or basic, such as the types of supernatural beings TROLL or GIANT. This type of image is a categorical identity in relation to which specific instantiations are perceived and interpreted. The categorical identity may be quite broad, for example including all such agents of chaos, here generally identified DEVIL (using the term common from later folklore), or supernatural beings threatening to humans and/or societies, here identified MONSTER. An image may also be much more complex and specific, such as the Scandinavian world-tree image YGGDRASILS.ASKR ('ash (tree) of Yggdrasill'), which entails a number of complementary images of the mythic animals inhabiting it as well as images of the worlds that are linked by its

roots. This complex mythic image also equates to a proper noun – i.e. there is only one *Yggdrasils askr*.

The equivalent of a proper noun is here distinguished as a *centralized sign* or *integer* in contrast to a *decentralized sign* or *integer*, which provides a categorical identity that may have multiple instantiations like TROLL or GIANT. Certain categorical identities may nevertheless be exclusive within a cultural environment. For example, Baltic PERKŪNAS, East Sámi TIERMES, Scandinavian THOR, and Finno-Karelian UKKO each constitutes a centralized sign, but at the same time each also constitutes a categorical identity THUNDER (or THUNDER-GOD). This categorical identity becomes exclusively identified with a single image in each milieu, but the categorical identity can also be considered to have social reality insofar as the exclusive role correlates images of different gods across cultures. In other words, when legends about THUNDER have moved from one environment to another, a "translation" of THOR as UKKO in the adaptation of a story is not simply linguistic, but also mythic. The boundary between centralized and decentralized signs can, however, seem to blur. For instance, images of substances that are not countable, such as MILK or FIRE, allow the identity of MILK or FIRE to be interpreted as the same although the empirical substances are different in each instantiation.

The image is not the same as the noun. An image TROLL can be recognized through description rather than using a word like Old Norse *troll*, or there may be a variety of words that can be used more or less interchangeably to designate the same image, as in Estonian for the image DEVIL (cf. Valk 2012). Although centralized signs often have proper names, such as *Þórr* as the word for the image THOR, the name is still a word that signifies the mythic integer, which can be recognized independent of the name through description or in iconographic representation. Cultural images that might be considered mundane and empirical according to our own thinking may nevertheless qualify as mythic in a certain environment or for a certain group, like the image BEAR in many cultures. This is also true of the Scandinavian image FINNR,[9] which is characterized by magic and incorporating an image

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[9] *Finnr* is customarily translated 'Sámi' although it was also used to refer to other groups (Frog & Saarikivi 2015: 82, 94). However, Sámi-speaking groups were culturally diverse (Frog 2017) and additional languages may have still been spoken in the Viking Age at this time (on representations of *Finnar*, see Aalto 2014). Also in later folklore, various vernacular terms are commonly translated 'Sámi' today, yet the implication that these words correlate with speakers of a particular language is rooted in viewing the term as an ethnonym within the ideological framework of Romanticism. Within this framework, race, culture, and language were presumed to hold a one-to-one correlation with ethnic identity – an ideology underscored by using terms meaning

SEPARABLE.SOUL as a model of corporeality, which allows the person's conscious agency to travel, act, and observe independent of the visible body in conjunction with magic or ritual. In other words, the empirically grounded images are embedded with information as thinking models that shape perceived and narrated realities.

Partials and Semantic Center

The term *partial* is here used to designate elements and features that are constitutive of a mythic integer, through which it is recognized and/or that are assumed for it. Partials are, however, not necessarily exclusive to a particular image or motif. Within the linguistic metaphor, partials are a broad category including correspondents to adjectives and adverbs as well as attributes. For example, SUPERNATURAL.STRENGTH is a partial of both THOR and GIANT. The degree to which a partial is generally occurring or particularly associated with a single image or motif can be considered the degree to which it indexes (points to) that mythic integer. For example, SUPERNATURAL.STRENGTH is so widely occurring that it will not necessarily activate an association with any particular mythic image. In contrast, ONE-EYED is a partial that indexes ODIN in Scandinavia to a degree that it is emblematic of the god; it can activate his image as a frame of reference even when the god is not represented *per se* (cf. Frog 2015: 42–43; see also Ahola, this volume).

The activation of mythic images and motifs often happens through co-occurring partials that make their referent recognizable. In *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 15, for example, Grímarr is described as *mikill ok ililigr* ('big and mean'), *Hann bíta eigi járn* ('Iron does not cut him'), and collectively with his companions it is said *Þeir eta allir hrátt ok*

'people/folk' and 'race' interchangeably with 'nation' even where the population lacked political autonomy. Translating *Finnr* and more recent comparable terms as 'Sámi' underestimates the cultural and complexity of the environment of Lapland and that the words were historically used for a broad category of culture type in the North – i.e. Lapland as a geographical space defined negatively in terms areas characterized by fixed settlement societies linked to agricultural practices. Before the Romantic ideology worked its magic for example in Swedish, *lapp* was not opposed to an ethnic category *per se* but rather to *nybonde* as a social category linked to fixed settlement and agriculture-centered livelihoods (noting that the medieval and later folklore tends not to characterize people of Lapland as linguistically other; communication is normally fluent and free). It was a socio-economic distinction built into the taxation system. This does not mean that the term *lapp* (or *nybone*) was without connotations of culture or language (cf. Irvine & Gal 2000) and was not also be used as an ethnonym, but rather that *lapp* and similar terms were, first and foremost, negatively defined as 'other' rather than positively defined by a particular language and cultural traits, while individuals and families could move between these categories (transition from *lapp* to *nybonde* commonly resulting in linguistic and cultural assimilation). To better reflect the historical terms, I translate these as 'Laplander' in the sense of an inhabitant of Lapland (not to be confused with *Lapp*, which became treated as a modern ethnonym for Sámi, which today is considered to have derogatory and potentially racist connotations).

drekka blóð ('They all eat raw meat and drink blood'), which leads to the conclusion *Er þat sannkallat, at þeir sé heldr trǫll en menn* ('Truly they must be trolls rather than men'). In the terminology used here, the partials BIG, MEAN, IMPENETRABLE.BODY, FLESH-EATING, and BLOOD-DRINKING accumulate in the description and activate the image TROLL, which is clear by the time the term *trǫll* is used. In *Fóstrbræðra saga*, ch. 9, it is said of Þormóðr Bersason: *má vera, at þeim sýnisk trǫll standa fyrir dyrum, þar sem þú ert* ('it could be that it will seem to them that a troll stands there at the door where you are'), which implies that the image partials BIG and perhaps also MEAN-LOOKING characterize Þormóðr. Similarly, Grettir Ásmundarson is mistaken for a troll owing to his appearance in *Grettis saga*, ch. 38. Whereas the image of a troll is decentralized, centralized images may also be activated through partials, like ONE-EYED activating the image ODIN.

Complex images may also have distinct images as partials: the image YGGDRASILS.ASKR entails a number of images of creatures inhabiting it; the image THOR entails the image of his weapon MJǪLLNIR, which otherwise remains distinct. An image may also be characterized by association with particular motifs to a degree that this association reciprocally operates as a partial, such as THOR SLAYS GIANT becoming emblematic of THOR and thus evolving into a partial GIANT-SLAYER. Although images and motifs may be found across broad areas and even cross-culturally, they may vary locally, regionally, culturally or contextually in the particular constellation of partials that characterize them.

Jens Peter Schjødt uses the term *semantic center* to describe "a center around which the various utterances concerning a mythic figure or a certain ritual should be seen" (2013: 12).[10] Here, this concept can be approached through *centrality*. The centrality of a feature of an image or other integer of the mythology can be considered – at least in principle – calculable through the number of integers and expressions that are dependent on it or otherwise affirm it. In the case of images, the semantic center can also be approached in terms of the indexicality of the mythic sign that develops through the motifs, themes, and narrative patterns in which it is used. The semantic center of an image may correlate straightforwardly with partials, like SUPERNATURAL.STRENGTH and GIANT-SLAYER as parts of the semantic center of THOR (Schjødt 2009: 17, 20). Decentralized signs also have a semantic center, such as IMPENETRABLE.BODY of BERSERKR, although the interpretations of why or how a

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[10] Sophie Bønding does not use this term in her chapter in the present volume, but her discursive approach to gods offers a useful lens for considering the phenomenon.

berserkr's body cannot be cut or pierced varies, as discussed below. In other cases, the semantic center is at a nexus of motifs and themes that may be more challenging to pin down or at least to describe with a simple label, such as a center of ODIN at a nexus of his acquisitions of various types of mythic knowledge and its redistribution (Schjødt 2013: 12). The semantic center of an image may also be characterized by multiple features that may not be clearly unified. Thus, the center of ODIN also includes his agentive role in cosmogonic events, as a performer of rituals or magic and orchestrating the fates of human heroes. Although these can be approached as partials of ODIN, they are not as easily labelled as GIANT-SLAYER. Of course, the semantic center of an image may also change over time, thus, in post-medieval folklore, the image ODIN seems to have gradually lost its connection to cosmogonic events and orchestrating the fates of heroes, narrowing the center to magic and knowledge.

