ANNETT KRAKOW

FATE, SEXUAL DESIRE, AND NARRATIVE MOTIVATION IN *HRÓLFS SAGA KRAKA*

Introduction

The legendary Danish king Hrólfr kraki is believed to have lived in the sixth century (Landolt 2000, 159–60).[1] The transmission history of the tales about him, his ancestors, and his champions is intricate and fascinating at the same time. It begins with the two Old English poems *Widsið* and *Beowulf*.[2] Whereas *Widsið* only briefly mentions Hrōþwulf (i.e. Hrólfr) and his uncle Hrōðgār (i.e. Hróarr), *Beowulf* is more comprehensive and also includes mention of characters known from the Nordic tradition on Hrólfr kraki. Texts from the medieval North, which tell of Hrólfr and his champions, include, among other things, three works composed at the beginning of the thirteenth century: Saxo Grammaticus' Latin *Gesta Danorum* and two Icelandic works often attributed to Snorri Sturluson, *Skáldskaparmál* and *Ynglinga saga*.[3] Moreover, *Skjǫldunga saga* is assumed to have been composed in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. This saga on the Danish kings from the Skjǫldung dynasty, to which Hrólfr belonged, is only preserved in two fragments from about 1300 and in a Latin

1 This article is based on a paper I gave in September 2023 at the conference "Sense and Sexuality: Erotic Discourses in/of History" in Katowice, Poland. I would like to thank David Schauffler for proofreading my article.

2 *Widsið* is preserved in a manuscript dated to the tenth century (Hill 1983, 1), *Beowulf* in a manuscript dated to the first decade of the eleventh century (Fulk, Bjork, and Niles 2008, xxvii). For an overview and brief comparison of the sources on Hrólfr kraki in Old English, Old Norse, and Latin, see Landolt (2000, 158–160).

3 *Gesta Danorum* is assumed to have been composed around 1200 (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015, xxxiv–xxxv), *Skáldskaparmál* (part of the *Prose Edda*) and *Ynglinga saga* (part of *Heimskringla*) in the 1220s (Faulkes 2005, xiv–xv; Finlay and Faulkes 2016, ix). For a list of texts from the medieval North, which mention Hrólfr, see also Shippey (2010, 24–27).

summary known as *Rerum Danicarum fragmenta* by Arngrímur Jónsson from the late sixteenth century (Bjarni Guðnason 1982, xxiii–xxiv, xxxvi).

Slightly younger are the earliest manuscripts of the text that this article will be primarily concerned with: *Hrólfs saga kraka*. Although the extant manuscripts of the saga do not predate the seventeenth century, a *Hrólfs saga kraka* is known to have existed in the Icelandic monastery Mǫðruvellir "in or just after 1461" (Slay 1960b, 132). Desmond Slay has extensively investigated the manuscripts of the saga and arrived at the conclusion that they are all copies of a single, now lost manuscript from an earlier period, probably from the sixteenth century (1960b, 132).[4] *Hrólfs saga kraka* has been the subject of studies focusing on, among other things, *fornaldarsǫgur*, analogies between Beowulf and Hrólfr's retainer Bǫðvarr, notions of kingship, the bridal-quest motif and maiden kings, and more generally sexual themes in the saga.[5]

In this article, I would like to continue earlier research on sexual themes and female characters in *Hrólfs saga kraka* and analyse episodes in which sexual desire motivates further events and thus can be seen as a crucial element in the construction of the saga's plot. The sexual desire of two characters, Helgi and Hvít, has severe consequences for other characters in the saga (including Hrólfr), and therefore the analysis will concentrate on them. Another aspect that in particular contributes to narrative motivation in the saga is the concept of fate. This is explicitly addressed in several passages in the saga. The analysis will also pay attention to instances in which the notion of fate and the consequences of the characters' sexual desire intersect. The narrative function of fate and sexual desire for narrative motivation in *Hrólfs saga kraka* will be at the core of the analysis.

4 See also Lansing (2012, 405–6, 427–29), who includes an overview of all fifty-one manuscripts of the saga, including three, which were not known to Slay.

5 For a recent discussion of Beowulf and Bǫðvarr, see Grant (2024). For opposing views on Hrólfr and the notion of a model king, see especially Ármann Jakobsson (1999) and Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir (2003). For an overview of sexual themes in the saga, see Ármann Jakobsson (2003) and Phelpstead (2003). For a comprehensive bibliography on *Hrólfs saga kraka*, see the website *Stories for All Time: The Icelandic fornaldarsögur*.

The structure of *Hrólfs saga kraka* and general remarks on narrative motivation

The structure of *Hrólfs saga kraka* can be described as episodic and including different strands. This is a feature it shares with a number of medieval works. Carol Clover (1982, 16) has argued that, in terms of composition, Icelandic sagas "conform to the principle of coherent multiplicity rather than unity; […] conceive of a plot as parallel and interlocking subplots; and […] weave together simultaneous lines of action." Especially the second compositional principle of subplots is characteristic of *Hrólfs saga kraka.* Narrator formulas mark the boundaries between the five major sections of the saga, with each of these sections following a different strand or subplot, which at times interlock.[6] Although Hrólfr is named in the title, he will not be a central character in the saga until the final section. However, the preceding sections are all linked to him because they tell either of other members of his family or of his retainers.

The first section (chapters 1–4) describes the dynastic conflict of the Danish kings: how Fróði kills his bother Hálfdan and pursues the latter's sons Hróarr and Helgi with the intention of killing them. The second section concentrates on the lives of the two brothers, Hróarr and Helgi. It is in this section that Helgi's sexual encounters with Ólǫf, Yrsa, and an unnamed elfin woman occur and that Hrólfr is born. Hrólfr is the son of Helgi and Yrsa – Yrsa is both Hrólfr's mother and his half-sister. This section ends with Helgi's death in battle against the forces of the Swedish king Aðils, who has married Yrsa in the meantime.[7] Section three introduces Svipdagr, who joins the retinue of the Swedish king but leaves because Aðils fails to acknowledge his faithful service in the successful defence of the land. Svipdagr then departs for Denmark, where he becomes

6 In a subchapter entitled "The Language of Stranding", Clover (1982, 85–90), gives examples of formulas for introducing, temporarily suspending, retrieving, and terminating strands.

7 At the end of chapter 12, the narrator declares: "Og lÿkur hier þætti Helga kongz" (Here ends the tale of King Helgi; Slay 1960a, 36; Byock 1998, 24). According to Byock (1998, ix), the second section ends after chapter 13. He does not elaborate on his decision, but it might be that it was motivated by the fact that this chapter tells of Yrsa's grief for Helgi and that the major character of the third section is only introduced in chapter 14. His indication of chapters for section four is also slightly different from that based on narrator formulas in the saga (Byock 1998, x).

a retainer of King Hrólfr. The next section (chapters 17–23) begins the narrative strand on Bǫðvarr by first telling of his parents and the curse that Hvít, the queen of Norway, has put on his father Bjǫrn and which leads to his death. After having taken revenge for his father's death, Bǫðvarr comes to King Hrólfr and earns his respect. The final section continues the narrative strands begun in earlier sections and weaves them together. Instigated by Bǫðvarr, Hrólfr takes revenge for the killing of his father and defeats the Swedish king Aðils. In this, he is supported by his retainers and his mother Yrsa. Afterwards, Hrólfr's half-sister Skuld senses an opportunity to overcome Hrólfr and plans an attack against him with her husband. Hrólfr is occupied with Yule celebrations and does not pay attention to their military preparations. Skuld is also skilled in magic, and her invocations of enchantments during the fierce, final battle of the saga contribute to its outcome: Hrólfr and his men are killed.

In this short summary, some motivations for the events and actions of characters have been indicated. The motivation of events transforms a 'story' (understood as a series of events) into a 'plot' by offering an explanatory framework for those events (Martínez and Scheffel 2019, 116–117). Motivation more narrowly understood as causality is also crucial for a well-known definition of plot by E. M. Forster from 1927 (Richardson 2005, 48–49), and this view is also voiced in some definitions of narrative, as Brian Richardson (2005, 50) has summarised: "While many definitions of narrative limit themselves to representations of two or more events in a time sequence, others argue for the necessity of some kind of causal connection." Already in Aristotle's *Poetics* (4th century BCE) "[t]he definition of beginning, middle and ending implies the importance of causal links between the parts of a tragedy" in order to form a unified whole, as noted by Jonas Grethlein (2023, 142, see also 34–35, 116) among others. This aspect of unity together with a manageable length ("to view it all at once"; Fyfe 1932, ch. 7 [1451a1]) and plausibility (i.e. necessity, probability) characterise Aristotle's understanding of *mýthos* (Baumbach 2019, 239–240). Aristotle defines *mýthos* (i.e. plot) as "the arrangement of the incidents" (Fyfe 1932, ch. 6 [1450a1]). Although he "points out that the criteria of probability and necessity apply to characters as well as to plot [...] he discusses motivation chiefly as an issue of plot" as Grethlein (2023, 143) stresses. Thus, the caus-

al links between events and scenes are prioritised over "the psychological grounding" of decisions and actions by characters (Grethlein 2023, 143).[8]

Causal motivation is one of three types of motivation distinguished by Matías Martínez and Michael Scheffel (2019, 118–127), the other two being final motivation and compositional or aesthetical motivation. With causal motivation, an event is explained as a likely or possible effect of a cause. Final motivation is relevant in texts where the storyworld is governed "von einer numinosen Instanz […]. Der Handlungsverlauf ist hier von Beginn an festgelegt" (by a numinous entity […]. Here, the course of the action is fixed from the start; Martínez and Scheffel 2019, 119; Matthews 2012, 76). They point out that causal and final motivation can be included in one and the same narrative, with causally motivated events and actions subordinate to this numinous force, for example God's providence in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, an epic poem from the seventeenth century (Martínez and Scheffel 2019, 119). The third type, compositional or aesthetical motivation, encompasses the artistic dimension; motifs and details mentioned should be functionally relevant for the course of events or semantically related to the narrative as a whole or large parts of it (Martínez and Scheffel 2019, 121–22). Finally, they stress that narrative motivation – any one of the three types – contributes to creating coherent narratives (Martínez and Scheffel 2019, 127). Martínez and Scheffel's categories have been used by, among others, Alastair Matthews in his analysis of the German medieval *Kaiserchronik*. Matthews (2012, 75–76) suggested refining Martínez and Scheffel's category 'final motivation' by differentiating between, on the one hand, "final motivation in the strict sense (predetermination)" and, on the other hand, "'divine causality' (the intervention of a numinous force as a causal factor in the narrative)" for cases in which, in the *Kaiserchronik*, "God's role in the narrative of history may be to act as one causal force alongside other, more familiar ones." This distinction also appears to be useful for analysing final motivation in *Hrólfs saga kraka* and will be drawn upon below.

