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bera tilt með tveim

On *Lokasenna* 38 and the One-Handed Týr

I. In the eddic poem *Lokasenna*, the deities attend a feast hosted by the sea-giant Ægir. The mischievous Loki, who arrives unwelcome, insults each of the guests in turn, and the altercations between him and them constitute an extensive caricature of the pantheon. *Lokasenna* is preserved only in the Codex Regius of the *Elder* or *Poetic Edda*, an Icelandic vellum written c. 1270.¹ The poem's 65 stanzas are all in dialogue form, but a prose preface describes the setting of the feast and lists the gods and goddesses present. Among them is Týr, who is described as follows: 'Týr var þar, hann var einhendr. Fenrisúlfr sleit hönd af hánum, þá er hann var bundinn.'² Týr quarrels with Loki in stanzas 37–40, and we shall review their exchange before turning to the main topic of this study, which is stanza 38 and the meaning of the phrase *bera tilt með tveim* in particular. Týr is a relatively minor god in the extant mythology, and *Lokasenna* 38 raises basic questions about his nature and place within the Norse pantheon as it was perceived by medieval Christians and their pagan forbears. Loki is the speaker in stanza 38, and the subject of the stanza's first half is Týr's alleged inability to *bera tilt með tveim*, whereas the latter half alludes to Týr's loss of his

¹ For more information on the Codex Regius see Einar G. Pétursson 1993, 100–1.

² Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 96. 'Týr was there. He was one-handed; Fenrisúlfr tore a hand from him when he was bound.'

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Abstract: In stanza 38 of the eddic poem *Lokasenna*, Loki insults the god Týr. The subject of the stanza's first half is Týr's inability to *bera tilt með tveim*, and the latter half alludes to his loss of the *hægri hönd* 'right hand (or arm)' to the wolf Fenrir. The sense of *bera tilt með tveim* is reconsidered here along with the problem of how the stanza's two halves relate to each other and whether the stanza pertains to Týr's martial aspect or his alleged role as a 'law-god'. It is argued that *Lokasenna* 38 concerns Týr's martial nature and that it relies on a wordplay whereby it is implied that Týr is unable *bera* 'bear, carry' peace between two parties or foes since his 'more peaceable' hand is wanting.

Keywords: *Lokasenna*, Týr, the Poetic Edda, Old Norse mythology

Finally, Loki insults Týr by claiming to have sired a son on his wife, adding that Týr never received the slightest compensation for this disgrace:

[40] Loki *quað*:
 ‘Þegi þú, Týr! þln né penning
 þat varð þinni kono, hafðir þú þess aldregi
 at hon átti mög við mér; vanréttis, vesall.’⁷

The alleged adultery is not known from other sources, and neither Týr’s wife nor her son is provided with a name or mentioned elsewhere. Indeed, false accusations and boasts are not uncommon in ON slanging matches (*sennmur*) and libel verses (*níð* or *flím*),⁸ and so Týr may be an uncompensated cuckold simply for the sake of satire, as some critics have suggested.⁹ The poet could in this respect have invented freely, but Týr’s maiming is another matter. Týr acknowledges his loss of a hand, and the myth of his maiming is related in *Snorra Edda* (see below), where Týr’s lack of one hand appears to be his primary distinction as in *Lokasenna* (with its prose preface).

III. Aside from *Lokasenna* with its prose preface, Týr’s maiming is only explained in *Snorra Edda*, a treatise on the art of poetry ascribed to the Icelander Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241). Snorri recounts the myth twice in his *Edda*, in *Gylfaginning* 25 and 34, and Týr is otherwise a rather obscure figure in the mythology.¹⁰ Snorri appears to have known

[‘Fame’s wolf’ = Fenrir] / — both of us suffer a loss; / nor is the wolf at ease, / who must in bonds abide / the twilight of the gods.” There is a lapse in the alliteration of the 4th and 5th lines. For emendations see von See et al. 1997, 464 and Dronke 1997, 341 and 365–6.

⁷ Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 104. [40] ‘Loki said: “Be silent, Týr! / It befell your wife / that she had a son with me; / neither an ell [of woolen cloth] nor a penny piece / did you ever get / for this injustice, you wretch.”’

⁸ The general accuracy of Loki’s accusations is discussed in McKinnell 1987–88, 234–37.

⁹ See, for example: Olsen 1960, 33–4; McKinnell 1987–88, 248; and Dronke 1997, 365. Regarding standard fines for such marital offences in the Saga Age see Jochens 1996, 147–53. A pun on *þln* (‘ell’, but also ‘forearm’) in *Lokasenna* 40 has been suggested by Söderberg 1987, 29. For further comments on the stanza see von See et al. 1997, 379 and 465–66.

¹⁰ The one-handed Týr is associated with only three or four other mythic events: 1) Týr is simply listed among the gods who entertain Ægir to a feast at the beginning of *Skáldskaparmál*; 2) he is also present at Ægir’s own feast in *Skáldskaparmál* 33 and *Lokasenna*; 3) in *Gylfaginning* 51, Týr fights alongside the gods at Ragnarøk, when he and the monstrous hound Garmr will slay one another; and 4) Týr is also assumed to be

Lokasenna in some form or another, and most probably its prose preface too, but it remains in dispute how much older than his treatise *Lokasenna* can be.¹¹ In any case, since the Codex Regius was written some fifty years after *Snorra Edda*, and Snorri was writing some 220–30 years after the Christian conversion of Iceland, it is of course doubtful to what extent these sources reflect *pagan* ideas about Týr.

