

RITI KROESEN

Ambiguity in the relationship between heroes and giants

The relations between giants and other inhabitants of the Scandinavian (mythological) world are often very complicated and ambiguous. Recent scholarship has occupied itself with them, and it seems not quite without success. (See the works of Lotte Motz and Gro Steinsland.) However, the meetings between giants and heroes, which play such an important part in the heroic literature of the North, have stayed more or less in the shadow. This article intends mainly to focus on these contacts. Its material will be taken from Old Norse/Old Icelandic heroic literature, that is: the heroic Lays of the *Edda*, the *Fornaldar Sögur*, a few less realistic episodes of the realistic Sagas, and, of course, *Saxo Grammaticus*. And also from the *Beowulf*, which contains Scandinavian narrative material. A few stories about dealings between giants and gods will also be included, because they can be explained in the same way as the heroic stories.

It will be useful to start with a brief (and by no means exhaustive) discussion about the words for giants and giantesses in Old Norse. (The etymology of almost all of them is totally obscure.) It is likely that different denominations point to different kinds of giants but it is very difficult, not to say impossible, to be sure about that. The following quote is from Cleasby-Vigfusson (1874, p. 498): "In popular Icelandic usage *risi* denotes size, *jötunn* strength, *þurs* lack of intelligence; thus *hár sem risi*, *sterkr sem jötunn*, *heimskr sem þurs*." Motz's investigation of the classical material has yielded somewhat different but not really contradictory results (1987, pp. 295–317, esp. pp. 298–302): "*jötunn* points to the giant's ownership of nature, *þurs* designates mental deficiency (this tallies with Cleasby-Vigfusson) and *troll* is used of giants who possess magic powers."

A shorter version of this paper was presented at the 9th International Saga Conference at Akureyri, 1–6th of August 1994.

A *risi* is a huge being, but it is also sometimes said that he is beautiful (see the quotation from Cleasby-Vigfusson above). The designation does not occur very often in the texts, but it may be interesting to note that *risi* is used for foreign giants (Biblical or Classic). For instance: "David hafði drepit Goliám risa" (David had slain the giant Goliath). (Fritzner II 1896, p. 116. The quotation is from *Konungs Skuggsjá*.)

In the Poetic Edda the giants are almost always designated by *jötunn*, but in the *Þrymsqviða* Þrymr is always called *þursa dróttinn* (Edda, pp. 111–17); the Fornaldar Sögur usually have the word *troll*, which in the Edda is almost non-existent. The fact that a *jötunn* is often called *hundviss* (very wise) might raise the suspicion that its usual explanation "the eater" is not correct. De Vries also questions its correctness on other, linguistic grounds (1962, pp. 295–6).

About the *trolls* something more must be said. In modern Norwegian folklore there are many stories about the trolls, an ugly and grotesque race of nature-spirits, who almost invariably do harm to human beings — by stealing their children for example, and putting their own ugly progeny in their place. They are usually of small stature. In English the word *troll* is often translated by "ogre". They are definitely *not* giants, although in the classical material giants are not always of tall stature. Though some dictionaries of Old Icelandic translate *troll* only with "troll", it seems rather probable that in the Fornaldar Sögur the word is also used about giants. It does not seem to matter greatly whether the hero has to do with a *jötunn*, a *þursa* or a *troll*. But when he meets a *troll*, even a friendly one, there is usually something grotesque and often gruesome about this being, and he is always ugly. Maybe the word *troll* points to these grotesque qualities, and maybe that is the reason why it is so scarce in the Edda Lays. In the Poetic Edda, the word occurs only once (Vsp. 40, 6–8, p. 9): "... einna nökkurr/ tungls tjúgari/ í trollz hami" (one of them, the devourer of the moon in the body of a troll). It does not seem possible to decide between a giant and a troll here. The *trollkona* of one of the prose interludes of the *Helgaqviða* *Hjorvardzsonar* (Edda p. 147), is probably a giantess, that is: if she is identical with *Hrimgerðr*, daughter of the *jötunn* *Hati*. That the trolls lack intelligence becomes evident by the fact that whenever it comes to a battle of wits between them and the heroes, the latter always have the best of it (as still happens in modern troll stories). The words for *giantess* are: *flagð*, *gygr* (used in the Edda), *skessa* and *trollkona*.