8 Grethlein (2023, 141–142) also points out that motivation is employed genre-specifically (i.e. differently in Classical Old Comedy than in Hellenistic New Comedy and the Ancient Greek Novel) and that "Aristotle's ideas about motivation were stricter than the practice of the tragedians is".

Apart from that, it should be borne in mind that the plot construction of this saga was restricted by the circumstances of its ending – according to tradition, Hrólfr fell with all his men in battle. Such "[o]ral storytelling and retelling of pre-existing stories" is characteristic of medieval literature and "has considerable consequences for motivation: an immanent motivation is always already present in the plot, and a poet is given only limited leeway to take the motivation into his own hands again", as Harald Haferland (2023, 347–348) puts it. Haferland (2023, 349, 356) has also drawn attention to how narrative schemata such as revenge or courtship contribute to structuring the plot and making it more predictable.[9] In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Óðinn's and Skuld's decisions taken against Hrólfr can be interpreted as revenge, which is employed in the plot to strengthen the focus on the end, i.e. on Hrólfr's downfall. Haferland (2023, 355–356) operates with the term 'finality' to describe those plots in which "a story's end appears to be emphasized, foreseeable, and pre-programmed".[10] This focus on the plot and the orientation towards the ending can lead to the inclusion of scenes and decisions of characters that seem not to be causally or psychologically motivated (such as in the *Odyssey*, when Penelope plans to marry again despite signs of her husband's return; Grethlein 2023, 127–133, 143). In such cases, one can speak of "motivational gaps" (Haferland 2023, 360) which result from what Clemens Lugowski once called "Motivation von hinten" (motivation from behind, Haferland 2023, 360; retroactive motivation, Grethlein 2023, 124).[11] For Grethlein (2023, 126, cf. also 141), 'retroactive motivation' is a feature of medieval narrative, together with "thematic isolation and suspense as to how". The latter is linked with a point mentioned above, the familiarity with the subject matter of a story being retold. With the outcome known, suspense will primarily be generated by how this outcome is achieved.[12] This can also be said of *Hrólfs saga kraka*, where

9 See also Schneider (2019, 258–260), who discusses three "Gravitationszentren, [...] von denen aus Kohärenz inhaltlich-thematisch organisiert werden kann [...]: Schema – Szene – (figurative) Bedeutung" (centres of gravity, [...] from which coherence can be organised in terms of content and theme [...]: schema – scene – (figurative) meaning).

10 Haferland (2023, 356) defines 'finality' as "a characteristic of plots, while final motivation describes the connection of narrative steps".

11 Lugowski discussed this kind of motivation in *Die Form der Individualität im Roman*, published in 1932; cf. Grethlein (2023, 124–125).

12 Cf. also Grethlein (2023, 126–127, quotation at 130): "As in many medieval narratives, this suspense does not consist in the uncertainty of the outcome. Foreshadowing as well as the

the narrative threads connected with fate and sexual desire, among other things, help to enrich narrative motivation and suspense as to when and how the consequences will affect Hrólfr.

God, Óðinn, and fate in *Hrólfs saga kraka*

In contrast to other texts about Hrólfr, *Hrólfs saga kraka* adds an additional interpretational perspective to Hrólfr's failure in the final battle:

> Og för þetta eptir lÿkendum sagdi meistarinn Gallterus, ad mannligur mättur kunni ei ad standast vid þuilÿkum fianda krapte, vtann mättur gudz hefdi á̋ möte komid, og stod þier þad eitt fyrir sigrinum Hrolfur k(ongur) sagdi meistarinn ad þu hafder ecki skyn á̋ skapara þijnum. (Slay 1960a, 123)
>
> ('And events turned out as expected,' said Master Galterus. 'Human strength cannot withstand such fiendish power, unless the strength of God is employed against it. That alone stood between you and victory, King Hrolf,' said the Master; 'you had no knowledge of your Creator.' Byock 1998, 78)

It was, so to speak, 'predetermined' that Hrólfr could not win because he was no Christian, and the authority indicated for this evaluation, Master Galterus, is only mentioned in this passage of the saga. Master Galterus has been identified with Walter of Châtillon (Lat. Galterus de Castellione), who composed a Latin epic on Alexander the Great around 1180, which was translated in prose form into Old Norse as *Alexanders saga*, maybe in the 1260s (Würth 1998, 101–03, 117). Finnur Jónsson (1904, xxvii) called this passage in *Hrólfs saga kraka* "det besynderlige 'citat' i sagaens slutning" (the strange 'quotation' at the end of the saga), and in an earlier publication, he had treated the reference to Master Galterus as a sign that a copyist of *Hrólfs saga kraka* wanted to imitate a stylistic feature of *Alexanders saga*. In *Alexanders saga*, the author's "subjektive bemærkninger [...] altid betegnes ved disse ord ('siger' osv.)" (subjective remarks [...] are always marked with these words ('says', etc.); Finnur Jónsson 1901,

familiarity of the myth allow no doubts to be raised about Odysseus' final triumph."

833). A content-oriented approach can complement the observations of Finnur Jónsson. According to Stefanie Würth (1998, 104–105), Walter of Châtillon intended to show that Alexander's life was influenced by fate and *fortuna* and that hubris led to the ruler's downfall. She has suggested that the reference to Master Galterus in *Hrólfs saga kraka* was included to present Hrólfr "als nordisches Ebenbild des großen Alexanders" (as a Nordic version of the great Alexander; Würth 1998, 181), but she does not elaborate on that idea.[13] If one wanted to find parallels, one could point to the numinous force that guides the path of life, or the instances in which Hrólfr's actions could be interpreted as a display of hubris, for example his tricking of Skuld's husband into subservience or his ignorance of the impending danger at Yule. For Marianne Kalinke (2003, 170), the reference to Galterus with its "interpretation of what Hrólfr's life and death are all about is a lame afterthought, an imposition of a Christian veneer that negates everything that has gone before". She sees, however, points of comparison been Alexander and Hrólfr in "the single-minded pursuit of wealth and fame and pleasure" (Kalinke 2003, 170).

Apart from the Christian God, *Hrólfs saga kraka* includes several passages in which other forces are referred to, which shape the course of events. Broadly, these forces can be subsumed under the notion(s) of fate. Following a definition by John Lindow (2020, 927), "fate may be defined as what must happen to a person or persons, beyond his or her control, usually beyond his or her knowledge" and that "[a]t least in the Old Norse textual tradition, fate is closely associated, although not exclusively, with what must last happen to a person, namely death". Fate also appears to be "associated with the agency of supernatural beings and the gods" (Lindow 2020, 927). During the 1920s and 1930s and again in the 1950s and 1960s, a number of scholars assumed "that the Germanic concept of fate was unique and that it was central to the lives of the various Germanic peoples", to quote Lindow (2020, 948). Since then, this view of a special form and significance of fate for pre-Christian Germanic peoples has been modified by the acknowledgement of influences from classical and Christian sources (Lindow 2020, 927, 948–949; Simek 2004, 8–9). Moreover, it has to be taken into account that assumptions about the concept of fate in pre-Christian times are made based on texts from later centuries, which

13 If not indicated otherwise, my translation.

may be informed by a Christian perspective (Simek 2021, 380). Old Norse texts drawn upon in the scholarly discussion on fate include primarily eddic poems and prose narratives on the gods, norns, and heroes from the legendary past as well as *Íslendingasǫgur* (Lindow 2020, 927–937, 945; for fate in *Íslendingasǫgur*, see Gropper 2017, 200, 202–207 and Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 81, 170–179, 186–190).

In accordance with the characteristics of the notion of fate mentioned above, *Hrólfs saga kraka* includes examples in which fate is associated with the divine power of Óðinn and the agency of Skuld, a character who by name is linked to supernatural beings (norns and valkyries – see below in the section on the elfin woman). Apart from that, the saga includes general references to fate by using the respective Old Norse terms. Following Helmer Ringgren (1967, 8, 15), the forces that shape the course of events could be termed personal if a god is involved, and impersonal if this is not the case. Ringgren stresses that it is the accessibility of a relationship that differentiates personal and impersonal powers: "[i]f man's fate is decreed by a god, it is possible to enter into relationship with him, and sacrifices, prayer and obedience may be thought to avert an evil destiny or create a good one, and so forth" (Ringgren 1967, 8). In the saga, it is stated that Hrólfr and his men did not worship the gods, "helldur trudu þeir á mätt sinn og megn" ([r]ather, they put their trust in their own might and main; Slay 1960a, 112; Byock 1998, 71). The formula 'trua á mátt sinn ok megin' may appear to be old and pre-Christian (among other things due to the alliteration), but as Gerd Wolfgang Weber (1981, 489–491) has argued, it is rooted in the Christian tradition and influenced by the high-medieval Latin prose style. For Weber (1981, 477–478), rejection of worship, trust in one's own power, and the belief in fate or luck constitute what he calls the "Topos der Irreligiosität" (topos of irreligiosity). This topos offers a typological interpretation of the past employed by Christian authors to idealise pre-Christian legendary heroes such as Hrólfr kraki (Weber 1981, 474–475; see also Simek 2004, 9 and Simek 2021, 284–285). Weber (1981, 478–479; emphasis in the original) suggests that both heroic legend in general and the tradition about Hrólfr in particular already included "einzelne *Signale*" (single *signals*), which made it easier to interpret Hrólfr typologically in the saga, for example the death of King Aðils during a sacrifice for the Dísir (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 2002, 57–58) and Uppsala as a pre-Christian reli-

gious centre or the "Topos vom treulosen Kriegsgott Óðinn" (topos of the faithless god of war Óðinn).