‘Týr’ replaces Mars in ON translations of Latin literature as well as in *týsdagr* = *dies Martis* (Tuesday).¹² Týr is defined as an *einhendr áss* ‘a one-handed áss [god]’ and *viga guð* ‘battle-god’ in *Skáldskaparmál* 9 of *Snorra Edda*, and he is moreover portrayed as a one-handed and distinctly martial god in *Gylfaginning* 25:

Hár segir: ‘Sá er enn Áss er Týr heitir. Hann er djarfastr ok bezt hugaðr ok hann ræðr mjök sigri í orrostum. Á hann er gott at heita hreystimönnum. Þat er orðtak at sá er “týhraustr“ er um fram er aðra menn ok ekki sésk fyrir. Hann var vitr svá at þat er mælt at sá er “týspakr“ er vitr er. Þat er eitt mark um djarfleik hans, þá er Æsir lokkuðu Fenrisúlfr til þess at leggja fjöturinn á hann, Gleipni, þá trúði hann þeim eigi at þeir mundu leysa hann fyrr en þeir lögðu honum at veði hönd Týrs í munn úlfsins. En þá er Æsir vildu eigi leysa hann þá beit hann höndina af þar er nú heitir úlflíðr, ok er hann einhendr ok ekki kallaðr sættir manna.’¹³

the son of the giant Hymir in the eddic poem *Hymiskviða*, i.e. the *týr* of stanza 4 who helps Þórr obtain Hymir’s cauldron, but there are reasons to suspect that this *týr* is the common noun meaning ‘god’ and that Þórr’s companion is in fact Loki. On this last point see Marteinn H. Sigurðsson, ‘Þórr’s Travel Companion in *Hymiskviða*’, *Gripla* 16 (2005), 197–208.

¹¹ For further discussion of the poem and its dating see von See et al. 1997, 363–84. One indication that Snorri knew and used *Lokasenna* is a stanza in *Gylfaginning* 20 that apparently stems from the poem though it looks like a conflation of sts. 29 (lines 1 and 4–6), 21 (lines 1–2) and 47 (line 3); the discrepancies may be due to Snorri’s faulty memory or familiarity with a different version of the poem, though it might perhaps also be argued that Snorri adapted these lines from the poem as we know it. See Dronke 1997, 348.

¹² There is no need to list here all the instances where ‘Týr’ translates Mars in ON literature. For a discussion of the Germanic weekdays see Green 1998, 236–53. Also Seip 1957, 611–16.

¹³ Faulkes 1988, 25. ‘Hár said: “There is also an Áss called Týr. He is the boldest and most courageous, and he has much command over victory in battles; it is good for men of prowess to invoke him. There is the expression that he who surpasses other men and does not falter is “Týr-brave”. He was so intelligent that he who is intelligent is said to be “Týr-wise”. One sign of his bravery is that when the Æsir were enticing Fenrisúlfr to get the fetter Gleipnir on him, then he did not trust them to release him until they laid Týr’s hand into the mouth of the wolf as a gage; and when the Æsir would not release him he bit the hand off at what is now called the wolf-joint [= wrist], and he is one-handed and not called a reconciler of men.’

Gylfaginning 34 gives a far more detailed account of Fenrir's binding, but very little of all the information added concerns Týr directly. Týr's courage explains why only he was willing to feed the wolf: 'Úlfrinn fœddu Æsir heima, ok hafði Týr einn djarfleik til at ganga at úlfnum ok gefa honum mat.'¹⁴ When the wolf agrees to try on the fetter Gleipnir, he demands: 'leggi einhverr hönd sína í munn mér at veði at þetta sé falslaust gert',¹⁵ and only Týr is willing (or brave enough) to wager his hand:

En hvern Ásanna sá til annars ok þótti nú vera tvau vandræði ok vildi engi sína hönd fram selja fyrr en Týr lét fram hönd sína hægri ok leggr í munn úlfnum. En er úlfrinn spyrnir, þá harðnaði bandit, ok því harðara er hann brauzk um, því skarpara var bandit. Þá hlógu allir nema Týr. Hann lét hönd sína.¹⁶

Týr offers his hand to Fenrir as a *veð* in both of Snorri's accounts. ON *veð* (like *veðjun*) means 'pledge, gage, wager, stake (in a wager), pawn',¹⁷ and to *leggja (eitthvat) at veði* means simply 'to wager, pawn, pledge (something)', as does the verb *veðleggja* (note also *veðja* 'to wager, bet').¹⁸ It is difficult to detect anything martial about the episode, and yet Snorri presents Týr's maiming as the prime example of his *djarfleikr* 'courage, valour', which Snorri appears to regard as an aspect of Týr's martial nature. The final sentence of *Gylfaginning* 25 may reflect this connection between Týr's maiming and martial nature: 'ok er hann einhendr ok ekki kallaðr sættir manna' ('and he is one-handed and not called a reconciler of men'). The link is somewhat tenuous, to be sure, and some critics have in fact postulated a very different connection between Týr's maiming and reputation as no reconciler of men, but before turning to these theories one might consider whether Snorri was influenced here by *Lokasenna* 38 and the words *bera tilt með tveim* in particular.

¹⁴ Faulkes 1988, 27. 'The Æsir brought the wolf up at home, and Týr alone had the courage to approach the wolf and give it food.'

¹⁵ Faulkes 1988, 28. 'someone should place his hand into my mouth as a gage that this is done without deceit.'

¹⁶ Faulkes 1988, 27–9. 'But each of the Æsir looked at another and found that their troubles had now doubled, and none would offer their hand until Týr put forth his right hand and placed it in the wolf's mouth. And when the wolf kicked, the band grew harder, and the harder he struggled, the tougher became the band. Then they all laughed except for Týr; he lost his hand.'

¹⁷ Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, 1112; Fritzner III 1886–96, 882–3; and Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957, 687. Also Sigfús Blöndal 1920–4, 917.

¹⁸ Note also *veðmáli* 'pledge, mortgage', which has the corresponding verbs *veðmæla* and *veðsetja*. On medieval Norse gages or sureties see Hamre 1975, 608–11.

