

KATELIN PARSONS

GRÝLA IN SLÉTTUHLÍÐ

1. Introduction

THE CHILD-THIRSTY GRÝLA makes her unwelcome appearance in countless *þulur*, songs and lullabies. The oldest to associate Grýla specifically with Christmas is a *grýlukvæði* attributed to the Reverend Guðmundur Erlendsson of Fell in Sléttuhlíð (ca.1595–1670), which opens with the words “Hér er komin Grýla” and describes the vagabond Grýla’s futile attempts to wheedle and coerce the people of Sléttuhlíð into giving her their wayward sons and daughters.¹ As such, the poem (referred to simply as *Grýlukvæði* in the context of this article) is closely related to two others from the seventeenth century: a *grýlukvæði* attributed to Stefán Ólafsson (1619–1688) and its cousin, *Leppalúðakvæði*, which Jón Samsonarson convincingly identified as the work of Hallgrímur Pétursson (1614–1674), composed in about 1648–49.²

All three poems share a metre and are closely intertwined in written and oral transmission (as attested in extant manuscript copies and oral recordings).³ What begins as one song may shift into another over the

1 Árni Björnsson, “Hjátrú á jólum,” *Skírnir* 135 (1961): 115. For a comprehensive discussion of Grýla in Iceland, the Faeroe Islands and beyond, see Terry Gunnell, “Grýla, Grýlur, ‘Grøleks’ and Skeklers: Medieval Disguise Traditions in the North Atlantic?” *Arv* 57 (2001): 33–55; Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir, “Shetland Rhymes from the Collection of Dr. Jakob Jakobsen,” in *Jakob Jakobsen in Shetland and the Faroes*, ed. Turið Sigurðardóttir et al. (Lerwick: Shetland Amenity Trust and the University of the Faroe Islands, 2010), 191–230; Yelena Sesselja Helgadóttir, “Retrospective Methods in Dating Post-Medieval Rigmorle-Verses from the North Atlantic,” in *New Focus on Retrospective Methods*, ed. Eldar Heide (in press).

2 Jón Samsonarson, “Leppalúði Hallgríms Péturssonar,” in *Þorlákstiðir sungnar Ásdísi Egilsdóttur fimmtugri*, 26. október 1996, ed. Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson et al. (Reykjavík: Menningar- og minningarsjóður Mette Magnussen, 1996), 43–49.

3 The metre, *dragmælt* (or *dragmælt grýlukvæðalag*), is not unique to these seventeenth-century poems, but it is strongly associated with *grýlukvæði* and other songs for and about children,

course of its performance, and individual lines and stanzas belonging to one poem may be incorporated into another. Though set in different locations within Iceland, the basic narrative is virtually identical: an insatiably hungry, animal-like antagonist arrives at a farm and begs for alms in the form of excess children (preferably naughty ones) but is inevitably refused — either placated with a gift of food or forcibly driven away. The unwelcome guest may visit more than one farm over the course of the poem, and the head of the household may cooperate to the extent of recommending a specific destination where he believes the children to be particularly naughty. While these three poems clearly draw on much older folk traditions surrounding Grýla and her kin, tradition and processes of blending over time cannot be the sole explanation for these shared features. In particular, both Jón Samsonarson and Þórunn Sigurðardóttir have emphasised that the author of *Leppalúðakvæði* must be familiar with *Grýlukvæði*, as there is a very specific reference in the poem to Grýla's misadventures in Sléttuhlíð.⁴

If *Grýlukvæði* is presumed to be the oldest of the extant seventeenth-century *grýlukvæði*, it may have served as a literary model for later compositions. However, although *Grýlukvæði* is generally hypothesised to predate other extant *grýlukvæði*, and is certainly attributed to an older poet, the issue of its age and authorship has never been fully addressed, nor has its dissemination in the seventeenth century been examined. Manuscripts preserving the poem confirm that *Grýlukvæði* was known in the West Fjords by 1665, but they do not provide a date of composition or author. The first known source to name Guðmundur Erlendsson as the author of *Grýlukvæði*, Páll Vídalín's *Recensus poetarum et scriptorum Islandorum*

cf. Jón Samsonarson, "Ókindarkvæði," *Gripla* 10 (1998): 29. In drawing on the *grýlukvæði* tradition, Eggert Ólafsson's satirical "Hér er komin hún Grýla" adopts the *dragmált* metre and grotesque imagery of older *grýlukvæði*, but its preservation is far less entangled with that of other *grýlukvæði* — perhaps, as Jón Samsonarson notes, because it was primarily intended for an adult audience.

- 4 Jón Samsonarson, "Leppalúði Hallgríms Péturssonar," 48; Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Hallgrímur með 'síra Guðmund Erlendsson í Felli í bak og fyrir': Tveir skáldbræður á 17. öld," in *Í ljóssins barna selskap: Fyrirlestrar frá ráðstefnu um séra Hallgrím Pétursson og samtíð hans sem haldin var í Hallgrímskirkju 28. október 2006*, ed. Margrét Eggertsdóttir et al. (Reykjavík: Listvinafélag Hallgrímskirkju, 2007), 49–61; Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "[A]f naturen en begavet digter: Pastor Guðmundur Erlendsson (ca. 1595–1670)," *Hymnologi* 39 (2010): 125–34.

hujus et superioris seculi, was written many decades after the poet's death. Guðmundur Erlendsson was a well-known poet to whom numerous works are (often spuriously) attributed, and his association with *Grýlukvæði* could have arisen due to the poem's geographical setting in his home parish of Sléttuhlíð.

This article provides a new edition of *Grýlukvæði* based on the earliest manuscript witnesses preserving the poem. While these are not necessarily closer to the archetypical *Grýlukvæði* than later manuscripts, they do illustrate the form in which the poem was transmitted in one particular cluster of seventeenth-century manuscripts. This edition, in turn, is the basis for a re-examination of the genesis of *Grýlukvæði* and its current status as one man's attributed contribution to the genre.

