

## ON HEIÐR

BY JOHN MCKINNELL

### 1. *Who is Heiðr in Völuspá?*

Þat man hon fólcvíg fyrst í heimi,  
er Gullveigo geirom studdo  
oc í holl Hárs hána brendo;  
þrysvar brendo, þrysvar borna,  
opt, ósialdan, þó hon enn lifir.

Heiði hana héto, hvars til húsa kom,  
völo velspá, vitti hon ganda;  
seið hon kunni, seið hon leikin;  
æ var hon angan illrar brúðar. (*Völuspá* 21–22)<sup>1</sup>

She remembers a killing between peoples, the first in the world,  
when they propped up Gullveig with spears,  
and in the hall of Hárr they burned her;  
three times they burned her, three times reborn,  
often, not seldom, and yet she still lives.

They called her Heiðr, wherever she came to houses,  
a prophetess foretelling good fortune, she laid spells on spirits;  
she understood magic, practised magic in a trance;  
she was always the delight of an evil bride.

The interpretation of these two stanzas constitutes one of the most familiar problems in the study of eddic poetry. Most of the critics who have wrestled with them have been mainly concerned to elucidate the enigmatic figure of Gullveig, and since the work of Karl Müllenhoff (1883) and Sigurður Nordal (*Völuspá* 1978) the majority view has been that she is a quasi-allegorical figure associated with the Vanir, that the Æsir burn her in Óðinn's hall in order to try to exorcise the greed for gold which she represents, but that this merely leads to her being reborn as the *völva* Heiðr, whose name is usually translated as the adjective 'Bright'. The attack on her then leads indirectly to the war between the two races of gods, hence to the destruction of the fortress-wall of the Æsir, the

<sup>1</sup> Eddic poems are normally quoted from NK throughout this article, but in *Völuspá* 22/5–6 I reject their emendation of the Codex Regius text, adopting instead the smaller emendation of *leikin* to *leikin* (H reads *hugleikin*); further see *Völuspá* 1978, 44.

employment and betrayal of the Giant Builder, and thus to the moral fall of the gods and the confrontation with the giants which ends at Ragnarøk.

It is a powerful and elegant interpretation which enables us to see the whole poem as a structure combining logical clarity with moral force. But for that very reason, it may be worth revisiting the evidence for it; might it have been accepted, perhaps, more because of the elegance of the construct than because of any independent evidence in its favour? And elegant as it is, it leaves two problems unsolved. First, it does not explain how the burning of Gullveig and her reincarnation as *Heiðr* lead the *Æsir* to attack the *Vanir*, rather than vice versa. Second, if the defining vices of the gods are oathbreaking and murder (in the killing of the Giant Builder, *Völuspá* 26) and greed for gold (in the Gullveig episode), it seems odd that evil men are later punished for oathbreaking, murder and — not the greed for gold, but the seduction of other men's wives (*Völuspá* 39/1–6). The parallel is so nearly perfect that we should perhaps question whether we have understood the point of the Gullveig story correctly.

However, I shall leave Gullveig aside for the moment and concentrate on the identification of *Heiðr*. In the first two lines of st. 22,

*Heiði hana héto hvars til húsar kom*

They called her *Heiðr* wherever she came to houses

does the pronoun *hana* refer back to the last stated feminine subject (i.e. Gullveig), or is it, as Hermann Pálsson (1994, 60) has suggested, part of the pattern whereby the *völva* who is the narrator of the poem opens a number of stanzas by referring to herself in the third person? (stt. 21, 27, 28, 29, 30, 35, 38, 39, 59 and 64, and at two other significant moments: introducing the theme of Ragnarøk at 44/5, and when she sinks down at the end of her prophecy, 66/8). The reciting *völva* does not always refer to herself in the nominative case; in st. 29 she unambiguously uses a dative construction:

*Valði henni Herfðör hringa oc men.*

*Herfðör* (i.e. Óðinn) chose rings and necklace for her.

Nor can we appeal to the moral force and clarity of the poem's structure and outlook as seen by Müllenhoff and Nordal; that would be circular argument, since their view depends in part on the interpretation of this crux. Instead, we must try to place ourselves in the position of the poem's early audiences and ask who they are likely to have assumed *Heiðr* to be.

There is only one other occurrence of the name in Old Norse poetry, in *Hyndluljóð* 32:

Haki var Hvæðno hóti beztr sona,  
enn Hvæðno var Hjørvarðr faðir,  
Heiðr oc Hrossþjófr Hrímnis kindar.

Haki was somewhat the best of Hvæðna's sons,  
but Hjørvarðr was Hvæðna's father,  
Heiðr and Hrossþjófr (were) Hrímnir's children.

Probably because of the conventional identification of Heiðr with Gullveig, *LP* (236) and Simek (1993, 135) treat Heiðr here as an otherwise unrecorded name of a male giant, though Sijmons and Gering refer to Heiðr and Hrossþjófr as 'geschwister', 'brother and sister' (SG III:1 391). *LP* also cites a supposed instance of Heiðr as a masculine name in a skaldic verse by Helgi Ásbjarnarson, but this seems to be a simple use of the masculine noun *heiðr* in the sense 'honour', 'praise (in the form of poetry)' (Kock I 97). *Hyndluljóð* 32 is clearly concerned with the kindred of giants of both sexes (since Hrímnir is a well-known male giant-name and Hvæðna is undoubtedly female); the long lists of names of male giants in *Pulur* IV b, f (Kock I 323–25) do not include Heiðr, although other names listed here do appear (Hrímnir in *Pula* IV b 1/5; Hrossþjófr in *Pula* IV f 3/1; Haki twice, but in the lists of names of sea-kings, *Pula* III a 8 (Kock I 322) and IV a 2/7; Hveðra — probably a variant of Hvæðna — in the list of names of troll-women, *Pula* IV c 2/7).

This section of *Hyndluljóð* has clearly been influenced by *Völuspá*, so much so that it (or perhaps the whole poem) is referred to by Snorri (*Gylfaginning* ch. 5) as *Völuspá in skamma* (ed. Faulkes 1982, 10, 176; trans. Faulkes 1987, 10; and further see *Völuspá* 1978, 119–20; SG III:1 390), and there is no reason to think that Heiðr here is a different figure from the one in *Völuspá*. Hrímnir is a common giant-name, and Hrossþjófr is probably to be connected with the Lappish soothsayer Rostiophus, who prophesies to Othinus in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* III.iv.1 (ed. Olrik and Ræder I 70; trans. Fisher and Davidson I 76) that Rinda will bear him a son who will avenge the killing of Balderus. Davidson suggests (II 56) that Rostiophus may be Loki in disguise, the epithet 'Horse-Thief' referring to his seduction of the giant builder's horse, for which see *Gylfaginning* ch. 42 (ed. Faulkes 1982, 35; trans. Faulkes 1987, 36), and this is quite possible.

The association with magical prophecy is reinforced by the opening of the next stanza in *Hyndluljóð*:

Ero vǫlur allar frá Viðólfri.

All prophetesses derive from Viðólfri.

