

LOKI'S CHILDREN

Carolyne Larrington

(St. John's College, Oxford University)

Old Norse myth has a well-defined set of adversaries who league themselves against the gods: the giants. Though the giants vary in their hostility to the gods according to genre, gender, and the number of heads they possess (see Schulz, 2004), they are present even before the creation of the universe, and they march from different cardinal directions at *ragna rök* to assail the gods. The Einherjar, the denizens of Valhöll, are expressly recruited to fight against these forces, and the final attack of the giants not only undoes the gods' victory over Ymir at the creation of the earth, but confirms a structural oppositionality in Norse myth which informs eddic and skaldic poetry, and the *Prose Edda* alike.

Yet the Norse mythic system also evolves a second set of monster-foes, two apocalyptic monsters who are apparently dedicated to the destruction of a specific god (Óðinn, Þórr) at *ragna rök*, and one who signifies Death itself: namely, the wolf Fenrir, the Miðgarðsormr, and the female figure Hel. These are the offspring of Loki and a giantess, whom, Snorri tells us, is named Angrboða. In this instance (though not, for example in Óðinn's liaison with Jörðr, which produces Þórr himself) the mating of god and giantess (*gygr*) produces monstrous and hybrid offspring. The existence of these siblings has implications for Loki's other children, those legitimately begotten on his wife Sigyn: Nari and Narfi, and perhaps for the products of Loki's two anomalous pregnancies: the eight-legged horse Sleipnir, and, mysteriously, all the *flögð* (ogresses), as alluded to in *Hyndl* 41. The monster-children of Loki are known from the earliest surviving Old Norse skaldic poetry, the works of Bragi and Þjóðólfr of Hvín. More information about them is gained from picture-stones (although their identification is not always straightforward in iconographic sources), from the *Poetic Edda*, and, finally, least reliably though most inventively, from the *Snorra Edda*. The children and their father have quite clear-cut roles in the earlier material, though even here interpretative questions are raised, but their functions become complicated and suggestive in the later texts, largely because Snorri's treatment of them integrates them into new narrative contexts which are not attested in detail elsewhere.

Early Skaldic Evidence

The three children of Loki appear in skaldic poetry, both early and late, often closely linked together. Kennings for Hel strikingly flag up her wide kin-affiliations. In Þjóðólfr's *Ynglingatal* she is designated as *Loka mæ'r* 'Loki's girl' (Yt 7), *Hveðrungrs mæ'r* 'Hveðrung's (a Loki-name) girl' (Yt. 32), *Býleists bróður mæ'r* 'Býleist's brother's girl' (i.e. 'daughter of Loki') (Yt. 31) and *ulfs ok Narfa jódis* '(horse-goddess > lady) of the wolf and of Narfi' (Yt. 7). *Nipt Nara* 'kin of Nari' occurs in *Hfl* 10; *Njörva nipt* 'Njörvi's kin' in *Son* 25. *Fenris nipt* 'kin of Fenrir' is found as late as Sturla Þórðarson's *Hákonarkviða* 24.

As for other women, Hel's position in a kinship network confirms, even constructs, her existence; she derives her identity from her father, brothers and uncle.

Unlike human women however, she is not married, and thus does not participate in the ‘Exchange of Women’ (Rubin, 1975) which cements different lineages through marital alliances. Rather she retains her autonomy and rules in her own right over her realm; a kind of *meykonungr* whom no suitor desires and whom no one can humble.

Hel in person is not always easily distinguished from the territory over which she rules, except in these kinship-type kennings (see Faulkes’s comment in Snorri, 1988, 168). Elsewhere in skaldic verse she is occasionally envisaged as an active hostess; in the eleventh-century poet Þórbjörn Brúnason’s *lausavísa* 1 (recorded in *Heiðarvíga saga*), a woman who wishes for the poet to die is referred to thus: *ann ... eplis ölselja mér Heljar* ‘the ale-giving woman wishes the apples of Hel for me’. These could be fruit growing in Hel’s kingdom, but, in conjunction with the designation of the hostile woman as *ölselja*, the personification of Hel seems likely. The verse is dependent on traditions of Hel as a hostess and *húsfreyja* in, for example, *Baldrs draumar*, where ale is brewed and the benches made ready in prudent anticipation of Baldr’s arrival. It seems likely that Hel’s role as hostess is connected to Germanic ideas of cup-bearing as the quintessential noble female role and possibly with the patristic concept of the *poculum mortis* in post-Conversion thinking (Enright, 1996; Brown, 1940). Egill’s reference in *lv. 7* to *hásalar Heljar* ‘the high halls of Hel’ is also consistent with this idea. Hel is seen performing a rather different kind of action in Arnórr jarlaskáld’s *Magnúsdrápa* 10 however: *Hel klauf hausa fólva* ‘Hel clove pale skulls’.