2. *Grýlukvæði* in *Þulur og Þjóðkvæði*

To date, the only critical edition of *Grýlukvæði* is found in *Þulur og Þjóðkvæði*, the fourth and final volume of *Íslenzkar gátur, skemtanir, víkivakar og þulur*, edited by Ólafur Davíðsson (1862–1903).⁵ *Þulur og Þjóðkvæði* is certainly a pioneering work, but the book was published posthumously and without significant revision.⁶ In a study of folkloric material in the manuscript DFS 67 and its treatment in *Þulur og Þjóðkvæði*, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir concluded that Ólafur Davíðsson's methodology and editorial practices fail to meet modern academic standards, and *Þulur og Þjóðkvæði* should thus not be used by those engaging in scholarly research.⁷

Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir does not specifically discuss Ólafur Davíðsson's treatment of *Grýlukvæði*, as it does not fall within the scope of

5 *Íslenzkar gátur, skemtanir, víkivakar og þulur*, vol. 4, *Þulur og Þjóðkvæði*, ed. Ólafur Davíðsson (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1898–1903). *Grýlukvæði* had previously been printed in the first volume of the second edition of Andreas Peter Berggreen's *Folke-sange og Melodier, fædrelandske og fremmede, samlede og udsatte for Pianoforte* (Copenhagen: Den Gyldendalske Boghandling, 1860), 248, as *Grílukvæði* ("Hjer er komin Gríla á Gægis hól" / "Gríla hun til Gægis' Høi kommen er"). Berggreen's source was organist Pétur Guðjónsson, who sent him the melody and text by letter in 1846–47, cf. pp. 269–70.

6 Cf. Finnur Jónsson's postscript to the volume, pp. 383–4.

7 Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, "(Ó)Traustar heimildir: um söfnun og útgáfu þjóðkvæða," *Skáldskaparmál* 4 (1997): 210–26.

her study, but a survey of his use of manuscript sources confirms that *Pulur og þjóðkvæði* presents the editor's own vision of *Grylukvæði* rather than a reflection of its preservation at any one given time. Of particular note is the fact that JS 481 8vo, the manuscript Ólafur Davíðsson claims to have used as a base text with the "occasional" deviation, contains not one version of the poem but *two*: a main text and variant readings.⁸ A comparison of JS 481 8vo with *Pulur og þjóðkvæði* reveals that Ólafur's printed text alternates between these two versions, in some stanzas favouring the main text and in others discarding it for the variant version. Discarded text is not noted in the critical apparatus, and the editorial choice of variant readings indeed seems somewhat arbitrary: *á Gægishól* and *úr Gægishól* are listed as variants in the first stanza, for example, but *frá Gægishól* (as in the main text of JS 481 8vo) is ignored.

Ólafur Davíðsson was born in Fell in Sléttuhlíð, and the confidence with which he edits the text could stem in part from his familiarity with the topography of the song. In the eighteenth stanza, he rejects *út að Tjörnum* (found in all extant manuscripts of the poem) in favour of *suðr að Tjörnum* — a change for which there is no textual evidence whatsoever.⁹ Alliteratively speaking, *út* is not wrong, nor is there an obvious error in the metre of the poem. There is, however, a serious directional error if Fell is assumed to be the starting point of the poem. Tjarnir is south of Fell, but to go *út að* in this context is to travel north, hence Ólafur Davíðsson's insistence on *suðr* in the face of overwhelming manuscript evidence.¹⁰ The Reverend Bjarni Þorsteinsson (1861–1938), who collected and printed a version of the melody to *Grylukvæði* in his *Íslenzk þjóðlög* collection, based his interpretation of the first stanza on just such geographical background knowledge; he preferred the reading *úr Gægishól*, however, which he ex-

8 "Handrit frá Jóni Árnasyni, líklega eftir hrs. hans A, XII, 8vo, bls. 689 o.s.frv. Tvær afskriftir í hrs. J. Sig. 398, 4to. Handriti þessu er fylgt að mestu, en víkið þó frá því á einstaka stað." *Pulur og þjóðkvæði*, 118. *Grylukvæði* in JS 398 b 4to is a copy of JS 481 8vo (including a selection of the variant readings). In JS 481 8vo, the source of these variant readings is given as *Grundarboók*, an unknown manuscript that may also be the exemplar for one of five copies of *Grylukvæði* in JS 289 8vo (5r–8v). Oddly enough, Ólafur Davíðsson mentions neither of two copies of *Grylukvæði* in JS 398 a 4to.

9 "Út í öllum hndr., en það mun vera rángt." *Pulur og þjóðkvæði*, 113.

10 See Stefán Einarsson, "Terms of Direction in Modern Icelandic," in *Scandinavian Studies Presented to George T. Flom by Colleagues and Friends*, ed. Henning Larsen et al. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1942), 43.

plained as a reference to Gægishóll, a landmark in the Höfðahólar hills, where Grýla supposedly made her home.¹¹

Judging by the sheer length of the *Pulur og þjóðkvæði* version of *Grýlukvæði*, which at 99 stanzas far exceeds the length of the two texts in JS 481 8vo,¹² Ólafur Davíðsson also wanted to incorporate as much material as possible into the main text, with the critical apparatus reserved mainly for variant readings and notes on structural variation. Stanzas 35 and 48–52 are noted as additions from other manuscripts, but he has silently inserted a full stanza (76) without stating its source, although this could simply be an oversight. The length of *Grýlukvæði* varies widely between manuscripts, as does its structure, and Ólafur Davíðsson's solution to the problem of presenting it as a single poem seems to have been to weave together the longest possible coherent narrative from the various manuscript strands available to him. In this respect, JS 481 8vo is an ideal choice of base manuscript, as it permits considerable editorial freedom in constructing such a narrative. At the same time, *Grýlukvæði* never existed in the form found in *Pulur og þjóðkvæði*, which is entirely Ólafur Davíðsson's creation — an artistic reproduction of the poem that does not strive to follow any one single version too closely.

