Preparing for the End

A Narrative Study of *Vafþrúðnismál*

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Abstract

The present work investigates the eddic poem *Vafþrúðnismál* through a theoretical lens constructed by the author that is based on the work of Paul Ricoeur, Aron Gurevich, and Mircea Eliade. By bringing together these three writers the intention is to allow for a close examination of the poem on narrative grounds that also allows for the possibility for general conclusions to be drawn about the cultural environment in which the poem was composed, namely medieval Iceland. The theoretical framework is the stage on which the interpretation of the poem occurs, which is done so in the tradition of a New Critical close reading that explores a wide range of comparative possibilities within the Old Norse-Icelandic literary corpus.

Vafþrúðnismál survives in full in the Codex Regius manuscript of eddic poetry (GKS 2365 4to; R) that is housed in Reykjavík, Iceland. The manuscript was composed in Iceland in the 13th century, and is one of the most revered of Iceland's national treasures. *Vafþrúðnismál* has been written about extensively, but not to the point of exhaustion, and it is the intention of this work to incorporate all of the important prior studies into the interpretation, while for the first time attending to the poem in a book-length study in English. The thesis is that in the mythological corpus *Vafþrúðnismál* is both a representation of a myth (i.e. a mythical representation) and a dramatic framework used by the poet to store and transmit a great wealth of mythological information. Its narrative setting—that is its mythical representation—is the poem's means to convey ancient mythological wisdom. The nature of the mythological wisdom that is conveyed in the poem is the subject of much of the study, and cross references to other sources from the corpus are explored when necessary.

To introduce the formal analysis of the poem the author supplies a history of the transmission of the poem, and a description of the works that *Vafþrúðnismál* has travelled with from the medieval period to the modern day. This transmission history is in turn preceded by an overview of the source texts, the author's theoretical framework, and the critical scholarship that most concerns *Vafþrúðnismál*. In the concluding chapter of the work the various threads that have been drawn through the work will be tied together with the intention to draw arguments to a close and to suggest future avenues for interpretation, in the humanities generally, and in medieval Icelandic studies specifically.

Ágrip

Í þessu verki er fengist við eddukvæðið *Vafþrúðnismál* út frá sjónarhorni sem höfundur sækir meðal annars til Paul Ricoeur, Aron Gurevich, og Mircea Eliade. Markmiðið er að nálgast ljóðið með nákvæmum lestri þar sem ekki er aðeins fengist við frásagnaraðferð þess heldur einnig það menningarlega umhverfi sem kvæðið er sprottið úr, þ.e. Ísland á miðöldum. Hinn fræðilegi rammi leggur til svið þar sem túlkun á ljóðinu á sér stað, í anda nýrýni en einnig með hliðsjón af ýmsum öðrum miðaldatextum.

Vafþrúðnismál er varðveitt í Konungsbók eddukvæða (GKS 2365 4to; R) sem nú er í Reykjavík. Handritið var sett saman á Íslandi á 13. öld. Nokkuð hefur verið fjallað um *Vafþrúðnismál* og hér er fengist við þessar fyrri rannsóknir í rækilegustu skoðun á kvæðinu til þessa. Tilgátan er að *Vafþrúðnismál* sé í senn birtingarmynd goðsögu og listrænn rammi sem nýtist skáldinu til að varðveita og miðla goðsagnaefni. Þannig er sögusviðið og goðsagan sem þar birtist um leið aðferð kvæðisins til að flytja eldri goðsagnafróðleik. Rannsóknin snýst mjög um þann goðsagnafróðleik og sess hans í öðrum íslenskum miðaldatextum er ræddur eftir þörfum.

Auk formlegrar greiningar á kvæðinu gerir höfundur rækilega grein fyrir varðveislu kvæðisins og þeim textum sem *Vafþrúðnismál* hefur orðið samferða frá miðöldum til nútímans. Einnig er rætt um útgáfusögu kvæðisins, helstu rannsóknir og fræðilegan ramma sem greining kvæðisins er reist á. Að lokum eru dregnir saman ýmsir þræðir, settar fram niðurstöður og bent á framtíðartúlkunarmöguleika fyrir kvæðið sjálft, hugvísindin yfirleitt og íslenskt miðaldaefni sérstaklega.