Now, although our subject is a restricted one and we need not repeat everything that has been said about giants, it is still necessary to say something about what a giant is generally thought to be. Let us first of all repeat a statement here made many times before, one that most scholars — though not all (Motz will not quite agree with me) — will endorse: giants are beings of *chaos*. The gods created the world out of chaos, that is to say: Óðinn and his brothers (who themselves were of giant descent) created the visible world out of the body of the giant *Ymir*. After that they built *Miðgarðr* for human beings and *Ásgarðr* for themselves. However, they could not put an end to chaos, they could at best keep it at bay. The giants still dwelled on the *outside* of cosmos, in the midst of wild untamable nature. They were a perpetual threat to the cosmos, and therefore they were the implacable enemies of gods and men, who had to fight them until the end of creation, when everything and everybody had to perish, including the gods and the giants themselves.

The struggle between *chaos* and *cosmos* is a widely spread theme; it might very well be universal. It is definitely not the same as the battle between good and evil, and we had better detach ourselves from that idea as long as we occupy ourselves with Old-Norse mythology. Scandinavian giants can be very good and very wise, they can occasionally (though not often) even be beautiful, but they still belong to chaos and they can only threaten the ordered world.

Men cannot stay neutral in this cosmic conflict. On the whole they will take sides with the gods, not because they are *good* — the question of their *goodness* simply does not arise —, but because it is relatively *safe* to stay with them, the protectors of their frail lives. Human beings can be easily destroyed by the untamed forces of nature. Giants are *dangerous* to ordered life. In the *Gylfaginning* (*Snorra Edda*, p. 14) Hár calls *Ymir* and all his progeny *bad*, but through this statement, which is no part of the story itself, Snorri evidently wants to make his own position as a Christian clear.

As a protection the gods built barriers between *Miðgarðr*, the inhabited world, and the wild outside, *Útgarðr*, where the giants lived. The name *Miðgarðr* itself reflects to this: “the place that is enclosed amidst fences”; *Útgarðr*: “the place on the outside of the fences”. It will be noticed that this explanation assumes the old horizontal model (Gurevich 1969 and Hastrup 1990) that was afterwards superseded by the Christian vertical model. On the whole, people (mostly farmers) preferred to stay on the inside. Yet there were people to whom the

lure of the wilderness and the danger of destruction would prove irresistible. They were the adventurers, to whom life in the ordered community was too tame, and the ever-returning daily duties too tiresome. In Old Norse society they were particularly found in the bands of *Vikings* and other warriors (although we do know about some farmers who also ventured to go on the outside; Ketill hoeng and his son Grímr loðinkinni in the sagas named after them, FAN II, pp. 149–81 and 183–98).

To these people the wild chaotic regions of continental Scandinavia with its mountains, rocks and woods, and the volcanic areas of Iceland, suggested beings of great strength and ferocious courage, that is: giants. And they envied those giants, because strength and courage are enviable properties; yet, at the same time they feared them, because they could be overcome by them. In the same way they both feared and envied the wild animals, bears and wolves. They feasted on their meat, dressed themselves in their skins, and called themselves by names in which *wolf* or *bear* was an element. Thus they tried to identify themselves with them, trying to absorb their admirable qualities by magical means. The opposite forces of attraction and repulsion installed an *ambivalent* relationship.

The same applies to giants. In some stories a giant is nothing more than a monster, the equivalent of a *dragon*, for instance: he is a danger to mankind, and must be eliminated at all costs. The hero must perform this task, in other words: he must be the *successor* of the gods, and the defender of ordered community. In other stories he can come to an agreement with a giant, he can stay with him for some time, although most certainly not for ever, and he can get some sort of *profit* from him.

In the northern regions of continental Scandinavia there lived small, dark human beings who belonged to another ethnic race than the blond people of the culture we are concerned with. They are known to us as the Samians or Lapps, and in the sagas they are called *Finnar*. Possibly some of the heroic stories are about these people. Hallbjörn, the father of Ketill hoeng, was called *hálftröll*, maybe as an indication of his mixed race (ÍF II, p. 3, FAN II, p. 151). It has been pointed out that people who do not belong to one's own ethnic group are often spoken about as if they were *dæmons* or *trolls*, and so could easily have become confused with them (Lindow 1995). But if so, then they must (at least to a certain extent) have been identified with them with the result that stories with identical structures were told about both

categories. We can therefore safely ignore this problem as being irrelevant to our investigation.