3. *Grýlukvæði* in Seventeenth-Century Manuscripts

What is unclear in Ólafur Davíðsson's edition of *Grýlukvæði* is that there is a considerable gap in the preservation of the poem: two seventeenth-century manuscripts contain a structurally different and much shorter text than found in the proliferation of much younger manuscripts that form

11 “‘Og gægist um hól’ segir alþýða oft og tíðum í staðinn fyrir ‘úr Gægishól’. En Gægishóll og kletturinn Gægir er utarlega í Höfðahólum í Skagafirði, og þar átti Grýla eitt sinn heima og átti í brösum við Slétthlíðinga.” Bjarni Þorsteinsson, *Íslensk þjóðlög* (Copenhagen: S. L. Møller, 1906–9), 669. Two locations in Sléttuhlíð bear the name Gægir: a hillock in the home field at Arnarstaðir and a large stone in the Höfðahólar hills, the height of a man, believed to be a source of danger. *Arnarstaðir, Heimildarmenn: Stefán Gestsson, bóndi á Arnarstöðum og Jóhanna, móðir hans, Kristján Eiríksson skráði*, unpublished report, 30 December 1975, Örnefnastofnun, 5; *Örnefnaskrá í innanverðri Sléttuhlíð í Skagafirði, eftir Pétur Jóhannsson Glæsibæ*, unpublished report, 17 March 1994, Örnefnastofnun, 1. Many thanks to Hrefna Sigríður Bjartmarsdóttir for this information.

12 The main text in JS 481 8vo has 82 stanzas, while the *Grundarbrók* text has only 61.

the bulk of his edition. Reconciling these structurally disparate versions within the space of a critical apparatus is all but impossible, and while it is more often the case that younger manuscripts vanish in the long shadow of older and more “textually significant” copies of a text, very little use is actually made of the oldest manuscripts preserving *Grýlukvæði* in *Pulur og Þjóðkvæði*.

The older of these two manuscripts is AM 147 8vo, a songbook written in 1665 by Gissur Sveinsson (1604–1683).¹³ A second, closely related songbook from the late seventeenth century, Add. 11.177, contains a text almost identical to Gissur’s.¹⁴ Whereas Ólafur Davíðsson describes AM 147 8vo as containing only a fragment (*brot*) of *Grýlukvæði* and made no use whatsoever of Add. 11.177,¹⁵ there is no material evidence that these texts are defective or fragmentary, though it is worth noting that there is a break in the pattern of repetition towards the end of both texts: neither of the last two stanzas repeats material from the stanza immediately preceding it, possibly indicating that the text has been abridged. Nevertheless, the narrative itself is internally cohesive, beginning with Grýla’s arrival and ending with Grýla scurrying away into a passageway and vanishing from sight.

The unknown scribes of Add. 11.177 did not copy *Grýlukvæði* directly from AM 147 8vo, but the manuscripts are closely related and contain much of the same material. Jón Helgason posited that the exemplar for Add. 11.177 was a sister manuscript of AM 147 8vo.¹⁶ In 1699–1700, this now-lost exemplar was in Vigur, where Magnús Ketilsson made a copy for Magnús Jónsson of Vigur (of which only copies are now extant), but he omitted *Grýlukvæði* and six other items — perhaps, as Jón Helgason suggested, because Magnús Jónsson already owned copies of these poems in his extensive library at Vigur.¹⁷ Extant and reconstructed manuscripts

13 A facsimile edition of AM 147 8vo was printed in 1960 as part of the series *Íslensk rit síðari alda*. Jón Helgason described the manuscript in his introduction, which was published as a separate volume and includes a biography of Gissur Sveinsson, see *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar: AM 147 8vo*, ed. Jón Helgason, *Íslensk rit síðari alda*, 2nd Series, ljósprentanir, vol. 2 (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska fræðafélag, 1960), 8–18.

14 For a detailed description of Add. 11.177 and its contents, see *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar*, 36–39.

15 “Hrs. Finns Magnússonar í Brit. Mus. 174, 4to. Ekki notað.” *Pulur og Þjóðkvæði*, 118.

16 Cf. *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar*, 45–49; 52–53; see also Haukur Þorgeirsson, “Þóruþjóð og Háu-Þóruleikur,” *Gripla* 22 (2011): 212.

17 *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar*, 49.

belonging to this manuscript family contain mainly ballads and collectively represent the oldest known collection of Icelandic ballads. Gissur Sveinsson himself likely recorded the bulk of this ballad collection, probably transcribing the oral performances of one or more informants.¹⁸ The title page of AM 147 8vo states that the volume is a gift from Gissur to Magnús Jónsson's father, Jón Arason of Vatnsfjörður (1606–1673),¹⁹ which indicates that Gissur recopied his personal ballad collection at least once for the benefit of others in his scribal circles.

Though Gissur Sveinsson describes his manuscript in general terms as *nokkur fornkvæði til gamans* (AM 147 8vo, 1v), he does include a number of more recent compositions, and there is little reason to doubt Jón Helgason's assessment that *Grýlukvæði* was a comparatively young poem at the time of its inclusion in AM 147 8vo.²⁰ Among these younger songs are Icelandic translations of a dozen Danish ballads from Anders Sørensen Vedel's *It Hundrede vduaalde Danske Viser* (1591), a book that may have served as a model for Gissur Sveinsson's manuscript and likely inspired early ballad collection efforts in Iceland.²¹

Vedel's ballads, recent translations into Icelandic, still classify as *fornkvæði* in the sense that these are Danish *fornkvæði*. The inclusion of *Grýlukvæði* in such a collection is an interesting editorial decision on the part of Gissur Sveinsson and strongly indicates an association with popular entertainment, though it could also be that the figure of Grýla — and not the poem *per se* — belonged to the realm of folk tradition. There are nevertheless similarities between *Grýlukvæði* and *Þóruljóð*, another one of the other non-ballads in Gissur Sveinsson's collection, found in both AM 147

18 Ibid., 51–52; Vésteinn Ólason, *The Traditional Ballads of Iceland: Historical Studies*, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit, vol. 22 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1982), 21–22.