Mythic Motif

Whereas an image is static, a *motif* is dynamic; it can be considered a type of equation that incorporates a verb and involves change or situates two or more images in a relation. For example, THOR SLAYS GIANT is a conventional integer of Scandinavian mythology that situates the image THOR in relation to the image GIANT. As with images, motifs may be either centralized or decentralized. Just as a centralized image may participate in the image of a categorical identity, such as Scandinavian GEIRRØÐR as a centralized image of GIANT, centralized motifs may participate in the categorical identity of a decentralized motif, such as THOR SLAYS GIANT:

THOR	SLAYS	GEIRRØÐR	Centralized
THOR	SLAYS	HRUNGNIR	Centralized
THOR	SLAYS	MIÐGARÐSORMR	Centralized
THOR	SLAYS	GIANT~MONSTER	Decentralized

Motifs can exhibit the same issues of ambiguity between being centralized and decentralized, as in a motif like MILK EXTINGUISHES FIRE (Harva 1948: 99), as well as exclusivity and equivalence, like THOR SLAYS GIANT as the Scandinavian form of the motif THUNDER SLAYS DEVIL, common cross-culturally in the Circum-Baltic region (Uther 1997–1999: 763):

THOR	SLAYS	GIANT~MONSTER	Culture-specific
PERKŪNAS	SLAYS	DEVIL	Culture-specific
TIERMES	SLAYS	DEVIL	Culture-specific
UKKO	SLAYS	DEVIL	Culture-specific
THUNDER	SLAYS	DEVIL	Cross-cultural

Motifs may also be transposed across contexts, leading to families of interrelated motifs. Thus, THOR SLAYS GIANT~MONSTER is connected to the decentralized motif HERO SLAYS DEVIL~MONSTER. The main difference is that the former is linked to events of cosmological scope whereas the latter concerns events limited to the human world, which, in Scandinavian mythology, makes the former a dominant referent for the latter (Frog 2022). Within the human sphere, usage of HERO SLAYS DEVIL~MONSTER in mytho-heroic contexts and *Íslendinga sögur* may also remain distinct in their significance and conventions of use.

Evidence of incantations invoking Þórr suggests that healing rituals may have symbolically correlated the healer with the thunder god and the agent of illness or harm with his adversaries that threatened individuals or social order (Hall 2009; Frog 2013b: 66–67; 2021b). This type of symbolic correlation structured Finno-Karelian healing rituals (Haavio 1967: 340; Siikala 2002: 100–104), in practices that appear to have been adapted from Scandinavian models (Frog 2013b; 2019a; see also Siikala 2002). Together, the ritual motif and its correspondents associated with different eras of the world form a *motif family*:

THOR	FIGHTS	GIANT~MONSTER	Cosmological/cosmogonic past
HERO	FIGHTS	DEVIL	Mytho-heroic past
HERO	FIGHTS	DEVIL	Historical past
HEALER	FIGHTS	ILLNESS.AGENT	Ritual enactment

Within a synchronic context, variable motifs operate like equations with open slots completed by images as slot-fillers. The conventional interpretations and significance that develop according to motifs' patterns of use also confer meaning and significance on the slot-filling images. For instance, the motif THOR SLAYS GIANT~MONSTER shapes understandings of Þórr as an agent in the world while any encounter recognized as an instantiation of the motif characterizes the agent slain as an adversary of the divine (and, by extension, human) community or social order. The motif then informs the roles and significance of individual agents filling rolls of HERO and DEVIL or HEALER and ILLNESS.AGENT and shapes how they are evaluated. The motif also informs the relationship between them and the significance of the

particular event. Just as Þórr's individual battles with giants participate in constructing the significance of the decentralized motif THOR SLAYS GIANT, the decentralized motifs linked to particular contexts of use also participate in constructing the significance of the broader decentralized motif.

Recognizing a mythic motif produces a frame of interpretation that may then carry additional information. Numerous examples of the motif SUPERNATURAL.AGENT COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM are found in the sagas, for instance:

DEAD	COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM
TROLL	COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM
GIANT	COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM
WITCH	COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM
VIRGIN MARY	COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM
ÞÓRR	COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM

The motif SUPERNATURAL.AGENT COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM is learned or analytically identified and abstracted through such individual instantiations. When it is recognized, a variation KINSMAN COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM correlates the kinsman with the categorical identity SUPERNATURAL.AGENT, which yields the interpretations KINSMAN=DEAD or KINSMAN=WITCH, whether this is recognized by the dreamer or subsequently revealed in the narrative. The conventional correlation of images within a particular motif or a set of such motifs implies some type of categorical equivalence, as the various instantiations of SUPERNATURAL.AGENT COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM lead to an abstracted image category SUPERNATURAL.AGENT. A category of slot-fillers is not always easy to translate into a simple label as in an open-slot motif like X INHABITS CAVE:

GIANT	INHABITS CAVE
TROLL	INHABITS CAVE
MONSTER	INHABITS CAVE
OUTLAW	INHABITS CAVE

The slot of the motif is encoded with information about the kinds of images appropriate to completing it, implying that the image OUTLAW is similar or equivalent to the images GIANT and TROLL (which converge in sagas). Joonas Ahola (2014: 341–350) has shown that the image OUTLAW is commonly used in motifs conventionally associated with supernatural

agents, and such use reciprocally constructs the image OUTLAW. Outlaws are not themselves supernatural, yet they may fill the same roles in saga narratives, with the consequence that HERO SLAYS OUTLAW may appear as a variation of HERO SLAYS DEVIL.

Transpositions of images in centralized motifs also occur, resulting in competing models, such as:

ODIN	TRANSFORMS ÞJAZI'S.EYES INTO:STARS	(*Skáldskaparmál* G56)
THOR	TRANSFORMS ÞJAZI'S.EYES INTO:STARS	(*Hárbarðsljóð* 19)
[GOD]	TRANSFORMS ÞJAZI'S.EYES INTO:STARS	(Bragi Frag 2[III])[11]

When challenging the idea of an Old Norse "pantheon",[12] Terry Gunnell suggests that gods may have replaced one another as actors in different mythic events (2015: 65), which would correlate here with the alternation of the images of different gods in the respective motif, theme or narrative pattern (not to mention the possibility that there may have been competing models for events like the creation of the world). As noted above, such transpositions are found in Finno-Karelian kalevalaic mythology, where they can produce local and regional variations in the mythology's varying configurations. However, gods do not supersede one another's roles in free variation. Exceptional variations are found, that are in some cases idiosyncratic and in others reflect mis-remembering, but the transposition of agents is generally fairly limited. This is connected to the semantic center of the agents' images, much as it seems improbable that ODIN would ever replace THOR in the latter's visit to the giant Geirrøðr, or that THOR would ever replace ODIN in the acquisition of the Mead of Poetry. There might also be additional constraints that reduce the likelihood of certain gods in active roles in a single event, as discussed below.

Diagrammatic Schemata

Whereas a motif is a dynamic minimal integer that relates images or entails change, images may also be in a static relation that is both meaningful and potentially shapes meanings and

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[11] The fragment has *hinn* ('that one'), referring back to the god performing the action. Snorri's identification of this act with Óðinn in *Skáldskaparmál*'s prose may suggest that he interpreted *hinn* as referring to Óðinn. However, it is also possible that Bragi used *hinn* to refer to Þórr but Snorri knew the account in another version that he preferred. Conversely, there is nothing in the verses in *Hárbarðsljóð* that indicates who performed the action, so the possibility cannot be excluded that the boast was accidentally identified with the wrong speaker when the poem was recorded (cf. Frog 2021a).

[12] Gunnell's proposal or at least his framing of it has been controversial and prompted a lively discussion, as seen in the contribution of Schjødt in this volume.

interpretations of the images that it organizes. This type of integer is here described as a *diagrammatic schema* of relationality – or simply a *schema* for short. The schema functions iconically. It may involve deictic spatial relationships, such as ABOVE/BELOW, LEFT/CENTER/RIGHT or BEFORE/BEHIND. Simple schemata are indicated by the relevant images separated by slashes followed by an equals sign and their schematic relations in the respective positions, such as:

ÁSGARÐR/GIANTLANDS=CENTER/PERIPHERY

YGGDRASILL'S.ASH/MÍMIR'S.WELL=ABOVE/BELOW

The meaningfulness of place and relationships between places may manifest in the cosmology through these schemata. Such schemata may also be temporal, such as BEFORE/AFTER. Temporal schemata normally hinge on events, but representation as a schematic relation may be a relevant to particular analytical concerns or, for instance, to emphasize certain features emblematic of periods in mythic time, such as Baldr's return from Hel's realm after *ragna rǫk*.

RAGNA.RǪK/BALDR'S.RETURN=BEFORE/AFTER.

Social relationships also operate as schemata of relations. These may be asymmetrical, like FATHER/SON, LORD/LIEGEMAN or POET/PATRON, extending into relations such as LORD/LAND or OWNER/HORSE. Such schemata carry information about both images and creates a frame of reference for their interaction, like:

ODIN/THOR=FATHER/SON

Relations may also be symmetrical, like BROTHER/BROTHER, FRIEND/FRIEND or ENEMY/ENEMY. However, the symmetry of a particular schematic social relation does not mean the two images are in a symmetrical relation of power or authority:

THUNDER/DEVIL=ENEMY/ENEMY

Diagrammatic schemata and their significance are not independently significant any more than images. THOR is characterized as ENEMY relative to GIANT~MONSTER through motifs like THOR SLAYS GIANT~MONSTER that reciprocally characterize THOR through partials like MONSTER-SLAYER. Nevertheless, a schema is constructed through its manifestations and their contexts, which shape the schema's significance and evolution over time. Although ODIN/THOR=FATHER/SON is a schema of the mythology, the schema FATHER/SON is widely manifested in society to the degree that it appears to provide a frame of reference for interpreting encounters and interactions between ODIN and THOR rather than their relationship significantly shaping the FATHER/SON schema, for which their relationship does not seem to be viewed as an exemplar.

Diagrammatic schemata may be more complex than simply binaries, like the schema manifested in certain ritual contexts of HEALER/PATIENT/ILLNESS.AGENT/HEALING.EVENT. More complex integers become cumbersome to refer to through as an equation or the equation may make a familiar schema difficult to recognize, so it may be preferable to refer to it by a label in italic font. For instance, the *Three Gods* schema is widely familiar, whereas the equation GOD$_1$/GOD$_2$/GOD$_3$ may seem cumbersome and difficult to recognize. The *Three Gods* schema is illustrative of the interrelations of a schema and images that complete its slots on the one hand and the potential for a formally equivalent schema to have multiple, distinct manifestations.