IV. The meaning of *bera tilt með tveim* is uncertain since *tilt* is not found in other ON texts. The word is usually thought to be the neuter of **tilr*, an adjective related to Old English (OE) *til*, which could mean ‘good, kind, gentle’, but also ‘apt, capable, competent’ as well as ‘excellent’, and whose neuter appears in the sense ‘use, service, convenience’ as well as ‘goodness, kindness’.¹⁹ Stanza 34 of the eddic poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana I* contains another instance of *bera e-t með e-m*,²⁰ where the preposition *með* means ‘between’ or ‘among’ and the verb *bera* ‘carry, bear’ is used figuratively with the object *sakrúnar* ‘runes of strife’:

einn veldr Óðinn
 øllo þölví,

þviat með sifiungom
 sacrúnar bar.²¹

This recalls ‘þorðuz ér bræðr ungir, / báruz róg milli’²² in *Atlamál in grænlenzku* 97 (another eddic poem), and the phrase *bera e-t milli/millum e-ra/e-rra* is commonly used in ON prose in the meaning ‘convey, carry (lies, slander, settlement proposals, etc.) from (sby) to (sby) or backwards and forwards between (people)’.²³

The object of *bera* can hardly mean anything like ‘strife’, ‘spite’ or ‘slander’ in *Lokasenna* 38. On the contrary, if *tilt* is the neuter of an adjective **tilr* and related to OE *til*, then Loki’s accusation must rather mean (essentially) ‘du konntest niemals etwas Gutes zwischen zweien vermitteln’.²⁴ However, since *með tveim* ‘between (or ‘among’) two’ implies the mediation of ‘something good’ between two persons or parties or foes, a more specific sense like ‘goodwill’ or ‘peace’ seems more apposite, and that is how many critics have understood *tilt* in its context.²⁵

In stanza 37, Týr enters an argument between Njörðr and Loki where Týr comes to the defense of Njörðr’s son Freyr, and so Loki’s riposte might be taken to mean something like: ‘Du bist nicht geeig-

¹⁹ See Bosworth and Toller 1898, 984. On Gothic *ga-tils* see Köbler 1989, 526. Also Kousgård Sørensen 1958, 121–2.

²⁰ As pointed out in von See et al. 1997, 460–61.

²¹ Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 158. ‘Óðinn alone causes / all the suffering; / for he brings runes of strife / between kinsmen.’

²² Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 261. ‘you young brothers fought each other, / brought strife between yourselves’.

²³ *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog. A Dictionary of Old Norse Prose* 2, 197.

²⁴ von See et al. 1997, 460.

²⁵ See, for example, Bugge 1881–1896, 119; Gering 1923, 180; Finnur Jónsson 1926, 476; Guðni Jónsson 1954, 152; Ólafur Briem 1985, 236; Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, 1041; Page 1995, 199; Gisli Sigurðsson 1998, 128.

net, zwischen mir und Niðrðr zu vermitteln, denn du hast nie einen Streit schlichten können'.²⁶ The general accusation 'you could never bring goodwill (or peace) between two men (or foes)' agrees in any case remarkably well with the final sentence on Týr in *Gylfaginning* 25 (see above), which *Lokasenna* 38 might in fact have elicited since Loki appears to be speaking of Týr's inability to reconcile two foes in conjunction with his lack of one hand: 'Þú kunnir aldregi / bera tilt með tveim; / handar innar hægri [...]']'.

V. Týr's reputation as no *sættir manna* can hardly be divorced from his martial nature. Snorri appears to conclude *Gylfaginning* 25 with an understatement to the effect that Týr is a promoter of strife, a characteristic that of course befits his bellicose nature, but Dumézil has construed Snorri's words rather differently. Dumézil would have us think that Týr lost his hand in a necessary perjury and that his maiming reflects his function as the primal Germanic *dieu juriste* in 'a pessimistic view of the law, directed not toward reconciliation among the parties, but toward the crushing of some by the others. Tyr "is not called a peacemaker."²⁷ Týr's injury is thus taken to be symbolic of his function as a 'law-god', and Dumézil regards Týr's reputation as no *sættir manna* as an aspect of this (alleged) function of the god within a culture whose legal procedures were (allegedly) governed by the pessimistic attitude that might is right, that law is essentially a form of war.²⁸

A peace-maker or umpire could be called *sáttarmaðr* or *sættarmaðr* in ON, and such men were collectively referred to as *góðviljamenn* or *góðgjarnir menn* 'men of goodwill'.²⁹ In *Skáldskaparmál* 53, Snorri lists *sættir manna* as a poetic periphrase or kenning for *hǫldr* 'yeoman' and *hǫfðingi* 'chieftain', which no doubt reflects the idea that free farmers and chieftains could by virtue of their station settle disputes and uphold peace,³⁰ and *sættir* + the genitive of a poetic noun meaning

²⁶ von See et al. 1997, 461.

²⁷ Dumézil 1973, 45.

²⁸ Dumézil seems to believe that the pagan Germani perceived some sort of analogy between legal meetings and battle, or that they even confused the two activities, but the 'evidence' adduced for this peculiar theory appears flimsy and wilfully interpreted (as in appeals to the kenning *sverðþing* 'sword-meeting' = 'battle'). See Dumézil 1973, 44–5.

²⁹ For further discussion of such arbitrators and terms used for them see Byock 1982, 110, 218–19, and 260.

³⁰ One might also note Snorri's comment on the term *ljónar* in *Skáldskaparmál* 65: 'Ljónar heita þeir menn er ganga um sættir manna.' Faulkes 1998, 106. 'Men who undertake settlements of disputes are called *ljónar*'.

'men' (like *sættir fira, gumna, bragna* etc.) was indeed used to denote 'king, ruler' in ON poetry, where the referent could be a saintly bishop or Christ as well as a secular ruler.³¹ Clearly, *sættir manna* could therefore define a patron of goodwill or peace and law and order, but Snorri avers that Týr is *not* called a *sættir manna*, and so it seems unlikely that he considered law and order to be Týr's special domain.