19 Jón Arason and Gissur Sveinsson were cousins, the great-grandchildren of Jón ríki Magnússon and Ragnheiður Pálsdóttir *á rauðum sokkum*. Jón Arason's daughter Ragnheiður and her husband, Torfi Jónsson, who lived in Flatey, inherited AM 147 8vo and sent it to Árni Magnússon by 1710.

20 *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar*, 8.

21 *Kvæðabók séra Gissurar Sveinssonar*, 53–54; Olav Solberg, "The Scandinavian Medieval Ballad: From Oral Tradition to Written Texts and Back Again," in *Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing*, ed. Else Mundal et al. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2008), 121–33.

8vo and Add. 11.177.²² The eponymous Þóra of *Þóruljóð* is a towering and not entirely human gatecrasher who arrives at a pre-Christian Yule feast in Denmark and demands hospitality from her host, Þorkell. Unlike Grýla, Þóra does not declare an interest in eating the household, but she is a terrifying sight all the same and complains that everyone who has encountered her in her travels has been repulsed by her appearance. Þorkell treats Þóra with greater respect than Grýla encounters in Sléttuhlíð, and while alms given to Grýla meet with little thanks, Þóra rewards Þorkell's generosity with the gift of a magnificent golden sail. In a recently published critical edition of *Þóruljóð*, Haukur Þorgeirsson dates the poem to the fourteenth century and suggests that it represents a form of midwinter drama in Iceland that possibly involved acting out Þóra's visit.²³ The same need not be true of *Grýlukvæði*, but its inclusion in the collection does confirm that despite a localised setting in Sléttuhlíð, the poem was known to a wider audience in Iceland by the mid-seventeenth century.

Gissur Sveinsson's life was largely spent in the West Fjords, and there is no reason to believe that the scribe and ballad collector had any personal connection with either Guðmundur Erlendsson or Sléttuhlíð. He was born and raised in Holt in Önundarfjörður, where his father, Sveinn Símonarson, was the minister and provost for the Vestur-Ísafjörður region. Unlike his ambitious and widely travelled younger brother Brynjólfur, who spent over a decade in Denmark and was appointed bishop of Skálholt in 1639, Gissur seems to have been content to move back to the region of his birth following several years of study at Skálholt. In 1628, he was ordained as the parson for Álfamýri in Arnarfjörður — a comfortable distance from his aging parents and three older half-brothers and their families in Önundarfjörður — and held this position for the rest of his life. A fourth half-brother, Jón Gissurarson, lived at Núpur in Dýrafjörður, where he engaged in extensive scribal work, sharing manuscripts with Brynjólfur and perhaps also with Gissur.²⁴

22 Jón Helgason omitted *Þóruljóð* from his edition of Icelandic ballads (*Íslensk fornkvæði*) because it uses an eddic metre, *fornyrðislag*, cf. *Íslensk fornkvæði / Íslanske folkeviser*, ed. Jón Helgason, vol. 1, Editiones Arnarnagæanæ, Series B, vol. 10 (Copenhagen: Ejnar Munksgaard, 1962), xl.

23 Haukur Þorgeirsson, "Þóruljóð og Háu-Þórleikur," 222–25.

24 It is worth noting that Gissur's first wife, Guðrún Finnsdóttir, came from the family who owned *Flateyjarbók*. Guðrún's brother Jón presented Brynjólfur Sveinsson with

The following is a semi-diplomatic edition of *Grýlukvæði* in AM 147 8vo (118v–121r), with variant readings from Add. 11.177. Capitalisation is as in modern Icelandic, with the exception of *tiðrnum* in stanzas 10–11, which is somewhat ambiguous as it could either refer to generic *tjarnir* ‘(pools)’ or the Tjarnir farm in Sléttuhlíð. Italics are used in expanding abbreviations.

Grylu kvæde

Hun mun vilja hvýla sig því hier eru börnn, hun] , og
hun er grá vmm halsinn hun hlackar eins og örn.

25 Cf. Margrét Eggertsdóttir, “Áhrif Brynjólfs á Hallgrím Pétursson, sálma hans og trúarviðhorf,” in *Brynjólfur biskup – kirkjuhöfðingi, fræðimaður og skáld: Safn ritgerða í tilefni af 400 ára afmæli Brynjólfs Sveinssonar, 14. september 2005*, ed. Jón Pálsson et al. (Reykjavík: Háskólaútgáfan, 2006), 90–92.

Hun er grá vmm halsinn og skaust jnnar j fiös,
hun vill ecke heyra þad hatýda liös.

Hun vill ecke heyra þann hätýda sǫng,
kvarttar hun vmm kiótleyse, kvadst hun vera svǫng. hun] ÷

Kvarttar hun vmm kiótleyse kiókrandi þä,
bad hun mig vmm barnid eitt j belginn sinn grä. kiótleyse] + og

Bad hun mig vmm barnid eitt sem brekinn hefde nǫg,
sem ylundum og æslunum alldri kiæme i lǫg.

Sem ylur hefde og æslinn og æpa so hatt,
syngia ecke sýn frædi sýfelldtt og þrätt. syngia] sýnge; fræde]
frædin; þrätt] hatt

Syngia ecke sýn fræde sýfelldtt og vel,
býta kvadst hun börninn og blæda läta j skjel. Syngia] Syngi

Býta kvadst hun börninn, bad eg hana vmm grid,
jeg gaf henne silung og selbita vid.

Jeg gaf henne silung og sýldreka spord,
tǫlltte hun vt ad tiórnum og talade ecke ord.

Tǫlltti hun vt ad tiórnum og talade vid hann Stein,
eru hier ecke aflógu vngbörnenn nein?

Ecke er hier aflógu vngbarned neitt,
so giegnda eg Grýlu jeg gat þad ecke veitt. er] eru; vngbarned] vngb

So giegnda eg Grylu, göd bornn ä jeg,
hvorke hafa þau ylur nie æpa þau miög.

Ecke hafa þau ylur, og eckertt þeirra hrýn,
so kostulega kunna þau kvöldd fræden sýn.