Both Motz and Steinsland are of the opinion that there may have been a cult of giants; Motz thinks that this is due to the giants having been originally an older "generation" of gods (Motz 1982; Steinsland 1986). But the explanation of this cult could also be much simpler than that. It has been known for a long time that there are two reasons for presenting a gift or sacrifice: *do ut des* (I give so that you shall give) and *do ut abeas* (I give so that you shall go away). The reason that people made offerings to the giants could in a great number of cases well be that people wanted to coax them into leaving without causing any (further) harm to them. And in case of the warriors who wanted to penetrate into the wild regions, what better reason can there be for sacrificing than to undertake such a dangerous venture?

Most species of living beings consist of both male and female, and thus it is with the giants. In the Nordic universe the notable exception are the dwarfs. Like maggots they were born out of Ymir's flesh (*generatio spontanea*) (*Snorra Edda*, p. 19). There are both giants and giantesses, and they usually live in families, the same as with gods and men. Yet the position of a giantess can be both more complicated and more interesting than that of her male companions, and therefore we must take a closer look at her.

We must be aware of the fact that the realms of *death* also belong to chaos, because death is the ultimate destructive force which will turn all cosmos into chaos again. And those realms of death are often governed by a *female* being, often a giantess. Thus we know *Hel* by name, the ruler of *Niflheimr*, where ordinary people go after their death. And *Rán*, either wife or daughter of the sea-giant *Ægir*, gets all the people who drown at sea. As will be seen later on, there are some nameless women, too, who can be interpreted as death-goddesses, and who are probably also giantesses.

At this point one might like to raise a question: are there also male giants who are rulers over the realms of death? *Vafþrúðnismál* 37 (*Edda*, p. 51) speaks about *Hræsvelgr*, a giant from whose wings all the winds are born. Cp. Snorri's paraphrasis of *Vafþrúðnismál* (*Snorra Edda*, p. 24). From his name it appears that he originally must have been a "corpse-swallower", a corpse-eating demon. But this is not the same as a ruler over the realms of death, nor is there any reason to identify all giants as inhabitants of the regions of death, as an elder scholar, O. Schoning, does (1903).

Yet there are other giants with better claims than Hræsvelgr. Famous is *Guðmundr á Glæsisvöllum* or *Glæsisvöllum*, mentioned in some Fornaldar Sögur (*Norna-Gests Þáttr*, FAN I, p. 309, *Hervarar Saga*, FAN II, p. 23, where he just seems to be an ordinary king, *Bósa Saga ok Herrauds*, FAN III, pp. 281–322, *passim*; *Þorsteins Þáttr bæjarmagns*, FAN IV, pp. 321–42, *passim*), a ruler over a far-off kingdom. And then there is *Guðrøðr*, the famous giant slain by Þórr (the subject of the *Þórdrápa* by *Eilífr Godrúnarson*, paraphrased by Snorri in the *Skáldskaparmál*), who, according to Saxo and the *Þorsteins Þáttr bæjarmagns*, also rules an underground kingdom (Skjald B I, pp. 139–44; *Skáldskaparmál*, *Snorra Edda*, pp. 88–90; Saxo (1931), pp. 240–3, Saxo F/ED, pp. 263–7. FAN IV, pp. 328–35).

Nevertheless, the female ruler over the dead is normal, the male the exception. She is also more interesting than her male counterpart, because — and maybe this will come somewhat unexpected to some people — a meeting between the hero and the goddess of death is also not unfrequently seen as an erotic event. (See Kroesen 1984 and Steinsland 1991.) She is not always a fiend to be hated and shunned, she can also be a seductress. To die can be to start an erotic relationship with the goddess of death. Of course such a relationship is utterly ambiguous.

Fontenrose (1969) has written about male and female monsters in general and their mutual relationships. He gets his material mostly from Greek and Oriental mythology, but in one of his appendices he also draws attention to the Beowulf and the Siegfried/Sigurðr story. And we will certainly find the most important themes in Scandinavian mythology treated by Fontenrose, although there are other themes, not mentioned by him. Fontenrose's theory that the themes treated by him originated in Asia Minor and from there spread out over the world, will not be adopted here. We rather prefer to think that owing to the basic structural similarity of human minds, related images can give expression to related ideas in different cultures. Fontenrose speaks about:

1) The *combat theme*. In stories of this type the hero meets and fights *both* a male and a female monster, who are relations of each other. The female is either mother, daughter, or wife of the male. Usually he slays first the male and afterwards the female monster, but the reverse order is not impossible. Two monsters of different gender, living side by side, are still known in modern expressions like "the devil and his old dam", in Danish "fanden og hans oldemor", in the

native tongue of the author of this article “de duvel en zijn ouwe moer”. (See Lehmann 1901.)