This link may derive from the fact that *Heiðr* was a traditional name for a *vǫlva*; and the name *Viðólftr*, which appears nowhere else, can most obviously be interpreted as ‘forest wolf’ (SG III:1 392 ‘*lupus silvaticus*’), which would be a ‘wild nature’ name similar to *Heiðr* ‘heath’. However, *Viðólftr* may be the same figure as Vitolfus, a retired warrior and magic-worker who heals the wounds of Haldanus and magically conceals his own house from the pursuing forces of Haldanus’s enemy in Saxo, *Gesta Danorum* VII.ii.2 (ed. Olrik and Ræder I 183; trans. Fisher and Davidson I 203, see notes in II 110). This name is probably to be derived from *vitt* ‘magic’ (in verse only in the phrase *vitta vétr*, *Ynglingatal* 3/3 and 21/3, Kock I 4, 7) and *vitta* ‘to enchant’ (in verse only in *Vǫluspá* 22/4), which perfectly describes the character’s role (see Fisher and Davidson II 110 and Simek 1993, 365). In that case, the poet of *Hyndluljóð* or the scribe of *Flateyjarbók* may have re-interpreted the name.

The poet of *Vǫluspá in skamma* clearly thought of *Heiðr* as a *vǫlva* of giant ancestry, and this would link her, not to Gullveig, but rather to the narrator of *Vǫluspá*, who says that she remembers the giants who gave birth to her or brought her up:

Ec man iǫtna, ár um borna,  
þá er forðom mic fœdda hǫfðo. (*Vǫluspá* 2/1–4)  
I remember giants, born of old,  
who had given birth to me (or brought me up) long ago.

Of course, it is possible that this may be a misinterpretation of *Vǫluspá* 22, but at our distance of centuries we are in no position to assert this; without evidence to the contrary, we should rather assume that the poet of *Hyndluljóð* understood *Vǫluspá* correctly.

## 2. *Heiðr* elsewhere

In prose sources *Heiðr* is a fairly familiar name for a *vǫlva*, and examples of it appear in:

*Orvar-Odds saga* ch. 2 (*FSN* I 286–89; for a discussion of this see Quinn 1998, 34–36);

*Hrólfs saga kraka* ch. 3 (*FSN* II 9–10);

*Landnámabók* (1968, 216–19; in the same story in *Vatnsdæla saga* chs 10–15 (1939, 28–42) the *vǫlva* is not named);

*Hauks þátttr hábrókar* (*Flateyjarbók* II 66–69);

Ch. 5 of the longer version of *Friðþjófs saga ins frækna* (1901, 14; here she is one of a pair of *seiðkonur*, the other being called *Hamgláma*, which may refer to her shape-changing ability. They are unnamed in the shorter version, see *FSN* II 247–70).

These stories share a number of major features besides the name of the *völva*:

1. *Heiðr* is typically seen as a peripatetic *völva* who is invited to prophesy at feasts; this may explain the line *hvars til húsa kom* (*Völuspá* 22/2). The only *Heiðr* who does not prophesy is one of a pair of *seiðkonur* in *Friðþjófs saga* who try to destroy the hero and his men by raising a storm at sea.

2. She may be of an alien origin connected with the far north — a Lapp (*Vatnsdæla saga*) or a giantess (*Hauks þáttr* and cf. *Hyndluljóð*). If *Heiðr* is the narrator of *Völuspá*, she has already claimed to have been *fædd* ('brought forth' or 'brought up') by ancient giants; and *Heiðreikr* (possibly 'heath-wanderer', cf. *reika*, 'to wander') appears as a male giant-name in Eilífr Goðrúnarson's *Pórsdrápa* 18/2 (Kock I 78), a poem which may be roughly contemporary with *Völuspá*.

3. The prophecies (or spells) are delivered from a high platform (*Hrólfs saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga*, *Friðþjófs saga*) and are preceded by a seizure in which *Heiðr* opens her mouth wide and gasps for breath (*Hrólfs saga*, *Hauks þáttr*); sometimes the hidden information is gathered at night (*Qrvar-Odds saga*). These features are not explicit in *Völuspá* (though the *völva*'s 'sitting out' in st. 28 probably implies that it is night), but they could easily be imagined in it.

4. The prophecies may be a 'song' which comes into *Heiðr*'s mouth from elsewhere (*Qrvar-Odds saga*, *Hrólfs saga*), in which case she refers in the verse to her own faculty of 'seeing', and may refer to herself either in the first person (*Hrólfs saga*) or in both first and third persons (*Qrvar-Odds saga*). Similarly, in *Völuspá* the prophecies clearly represent an external truth, and the narrating *völva* refers to herself in both the first and third persons.

5. The prophetess is paid with gifts, which may include a gold ring (*Hrólfs saga*, *Hauks þáttr*, though in the former the ring is given in an attempt to stop *Heiðr*'s revelations); similarly, Óðinn presents the speaking *völva* with *hringa oc men* (*Völuspá* 29/2).

6. The story in *Hrólfs saga* suggests that once the questioner has employed the correct procedure, *Heiðr* may be unable to stop her prophecy unless she can escape from the questioner's presence, or at least from the prophecy platform. In the same way, the narrating *völva* in *Völuspá* is apparently forced to speak when Óðinn looks her in the eye (*Völuspá* 28/4).

7. There is usually a powerful hostility between *Heiðr* and her male hearer, who may wish to defy his future or remain ignorant of it, and may attack or threaten her (*Qrvar-Odds saga*, *Hrólfs saga*, *Vatnsdæla saga*). We should probably assume a similar hostility between Óðinn and the

narrating *völva* in *Völuspá*, though in this case, as in *Hrólfs saga*, he is forcing her to speak rather than trying to prevent her.

8. *Heiðr* sometimes prophesies her hearer's death (*Qrvar-Odds saga*, *Hrólfs saga*), as the narrating *völva* in *Völuspá* prophesies that of Óðinn (*Völuspá* 53/7–8).

9. *Heiðr*'s prophesies always come true; this must also be assumed to be the case in *Völuspá*.

10. In *Landnámabók*, *Vatnsdæla saga* and possibly *Hauks þáttr* *Heiðr* seems to be connected with (or opposed to) the cult of Freyr, though she is never one of the Vanir herself. I shall return to the significance of this for the figure of *Heiðr* in *Völuspá*.

It seems, therefore, that nearly all the features traditionally associated with the name *Heiðr* are obviously borne out in what we are told about the narrating *völva* in *Völuspá*. The fact that some of them also appear in stories about *völur* with other names is not important for this argument; the point is that they recall other parts of *Völuspá* besides stt. 21–22. Of course it is true that all the other sources I have looked at are later than *Völuspá*, and one might argue that they have all used this famous poem in creating a traditional character for the name; but even if this were so, it would be rash to assume that they had all misunderstood the poem, and in the same way. The balance of likelihood must be either that *Völuspá* and the other sources all draw on a pre-existing tradition, or else, if it really is the source for all the others, that they understood it correctly, and consequently that *Heiðr* is the narrator of the poem.