$\text{og}] \div$

Valka mÿn og] Walg.
[par] ÷

 $\log] \div$

Þu att ad giöra þau gustaka verk,
valla er þier vorkynnande vel vitrum klerk.

preserving *Leppalúðakvæði*,²⁷ and it could be argued that these verses in *Grýlukvæði* are a later addition that originate from *Leppalúðakvæði* — rather than the other way around. If *séra Gvöndur* is absent from the scene, the possibility arises that *Grýlukvæði* could have been composed *before* 1634, with material added freely to the narrative until it measured a full 99 stanzas by the mid-nineteenth century.

Neither Gissur Sveinsson nor the scribe of Add. 11.177 state the author of *Grýlukvæði*. Even in younger manuscripts from the nineteenth century, *Grýlukvæði* is generally not associated with a specific author. In AM 960 4to 6, a transcription of an oral performance dating from 1847, the poem is “attributed to” (*eignað*) Guðmundur Erlendsson (7v), but this attribution is in a separate clause at the end of the transcription. The clause unfortunately does not specify whether the informant herself (Guðrún Jónsdóttir, a married farm worker on the Syðra-Krossanes farm in Eyjafjörður) is the source of this information. Of the manuscripts surveyed in connection with this article, only JS 510 8vo states directly and without reservation that Guðmundur Erlendsson *is* its author.²⁸

As mentioned earlier, the first known attribution of *Grýlukvæði* to Guðmundur Erlendsson is in Páll Vídalín’s *Recensus poetarum et scriptorum Islandorum hujus et superioris seculi*. In Þorsteinn Pétursson’s translation of this work, Guðmundur Erlendsson is credited with composing “Grýlu qvæde (qvod in suo genere vel pulcerrimum Carmen).”²⁹ Páll Vídalín does not specifically identify this *grýlukvæði*, but he did borrow AM 147 8vo from Árni Magnússon in 1710 (a loan recorded in a note inserted at the front of the manuscript) and thus had seen the same version of the poem as printed here above. That Páll Vídalín was referring to a second and now-

27 Lbs 450 8vo, a manuscript dating from the eighteenth century but probably not written by Jón Egilsson from Stóra-Vatnshorn in Haukadalur as stated in the manuscript catalogue, cf. Jón Samsonarson, “Leppalúði Hallgríms Péturssonar,” 43.

28 “[O]rt af s. Guðm. á Felli.” JS 510 8vo, 165.

29 Páll Vídalín, *Recensus poetarum et scriptorum Islandorum hujus et superioris seculi*, vol. 1, *Texti*, ed. Jón Samsonarson, Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, Rit, vol. 29 (Reykjavík: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi, 1985), 40. All but a few pages of Páll Vídalín’s original Latin text have been lost, and this translation by Þorsteinn Pétursson and Hálfdan Einarsson’s abridged transcription form the bulk of Jón Samsonarson’s edition. Only in Þorsteinn Pétursson’s translation do references to individual works by Guðmundur Erlendsson appear. Þorsteinn adds a number of works by Guðmundur Erlendsson to Páll Vídalín’s list in his *Lærdómssaga*, JS 30 4to, dated 1780, cf. Páll Vídalín, *Recensus*, 40.

lost *grýlukvæði* is highly improbable, but *Grýlukvæði* in Gissur Sveinsson's collection is an anonymous poem, and this particular manuscript cannot be the source of the information that Guðmundur Erlendsson was its author.

Páll Vídalín's treatise also claims that Guðmundur composed the *Rímur af krosstrénu*, a set of very popular sacred *rímur* based on the legend of the cross-tree. As Mariane Overgaard has pointed out, its author expressly identifies himself in the text of the *rímur* itself as "Sigurður prestur", and extant manuscripts of the *Rímur af krosstrénu* are virtually unanimous in attributing the work to Sigurður Jónsson of Presthólar.³⁰ A plausible explanation is that Páll Vídalín has confused *Rímur af krosstrénu* with the *Rímur af barndómi Jesú Krists*, Guðmundur Erlendsson's verse adaptation of *Jesu Barndoms Bog* (1508), a Danish *folkebog* based on the apocryphal Protoevangelium of James and Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew.³¹ The error is a fairly major one, and an indication that Páll Vídalín may be an unreliable authority concerning Guðmundur Erlendsson's poetic output; that he attributed *Grýlukvæði* to the parson for Sléttuhlíð could simply be an inference.

Even in his own day, Guðmundur Erlendsson was not the only poet acquainted with Sléttuhlíð and its immediate vicinity. His friend Sveinn Jónsson, a minister at Hólar (1639–1648) and later the parson for Barð in Fljót, composed an elegy on the death of Guðmundur's wife, Guðrún. In Hallur Guðmundsson's *Ó þú fallvalta veraldarvist*, a poem commemorating his father,³² he mentions a Sigurður Magnússon who passed away on March 7th, 1669, praising Sigurður as his father's treasured friend (*matavinur*) and his own personal benefactor (*velgjörðarmaður*). Sigurður, who farmed at Tjarnir in Sléttuhlíð at the time of his death, was the brother of a farmer-poet, Ásgrímur Magnússon of nearby Höfði in Höfðaströnd (d. 1679), author of *Rímur af Víglundi og Ketilríði* and *Rímur af Ölkofra*.

30 *The History of the Cross-Tree down to Christ's Passion: Icelandic Legend Versions*, ed. Mariane Overgaard, Editiones Arnarnæanæ, Series B, vol. 26 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1968), cxlvi. Cf. also Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Hallgrímur með 'sira Guðmund Erlendsson í Felli í bak og fyrir,'" 54.

31 These were by far the most popular *rímur* composed by Guðmundur Erlendsson, and new copies continued to be produced into the nineteenth century. Indeed, if the number of extant manuscripts is any indication of popularity, then the *Rímur af barndómi Jesú Krists* were the single most popular set of sacred *rímur* composed in the seventeenth century.