Although Hrólfr and his men have not actively sought to enter into a relationship with Óðinn, they are not as indifferent to his power as it may seem. Earlier in the saga, one learns about their encounters with the farmer Hrani. After two encounters with Hrani, which help them to prepare for the fight against the Swedish king Aðils, they meet him for a third time. Now, however, Hrólfr and his men reject Hrani's gift of three weapons. Only after having left do they realise that this farmer was, in fact, Óðinn and that the refusal may have negative effects, as Bǫðvarr says: "munu vær sigri hafa neitad" ([w]e may have denied ourselves victory; Slay 1960a, 109; Byock 1998, 69). He suggests to Hrólfr to keep a low profile because he is afraid that Hrólfr might not gain victory from then on. Although Hrólfr agrees with Bǫðvarr that it was a mistake to reject Hrani's/Óðinn's gifts, he tries to downplay the significance of Óðinn's power by classifying Hrani as "jllur andi" (an evil spirit) and stating shortly afterwards that "audna rædur huǫrz mannz lijfe, enn ecki sä jlli andi" ([f]ate rules each man's life and not that foul spirit; Slay 1960a, 109; Byock 1998, 69). Here, Hrólfr indicates a difference between Óðinn's influence and that of *auðna*, a term that denotes 'fate, destiny, fortune' and 'good luck' (cf. *ONP*).[14] Óðinn is mentioned once more in the saga. In the final battle, an enraged Bǫðvarr suspects Óðinn – although he cannot see him – of fighting on the enemy's side and calls him, among other things, "herianz sonurinn enn fvle og ötrue" (this foul and unfaithful son of the evil one) and "þad jlla eyturkuykindi" ([t]hat vile, poisonous creature; Slay 1960a, 122; Byock 1998, 77).[15] This negative, demon-like characterisation of Óðinn, who has

14 Ferrari (2012, 280–281) has interpreted Hrólfr's comment in the following way: "*Auðna*, in the king's words, is a substitute for the true Christian God, whom, according to the epistemic constraints of the fictional world of the saga, the characters cannot know [...]." Given the comment by Master Galterus at the end of the saga, I am sceptical of equating *auðna* with God.

15 An encounter with a farmer, whose gifts of protective war gear are refused by Hrólfr, is also included in *Rerum Danicarum fragmenta*. Hrólfr realises shortly afterwards that the farmer was, in fact, Óðinn and that the refusal is synonymous with a denial of future victory. Remaining quiet can only be a temporary solution and postpone Hrólfr's defeat. In contrast to the saga, Hrólfr does not question Óðinn's power and neither does he or a retainer verbally abuse the god in the account *Rerum Danicarum fragmenta*. In the final battle, Óðinn fights in human form in the ranks of Hrólfr's enemies, and even dead bodies come to life again, because "Satana scilicet in eadem ingresso" (Satan had entered into them), in

turned against Hrólfr, in conjunction with the allusion that Hrólfr and his men have similarities with noble heathens because they do not worship the gods, "makes it possible for Christians to praise the otherwise pagan king", as Annette Lassen (2022, 102) has stated. One can add that the supposed comment by Master Galterus that Hrólfr would have needed God's help to win likewise offered the saga audience a further clue to put this pre-Christian king into a Christian frame of reference.

Hrólfr assumes that apart from Óðinn, there is another, impersonal power that seems to be independent of this god. In this case, i.e. "[i]f the power of destiny is regarded as impersonal, […] [t]he decree of destiny cannot be changed or averted and it is no use praying or offering sacrifices, for there is no one to hear or to receive and to react", as Ringgren (1967, 8) has pointed out. Other characters in the saga do not make such a distinction. They refer more generally to fate and good luck, leaving it open whether this fate is related to Óðinn's will or not. Hrólfr has been quoted above as stating that *auðna* (fate, good luck) determines human lives and not Óðinn. This term is also employed by Hrólfr's mother Yrsa after Hrólfr and his twelve champions have successfully defied King Aðils' attempts to kill them: "hefur nu meira mätt audna þijn enn trǫllskapur hanz" (at this very moment your good luck has more power than his sorcery; Slay 1960a, 103; Byock 1998, 65). Apparently, Yrsa does not know that Hrólfr had encountered Hrani/Óðinn before and followed his advice to take only his twelve best men with him to King Aðils. Thus, Hrólfr's success in this case is connected to a power of fate that is personal rather than impersonal.

After Hrólfr and his men have rejected the gift of weapons from Hrani/Óðinn, one can find some references to the impossibility of averting the consequences for Hrólfr. They are often included in the direct speech of the characters.[16] Bǫðvarr advises Hrólfr to remain quiet in or-

order to cause a terrible storm directed towards Hrólfr and his men (Bjarni Guðnason 1982, 36; Miller 2007, 21). The dead rising up has a parallel in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, where Bǫðvarr suspects that they fight against them (Slay 1960a, 120). For the literary portrayal of Óðinn in *Skjǫldunga saga* and *Rerum Danicarum fragmenta*, see also Lassen (2022, 99–111).

16 This concurs with a tendency noticed by Peter Hallberg (1973, 148, 150; emphasis in the original) of "the frequency and distribution of the 'fortune words'" in several subgenres of Old Norse literature: "those words are strongly 'over-represented' in direct speech". Hallberg (1973, 151) suggests that this may reflect the authors' "feeling that this vocabulary mainly belonged to an old native tradition, somewhat weakened and perhaps even a little old-fashioned in the authors' own days".

der to avoid being attacked, but he seems not to be convinced of his own advice and voices a premonition "ad skamt muni til störra tijdinda fyrir oss ǫllum" (that it is but a short time before momentous events affect us all; Slay 1960a, 109; Byock 1998, 69). Skuld notices that Hrólfr always stays at home and interprets his behaviour as a sign that he himself fears that he will not be victorious again: "[s]etur hun hier til enn mesta seid ad vinna Hr(olf) kong brödur sinn, so ad j filgd er med henni alfar og nornir og annad ötǫluligt jllþydi" (Skuld, to overpower her brother King Hrolf, fashioned a spell of high potency, which summoned elves, norns and countless other vile creatures; Slay 1960a, 111; Byock 1998, 71). In fact, the potency of Skuld's *seiðr* is so strong that humans have no chance against it. But still, Skuld deplores what will happen: "er ad slijkum hellst skade, enn þö skal til skarar skrjida allt ad einu" (the loss of such men is a dreadful misfortune. Nevertheless, all now moves towards the same end; Slay 1960a, 115; Byock 1998, 73). The term *seiðr* has the meanings "(performing of) sorcery, spell, incantation" (*ONP*) and as Stephen Mitchell (2020, 655) states "[c]ertainly by the time of most written records from Old Icelandic, it is one of the dominant terms for witchcraft and sorcery". *Seiðr* has attracted a lot of scholarship which, among other things, has also tried to establish possible relations to shamanism and Sámi traditions and explore how the archaeological evidence can complement the textual sources (cf., e.g., Mitchell 2020, 667–668 and Price 2019, 43–54, 330–342). Magic (and *seiðr* as a part of it) has also been analysed as a motif and device in plot construction in the literature from the medieval North, among others by Stephen Mitchell (2011, 74–116) for a variety of (sub-)genres, by Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2013, 47–58) for *Íslendingasǫgur*, and by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2014) for *fornaldarsǫgur*. Given the fact that *Hrólfs saga kraka* is often counted among the *fornaldarsǫgur*, the results concerning the narrative functions of magic in this group of sagas are specifically relevant for the present article. Stephen Mitchell (2011, 103, see also 85) has pointed out that magic occurs more frequently "the greater the distance between the time of composition and the setting of the saga", with magic often being linked to paganism. Mitchell's observation is also taken up by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2014, 52, see also 42) as the third point in her list of functions of magic in *fornaldarsǫgur*: "a) Provide the hero with [...] an opponent in the plot. b) Bolster the hero's moral standing, e.g. by

presenting magic in contrast to the heroic ideal. c) Present a picture of pre-Christian times. d) Spice the narrative, so enhancing its entertainment value". *Hrólfs saga kraka* includes characters with the ability to work magic, such as Aðils, Skuld, and Hvít, who are opponents of Hrólfr and Bǫðvarr. Function b may be subject to discussion since scholarship has come to different conclusions as to whether or not Hrólfr corresponds to the ideal of a king. Function c is detectable in the saga: magic is among the means used to characterise the past as pre-Christian and, according to the comment by Galterus at the end of the saga, Skuld's magic is invincible for non-Christians. The last function certainly also applies to the saga. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2014, 47–48) mentions, among other things, curses as a device to advance and determine plot development. In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, this is particularly noticeable in the curse uttered by Hvít (see below).

Working magic and divination can also be interpreted as expressions of "[a] cult pertaining to fate" (Lindow 2020, 947). In the saga, Skuld's *seiðr* helps to realise the fate laid out for Hrólfr and his men: inevitably, they will face defeat. Bǫðvarr does not want to accept the situation. At the beginning of the final battle, he is absent. Instead of him, a mighty bear is seen fighting in the ranks of King Hrólfr. Skuld is unable to work her trick while the bear is there. The bear is obviously evoked by Bǫðvarr to fight on the battlefield, while Bǫðvarr himself stays behind in the king's room.[17] He fights Skuld with her own means but is disturbed by another of Hrólfr's champions. By coming to him, Hjalti ignores King Hrólfr's conviction that Bǫðvarr knows best how to help them. Hjalti arrives at a most unfortunate moment and is rebuked for that by Bǫðvarr: "nær mundi nu lagt hafa ädur huǫrir sigrast hefdi […] Og vill nu draga til þess sem verda vill ad einginn räd skule duga" ([i]t was nearly decided which side had gained the victory […] Now events will run their course, turning out as they will, and no action on our part will affect the outcome; Slay 1960a, 119; Byock 1998, 75). Bǫðvarr's attempt to change the future predestined by the refusal of Hrani's/Óðinn's gift has thus failed. From his words, one can get the impression that Hjalti's disturbance is why Bǫðvarr could not win the contest of powers against Skuld.