The original meaning of the name *Heiðr* is uncertain. In the study of *Völuspá* it has usually been connected with the neuter noun *heið* 'brightness (of the sky)' and especially with the adjective *heiðr* 'bright', but this may be merely because of the assumed identity of *Heiðr* with Gullveig and her association with gold.

A second, more complex possibility is that it is derived from the feminine noun *heiðr* 'heath', perhaps with a perceived semantic link to the adjective *heiðinn* 'heathen', which first appears in Old Norse in Eyvindr skáldaspillir's *Hákonarmál* 21/5 (composed c. 962–65; Kock I 37). As Hákon had grown up and been converted to Christianity in England, it may here be a direct borrowing from Old English *hæðen*. There was probably a perceived connection between heathenism and the wild countryside in both Old English and Old Norse; OE *hæðstapa* 'heath-stepper', 'stag' appears in the hellish context of Grendel's mere in *Beowulf* 1368, and ON *heiðingi* occurs both in the sense 'heath-dweller', 'wolf' (seven instances in verse, the oldest of which

are probably *Atlakviða* 8/3 and 8/5), and also meaning ‘heathen’ (four surviving examples in twelfth-century verse, e.g. Einarr Skúlason, *Geisli* 55/4, Kock I 217).

A third derivation would be from the masculine noun *heiðr* ‘honour’, ‘praise’ and the related feminine noun *heið* ‘payment’, ‘fee’. It may seem odd for a *völva* to be given a name like this, but when Loki disguises himself as an old magic-working woman in *Gylfaginning* ch. 49, he adopts the equally curious name *Þokk* (apparently ‘Thanks’, ed. Faulkes 1982, 48; trans. Faulkes 1987, 51). In purely grammatical terms, the second of these derivations seems most likely, since the name *Heiðr* declines like *heiðr* ‘heath’; but to decide which is most probable in cultural terms, we must look at other significant names given to *völur*.

### 3. *Heiðr and her sisters*

The majority of names associated with *völur* and *seiðkonur* in Old Norse prose sources are conventional two-element female names which are also used for women who have no association with magic, and they probably have no particular significance (e.g. Oddbjörg in *Víga-Glúms saga*, Sæunn in *Njáls saga*, Þorbjörg lítilvölva in *Eiríks saga rauða*, Þórdís in *Fóstbræðra saga*, Þórdís at spákonufelli and Þórveig in *Kormáks saga*, Þuríðr sundafyllir in *Landnámabók*). However, there are some other single-element names besides *Heiðr* which are particularly associated with magic-working women:

1. *Busla* in *Bósa saga* (chs 2, 5, *FSN* II 467, 472–73) is the foster-mother of the hero Bósi, who confronts King Hringr and chants a poem against him, in which she threatens him with various disasters if he refuses to give up his hostility towards Bósi and Herraúðr. *Busla* refers to herself mainly in the first person, but also once in the third person (by her name), and she ends with a question:

eða viltu þulu lengri?

or do you want a longer list?

which strongly recalls the second refrain in *Völuspá*:

vitoð ér enn, eða hvat?

do you know enough yet, or what?

The name *Busla* may be connected with the poetic verb *bysja* ‘to gush’ (past tense *busti*), but I have not found any other example of it.

2. The name *Gríma* is used for three different magic-making women, one in *Laxdæla saga* chs 35–37 (1934, 95–107) and two in *Fóstbræðra saga*

chs 9–10 and 23 (1943, 161–69, 242–48), as well as being applied to a troll-woman (*Þula* IV c 1/6, Kock I 324); but there is also one woman in *Landnámabók*, Gríma Hallkelsdóttir, who is not associated with magic (1968, 83, 108–10). The name is linked to the noun *gríma* ‘mask’, ‘cowl’ (and in poetry also ‘night’).

3. *Gróa* is one of the commonest names for a *völva*, and is the only one of this group which is also relatively common as a non-magical female name; *Landnámabók* records twelve different examples of it. In *Svipdagsmál* 1–16 (SG I 196–200), *Gróa* is awoken from the dead to chant nine protective *galdrar* over her son. Another mythological *Gróa* (in *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 17, ed. Faulkes 1998, I 22; trans. Faulkes 1987, 79–80) begins to extract the fragment of *Hrungnir*’s whetstone from *Þórr*’s head (cf. also *Þjóðólfr* of *Hvin*, *Haustlǫng* 20/1–4, early tenth century, Kock I 12); the fact that *Þórr* has to fetch her husband *Aurvandill* across *Élivágar* (‘Frozen Waves’) suggests that she was probably thought of as the wife of a giant. A more sinister *Gróa*, in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* ch. 2 (*FSN* II 362–63), fosters the foundling *Grímr* and teaches him her magic. In *Vatnsdæla saga* ch. 36 (1939, 95–96), *Gróa* has supernatural foreknowledge of her own fated death. Saxo’s *Gróa* (*Gesta Danorum* Liv.2–12, ed. Olrik and Ræder I 13–18, trans. Fisher and Davidson I 16–19 and notes II 27) is not a *völva*, but has strong giant associations; she is wooed by King Gram, partly through his champion Bessus, in a sequence of verse reminiscent of *Skírnismál*. The name *Gróa* is obviously derived from the verb *gróa* ‘to grow’.

4. *Hulð* is a *seiðkona* and *völva* in Finnmark in Snorri’s *Ynglinga saga* chs 13–14 (1941, 29–31), though she does not appear in either of the two stanzas of *Þjóðólfr*’s *Ynglingatal* which are quoted in these chapters; she may also have been the central figure of a lost *Huldar saga*, about a *trollkona mikil*, which Sturla Þórðarson recited before the court of King Magnús Hákonarson in Bergen in 1263 (*Sturlu þáttr* ch. 2, *Sturlunga saga* II 232–33). She has also been linked to the German fairytale figure of Holda or Frau Holle, Mother Winter (Simek 1993, 165); but her name is related to the verb *hylja* ‘to conceal’ (past participle *huliðr* or *huldr*), and seems to mean ‘hidden’.

5. *Hyndla*, the wise giantess of *Hyndluljóð*, is called upon to give esoteric information, some of it about the future (*Hyndluljóð* 42–44). Like *Busla* and the narrating *völva* in *Völuspá*, she challenges her hearer in one of her refrains (*Hyndluljóð* 17/8, 18/10, 34/4, 36/4, 39/4):

viltu enn lengra?

do you want still more?



The name means 'little bitch' (see SG III:1 369; LP 305), and probably had giant associations (cf. the giant-name *Hundalfr* in *Pula* IV f 3/2, Kock I 325); it also appears as a common noun in *Maríu saga* (1871, 494), where the little bitches symbolise *parflausar hugsanir* 'idle thoughts'.

Nearly all these names seem to be connected with wild nature or with concealment, and a derivation of *Heiðr* from *heiðr* 'heath' therefore seems more likely than one which connects the word to brightness or to honour; this is also borne out by the grammatical declension of the name (see p. 400 above).