Lorenz has tried to reconcile Snorri with Dumézil's theory that Týr was the original Germanic law-god. He seems to think that the (supposed) law-god lost his legal capacity when he lost his hand to Fenrir: 'Die Bemerkung, daß Týr *er ekki kallaðr sættir manna* hat für die Mythologie zentrale Bedeutung — gerade der Gott, der für den Bereich des Rechts zuständig ist, vermag seine Funktion nicht (mehr) zu erfüllen'.³² Dumézil does indeed suppose that Týr 'slipped' at some early stage from the function of 'sovereign-lawyer' to mere 'warrior', though he does not (or so it seems) imagine this supposed demotion to be the result of the god's mutilation: 'Perhaps it was not *in order* to become the divine lawyer that Tyr lost his right hand, but it was at the very least *because* he was the lawyer that he, alone among the gods, was the one who did in fact lose his hand.'³³ Strutynski seeks to elucidate Týr's alleged *glissement* from law to war by postulating a transformation of Germanic morality: 'Apparently the moral consciousness of the Germans was developed to so high a point that they would not tolerate a god of justice who violated the precepts of his own function.'³⁴ Understandably, von See is skeptical about the Dumézilian treatment of Týr: 'Die Gegensätzlichkeit dieser Begründungen führt allein schon die ganze Theorie ad absurdum.'³⁵

As previously noted, Snorri presents Týr's injury as the prime example of his courage, which Snorri evidently regards as an aspect of the god's bellicose character, and it appears only natural that such a brave and belligerent god is no *sættir manna*. That seems to go without saying, in fact, and so Snorri appears to have rounded up his account of the god with an understatement or litotes. One might consider here for comparison the description of one Tannr Bjarnason in Sturla Þórðarson's (d. 1284) *Íslendinga saga*: 'Sa maðr var í Miðfirði, er Tannr het [...] hann var orð-illr, ok orti, ok niðskar; enngi var hann manna sætir.'³⁶

³¹ For examples of such kennings see Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, 558.

³² Lorenz 1984, 343.

³³ Dumézil 1988, 143.

³⁴ Strutynski 1974, 36.

³⁵ von See 1988, 60–61.

³⁶ Kålund 1906, 320. 'There lived in Miðfirðr a man by the name of Tannr [...] he spoke evil of others, made verses, and was libellous; he was no reconciler of men.'

The final words are clearly litotic: Tannr is a troublemaker — an inciter of conflict.³⁷ Sturla uses a similar litotes in his *Hákonar saga gamla Hákonarsonar* when Kolbeinn Dufgusson arrives in Iceland and plots an attack on Gizur Þorvaldsson: ‘þotti hann ecki mikill manna-lættir er hann kom vt.’³⁸

The significance of Týr not being called a *sættir manna* seems therefore plain: the intrepid battle-god is no pacifist, of course, but on the contrary a promoter of hostility, and Týr thereby resembles Mars, who was considered a ‘litigiorum et discordiae comissor’.³⁹ Snorri’s litotic conclusion of *Gylfaginning* 25 appears therefore to support the usual interpretation of *Lokasenna* 38.2–3, that is: ‘you could never / bring peace (or goodwill) between two men (or foes)’.

VI. Týr is only said to have lost his *right* hand in *Lokasenna* 38 and *Gylfaginning* 34. Snorri may well have drawn on the poem in this particular, but it has at all events contributed to the impression that Týr lost his hand in an act of perjury. Dronke observes, for example: ‘His deed demonstrates the cost of oath-breaking, and the need, sometimes, to incur that cost. The scanty evidence of Týr links him with covenants and law. He loses his right hand, the hand that pledges faith.’⁴⁰ Speaking of the loss of a ‘Schwurhand’, de Vries remarks: ‘Die Bedeutung des Mythos von Týr ist also diese, daß er zeigt, wie ein Gott zur Sicherung der kosmischen Ordnung eine notwendige Lüge mit dem Verlust seiner

³⁷ In his study of litotes in ON, Hollander classifies this statement about Tannr as a litotes of the type ‘denied compound noun’ and he glosses the words simply ‘a troublemaker’. See Hollander 1938, 12.

³⁸ Mundt, 1977, 156. ‘he was not considered a great reconciler of men when he came to Iceland.’ One might also consider the description of Þórarinn svartí Þórólfsson in *Eyrbyggja saga* (ch. 15): ‘Hann var mikill maðr ok sterkr, ljótr ok hljóðlyndr, vel stilltr hversdagliga; hann var kallaðr mannasættir [...] Svá var hann maðr óhlutdeilinn, at óvinir hans mæltu, at hann hefði eigi síðr kvenna skap en karla.’ Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 27. ‘He was a big and strong man, ugly and taciturn, and usually well tempered; he was called a reconciler of men [...] He was so unmeddlesome that his enemies said his disposition was no less like that of a woman than a man.’ This may be contrasted to the description of the neighbouring troublemaker Oddr (also in ch. 15): ‘[Oddr] var mikill maðr ok knár, hávaðamaðr mikill ok málugr, slysinn ok rögsamr.’ ‘[Oddr] was a big and hardy man, boisterous and talkative, mischievous and slanderous [?or contentious].’ Þórarinn proves that he has the heart of a man by slaying Oddr, and it seems doubtful that the author is thinking in particular of the legal arbitration of freeholders when he says that Þórarinn was called a *mannasættir* — Þórarinn’s pacifism must surely be associated instead with the implication that he is a coward.

³⁹ Caspari 1886, 8. ‘perpetrator of disputes and discord’.

⁴⁰ Dronke 1997, 341 translates lines 2–3 of *Lokasenna* 38: ‘you never had the talent / for settling two factions fairly.’

Hand bezahlen will.⁴¹ No evidence has apparently been adduced for such a perjury-talion among the pagan Germani or Norsemen, and though such a talion was known among some Germanic Christians on the Continent (a Christian rationale may be found in Matthew v, 30),⁴² there is no apparent reason to interpret the *veð* of Týr's right hand along such lines and much less assume that he was a god of law, oaths or legal contract on account of his maiming.

It should be noted in this connection that *Lokasenna's* metre (*ljóða-háttir*) requires no alliteration (on two words) in the fourth line of its stanzas, and it so happens that there is also inessential alliteration on *hægri* and *hønd* in line four of *Lokasenna* 61, where Þórr threatens Loki with his hammer:

Þórr *quað*:
 'Pegi þú, röð vættr! hendi inni hægri
 þér scal minn þrúðhamarr, drep ek þic Hrungnis bana,
 Miðllnir, mál fyrnema; svá at þér brotnar beina hvat.⁴³

One might compare this to *Ragnarsdrápa* 15, where Þórr wields his hammer over Jormungandr with his *hægri hønd*, but in this case the alliteration is essential:

Hamri fórsk í hægri ægir Qflugbarða
 hønd þar er allra landa *endiseiðs *of kendi.⁴⁴

It seems questionable to attach any symbolism to Þórr's threat of battering Loki with his right hand rather than the left. This specific seems more likely to exemplify the poet's taste for inessential (that is, purely artful or ornamental) alliteration,⁴⁵ and the same caveat must surely apply to the loss of Týr's *hægri hønd* in stanza 38.