Contents

Abbreviations

Alv = Alvíssmál
Bald = Baldrs draumar
Fáfn = Fáfnismál
Grímn = Grímnismál
Gríp = Grípisspá
Grott = Grottasǫngr
Gylf = Gylfaginning
Hárb = Hárbarðsljóð
Háv = Hávamál
Hgát = Heiðreks gátur
Hym = Hymiskviða
Hyndl = Hyndluljóð
ÍF = Íslenzk fornrit
Lok = Lokasenna
Ríg = Rígsþula
Skáld = Skáldskaparmál
Skírn = Skírnismál
SnE = Snorra Edda
Vafþr = Vafþrúðnismál
Vkv = Vǫlundarkviða
Vsp = Vǫluspá
Vǫls = Vǫlsunga saga
Yngl = Ynglinga saga
Þrym = Þrymskviða

Manuscripts

A = AM 748 I a 4to
R = Codex Regius of eddic poetry – GKS 2365 4to
H = Hauksbók – AM 544 4to
U = Codex Upsaliensis – DG 11 4to
SnR = Codex Regius of Snorra Edda – GKS 2367 4to
W = Codex Wormianus – AM 242 fol.
T = Codex Trajectinus – Traj 1374

Foreword

The aim of the present work is to read *Vafþrúðnismál* in the context of Old Norse mythology and medieval Icelandic literature, a task I have focused on during my PhD studies at Háskóli Íslands, the results of which are presented in this thesis. Funding for the research that went into this project came from the Rannsóknamiðstöð Íslands—RANNÍS—and this dissertation is one of my primary contributions to the research project *Encounters with the Paranormal in Medieval Icelandic Literature*. In order to reach this stage of completion I have had considerable assistance from many people who work in the 'Icelandic' and 'Humanities' offices at Háskóli Íslands, and elsewhere.

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Introduction

The literary study of a poem such as *Vafþrúðnismál* (*Vafþr*)[1] can give rise to meaning on three levels: the literary level, wherein a formal literary interpretation opens the poem's meaning; the historical level, wherein the poem's contents and its meaning tell us something about the culture or cultures that preserved and transmited the work; and the critical level, in that the ongoing debate about the meaning of the poem on both its literary and historical levels in fact exercises the poem's influence on society by facilitating insight into the past and evoking lessons for the future. The primary focus at present is on the literary level, as it is through the study of medieval Icelandic literature that interpretations will be made in this dissertation. The secondary aim is towards the historical level, in that through a comparative and contextual reading some understanding of why *Vafþr* was composed and what the cosmic story recounted in the poem means in comparison to the comparative materials will be made. And finally, on the critical level it is the aim of the work to incorporate all of the significant critical voices on the subject of *Vafþr* into the debate, and to in the end comment on the validity and contribution by each to a study of *Vafþr*. All three levels are explored simultaneously with the express goal of adding to the critical debate about medieval Icelandic literature.

The study of literature is to a large extent a subjective practice dependent on the perception of the individual critic. With careful scrutiny each reader of a text can achieve a measure of critical insight as long as they are both careful and thoughtful with their interpretations. The following quotation captures the present author's opinion regarding the practices of literary criticism. Bogel writes, '[e]very interpretive method must be incomplete or limited or false in some sense, yet each can offer truth and insight if it is employed competently by a particular interpreter'

[1] Literary works mentioned many times over will be referred to in abbreviated form. The first time a work is named its title will be given in full along with its abbreviated form in parentheses. The next time, and thereafter, the work's title will be given in abbreviated form only. The list of abbreviations directly after the table of contents is intended to clarify abbreviations for the reader. Manuscripts, likewise, will be given with their full name the first time they are named, followed by their shelf mark and abbreviated form in parentheses, and thereafter given only in abbreviated form. If a literary work or a manuscript name and shelf mark appears in a footnote before it is introduced in the main text the name of the literary work or manuscript name and shelf mark will be given in full with the appropriate abbreviation, if applicable, and after introduced into the main text, all subsequent appearances in the main text and in footnotes are in abbreviated form. Some works are not referenced frequently enough to warrant abbreviation, and will only be referred to by their full name when needed.