In contexts of worship and descriptions of temples, like that of Adam of Bremen (*Gesta Hammaburgensis*, ch. IV.26), the schema GOD$_1$/GOD$_2$/GOD$_3$=ODIN/THOR/FREYR seems to appear in various contexts (see also Schjødt 2012). This *Three Gods* schema is often viewed through the Dumézilian tripartite model, which is based on comparative research of Indo-European mythologies. Dumézil built on Emile Durkheim's view that religion's "primary object is not to give men a representation of the physical world," but that instead "individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members and the obscure but intimate relations which they have with it" (1915 [1912]: 225). Accepting that mythology is a projection of a society and relationships within it and also that mythology is transmitted in conjunction with language, Dumézil interpreted structures identified through comparative mythology as evidence for structures in the society of speakers of Proto-Indo-European language. Observing a pattern of three central gods in the religions of Indo-European peoples, he reconstructed a GOD$_1$/GOD$_2$/GOD$_3$ schema in which each god was

characterized by certain functions in religious life – a sort of distribution of labour – and also correlated with one of three classes in society (e.g. Dumézil 1988 [1948]: cf. also Lyle 2012; Schjødt 2012). If the tripartite model is accepted for Proto-Indo-European, such a schema would reciprocally construct the images of the gods filling its respective slots.

An issue with the Dumézilian model has been the inclination to simply take the GOD₁/GOD₂/GOD₃ schema reconstructed for Proto-Indo-European and apply it directly as a framework for viewing traditions recorded thousands of years later, even though the gods filling the slots may have been exchanged over time. As long as the schema was an operative integer of the mythology (which should not simply be assumed for all Indo-European cultures), it must have maintained consistency as a schema even when images of different gods replaced one another. Like the FATHER/SON schema, the *Three Gods* schema would shape the significance of the images filling its slots, but the gods filling those slots can also reciprocally impact the schema. For example, the position of the Proto-Indo-European sky god DYÉUS seems to be filled by ODIN, but formal continuities in a *Three Gods* schema would not prevent the significance of its slots and their relations from evolving. As highlighted above, images are constructed through the motifs with which they are associated. Identifying ODIN with a position in the North Germanic *Three Gods* schema seems not to have simply involved identifying him as one of three gods but also characterized him through partials and motifs associated with that position, like the partial PATRIARCH and facing Fenrisúlfr at *ragna rǫk*, although the latter is otherwise linked to Týr (see Frog 2019a: 268–271).

A *Three Gods* schema is also found in cosmogonic contexts. Where GOD₁/GOD₂/GOD₃=ODIN/HŒNIR/LOKI~LOÐURR, the schema is associated with the motif THREE.GODS WANDER WORLD, which sets the stage for an event in cosmogonic time.[13] A parallel schema GOD₁/GOD₂/GOD₃=ODIN/VILI/VÉ also seems to have had an established position linked to cosmogonic time. The parallel cosmogonic schemata raise the question of whether they are historically related, whether the three gods were "updated" in one type of usage while the earlier three gods were preserved in another, or they reflect reproductions of the general *Three Gods* schema in different connections at different times, yielding one of three gods who have adventures together and another as a prime generation of three brothers.

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[13] On this motif in the cycle of Sigurðr *Fáfnisbani*, see Frog 2022; on this schema in incantations, see Mitchell in this volume.

Some schemata may be challenging to represent as simple text. For example, the *Three Sons in the Third Generation* schema is an integer of cosmogonic mythology found in Tacitus's account of the origin of the three central Germanic tribes, in the origin of Óðinn and his brothers Vili and Vé, and in the origin of Gotland and its social order in *Guta saga* (Olrik 1907; Schütte 1907: esp. 124–136; Frog 2022). Presenting this schema visually is most effective as a tree-like genealogy:

$$\begin{array}{c} \text{PROGENITOR} \\ | \\ \text{FATHER} \\ \end{array}$$

$$\text{SON}_1 \qquad \text{SON}_2 \qquad \text{SON}_3$$
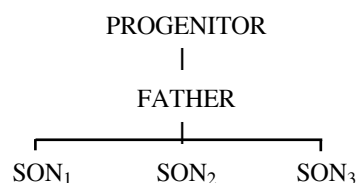
Other schemata may be so complex that they defy easy representation, such as of the situation of YGGDRASILL'S.ASH with the constituent images that form its partials along with its relations to realms, locations, and additional images in the cosmology. Coding schemata as equations is most effective where these are simple, such as ODIN/THOR=FATHER/SON.

Themes

Regular constellations of images and motifs and/or equivalent sets of these form distinct integers that can be called *themes*. Themes are here formally distinguished from motifs in terms of their complexity and potential to embed, repeat, and vary motifs that may also occur independent of the theme. For example, the motif SUPERNATURAL.AGENT COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM often appears in sagas as part of a more complex and predictable sequence in which the communication is a request or a warning. These variations tend to form a three- or four-part sequence, varying by both whether the visit is motivated by something disturbs or harms the supernatural agent and whether the dreamer complies with the communication or ignores it. If the dreamer complies, the predictable outcome is some benefit while ignoring the communication predicts that the dreamer will suffer. The juxtaposition of these signs customarily implies a syntactic relation. In the markup, a right arrow indicates that a motif follows from the preceding motif as part of a conventional sequence; a left arrow indicates that an element is presented out of order and parentheses indicates that it may be omitted – in this case the agent's motivation for the request or

warning may be explained in the dream. Alternative sequences are indicated by "IF … THEN …". Although some simple themes can be presented as continuous text, their constituents can be easier to keep track of and also to count for considering complexity when they are presented on separate lines. The following theme is here labelled the *Dream Communication* theme ("s.a" abbreviates SUPERNATURAL.AGENT):

> S.A COMMUNICATES REQUEST~WARNING IN:DREAM
> (← X DISTURBS~HARMS S.A)
> IF → DREAMER COMPLIES WITH:REQUEST~WARNING
>   THEN → DREAMER BENEFITS
> IF → DREAMER IGNORES   REQUEST~WARNING
>   THEN → DREAMER SUFFERS

In practice, a formal distinction between a motif and a theme constituted of multiple motifs is not always clear. This is both because motifs may crystallize into larger, complex integers without their constituents being used independently, and also because themes may, in individual variations, collapse into use of only a single motif, whether other elements are implicit or simply omitted. In a large corpus of examples, distinctions between types and subtypes of themes may be at a nuanced level of detail because a larger number of examples enables a more grounded assessment of regular features and which variations are socially established, and whether these are local, linked to a centralized event or event sub-type, or linked to particular meanings or connotations. Post-medieval legend types are often easily analyzable in terms of a series or system of motifs, which, in a type index like Bengt af Klintberg's thorough *Types of the Swedish Folk Legend* (2010), tend to appear as simple plots. The quantity of material allows distinctions between numerous types that are closely related. For example, sections of the index on encounters with nature spirits present multiple types distinguished by particular details, such as whether the spirit is given food or snuff, and whether it is a forest spirit or water spirit (af Klintberg 2010: 100, types E12–13, 113–114, types F11–12). Such legends can be approached on a *scale of specification*. When viewed at a higher degree of abstraction, many examples concern supernatural inhabitants of the landscape, such as nature spirits or trolls, and follow the pattern:

> PERSON ENCOUNTERS SUPERNATURAL.AGENT
>   → SUPERNATURAL.AGENT IS.PLEASED

   → SUPERNATURAL.AGENT REWARDS PERSON

A major division occurs based on the types of agents: nature spirits with control over resources are linked to one set of encounter types while trolls are linked to another. Many encounters with nature spirits are organized by the following theme, with motifs letter-coded for easy reference:

   A.   MAN ENCOUNTERS NATURE.SPIRIT
   B1. (→ NATURE.SPIRIT MAKES REQUEST)
   B2. (→ NATURE.SPIRIT COMPLAINS OF:DIFFICULTY)
   C.   → MAN DOES~GIVES SOMETHING WHICH:PLEASES NATURE.SPIRIT
   D.   → NATURE.SPIRIT REWARDS MAN WITH:GAME~CATCH

This abstract theme can be seen as an equation that has evolved multiple conventional forms linked to two factors of specification. The most significant factor is contextual, which normally follows the pattern:

IF LOCATION=FOREST   THEN NATURE.SPIRIT=FOREST.SPIRIT
                            REWARD=GAME
IF LOCATION=WATER   THEN NATURE.SPIRIT=WATER.SPIRIT
                            REWARD=CATCH~FISHING.LUCK

When the location is not linked to water, the following variation is also possible:

                           NATURE.SPIRIT=MOUNTAIN.SPIRIT
                           REWARD=ORE.DEPOSIT

Within the themes, the most variable of the motifs is B, which is the determinant of C – i.e. if the spirit asks for snuff, it is given snuff; if it asks for food, it is given food; if the spirit complains of a splinter, the splinter is removed, etc. A structural relation operates in the specification of REQUEST → RESPONSE or PROBLEM → SOLUTION or the absence of B, in which case C is a spontaneous act. The contextual factor of the location is also a determinant on B, with certain requests or problems possible for any type of nature spirit while others, like getting caught in a fishing net, are not.

     On the scale of specification, some traditional themes appear as variations based on elaboration. For example, the basic theme DEVIL FLEES THUNDER → THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL may

involve specification according to the form taken by the DEVIL, like AS:BALL.OF.YARN, which forms a distinct Swedish legend type (af Klintberg 2010: 197, type K172). This theme also exhibits a conventional elaboration (af Klintberg 2010: 197, type K173):

> DEVIL AS:BALL.OF.YARN FLEES THUNDER
> → DEVIL HIDES IN:WOMAN'S.SKIRTS
> → WOMAN SHAKES.OUT DEVIL
> → THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL

Recognizing a scale of specification in themes and families of themes is important for understanding how specific themes that are similar relate to one another and also to variations that are only found once, for instance with a unique REQUEST → RESPONSE sequence. When considering medieval traditions, it is important to acknowledge that source material may be too thin to distinguish types according to, for instance, conventional REQUEST → RESPONSE sequences. As a consequence, traditional integers identified in the corpus could end up at a higher level of abstraction.