Fenrir is mentioned in the early kennings for Hel, as noted above, but he does not generally appear in early skaldic verse. He is *Tveggja bága* ‘the foe of Tveggi (Óðinn)’ in *Son* 25, in another kenning which actually refers to his sister. There are important references to him in *Hákonarmál* 20 and *Eiríksmál* 7 (discussed further below). The cosmic wolf who will ingest the sun at *ragna rök*, and who perhaps should be identified with Fenrir, appear as the *himintörgu vargr* ‘wolf of heaven’s shield’ in *Þórsdrápa* 5, while *himins hvélsvelgr* ‘swallower of heaven’s wheel’ occurs in the anonymous tenth-century verse known as a troll-woman’s response to Bragi. Elsewhere, since *fenrir* is a poetic term for ‘wolf’, it is usually *canis lupus*, the beast of battle, rather than the cosmic monster who is evoked.

The *Miðgarðsormr* is much more frequently encountered in early skaldic poetry. His relationship to Loki is confirmed in Eilífr Goðúnarson’s *Þórsdrápa* 4: Loki is said to be *lögseims faðir* ‘father of the sea-band’. More detail about the *Miðgarðsormr* is given in Bragi’s account of Þórr’s fishing-expedition in *Ragnarsdrápa* 14-19 (*Þórr’s fishing* as Margaret Clunies Ross has now re-titled it, identifying it as a separate poem) which probably dates from the first half of the ninth century. Here the serpent is insistently characterised as a band or ribbon in the sea which binds the land, ‘a boundary of the world and consequently an indispensable part of the cosmos’ as Preben Meulengracht Sørensen notes (2002, 132). He is noxious (*þæfan jarðar reist* ‘the foul-smelling one who twists round the earth’, st. 14); ugly (*ljóti þvengr borðróins barða brautar* ‘the ugly thong of the oar-bearing ships’ roads’, st. 17) and poisonous (*hrökkviáll Völsunga drekku* ‘the crooked eel of the Völsungs’ drink (poison)’, st. 18). Similar kennings: *grundar fiskr* ‘fish of the depths’ (Gamli *gnæfarskald*) or *seiðr jarðar* ‘earth’s saithe-fish’ (Eysteinn Valdason, 3) occur in other early poems about Þórr.

In the tenth-century *Húsdrápa* the serpent is less repellent and more lustrous: *storðar men* ‘necklace of earth’ (st. 3), *stirðþinull storðar* ‘stiff net-string of earth’ (st. 4), ‘shining serpent,’ *fránum naðri* (st. 6), a descriptor used for other snakes. Kennings with a similar semantic import, characterising the Miðgarðsormr as a string or band, surrounding the earth, occur in eddic poetry, as in *Hym* 22 (*umgjörð*), or *Vsp* 60 (*moldþinurr*). Bragi sees the monster as disgusting; other poets recognise both beauty and functionality in the Miðgarðsormr’s existence.

Iconography

Four early carvings depicting Þórr’s encounter with the Miðgarðsormr are discussed by Sørensen (Sørensen, 2002, 124-30). These depict the god and serpent during Þórr’s fishing-expedition, signalled by the fact that Þórr is shown in a boat, usually accompanied by the giant Hymir (though not on the Altuna stone) while the serpent rears up from the depths, in the manner described in skaldic verse. No record of Þórr’s dealings with the Miðgarðsormr at *ragna rök* survives, but Óðinn’s fatal encounter with Fenrir is shown on the Ledberg runestone from Östergötland, and the Kirk Andreas rune stone from the Isle of Man (Jesch, 2002, 263). Hel is not identifiable in the iconography, though it is possible that some of the cup-bearing females, often identified as valkyries, may represent the ruler of Hel’s hall.