(2013, 57). The task of this introduction is to introduce the subject for interpretation and the interpretive method that will be advanced in this work. While introducing the methodology I will attempt to identify its limits, but also introduce the areas of 'truth and insight' that the study intends to offer to the critical fields of Old Norse mythology, eddic poetry, and medieval Icelandic literature.

I argue that an interpretation that is grounded in a close reading and contextual analysis of a mythological text such as *Vafþr* is a relevant critical practice that can result in an original reading of the chosen text, provide new insight into the medieval society from which the text originates, and help to develop modern interpretive practices. The freshness that is sought after is a result of the new perspective that a contemporary thinker can bring to a work, but in order to accomplish this task a number of terms need to be defined at the beginning so that the reader and the present author are on the same level. Two such terms—myth and narrative—are primary to the present work and are addressed at the outset.

A myth is a story that is thought to have originally been religious in nature. The story, moreover, is or was told by a cultural group for the purpose of explaining a natural or cosmic phenomenon. Individual myths are often part of interconnected collections of similar stories, and these stories together are known as a culture's mythology (Murfin and Ray 2009, 323; cf. Abrams 1999, 170–72). Based on this definition *Vafþr* is considered a representation of a myth, for as a 13th-century poem it may represent an archaic myth. The information that is revealed in the poem is thought to have religious origins in the pre-Christian belief system or systems of the Norse language area, although the value of the poem as a window into past religious practice or belief is questionable, or even dubious at best, and this problem will be discussed below. However, there are numerous explanations for natural and cosmic phenomena in the poem that are highly metaphoric in their quality, and the poem was indeed told by a cultural group, as can be demonstrated by its survival in a medieval Icelandic manuscript from the 13th century. *Vafþr*, finally, is one of a number of mythological eddic poems that have survived in what is known in English as *The Poetic Edda*, which, together with *Snorra Edda* (*SnE*) are the two most important sources for Old Norse mythology. Thus, *Vafþr*, as a representation of a myth is also a part of a represented mythological system, or mythology.[2]

A narrative, on the other hand, is a story, the telling of a story, or an account of a situation or an event (Murfin and Ray 2009, 326). Therefore, *Vafþr* is also a narrative, in that it is a story of Óðinn going to visit Vafþrúðnir; it is also the telling

[2] Abrams writes, '[i]t can be said that a mythology is a religion in which we no longer believe. Poets, however, after having ceased to believe in them, have persisted in using the myths of Jupiter, Venus, Prometheus, Wotan, Adam and Eve, and Jonah for their plots, episodes, or allusions' (1999, 171).

of a story in eddic verse, and an account of a situation or event, in this case Óðinn's travels. In short, *Vafþr* is both a representation of a myth and a narrative. There are many types of narrative, on which Roland Barthes (1915–80) writes:

> Innombrables sont les récits du monde. C'est d'abord une variété prodigieuse de genres, eux-mêmes distribués entre des substances différentes, comme si toute matière était bonne à l'homme pour lui confier ses récits: le récit peut être supporté par le langage articulé, oral ou écrit, par l'image, fixe ou mobile, par le geste et par le mélange ordonné de toutes ces substances; il est présent dans le mythe, la légende, la fable, le conte, la nouvelle, l'épopée, l'histoire, la tragédie, le drame, la comédie, la pantomime, le tableau peint, le vitrail, le cinéma, les comics, le fait divers, la conversation. (1966, 1)
>
> (The narratives of the world are numberless. Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances – as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting, stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. (1977, 79))