Immanent Integers, Implicit Integers, Partials, and Indexicality

Alongside motifs that are narrated or performed, there are also motifs that *could* happen under certain conditions, such as if a taboo is violated, which are called *immanent motifs*. In later folklore, for example, the motif THUNDER SLAYS DEVIL has centrality within the mythology. This means it is a model that is presupposed as an operating principle behind numerous additional mythic models, such as the motifs DEVIL FLEES THUNDER and DEVIL HIDES FROM:THUNDER, which are widely found at the core of legends. In narration, these are often presented sequentially, like DEVIL FLEES THUNDER → THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL. However, fleeing or hiding are implicitly understood as motivated by the immanent motif THUNDER SLAYS DEVIL,[14] which can be described more simply as THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL, using curly brackets to indicate that the motif is immanent:

> {THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL}
> → DEVIL FLEES THUNDER

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[14] Within Christianized settings, the plurality of agents of chaos survived and blurred with the dualist Christian conflict between God and the Devil. This led to the characterization of "the Devil" in some contexts as stupid and not malevolent while in others he could be killed by Thunder or God.

Immanent motifs are often implicit and assumed or inferred. Implicit motifs can be indicated in square brackets; a left arrow is used because the immanent motif is inferred from the motif DEVIL FLEES THUNDER rather than inferred prior to it:

> DEVIL FLEES THUNDER
> [← {THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL}]

It might seem circular that devils run because Thunder may strike them and that running devils then get struck by Thunder, but it reflects the centrality of the motif and how that motif indexes themes of which it is a constituent.

Implicit motifs are common in connection with taboos or associated behaviours, for example intended to avoid being struck by lightning. These operate as IF… THEN… equations: *if* certain things are done, *then* an immanent motif is actualized as a consequence. In its complexity, even a simple equation of this type constitutes a theme, which in later folklore will also often be found in accounts of what happens to violators. However, it is necessary to bear in mind that interpretations change faster than motifs. Immanent motifs are not an exception, and taboos can be maintained as an avoidance of something without clear ideas of why it should be avoided. For instance, many taboos linked to thunder are to avoid having a devil hide in one's proximity or being mistaken for a fleeing devil (e.g. Valk 2012: 52–56). The prohibition in Finland and Karelia against laughing when it thunders, also for children, seems natural to interpret in connection with legends about mocking thunder (Jauhiainen 1998: 222, types F301–304), built on the theme:

> PERSON MOCKS THUNDER
> → THUNDER STRIKES MOCKER

Although a historical connection may seem likely, many if not most people probably did not reflect on such connections in terms of causation, and simply accepted it (Converse 1964). Immanent motifs become meaningful frames of reference in relation to other factors. Thus {THUNDER STRIKES DEVIL} only operates as an immanent motif in relation to the presence of THUNDER or other potential for the god to strike. It was observed above that a motif like THOR SLAYS GIANT~MONSTER can become a partial MONSTER-SLAYER of THOR. This partial is an immanent

motif that becomes meaningful when the image THOR is present along with one or more images that could fill the slot MONSTER. The same can happen with decentralized images like CAVE. Association with the motif X INHABITS CAVE leads this to become an immanent motif and thus GIANT- or OUTLAW-INHABITED becomes an immanent partial of the respective image CAVE, just as CAVE-DWELLER may be a partial of GIANT or OUTLAW.

The information encoded in motifs may concern implicit outcomes, which becomes important, for instance, in interpretations of descriptions of ritual performances. Motifs enacted as the performance of ritual behaviour are often only formally described. The definition of motif here corresponds to a *rite* as "the minimum significant unit of ritual behaviour" (Rydving 2010: 37), like SPECIALIST COVERS SELF or SPECIALIST CLOSES SELF ~ IS.ENCLOSED IN:ROOM, which is associated with what seem to be deep-trance rituals in Old Norse sources (Tolley 2009 I: 260). This motif repeatedly occurs with the appearance of an animal or monster during a battle, and in some cases the animal is wounded and the performer later appears with the same wound or dies (Boberg 1966: types D100–190, D615.4, D659.2; Ellis Davidson 1973: 29–30; cf. Jauhiainen 1998: type D031; af Klintberg 2010: Q21A, Q21B, Q23A, Q24, Q25A, Q25B, Q63). In other cases, the performer explicitly describes having visited remote locations or travelled in the form of an animal (Frog 2021b; see also Boberg 1966: types D615.4, D659.2; Jauhiainen 1998: types D271, D911, D926, D956, etc.; af Klintberg 2010: type M42; also Vajda 1959: 471–473; Ellis Davidson 1973; Tolley 2009 I: ch. 4 and pp. 469–470). The motif of covering or concealment occurs in multiple contexts, but those multiple contexts reciprocally encode the motif with information about what is customarily happening in such performances:

> SPECIALIST CONCEALS SELF
>   ← SPECIALIST TRAVELS {INDEPENDENT OF:BODY} AS:ANIMAL
>   OR → ANIMAL ACTS ON:BEHALF.OF:SPECIALIST

A corresponding pattern is commonplace in later legends of Laplander sorcerers:

> LAPLANDER LIES IN:DEATH-LIKE STATE [→ SOUL LEAVES BODY]

In later legends, this motif is particularly associated with Laplanders but not with Scandinavians, Finns, or Karelians (Christiansen 1958: type 3080; Jauhiainen 1998: types

<mark>D1031–1040; af Klintberg 2010: types M151–160</mark>). Analysis of the motif can then be used to extract information built into it, revealing SEPARABLE.SOUL as an implicit partial of the image LAPLANDER (Frog 2021b). Generally speaking, images do not form and have meaning in themselves; motifs and themes seem to be fundamental in constructing them as socially recognized and shaping their meanings, indexicality, and evaluation.

Narrative Patterns and Plots

Old Norse narrative patterns have been extensively discussed under various terms (e.g. Harris 1972; Power 1984; McKinnell 1994), though this has generally been done on the foundations of other paradigms developed within folklore studies without the technical distinctions between narrative pattern, theme, and motif applied here. *Narrative pattern* here designates a more complex traditional integer which may also include themes or equivalent sets of these. Motif, theme, and narrative pattern are distinguished from one another in a structural hierarchy. That hierarchy advances to additional levels – i.e. integers that incorporate narrative patterns forming a coherent sequence, as in a complex epic of multiple adventures – but the higher levels are distinguished relative to one another and these are all referred to with the term *narrative pattern* rather than being terminologically distinguished.[15] The formal distinction between a theme and narrative pattern is most salient when themes repeat or themes that are clearly recognizable from other contexts are used in combination. The *Dream Communication* theme outlined above is found repeating in cycles in two sagas. In *Þorvalds þáttr viðfǫrla*, ch. 2, a local land spirit (referred to as a *spámaðr*) is gradually exercised from the landscape by Þorvaldr, who performs Christian rites and sprinkles the land spirit's stone with holy water each day. The land spirit visits the landowner in a cycle of three dreams with the recurring theme:

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[15] The higher levels of complexity can be distinguished relative to one another in individual cases and perhaps local traditions. However, variation in a larger corpus shows that intermediate levels can collapse while retaining relative differences between the highest level and the level of themes. Such variation breaks down the usefulness of terminological distinctions between different higher levels because particular examples may present the narrative pattern in focus as at different levels above the theme, which would result in labelling the same integer of tradition as belonging to different formal categories. Motifs and themes can also be elaborated and a theme may be collapsed into an emblematic motif, but such variation is mainly in individual examples while they retain distinguishability as traditional units with a certain level of complexity. Higher levels of complexity seem to become much more fluid, which might be described as a hierarchy of *1st, 2nd, nth* -level complexity.

HOLY.WATER DISTURBS LAND.SPIRIT
→ LAND.SPIRIT COMMUNICATES REQUEST IN:DREAM
→ DREAMER IGNORES REQUEST
→ DREAMER BENEFITS

In this case, the *Dream Communication* theme has been taken up in conversion discourse as reflecting conflicts between Christianity and paganism. The conventional outcome of the theme is inverted. The traditional integer has been manipulated in connection with the conversion discourse so that the dreamer benefits rather than suffers harm when ignoring the supernatural agent's request.

In *Þorvalds þáttr*, the narrative pattern is presented in a manner common for legends, as a rapid and unbroken series. In *Flóamanna saga*, ch. 20–21, Þórr is troubled that Þorgils *ǫrrabeinsstjúpr* has converted to Christianity and visits Þorgils in a series of five dreams. The narrative pattern becomes a framework that links a series of events in an extended stretch of narration through its recurrent theme. It may be noted that that the tension established in the first dream and the motif CONVERSION DISTURBS ÞÓRR need not be explicit in the theme's subsequent uses:

(CONVERSION DISTURBS ÞÓRR)
→ ÞÓRR COMMUNICATES REQUEST~WARNING IN:DREAM
→ DREAMER IGNORES REQUEST~WARNING
→ DREAMER SUFFERS(?)

Here, the *Dream Communication* theme has been taken up in conversion discourse as reflecting conflicts between Christianity and alignment with Þórr as iconic of paganism. The case is interesting because of the ambivalence of the outcomes of the encounters: Þorgils suffers especially in connection with seafaring yet he is not destroyed by Þórr, and he is eventually freed from the troubles as a Christian. That there are two examples of cycles of dreams and that both concern supernatural agents troubled by Christianization suggests that this was a socially circulating narrative pattern connected with Christianization discourse.

The repetition of a theme creates a type of macro-parallelism (Urban 1986), an organizing principle that is widely found as a narrative strategy. In these cases, the basic theme is directly repeated. In other cases, it may be varied, for instance by a single motif or

by a pair of motifs in a structural sequence like PROBLEM→SOLUTION in a series of challenges or a series of obstacles met on a journey; functionally-equivalent themes may also be used in series (e.g. a protagonist faces three challenges, each a unique theme).