The name *Heiðr* apparently implied an ancient woman, often of giant or Lappish origin, and Hermann Pálsson (1996, 14–26) has suggested that the narrator (and authoress) of *Völuspá* is herself to be assumed to be one of the Saami. I think this unlikely; of all the *völur* considered above, only *Heiðr* in *Vatnsdæla saga* (but not in the same story in *Landnámabók*) is said to be Lappish, and this may be influenced by the male Lappish enchanters whom Ingimundr employs in the same story in an attempt to find his silver Freyr image. *Hulð* in *Ynglinga saga* apparently lives in Finnmark, but her ethnic origin is not stated. Against this, *Heiðr* is a giantess in *Hyndluljóð* and apparently also in *Hauks þáttr*; *Gríma* is a troll-woman in the *þulur*; *Gróa* in *Skáldskaparmál* is the wife of a giant, in Saxo she is betrothed to a giant, and in *Göngu-Hrólfs saga* she is the foster-mother of a monstrous son whose actual mother is thought to have been a sea-hag; *Hulð* also has elemental associations which suggest a giant origin; and *Hyndla* is explicitly called *brúðr iqtuns* (*Hyndluljóð* 50/3). Since the narrator of *Völuspá* also says that she was herself brought up by giants, it seems likely that this was a common literary assumption about *völur* in mythological and legendary sources, and that cases where *völur* are said to be of Saami or other remote northern origins represent a later rationalisation of this tradition.

#### 4. *Heiðr and the evil woman*

At the end of *Völuspá* 22 it is said of *Heiðr*,

æ var hon angan illrar brúðar

she was always the joy of an evil woman

and most commentators have merely remarked on the bad reputation of those who practised *seiðr*. Hermann Pálsson (1996, 50) differs from other editors (including his own earlier edition, see Hermann Pálsson 1994, 9) in reading *þjóðar* 'nation' instead of *brúðar*, again associating it with the Saami; but as the Codex Regius scribe himself has apparently corrected

this reading to *brúðar* (which is also found in H), it is difficult to justify reading *þjóðar* here. But what exactly does *brúðar* mean in this context? Does it refer to a particular evil woman, or to evil women in general, and what kind of evil is meant?

The word *brúðr* is common in Old Norse verse (*LP* gives 55 examples) in the lexical senses ‘bride’, ‘wife’ and ‘woman’ (which flow into each other to some extent). But most instances of it are of a few specific kinds, some of whose connotations may seem surprising. Since the reference in *Völuspá* is to an ill *brúðr*, three small groups of approving usages may be ignored here (*brúðr* plus the title of a nobleman, e.g. *iarla brúðr*, *Guðrúnarkviða I* 3/2; cases derived from Christian religious expressions of the ‘bride of Jesus’ type, e.g. *brúðir Jésú*, *Heilagra meýja drápa* 4/1; and complimentary addresses to attractive and/or noble women as *brúðir*, e.g. *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 35/7).

Most, however, appear in more sinister contexts:

1. The largest group is of ‘brides’ or potential ‘brides’ of giants: *bergrisa brúðr*, *Grottasöngur* 24/1–2; *brúð(i)r iqtuns*, *Hyndluljóð* 4/6, 50/3; *brúðr Aurnis jóða*, *Draumvísur (XI)* 10/3 (Kock I 198); *brúðr bergjarls*, *Anon (X) lausavísa III A* 1/1 (Kock I 92); *brúðir þolvísar*, *Hárbarðsljóð* 23/3; *brúðr sefgrímnis mága*, *Pórsdrápa* 4/7–8 (Kock I 77). Other *brúðir* who fall more loosely into this group include the proposed bride of the dwarf Alvið in *Alvíssmál* 1/2, 2/6, 4/2 and the *brúðir berserkia* whom Þórr boasts of having fought in *Hárbarðsljóð* 37/1–2.

2. Other *brúðir*, though sometimes the sexual partners of gods, are themselves giantesses (Skaði in *Grímnismál* 11/5; Jörð in *Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld*’s *Hákonardrápa* 6/1–2, Eyvindr skáldaspillir’s *Háleygjatal* 15/3, and Eyjólfur dáðaskáld’s *Bandadrápa* 3/5). Others again are hags who appear to have no husbands, like the *gýgr* (‘hag’) who speaks out of a stone and is addressed as *brúðr* by the dead Brynhildr in *Helreið Brynhildar* 3/2. A particularly interesting example of a troll-woman ‘bride’ in the context of this argument is the wolf-kenning *heiðingja . . . brúðar* in the last stanza of Oddi’s *drápa* quoted in *Stjörnu-Odda draumr* ch. 9 (1991, 481), referring to Hléguðr, who in battle magically acquires a wolf’s head and becomes invisible unless looked at under one’s left hand.

3. Three doubtful cases may refer to the idea of features of the natural world as giantesses: Snæbjörn’s reference to waves as *skerja . . . nú brúðir*, (*lausavísa* 1/2–4, Kock I 105); the reference to the sun as *heið brúðr himins* in *Grímnismál* 39/6; and most interestingly, though very uncertainly, Einarr Skúlason’s designation of Freyja as *Vanabrúðr* in *Øxarflokkr* 5/2 (Kock I 221), though this might be placed in the ‘complimentary’ group.

4. There are four uses of *brúðr* in contexts connected with death: *Atlakviða* 41/7, where Guðrún is setting fire to Atli's hall, killing everyone inside; *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* 46/9–10, where Helgi refers to the presence of *brúðir byrgðar í haugi* 'brides buried in a mound'; *Sigurðarkviða in skamma* 53/4, where the dying Brynhildr is referring to herself; and Hrafn Önundarson, *lausavísa* 1/3 (Kock I 100), who dreams that the bed of his *brúðr* is reddened with his own blood. Akin to this are at least two references to valkyries as *brúðir*: *Grípisspá* 16/2, referring to the valkyrie Sigrdrífa, and *Helgakviða Hjörvarðssonar* 7/3, referring to Sváva. Two other valkyrie-like figures are also called *brúðir*: the favourable dream-woman who will receive Gísli after his death (Gísli Súrsson, *lausavísa* 22/3, Kock I 58); and the figure of Guðrún in armour in *Atlakviða* 43/3.

5. *Brúðr* also appears in a number of contexts which imply the unreliability or treacherous behaviour of women: *Grípisspá* 45/6, 46/2, 49/2 all use *brúðr* to refer to Brynhildr while predicting her resentful and treacherous behaviour; one of the proverbially unreliable things listed in *Hávamál* (86/5) is *brúðar beðmál* 'the words of a woman in bed'; *Sigrdrífumál* 28/2–3 warns against being tempted to kiss *fagrar / brúðir becciom á* 'pretty women on the benches'; and Kormákr (*lausavísa* 23/2, Kock I 45) alludes regretfully to how he used to trust Steingerðr. One might perhaps add *Völundarkviða* 19/2 (which may refer to Völundr's swan-wife and could also belong to the valkyrie group) and 33/9 (referring to the sexually pliant Þoðvildr).