Thus *Vafþr* is by default a narrative, and as a narrative it is of the mythic variety.[3]

Vafþr is not a suspenseful narrative. For the audience there is little question of whether or not Óðinn will be the victor, as Óðinn is always the victor in wisdom contests.[4] In their dialogue Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir provide a cosmological history and geography of the cosmos beginning with its origins, leading to its downfall, and ending with its regeneration. At the forefront of the wisdom contest is the underlying theme of the division and struggle between the æsir and the jǫtnar that is in this instance being played out head-to-head in the contest. Vafþrúðnir's death takes place after the poem is finished, and although it does not occur within the action of the narrative the reader can assume that it does indeed take place, or else the grave tone of Vafþrúðnir's defeat would not resound as deeply as it does. The excitement that does permeate the poem is in the irony of Vafþrúðnir's defeat, as he thought himself to be in control of the contest right up until its conclusion, but then experiences a reversal of fortunes. The structure of the poem mirrors the

[3] It is important to note that some definitions of narrative are not nearly as all-encompassing as Barthes' definition. Baldick, for example, writes: '[n]arratives are to be distinguished from descriptions of qualities, states, or situations, and also from dramatic enactments of events (although a dramatic work may also include narrative speeches)' (1991, 145). The present author argues that the wider definition as supplied by Barthes is more suitable for a study such as the present that concerns mythological materials that are both epic and dramatic. Bringing the epic and dramatic under the term narrative allows for the full range of comparative analyses to be undertaken in the present work.

[4] *Heiðreks gátur* (*Hgát*) and *Hárbarðsljóð* (*Hárb*) come to mind, for example, where Óðinn is victorious over King Heiðrekr and Þórr, respectively.

cosmological cycle of Old Norse mythology as it is represented in the eddic poems and *SnE*, ranging from creation to destruction, ultimately leading to the rebirth of the world after the warring factions have destroyed it. In this sense *Vafþr* is microcosmic: within the narrative frame the cosmos is represented in miniature. Through much of the history of the mythological cosmos, as the preserved narratives present it, the æsir and the jǫtnar are antagonists, but at Ragnarǫk the jǫtnar are wiped out completely and the æsir mostly eradicated, but not completely, and the divine line continues on into the next generation. Vafþrúðnir succumbs and dies as a result of his guest's final advances while Óðinn lives to see another day.

Beyond being a dramatic text that is ripe for analysis, *Vafþr* is an important poem to interpret also for the reason that it is the third poem in the Codex Regius manuscript of eddic poetry (GKS 2365 4to; R) and the title of the poem is indeed preserved in the manuscript (see *Konungsbók eddukvæða*, 118). This manuscript and others like it amount to modernity's windows through which the preserved impressions of the beliefs of past cultures can be discerned. From these impressions it may be possible to learn about the society for which these narratives were significant enough to preserve for posterity, that is 13th- and 14th-century Iceland. It is not the assertion of the present author that the belief system or systems that survive in the mythological eddic poems continued into the 13th century, but more so that there must have been a reason for the 13th-century Icelanders who were involved in mythography and the scribal activity surrounding R to preserve the texts.[5] The poem deals with pagan material, and is an important source for interpreting the medieval Christian preservation of pagan materials in Iceland. The R manuscript of eddic poetry is dated to approximately two and a half centuries after Iceland's conversion to Christianity, c. 1000 CE. The medieval period has been seen as a transitional one generally, with the preserved eddic poems representing the transition from polytheism to theism in Iceland, and marking the movement of the society from an oral culture to a written culture, and, ultimately for Iceland, the change from a commonwealth state to being a part of a monarchy. Although Iceland was clearly Christian by the 13th century there was some impulse to preserve the pagan past that is also evident in other places at similar and different times.[6] The present interpretation and interpretations like it are indeed carrying out

[5] McKinnell writes that '[i]t no longer seems possible to explain the genesis and survival of the Old Norse mythological poems in terms of the continuation of an ancient belief system. To be worth preserving in written form, mythological poems must have had some continuing relevance for Christians' (2005, 3).