Distinguishing between a theme and a narrative pattern is often ambiguous where sources are limited. This can be illustrated by the escape from a giant's home by flight of both Loki and Óðinn in the Rape of Iðunn and the origin of the Mead of Poetry, according to *Snorra Edda*. In the Rape of Iðunn, Loki has created the situation and borrows Freyja's *valshamr* ('falcon-form') to seek Iðunn in Giantlands:

> Ok er hann fær valshaminn flýgr hann norðr í Jǫtunheima ok kemr einn dag til Þjaza jǫtuns. Var hann róinn á sæ, en Iðunn var ein heima. Brá Loki henni í hnotar líki ok hafði í klóm sér ok flýgr sem mest. En er Þjazi kom heim ok saknar Iðunnar, tekr hann arnarhaminn ok flýgr eptir Loka ok dró arnsúg í flugnum. En er Æsirnir sá er valrinn flaug með hnotina ok hvar ǫrninn flaug, þá gengu þeir út undir Ásgarð ok báru þannig byrðar af lokarspánum, ok þá er valrinn flaug inn of borgina, lét hann fallask niðr við borgarvegginn. Þá slógu Æsirnir eldi í lokarspánu en ǫrninn mátti eigi stǫðva er hann misti valsins. Laust þá eldinum í fiðri arnarins ok tók þá af fluginn. Þá váru Æsirnir nær ok drápu Þjaza jǫtun fyrir innan Ásgrindr ok er þat víg allfrægt.
>
> *Skáldskaparmál* G56

> And when he got the falcon-form (*valshamr*), he flew north into Giantlands and came one day to the giant Þjazi. He was rowing on the sea, and Iðunn was at home alone. Loki made her into the likeness of a nut and had held her in his claws and flew as well as he could. And when Þjazi came home and looked for Iðunn, he took an eagle-form (*arnarhamr*) and flew after Loki with a rushing sound of flight. And when the gods saw that the falcon flew with the nut and where the eagle flew, then they went out below Ásgarðr and brought loads of wood shavings there, and then when the falcon flew into the fortress, they had him drop down at the fortress's wall. Then the gods set fire to the wood shavings and the eagle was not able to stop when he failed to catch the falcon. Then the eagle's feathers caught fire and ended his flight. Then the gods were close by and slew the giant Þjazi inside [the gate] Ásgrindr and this victory is widely spoken of.

In the origin of the Mead of Poetry, Óðinn, calling himself Bǫlverkr, has gotten into the sealed location where the giant Suttungr's daughter Gunnlǫð is keeping the Mead of Poetry in three named containers. Just as the Rape of Iðunn is a complex narrative culminating in Loki recovering her, the origin of the Mead of Poetry is a complex narrative in which the mead comes into Suttungr's possession, leading up to the theft as a climax:

> Fór Bǫlverkr þar til sem Gunnlǫð var ok lá hjá henni þrjár nætr, ok þá lofaði hon honum at drekka af miðinum þrjá drykki. Í inum fyrsta drykk drakk hann alt ór Óðreri, en í ǫðrum ór Boðn, í inum þriðja ór Són, ok hafði hann þá allan mjǫðinn. Þá brásk hann í arnarham ok flaug sem ákafast. En er Suttungr sá flug arnarins, tók hann sér arnarham ok flaug eptir honum. En er Æsir sá hvar Óðinn flaug þá settu þeir út í garðinn ker sín, en er Óðinn kom inn of Ásgarð þá spýtti hann upp miðinum í kerin, en honum var þá svá nær komit at Suttungr mundi ná honum at hann sendi aptr suman mjǫðinn, ok var þess ekki gætt. Hafði þat hverr er vildi, ok kǫllum vér þat skáldfífla hlut. En Suttunga mjǫð gaf Óðinn Ásunum ok þeim mǫnnum er yrkja kunnu. Því kǫllum vér skáldskapinn feng Óðins ok fund ok drykk hans ok gjǫf hans ok drykk Ásanna.
>
> *Skáldskaparmál* G58

> Bǫlverkr went there to where Gunnlǫð was and lay three nights with her, and then she promised him to drink three drinks of the mead. In the first drink, he drank everything out of Óðrir, and in the second out of Boðn, in the third out of Són, and he then had all the mead. Then he changed himself into an eagle-form (*arnarhamr*) and flew as powerfully as he could. And when Suttungr saw the eagle's flight, he took an eagle-form (*arnarhamr*) and flew after him. And when the gods saw where Óðinn flew, then they set a tub out in the yard, but then Suttungr was getting so close to him that he would catch him so that he [Óðinn] sent some of the mead behind him, and this was not paid attention to. Whoever wanted could have it, and we call it the poor poet's share. And Óðinn gave Suttingr's mead to the gods and to those men who know how to compose. Because of this, we call poetic composition Óðinn's catch and find and his drink and his gift and the drink of the gods.

Comparison presents an immediate correspondence between the escape of Loki and Óðinn in the form of raptors, each pursued to Ásgarðr by a giant in the form of an eagle. The question of whether this is better described as a theme or narrative pattern is a question of complexity. The matter is complicated by whether only the information presented is analyzed. Several narratives in the *Skáldskaparmál* section of *Snorra Edda* shift into lists of poetic expressions for how things are called rather than concluding the story. In the account of the Mead of Poetry, ways of referring to poetry are listed while what happened when Suttungr arrived in Ásgarðr is unmentioned. *Hávamál* indicates Suttungr was killed and this is a common outcome for any giant in a hostile encounter with the gods,[16] which suggests a further parallel between the narratives. Moreover, there is a general parallel in the broader narrative pattern as first describing the giant's acquisition of an object or person that can be considered a symbol of creative or generative power. When this is acknowledged, comparison of the different parts of the stories requires looking at different levels on the scale of specificity. The consideration of a more complex integer at higher levels of abstraction tends to reduce them to simpler, core units:

Instigating theme/episode:

CORE: GIANT ACQUIRES SOURCE~SYMBOL OF:PRODUCTION~GENERATION
→ GIANT KEEPS EXCLUSIVE.ACCESS TO:SOURCE~SYMBOL

→ Central theme/episode of comparison:

A1. GOD GAINS PRIVATE.ACCESS TO:WOMAN IN:GIANT'S.HOUSEHOLD
→ A2. GOD ACQUIRES SOURCE OF:PRODUCTION~GENERATION IN:FORM.OF.FOOD~DRINK
→ A3. GOD TAKES FORM.OF:RAPTOR
→ A4. GOD FLIES TO:ÁSGARÐR
→ B1. GIANT DISCOVERS THEFT
→ B2. GIANT PURSUES GOD IN:FORM.OF:EAGLE
→ C1. GODS SEE RAPTOR-FORMED.GOD (&EAGLE-FORMED.GIANT) APPROACHING
→ C2. GODS MAKE PREPARATIONS FOR:RAPTOR-FORMED.GOD'S.ARRIVAL
→ C3. GODS SLAY GIANT
→ C4. RAPTOR-FORMED.GOD GIVES SOURCE.OF:GENERATION TO:GODS

The question of complexity is particularly interesting in this case because there seem to be three shifts in narrative focus that might be described as changes in scene, here identified as

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[16] All eddic poems are cited according to the edition of Neckel & Kuhn 1963.

A, B, and C. In A, the god is in focus in his encounter with the woman in the giant's household without the giant being present. In B, the giant is in focus, describing him returning home and discovering that Iðunn is gone, or describing Suttungr seeing the god depart in the form of a raptor (which may not be a change in focus *per se* and still follow Óðinn's perspective). In C, focus jumps to Ásgarðr and the gods in what can be unambiguously described as a change in scene. Themes as integers of tradition do not generally seem to exceed a scene in scope, which makes it seem likely that the escape by flight and arrival operated and varied in the oral tradition as themes in a narrative pattern, although nothing crucial seems to hinge on the question in either case.

A *plot* or *plot-type* is considered a theme or narrative pattern that is customarily instantiated as a sequential whole from complication to resolution as a (potentially multimedial) textual integer. An indicator of plot is that it is characterized by finalization, which demarcates the utterance as a complete whole (Medvedev/Bakhtin 1978: 129–135), even if the plot may also be linked to, or extended with, additional material. Models of theme, narrative pattern, and plot may also be applied to analyses of ritual performance as an enacted sequence affecting the unseen world or its inhabitants and/or affecting the empirical or social world through predictable outcomes. Within the corpus, plot types can be found. Eddic poems seem likely to have circulated at least locally with regular plots, although the content and organization within that plot might have varied considerably in a poem like *Vafþrúðnimál* or *Grímnismál*. Some mythological narratives may also have had regular plots as discrete wholes, like the Rape of Iðunn or Þórr's fishing for Miðgarðsormr. In sagas, however, distinguishing between a plot and a narrative pattern is often irrelevant. For instance, *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. 12, *Hrólfs saga kráka*, ch. 1, and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ch. 30, present variations of a narrative pattern that can be described as a legend about sorcerers who perform a ritual and seek knowledge about remote locations. The legend type can be outlined as:

PATRIARCH ASKS SORCERERS TO:ACQUIRE INFORMATION FROM:REMOTE.PLACES
(→ SORCERERS CLOSE.AWAY THEMSELVES [=RITUAL.PERFORMANCE]
       ~ SORCERERS TRAVEL IN:WHALE-FORM)
→ MAGIC~SUPERNATURAL.AGENTS PREVENT SORCERERS FROM:COMPLETING.TASK
→ SORCERERS REPORT EXPERIENCE TO:PATRIARCH

In *Óláfs saga*, King Haraldr Gormsson sends a sorcerer to scout out Iceland and the theme or narrative pattern can be considered to form a complete plot. In *Hrólfs saga*, the integer is very briefly presented like a theme in a longer sequence. In *Vatnsdæla saga*, the integer is more fully narrated and interwoven with earlier and later episodes.

Knowledge about mythology and ritual of the past can be embedded within motifs, themes, and narrative patterns. For example, probably the most well-attested complex ritual performance preserved in Old Norse literature is that of a *vǫlva* at a collective event where she presents prophesies. Several of these descriptions are integrated in the narrative pattern that John McKinnell describes as *The Hostile Young Man* (2003: 222–225), with three additional descriptions outside of it. However, one of these three appears to be an adaptation of the story pattern to a different type of protagonist (*Eiríks saga rauða*, ch. 4).[17] The other two are *Hrólfs saga*, ch. 3 and *Gesta Danorum*, Book VII.1.5, which retells the same events of as *Hrólfs saga* in what appears as either a variation of the narrative pattern or a hybrid form that combines it with a separate narrative pattern.[18] If this is correct, all of the accounts of this type of public ceremony of a *vǫlva* appear in connection with a single narrative pattern and its variations. In that case, descriptions of the ceremony were not being documented independently out of mere antiquarian interest but as an integrated element of a narrative pattern that is consistently used in connection with the fate of a central character. That *Hrólfs saga* and *Gesta Danorum* seem to independently tell the same distinctive adaptation suggests that it was established in collective tradition. This highlights that the narrative pattern was not simply an abstract model that was generatively used in each saga context, but that it also provided a framework for legends circulating about particular people and situations in the past. Like Þórr's encounters with giants, the

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[17] Rather than a young non-Christian hero who does not want to be involved in magic and refuses to hear a prophesy, the hero is a young Christian woman who refuses to help perform a pagan ritual; rather than receiving a prophesy as hostile outcome, she receives a positive prophesy as a reward for her eventual compliance. As customary for the narrative pattern's use, the encounter sets her on the course of her fate as a significant person.