There happen to be many places in ON verse and prose where *hønd*

⁴¹ de Vries 1970 II, 24.

⁴² Such a talion in early medieval and Germanic law-codes like *Lex Chamavorum* and *Lex Saxonum* is noted in Páll Sigurðsson 1992, 100.

⁴³ Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 108. 'Be silent, you unmanly creature! / My mighty hammer / Mjöllnir shall deprive you of speech. / With my right hand / I'll strike you with the bane of Hrungnir [= Mjöllnir], / so that your every bone is broken.'

⁴⁴ Faulkes 1998, 15–16. 'The terrifier of Qflugbarði [= Þórr] wielded the hammer in his right hand when he felt the coalfish that encircles all lands [= Jormungandr (the Midgard-serpent)].' This stanza is only preserved in Snorri's *Edda* and the poem is attributed to the 9th-century Norwegian Bragi Boddason.

⁴⁵ See, for example, sts. 2, 3, 11, 12, 13, 16, 25, 26, 30, 33, 43, 48, 49, 50, 55 and 65. The inessential alliteration may sometimes be accidental, but the tendency to artful alliteration is clear.

is evidently qualified with *hægri* simply for alliterative effect. Another eddic example is perhaps found in *Völuspá* 5, where *hond* seems to be used metaphorically of the sun's rays:

Sól varp sunnan, hendi inni hægri
sinni mána, um himiniðdur⁴⁶

The following stanza from *Landnámabók* is attributed to the 10th-century Icelander Helgi dýr Skefilsson, but whether or not Helgi was actually wounded in his right hand, the poet does obviously take advantage of the fact that *hægri* alliterates with *hond*:

Band's á hægri hendi, – lýgk eigi þat – leygjar,
hlautk sör af Tý bõru linnvengis Bil, minni.⁴⁷

Whether or not Snorri drew on *Lokasenna* 38 when he specifies that Týr lost his right hand, it must be borne in mind that ON prose also contains many instances where *hægri* qualifies *hond* simply for artful alliteration. For example, in *Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa* (ch. 12), when Oddný incites Þórðr by ordering him to clean out the stables, we learn that he 'drap hendi sinni hægri á kinn henni.'⁴⁸ In *Fjótsdæla saga* (ch.

⁴⁶ Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 2. 'From the south the sun, / partner of the moon, / threw her right hand / round the rim of heaven.' It is possible, however, that the right hand is specified because the sun is imagined to turn her right side towards earth (as has sometimes been suggested).

⁴⁷ Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 379. A translation might run as follows: 'A band is on my right hand [or arm], woman; I received a wound from the man — I do not lie.' The Týr or appellative *týr* 'god' of *bõru leygr*, where the last two words form a kenning for gold ('wave of the fire'), is a typical man-kenning, that is 'god of the gold'. Also conventional is the woman-kenning *linnvengis Bil*, where Bil (the name of a goddess) is qualified by 'land of the serpent (= gold)', which yields 'goddess of the gold'. Since the mention of Týr/*týr* coincides here with the poet's claim of being wounded on the *hægri hond*, some readers might at first want to detect some allusion to Týr's maiming, but three things should be noted in this connection: 1) *hond* may here be qualified by *hægri* for purely alliterative reasons — the alliteration is essential and there are (as we have noted) many examples of *hægri* qualifying *hond* for a purely euphonic effect; 2) Týr/*týr* is one of the most common elements in man- or warrior-kennings where a common noun meaning 'god' (like *týr*), or else the name of a particular god, is used as a base-word; and 3) the referent of the kenning based on Týr/*týr* is *not* the one who sustains the injury to his hand (or arm) but the opponent who is responsible for the injury (who is Sigurðr Ljótsson according to *Landnáma*). This last point makes any allusion to the one-handed Týr seem exceedingly suspect, and yet it is not easy to imagine that the poet could have avoided thinking of the one-handed Týr if he was aware of the idea that Týr was one-handed.

⁴⁸ Sigurður Nordal and Guðni Jónsson 1938, 140. 'struck her on the cheek with his right hand.'

19), we are told that Gunnsteinn wrested a knife from Helgi's right hand: 'Hann seilist upp yfir borðit ok þrífr hönd hina hægri fyrir ofan úlfliðinn ok kreistir höndina svó fast, at hann lýr alla hana ok ór hrýtr knífrinn ok niðr á borðit.'⁴⁹ One need hardly search for some symbolism in these specifics, and the same may be said, for example, of King Haki losing his *hægri hönd* in battle in *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum* (ch. 5); King Heiðrekr wielding a sword with his *hægri hönd* in *Heiðreks saga* (ch. 6); Þórir hundr wearing a gold ring on his *hægri hönd* in *Ólafs saga helga* (ch. 165 (*Heimskringla*)); King Ólafr's bleeding from his *hægri hönd* in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* (ch. 108 (*Heimskringla*)); or Egill chopping off a giant's *hægri hönd* in *Egils saga einhenda* (ch. 10).⁵⁰ Two examples from Snorri Sturluson's *Heimskringla* have just been cited, and two might be added from his *Edda*. In *Gylfaginning* 45, we are told how Þórr and his companions dwelt for the night in a hall that turned out to be the glove of a giant. When they suddenly felt the earth quake: 'Þá stóð Þórr upp ok hét á lagsmenn sína ok leituðusk fyrir ok fundu afhús til hægri handar í miðjum skálanum ok gengu þannig.'⁵¹ In *Skáldskaparmál* 44, Snorri relates how Hrólfr kraki delayed the Swedish host that pursued him: 'Tók Hrólfr kraki hægri hendi gullit ofan í hornit ok sóri alt um gøtuna. En er Svíar sjá þat, hlaupa þeir ór sǫðlunum ok tók hverr slikt er fekk [...]'.⁵²

Hence the question arises as to whether Týr's *hægri hönd* in *Gylfaginning* 34 does not merely manifest the same alliterative or euphonic habit irrespective of whether Snorri relied here on *Lokasenna* 38, where *hægri hönd* is suspect for the same reason. The case of Týr might well be exceptional, but is it sensible to work in a circle and presume that Týr is exceptional *because* he is said to lose his *hægri hand* — that is, because of the talion-hypothesis which is underpinned by the qualifying *hægri*? Of course not. Snorri's wording gives moreover no reason

⁴⁹ Jón Jóhannesson 1950, 280. 'He reaches up over the table and grasps the right hand above the wrist and squeezes the hand so firmly that he bruises it all and the knife falls down on the table.'