2) The *seduction* or the *Venusberg theme* (after the well-known German Tannhäuser (!) story). The female starts an erotic relationship with the hero. (Compare what has been said about a possible erotic relation between the goddess of death and the hero.)

Fontenrose repeatedly points out that the outward form of the monster is structurally irrelevant. While the *dragon* is the most well-known type in the Classical world, all other kinds of monsters can also be found there. To the Scandinavians (and other Teutonic peoples) the dragon is not entirely unknown (Beowulf, Siegfried/Sigurðr), but the type most commonly known by them is that of the *giant*.

It must be pointed out that the two themes not unfrequently occur in one and the same story, and therefore cannot be treated quite separately. The female might want to *avenge* her male companion on the hero, and then start to do so by trying to *seduce* him. The female monster, though, can also be either without a male counterpart, or abandon him, and then, of course, we have seduction pure and simple.

EXCURSION: Meetings between monsters and heroes do not only occur in myth or heroic legend, but also in *fairy tales*. The scenario of a hero fighting a monster, or more than one monster, can be recognized in the well-known story of the *dragon slayer*, and it occurs in all kinds of genres: myth, heroic legend and fairy tale. de Vries, who has amply treated this analogous structure (1954 and 1959), has pointed out that it can be interpreted as an *initiation scenario*: a hero (model to the *initiandus*) has to perform a series of difficult tasks, culminating in the slaying of a monster, after which he restarts his life on a higher level. This explanation certainly has its attractions, but it can also be seen as belonging to the still wider-spread *quest* type — the term is derived from courtly literature —, in which the hero must perform an extremely difficult task for the benefit of mankind or of only himself. A journey is very often involved.

This type appears to have a well-nigh universal appeal to mankind, because in religious terms human life can be seen as the fulfilment of such a quest and also as a journey from the cradle to the grave (see e.g. John Bunyan's *The pilgrim's progress from this world to that which is to come*), or of a kind of initiation, too. In modern times the type is amply represented in fantasy literature (such as Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*), but in more or less disguised form also in other literary genres. The modern James Bond is a still far from realistic case, but one can also imagine it taking on a realistic form.

The seduction theme also has its counterparts. We will merely

remind the readers of the witch in the fairy tale *Hänsel and Gretel*, who is a very convincing death-goddess. Small children can better be seduced by cakes and candies than by sex, but in the *Odyssey* Circe lures the sailors to their unhappy fate both with food and wine and with sex. Modern stories telling about a vamp luring a promising young man to his destruction, might also represent this type of story.

Male giants must most often be fought against by the hero (as by the gods before him). Sometimes this happens because people ask him to deliver them from these evil creatures harrying their country and threatening their lives (Beowulf, Þǫðvar-Bjarki, Grettir). Most often, however, he acts on his own initiative, sometimes because he wants to save an unhappy damsel in distress (Gram and Hadingus in the First Book of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*). In most Viking stories the hero fights just because he wants to enhance his own glory and gain the huge treasures hidden in the cave of the giant(s). In that case he has lost some of the primeval earnestness of mythological heroes. Besides the dragons, the giants can in stories of this type be substituted by the *haugbúar*, the dead warriors inhabiting their grave-mounds in the wilderness, and still jealous of keeping their treasures from the unwelcome intruder. This is a nice way of glorifying a deed that originally must have been both theft and sacrilege.

As has been said before, the giantess can simply double her male relation. Beowulf delivers a fatal wound to Grendel, and after that he has to fight Grendel's mother, who has killed one of Hrothgar's followers in revenge for her son, in her dwelling on the bottom of the pool, the realm of death. In the *Grettissaga* (ÍF VII, 1936, pp. 212–7) the opposite happens in the Sandhaugar episode, which resembles the Beowulf very much: first Grettir meets an awful giantess at the farm at Sandhaugar. After that he dives through a waterfall to the cave behind it, where he fights and kills a male giant. Although Grendel's mother might very well be interpreted as a death-goddess, there is little reason to think of the female giant at Sandhaugar as one.