[18] McKinnell (2003: 119–122) identifies the example in *Hrólfs saga* with the narrative pattern he calls *The Unjust Patriarch*, which does not otherwise include descriptions of this type of ritual ceremony. Saxo's account independently describes the same events, but he seems to conflate the *vǫlva*'s ritual with the deep-trance ritual that appears in *Hrólfs saga*, ch. 1, mentioned above, and concerned with seeking the same children (see Frog 2019b: 288n.48; 2021b). The ceremonies differ from *The Hostile Young Man* pattern in that, rather than to make prophesies generally, the *vǫlva* is called to locate two lads, and, rather than the lads refusing to hear a prophesy resulting in a disruption of the ceremony, they are not present and the *vǫlva*'s performance is interrupted by a gift (bribe) from someone who does not wish her to divine anything about the lads. Although the variations diverge from *The Hostile Young Man* narrative pattern in several respects, the narrative pattern would remain recognizable as a frame of reference for interpretation insofar as the ritual situation was used in connection with it rather than in diverse narrative contexts.

instantiations of the narrative pattern in connection with particular heroes or historical persons could produce enduring specific forms that were in dialogue with the abstract narrative pattern, and the abstract pattern was invariably expressed through specific variations. However we assess the relationship between what is told and the practices to which they appear to refer, the narrative integers form concrete examples of knowledge about ritual practices and the prophesies that they produced in the past. These integers thus operate as mooring posts for cultural memory (see also Frog 2021b; 2021d).

Referential Practice and Meaning Construction

In addition to providing models for knowing and understanding, mythic signs are also used to produce meanings and they appear prominently in Old Norse sources for constructing understandings of agents and events of the past. Statements introduced above like *má vera, at þeim sýnisk trǫll standa fyrir dyrum, þar sem þú ert* ('it could be that it will seem to them that a troll stands there at the door where you are') (*Fóstrbrœðra saga*, ch. 9), or the statement about the arriving Sigurðr *Fáfnisbani* in *Vǫlsunga saga*, ch. 26, *hygg ek at hér fari einn af goðunum* ('I think that here is coming one of the gods'), correlate mythic images with people in the manner of metaphor or simile, as do uses of bynames like *Ásgarðr* for a location in the experienced landscape (e.g. *Heiðarvígs saga*, e.g. ch. 13; though see also Egeler 2018). These types of refences do not identify people and places as manifestations of the images *per se*; they create comparisons that suggest an equivalence of partials.

Motifs, themes, and narrative patterns can, like images, be recognized through emblematic partials, although it may require a concentration of such partials to achieve a critical mass that activates the integer as a referent. A concentration of such partials is how, for instance, centralized integers like THOR FISHES FOR:WORLD.SERPENT is recognized on picture stones as well as in allusive verbal descriptions in skaldic verse (see also Frog 2015: 41–42). In narrative contexts or representations of the past, centralized mythic signs are activated in ways that advance beyond metaphor or simile to create a categorical identity of mythic proportions. Scandinavian traditions appear to have imagined the history of the world in terms of temporal eras, such as the pre-creation time of Ymir, the cosmogonic adventure-time of the gods, the time of ancient heroes, and historical time.[19] Within an era, events

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[19] The concept of temporal eras is distinct from that of "cosmological timelines", on which see Barber forthcoming.

that are variations of an integer like a theme generally appear on equal footing. Whether *The Hostile Young Man* narrative pattern in mytho-heroic sagas or the parallel acquisition and escape of Iðunn and the Mead of Poetry discussed above, the examples seem to more or less uniformly participate in constructing the significance, associations, and interpretations of that integer, although some might be told more often (i.e. have greater token frequency) or be especially valorized owing to the popularity of the hero, etc. Differences between eras tend to correlate with a difference in the scope of an event's significance that creates a referential asymmetry between examples of a particular integer. Events of cosmological scope or set in the cosmogonic adventure-time of the gods become dominant referents for events exhibiting the same features on the scope of the human world, local societies, or individuals. The result is directional reference, so that events of cosmological proportions appear as models informing the significance and interpretation of events with human actors rather than vice versa or the respective events participating on equal footing in constructing a more abstract understanding of the integer. Such referential engagements are hierarchical, but not unilateral, so they also participate in the understandings of the respective mythic integer or may even comment on it directly (see further Frog 2022).

For example, motifs of killing an ox with one's bare hands, as in *Finnboga saga*, ch. 7, or *Þorsteins þáttr uxafóts*, ch. 13, seems to refer to Þórr's slaying of an ox from Hymir's heard in order to use its head for bait when fishing for the Miðgarðsormr. Although the single motif might be considered ambiguous, it occurs in *Finnboga saga* among other strength feats that include a comparison of rowing (ch. 8), paralleling Þórr's on his fishing expedition, as well as dragging an enormous fish out of the sea, which others considered impossible (ch. 5). In *Grettis saga Ásmundsson*, ch. 50, Grettir's competitive encounters with the foster-brothers Þormóðr and Þorgeirr include rowing feats, fetching an ox in a boat and Grettir's carrying of the ox (though not killing it). Alongside *Finnboga saga* and *Þorsteins þáttr*, these point to variations on motifs of Þórr's feats identified with human heroes to characterize them as "Þórr-like", if not supernaturally strong, although the respective situations in historical time lack mythic adversaries (when performing these feats, Finnbogi is still named Urðarkǫttr, only later receiving the name Finnbogi):

A.   ÞÓRR TEARS HEAD FROM:OX WITH:HANDS

   B.   ÞÓRR ROWS BOAT WITH:EXCEPTIONAL.STRENGTH
   C.   ÞÓRR PULLS WORLD.SERPENT FROM:SEA ON:FISHING.LINE

   A.   URÐARKǪTTR SLAYS OX WITH:HANDS
   B.   URÐARKǪTTR ROWS BOAT WITH:EXCEPTIONAL.STRENGTH
   C.   URÐARKǪTTR PULLS ENORMOUS.FISH FROM:SEA ON:FISHING.LINE

  A+C? GRETTIR CARRIES OX ALONE
   B.   ÞORMÓÐR ROWS BOAT WITH:EXCEPTIONAL.STRENGTH
   B.   GRETTIR ROWS BOAT WITH:EXCEPTIONAL.STRENGTH

   A.   ÞORSTEINN SLAYS OX WITH:HANDS

This type of referential practice is also found with themes, such as:

   SERPENT GROWS UNTIL:ENCIRCLES LOCATION
  & SERPENT BITES OWN.TAIL = BECOMES OROBOROS
  → HERO SLAYS OROBOROS-SERPENT

BITES OWN.TAIL can also be considered a partial of SERPENT GROWS UNTIL:ENCIRCLES LOCATION, but it warrants making salient here because, in Scandinavian traditions, the image OROBOROS is specifically identified with the Miðgarðsormr. When a serpent grows to such a scale that it encircles a maiden's bower in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, ch. 2, it therefore appears to refer to the centralized image MIÐGARÐSORMR. The slaying of this serpent by Ragnarr thus characterizes him as performing a feat equivalent to THOR SLAYS MIÐGARÐSORMR, even though the specific features of the slaying are quite different.

   These types of referential engagements with events of cosmological proportions are most salient when multiple centralized mythic signs are used together. Meaningfulness is dependent on recognizability, and recognizing any one sign in a cluster increases sensitivity to others while the cooccurrence of multiple mythic signs suggests that that parallels are non-accidental. The concentrated co-occurrence of mythic signs from a particular event may follow that event's organization, but they may also be varied and recombined. For example, Starkaðr's slaying of King Víkarr orchestrated by Óðinn in *Gautreks saga*, ch. 7, exhibits a concentration of motifs linked to the slaying of Baldr, but these are combined with additional motifs:

   A1. DECEIVER ORCHESTRATES PUBLIC.SLAYING.EVENT

> → A2. DECEIVER GIVES PLANT TO:SLAYER
> → B1. SLAYER ACTS WITHOUT:SUSPECTING.OUTCOME=HARM
> → B2. HUMAN SACRIFICED TO:ÓÐINN ON:GALLOWS
> → C1. HARMLESS OBJECTS BECOME INSTRUMENTS.OF:SLAYING
> C1a. PLANT BECOMES WEAPON
> C1b. FAKE.NOOSE BECOMES STRONG
> C1c. WEAK.GALLOWS.BRANCH BECOMES STRONG
> → C2. UNSUSPECTING.SLAYER KILLS UNSUSPECTING.VICTIM

Motifs A2, B1, C1, C1a, and C2 characterize the cosmological Baldr-slaying, and A2 and C1a seem to index this event exclusively. The motifs thus index the cosmological event as a dominant referent, which becomes mapped over the slaying of Víkarr, conferring significance on the event and becoming a framework for its interpretation. If the knowledge of the Baldr-slaying is comparable to what is found in *Snorra Edda*, it yields the correlations ÓÐINN~LOKI, STARKAÐR~HǪÐR, and VÍKARR~BALDR. The motifs of the narrative pattern of the Baldr-slaying are used in combination with additional motifs and in a context that seems quite different compared to other sources available, but that does not diminish their potential to make the scene pregnant with significance of cosmological proportions. I have elsewhere reviewed uses of themes and story patterns linked to the death of Baldr in *Heiðreks saga*, *Reginsmál*, and *Vǫlsunga saga*, *Grímnismál* and *Hrómundar saga Grípsson* and further afield (Frog 2010: ch. 21). The number and range of uses suggest that a cycle linked to Baldr's death held an established position in referential practices in mytho-heroic saga contexts, where it is often linked to establishing the slayer as an Odinic hero.