A few of these examples are doubtful, but between them these groups account for up to 41 of the 54 other instances of *brúðr* listed in *LP*. To judge from the surviving uses of the word in verse, therefore, the phrase *illrar brúðar* in *Völuspá* 22/8 is most likely to refer to a giantess or the like, to a context associated with death, or to sexually motivated unreliability. It does not otherwise appear in contexts directly connected with *seiðr*, so we should probably assume that whoever this woman may be, she needs Heiðr's prophetic gifts because she does not share them.

### 5. *Gullveig*

I shall now turn back to the meaning of the name *Gullveig*, which is found only in *Völuspá*. It seems likely that the poet may have invented Gullveig himself; if so, her meaning can only be what a contemporary audience could gather from the name. I used to think that this points towards an allegorical interpretation of her; but it is alternatively possible that the poet intended his audience to recognise in her a mythological being who

usually goes by another name. In either case, the interpretation of her must begin from the meaning of her name.

*Gull-* is a rare element in personal names; see *Gullrönd*, Guðrún's sister in *Guðrúnarkviða I*; *Gullmævill*, a dwarf in *Pula* IV ii 4/3 (Kock I 336); *Gullintanni* 'gold-tooth', a by-name of Heimdallr (*Gylfaginning* ch. 27, ed. Faulkes 1982, 25; trans. Faulkes 1987, 25) (and *gulltönnr*, a royal nickname in Snorri Sturluson, *Ynglinga saga* ch. 42 (1941, 73), where the divine origins of the family suggest a mythological sense); *Gulla*, *Gulli* and the giant-name *Gullnir*, derived from nicknames denoting wealth; and *Gullkúla* 'gold knob', possibly from a gold possession (for the last four, see Lind 1905–15, cols 349, 400–01). In nicknames *gull-* is commoner (see Lind 1920–25, cols 123–25); it may be prefixed to the names of rich people (e.g. *gull-Ása*, *gull-Haraldr*), can appear alone (*gul(l)i*), or in compounds like *gullkleppr* 'gold-mass', *gullkorni* 'rich farmer', *gullskór* 'gold-shoe' (applied to King Hákon Hákonarson's messenger Hallvarðr). It can also denote owners of gold objects, e.g. *gullberi*, *gullháls*, *gullhjálmr*, *gullkambr*, *gullknappr*. Three names might refer to blonde hair (*gullbrá* 'gold-(eye)brow', *gullkárr* 'gold-curl', *gullskeggr* 'gold-beard'), but Lind sees the latter two as double nicknames = 'rich bearded/curly-haired man'. *Gullbrá* in *Vilmundar saga víðutans* is named after an omen that she will marry a king (Loth 1964, 141), and here it must refer to a gold crown. In the folktale *Gullbrá og Skeggi* (Jón Árnason 1961, I 140–44) she is a witch who owns a chest of gold; perhaps the nickname implied a woman with gold ornaments on her forehead. The only metaphorical *gull-* nicknames are translated from Latin or Greek: *gullmunnr* (= St. John Chrysostom), *gullvarta* (a watchtower in Byzantium, de Vries 1977, 194). It seems that *Gull-* in human names normally refers to wealth or to objects made of gold, not to figurative excellence or golden colour.

There are some other mythological names beginning in *Gull-* (or *Gullin-*), mostly applied to animals which belong to the gods:

1. Freyja's (or Freyr's) sacred boar *Gullinbur(sti)* 'gold-bristle' (*Hyndluljóð* 7/6; *Gylfaginning* ch. 49, ed. Faulkes 1982, 47; trans. Faulkes 1987, 50; *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 7, ed. Faulkes 1998, I 18; trans. Faulkes 1987, 75).

2. The horse *Gull(in)faxi* 'gold-mane' (*Þulur* I a 2/6, IV rr 1/2, Kock I 321, 340), which Snorri explains was given by Þórr to his son Magni after Hrungnir was killed (*Skáldskaparmál* ch. 17, ed. Faulkes 1998, I 20–22; trans. Faulkes 1987, 77–79).

3. *Gullinhorni* 'gold-horn', a bull, of which nothing else is known (*Pula* IV ö 3/2, Kock I 334).

4. *Gullinkambi* 'gold-comb', the cock that wakes the gods (*Völuspá* 43/2).

5. *Gulltoppr* ‘gold-top’, listed as one of the horses of the Æsir (*Grímnismál* 30/5; *Þulur* I a 1/5, IV rr 1/3, Kock I 321, 340), and said by Snorri to be Heimdallr’s horse (*Gylfaginning* chs 27, 49, ed. Faulkes 1982, 25, 47; trans. Faulkes 1987, 25, 50; *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 8, ed. Faulkes 1998, I 19; trans. Faulkes 1987, 76).

In these cases, the element *Gull(in)-* indicates possession by the gods, sometimes the Vanir, and probably that the animals concerned are in some way made of gold (see p. 409 below).

There are also many common nouns in Old Norse verse which have the first element *gull-*. The largest group of these, which is not relevant to *Völuspá*, is of terms for men who use gold, usually as gatherers or generous distributors of it (*gullbroti*, *gullkennir*, *gullmiðlendr*, *gullsamnandi* and six others), but occasionally as smiths (*gullsmiðr* and probably *Gullmævill*, see p. 405 above). Two terms for snakes, which probably refer to their lying on hoards of treasure, are also irrelevant here (*gullbúi*, *gullormr*).

When these are discarded, two types of compound remain. The first is a large group referring to objects made of or covered with gold: *gullband*, *gullbaugr*, *gullbitill*, *gullbrynja*, *gullhjálmr*, *gullhlað*, *gullhring*, *gullker*, *gullmen*, *gullseimr*, *gullskál*, *gullstafr*. The second is a pair of woman-kennings: *gullfit*, *gullskorð*, to which we should probably add *gull-Skøgul* (where the valkyrie-name *Skøgul* stands for ‘woman’) and *Gullrönd* (perhaps referring to her gold-edged clothing?). There are no compound nouns which refer to any psychological or moral effect of gold; and Lotte Motz’s theory that *Gullveig* simply means ‘golden (coloured) drink’ (Motz 1993, 82–84) also seems unlikely, since there are no other nouns that refer simply to golden colour.

The element *-veig* is not uncommon in female names; in verse we find *Álmveig* (one of the ancestresses of the Skjöldungar, in *Hyndluljóð* 15/5), *Bøðveig* (said in *Sólarljóð* 79/4 to be the eldest daughter of Njörðr), *Rannveig* (Óláfr inn helgi, *lausavísa* 1/3, Kock I 110, and *Málsháttakvæði* 18/4 — referring to two different women, apparently both historical) and *Þórveig* (Kormákr, *lausavísa* 22b, Kock I 45). Also relevant is the woman-kenning *hørveig* (*Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 23, *lausavísa* 7/6, ed. Jónas Kristjánsson 81; ed. Turville-Petre 42 and notes on p. 79), where the first element means ‘flax’, ‘linen’, and clearly refers to what the woman wears; the same might be true in the name *Gullveig*. It is even possible that some poets regarded *-veig* merely as a *heiti* meaning ‘lady’, possibly with ancestral or Vanic connotations. *Veigr* also appears as a male dwarf-name (*Völuspá* 12/1), but the meaning here is no clearer than in the case of the female name-element.