Grendel's mother killed for revenge and thus repeated her son's actions, but often these females have another subtler approach, and they are the more interesting for it. Thus in the story of *Hadingus* in Book I of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* (pp. 29–30; F/ED pp. 29–31) where the same scenario can be found twice (Kroesen 1987). The first time Hadingus kills a seamonster on the coast of Hälsingland (northern Sweden). Soon afterwards he is accosted by a woman who threatens him with the most terrible consequences for his deed, if he does not

pay compensation by sacrificing black cattle to Freyr. Black animals belong to the gods of the underworld, and therefore the chthonic god Freyr must here be a god of the underworld. (See lemma "Schwarz" (written by Mengis) in Bächthold-Stäubli 1935–36.) There must also be a connection between the woman and the seamonster. She must probably be seen as a death-goddess.

The second time Hadingus slays a giant, the unwelcome betrothed of the Norwegian princess Regnilda, whom he afterwards marries. The death-goddess whom he meets this time during the night following the wedding party wants to have him for herself and abducts him to the nether regions of the underworld, from which he must have been rescued in a part of the story now lost to us. In my paper of 1987 it is assumed that this is an example of the classical twin-brother tale, where the slayer of the monster falls victim to a witch (the death-goddess), and has to be rescued by his twin-brother, in this case Liserus, the blood-brother given to him by Óðinn.

In the Eddic Lay of *Helgi Hjörvarðsson* (*Edda*, pp. 140–9) Helgi slays the giant Hati. Afterwards the giant's daughter Hrimgerðr wants Helgi for her bed-fellow as a compensation. The hero's intimate friend, jarl Atli, manages to put her off until the first rays of the rising sun turn her into stone. This is only a temporary relief. During the dark demonic time at Yule Helgi's brother Heðinn meets a giantess, who is probably identical with Hrimgerðr. She wants his companionship, which he refuses. In her anger she swears revenge. The fact that he takes a most unviolable oath to have his brother's betrothed, must be a result of her curse. When Helgi is told about this, he is not angry with his brother, but accepts it as a sign that he has to die. The death-goddess has to have her compensation. (See Gehrts 1967 and Kroesen 1984.)

The next story to be considered is one about the gods. The story of *Skaði* can namely be explained in the same way (*Snorra Edda*, pp. 68–70). Her father, the giant *Þjazi*, has been slain by the gods, and as a good daughter she comes to *Ásgarðr* to ask for compensation. When we look again at the analysis of the previous stories, we ask ourselves whether in this story at least *Skaði* could also be seen as a death-goddess. She is often interpreted as a goddess of the land, and if this is the case, she could also in her negative aspect be a death-goddess.

The god whom *Skaði* really wanted to have for a husband was *Baldr*, but due to a mistake she got *Njörðr*. Now we know that a goddess of death actually got *Baldr*. Could it be, then, that the story as

we have it, is a contamination of two older stories: one about Skaði, who got Baldr as a compensation for the death of her father Þjazi, and one about Skaði and Njǫrðr? (Kroesen 1987.)

We also want to draw attention here to a small episode in the *Laxdæla Saga*, which, although it is not about giants, is still about a monster and his female relative. (ÍF V, 1934, pp. 84–5.) In it Óláfr pái, after having slaughtered the miraculous bull *Harri*, dreams about a big woman, who is very angry with him because he has killed her son. As a retaliation she will see to it that also his son (Kjartan) will be slain.

We will now proceed with stories in which the female acts alone, that is as a *seductress*. A beautiful example can be found in a story about the gods again. In the *Baldrs Draumar (Edda, pp. 277–9)* Óðinn raises a dead *völva* from her grave at the entrance of the underworld. It will perhaps not be too farfetched to think that she is the goddess of death herself (*Hel?*). She informs her questioner that a great drinkingparty is being organized for the reception of Baldr, maybe the weddingfeast of Baldr and herself.

From a florid figure of speech in the *Fóstbrœdra Saga* (ÍF VI, p. 138) we get the same idea: *Þorgeirr* informs one of his enemies whom he intends to kill that *Hel* will embrace him that evening: "... ok mun þat eptir ganga, sem mik hefir um þik dreymt, ok mun *Hel*, húsfreyja þín, leggja þik í faðm, ..." ("... what I have dreamed about you will come true, and *Hel*, your wife, will put her arms about you ...").

But not all amorous giantesses need be seen as death-goddesses, and the implications of a meeting of the hero with a giantess need not always be that serious. In the prose introduction of the *Grimnismál (Edda, p. 56)* Óðinn taunts his wife about what has become of her foster-son: "Sér þú Agnar, fósttra þinn, hvar hann elr börn við gýgi í hellinum? ..." ("Do you see your foster-son Agnarr? He is begetting children on a giantess in the cave ...").