[6] Saxo Grammaticus (c. 1150–c. 1220) in Denmark, Paulus Diaconus (c. 720–c. 799) in Italy, and Geoffrey of Monmouth (c. 1100–c. 1155) in England provide three fine examples of the medieval impulse to preserve the pagan past after conversion to Christianity, but at the same time these three writers construct and invent the pagan past, which was a necessity for them

the same objective, which is to preserve the past through dialogue with it. Without an understanding of the past it is not possible to prepare for the future. All interpretation must take place in the present, and as such in the critical act there is a union of past, present, and future. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908–2009) writes the following, which captures why it is so important to study the mythological texts of the past:

> I am not far from believing that, in our own societies, history has replaced mythology and fulfils the same function, that for societies without writing and without archives the aim of mythology is to ensure that as closely as possible – complete closeness is obviously impossible – the future will remain faithful to the present and to the past. (1978, 42–43)

Interpreting representations of the mythological past keeps those of us living in the present and those to be born in the future connected to the ages that existed before written records were able to capture some narratives. Although the eddic poems only offer us a glimpse of what it may have been like to live in the time before writing in the North, it is a glimpse that is well worth taking.

At the beginning of the third poem in the R manuscript of eddic poetry, we are told that Óðinn of the æsir approaches his wife Frigg and speaks with her. They are presumably either at her home, Fensalir, or perhaps at his, Hliðskjálf, both in the divine stronghold of Ásgarðr, although we are not told this directly as the poem begins *in situ*. *Grímnismál* (*Grímn*), the poem that directly follows *Vafþr* in R has a prose introduction that places Óðinn and Frigg at Hliðskjálf, so it is tempting to also imagine them there at the beginning of *Vafþr*, but that is not certain. Óðinn is seeking advice from his wife and informs her that he is going to leave Ásgarðr and embark on a journey that will bring him to the hall of Vafþrúðnir and that when he arrives there he intends to test the wisdom of the jǫtunn. Frigg shows concern for her husband and cites the danger of the journey as a reason for the áss (masculine singular form for ‘member of the æsir’) to remain at home, but she then accepts Óðinn’s plan after he explains to her that he is determined to make the trip and is wise enough to take care of himself. Frigg wishes him well on his journey. The beginning of the poem is a domestic scene of a married couple in which the wife is concerned for her husband. As audience members we do not know anything about Vafþrúðnir from any source other than *Vafþr* and places where the poem is cited in *Gylfaginning* (*Gylf*), and thus we enter the poem somewhat blind to the jǫtunn’s capability and are indeed utterly unaware of the challenge that Óðinn is up against. Vafþrúðnir appears in this one poem only, yet it is an important appearance, for in

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as they did not have direct access to it.

the verses of the poem we watch Óðinn duel to the death with his paranormal opponent in a prelude to the final battle that will occur at Ragnarǫk. It is also one of three eddic poems that feature the name of a jǫtunn in the title. The others are *Hymiskviða* (*Hym*) and *Þrymskviða* (*Þrym*), two poems that predominately feature Þórr. The animosity between the æsir and the jǫtnar runs through many Old Norse mythological works, and it is not only Óðinn who contests with the opposing forces of the dark side, as does Þórr in *Hym* and *Þrym*, for example, and for that matter Loki. Loki is both a friend and a foe of the æsir, but at Ragnarǫk he will show his true colours and fight on the side of the jǫtnar.[7]

To my knowledge the present work may be the first book-length study solely given to the interpretation of *Vafþr*.[8] Following in the footsteps of many articles on *Vafþr*, and book-length studies that have commented much on the poem, to a certain degree this work has the intention of filling a gap that remains in the scholarship, or rather of taking advantage of the opportunity to make an important statement about the poem that deserves its due attention.