Hjalti's behaviour during the Yule celebrations and the battle that

17 For a discussion of how this episode in the saga was influenced by the traditions of the animal-warrior and the animal-double, see Ramos (2015, 59, 64, 72–73).

follows is noteworthy. During the celebrations, he goes to his mistress, and on his way to her, he sees that Skuld is preparing an attack. He does, however, only warn Hrólfr and the others after returning from the visit to his mistress (Slay 1960a, 112–113). Maybe his behaviour is linked to his understanding of fate (here, death in the upcoming battle) as something that cannot be averted and, therefore, believes it is unimportant to raise the alarm immediately or to disturb Bǫðvarr. His comments on fate suggest that what is going to happen does not come as a surprise: "Hafa hier og storar bendingar fyrir borid, þött vier hǫfum dulist vid langa tijma, og er mier meiri grunur ad hier muni störir tilburdir eptir koma" (We have for a long time, despite many clear indications, ignored what was coming. Now I have reason to suspect that momentous events [...] are about to take place; Slay 1960a, 114; Byock 1998, 72). Hjalti makes a similar remark after Bǫðvarr has joined them on the battlefield,[18] and finally he states, "ecki er forlǫginn hægt ad beygia nie á möti nätturunne ad standa" ([i]t is not possible to bend fate nor can one stand against nature; Slay 1960a, 122; Byock 1998, 77).[19] From these words one could infer that Hjalti thinks that one has to accept fate and, in consequence, that Bǫðvarr's evocation of the bear was in vain right from the beginning.

The numinous forces presented in this section contribute to narrative motivation in the saga, as becomes obvious through events and in the comments of several characters. Óðinn's impact on Hrólfr and his men can be seen as an example of what Matthews (2012, 76) has classified as "divine causality". Hrólfr's death in battle is not planned or predetermined by Óðinn at their first encounter; it is Hrólfr's behaviour that forms the basis for Óðinn's reactions. The first two encounters had positive effects because Hrólfr took Óðinn's advice seriously; the third time, however, he did not. It is more difficult to establish whether the saga includes Matthews' (2012, 76) other category, final motivation understood as predetermination. Hrólfr seems to assume that another abstract force exists that determines life and is more influential than Óðinn: *auðna*. It remains, however, unclear whether to Hrólfr *auðna* implies predetermination or whether he

18 He says: "hefur oss leingi fyrir bodad þessum tijdindum sem nu eru framm kominn" (we have long been forewarned about the events now occurring; Slay 1960a; Byock 1998, 77).

19 The term used by Hjalti is *forlǫg*. It can be translated as 'law, fate, destiny' and, as Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon (1874, 164) have noted, "the word is not very freq. in old writers".

sees it as another force that causally motivates events, yet in a stronger way than Óðinn. As mentioned before, other characters do not make such explicit statements. From Hjalti's comments and behaviour, one could infer that he equates fate with an ill-starred future that is the result of Óðinn's decision ('causal divinity'). The alleged quotation by Master Galterus with its reference to the Christian God and his suggested superiority over the enemy's power discusses a hypothetical case. Therefore, Master Galterus' words do not imply the assumption that all events in the saga are subject to God's predetermination.

Sexual desire and motivation: Helgi and Ólǫf

Helgi's involvement with Ólǫf, Yrsa, and the elfin woman are presented as causally linked in the saga. The outcome of his encounter with Ólǫf leads to his marrying Yrsa, and the dissolution of this marriage paves the way for the encounter with the elfin woman and the birth of Skuld. Skuld plays a crucial role in Hrólfr's life, as could be seen in the section above. In the saga, she is one of Hrólfr's antagonists and takes power – albeit for a short time only – after his death. Therefore, one could say that Helgi's encounters with Ólǫf and Yrsa have two functions in the plot: to introduce Hrólfr and to form a prelude for the introduction of Skuld.

Helgi's interest in Ólǫf is aroused by his wish to increase his fame and importance by conquering a powerful queen. The verb 'conquer' is here used without its romantic connotations for several reasons, as a look at the saga makes clear:

> Fyrir Saxlandi riedi j þann tijma su drottning er Olof hiet. Hun var á̋ þä leid sem herkongar. Hun för med skiǫlld og bryniu og suerdi girt og hialm á̋ hǫfdi. Þanninn var henni hättad, væn ad jfirliti enn grimm j skapi og störmannlig. Þad var mäl manna ad sá̋ væri kostur bestur j þann tijma á̋ Nordurlǫndum er menn hǫfdu spurn af, enn hun villdi þö ǫnguan mann eiga. Helgi kongur friettir nu til drottningar þeirrar enu störlätu, og þötti sier mikill frami j aukast ad fá̋ þessarar konu, huǫrt sem henni væri þad viliugt eda ei. Og eitt huǫrt sinn för hann þangad med mycklu herlidi. (Slay 1960a, 16–17)

> ('At that time a queen named Olof ruled over Saxland. Like a warrior king, she dressed in a coat of mail, carried sword and shield, and wore a helmet. This was her nature: beautiful in looks, yet cruel and arrogant in temperament. Those who knew about such matters said that Olof was the best match in all the northern countries, but she had no intention of marrying any man. King Helgi heard about this proud queen. It seemed to him that marrying the woman, whether she was willing or not, would increase his fame and importance. So one day he set off with a large company of armed men and, without warning, he landed in the country ruled by the powerful Queen Olof.' Byock 1998, 11)

Ólǫf is described in military terms as a king over an army (*herkóngr*). In this saga character, the attributes of a warrior woman have been combined with another type of character attested in Old Norse literature, that of a *meykóngr*, a maiden king in bridal-quest narratives. In particular Marianne Kalinke has studied such narratives, which were especially popular in Iceland in the fourteenth century. In bridal quests, the hero's effort to obtain a bride is the generating force of the plot and, as Kalinke stresses, marriage is the goal, never the sexual union alone (Kalinke 1990, viii, 1, 22). She has paid special attention to bridal quests in which the future bride is a maiden king, that is a female character who rules over a country. Such a woman is portrayed as arrogant because she rejects her suitors and also abuses them physically and psychologically; moreover, her reaction appears to be an overreaction and unjust because the suitor, in general, has honourable intentions (Kalinke 1990, 66, 78f.). The abused suitor then attempts to outwit the maiden king, including by displaying unchivalrous behaviour, in order to make or "persuade her to accept him in marriage", for instance by taking advantage of her greed (Kalinke 1990, 66). Kalinke (2014, 275, 284) assumes that the origin of the maiden-king narrative or "romance", as she calls it, emerged from the combination of motifs from two sagas, which "presumably circulated in Iceland at around the same time", *Clári saga* and *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*. To this type of narrative, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar* (of which the oldest manuscript fragments date from c. 1300) seems to have contributed the figure of the maiden king and the nature of the conflict between her and the suitors: Þórbjǫrg rejects Hrólfr

Gautreksson because of his lower status (Kalinke 2014, 277, 279, 282–283). In *Clári saga*, which presents itself as having a Latin source, one can find "the motif of the arrogant woman who rejects and mistreats her wooers" and the motif of the rejected wooer's vengeance, for which his disguise and the woman's avarice are crucial (Kalinke 2014, 280, 281–282, 284, quotation at 282).[20] Kalinke (2014, 273–274) also mentions that a woman's mistreatment of her suitors is not unique to maiden-king narratives, as the example of Sigríðr Tóstadóttir shows. In *Heimskringla*, Sigríðr is said to be a haughty woman who, as the widow of the Swedish king, burns two petty kings (one of them being the father of the future Saint Óláfr) who have come to woo her.[21] In the debate on the origin of the maiden-king motif Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2012, 231, 233–234, quotation at 237) has stressed that it should be seen "as a more original creation, borrowing aspects from a large literary stock consisting of folktales, native tradition and foreign narratives" and mentions in particular autonomous female figures from Old Norse literature such as the shieldmaiden Brynhildr from heroic legend). She is critical of Kalinke's emphasis on the possible contribution of *Clári saga* and focuses instead on why maiden-king narratives may have gained popularity. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2012, 240) suggests that the maiden-king narratives "can be seen as a native response to romance, featuring less idealistic forms of wooing, love, sex and other gender relations than the refined examples the translated texts (for example *Parcevals saga* […]) offer". Building upon Henric Bagerius' analysis of sexuality and aristocratic identity in late-medieval Icelandic literature, she understands maiden-king narratives as expressions of "anxieties about the erosion of gender roles and a fixed social order", but eventually "[t]he dominant patriarchal order that insists and depends on women's compli-

20 Earlier, Kalinke (1990, e.g. 66, 68, 104, 106–107) also saw *Clári saga* as a formative example and assumed this saga to be a translation of a Latin text. The assumption that it is a translation was challenged later on by Hughes (2009, 136) who in his analysis arrived at the conclusion that *Clári saga* "is an indigenous Icelandic composition, in its present form from the second quarter of the fourteenth century". For a summary of different positions on *Clári saga*, cf. Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (2010, 418–420).

21 In *Haralds saga gráfeldar*, she is described as "svarkr mikill" (a very haughty woman), and in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* the burning is explained as follows: "Sigríðr sagði þat, at svá skyldi hon leiða smákonungum at fara af ǫðrum lǫndum til þess at biðja hennar" (Sigríðr said that thus would she make petty kings stop going from other countries to ask to marry her; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 2002, 215, 289; Finlay and Faulkes 2016, 131, 179).

ance is reaffirmed, encouraging women in the audience to conform to their traditional subservient gender roles" (Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2012, 242).[22]

The typical characteristics of a maiden king can also be found in the description of Ólǫf: she is a beautiful woman, the best match, but with the drawback of being arrogant, cruel, and not wanting to marry. Given the surprise attack on her country, Ólǫf knows she has no chance to gather forces against Helgi, and thus she cannot prevent his 'wooing'. Being confronted with the nuptial scenario, she criticises the speed of events and twice reminds him to behave honourably, but Helgi tells her that his behaviour is justified because of her arrogance and pride, and "ad vid buum nu saman slijka stund sem mier lijkar" (that we remain together for as long as it pleases me; Slay 1960a, 18; Byock 1998, 12). In what follows, the common pattern of bridal-quest episodes is again discernible: the suitor believes that the maiden king will spend the night with him on his terms, but he is taught otherwise (Kalinke 1990, 75–76). Ólǫf disgraces Helgi while he is asleep, shaving off all his hair, smearing him with tar, stuffing him into a sack, and having him taken to his ship, where his men discover him.[23] Ólǫf's reaction is drastic but not groundless, because Helgi is not a suitor with honourable intentions. From the start, as can be found in the text, he is determined to impose his will on Ólǫf. Her subsequent behaviour is commented on by the saga narrator, who states that "hefur hennar ofsi og öjǫfnudur alldrei verid meiri enn nu" (her arrogance and her overbearing manner had never been greater) and summarises the negative public opinion about her: "[Þ]ikir ǫllum hin mestu ödæmi er hun skylldi hafa gietad spottad slijkan kong" (Everyone thought it a flagrant misdeed to have mocked such a king in this way; Slay 1960a, 20; Byock 1998, 13).