32 Preserved in Lbs 1529 4to.

This was not Ásgrímur's only connection to the Reverend Guðmundur, however, as he was also Guðmundur Erlendsson's brother-in-law.³³

In an entry on the word *jólasveinn* in Jón Ólafsson from Grunnavík's dictionary, the comment is made that "Grímur Magnússon í Höfða" is the author of a *grýlukvæði* that Ólafur Davíðsson was later unable to identify, although he mentioned the reference in *Þulur og þjóðkvæði*.³⁴ Jón Samsonarson was largely able to confirm Jón Ólafsson's statement in the same dictionary entry that Hallgrímur Pétursson had composed *Leppalúðakvæði*, but he added that (Ás)grímur's *grýlukvæði* remained a lost work.³⁵

As mentioned earlier, Höfðaströnd adjoins Sléttuhlíð. The minister at Fell traditionally served at the outlying church at Höfði in Höfðaströnd, and even if Ásgrímur Magnússon had composed a *grýlukvæði* in which Grýla pays a visit to Höfði (and not Fell), the local minister would still be *séra Gvöndur*. In other words, *Grýlukvæði* does not need to be composed by Guðmundur Erlendsson himself for the parson to make an appearance in the poem.

In the case of the disputed authorship of *Leppalúðakvæði*, Jón Samsonarson's main argument in favour of Hallgrímur Pétursson is that the speaker's three children are called Eyjólfur, Guðmundur (Gvöndur) and Steinunn — names that correspond to those of Hallgrímur Pétursson and Guðríður Símonardóttir's daughter and two sons. As stated earlier, Jón Samsonarson dates it to 1648–49.³⁶ He noted a similar parent-child connection between *Ókindarkvæði* and its probable author, Björg Pétursdóttir (1749–1839), who ends the cautionary verse with a warning addressed to her daughter Sigríður, advising the young girl to mind her manners.³⁷

By contrast, none of the three girls mentioned in *Grýlukvæði* (Valka/Valgerður, Herdís and Sólveig) can be identified as Guðmundur Erlendsson's own children: his eldest daughter was named Margrét (b. 1625), and

33 His first wife was Guðmundur's sister Þóra, and they had at least one child together, Sigríður (1626–d. after 1703). After Þóra's death, Ásgrímur married Sveinn Jónsson's sister Þuríður.

34 „Jón Ólafsson frá Grunnavík segir í Orðabók sinni *jólasveinar*, að [Ás]Grímur Magnússon í Höfða á Höfðaströnd hafi ort *Grýlukvæði*, en ekki þekki eg það.“ *Þulur og þjóðkvæði*, 144.

35 “*Grýlukvæði* eftir Ásgrím Magnússon í Höfða hefur ekki komið fram.” Jón Samsonarson, “*Leppalúði Hallgríms Péturssonar*,” 43.

36 Ibid., 48. The *terminus post quem* for the composition of *Leppalúðakvæði* is 1644, the year when Hallgrímur Pétursson was ordained as minister for Hvalsnes.

37 Jón Samsonarson, “*Ókindarkvæði*,” 23–33.

a younger daughter was probably named after his sister Þóra.³⁸ In AM 147 8vo, however, the girls are identified somewhat cryptically as *móðir* — and hardly in a biological sense of ‘female parent’, as Grýla speaks of *hin móðir prests*. This could, of course, be a misreading (or mishearing) of *dóttir*, but *móðir* is a fairly illogical substitution for *dóttir* — in modern Icelandic at least. If, like *út að Tjörnum*, this is a corruption of the text (as Ólafur Davíðsson interprets it), why do multiple manuscripts from the seventeenth century onwards contain a reading that goes against the semantic better sense of the scribe? Given the context, Grýla could be cynically referring to the young girls as *future* mothers, although the word may also be used in a broader, non-maternal sense (cf. *matmóðir*, *húsmóðir*).

Comparatively little is known of Ásgrímur Magnússon’s family, but he and his second wife, Púriður Jónsdóttir, had at least two daughters who survived to adulthood: Valgerður (1636–1706) and Herdís (1638–d. after 1709). A son, Erlendur, was born about 1644, but it seems likely that *Grýlukvæði* had already been composed by the time of his birth; Erlendur was roughly the same age as Hallgrímur’s daughter Steinunn, who is mentioned in *Leppalúðakvæði*. That the Valka and Herdís of *Grýlukvæði* are none other than Ásgrímur Magnússon’s two daughters seems likely, especially as there are no other known contenders in Guðmundur Erlendsson’s extended family.³⁹ The two sisters were daughters of a farmer rather than a minister, but they might certainly be expected to become wives and/or mothers of clergymen given their advantageous ties to the families on the church farms of Fell and Barð. The age difference between the pair also agrees with the description given in *Grýlukvæði*: Valka, as the older sister, is old enough to sing, while Herdís can still only wail.

38 Guðmundur Erlendsson and his wife Guðrún Gunnarsdóttir had eight children together, at least five of whom were boys. Their eighth child is mentioned only in a commemorative poem he composed after his wife’s death in 1668, where it can be seen that this child died very young (probably in infancy), and it would be somewhat tenuous to suppose that this unnamed child was one of the girls mentioned here.

39 The latter name in particular was relatively uncommon: only 20 of 1823 women living in the Skagafjörður region in 1703 were named Herdís, cf. Ólafur Lárusson, *Nöfn Íslendinga árið 1703*, Safn til sögu Íslands og íslenzkra bókmennta, 2nd Series, vol. 2 (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1960), 35. Solveig, by contrast, is a member of the parson’s household; her identity and relationship to the parson remains uncertain, and she could well be a foster child. Solveig may be the *keipótt móðir* mentioned later in the poem, but this is not clarified.

The simplest explanation as to why no trace of Ásgrímur's *grýlukvæði* has ever been found is that poem and "Hér er komin Grýla" are one and the same work. In AM 147 8vo and other manuscripts preserving the poem, *Grýlukvæði* begins with an unidentified speaker at an unidentified location. In all manuscripts surveyed, the sisters Valka and Herdís are introduced *prior* to any mention of a minister or church, and the initial speaker is also the father of Valka and Herdís in all but three manuscript copies: AM 147 8vo, Add. 11.177, and JS 289 8vo (5r–8v). In fact, Grýla states outright that she is "here at Höfði" in six manuscripts of *Grýlukvæði* when she threatens to listen for Valka and Herdís's crying.⁴⁰ If Ásgrímur indeed composed *Grýlukvæði*, then Grýla quite logically begins her journey with a stop at Höfði in Höfðaströnd, in which case he accurately directs Grýla *út* to Tjarnir, which is north of Höfði and farther out in the fjord.⁴¹ From Tjarnir, Grýla continues in a more or less direct line to Fell.