Loki as the Father of the Wolf

‘The Monster’s Body is Always a Cultural Body’, proposes Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Cohen, 1996, 4). Fenrir’s form is highly significant, for the wolf haunts the medieval European imagination as the most feared of predators. Wolves are imagined as waiting to pick off the unwary and solitary traveller in Old English wisdom poetry (Shippey, 1972, 70-1). They are the only mammal to appear among the ‘Beasts of Battle’, a widespread topos in Old English, Old Norse and Welsh poetry (Jesch, 2002). Wolves are devourers, of flocks and of carrion. Fear of the wolf is fear of engulfment, fear of physical dismemberment and consumption; a (part)-imagined terror of becoming incorporated into another creature’s body, of ceasing to exist (Salisbury, 1994, 69; Pluskowski, 2003, 158-9). Old Norse cosmology seems to envisage two ur-wolves, according to *Grm* 39: Sköll and Hati, son of Hróðvitnir (probably a name for Fenrir). These pursue the heavenly bodies which they will devour at *ragna rök*. Like Fenrir himself these cosmic wolves symbolise Time the destroyer, that which swallows up the creations of men and gods, forming a limit to human and divine endeavours which neither gods nor men can circumvent; their unbinding marks the onset of apocalypse, the end of present Time.

Fenrir’s offspring are raised by an old woman in Járnsviðr ‘Iron-wood’ according to *Vsp* 40. One of them is designated as the swallower of the moon (*tungls tiugari*), presumably one of the cosmic wolves of *Grm*, but in *Vaf* 46-7 it is Fenrir himself who consumes the sun. Moreover Fenrir, his jaws agape so widely that the upper jaw touches the heavens while the lower jaw rests on the earth, says Snorri, will devour Óðinn at *ragna rök*. As Bakhtin notes, ‘The gaping mouth is related to the image of swallowing, the most ancient symbol of death and destruction’ (Bakhtin, 1965, 301).

Fenrir is killed in turn by Víðarr, Óðinn's son, who steps willingly into the monster's mouth and pierces his heart with a sword (*lætr hann megi Hveðrungs / mund um standa / hjör til hjarta*) (Vsp 55). Víðarr himself risks engulfment in his quest to avenge his father.

Snorri expands on the information we learn elsewhere about Fenrir's parentage. His mother is the giantess Angrboða, also mentioned in *Hyndl* 40) (*Völuspá in skamma*). Why the pairing of god and giantess, which elsewhere brings forth such stalwart heroes as Þórr, or such powerful ancestral figures as Fjölfnir, son of Freyr and Gerðr (at least according to Snorri, but see Clunies Ross, 1994, 141-2), should produce anomalous monsters instead of anthropomorphic figures is unclear. Perhaps it is because of Loki's own mixed heritage, son of a giant and of Laufey, likely one of the Æsir (Sørensen 2002, 132 and references there; Clunies Ross, 1994, 64-6; 220) that he is the progenitor of creatures who 'resist any classification built on hierarchy or a merely binary opposition, demanding instead ... difference in sameness, repulsion in attraction' (Cohen 1996, 7). As Meulengracht Sørensen suggests, the fact the monster-brood share the blood of the Æsir would explain why the gods accommodate them until the final confrontation of *ragna rök*, giving them distinct spheres of influence and relying on them to generate and demarcate boundaries between important and often opposed domains, rather than attempting to destroy them at their first appearance. For Cohen (1996, 12) 'the Monster Polices the Borders of the Possible', 'warning against exploration of its uncertain demesnes'.

We have seen how the Miðgarðsormr is necessary to girdle the land, holding it together, and to mark the limits of the outer ocean, a function clearly recognised in his skaldic epithets. Similarly, if less spectacularly, Fenrir's slavering jaws generate the river Ván, one of the rivers which flows between the 'here' (*heðan*) of *Grm* 28, past the world of men and down into Hel's realm, separating and demarcating the human and divine territories from the world of death. Hel too rules over a clearly separate domain. The way there is guarded by female sentries: giantesses, *völur* or the girl Móðguðr (*Helr, Bdr, Gylfaginning* 47). A hostile beast (significantly a barking and bloody dog, *hvelpr blóðugr* in *Bdr* 2-3, perhaps also kin to Fenrir) and frequently-mentioned high gates (*helgrindar*) may also bar the road.