22 Bagerius (2009, 14, 17–18, 77–78, 83, quotation at 17) analysed sexuality in selected *fornaldarsǫgur* and *riddarasǫgur* (mainly indigenous ones) as "sociala markörer" (social markers), especially for the Icelandic elite, in the context of societal changes in Iceland beginning in the second half of the thirteenth century with the Icelanders' acceptance of paying taxes to the Norwegian king. See also Sif Ríkharðsdóttir (2010, 429–430), who suggests interpreting the final submission of the maiden kings in these sagas "undir ríkjandi hugmyndir um kynhlutverk og stöðu kvenna" (to the prevailing ideas of gender roles and the position of women) as reactions to societal discussions about a possible threat posed by powerful and independent women.

23 Shaving and tarring also occur in *Sigurðar saga þǫgla*, *Viktors saga ok Blávus*, and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*; cf. Kalinke (1990, 77); Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2013, 167).

The vengeance Helgi has in mind is to accomplish the sexual union he did not at the first meeting with Ólǫf. Helgi knows that she is greedy and, using the pretext of a supposedly great treasure, he manages to lure her into a forest. He does not accept her offer to make up for her earlier behaviour by having him wed her honourably. Instead, he rapes her for many nights in a row and leaves her pregnant with a child, Yrsa, that she named after a dog and neglects. In his study on rape in saga literature, Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist (2015, 431) summarised that "rape was considered primarily an offence against the woman's male relatives and only secondly against the woman herself". According to *Grágás*, the Icelandic law collection (manuscript dated to the thirteenth century), full outlawry was the punishment for a rapist of a free woman who had a permanent place of residence (Charpentier Ljungqvist 2015, 433). In Ólǫf's case, there is no male relative mentioned who would seek legal action. In the saga, rape is used as a means of revenge, and in this way, "[t]he gender hierarchy is reestablished in accordance with the medieval patriarchal gender order", in Charpentier Ljungqvist's (2015, 436–437) interpretation.[24]

It has already been mentioned that some episodes and characters from *Hrólfs saga kraka* are also included in earlier, mostly medieval texts. This also applies to the Helgi-Ólǫf episode. Comparing this episode in the earlier texts with the extant version of *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Marianne Kalinke's (1990, 97–98) suggestion that the episode has been modified in *Hrólfs saga kraka* under the influence of maiden king-narratives seems to be plausible. In some of these earlier texts, only the rape and the child resulting from it are mentioned, and there are differences concerning Ólǫf's civil status. In *Gesta Danorum* (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015, 106), where she is called Thora, she is single and a virgin. In other texts, she is said to have been married. The episode is narrated in the greatest detail in *Rerum*

24 See also an article by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir (2016) on gender-based violence and social status in *fornaldarsǫgur* and indigenous *riddarasǫgur*. She concludes that in *fornaldarsǫgur*, violence and sexual compulsion are often directed against women of lower social rank, whose fathers sometimes even give them to visiting men of higher social standing: such episodes "are, in general, standardised and must have been regarded as an apt literary motif that the saga authors used when their heroes sought for hospitality in the north" (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2016, 200, see also 198, 203). In contrast, "in the indigenous *riddarasögur*, women of high social standing are sexually violated by men of similar social standing", with the rape of a maiden king presented as being socially accepted (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2016, 203).

Danicarum fragmenta (Bjarni Guðnason 1982, 23–24), where she is called Olava and married to the king of Saxland. In her husband's absence, Helgo (i.e. Helgi) attacks the country and wants to sleep with her. In this narrative, one can find elements that are also included in the saga: Olava shaves Helgo, puts tar and feathers on his head, and has him taken back to his ship. A year later he returns, abducts her, takes her into the deep forest, and sleeps with her for three nights, leaving her pregnant with Yrsa.

Sexual desire and motivation: Helgi and Yrsa

In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Yrsa grows up believing that her parents are a farmer and his elderly wife. The queen neglects Yrsa completely. One day when Yrsa is thirteen years old, she is tending a herd when Helgi, disguised as a beggar, sees her and is immediately struck by her beauty. He asks her about her family, and she answers to the best of her knowledge that she is a poor man's daughter. Love suddenly awakes in Helgi, he abducts the girl despite her protests and marries her. In her *Motive der Weltliteratur*, Elisabeth Frenzel (2008, 169–170) notes that literary works rooted in the heroic period tend to present abductions in such a way that the woman either had agreed to the abduction before or agrees to it afterwards. In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, the abduction is caused by one-sided desire on Helgi's part, but eventually, the relationship of Helgi and Yrsa is characterised by reciprocal love. The verbal expressions used are *ást* and *ástarhugr*; both words can mean 'love' and 'affection', and the phrases *unna mikit*, 'to love a lot' and *unna mest* 'to love the most' (cf. *ONP*).[25] Later, when Yrsa is already married to Aðils, Helgi pays them a visit and is eager to spend as much time as possible in conversation with Yrsa (Slay 1960a, 34). These expressions are short and laconic, but they are also typical of how love is expressed in several saga subgenres. Their formulaic and slightly distanced character should not deceive the saga audience. Daniel Sävborg (2007, 147–148), who has studied the depiction of love and formulaic language especially in *Íslendingasögur*, has stressed that such a limited number of plain and unexciting set phrases, as well as references in the sagas to sitting together for a long time talking, making it a habit to visit, or giving the wooed woman a present in the form of a piece of clothing, are "en

25 Examples from the saga: Helgi is said to love Yrsa (Slay 1960a, twice at 23, 35), reciprocal love (Slay 1960a, twice at 29), Yrsa states that she loved Helgi (Slay 1960a, 36).

litterär markering, ett meddelande från författaren till läsaren, och inte en mimetisk beskrivning av ett psykologiskt fenomem" (a literary marker, a message from the author to the reader, and not a mimetic description of a psychological phenomenon). Put differently, these formulae and motifs are signals to the audience, who have to interpret or decode them appropriately as referring to love.

Yrsa's mother Ólǫf keeps quiet about the kinship ties when she learns about their marriage, but the saga narrator conveys her hopes to us: "ad þetta mundi H(elga) k(ongi) vera til harmz og suivirdingar, enn til einskiz frama nie jndiz" (that these events would bring grief and dishonour to King Helgi and that neither success nor joy would come out of them; Slay 1960a, 23; Byock 1998, 16). Predictions in literary texts tend to come true, and *Hrólfs saga kraka* with its tragic ending is no exception. The causal chain of action initiated by Helgi's bridal quest for Ólǫf and the subsequent rape has its next link in the incest of father and daughter. Elisabeth Frenzel (2008, 397) concludes in her article on the incest motif in world literature that even if it is committed unknowingly, "bleibt der Inzest jedoch Indiz für einen Fluch, der auf einem Menschen oder einem ganzen Geschlecht liegt; er fungiert als eine Art Archetyp unbewusster Sünde" (incest, however, remains an indication of a curse that lies on a person or a whole family; it functions as a kind of archetype of an unconscious sin). She adds that once the person who has committed the incest becomes aware of what they have done, the trajectory of the plot changes and turns against that person. Frenzel (2008, 391–392) also draws attention to the ambivalence inherent in incest: on the one hand, it is a taboo; on the other, it was a privilege of the gods and some secular ruling dynasties such as the Ptolemies. In literary works, revealing their true parentage can also lead to a happy ending if the two lovers learn that they are not related and thus did not commit incest (Frenzel 2008, 395–396). The incest motif can occasionally be found in Old Norse literature. If it occurs, it tends to be incest between siblings, such as in *Vǫlsunga saga* (Signý and Sigmundr) and in *Jómsvíkinga saga* (Arnfinnr and his sister), or in the world of the gods, where Njǫrðr and his sister are said to be the parents of Freyr and Freyja, who, in turn, are accused of incest in the eddic poem *Lokasenna* (Gundersen 1962, col. 370–371; Jochens 1998, 23).[26] *Hrólfs saga kraka*

26 Examples in which the incest involves a foster-mother and a son include *Qrvar-Odds saga* and *Mírmanns saga*, and in *Postola sǫgur* a mother is said to encourage her son to have a

includes incest between father and daughter, but in both the saga and the earlier texts on Hrólfr that include the incest, neither Helgi nor Yrsa commit it knowingly.

In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Ólǫf keeps her knowledge of the incestuous relationship secret for some time. When she reveals it, the couple already have a son, Hrólfr. What causes Ólǫf to come forward is that it displeases her to hear that Helgi and Yrsa loved each other dearly and were content with their marriage. Ólǫf pays Yrsa a visit, and the meeting between the two is cold. Yrsa has not forgotten the bad treatment at Queen Ólǫf's court and suspects that the farmers are not her true parents. What Ólǫf tells her comes as a shock, and she wants to separate from Helgi, but Helgi wants them to continue their marriage. Eventually, Yrsa leaves him and follows Ólǫf home to Saxland. Yrsa's behaviour reflects the interpretation of incest as a taboo, as unacceptable behaviour that is punished according to the law (for the laws, see Gundersen 1962, col. 372–374; Magnús Már Lárusson 1962, col. 374–376; Jochens 1998, 37, 42).

In an earlier source, *Gesta Danorum*, the incest motif is even more loaded. In this text, the raped maiden Thora plans the incest: "Siquidem filiam nubilis etatis de industria littori immissam concubitu patrem maculare precepit" (She deliberately sent her daughter, now of marriageable age, down to the shore, instructing her to defile her father in fornication; Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015, 106–107). The narrator of *Gesta Danorum* explicitly and comprehensively condemns Thora's revenge, but:

> Magnum sed uno expiabile scelus, quod concubitus noxam fausta proles detersit neque opinione tristius quam fructu iocundius fuit. Siquidem genitus ex Vrsa Rolpho ortus sui infamiam conspicuis probitatis operibus redemit, quorum eximium fulgorem omnis eui memoria specioso laudum preconio celebrat. Fit enim, ut letis lugubria finiantur et in speciosos exitus turpiter auspicata concedant. (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015, 108)

> ('The impiety was great, but redeemed in one way: offensive as the union was, it was cleansed by a blessed offspring, a happy consequence to a miserable, disreputable affair. For Yrsa's son Rolf

sexual relationship with her; Jochens (1998, 192, 204–205); Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir (2013, 75, 114).