The origin of the element is uncertain. Noreen relates it to Gothic *weihs* 'place' and Latin *vicus* 'village', but this seems unhelpful (though it is historically possible),<sup>2</sup> for there is no way that a tenth-century poet could have recognised this meaning, or used it in a made-up name. Sijmons and Gering suggest that the root is that found in *víg* 'war' and Gothic *weihan* 'to fight', and this might have been more meaningful to a tenth-century poet (cf. the sword-*heiti veigarr*, *Pula* IV 1 4/1, Kock I 328). Most commentators, however, have connected it with the feminine noun *veig* 'alcoholic drink', though Dronke (II 41) suggests that the poet may also have wished to draw on the sense 'military strength', which survives only in prose (see CV 690).

All these interpretations seem philologically possible, but the element should clearly be interpreted in the same way in all the names in which it appears, and it is certainly easier to find other female name elements connected with war than with drink. Common second elements of female names include *-gunnr*, *-hildr*, *-víg*, and among first elements we find *Bqð-*, *Guð-*, *Hild-*, *Víg-* and the possibly relevant *Val-*. Similar elements connected with drink are much rarer: *Mjað-* among first elements (but not *Ql-*, which derives from PON *alu* 'magic', 'ecstasy', see Krause 1966, 239), but no second elements at all. Of course, *-veig* might be the exception, but the preponderance of military elements in other Norse female names suggests that a connection with military force may be more likely.

The second element of the name *Gullveig* therefore seems most likely to mean either 'military strength' or simply 'lady'; the sense 'drink' is possible, but there is no particular reason to favour it, and *veig* never appears in the abstract sense 'intoxication', as Müllenhoff's interpretation (1883, 95–96) would require. The first element could mean 'made of gold', 'wearing gold', 'having much gold', or perhaps 'belonging to the gods (especially the Vanir)'. If the poem's first audience were expected to recognise *Gullveig*, therefore, it would probably have been as a female figure made of, wearing or possessing gold, and endowed with military strength. There does not seem to be any warrant in the other uses of the name-elements for taking her as an allegorical figure constructed by the poet to symbolise the intoxicating greed for gold.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the name, *Goldeburh*, of the heroine of the Middle English romance *Havelok*, which has strong Scandinavian connections, and the second element of the Norse personal name *Herborg* (*Guðrúnarkviða* I 6/1), in both of which the second element seems to mean 'fortress'.

6. *Gullveig, Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr and Hyndla*

Turville-Petre (*MRN* 158–59) regards Gullveig as a version of Freyja, and Ursula Dronke (*II* 41, 129) has usefully linked the gold-adorned and sensual nature of Gullveig/Freyja with that of the Freyja-like figure of Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr, who appears in a variety of sources and was particularly worshipped by Hákon jarl inn ríki, the last great upholder of heathenism in Norway. The sources for the cult of Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr are:

Skúli Þorsteinsson, *lausavísa* 4 (Kock I 145);

Þorkell Gíslason, *Búadrápa* 9–10 (Kock I 261);

Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinnsson, *Jómsvíkingadrápa* 30, 32 (Kock II 4–5);

Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál* ch. 45 (Faulkes 1998, I 60);

*Njáls saga* ch. 88 (1954, 214–15);

*Harðar saga* ch. 19 (1991, 51–52);

*Ketils saga hængs* ch. 5 (*FSN* I 261);

*Flateyjarbók: Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 114 (*Flateyjarbók* I 157, also regarded as *Færeyinga saga* ch. 23, 1967, 43–45);

*Flateyjarbók: Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* chs 154–55 and *Jómsvíkinga saga* chs 32–34 (*Flateyjarbók* I 210–11; *Jómsvíkinga saga* 1962, 36–38);

*Flateyjarbók: Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 173 (*Flateyjarbók* I 235, also regarded as *Þorleifs þáttr jarlsskálds* ch. 7, 1956, 225–27);

*Flateyjarbók: Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 326 (*Flateyjarbók* I 452–54).

Two further possible references to her are Tindr Hallkelsson, *Hákonar-drápa* 1/1–4 (Kock I 75); Saxo, *Gesta Danorum*, III.ii.8 (ed. Olrik and Ræder I 65; trans. Fisher and Davidson I 71, see notes in II 53–54).

The sheer variety of sources in which Þorgerðr appears tends to suggest that, although some details are historically improbable, her cult itself is a historical fact. The range of forms of her title (*høldabrúðr*, *Hølgabrúðr*, *Hørdabrúðr*, *hørgabrúðr*, *Hørgatröll*) points to the same conclusion (see Storm 1885 and *Jómsvíkinga saga* 1962, 51–52), and implies that she was worshipped in more than one province of western Norway, and perhaps in southern Iceland as well.

Þorgerðr's first name may be best explained as derived from that of *Gerðr*, the consort of Freyr, with the prefix *Þor-* added to link this Vanir-connected being to the majority cult of the *Æsir*. This suggestion is strengthened by the likelihood that her name may sometimes have been shortened to *Þóra* or (if Tindr Hallkelsson means to refer to her) to *Gerðr* (see Chadwick 1950, 411–12, 400 respectively).

The second element of her title is usually *-brúðr*, though the form *Hørgatröll* in *Ketils saga hængs* shows that she had some giant associations (as



*brúðr* itself often has, see p. 403 above), and the nouns *flagð* and *tröll* are also applied to her and/or her sister in *Jómsvíkingadrápa* and *Jómsvíkinga saga* respectively (*Jómsvíkinga saga* 1962, 37). The various forms of her title may perhaps be translated ‘wife of noblemen’, ‘wife of Hǫlgi’ or ‘woman of the Háleygjar’, ‘woman of the Hǫrðalanders’, ‘woman/trollwoman of the shrines’. Snorri and the writer of *Flateyjarbók* ch. 173 take *-brúðr* here to mean ‘daughter’, but this sense is never found elsewhere, and these sources have probably misunderstood a situation in which the male ruler of a province and his dead ancestors were regarded as the sexual partners of the goddess. In most surviving sources, her living ‘husband’ is Hákon jarl (in *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326, Óláfr Tryggvason mocks her by saying, after Hákon’s death, that she has just lost a husband who was very dear to her); dead ancestors are also seen as sexual partners of a goddess in *Ynglingatal* 7, 30–32 (Kock I 5, 8 and with commentary in Snorri Sturluson, *Ynglinga saga* 1941, 33–34, 76–79), where dead kings are said to provide Hel with sexual enjoyment, and probably in *Grímnismál* 14, which claims that Freyja takes half the slain each day.