As a symbol of Time the bound Fenrir remains operative and above all watchful in the human and divine worlds, as two tenth-century poems remind us. In *Eiríksmál* 7, he stares predatorily at the homes of the gods (*sér úlfr enn hösvi á sjöt goða*) while Eyvindr Finnsson's *Hákonarmál* 20 anticipates the moment when he will be loosed to advance on the homes of men: *Mun óbundinn / á ýta sjöt / fenrisulfr fara*. Both Ásgarðr and Miðgarðr, the settlements of gods and of men, are in peril, for the bound wolf gazes hungrily towards them, anticipating the day when his bonds will break and he can avenge himself. The gods regard Fenrir as a menace with whom they cannot live at close quarters. Though Óðinn keeps two wolves Geri and Freki ('ravener' and 'devourer'), in the role of household hounds, according to *Grm*, the Æsir are not comfortable with Loki's child loose within their (giant-built) walls. In his monstrous form the wolf embodies the fear which Lacanian psycho-analysts, and after them, and more usefully perhaps, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, have described as *extimité*, an 'intimate alterity', that which is Other, but which is also close at hand, intimately associated with the normal and with the human (Cohen, 1999, xii, 94). Fenrir the wolf is likely also Garmr the hound, the *freki* which breaks free at the onset of *ragna rök*, (Vsp 44, 49, 58),

though Snorri assumes two different beasts. Snorri sends Garmr to be the death of Týr, an old adversary if the creatures are identical (Snorri, 1988, 50). Domesticated from the wolf, man's closest animal associate, the dog is the beast in the home, the companion who may turn on his master. Fenrir-Garmr is not like Geri and Freki brought perhaps temporarily to heel by Óðinn's authority, but the son of one of the gods, a creature who makes manifest the true nature of his father.

Loki himself is a version of the 'extimate', the enemy within, the Both/And, for he is one of the Æsir, bound in blood-brotherhood to Óðinn, of whom he is a close associate, in some respects even to be regarded as an avatar (Ström, 1956). Loki is denoted as *ulfs faðir* 'father of the wolf' (*Haustlög* 8), but strictly speaking, he is Father of wolves, for the prose at the end of *Lokasenna* tells us how Loki was bound with the guts of his son Nari, and that his son Narfi *varð at vargi*. Snorri (1988, 49) rationalises the story: though he is uncertain as to whether the son of Sigyn is Nari or Narfi, another son Váli (normally Óðinn's son born to avenge the death of Baldr) is transformed into a wolf, rends his brother and provides the guts which bind the father until *ragna rök*. That wolves turn even on closely-related kin is part of lupine lore in Old Norse (cf. *Hamð* 29). The transformation of Loki's other son makes visible the wolfishness of the father's own nature; like a watch-dog Loki too lives with the Æsir, fundamentally untrustworthy, but for a long time successfully mediating between his god and giant nature and averting different kinds of danger facing his Æsir brothers. The day comes, however, when he can no longer be tolerated within their community, and, like his wolf-son, he too is bound with wolf-made fetters. The configuration of the tableau of Loki's captivity which Snorri elaborates: the wolf-guts, the serpent (*eitromr*) hanging over Loki's face and placed there by Skaði (*Vsp* 35, Snorri, 1988, 49) and the attentive woman, holding a vessel, seems to allude to Loki's fatherhood: his paternity binds him to signs of the monster-siblings, Loki's most significant contribution to the apocalypse of *ragna rök*. Like the *grey norna* (the dog of the Norns) in *Hamðismál*, Loki will finally turn on his divine peers, his social and fictive brothers, finally allying himself with the giants who are his fierce blood-kindred.