Time is at the core of the present interpretation, as it is through time that a narrative can be divided and placed into units for analysis, before it is configured back into a whole. Vésteinn Ólason has written the following about *Vǫluspá* (*Vsp*).

> The concept of time is relevant to all studies of *Vǫluspá*. Time, past, present, and future, is a constitutive element of the poem as a narrative, and the poem is an entity existing in time: some idea about its place in history is a precondition of any attempt at its interpretation, although the origins of *Vǫluspá* cannot be determined at a fixed point in time. Instead the poem can be compared with an organism developing through time. It is nonetheless important to establish as precisely as possible when that development took place. (2013, 25)

It is my assertion that the same standard applies to a study of *Vafþr*, and this work proceeds on those grounds. If the present thesis is accepted—that the narrative of *Vafþr* is an important Old Norse mythical representation in its own right—it may allow critics of Old Norse mythology generally and eddic poetry specifically to reinterpret the mythological cycle in light of Óðinn's actions between the death of his son Baldr and his own death. In *Vafþr* the áss is actively seeking out information about his own fate, and contending with a jǫtunn to do so.

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[7] Loki's role in the Old Norse pantheon is one of the most interesting topics for interpretation. The recent monograph by Bonnetain (2006) is a comprehensive study of the mythical character, and is an important new addition to a distinguished list of studies about Loki. See also Jan de Vries (1933) and Dumézil (1948).

[8] Stahl (2014) has completed a PhD dissertation on *Vafþr* that the present author looks forward to reading when available, which I hope will be an important contribution to the growing critical discussion on the poem.

Chapters 1 and 2 provide the reader with important background information relevant to the interpretation. Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 are comprised of a close and contextual reading of *Vafþr* that relies to a great degree on the information that is presented in the first two chapters. In chapter 7, the concluding chapter, it is the intention of the author to point out the most relevant findings of the study to the audience and the critical field, and to comment on the study's limits. One question highlights the theme of the poem, and what is on the line in this thesis: what is at stake in a contest of wits? The answer, of course, is everything.

1. Context and Criticism

The present work on *Vafþr* is situated within the context of eddic studies, medieval Icelandic studies, the history of religions, and literary studies generally. The sources that are interpreted are for the most part Old Norse mythological texts that originate in medieval Iceland, and they are all treated here as literary texts, works found within the realm of letters, regardless of what their pre-historical origins may or may not have been. The intention is to breathe life into the characters in the stories by bringing related texts together that treat similar narrative patterns and to highlight themes, conventions, and symbols that are revealed through a close reading of *Vafþr* in comparison with other mythological materials. As Óðinn faces Vafþrúðnir in a wisdom contest, this work seeks to confront the history of knowledge through the lens of a single poem along with texts that are related to it. With the creative sensibility that helps people to understand the natural world and the literary corpus, the present author intends to add to the learned discussion of eddic poetry and its significance as cultural artifact and living narrative that, although changed, holds meaning that can throw light upon our present age, the 21st century. Beginning with *Vafþr* and sticking to it this project tests the validity of interpreting medieval texts with modern literary theory, and in so doing brings the medieval and the modern into the same sphere.

When interpreting a mythological text there is not only the extant text that is to be interpreted, but also a hidden layer behind what survives. The hidden layer is made up of the hypothetical mythical structure that was the foundation for the extant source or sources together with whatever can be said or known about the environment that produced the text. In many cases mythical structures manifest in multiple versions of a single myth.[1] Hastrup writes that '[m]yth embeds the past in the present' (1987, 266), which, in our context is on two levels. The version of the