⁵⁰ The *vinstri hönd* is by contrast rarely specified. *Gylfaginning* 5 contains a notable instance where the primordial pair of *hrímþursar* or 'frost-giants' is born under the left *hönd* of Ymir and this specific might well reflect the 'sinister' nature of the race. ON *vinstri* 'left' could sometimes harbour a sense like 'worse' or 'evil' (see below).

⁵¹ Faulkes 1988, 37. 'Then Þórr stood up and summoned his companions and they searched about and found a side-room on the right hand side half-way down the hall and entered.'

⁵² Faulkes 1998, 59. 'Hrólfr took the gold out of the horn with his right hand and strewed it all over the road. And when the Swedes saw this, they leapt from their saddles and each took what he could get [...]'

to suppose that he was thinking in terms of perjury, and his use of the phrase *leggja e-t at vèði* strongly suggests that he was not. In fact, it seems entirely fitting to view Týr's *vèð* as a stake or gage in a simple wager or bargain with the bound wolf, and it appears even more difficult to extract any allusion to a perjury-talion from *Lokasenna* 38.

VII. McKinnell imagines that Týr is seeking reconciliation in *Lokasenna* 37: 'Whether or not Týr is a competent arbitrator, that appears to be the role he is trying to play here; and as there is no other clear motive for him to intervene, I would suggest the possibility that he has an official function as arbitrator, just as Bragi is the official orator and Sif may be the official hostess'.⁵³ And McKinnell suggests that Loki is accusing Týr of being an *unworthy* arbitrator in stanza 38: 'To Loki, Týr's lost hand is the sign of a broken oath, and how can one trust an arbitrator who is himself an oath-breaker? No wonder Loki accuses him of not being 'even handed'. Seen in this light, Týr's reply is pure cynicism (st. 39); it amounts to saying: "Well, we may have tricked the Wolf and I lost my hand as you say, but it worked."⁵⁴

As to Loki's claim to have sired a son on Týr's wife, McKinnell observes that 'the only sort of arbitration that is appropriate for a warlike god like Týr is the *hólmganga* ['duel'], the arbitration of force'.⁵⁵ So since the purported cuckold is one-handed and therefore (supposedly) unable to seek redress by challenging Loki to a duel, Loki has (supposedly) turned Týr's (supposed) argument that might is right against Týr himself: 'The allegation about Týr's wife functions as a moral supposition, to show the inherent injustice of the *hólmganga*, in this casual assumption that whoever succeeds must be justified', and Týr's (supposed) argument has thus been shown up 'as morally bankrupt in a way that makes him appear disgraced and ridiculous himself'.⁵⁶

McKinnell's interpretation relies on some disputable assumptions. To begin with, it might be questioned whether we must think of a

⁵³ McKinnell 1987–88, 247.

⁵⁴ McKinnell 1987–88, 248.

⁵⁵ McKinnell 1987–88, 248.

⁵⁶ McKinnell 1987–88, 248. McKinnell (1994, 50) has summed up his interpretation of the exchange between Loki and Týr: 'Týr is reminded why he lost his right hand: Fenrir bit it off after the gods broke their oath to release him if their rope succeeded in binding him (st. 38) [...] Týr is accused by implication of injustice in arbitration: first because he should be disqualified as an oathbreaker himself (st. 38, see above); second because, as patron of duels, he stands for a code which equates might with right. This is ludicrously illustrated by his own case: Týr's wife has had a child by Loki, but Týr can get no compensation, because he cannot fight for it, having only one hand (st. 40).'

hólmganga when Loki compounds the cuckold's disgrace by claiming that he received no compensation. This may imply unmanliness on Týr's part, but Týr is nowhere, as far as we know, associated with the practice of *hólmganga*. It may be objected that this is a pedantic objection; Týr is a warlike god, but to surmise that Loki never paid a fine for the alleged adultery and bastard offspring since the alleged cuckold and patron of arbitration and duels was deemed unfit to engage himself in the 'arbitration of force' on account of his loss of one hand in a broken oath does seem a rather far-fetched train of thought. More importantly, it remains very doubtful whether Týr was imagined to have lost his hand in an act of perjury — and why indeed should a one-handed oath-breaker be the official patron of oaths or arbitration or judicial duels? Furthermore: it is not at all clear that Týr has any conciliatory pretensions when he remonstrates in favour of Freyr, and Loki's riposte hardly requires us to think that arbitration is Týr's particular field of patronage. On the contrary, Loki seems to be saying that Týr could never bring about goodwill or peace, and such a charge is clearly consistent with Týr's militant nature, which is evidently the aspect of Týr that Loki is criticizing. And while Týr may have no special motive to intervene at this juncture on Freyr's behalf, the satirizing poet has good reason to let him do so as it is of course ironic to see the patron of battle and strife intervene to applaud the kindnesses of the patron of peace,⁵⁷ and the alliterative emphasis on *þú* ('Þegi þú Týr!, / þú kunnir aldregi [...]') underscores this irony if *bera tilt* means in fact the furtherance of goodwill or peace.