At the same time, Ásgrímur's presence as the poem's initial speaker and father of Valka and Herdís would not preclude that Guðmundur Erlendsson (or a third local poet) "sent" Grýla to his neighbour in Höfði in ca. 1638–1644. The case of *Grýlukvæði* is more complicated than that of *Leppalúðakvæði*, where the poem was attributed to two poets of different ages living in two different regions of the country: establishing its author was a simple process of eliminating the poet who did *not* know three siblings named Eyjólfur, Guðmundur and Steinunn. Even though the version of *Grýlukvæði* in AM 147 8vo does not mention Guðmundur Erlendsson by name, a *grýlukvæði* starring Ásgrímur Magnússon's daughters would be unlikely to feature a different parson: *séra Gvöndur*'s identity is largely confirmed. If poets and brothers-in-law Ásgrímur Magnússon and Guðmundur Erlendsson both appear in *Grýlukvæði*, who is its author?

Arguably, *Grýlukvæði* is a case of a poem that belongs to no one single

40 Stanza 14 of the main text of JS 481 8vo begins with the line: *Hér atla' eg á Höfða að hlusta til þess*. Ólafur Davíðsson's edition uses the variant version instead (*Hér atla eg að hvíla að hlusta til þess*), but the critical apparatus does include three manuscript copies that name Höfði in this stanza: AM 277 8vo, ÍB 109 8vo and one copy of *Grýlukvæði* in JS 289 8vo (15r–22r). *Grýlukvæði* in JS 289 8vo is, in turn, a copy of AM 960 4to 6. A sixth manuscript containing this variant, not included in Ólafur Davíðsson's edition, is one of two copies of the poem in JS 389 a 4to.

41 Höfði is, incidentally, situated much closer to the Höfðahólar hills than Fell. A malicious creature who makes her home in Höfðahólar would also be well positioned to spy on the cove of Sandvík, where Grýla claims to have seen Solveig.

author. Extant copies, even those from the seventeenth century, are many degrees removed from a poet's pen. In some sense, this is just as true of *Leppalúðakvæði* and many other works of the post-Reformation era; the manuscripts preserving them, the very medium by which they are transmitted, lend themselves poorly to author-centred textual criticism.⁴² Post-Reformation poetry in Iceland, secular and sacred alike, flourished in a literary culture in which the boundaries between composition, production, reception and performance were highly fluid. *Grylukvæði* is not a single creative act at a single place and time: it is also the work of the informants who learned the song and shared it with others, the collectors who recorded the words and melody for posterity and transformed oral performances into written texts — even the editor who reconstructed the epic narrative of Guðmundur Erlendsson of Fell in Sléttuhlíð from the various corrupt fragments available to him.

Attempting to extract the genesis of *Grylukvæði* from the tangled web of transmission only serves to complicate the authorial picture, opening up possibilities of collaborative authorship even at the stage of its initial composition. Guðmundur Erlendsson and Ásgrímur Magnússon could easily have composed *Grylukvæði* together, perhaps during one of Guðmundur's regular visits to Höfði, in which case Páll Vídalín and Jón Ólafsson are both correct in attributing it to two different authors. Multiple authorship — with two or more initial contributors — could certainly explain why the narrator of *Grylukvæði* seems to shift from one farm to another: in AM 147 8vo (though not in Ólafur Davíðsson's edition), Grýla meets first-person "me" at *three* locations before fleeing from the enigmatic Skeggi.⁴³

42 Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 135.

43 On the identity of Skeggi, see Jón Samsonarson, "Leppalúði Hallgríms Péturssonar," 48–49. A comic poem on the farmhand Skeggi beginning with the line "Skeggja átti ég að skenkja" (*Skeggjavísur* or *Skeggjasálmur*) is printed in the 1885–86 edition of the collected works of Stefán Ólafsson, to whom a *grylukvæði* is also attributed. As Jón Samsonarson points out, the stated policy of its editor was to include all works attributed (even tentatively) to Stefán Ólafsson, and additional research would be required to confirm his authorship of *Skeggjavísur*. At least one copy of *Skeggjavísur* (found in JS 271 4to) states it to be the work of the poet Jón Guðmundsson of Fell, one of Guðmundur Erlendsson's sons. An anonymous Skeggi-poem (*Skeggi til Laugu skrifar og segir*) in AM 441 12mo is also included in the collected works of Stefán Ólafsson on the basis of its similarity to *Skeggjavísur*. The poem takes the form of a love letter from Skeggi to his fiancé, in which he responds to a message conveyed to him from "Gvöndur séra", cf. Stefán Ólafsson, *Kvæði*, ed. Jón Þorkelsson, vol. 1 (Copenhagen: Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag, 1885), 160.