In the younger *Fornaldar Sögur* staying with a giantess can be a delightful interlude for the hero. The authors of these stories used the old motifs again and again, and often one is at a loss to guess how much understanding they still had about them. Otherwise one might object justly that these giantesses act most ignominiously towards their own relatives. We will give a few examples.

In the *Hjálmþés Saga ok Ólvis* (FAN IV, pp. 175–244, pp. 194–95) *Hjálmþér* has to slay a giant in order to escape from a curse put on him by his stepmother. *Skinnhúfa*, the giant's daughter, goes as far as

to get him the giant's sword, the only weapon with which he can be killed. This is in itself an old and interesting motif — cf. for instance the killing of Grendel's mother in the *Beowulf* — but it cannot be pursued here. In the *Egils Saga einhenda ok Ásmundarberserkjabana* (FAN III, pp. 323–66, pp. 354–61) the giantess Arinnefja does not only restore Egill's lost hand to him, but also assists him and his foster-brother Ásmundr to save two human sisters from her male relatives.

It still remains possible for us to read some hidden meaning behind stories like these, a meaning that is of all times: the attraction between the sexes can overcome all obstacles, even when male and female belong to quite different circles of life. Yet this is not always true: a human male can stray on the outside of the inhabited world and find himself a love-partner there, but a human female is in no way allowed to go beyond the fences that gods and human males have erected for them. See for these questions of *endogamous* and *extrogamous* marital relationships Meulengracht Sørensen (1977, pp. 759–68). He discusses also the interesting possibility that Loki's father *Fárbauti* was a giant, whereas his mother *Laufey* was one of the *Æsir*. In this case their son Loki was the unhappy result of a marriage that was against the existing order of existence. Perhaps this explains Loki's predilection for creating chaos. There is but one story about a love relationship between a giant and a female who was not a giantess, namely Starkaðr's grandmother who rejected the god Þórr and favoured a giant instead (*Gautreks Saga*, FAN IV, pp. 29, the first chapter of the U-version of the *Heiðreks Saga* (ed. Tolkien, 1960), pp. 66–7). She came from *Álfheimr*, so probably she was one of the *Álfar* (or *Væinir*?). But from the unhappy fate of the dark and demonic warrior Starkaðr, a person who stays outside human community forever — although he is a fierce defender of some of its values — one can draw the conclusion that an alliance like that should never take place.

That there can also be other relationships between human males and giants/giantesses can be proved by a motif that is of particular importance in the heroic stories: a great many heroes stay for some time in the home of a giant (Ellis 1941). This is even told of the historic hero king *Haraldr fagrhár*, who stayed for some time with the giant *Dofri* as a boy (*Óláfs Saga Tryggvasonar*, *Flateyjarbók* I, pp. 565–66). Óláfía Einarsdóttir (1971) makes it abundantly clear that this must have been a widely-known story about the famous conqueror; most of the versions about his life know something about it, but give it in a more or less disguised way. Usually this is at the beginning of their

glorious careers, and thus this dwelling in the wilderness could be seen as a kind of *liminal* experience, preceding their initiation to their life as warriors and members of a warrior-bond.

Haraldr fagrhar received an education at the hands of the wise giant Dofri. More frequent, more conspicuous and more interesting are the cases where the part of the foster-parent (*fóstra*) is cast for a *woman*. In that case it is not unusual for the relation to develop into a love-affair.

Hadingus' career started in the same way as that of Haraldr fagrhar: his guardian brought him to a giant for his education (*Saxo*, pp. 19–24; F/ED pp. 21–5). But after his return to the human world he also had to be educated by *Óðinn*, in order to become a warrior-king. *Hadingus'*s case was complicated by the fact that the giant's daughter, who had suckled him in the beginning, became his lover afterwards. Here the giantess is both an educator and a seductress. She tried to make their relation a lasting one by accompanying him to the human world (this case is unique!), but she had to pay for this with her life.

A certain episode in the life of *Qrvar-Oddr* has often been compared to it (FAN II, pp. 271–80). This episode is a later insertion into some of the versions of the saga. (See *Qrvar-Odds Saga*, ed. R. C. Boer (1888), introduction.) There is also another reason to treat it with suspicion: it is in the middle of *Oddr's* career, not in his early youth as in the case of Haraldr and *Hadingus*, and it occurs after *Oddr's* having become a Christian in the South of Europe! He stays with a family of giants for some time; a giant-girl uses him as her toy; afterwards they become lovers. After his return to the human world he meets *Óðinn* with whom he strikes a pact. His dwelling in the giant-world could therefore also be seen as something that preceded the initiation to the warrior-bond of *Óðinn*, who did not object to his being a Christian! The author here made a quaint use of older oral material (see Kroesen 1985).