VIII. Many other stanzas of *Lokasenna* begin with a statement that is somehow explained, illustrated or extended in the stanza's latter half (cf. sts. 13, 17, 20, 22, 26, 30, 34, 37, 39, 54 and 60).⁵⁸ For comparison, one might consider stanza 22, where Loki alludes to a notorious characteristic of Óðinn and begins his invective with the phrase *þú kunnir aldregi* 'you could never' (as in stanza 38):

Loki qvað:

'Þegi þú, Óðinn!	opt þú gaft,
þú kunnir aldregi	þeim er þú gefa scyldira,
deila víg með verom;	inom slævorom, sigr. ⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See note 65 on Freyr's image as the patron of peace.

⁵⁸ This characteristic has been noted in von See et al. 1997, 375 and 461, as well as Jakobsen 1979, 36–7.

⁵⁹ Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 101. 'Loki said: "Be silent, Óðinn! / You could never /

In their search for a similar coherence in stanza 38, critics have sought to explain how Týr's alleged inability to *bera tilt með tveim* might relate to the loss of his right hand. To this end, Ruggerini has suggested that Loki is taunting Týr for being unable to keep two fighting men apart as he has only one hand to do so.⁶⁰ Such an irony is possible, but Jakobsen appears to have found a more likely solution.⁶¹ He takes the preposition *með* to mean in this case 'with' (instead of 'between' or 'among'), and he furthermore takes *tilt* to be adverbial and *bera* in its *literal* sense 'carry, bear'.⁶² Jakobsen thus gets the reading:

Ti du, Týr!	den høyre hånden,
Du kunne aldri	den vil jeg omtale,
bære godt med (eventuelt:	som Fenrir sleit ifra deg. ⁶³
mellom) to (hender);	

Plainly, the literal sense of *bera* cannot be ignored in conjunction with *með tveim* and the mention of Týr's loss of a hand, and the statement 'you could never carry well with two (hands)' would naturally call for the reason why Týr's powers of handling are impaired. Jakobsen's reading offers thus an attractive link between the stanza's halves, and yet he may be wrong in thinking that Snorri misunderstood Loki's words to mean that Týr is no reconciler of men.⁶⁴ It seems more likely that Jakobsen has exposed an intended lexical ambiguity; for Snorri's supposed understanding of the stanza gains considerable support from Týr's martial image and the aforementioned uses of *bera e-t með e-m* and *bera e-t milli/millum e-ra/e-rra*, where *bera* is used *figuratively*. Furthermore: Jakobsen's reading does by no means elucidate why Týr (of all gods) should intervene in defense of Freyr, whereas Snorri's supposed understanding has the additional merit of providing an ironic contrast between the god of peace (Freyr) and the god of battle (Týr).⁶⁵

.....
 divide the slaying among men; / often you gave / whom you should not have given /
 — the faint-hearted — the victory."⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Ruggerini 1979, 64.

⁶¹ Jakobsen 1979, 36–9.

⁶² A literal sense of *bera* in *Lokasenna* 38 was in fact supposed by some scholars in the 19th century. See von See et al. 1997, 461 and Jakobsen 1979, 39.

⁶³ Jakobsen 1979, 36.

⁶⁴ Jakobsen 1979, 36 takes the view that Snorri misconstrued the stanza's first half (with most modern critics) as referring to the battle-god's inability to reconcile men and added therefore 'ok er hann ekki kallaðr sættir manna' as an afterthought once he had finished his description of the maiming and turned his thoughts from the stanza's latter half to the first.

⁶⁵ Freyr is defined as a god of peace and plenty in *Gylfaginning* 24 and elsewhere.

IX. The result of the discussion so far has been to cast doubt on the prevalent theory that Týr lost his *Schwurhand* or 'the hand that pledges faith' in some kind of oath-taking or judicial ordeal or 'legal' contract with the wolf Fenrir. It should be plain that the accounts of Týr's maiming in *Gylfaginning* 25 and 34 do neither need nor even lend themselves kindly to such an interpretation, and one must for obvious reasons be wary of building overmuch in this respect on the specific detail that Týr lost his *hægri* hand. The alleged legal symbolism is, of course, even more elusive in *Lokasenna* 38, and Jakobsen has provided a more prosaic and plausible reading of the stanza. For reasons previously noted it seems likelier, however, that Loki is criticizing Týr's bellicosity and that *Lokasenna* 38.2–3 means in the first instance essentially: 'You could never bring goodwill (or peace) between two men (or foes)'. Loki's subsequent comment on Týr's maiming has struck some readers as an oddly disjointed sequel to such a charge, and yet the loss of Týr's *hægri hǫnd* may in fact offer an explanation (of sorts) for why Týr should himself be incompetent in the department of goodwill or peace, as I shall presently seek to explain.

X. The ON adjective *hægr* can mean 'apt, competent, expedient, skilful, agile, easy' (much like OE *til*), and *hægri hǫnd* does accordingly denote 'right hand' or literally the 'more expedient (or 'dextrous' or 'adroit') hand'. Týr's loss of his 'handier' hand might thus support Jakobsen's reading, that is help explain how Týr could never 'bære godt med (eventuelt: mellom) to (hender)', and yet it might be recalled here that *hægr* also possessed a sense in the region of 'kindly, docile, affable, peaceable, mild' (again rather much like OE *til*: 'good, kind, gentle').⁶⁶ In point of fact, the comparative form *hægri* does sometimes possess a sense like 'better, more beneficial, kinder, benevolent' or even 'blessed' in conjunction with *hǫnd*. One example is a rendering of Rom.viii, 28 in *Jóns þátrr Halldórssonar byskups*, where it

This image is presumably also alluded to in *Lokasenna* 35, where his father Njǫrðr says: 'þá ec mög gat, / þann er mangi fiár' (Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 103) 'when I begot the son / whom no one hates'. Dronke is no doubt correct when she comments on *Lokasenna* 37 (1997, 364): 'Freyr is now praised as a chivalrous knight in almost Arthurian terms, bringing comfort to ladies and magnanimously freeing prisoners.' Dronke adduces here a verse from *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka* in which these same knightly virtues are extolled, as do von See et al. 1997, 458–9.