> rescued his birth from discredit by striking and meritorious deeds; their remarkable splendour was proclaimed and trumpeted by all succeeding ages. Gloom occasionally ends in joy and inauspicious beginnings give place to brilliant conclusions.' Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015, 109)

The narrator of *Gesta Danorum* does not see the incest as a curse; it is no obstacle for Hrólfr's future. His deeds can compensate for the stigma of his parents' incest. The incest is, nevertheless, referred to again later in *Gesta Danorum* and causes uneasiness: Rolou (i.e. Hrólfr) reminds his mother that she is at the same time his (half-)sister, and Atislus (i.e. Aðils) criticises the two of them for sitting too close together because this would be inappropriate for siblings (Friis-Jensen and Fisher 2015, 112). Atislus' criticism could perhaps be understood as an insinuation of potential incest between brother and sister.

In *Hrólfs saga kraka*, incest can be said to be a curse on an individual or a family, as in Frenzel's observation quoted above. In the saga, the motif is used for narrative 'compression' and motivation: it prepares the audience for the possible tragic future of Helgi and Hrólfr and is thus also linked to the notion of fate that is taken up later in the saga.

Sexual desire and motivation: Helgi and the elfin woman

Helgi's encounter with the elfin woman has no counterpart in the other preserved texts on Hrólfr. This encounter takes place after the separation from Yrsa. The elfin woman comes to him on a Yule evening, asking for shelter. She looks like a poor being with ragged clothes. She wants to lie next to Helgi "þui lÿf m(itt) er j vedi" (for my life is at stake; Slay 1960a, 32; Byock 1998, 22). Helgi feels repelled by her but consents to her wish. When he turns around after a while, she has transformed into a beautiful woman dressed in silk. It turns out that by allowing her to lie close to him, he has released her from a curse her stepmother had put on her. She wants to leave, but Helgi does not allow her to. His lust leads him to have intercourse with her, and the next morning, she presents him with the future scenario: he has to visit their daughter after a year has passed, "enda muntu giallda ef þu giǫrir ei so" ([u]nless you do so, you will pay for it; Slay 1960a, 33; Byock 1998, 22). Helgi forgets about the arrangement,

and three winters later, the elfin woman brings their daughter to him and repeats her earlier prediction: "Þat skalltu vita k(ongur) s(agdi) hun ad ættmenn þ(ijnir) munu þess giallda er þu hafdir þad ad ǫnguo er eg bauð þier" ('You must know, King, that your kinsmen will pay for your ignoring my request'; Slay 1960a, 33; Byock 1998, 22–23). In her analysis of *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Johanna Denzin (2008, 209) has argued that it "does function as a romance, albeit as a tragic romance", as it "relates the stories of five failed romances", one of them being Helgi's encounter with the elfin woman.[27] In Denzin's (2008, 215) view, "Helgi had the potential to be a true romance hero in that he embodied on a basic level great intellectual and physical ability", and this episode with the elfin woman, which is not included in earlier preserved texts on Hrólfr kraki, "could be interpreted as a desire on the part of the author to emphasize Helgi's deficiency as a romance protagonist". If romance is understood to also refer to 'love' and a sexual relationship based on mutual consent, the episode with the elfin woman is certainly further evidence that Helgi only takes into account his own needs. However, according to tradition, Helgi's son Hrólfr was to die in a fierce battle, and therefore the inclusion of the episode with the elfin women serves, in my opinion, first and foremost to intensify the plot construction, which is geared towards Hrólfr's death.

Some scholars have drawn attention to the name chosen for the daughter. Skuld is the name of one of the norns[28] from Norse mythology associated with the future (comp. the verb *skulu*), and *skuld* itself means 'debt, due' (cf. Cleasby and Guðbrandur Vigfússon 1874, 559; Ármann Jakobsson 2003, 182; Kalinke 2003, 163; Simek 2021, 321, 404). In *Gylfaginning*,

27 Denzin (2008, 209): "On a very basic narrative level, *Hrólfs saga kraka* relates the stories of five failed romances: King Helgi and Queen Ólöf, Helgi and a mysterious elfin-woman, Helgi and his daughter Yrsa, and the romance of Böðvarr's grandparents and his parents." Referring to Hermann Pálsson and Marianne Kalinke, she states that some *fornaldarsǫgur* can be defined "as secular romances" and lists Hermann Pálsson's criteria (Denzin 2008, 207–209, quotation at 207). Despite this definition, she also seems to base her analysis on other meanings of the term romance, which makes it difficult to know what is meant by 'romance'; cf. also Sävborg (2012, 157–158).

28 For example, in *Gylfaginning* ch. 15: "[...] Urðr, Verðandi, Skuld. Þessar meyjar skapa mǫnnum aldr. Þær kǫllum vér nornir" ([...] Weird, Verdandi, Skuld. These maidens shape men's lives. We call them norns; Faulkes 2005, 18; Faulkes 1987, 18). In *Vǫluspá* st. 20, the term *nornir* is not used, Skuld, Urðr, and Verðandi are called "meyjar margs vitandi" (girls, knowing a great deal; Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 295; Larrington 2014, 6).

"norn in yngsta er Skuld heitir" (the youngest norn, called Skuld) is mentioned together with the valkyries Guðr and Rota, and the three of them "ríða jafnan at kjósa val ok ráða vígum" (always ride to choose who shall be slain and to govern the killings; Faulkes 2005, 30; Faulkes 1987, 31). Elsewhere, Skuld is also the name of a valkyrie (in *Vǫluspá* and *Skáldskaparmál*), which is why Karen Bek-Pedersen (2011, 79; see also 114) arrives at the conclusion that "(i)t may simply have to be granted that Skuld spans that grey area where *nornir* and *valkyrjur* overlap". In some texts, the conceptualisation of norns appears to intersect with that of other female mythological figures such as *dísir*, *spákonur*, and *vǫlur* (Dillmann 2002, 393; Simek 2021, 321). After the conversion to Christianity, the term *norn* seems to have gradually shifted in meaning towards "'Zauberin' oder 'Hexe'" ('sorceress' or 'witch'), as François-Xavier Dillmann (2002, 393) argues, and one of his examples for this change is the character of Skuld in *Hrólfs saga kraka*. As mentioned above, Skuld is said to be in the company of elves and norns and works *seiðr*. The name Skuld with its connotations of fate, battle, and death underlines this character's role as an antagonist to Hrólfr.

The aftermath of Helgi's encounter with the elfin woman serves further narrative 'compression' in the saga because the strand about the elfin woman and Skuld is explicitly linked by the narrator with Hrólfr's death. Hrólfr will eventually pay with his life for his father's breach of the contract. His fate is interwoven with Skuld's; he is literally overpowered by the 'debt'. In the saga, a further element was added to motivate Skuld's antipathy to Hrólfr.[29] It is narrated that Hrólfr tricked Skuld's husband Hjǫrvarðr into paying tribute. Hrólfr asks Hjǫrvarðr to hold his sword, while he "brä brökabellte sijnu [...] ad sä skal vera vndirmadur annarz jafnann sijdann, er tekur vid suerdi annarz, medan hann bregdur bröka bellte" (unfastened his belt [...] '[...] he who holds the sword of a man who is undoing his belt, will from then on be the lesser of the two'; Slay 1960a, 51; Byock 1998, 34). Hjǫrvarðr is subordinated and humiliated, and perhaps, this deception on Hrólfr's part can be interpreted as an "example of symbolic homosexual domination", as Carl Phepstead (2003, 12–13) has suggested.[30] As has been mentioned above, *Hrólfs saga kraka* is episodically

29 For a comparison of the saga and the earlier texts concerning Skuld and Hjǫrvarðr, see Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir (2003, 143–144).

30 Kalinke (2003, 163) has suggested that the deception in the saga "is a variant of a motif in the *Nibelungenlied*, where a gesture of subservience [...] carries the same meaning and

structured. In part, this may be related to the long history of the tradition about Hrólfr. In his analysis, Tom Shippey (2010, 19) judges that *Hrólfs saga kraka* "as a whole is not well-structured" and "consists of [...] not very well integrated units". In his view, the saga author attempted "his best to thread items together", for example by including the story of the elfin woman and her daughter and of Hjǫrvarðr, "thus providing a double motivation ahead of time for the Last Battle" (Shippey 2010, 20–21). One can agree with this observation on motivation and add that these motivations work well within the plot and help to emphasise the orientation towards the known ending of Hrólfr's life.

Sexual desire and motivation: Hvít and Bjǫrn

The last example of sexual desire and motivation in *Hrólfs saga kraka* involves Hvít, the daughter of the king of the Finns. A marriage is arranged between her and the widowed elderly Norwegian king. Hvít takes an interest in her stepson Bjǫrn and approaches him with sexual advances in her husband's absence, but Bjǫrn is not interested at all and slaps her hard (Slay 1960a, 55). Hvít punishes him for rejecting her and puts a curse on him: "Nu listur hun til hanz med vlfhanska, og s(egir) hann skylldi verda ad einum hydbyrne ölmum og grimmum [...] alldrei skalltu vr þessumm alǫgum fara" (Then she struck him with her wolfskin gloves, telling him to become a cave bear, grim and savage [...] You will never be released from the spell; Slay 1960a, 55–56; Byock 1998, 37). Hvít represents the figure of the wicked stepmother who works magic (just like the stepmother who had put a curse on the elfin woman), but even more, she represents the figure of the scorned woman, who can also appear "in der zugespitzten Variante der verschmähten Stiefmutter" (in the extreme variant of the scorned stepmother; Frenzel 2008, 159). Although Hvít is not Bjǫrn's biological mother, she can be said to fulfil the role of a 'substitute' and, thus, her sexual advances could also be understood as attempted incest.