When *Oddr* leaves his giant-mistress she is pregnant. Some years afterwards the hero is joined by a youth who identifies himself as his son born from this alliance. He proves to be a valiant fighter and is of great help to *Oddr*, but he is killed by *Oddr's* archenemy *Qgmundur Eyþjófsbani*. Further progeny is denied to *Oddr*. Also other heroes have sons by giantesses, but on the whole also these youngsters die young without off-spring. (The complete material can be found in Ellis 1941.) There are a few exceptions, though. The historical *Ketill hoeng* was named after a legendary hero, also called *Ketill hoeng*, who

had a son Grímr by a troll-woman Hrafnhildr Brúnadóttir. Grímr moved to Iceland and had a family there.

The hero of the *Kjalnesinga Saga*, *Búi*, makes a journey to Norway; ordered by Haraldr fagrhár, he collects a backgammon board from the king's foster-father, the giant *Dofri*. He then has an affair with *Friðr*, the giant's daughter, out of which union a son is born, *Jökull*. In the *Jökuls Þáttur Búasonar*, the fantastic sequel added to the Saga, this son has a glorious career which ends with his becoming the king of Serkland; he presumably starts a new dynasty. However, Serkland is far removed from Scandinavia (ÍF XIV, pp. 3–44, and 47–59).

The famous hero *Starkaðr* himself was a half-giant (*Saxo*, *Gautreks Saga*, *Hervarar Saga*, U-version). According to Saxo (p. 170) he had six arms; the god Þórr cut off his superfluous limbs through which act he became able to live among ordinary human beings. The same god, who had an implacable hatred towards the hero, because his mother had at one time rejected the god's love in favour of that of the giant *Starkaðr Aludrengr*, also condemned *Starkaðr* to stay without progeny forever (*Gautreks Saga*, FAN IV, p. 29, *Hervarar Saga*, ed. Tolkien, p. 66–7).

We will end our investigation with dwelling a little on the remarkable story of *Þórisdalr* in the *Grettis Saga* (ÍF VII, pp. 200–1). It is quite exceptional in that it serves as a kind of sabbatical leave in the hero's tormented life as an outlaw. The community had exiled him to the outside, but now there proved to be in the middle of chaos that had threatened him for such a long time, another kind of ordered life, a small new cosmos so to speak, where kind giants offered him their hospitality, and allowed him to live — for a time only, alas.

The heroic story is written to enhance the glory of the hero. Whether he goes out to meet the giants in order to serve the community or to serve his own ends, whether he fights and slays them or stays with them for some time, he will always reap some profit for himself from it. Although modern readers can feel some sympathy for giants, and can even feel for them as poor, harassed beings who cannot be left in peace, the sympathies of the original audience must always have been on the side of the hero, a glorious adventurer, who dared to go beyond ordered life.