⁶⁶ See La Farge and Tucker 1992, 131; Sveinbjörn Egilsson 1931, 307; Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1957, 305; Fritzner 1886–96, 159; Sigfús Blöndal 1920–4, 379; and Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, 406.

is said of Bishop Jón: 'vel fylltiz með honum þat sem postulinn segir, at þeim er Guð elskar snýz allt til hægri handar [= 'omnia cooperantur in bonum']'.⁶⁷ Similarly, it is said of St. John Damascene in *Jóns saga postula iv* that 'ollom gíofum ser logðum af guði vikr hann til hægri handar',⁶⁸ and in Arngrímur Brandsson's saga of St. Guðmundr (*Guðmundar saga D*), we are told how a starving woman cooked moss in water drawn from the saint's well and this was transformed into food 'fyrir hægri handar skipti græðara várs Jesu Christi'.⁶⁹ This traditional and figurative significance of *hægri hönd* squares rather well with the aforementioned senses of *hægr*, but it has no doubt gained currency mainly on account of the pervasive Christian symbolism of *dexter* and *sinister* whereby ON *vinstri* 'left' can by contrast mean 'worse' or 'adverse' and even 'sinful' or 'evil' when it qualifies *hönd*.⁷⁰

This figurative use of *hægri hönd* appears in various contexts in poetry and prose where the ordinary understanding is obviously inadequate so that the reader must reconsider the sense of the adjective. But then it has indeed troubled readers how the loss of Týr's *hægri* hand relates to his inability to *bera tilt með tveim*, and hence arises the question of whether *hægri* is in the ordinary sense suitable to the context.

Now OE *til* suggests that ON **tilr* possessed a similar range of meaning as *hægr*, and **tilr* and *hægr* define two shortcomings in *Lokasenna* 38, one in each half of the stanza: Týr cannot 'bear' *tilt*, and he has lost his *hægri* hand. The latter fault (in the latter half) is evidently meant to explain the former fault (in the first half), but precisely how is a problem. We cannot, of course, ignore the coincidence of *bera* 'carry,

⁶⁷ Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir 1998, 448. 'the words of the apostle were truly fulfilled in him, that all things turn *til hægri handar* ['to the right hand', i.e. 'turn out well'] for those who love God'. *Jóns þáttur* dates from around 1350.

⁶⁸ Unger 1874, 497. 'he turns all the gifts he received from God *til hægri handar* ['to the right hand', i.e. towards good (?deeds)]'. The saga is usually dated to c. 1300. Variations of this type of phrase are discussed in Jón G. Friðjónsson 1997(a), 91–100, at 96–7, as well as in the same author's *Rætur málsins* 1997, 303–4.

⁶⁹ Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1878 II, 135 'through the *hægri handar* exchange of our healer Jesus Christ.' The saga dates from around the mid-fourteenth century.

⁷⁰ See examples listed and discussed in Jón G. Friðjónsson 1997(b), 303–5. One example of *vinstri (hönd)* with a sense in the region of 'sinful' or 'evil' may be found in *Páls saga postula II* (Unger 1874, 237), where it is explained why St. Paul sits 'til hægri handar a innsigli páfvans' ('on the right hand side of the Pope's seal'): 'síðan er hann trúði aa Jesum Kristum, giorði hann allðri hofuðsynd, at því er lesit er. En þær giora manninn vinstri handar mann.' ('it is read that he never committed a cardinal sin once he believed in Jesus Christ; for they [i.e. cardinal sins] make the man a left-handed man [for 'a man of the left hand'].')

bear' *með tveim* and the mention of Týr's loss of a *hǫnd* (as Jakobsen has urged), but can we ignore the apparent synonymy of **tilr* and *hægr*, the words that define *bera* and *hǫnd* respectively?

Hardly. The idea that Týr lost his *right* hand has no clear bearing on his alleged inability to *bera tilt með tveim* in the sense 'bring goodwill (or peace) between two men (or foes)', and this perplexity is all the more notable given Loki's emphasis on which hand it was that Týr lost ('handar innar hægri, / mun ec hinnar geta [...]') ('the *hægri* hand, / that one I shall mention [...]'),⁷¹ where the alliteration on *hægri* and *hǫnd* is moreover at variance with the alliteration required by *Lokasenna*'s metre. The inessential alliteration on *hægri* and *hǫnd* is (or so it seems) merely an euphonic effect in *Lokasenna* 61, but stanza 38 would seem to differ in that its very coherence appears to depend on how we interpret *hægri hǫnd*.

The ordinary sense of *hægri hǫnd* appears inadequate in *Lokasenna* 38. It was, however, customary in certain contexts (as we have seen) to attach to these words a figurative sense whereby *hægri* in the region of 'more beneficial, benign, kindlier' replaces the ordinary sense 'right', and this may be a case of it. If *tilt* meant in fact something like 'kindness' or 'goodness' (like the OE neuter of *til*) or more specifically 'goodwill' or 'peace', as the context suggests, then *hægri* with a sense close to 'more beneficial, benign or kindlier' can clarify in what way Freyr's advocate is perceived as being himself unable to *bera tilt* because of his lack of the *hægri* hand:

Pegi þú, Týr! þú kunnir aldregi bera tilt með tveim; ⁷²	– and for this reason:	handar innar hægri mun ec hinnar geta, er þér sleit Fenrir frá. ⁷³
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Týr (of all gods) has just extolled the goodwill of Freyr, the benign patron of peace, but the left-handed god of battle and strife is in turn ironically reminded that he himself (note the alliterative emphasis on *þú*) could never extend kindness (or goodwill or peace), and here one should appreciate both the literal and figurative senses of *bera* underscored by the ambiguity of *með tveim* ('between two men (or foes)' or 'with two hands'), which prepares us for further wordplay in *hægri*

⁷¹ It may be noted that the demonstrative pronoun *hinn* (gen. fem. sing. *hinnar*) is here obviously used in the sense 'that (one)' as opposed to 'the other' since the latter sense has apparently confused some modern Icelandic editors.

⁷² Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 104.

⁷³ Neckel and Kuhn 1983, 104.

hond. In short, *Lokasenna* 38 appears to involve a play on words linking Týr's martial nature to his distinctive injury and whereby he is essentially told that he (himself) could never *bera* kindness (or goodwill or peace) between men because his *hægri hond* — in the sense 'kindlier' or 'more benign' or 'more peaceable' hand — is wanting.

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