Snorri's account of the binding of Fenrir in *Gylfaginning* (1988, 27-9) is the only version we have of the gods' pre-emptive action against the beast. Snorri shows the wolf as an amiable animal, talkative and playful, who is raised at home and fed by Týr. The decision to bind him rests partly on prophecies that he will harm the Æsir, partly on alarm about his increasing size, *hversu mikit hann óx hvern dag*. (Snorri, 1988, 27). Fenrir does not seem particularly ill-disposed towards the gods until they mistreat him, and, as Clunies Ross points out, he regards the competition with the gods to break whatever bonds they put on him as an opportunity to win honour (Clunies Ross, 1994, 220). Yet the gods deceive him about the nature of the magic fetter Gleipnir they bring to bind him with, and thus compromise the essential nature of Týr, guarantor of law and of solemnly-sworn oaths, Fenrir's former care-giver, by having him swear falsely to the suspicious wolf. Fenrir is confined in a cave, bound until the world's end, and his mouth propped open by a sword – *góm-sparra gylðis kindar*, 'the jaw-prop of the howler's descendant' as Einarr Skúlason terms it in the twelfth-century poem *Geisli* (48) – allowing the free passage of his slaver, the source of the river Ván. For Snorri, Fenrir is a house-dog; grown too big and prophesied to be dangerous, his master and food-giver betrays him, chaining him up with a painful muzzle.

Now, instead of keeping watchful guard over his master's property, the wolf gazes banefully from afar at the homes of gods and men. Fenrir has been turned into a rabid dog, slaving and wild.

The Miðgarðsormr

Loki's second child is, on account of his marine habitat, less visible than his brother Fenrir. Cast by Óðinn into the ocean he has grown to monstrous size and now circumscribes the earth with his tail in his mouth. He is also named as Jörmungandr (perhaps 'mighty staff'). In conceptual terms he represents the spatial limits of the known world; the sea-dragon functions as the 'monstrous version of the concept of place because it destabilises boundaries', suggests Williams (1996, 206; cf. also Sørensen, 2002, as quoted above). Men can venture no further than where the Miðgarðsormr lurks – a limit which Hymir the giant recognises (according to Snorri) when he advocates a little flat-fish angling rather than rowing out to the margin where the serpent represents a real danger. The Miðgarðsormr is indeed a kind of sea-dragon, spitting poison rather than flames, a type of the universal primeval monster who is present at the creation, and thus reappears at the destruction of the universe. The Miðgarðsormr is not a devourer though, he advances by the side of his brother spitting poison (see Williams, 1996, 207). The serpent and his father are however absent from the Norse creation myths, unless we identify Loki with Loðurr and give him a role in the anthropogony (see Turville-Petre, 1964, 142-4), but they are certainly destroyers (Schier, 1999, 33). The serpent is always exiled from the human community, outside not only the walls of Miðgarðr, but beyond solid land itself, representing chaos and wilderness, apparently destined to be the antagonist and finally the victim of the civilising hero.

Some scholars find it curious that the Miðgarðsormr is not overcome at the encounter delineated in *Hymiskviða*, where for a moment it seems possible that *ragna rök* might be forestalled by Þórr's engagement with the monster, arguing that in an 'original' Indo-European context, the hero kills the monster (Turville-Petre, 1964, 76). But the dragon's fate is different from other types of monster; in European stories, very often, but not always, saints' lives, it is the dragon's exile from the city, rather than his death, which is sufficient to demarcate the boundary between the civilised and the wild and to guarantee the survival and progress of human culture (le Goff, 1977, 236-79). Nor does *Völuspá* directly recount the Miðgarðsormr's death (though the stanzas dealing with the death of Þórr are particularly unclear). Snorri suggests that Þórr is successful in slaying the Miðgarðsormr before he himself expires from the effects of its poisonous breath, and this seems the most plausible way of interpreting the difficult *Vsp* verses 55(H) and 56. Nevertheless Snorri seems uncertain about his own interpretation in *Gylfaginning*; revisiting the encounter in *Skáldskaparmál*, he suggests that just as Hector failed to kill Achilles, and killed a hero called Roddrus instead, so the death of Hymir was a substitute for killing the serpent, and, moreover, though Þórr died from the Miðgarðsormr's poison at *ragna rök*, it is not clear that the serpent also died. The Æsir are guilty of exaggeration: *meir hröpuðu þeir frásögninni en satt var en þeir sögðu at Miðgarðsormr fengi þar bana* ('they extended the story beyond what was true when they said that the Miðgarðsormr was killed there'), (Snorri, 1998, 6).