Manipulations of mythic signs to characterize human agents is widespread and may be extremely complex. This complexity may increase dramatically in adaptations of full narratives into human contexts, as in *Þorsteins saga bœjarmagns*, *Gesta Danorum*, or *Ynglinga saga*. The use of personal names known from cosmological events reduces the number of emblematic partials needed to reach a critical mass that activates a centralized mythic sign. Once that sign is activated, it becomes a frame of reference for producing meanings and interpretations. Accounts about euhemerized gods are today easily identified as adapting mythology of cosmological scope, yet, in principle, these are also the accounts that can deviate most from mythic events that they efficiently engage.

Whereas uses of motifs, themes, and story patterns linked to Þórr's fishing adventure or Baldr's death seem to have been directional references, this is not necessarily true of all

cases of concentrated constellations of mythic signs. In *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, ch. 1, for example, a beer-brewing contest between wives leads the woman Geirhildr to call on Óðinn, Óðinn arrives in disguise and spits in the vat as a fermenting agent, saying he will return for what is between Geirhildr and the vat; Geirhildr wins the competition; her son, who was then unborn (and thus between Geirhildr and the vat), later dies on the gallows. A number of features of this sequence are implicit:

A. PERSON SUMMONS SUPERNATURAL.AGENT
    → A1. ÓÐINN APPEARS IN:DISGUISE
    [→ A2. PROMISE MADE TO.:SUPERNATURAL.AGENT FOR:AID]
    → A3. GOD SPITS IN:VAT
        [= A3*. AID RECEIVED FROM:SUPERNATURAL.AGENT]
    → A4. PHRASING [OF:AGREEMENT] FOOLS PERSON
→ B. PERSON SUCCEEDS [THROUGH:SUPERNATURAL.AID]
→ C. HUMAN SACRIFICE TO:ÓÐINN ON:GALLOWS
    [= C*. AGREEMENT KEPT WITH:SUPERNATURAL.AGENT]

Although an agreement is not explicit in the text, the sequence is organized by a theme that can be described as *A Promise for Supernatural Aid* (A2→A3*→B→C* above). The short account becomes understandable through recognizing this theme or piecing it together through the interpretation of juxtapositions as causally related. All of these motifs can be considered common in mytho-heroic sagas except for GOD SPITS IN:VAT, which is associated with the origin of the Mead of Poetry, both in the description of the gods and their adversaries called *vanir* (probably GIANTS) forming a truce by spitting in a vat and also in Óðinn's spitting the stolen mead into vats when returning to Ásgarðr. Although this motif indexes the origin of the Mead of Poetry, it does not seem to refer to a single mythic event. Nevertheless, the concentration of decentralized mythic signs embed this event in the mythic discourse of mytho-heroic sagas as a "natural" encounter with Óðinn and filled with associated significance.

'My God Can Beat up Your God'

Mythic signs become instruments in encounters between people aligned with different religious identities or understandings of how the world works. Knowledge of signs aligned with other groups allows them to be manipulated in what can be approached as competing perspectives in a shared symbolic matrix, whether these compete for a position as the

dominant religion formation as exclusive alternatives, are maintained in parallel in connection with different groups in society or seek to assimilate or hybridize with one another.

In competitive encounters between religions, supernatural agency is often a key issue. The narrative pattern with the core motif SUPERNATURAL.AGENT COMMUNICATES IN:DREAM, introduced above, is an example of the agency of the Christian God or his representatives intervening on a predictable pattern of consequences for ignoring non-Christian supernatural agents. Such encounters may be described between specialists, as in the following example from *Kristni saga*, where I consider *berserkir* a type of ritual specialist (on which, see Frog 2019b: 276–277):

> Þar kómo berserker tveir, er Haukr hét hvárr-tvegge; þier […] gengo grenjande ok óðo elda. […] vígðe biscop eldenn áðr þeir œðe; ok brunno þeir þá miok. Efter þat gengo men at þeim, ok dráopo þá;
>
> *Kristni saga*, ch. 2

> Two *berserkir* came there, who were both called Haukr. They […] went around howling and waded through fire. […] the bishop consecrated the fire before they waded through; and they were badly burned. After that people went at them, and they killed them;

The description of howling is an emblematic partial of BERSERKR PERFORMS BERSERKSGANGR, which is also reflected in the theme BERSERKR WALKS THROUGH.FIRE → FIRE DOES.NOT BURN. The motif BERSERKR PERFORMS BERSERKSGANGR produces a state of imperviousness to natural forms of harm, characterizing the image BERSERKR by the partial IMPERVIOUS. Interpretations of how or why this is the case vary according to whether the image BERSERKR's imperviousness is innate, in which case the partial IMPERVIOUS may be more specifically described as IMPENETRABLE-BODIED. This partial may also be identified with assertions of agency – i.e. in the sense of a capacity to affect things in the world – like GAZE BLUNTS IRON. This type of interpretation is built on an equation PERCEPTION=INTERACTION, whereby a perceiver may affect the thing perceived or be affected by it (cf. Freyr's lovesickness on seeing Gerðr in *Skírnismál*). In this case, the *berserkr* is FIRE-IMPERVIOUS and SHARP-IRON-IMPERVIOUS because he

affects fire or iron when seeing them and the theme HERO TRICKS BERSERKR → BERSERKR BLUNTS WRONG.BLADE become possible. In the example above, the motif CHRISTIAN CONSECRATES FIRE characterizes the fire with the partial CHRISTIAN-CONSECRATED, which changes the outcome:

> A1. BERSERKR PERFORMS BERSERKSGANGR
> → A2a. BERSERKR WALKS THROUGH FIRE
> → A2b. FIRE DOES NOT BURN BERSERKR
> B1. CHRISTIAN CONSECRATES FIRE
> → B2. BERSERKR WALKS THROUGH CHRISTIAN-CONSECRATED FIRE
> → B3. FIRE BURNS BERSERKR

This simple narrative pattern is repeated a few chapters later, where the enactment of theme A is only referred to in the *berserkr*'s direct speech, theme B is enacted, accompanied by a third theme:

> Þar skoraðe Norœnn berserkr á hann til holm-gǫngo. […] Berserkrenn mælte: "Eige muntú þora at berjaz við mik, ef þú sér íþrótter mínar. Ek geng berom fótom um eld brennanda; ok ek læt fallaz berr á sax-odd mínn; ok saknar mik hvárke." […] Þangbrandr vígðe eldenn, en gerðe cross-mark yfer saxeno. Berserkrenn brann á fótom er hann óð eldenn. En er hann fell á saxet, stóð þat í gegnom hann; ok feck hann af því bana.
>
> *Kristni saga*, ch. 5

> There a Norwegian *berserkr* challenged [Þangbrandr] to a duel. […] The *berserkr* said: "You won't dare to fight with me if you see the feats I can do. I walk through burning fire with bear feet; and I let myself fall bare-chested on the point of my sword; and neither harms me." [....] Þangbrandr consecrated the fire, and he made the sign of the cross over the sword. The *berserkr* was burned on his feet when he waded through the fire. And when he fell onto his sword, it went through him; and he got his death from that.

The expansion of theme A and the third theme can be described:

> A1. BERSERKR PERFORMS BERSERKSGANGR

→ A3a. BERSERKR FALLS ON SWORD
→ A3b. IRON DOES NOT CUT BERSERKR
C1. CHRISTIAN CONSECRATES SWORD
→ C2. BERSERKR FALLS ON CHRISTIAN-CONSECRATED SWORD
→ C3. IRON CUTS BERSERKR

Legends such as these present people as representatives of different religious alignments who play out scenarios that point to the relative power of the forces with which they align while also characterizing the associated identities. The contrast between *berserkir* and Christians is a polarized manifestation of the conflict and competition with 'paganism'. However, polarized contrasts are not automatic outcomes of religious encounters. The institution of *goði*, for example, seems to have been a public, non-Christian religious role rather than only secular. In Iceland, this role nevertheless became aligned with the new religion to the point that it became commonplace for a *goði* to also become a priest until this was prohibited at the end of the twelfth century (Orri Vésteinsson 2000: ch. 5). In addition, the polarized identification of *berserkir* with paganism in Iceland seems not to have occurred in Norway, where *berserkir* could be Christian and the word *berserkr* is found as an epithet into the fourteenth century (Samson 2011: 225–226; Dale 2014: 180–183, 200–202). The image BERSERKR thus appears to have had a different evaluation and at least variable religious alignment in different Christian societies.

Although different types of agents may be rooted in historical social environments, these roles get constructed as images through discourse, which also develops diagrammatic schemata of relations, such as CHRISTIAN.MISSIONARY/PAGAN.WOMAN as contrasted and competing religious authorities. This schema manifests in diverse scenarios. For example, the missionary Þorvaldr preaches while the woman Friðgerðr makes sacrifices in a temple within earshot, and no one is converted (*Kristni saga*, ch. 2). Þangbrandr has an open verbal conflict with Steinunn (called Steinvǫr), in which she is attributed with skaldic stanzas about how Þórr smashed Þangbrandr's ship and Christ did not prevent it (*Kristni saga*, ch. 5). King Óláfr enters a house in disguise and disrupts the woman's ritual and converts all present in *Vǫlsa þáttr* (on which, see also Ahola, this volume). The schema is characterized by bundling elements of gender and religious identity along with the evaluative alignment of the narrative voice in the construction of CHRISTIAN/PAGAN conflicts. Helga Kress (1993: 43–44) observes that this schema appears linked to the POET/WOMAN schema, seen in encounters

like Bragi's encounter with a troll-woman (*Skáldskaparmál*, ch. 54), and the ODIN~ODINIC.HERO/VQLVA schema, seen in *Vǫluspá*, *Baldrs draumar*, as well as in *The Hostile Young Man* and *Unjust Patriarch* narrative patterns mentioned above (see also McKinnell 2003). Viewing these as independent because one is aligned with Christians' perspectives while the latter are not underestimates the fluidity of mythic discourse. *The Hostile Young Man* narrative pattern represents young male heroes refusing to participate in non-Christian rituals while the encounters between Óðinn and *vǫlur* explicitly identify the woman as a ritual specialist. That outcomes of both Christians' encounters with pagan women and encounters with *vǫlur* tend to have some degree of ambivalence supports the view that the schemata are linked.