Like Helgi, Hvít takes revenge for being sexually rejected, and her revenge also has consequences for the plot, although these may not be as obvious as in Helgi's case. By the spell, Bjǫrn is transformed into a bear,

has equally dire consequences as in *Hrólfs saga kraka*"; the situation she refers to is when "Siegfried stands by the stirrup of Gunthers's horse".

but during the night, he becomes a human again. When these events take place, he has already been in a love relationship with Bera for a long time. Bera recognises Bjǫrn despite his appearance as a bear, and she becomes pregnant by him before he is killed on the initiative of Hvít. During her pregnancy, Bera is forced by Hvít to eat a small bit of meat of the killed bear, i.e. of Bjǫrn.[31] In consequence, two of the three sons she gives birth to have animal traits: Elgfróði is an elk below the navel and Þórir has the feet of a dog (Slay 1960a, 61). The third son, Bǫðvarr, has no such traits. After killing Queen Hvít in revenge for her deeds, Bǫðvarr visits his brother Elgfróði. Elgfróði advises him to enter the service of King Hrólfr, but he notes a flaw Bǫðvarr has: "ecki ertu so sterckur frændi sem þier hæfir. Frodi nam sier blöd j kalfanum og bad hann drecka" ('Kinsman, you are not as strong as you should be.' Frodi drew blood from his own calf, telling Bodvar to drink of it; Slay 1960a, 70). By drinking some of his brother's blood, Bǫðvarr gains extreme strength. It is precisely this strength that distinguishes him from others among Hrólfr's retainers. It has been mentioned above that Bǫðvarr possesses the power to evoke a bear in the final battle. As Eduardo Ramos (2015, 57–58), among others, has stressed, in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, Bǫðvarr is not a *berserkr* (as in *Skáldskaparmál*), but "[l]ike a *berserkr* animal-warrior, the bear shows immunity to enemy attacks". He suggests that this episode has to be seen in connection with the influence of chivalric literature, which demanded another type of hero than a *berserkr*, and thus "the bear episode in *Hrólfs saga kraka* allows for the presence of an animal-warrior through the use of an animal-double without disturbing the courtly environment in which the saga is set" (Ramos 2015, 73, see also 71). For Ramos (2015, 71–72), the purpose of the inclusion of the story about Bǫðvarr's parents is to underline his relationship with these fierce animals. The relationship of Bǫðvarr's family with bears is also discernible in their names. As was the case with Hrólfr's half-sister Skuld, here too the names are telling: *bjǫrn* means 'bear', *bera* 'she-bear',

31 For David Varley (2015, 47), "Hvít's use of meat parallels the use and function of the motif of the magic potion." Hvít and female characters like Borghildr in *Vǫlsunga saga* are for Varley (2015, 42) representative examples of "regal witches who marry into royal lines": such a figure inverts the expected behaviour of a queen and uses potions or poison "to strike down her enemies in her husband's court, in the very centre of patriarchal royal hegemony". It should be noted, however, that Hvít only resorts to the working of magic after Bjǫrn has rejected her advances.

and Bǫðvarr's byname *bjarki* is assumed to mean 'little bear' (cf. *ONP*; Byock 1998, xxvii). Based on the saga's account of Bǫðvarr's parents, it could be argued that the two extraordinary qualities in Bǫðvarr – his strength and his power to fight as an 'animal-double' (to use Ramos' term) in the form of a bear – are causally linked to Hvít's curse of his father Bjǫrn and the piece of meat taken from his killed body.[32] Thus, the effects of Hvít's revenge leave an impact that is apparent later in the plot, most notably in the final battle.

Final remarks

The analysed examples of narrative motivation from *Hrólfs saga kraka* include final and causal motivation. Motivation has to take into account the ancient tales about Hrólfr according to which he died in the final battle. If the traditional end is not to be changed, narrative motivation in the saga has to be adapted in accordance with Hrólfr's death. In the saga, an attempt was made to include final motivation understood as predetermination – Master Galterus' comment that Hrólfr failed because he was no Christian. This perspective is, however, only briefly mentioned and does not seem to offer a convincing frame of interpretation. Another force that probably could be understood to be related to predetermination is *auðna*, but this remains ambiguous in the saga. It could also be seen as a divine causal force, albeit a stronger one than Óðinn, in Hrólfr's view. Causal motivation is visible in the 'domino effect' that Helgi's attempt to conquer Ólǫf has: his attempt causes her to mock him; her mocking leads to the rape, to her revenge in the form of keeping quiet about the incest between Helgi and Yrsa, and to the birth of Hrólfr. The revelation of the incest and the separation of Helgi and Yrsa likewise leads to a chain of cause and effect, culminating in the confrontation between Skuld and Hrólfr in the final battle. Thus, these episodes are oriented towards the focal point of the plot – the ending – and contribute to the saga's 'finality' (to use Haferland's term). Like Helgi's, Hvít's sexual desire is also presented

32 There is a similar interpretation in Varley (2015, 47): "[T]he saga [...] implies that Böðvarr's own supernatural abilities are also a consequence of his unusual heritage; they are powers that are the product of external interference, and which are conveyed through the medium of his mother's body."

as a cause for later events and the emergence of Bǫðvarr, a character of special importance in the final battle. Fate and the consequences of sexual desire as personified by Skuld are explicitly intertwined when Skuld and Bǫðvarr comment on fate and try to take advantage of it (Skuld) or avert it (Bǫðvarr). Magic is also referred to in other places in the narrative, yet in this particular case, it creates suspense as both Skuld and Bǫðvarr employ it in order to overcome each other in the final battle. Fate and sexual desire are not just individual motifs in *Hrólfs saga kraka* but motivations contributing to a cohesive saga plot and creating suspense as to how the known ending, Hrólfr's death, will come about.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, ed. 2002. *Heimskringla*. Vol. 1. 4th edition. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Bjarni Guðnason, ed. 1982. *Danakonungasǫgur. Skjǫldunga saga, Knýtlinga saga, Ágrip af sǫgu Danakonunga*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Byock, Jesse L., trans. 1998. *The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*. London: Penguin Books.

Faulkes, Anthony, trans. 1987. *Snorri Sturluson, Edda*. London: J. M. Dent.

Faulkes, Anthony, ed. 2005. *Snorri Sturluson, Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*. 2nd edition. London: Viking Society for Northern Research.

Finlay, Alison, and Anthony Faulkes, trans. 2016. *Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla.* Vol. 1: *The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason*. 2nd edition. London: Viking Society for Northern Research.

Finnur Jónsson, ed. 1904. *Hrólfs saga kraka og Bjarkarímur*. København: S. L. Møllers Bogtrykkeri.

Friis-Jensen, Karsten, ed., and Peter Fisher, trans. 2015. *Saxo Grammaticus. Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*. Vol. 1. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Fulk, Robert Dennis, Robert Bjork, and John Niles, eds. 2008. *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. 4th edition. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press.

Fyfe, William Hamilton, trans. 1932. *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*. Vol. 23. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Hill, Joyce, ed. 1983. *Old English Minor Heroic Poems*. Durham: Department of English Language and Medieval Literature.

Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason, eds. 2014. *Eddukvæði.* Vol. 1: *Goðakvæði*. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag.

Larrington, Carolyne, trans. 2014. *The Poetic Edda*. Revised edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Miller, Clarence H., trans. 2007. "Fragments of Danish History." *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 20 (3): 9–22.
Slay, Desmond, ed. 1960a. *Hrólfs saga kraka*. Copenhagen: Munksgaard.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir. 2014. "The Narrative Role of Magic in the *fornaldarsögur*." Trans. by Jeffrey Cosser. *Arv* 70: 39–56.
———. 2016. "'How Do You Know If It Is Love or Lust?' On Gender, Status, and Violence in Old Norse Literature." *Interfaces* 2: 189–209. https://doi.org/10.13130/interfaces-6982.
Ármann Jakobsson. 1999. "Le Roi Chevalier. The Royal Ideology and Genre of *Hrólfs saga kraka*." *Scandinavian Studies* 71 (2): 139–166.
———. 2003. "Queens of Terror. Perilous Women in *Hálfs saga* and *Hrólfs saga kraka*." *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi. Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8-2.9 2001*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, and Agneta Ney. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, Institutionen för nordiska språk, 173–189.
Bagerius, Henric. 2009. *Mandom och mödom. Sexualitet, homosocialitet och aristokratisk identitet på det senmedeltida Island.* Göteborg: Göteborgs universitet, Institutionen för historiska studier.
Baumbach, Manuel. 2019. "Handlung und Handlungslogik – Antike." *Handbuch Historische Narratologie*, ed. by Eva von Contzen and Stefan Tilg. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 239–248.
Bek-Pedersen, Karen. 2011. *The Norns in Old Norse Mythology*. Edinburgh: Dunedin Academic Press.
Charpentier Ljungqvist, Fredrik. 2015. "Rape in the Icelandic Sagas: An Insight in the Perceptions about Sexual Assaults on Women in the Old Norse World." *Journal of Family History* 40 (4): 431–447.
Cleasby, Richard and Guðbrandur Vigfússon. 1874. *An Icelandic-English Dictionary*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. http://lexicon.ff.cuni.cz/texts/oi_cleasbyvigfusson_about.html.
Clover, Carol. 1982. *The Medieval Saga*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
Denzin, Johanna. 2008. "*Hrólfs saga kraka*: A Tragedy, Comedy, History, Pastoral, Pastoral-Comical, Historical-Pastoral, Tragical-Historical, Tragical-Comical-Historical-Pastoral … Romance." *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland. Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, ed. by Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin. Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 207–229.
Dillmann, François-Xavier. 2002. "Nornen." *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*. Vol. 21, ed. by Heinrich Beck et al. 2nd edition. Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 388–394.

Ferrari, Fulvio. 2012. "Possible Worlds of Sagas: The Intermingling of Different Fictional Universes in the Development of the *Fornaldarsögur* as a Genre." *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. by Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney and Ármann Jakobsson. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 271–289.

Finnur Jónsson. 1901. *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*. Vol. 2, part 2. København: Gad.

Frenzel, Elisabeth. 2008. *Motive der Weltliteratur. Ein Lexikon dichtungsgeschichtlicher Längsschnitte*. 6th edition. Stuttgart: Kröner.

Grant, Tom. 2024. "In Defence of Böðvarr *bjarki*." *Neophilologus* 108 (2): 279–297.