[1] In reference to the dragon-slaying myth, for example, Ármann Jakobsson writes that '[t]here are several medieval texts about Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, pictures as well as narratives, but there is also the legend—a different kind of text—which materialises in texts including *Vǫlsunga saga*, which will be the focus of this study. The scholar who wishes to say something about the heroic dragon-slayer myth is trying to interpret an intangible text which does not exist on paper; it is necessary to work from versions of it in narratives such as the legendary sagas and use them as a pathway to the essence of the myth' (2010, 34). An interpreter seeking to unfold the layers of the dragon-slayer myth may work with legendary materials that survive in manuscript form, but the interpreter that seeks to uncover the myth of Óðinn making a visit to the giant Vafþrúðnir is left with only the single surviving source, *Vafþr*, along with its fragments and related texts to attempt to uncover the myth behind the text.

myth that was recorded in 13th-century Iceland into manuscripts embedded the past, potentially oral and pre-conversion culture of Icelanders into their 13th-century manuscript tradition, and now in the 21st century both the mythological tradition inherited by 13th-century Icelanders and the selection of 13th-century Icelandic literary texts embed the 13th-century Icelandic literary consciousness into the 21st century, perpetuated through literary criticism and textual interpretation. In other words, the myth is still working, even today, and our version or representation is different than the version or representation that was known to 13th-century audiences. It cannot be confirmed that a poem such as *Vafþr* as it is found in the R manuscript is a recording or transcription of an oral poem, but it is likely that the mythological information transmitted in it—and poems like it—originates in oral culture, as similar bits of mythological information are present in other sources.[2] This suggests that as time passed and writing became increasingly widespread, more and more orally transmitted narratives found their way into written form. Medieval people likely adapted narrative structures that have origins in older myths, and in so doing renewed and gave new life to the structures. The unknown or disguised Óðinn appearing was a common narrative structure, and the various manifestations of it result from medieval creative activity. The result is that both similar and different versions of the same bits of mythological information were recorded into narratives. There is much that is unknown, however, and lost to history, and for this reason the critic must proceed with caution.[3]

Time is an element that is central to any text, including *Vafþr*. The foundation of any plot is its timing and the characters of a story all act—or fail to act—in time. All stories have a time that passes, that is a beginning, middle, and an end, and each phase takes place one after the other in a chronological order. These phases are not

[2] Lassen writes the following about Óðinn as he appears in eddic poetry: '[e]ddadigtene danner i forbindelse med de kristne tolkninger en gruppe for sig, da de ikke i samme grad som de prosaiske hovedtekster om guderne er influeret af kristne forestillinger. Et digt som *Lokasenna* er højst sandsynligt kristent, og derudover synes elementer i andre digte også at være styret af en kristen tankegang. Men vi ser ikke Odin tolket eksplicit i direkte overensstemmelse med kristne tolkningsstrategier i noget eddadigt. I de fleste tekster er der i øvrigt også elementer i skildringen af Odin, som ikke hidrører fra kristendommen. Men eddadigtene er notorisk svære at datere, og derfor mangler vi den kulturhistoriske kontekst, som de tilhører. Visse eddadigte må være en slags kristne rekonstruktioner, der fungerer som en hedensk stemme fra fortiden' (2011, 387–88).

[3] Hastrup adds that '[i]n contrast to science arts were seen as neither analytic nor cumulative. They were bound to compare unfavourably with science just as myth has compared unfavourably with history in the modern apprehension of historical truth. My point is that both history and myth are *arts* of memory. By the very fact of their construing narrative wholes both create unity and synthesis out of multiplex and chaotic lived experiences. They are not necessarily different arts of (verbal) memory but different genres in the art of memory in general. As such they are subject to different and changing conventions' (1987, 262).

always presented chronologically but a reconstruction of a narrative can ultimately place its events in a chronological ordering. *Vafþr* and the other sources brought into the present work, like other stories, have an action comprised of episodes unfolding one after the other, and a plot that results from the bringing together of the action. The plot, in other words, is made up of the action. Furthermore, both pagan and Christian conceptions of cosmological time exert influence in the Old Norse mythological texts, and it is an aim of the present work to uncover the respective influences in *Vafþr*. Time is thus studied on two levels: the level of the narrative, in terms of the action and the plot, and in the content of the poem. Put in another way, time permeates the narrative setting and the mythological information. *Vafþr* is the foremost source for scrutiny, but there are a number of other sources that must be introduced along with their context before more can be said about the method of this investigation into mythical representation.