Snorri pairs the tale of Þórr's fishing-expedition in *Gylfaginning*, with its inconclusive encounter between god and monster with the account of Þórr's visit to Útgarða-Loki, an international folk-tale in which the god gains only a highly qualified victory. During the visit, Þórr and his companions compete in a series of *íþróttir*, tests largely of endurance in which the divine party are pitted against infinite or ineluctable concepts in order to emphasise the limitations even of divine capabilities. Loki is challenged by Logi, fire, an association which haunts him to the present day, thanks to Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm and, consequently, Wagner. Þjálfi, Þórr's human servant, races against Hugi (Thought), and Þórr himself, in an escalating series of trials, first fails to drain the sea, which lies at the end of his drinking horn, is humiliated by his inability to lift a rather large grey cat which lopes into the hall, and finally is almost thrown to the ground by Elli (Old Age), Utgarða-Loki's nurse. Snorri's Christian allegorizing tendencies are clearly at work here, and, just as he makes Fenrir into a communicative and unthreatening house-dog who turns nasty when he is mistreated, so the Miðgarðsormr is trivialised by its assimilation to a cat, even one which is *heldr mikill* (Snorri, 1988, 41, 42). The disguise works perfectly, for the contrast between the terrifying monster of the deep whose jaws, pierced by Þórr's hook, gape over the god's head in Hymir's boat, and the cat who arches its back and suffers one paw to be lifted from the ground could not be more finely judged. Snorri's transformation of the primeval monsters into pets is a studied comic containment of the apocalyptic figures who will be unleashed in his climactic description of *ragna rök*, a treatment which takes its solemn tone from *Völuspá*.

The Father of Hel

Hel is the odd one out among Loki's children, both in terms of gender and in her activities at *ragna rök*. Though she does not march with her siblings, her influence is everywhere; the onset of the end is signalled by a soot-red cock crowing in her hall (*Vsp* 43) and fearful men tread the paths to Hel's abode (*Vsp* 47, 52). In the skaldic poetry, as we saw above, she is most active in *Ynglingatal*, claiming the lives of successive kings, but it is often impossible to disambiguate her from her domain, in both pagan and Christian verse. Snorri is quite specific about Hel, both in terms of appearance, and in describing her domain: *Hon er blá hálf en hálf með hörundar lit – því er hon auðkend – ok heldr gnúpleit ok grimlig* (she is half blue-black and half skin-coloured – thus she is easily recognised, and with a rather drooping face and fierce-looking). (Snorri, 1988, 27). Hel conforms to one of Cohen's principal monster-paradigms; 'The Monster is a Harbinger of Category Crisis', (Cohen, 1996, 6). Hel, like her father, is not straightforwardly Other, but rather she embodies 'Both / And', the living and dead, a crisis-ridden category in Old Norse belief (see Ólason, 2000; Martin, 2005). Hel has power over nine worlds and makes arrangements (*skipti öllum vistum*) for the dead who are sent to her: those who die of sickness and old age. To match the territorial range of her authority, she has a number of halls. Snorri allegorises their features in terms of hardship and suffering, in a manner clearly derived from Christian sources, and which is at odds with his style elsewhere (see Larrington, 2001).

In Hel's later detailed appearance in *Gylfaginning*, in the aftermath of the death of Baldr (Snorri, 1988, 47), the lady is hospitable and courteous, seating her newly-arrived honoured guest in the high-seat, and offering hospitality to Hermóðr, though she wishes to test the assertions he makes about Baldr's popularity. Snorri scripts Hermóðr's journey along the difficult road to Hel's hall in eddic terms, as discussed above, negotiating his way past a female guardian and spurring his horse over Hel's gates. Hermóðr's reception in the strange hall is shaped in part by saga conventions, but Snorri also takes his cue from the *Baldrs draumar* tradition: the benches are strewn and the ale is brewed in preparation for Baldr's arrival. Hel is a thrifty and organised *húsfreyja*, making provision: arranging accommodation, brewing the ale and preparing the food. When Hermóðr's visit is over, Baldr and Nanna see him on his way, giving him parting gifts, just as generous Icelandic chieftains would. Baldr has some authority in the hall in Snorri's depiction, but it is Hel who decides who stays and who goes.