Bibliography

- Bächthold-Stäubli, H. (ed.) 1935–36: *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*, vol. VII, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Cleasby, A. & Vigfusson, G. 1874: *An Icelandic-English dictionary*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- Den Norsk-Islandske Skjaldedigtning* (Skjald) B I. Finnur Jónsson (ed.), København 1915.
- Edda*. G. Neckel-H. Kuhn (eds.), Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg 1962.
- Ellis, H. R. 1941: "Fostering by Giants in Old Norse Saga Literature". *Medium Ævum* 10, pp. 70–85.
- FAN, see *Fornaldar Sögur Norðrlanda*.
- Flateyjarbók* I. C. R. Unger (ed.), Kristiania 1860.
- Fontenrose, J. E. 1969: *Python. A study of Delphic myth and its origins*. University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles.
- Fornaldar Sögur Norðrlanda* (FAN). Guðni Jónsson (ed.), Íslendingasagnaútgafan, Reykjavík 1976.
- Fóstbræðra Saga*. Björn K. Þórolfsson and Guðni Jónsson (eds.), Íslensk Fornrit (ÍF) VI, Reykjavík 1943.
- Fritzner, J. 1954 (1883–96): *Ordbog over Det gamle norske Sprog*, nytt oforandret optrykk av 2. udgave, Tryggve Juul Møller Forlag, Oslo.
- Gehrts, H. 1967: *Das Märchen und das Opfer*. Bouvier, Bonn.
- Grettis Saga Ásmundarsona*. Guðni Jónsson (ed.), ÍF VII, Reykjavík 1936.
- Hastrup, K. 1990: "Cosmology and society in medieval Iceland". *Island of anthropology, Studies in past and present Iceland*, Odense University Press, pp. 25–43.
- Hervarar Saga*. Christopher Tolkien (ed.), The Saga of King Heiðrek the Wise, U-version, Thomas Nelson and Sibs Ltd, London, Edinburgh, Paris, Melbourne, Johannesburg, Toronto and New York 1960.
- Kjalnesinga Saga and Jökuls Pátrr Búasonar*. Jóhannes Halldórsson (ed.), ÍF XIV, Reykjavík 1959.
- Kroesen, R. 1984: "The Story of Eric the Eloquent as a Monster Slayer tale". *Les sagas de Chevaliers, Riddara Sögur, Actes de la Ve Conférence sur les Sagas, présentés par Régis Boyer* (1982).
- 1985: "On the christianization of two initiatory patterns in the Orvar-Odds Saga". *Workshop Papers of the Sixth International Saga Conference*, Det Arnamagnæanske Institut, Vol. II, Copenhagen, pp. 645–59.
- 1987: "One Hadingus — Two Haddingjar". *Scandinavian Studies* 1987, pp. 404–35.
- Laxdæla Saga*. Einar Ól. Sveinsson (ed.), ÍF V, Reykjavík 1934.
- Lehmann, E. 1901: "Fandens Oldemor". *Dania* 8, pp. 179–94.
- Lindow, J. 1995: "Supernatural others". *Scandinavian Studies* 1995, Vol. 67, 1, pp. 1–31.

- Meletinskij, E. 1973: "Scandinavian mythology as a system". *Journal of Symbolic anthropology* I-II.
- Meulengracht Sørensen, P. 1977: "Starkaðr, Loki og Egill Skallagrímsson". *Sjötiú Ritgerðir helgaðar Jakobi Benediktssyni*, Reykjavík, pp. 759-68.
- Motz, L. 1980-81: "The Rulers of the Mountain: A Study of the Giants of the Old Icelandic Texts", *Mankind Quarterly* 21, pp. 393-417.
- 1986: "Giants in Folklore and Mythology: A new Approach". *Folklore* 93, pp. 70-84.
- 1987: "Families of Giants". *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 102, pp. 216-36.
- Óláfía Einarsdóttir 1971: "Harald Dovrefostre af Sogn". *Historisk Tidsskrift* L: II, Oslo, pp. 131-66.
- Saxo (Grammaticus): *Gesta Danorum*. J. Olrik and H. Ræder (eds.), Levin & Munksgaard, Havinæ (Copenhagen), 1931.
- : *History of the Danes*. P. Fischer (tr.), H. E. Davidson (ed.), D. S. Brewer/Rowman & Littlefield, Cambridge 1979-80.
- Schoning, O. 1903: *Dødsriger i nordisk Hedentro*, Kleins Forlag (Camilla Klein), København.
- Snorri Sturluson: *Edda*. Finnur Jónsson (ed.), G. E. C. Gad, København 1900.
- : *Prologue and Gylfaginning*. Anthony Faulkes (ed.), Clarendon Press, Oxford 1982.
- : *Gylfaginning*. Gottfried Lorenz (ed.), Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 1984.
- Steinsland, G. 1986: "Giants as Recipients of Cults in the Viking Age?", *Words and Objects, towards a Dialogue between Archeology and History of Religion*, Gro Steinsland (ed.), Norwegian University Press: The Institute of comparative research in human culture, Serie B XXI, Oslo, pp. 212-22.
- 1991: *Det hellige Bryllup og Norrøn Kongeideologi*, Solum Forlag, Oslo.
- 1992: "Døden som erotisk Lystreise", *Festskrift til Eyvind Fjeld Halvorsen*, Oslo, pp. 319-32.
- de Vries, J. 1954: "Betrachtungen zum Märchen. Besonders in seinem Verhältnis zum Heldensage und Mythos", *Folklore Fellows' Contributions* (FFC) 150, Helsinki.
- 1959: "Heldenlied en Heldensage", *Aula-boek* 25, Utrecht.
- 1962: *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, E. J. Brill, Leiden.