Þorgerðr is strongly associated with gold, and the jarl had to make offerings of treasure to her in order to keep her favour (see *Skáldskaparmál*, *Flateyjarbók* chs 114, 154–55, 326 and *Jómsvíkinga saga*). In *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326 Óláfr Tryggvason even implies that she was so covetous for gold that she could be ‘bought’ like a prostitute (like Freyja, as we can see from *Sǫrla þáttr* ch.1, *FSN* II 97–98). The idol of Þorgerðr is described as wearing gold rings (*Njáls saga*, *Flateyjarbók* ch. 114), as inlaid with gold (*Flateyjarbók* ch. 114) or as possessing treasure (*Skáldskaparmál*, *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326). Snorri’s statement that the funeral mound of Hǫlgi was made of alternate courses of gold and silver and of earth and stone is obviously a hyperbole, but it may point to the custom of using *goldgubber* as temple offerings. This has been well illustrated by Margrethe Watt’s recent excavations at Sorte Muld, Bornholm, where about 2300 *goldgubber* were found (Watt 1999, 132–42). They are tiny gold plates, apparently dating from between the late sixth and the late ninth century, stamped with male and/or female figures (or in a few cases with the forms of animals, usually boars), and they were probably deposited as religious offerings at sites connected with the worship of the Vanir. They are extremely difficult to find, and the huge number of them found at Sorte Muld probably reflects the unusually meticulous excavation methods used there, notably the water-sieving of large amounts of spoil. The much smaller numbers found elsewhere may therefore represent only a small proportion



of those that were actually present on the sites concerned; they may have been deposited in very large numbers at these sites. If Gullveig refers to a figure like Freyja or Þorgerðr, it would make perfect sense for her to be referred to as rich in gold, wearing gold, or made of gold. The apparent absence of tenth-century *gubber* may suggest that this kind of cult became less popular in the last century of heathenism; perhaps this may also explain why late heathen Norwegians were not prepared to tolerate Hákon jarl's 'sacred promiscuity' (see p. 412 below).

Þorgerðr also engages in military magic on behalf of her followers, shooting arrows from her fingers and sending driving hail against their enemies, though she sometimes demands human sacrifice in return (*Flateyjarbók* chs 154–55, *Jómsvíkinga saga*, *Flateyjarbók* ch. 173), or kills her followers when she withdraws her patronage from them (*Harðar saga*). It would thus be appropriate, if Gullveig represented a figure like Þorgerðr, for the name-element *-veig* to refer to military strength, and this would also supply an explanation of the battle-magic (*vígspá*) which the Vanir subsequently use in their war against the Æsir (*Völuspá* 23–24).

According to *Flateyjarbók*, *Jómsvíkinga saga* and *Njáls saga*, Þorgerðr has a sister called *Irpa* 'the Swarthy One', who is present in her temple and also helps her in warfare. The name *Irpa* is probably related to *jarpr* 'swarthy' (cf. OE *eorp*, used of dark-skinned peoples, e.g. the Egyptians in *Exodus* 1997, 105, line 194 and note; and cf. the ON personal name *Erpr* applied to sons of foreign fathers, e.g. in *Atlakviða* 38 and *Hamðismál* 14, 28, ed. Dronke I, 11, 164, 167 and note on p. 71; see also Simek 1993, 327). It looks like a nickname substituted for the name of a figure whom it was considered unlucky to name directly. She may have been either a 'dark' aspect of Þorgerðr herself, or a figure of Hel, and perhaps the two things sometimes became synonymous.

*Irpa* is not the only dark sister of a fertility goddess. Freyja opens the narrative framework of *Hyndluljóð* by calling on her 'sister' Hyndla (1/3), who is a giantess and lives in a cave. Freyja's lover Óttarr needs to obtain detailed knowledge of his ancestry from Hyndla in order to assert his land rights in a legal dispute. The relationship between the two female characters, however, is one of bitter enmity, and after Hyndla has given the necessary information and the *minnispl* 'ale of memory' which will enable Óttarr to remember what he has been told, Freyja destroys her with fire (or, if we accept Judy Quinn's interpretation, Hyndla makes an unsuccessful attempt to attack Freyja with fire, see pp. 411–12 below).

After telling Óttarr his ancestry Hyndla turns to the parentage of the gods, giants and other beings, the future collapse of the world, and the

coming of another figure, which seems to resemble the Second Coming of Christ (stt. 29–44). This passage bears such an obvious resemblance to *Völuspá* that Snorri refers to it (or perhaps to *Hyndluljóð* as a whole — see Steinsland 1991, 461–94) as *Völuspá in skamma* (see p. 396 above); it may have a separate origin from the rest of the poem, but even if this is so, it would hardly have been interpolated into *Hyndluljóð* if the interpolator had not seen a parallel between the situation in that poem and the one in *Völuspá*.

Despite her association with *seiðr*, Freyja in *Hyndluljóð* is apparently unable to prophesy herself; nor is Þorgerðr ever portrayed as having magical powers of her own, apart from the ability to intervene in battle (and even there, she is not victorious against the Jómsvíkingar until she and Irpa unite to employ their storm of hailstones). In the same way, Heiðr and Hamgláma in *Friðþjófs saga* unite in an attempt to destroy Friðþjófr by making the air dark *með sjódrifi ok ofveðri, frosti ok fjúki ok feiknarkulda* ‘with sea spray and a violent storm, frost and snowstorm and deadly cold’ (1901, 25).

Freyja needs prophetic information from Hyndla, and similarly, the queen in *Ynglinga saga* chs 13–14 has to employ the *völva* Hulð rather than carry out the required magic herself. If Gullveig is a representative of Freyja (or of a similar deity), she may well also be the *ill brúðr* who takes pleasure in Heiðr, and even the choice of the word *brúðr* itself could be a covert reference to a figure like Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr or Freyja as *Vanabrúðr*. The rare word *angan* ‘delight’ may point in the same direction; it appears only three times in verse, and both the other cases are connected with goddesses (*Friggiar angan*, *Völuspá* 53/7–8; *Freyju angan*, in a small fragment of a love poem by Óláfr Leggsson svartaskáld, Kock II 52). It is probably a figurative variant of *angi* ‘a delightful perfume’, and might well be connected with incense used in burnt sacrifices to goddesses. The only instance of *angi* in verse is in Hallfreðr vandræðaskáld, *lausavísa* 18/8, Kock I 87, where it refers to the delightful scent of a woman; so there could also be a suggestion that Gullveig derives her sexual allure from the magic performed for her by Heiðr.

For Freyja in *Hyndluljóð*, fire is a weapon, whether used by her against the giantess or unsuccessfully by Hyndla against her (depending on who is taken to be the speaker in st. 48); it is also probably a means whereby she is worshipped by Óttarr (st. 10/1–4), so there would be a particular irony in using it as a means of attacking her. There are three apparently distinct stories of sacrilege against shrines of Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr (in *Njáls saga*, *Harðar saga* and *Flateyjarbók* ch. 326); all three

involve the burning of the idol and/or her temple, and in the last case, she is burnt along with an idol of Freyr. Judy Quinn (forthcoming)<sup>3</sup> argues that Hyndla uses fire against Freyja in *Hyndluljóð* 48 rather than vice versa, and if this is correct, that would be a fourth instance of the same thing. These stories may all originate from the Christian taste for destruction of idols, but as two of the burnings are carried out by heathens, it may be worth considering whether there could have been another motive for them.