6. Conclusion

Ásgrímur Magnússon's presence in the *Grylukvæði* long ascribed to Guðmundur Erlendsson underlines that Icelandic poets of the seventeenth century did not operate in a literary void. At the same time, it demonstrates the significance of marital ties not only in the distribution of manuscripts, as examined by Susanne Arthur,⁴⁴ but also in literary activities at large. Such ties play a complex and often overlooked role in the lives of Iceland's authors and poets and the later dissemination of their work. Magnús Jónsson, for example, calls into question Jón Halldórsson's account of Brynjólfur Sveinsson's legendary "discovery" of the young Hallgrímur Pétursson during Brynjólfur's years in Denmark (in which Brynjólfur meets Hallgrímur entirely by coincidence and is spontaneously inspired by the boy's keen tongue to enrol him in the cathedral school in Copenhagen), pointing out that Hallgrímur was Brynjólfur's sister-in-law's nephew.⁴⁵ The same Þorbjörg Guðmundsdóttir who linked Höfðaströnd and Öfundarfjörður through her marriage to Jón Sveinsson may have used her influence with her husband and brother-in-law to ensure that her brother's child did not end his days as a mistreated blacksmith's apprentice in faraway Glückstadt. A less dramatic example is the preservation of works by Hallur Ögmundarson in AM 622 4to; Guðrún Nordal suggests that the scribe, Gísli Jónsson, chose to include these particular poems because Hallur was an illustrious relative of his (future) wife, Kristín Eyjólfsdóttir.⁴⁶ If Valgerður and Herdís in *Grylukvæði* are indeed Ásgrímur's daughters, this confirms that *Grylukvæði* was composed no more than ten years before *Leppalúðakvæði* and provides further evidence for the literary interactions between Guðmundur Erlendsson and Hallgrímur Pétursson proposed by Þórunn Sigurðardóttir⁴⁷ — and possibly widens the circle to include Ásgrímur as well.

44 Arthur, "The Importance of Marital and Maternal Ties," 221–22.

45 Magnús Jónsson, *Hallgrímur Pétursson: Ævi hans og starf*, 2 vols. (Reykjavík: H.F. Leiftur, 1947), 1:33–34.

46 Guðrún Nordal, "Á mörkum tveggja tíma: Kaþólskt kvæðahandrit með hendi siðbótarmanns, Gísla biskups Jónssonar," *Gripla* 16 (2005): 222.

47 Þórunn Sigurðardóttir, "Hallgrímur með 'sira Guðmund Erlendsson í Felli í bak og fyrir'," 52–54.

In other regions of the North Atlantic, Grýla and her kin are associated with mumming and disguise traditions, and Terry Gunnell has speculated that Grýla in Iceland was likewise once a masked or costumed figure who travelled between farms in mid-winter, demanding hospitality (or offerings in the form of meat) from those she encountered, a tradition that possibly moved indoors due to a worsening climate.⁴⁸ *Grýlukvæði* describes just such a trip through Höfðaströnd and Sléttuhlíð, set during the Christmas season, and the poem would certainly lend itself to dramatisation, though Gissur Sveinsson's version describes her physical appearance in rather sparse terms. Conversely, *Grýlukvæði* could actually represent a deliberate step away from older traditions surrounding Grýla and other Yuletide visitors (such as the Þóra of *Þóruljóð*); if there were indeed ritual elements to Grýla's character, as Gunnell believes, these would hardly have been encouraged in post-Reformation Iceland — and certainly not in the Sléttuhlíð of Guðmundur Erlendsson's day. Whether or not he had a direct hand in *Grýlukvæði*'s composition, Guðmundur Erlendsson belonged to a generation of clergyman-poets influenced by Guðbrandur Þorláksson's vision of a cleaner, more spiritual poetic landscape. In his preface to *Vísnaþók* from 1612, Guðbrandur exhorted his fellow Icelanders to purge their repertoires of amoral works and amuse themselves with more edifying material — such as *rímur* based on stories from the Bible.⁴⁹ Guðmundur Erlendsson's own *rímur* are very much in keeping with this emphasis on “profitable” entertainment, as are his numerous verse adaptations of fables by Aesop and others, in which the moral of the story forms the refrain.

There is an unmistakable emphasis on the merits of obeying one's parents throughout *Grýlukvæði* and *Leppalúðakvæði*, and although Grýla's interest in wilful children who neglect their religious studies (*syngja ekki sín fræði*) could predate her arrival in Sléttuhlíð, it is perhaps not a coincidence that two very similar narrative poems emerge within a decade of each other in which the monstrous visitor encounters (and is repelled by) a man of the cloth. Even if bringing Grýla from farm to farm could have been an annual tradition from time immemorial, the narrative *grýlukvæði* need not have been an established genre in the mid-seventeenth century. Instead,

48 Gunnell, “Grýla, Grýlur, ‘Grøleks’ and Skeklers,” 48.

49 *Vísnaþók Guðbrands*, ed. Jón Torfason et al. (Reykjavík: Bókmenntafræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands, 2000), 3.

Grýlukvæði and later narrative Grýla-poems of the seventeenth century may represent a new twist on ancient folklore, transforming popular midwinter drama into acceptably moral entertainment: an ogress who hungers for naughty children but from whom well-behaved little sons and daughters are quite safe.

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EFNISÁGRIP

Grýla í Sléttuhlíð

Lykilorð: *Grýlukvæði*, *Leppalúðakvæði*, Guðmundur Erlendsson í Felli, Ásgrímur Magnússon í Höfða, handritageymd, höfundareign, bókmenning og -menntir eftir siðaskipti.

Grýlukvæði frá Sléttuhlíð í Skagafirði er varðveitt í tveimur handritum frá síðara hluta 17. aldar auk fjölda yngri handrita. Í útgáfu Ólafs Davíðssonar frá árinu 1903 er kvæðið eignað séra Guðmundi Erlendssyni frá Felli í Sléttuhlíð (um 1595–1670). Þessi útgáfa gefur þó óljósa mynd af varðveislu kvæðisins og styðst lítið við elsta handritið, AM 147 8vo, sem Ólafur kallar „brot.“ Í handritinu reynist uppskriftin vera heil en hún inniheldur gerð kvæðisins sem er með öðru sniði en finnst í yngri handritum. AM 147 8vo liggur til grundvallar nýrri útgáfu af þessu grýlukvæði sem birtist í greininni. Færð eru rök fyrir því að kvæðið sé það sama og grýlukvæði eignað Ásgrími Magnússyni (d. 1679) sem Jón Samsonarson taldi vera týnt. Grýlukvæðið mun hafa verið ort um 1640 en ómögulegt er að fullyrða um höfund kvæðisins, enda var Ásgrímur mágur Guðmundar og bjó í næsta nágrenni í Höfða á Höfðaströnd. Kvæðið er vísbending um nán tengsl milli Guðmundar og Ásgríms og undirstrikar mikilvægi fjölskyldusambanda í íslensku bókmenntalífi 17. aldar.

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