Grethlein, Jonas. 2023. *Ancient Greek Texts and Modern Narrative Theory. Towards a Critical Dialogue*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gropper, Stefanie. 2017. "Fate." *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson and Sverrir Jakobsson. London and New York: Routledge, 198–209.

Gundersen, Dag. 1962. "Incest. Allm. og Norge." *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid från vikingatid till reformationstid*. Vol. 7, ed. by John Granlund. Malmö: Allhem, col. 370–374.

Haferland, Harald. 2023. "Motivation in Medieval and Early Modern German Literature." *Handbook of Diachronic Narratology*, ed. by Peter Hühn, John Pier, and Wolf Schmid. Berlin and Boston, 347–370.

Hallberg, Peter. 1973. "The Concept of Gipta-Gæfa-Hamingja in Old Norse Literature." *Proceedings of the First International Saga Conference. University of Edinbugh, 1971*, ed. by Peter Foote, Hermann Pálsson, and Desmond Slay. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 143–183.

Hughes, Shaun F. D. 2009. "*Klári saga* as an Indigenous Romance." *Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland. Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke*, ed. by Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin. Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 135–163.

Jochens, Jenny. 1998. *Women in Old Norse Society*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir. 2012. "From Heroic Legend to 'Medieval Screwball Comedy'? The Origins, Development and Interpretation of the Maiden-King Narrative." *The Legendary Sagas: Origins and Development*, ed. by Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 229–249.

———. 2013. *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kalinke, Marianne. 1990. *Bridal-Quest Romance in Medieval Iceland*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

———. 2003. "Transgression in *Hrólfs saga kraka*." *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi. Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8-2.9 2001*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, and Agneta Ney. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, Institutionen för nordiska språk, 157–171.

———. 2014. "*Clári saga*, *Hrólfs saga Gautrekssonar*, and the Evolution of Icelandic Romance." *Riddarasǫgur. The Translation of European Court Culture in Medieval Scandinavia*, ed. by Karl G. Johansson and Else Mundal. Oslo: Novus Forlag, 273–292.

Landolt, Christoph. 2000. "Hrólfr kraki." *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*. Vol. 15, ed. by Heinrich Beck et al. 2nd edition. Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 158–162.

Lansing, Tereza. 2012. "Einn Fagur Aldingardur – The Manuscript Transmission of *Hrólfs saga kraka*." *The Legendary Sagas. Origins and Development*, ed. by Annette Lassen, Agneta Ney, and Ármann Jakobsson. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 405–430.

Lassen, Annette. 2022. *Odin's Ways. A Guide to the Pagan God in Medieval Literature*, trans. by Helen F. Leslie-Jakobsen and Margaret Cormack. New York and London: Routledge.

Lindow, John. 2020. "Fate." *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures.* Vol. 2: *Contexts and Communication between Worlds*, ed. by Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén. Turnhout: Brepols, 927–950.

Magnús Már Lárusson. 1962. "Incest. Island." *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid från vikingatid till reformationstid*. Vol. 7, ed. by John Granlund. Malmö: Allhem, col. 374–376.

Martínez, Matías and Michael Scheffel. 2019. *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*. 11th edition. München: C. H. Beck.

Matthews, Alastair. 2012. *The Kaiserchronik. A Medieval Narrative*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mitchell, Stephen. 2011. *Witchcraft and Magic in the Nordic Middle Ages*. Philadelphia & Oxford: University of Pennsylvania Press.

———. 2020. "Magic and Religion." *The Pre-Christian Religions of the North. History and Structures.* Vol. 2: *Contexts and Communication between Worlds*, ed. by Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén. Turnhout: Brepols, 643–670.

ONP = Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog. n.d. https://onp.ku.dk/onp/onp.php?.

Phelpstead, Carl. 2003. "The Sexual Ideology of *Hrólfs saga kraka*." *Scandinavian Studies* 75 (1): 1–24.

Price, Neil. 2019. *The Viking Way. Magic and Mind in Late Iron Age Scandinavia*. 2nd edition. Oxford & Philadelphia: Oxbow Books.

Ramos, Eduardo. 2015. "Bear-Dreaming: Converging Animal Traditions in *Hrólfs saga kraka*." *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 46: 57–73.

Richardson, Brian. 2005. "Causality." *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, ed. by David Herman, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan. London & New York: Routledge, 48–52.

Ringgren, Helmer. 1967. "The Problem of Fatalism." *Fatalistic Beliefs in Religion, Folklore, and Literature: Papers read at the Symposium on Fatalistic Beliefs, held*

at Åbo on the 7th–9th of September, 1964, ed. by Helmer Ringgren. Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 7–18.

Schneider, Christian. 2019. "Handlung und Handlungslogik – Mittelalter." *Handbuch Historische Narratologie*, ed. by Eva von Contzen and Stefan Tilg. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 249–261.

Shippey, Tom. 2010. "*Hrólfs saga kraka* and the Legend of Lejre." *Making History. Essays on the fornaldarsögur*, ed. by Martin Arnold and Alison Finlay. London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 17–32.

Sif Ríkharðsdóttir. 2010. "Meykóngahefðin í riddarasögum. Hugmyndafræðileg átök um kynhlutverk og þjóðfélagsstöðu." *Skírnir* 184: 410–433.

Simek, Rudolf. 2004. "Schicksalsglaube." *Reallexikon der germanischen Altertumskunde*. Vol. 27, ed. by Heinrich Beck et al. 2nd edition. Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 8–10.

Simek, Rudolf. 2021. *Lexikon der germanischen Mythologie*. 4th edition. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag.

Slay, Desmond. 1960b. *The Manuscripts of Hrólfs saga Kraka*. Copenhagen: Munksgaard.

Stories for All Time: The Icelandic fornaldarsögur, Hrólfs saga kraka (n.d.). https://fasnl.net/bibliography/20.

Sävborg, Daniel. 2007. *Sagan om kärleken. Erotik, känslor och berättarkonst i norrön litteratur*. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, Institutionen för nordiska språk.

———. 2012. "[Review] Romance and Love in Late Medieval and Early Modern Iceland. Essays in Honor of Marianne Kalinke, ed. by Kirsten Wolf and Johanna Denzin […]." *Saga-Book* 36: 155–158.

Valgerður Brynjólfsdóttir. 2003. "A Valiant King or a Coward? The Changing Image of King Hrólf kraki from the Oldest Sources to *Hrólfs saga kraka*." *Fornaldarsagornas struktur och ideologi. Handlingar från ett symposium i Uppsala 31.8-2.9 2001*, ed. by Ármann Jakobsson, Annette Lassen, and Agneta Ney. Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, Institutionen för nordiska språk, 141–156.

Varley, David. 2015. "The Mead of Poetry and the Witch's Potion: Methods of Conceptualising Gender Conflict." *Saga-Book* 39: 41–60.

Vésteinn Ólason. 1998. *Dialogues with the Viking Age. Narration and Representation in the Sagas of the Icelanders*, trans. by Andrew Wawn. Reykjavík: Heimskringla.

Weber, Gerd Wolfgang. 1981. "Irreligiosität und Heldenzeitalter. Zum Mythencharakter der altisländischen Literatur." *Speculum Norroenum. Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. by Ursula Dronke, Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, Gerd W. Weber, Hans Bekker-Nielsen, and Robert J. Glendinning. Odense: University Press of Southern Denmark, 474–505.

Würth, Stefanie. 1998. *Der 'Antikenroman' in der isländischen Literatur des Mittelalters. Eine Untersuchung zur Übersetzung und Rezeption lateinischer Literatur im Norden*. Basel and Frankfurt am Main: Helbing & Lichtenhahn Verlag.

SUMMARY

Fate, sexual desire, and narrative motivation in *Hrólfs saga kraka*

Keywords: narrative motivation, fate, sexual desire, narrative strands, transmission history

This article discusses how fate and sexual desire are used for narrative motivation in *Hrólfs saga kraka* (oldest manuscripts from the seventeenth century). In the analysed examples, focus is put on final and causal motivation. In the saga, an attempt was made to include final motivation understood as predetermination, when Hrólfr's defeat in battle is explained by his not being Christian. The concept of *auðna* is more ambiguous. It seems to be perceived as a (divine) causal force and a stronger one than Óðinn. Causal motivation is especially prominent in the section about Hrólfr's father, Helgi. His unsuccessful attempt to marry Ólǫf causes a 'domino effect': by raping Ólǫf, he fathers Yrsa, and later with Yrsa he fathers Hrólfr. The revelation of the incest and the separation of Helgi and Yrsa likewise leads to a chain of cause and effect, culminating in the confrontation between Skuld and Hrólfr in the final battle.

ÚTDRÁTTUR

Örlög, girnd og drifkraftur frásagnar í *Hrólfs sögu kraka*

Efnisorð: drifkraftur frásagnar, örlög, girnd, frásagnarþræðir, varðveislusaga

Greinin fjallar um hvernig fyrirbærin örlög og girnd eru notuð sem drifkraftur frásagnar í *Hrólfs sögu kraka* (elstu handritin eru frá sautjándu öld). Í dæmunum sem hér eru tekin til athugunar beinist athyglin að lokaframvindu og orsakasamhengi frásagnarinnar. Í sögunni mótast lokaframvindan af forlagahyggju þegar skýringin á ósigri Hrólfs í orrustunni reynist vera sú að hann er ekki kristinn. Hugtakið auðna er margræðara. Í sögunni virðist það merkja guðdómlegt orsakavaldandi afl sem þó er öflugra en Óðinn. Orsakasamhengi frásagnarinnar er sérlega áberandi í kaflanum um föður Hrólfs, Helga. Misheppnuð tilraun hans til að kvænast Ólǫfu hefur keðjuverkandi áhrif; með því að nauðga Ólǫfu getur hann Yrsu og síðar, með Yrsu, getur hann Hrólf. Þegar upp kemst um sifjaspellin og í kjölfar aðskilnaðar Helga og Yrsu er rakin keðja orsaka og afleiðinga sem leiðir til átakanna milli Skuldar og Hrólfs í lokaorrustunni.

Annett Krakow
Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach, Instytut Literaturoznawstwa
ul. Grota-Roweckiego 5
PL-41-205 Sosnowiec
annett.krakow@us.edu.pl