Snorri and the Three Siblings

Snorri's treatment of the three siblings in *Gylfaginning* is inconsistent, but consistently so. When he writes about *ragna rök*, that is when he is heavily dependent upon the mythological poetry – chiefly *Völuspá*, but also *Vafþrúðnismál* – he takes the monsters seriously, matching the great wolf with the Father of the Gods, and he probably follows his understanding of *Völuspá* in making Þórr and Miðgarðsormr mutually destroy one another. That Snorri is uncertain about the battle between these two is evidenced not only by his comments about the confrontation in *Gylfaginning*, but also in *Skáldskaparmál*, as discussed above (Snorri, 1998, 6) where he assimilates god and monster (both Fenrir and Miðgarðsormr) to human figures in the Trojan War. In the *ragna rök* context though, Snorri generalises the pattern further in providing dedicated opponents for other major gods; Týr is subjected to lupine / canine revenge for his earlier deception of Fenrir when Garmr attacks him; Freyr falls to Surtr, the fire-giant. Outside the *ragna rök* contexts, Snorri permits himself to embroider the existing traditions, taking the monsters less seriously than in his sources. In the fishing-expedition, the Miðgarðsormr and Þórr fasten one another with an appalling look; a detail often remarked upon in skaldic sources as well as *Hymiskviða*, but here comedy lies in the reaction of the cowardly giant, who resists the encounter with the monster, cutting the line and ending the stand-off between the cosmic opponents, an addition to *Hymiskviða* as it survives in the *Poetic Edda*.

Moreover, just before the Miðgarðsormr's terrifying apparition in this tale, he has been seen in the court of Útgarða-Loki, disguised as a harmless-looking grey-coloured cat whom Þórr cannot lift from the floor. Just as Fenrir becomes a house-dog, so Miðgarðsormr is temporarily domesticated. It is possible too that Elli, Old Age, Útgarða-Loki's aged nurse whom Þórr wrestles, is predicated on that other unavoidable woman, Hel, demoted to servant status, but still capable of bringing even an immortal god to his knees. The siblings have become comic figures; although their powers are unabated, they are presented by their giant ally as domestic, familiar figures of the kind one might expect to encounter in a great lord's hall. Snorri, as various scholars have pointed out, makes use of an international folk-tale, just as in his description of Hel's hall, he imports the language of Christian allegory into his text.

Extimité, that intimate alterity problematising the Other which is already inside the gates, glaring down at the defender of Miðgarðr, gazing hungrily at the homes of gods and men, or sliding into the dreams even of the son of Óðinn himself, is apparently Snorri's own contribution to Norse teratology; he creates the detailed portraits of Fenrir the house-dog, the Miðgarðsormr-cat, and Hel the *húsfreyja*. Yet perhaps Snorri is only externalising the implications of the monsters' paternity; their father is already always in the company of the gods, adventuring with his blood-brother and his kin, causing havoc, and solving the problems he brings. That Loki is himself wolfish is clear from his fate; bound like his son, with the guts of his other son, with the serpent and the *húsfreyja* in telling configuration around his prostrate form. In the larger Norse mythic conceptualisation, Loki's children are less intimate and more ineluctable; excluded from the human and the divine worlds, they lurk on the borders of time, space and life itself awaiting their moment: the time of *ragna rök* when, as in Cohen's seventh Monster Thesis, they will 'stand at the Threshold of Becoming' (Cohen, 1996, 20). Their irruption marks the end of one sort of time, space and mortality, but they are harbingers of a new heaven and new earth, arising anew in the final verses of *Völuspá*.

Giants and trolls perform the work of the Other, the adversary in most Old Norse myth and legend; native monsters, apart from the odd dragon and a number of vultures, are rather scarce in poetry and in *fornaldarsögur*, where creatures from learned tradition: cyclops, Cynocephali and *blámenn* roam freely (Schulz, 2004, 158, 233-52). The *finngáalkn*, though its form varies, seems in some texts to have watery associations like the Miðgarðsormr (Schulz, 2004, 154-9); the terrifying *hjasi* of *Egils saga einhanda ok Ásmundar*, which looks like a *glatúnshundr* and whose ears reach the ground seems to belong to the same genus as Fenrir - Garmr. Loki's children have their heirs in non-mythological texts; they have shed their cosmic significance and become assimilated to the everyday perils a late Viking hero has to face.

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