One of the most notable features of Þorgerðr's *protégé* Hákon jarl is his sexual promiscuity. According to *Ágrip* ch. 12 (ed. Bjarni Einarsson 16; ed. and trans. Driscoll 22–23) *var . . . górr . . . engi grein, hvers kona hver væri, eða systir, eða dóttir* 'no distinction was made as to whose wife or sister or daughter each one was'; *Fagrskinna* ch. 22 (1985, 139) adds *var hvárki þyrmt frændkonum ríkismanna né eiginkonum bæði ríkra ok óríkra* 'neither the kinswomen of powerful men nor the wives of either great or small were spared'; and in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* ch. 45 (Snorri Sturluson 1941, 290–91; see also *Flateyjarbók* I 237–38) Snorri says that his reign was characterised by good harvests and peace, and then immediately passes on to his sexual immorality: *jarl lét taka ríkra manna dætr ok flytja heim til sín ok lá hjá viku eða tvær, sendi heim síðan, ok fekk hann af því óþokka mikinn af frændum kvinnanna* 'the jarl had the daughters of powerful men seized and brought to him, and he would sleep with them for a week or two and then send them home, and because of that he gained great unpopularity among the relatives of the women.' This may be explained by Richard North's suggestion (at a Leeds conference a few years ago) that Hákon's promiscuity was linked with his worship of Þorgerðr Hølgabrúðr, and that he saw himself as the sexual partner and agent of the fertility goddess, empowered to pass on her gift of fertility both to the land and to human beings, especially noble families, through brief cohabitations with a large number of women.

## 7. Conclusions

Let me summarise the results of the argument so far. If I am right, *Gullveig* means either 'woman made of gold', 'gold-adorned woman' or 'the gold-adorned military power'; it refers to an idol of Freyja or some similar goddess, which is attacked with spears (the weapon of the rival cult of Óðinn) and subsequently burned, because of the abduction of other men's wives and

<sup>3</sup> I should like to express my thanks to Judy Quinn for allowing me to read this article before publication.

female relatives which is a feature of her cult. One can burn an idol, but just as gold emerges refined from the fire, the cult of the goddess herself survives. Because of this, the Æsir then begin a war against the Vanir which may have had political echoes of the attack of the Jómsvíkingar on Hákon jarl, but they are no more successful against the battle-magic of the Vanir than the Jómsvíkingar were against Þorgerðr and Irpa, and this leads them to a peace-settlement in which they compromise with and absorb the sexual evil represented by the Vanir. So thoroughly do they accept Freyja that they then break their oaths to the Giant Builder and kill him in order to keep her. This would also provide a better explanation of the human sins which the gods choose to punish in *Völuspá* 39; they are vainly trying to prevent the world from getting even worse by punishing the same three errors into which they have themselves fallen: murder, oathbreaking, and the abduction of other men's wives.

More importantly, it seems probable that *Heiðr* is not a reincarnation of Gullveig, but rather the narrating *völva* of the poem. Her name originally means 'heath'. Like Hyndla and perhaps also Irpa, she is of giant origin, and somewhat like *Heiðr* in *Hrólfs saga kraka* she can be induced by magical ritual and by gifts (including gold) to reveal the mysteries she has seen. The other eddic poem whose text and framework resemble those of *Völuspá* is *Baldrs draumar*, and here again we meet a *völva* from whom Óðinn extorts wisdom about the mythic future. This time the *völva* is explicitly raised from her grave, and in the final confrontation between them Óðinn denies that she is a real *völva* at all; rather, she is *þriggia þursa móðir* 'mother of three monsters' (perhaps the trollwoman Angrboða, the mother of Fenrir, the Miðgarðsormr and Hel? — *Baldrs draumar* 13/7–8). When Óðinn says she is not a *völva*, he presumably means the word in its ordinary, non-mythic sense of a travelling female fortune-teller; for the figure he has raised from the dead is not a living and mortal woman, but a giantess or her *draugr*. In view of this parallel, it seems most sensible to interpret *Heiðr*'s statement that she 'remembers nine worlds' (*nío man ec heima*, *Völuspá* 2/5) as a hint that she, too, may have been raised from the dead (or even that she could be a version of Hel herself).

*Heiðr* may be the sinister 'dark sister' of Gullveig/Freyja, but the tenor of her true prophecy is not finally under her own control. In *Völuspá* 22/3, *völu velspá* has been variously translated. Guðbrandur Vigfússon's suggestion (*CPB* I 196) that the second word has a long first vowel, so that *vélsþá* should be translated 'making deceitful prophecies', may be discounted, since all the predictions made by *völur* in these stories can be

relied on to come true (see SG III:1 28; and oddly, Guðbrandur's own subtext translation reads 'the sooth-saying Sybil'). But the compound adjective *velspá* appears nowhere else; so does it mean 'accurate in prophecy' (as in Nordal's translation 'spávís' (*Völuspá* 1978), Hermann Pálsson's (1994) 'réttspá', *LP*'s 'dygtig spående') or 'making favourable prophecies' (as in Dronke II 12 'a good seer of fair fortunes')? La Farge and Tucker (1992) give both alternatives ('prophesying well or rightly'). The interpretation 'accurate in prophecy' might seem to fit the context of *Völuspá* better, since many of the predictions made by the *völva* are anything but pleasant for Óðinn; but the encounter between the *völva* Oddbjörg and her hostess Saldís in *Víga-Glúms saga* ch. 12 (ed. Jónas Kristjánsson 41; ed. Turville-Petre 21) seems rather to point towards the other translation. Saldís asks Oddbjörg to prophesy something about her two grandsons, *ok spá vel* — and there is no doubt that her meaning here is 'and prophesy something favourable'. When the response is not what she was hoping for, she threatens that the *völva* will be driven away *ef þú ferr með illspár* 'if you go making evil predictions'. If the phrasal verb *spá vel* means 'to make a favourable prophecy' and the noun *illspá* means 'an unfavourable prophecy', we are bound to ask in what sense Heiðr prophesies good fortune: is she speaking from the point of view of her own kind, the giants, to whom any disaster that befalls the gods is good news; and/or is there a deeper hint of the ultimate rebirth of a new and better world, which in the longest possible term is good news for gods and men?

I would like to finish with a word or two about the tools and methods I have used in this paper. I began this investigation with a genuinely open question; I really didn't know how to interpret Heiðr, and the results of looking at other instances of the name were a surprise to me. As we all must, I based my work on that of past scholars — lexicographers, editors and critics from the time of Snorri Sturluson until now — and it is a measure of the sweep of their achievements that I have struggled here to interpret a mere two stanzas with their help, and even so have left much unsaid — for example about the attack on Gullveig with spears, about the *ganda* of 22/4, about the whole process of *seiðr* and about how many *völur* there are in *Völuspá* (I think one, but for a different view see Dronke II 27–30, 99–101). But this is also a measure of how much still remains to be done in eddic research: we have just begun to look seriously at the emotional connotations of vocabulary, at type-scenes and characters, and at the question of how far individual poets were free to diverge from these patterns. And what is true here could be demonstrated with equal force in

any other area of research into Old Norse literature, and more generally in all areas of the study of early Scandinavia.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> An earlier version of this paper was delivered as the Society's presidential address at its annual general meeting in Durham in June 2000.

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