The conflicts and competition between Christianity and non-Christian religion take countless forms, but patterns also emerge that appear to reflect conventions of the discourse. Thus conflicts linked to worship tend to exhibit an opposition of CHRIST/THOR as remote agents who actively affect things in the world. This structure is diagrammatic rather than reducing to a regular motif. It manifests in, for example, Þórr harassing Þorgils because of his conversion (*Flóamanna saga*, ch. 20–21), Steinunn's claim that Þórr smashed Þangbrandr's ship (*Kristni saga*, ch. 5), and in the conflict surrounding a whale-like animal that turns out to be sent by Þórr in *Eiríks saga rauða*, ch. 8, and which makes all the Christians ill from eating it. Other non-Christian gods do not tend to appear as absent orchestrators of events in religious confrontations.

Some examples of mythic discourse are quite complex, as in the exchange between Þangbrandr and Steinunn as presented in *Njáls saga*, ch. 102. This is an example of both the CHRISTIAN.MISSIONARY/PAGAN.WOMAN and CHRIST/THOR schemata. It is also interesting because the description of Steinunn "preaching paganism" reproduces and inverts the motif CHRISTIAN PROSELYTIZES TO:PAGANS as PAGAN PROSELYTIZES TO:CHRISTIAN. The dialogue, constituted of three points, warrants more detailed consideration:

Þangbrandr fór allt vestr um sveitir. Steinunn kom í mót honum, móðir skáld-Refs. Hún boðaði Þangbrandi heiðni og taldi lengi fyrir honum. Þangbrandr þagði meðan hún talaði en talaði lengi eftir og sneri því ǫllu er hún hafði mælt í villu.

"Hefir þú heyrt það," sagði hún, "er Þór bauð Kristi á hólm og þorði Kristur eigi að berjast við Þór?"

"Heyrt hefi eg," segir Þangbrandur, "að Þór var ekki nema mold og aska ef guð vildi eigi að hann lifði."

"Veist þú," segir hún, "hver brotið hefir skip þitt?"

"Hvað segir þú til?" segir hann.

"Það mun eg segja þér," segir hún: [....]

Eftir það skildu þau Þangbrandr og Steinunn og fóru þeir vestr til Barðastrandar.

Njáls saga, ch. 102

Þangbrandr travelled all through the west. Steununn came to meet him, mother of poet-Refr. She preached healthendom to Þangbrandr and made a long speech before him. Þangbrandr was silent while she spoke but spoke long thereafter and twisted all the which she had said into falsehood.

"Have you heard," she says, "that Þórr challenged Christ to a duel, and he didn't dare fight with Þórr?"

"Have you heard," says Þangrbandr, "that Þórr would be nothing but dirt and ash had God not wished he live?"

"Do you know," she says, "who broke up your ship?"

"What do you say?" he says.

"This will I say to you," she says:

> [Steinunn recites two stanzas in *dróttkvætt* meter stating that Þórr did it, and Christ didn't help].

After that they parted, Þangbrandr and Steinunn, and they travelled to Barðastrandar.

Beginning from the third question: Þórr was prominently linked to seafaring in, as reflected, for instance, in *Flóamanna saga* in the case of Þorgils' hardships, in *Landnámabók*'s statement that Helgi *magri trúði á Krist, en hét á Þór til sjófara ok harðræða* ('believed in Christ but called on Þórr in seafaring and hard times') (ch. S218), as well as the reverse in *Landnámabók*'s description of Kollr calling on Þórr in a storm and being shipwrecked while his foster-brother Ørlygr Hrappson calls on Patrekr and arrives safely in Iceland (Perkins 2001: 23–24). Steinunn's claim that Þórr destroyed Þangbrandr's ship and Chirst did not stop him asserts Þórr's superior agency in one of the god's central fields of activity. This

claim is comparable to the demonstration of relative degrees of supernatural power in examples of Christian sanctification in undermining the supernatural imperviousness of *berserkir* above. The assertion is well-suited as the final claim as an empirical event that demonstrates limitations of Christ's power relative to Þórr's. The third position is, however, likely determined by the quotation of stanzas as most effective in a rhetorical climax to the dialogue.[20]

Þangbrandr's question identifies Þórr as dependent on God's power. This is based on a Christian cosmogonic motif GOD CREATES ADAM FROM:EARTH. Like referential practices that correlate human heroes with feats of Þórr, the image of the agent in question is transposed with one in the motif. As discussed above, transposing URÐARKQTTR, GRETTIR, or RAGNARR into a slot of a motif recognizably identified with ÞÓRR implies an equivalence that informs the significance of the human hero. Adam is the first human being and thus ADAM is interchangeable with the decentralized sign HUMAN in the motif Þangbrandr manipulates. Transposing the image THOR into the slot of ADAM indicates an equivalence that correlates THOR with the category HUMAN rather than DIVINITY in a relation to GOD. The euhemerist theory that vernacular gods were actually human sorcerers is prominent in both the works of Snorri Sturluson and Saxo Grammaticus, and the transposition of THOR into the slot of ADAM may reflect a thirteenth-century euhemerist interpretation of Þórr.

Steinunn's first question adapts a non-Christian cosmological motif THOR CHALLENGES GIANT TO:DUEL. Within the mythology surrounding Þórr, this motif sets in motion a narrative pattern that culminates in the theme of combat: THOR STRIKES GIANT (WITH:PROJECTILE) → THOR SLAYS GIANT. In this case, CHRIST is transposed into the slot for GIANT, indicating an equivalence that connotes a negative evaluation of CHRIST. It implies that CHRIST is an agent of chaos and threat to society, in the category described as DEVIL above,[21] and thereby with the diagrammatic schema THOR/DEVIL and associated motifs such as DEVIL FLEES THOR. Like Þangbrandr's response, Steinunn's statement is far more than an assertion of relative power relations: it transposes of the image of a god emblematic of the other religious identity into the system of signs of her own to produce new meanings.

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[20] Steinunn's stanzas are quoted already in *Kristni saga*, ch. 5, without the relevant dialogue.

[21] Christ was commonly characterized by the epithet *hvítr* ('white'). This epithet was connected to lightness, brightness, and beauty and potentially associated with baptismal gowns, but it was also the colour of cowardice (Sturtevant 1952). That Christ is said not to be bold enough to face Þórr could potentially be linked to him being called 'white' in other contexts, but the epithet is not used here.

The correlative process of identifying centralized signs linked to another religious identity with decentralized categorical signs in one's own is an organic part of mythic discourse in religious encounters. It is a process of interpreting the unfamiliar in relation to the familiar, although this is also encoded with stance-taking toward the religion and its agents. In the case of Helgi *magri*, it seems CHRIST was interpreted as a representative of the vernacular category GOD alongside THOR. This categorical identification reflects a trajectory of assimilation within an ideological framework that did not demand exclusivity. Both Þangbrandr and Steinunn are presented as viewing their respective religions as opposed. Each identifies the other's god with a category that places it in an asymmetrical power relation relative to that of GOD, which simultaneously excludes the agent from the latter category. Steinunn's challenges are more interesting because the narrative representation is a construct of Christians. The meaningfulness of the duel-challenge scenario is rooted in non-Christian mythology and manipulates mythic signs to both undermine the authority of Christ and criticize his potential impact on society. This is in an exchange where the representative of paganism gets the last word and seems to come out ahead. The dialogue is only found in *Njáls saga* and it is unknown whether it was invented in the composition of the saga or reflects an oral legend tradition, but Þangbrandr's retort seems likely to reflect thirteenth-century euhemerism discourse, and Steinunn's reference to the duel scenario seems to reflect thirteenth-century Icelanders' imagining of anti-Christian discourse as embedded in, and from the perspective of, non-Christian mythology as known and understood at the time.

Overview

The approach to mythic discourse outlined here presents a set of tools for abstracting source evidence into integers of tradition and their use. The process of abstraction and analysis makes it possible to identify legend traditions in the sagas that may have been overlooked, like that in *Vatnsdæla saga*, ch. 12, *Hrólfs saga kráka*, ch. 1, and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, ch. 30, where the description of a non-Christian ritual practice is embedded in a narrative pattern. Once the narrative pattern is identified, it becomes possible to consider whether additional cases sharing common features reflect variations of adapting the mythic integer in different ways. Thus, by considering examples of a *vǫlva*'s public ritual in examples outside of *The Hostile Young Man* narrative pattern, it was observed that these

seem to be variations on that pattern. The likelihood of this possibility is increased when it accounts for all examples of the description of the performance situation. In these cases, the complexity of the narrative pattern in conjunction with the number of examples allows the interpretation to proceed with greater confidence. As complexity and the number of examples decreases, comparisons become less certain and the possibility of accidental parallels increases.

Distinguishing integers of tradition according to different formal types enables more nuanced approaches to how they interact, and it can be combined with close reading of the source materials. The formal analysis of what is being manipulated provides a framework in which the patterns of use of individual mythic integers may be traced through the corpus in order to assess their package of traditional meanings, associations, evaluations, and interpretations, and also to explore the meanings and significance of their use and manipulation in particular cases. Once the operation of mythic discourse is in focus, the dynamics of meaning-making become more visible also in accounts of religious encounters, as illustrated through the dialogue between Þangbrandr and Steinunn. An advantage to this approach is that it provides a single framework for analyzing mythological texts, rituals and descriptions of rituals, evidence in different media,[22] and for considering combinations of mythic integers linked to different cultural or religious backgrounds. From individual mythic integers and their combination, attention can expand to broader patterns that may reflect different and perhaps competing perspectives.

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[22] Although not illustrated here, for examples of the analysis of iconographic representations, see Frog 2015.

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