1.1 Primary Sources

The ages for all of the eddic poems in their original, presumably oral forms are unknown, although there are various theories that make propositions for their dates of composition in relation to one another, with proposed dates for poems varying from the 9th through 13th centuries in their extant forms. Such uncertainty makes it difficult to determine to what degree a mythological text from the medieval period retains pagan influence, if at all. *Gylf*, a major prose text that is a part of *SnE*, however, is dated quite firmly to c. 1220, the time around when Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) is thought to have written it,[4] and the eddic poems *Hávamál* (*Háv*), *Vsp*, *Hyndluljóð* (*Hyndl*), *Vafþr*, *Grímn*, *Fáfnismál* (*Fáfn*), and *Lokasenna* (*Lok*) are all quoted in it.[5] If it is accepted that *Gylf* be dated to c. 1220, it can be established

[4] Snorri Sturluson's authorship of *SnE* is a topic that is debated, as it is not certain if he wrote the work himself with pen in hand, as a member of a team, or whether he even acted as the patron of the work which was carried out by others. What is certain, however, is that Snorri Sturluson was a prominent chieftain in Iceland at the beginning of the 13th century, was a skaldic poet who composed a *drápa* in honour of King Hákon Hákonarsson and Jarl Skúli Bárðarson. On the dating of *SnE* see Wanner, who makes a convincing argument that the work should be dated to the years around c. 1220, after Snorri's return from his first trip to Norway. His argument is based on Snorri's political activity and his presumed desire to convert his accumulated cultural capital, using Bourdieu's terminology, in the form of skaldic poetry into political capital. In order to make the conversion of forms of capital Snorri Sturluson had to revive, or at least preserve, the art of skaldic poetry and this required the writing of *Gylf*, an accessible guide to Old Norse mythology that would help the intended audience of skaldic poetry understand the poetic language, which in turn would result in Snorri's ability to exchange his capital (2008, 140–61).

[5] McKinnell writes that, in regards to eddic poetry, '[i]t is important to try to date this material, because the outlook of a tenth-century heathen poet composing about gods in whom he or she genuinely believed is likely to have been rather different from that of a christian of

that these eddic poems are at least as old, hence their citation in that text, but it is still not possible to assign an earlier date to any of them with any degree of certainty.[6] The eddic poems as they survive in manuscript form ultimately represent a 13th-century rendering of them, and can be considered to be the Christian society's reception of the eddic poems, which may have exerted either little or great influence on the content. Much of the subject matter found within the poems clearly dates back into the pagan era, even the names of the mythological characters demonstrates this, and, what is more, the historical roots of the heroic poems from the eddic corpus reach back to pre-historical figures and events that have their origins in the 5th, 6th, and 7th centuries, during the age of great migrations in Europe that followed the collapse of the Roman Empire.[7] The events described, however, have been altered greatly and it would be impossible to reconstruct any historical event from that period based on any eddic poetry or legendary sagas. Thus the terminus for how far the critic can travel backwards in time with certainty reaches its limit in the 13th century, the age of the oldest manuscripts in which the mythological sources dealt with in the present study appear.

Even though the extant eddic poems are dated to the 13th century, overall the origins, development, and composition of eddic poetry span eight centuries when the subject matter is considered. It begins in the period when the pre-historical characters represented in the heroic poems were known to be alive, Attila the Hun (d. 453; represented as Atli Buðlason in eddic poetry) and Ermanaric (d. 376; represented as Jǫrmunrekr in eddic poetry) for example, through the 13th and 14th centuries in Iceland, the age of the oldest manuscripts.[8] It can be presumed, if only

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two centuries later, for whom they were no more than an entertaining fiction, much as the classical gods were, say, to Petrarch' (1994, 15).

[6] Returning to the question of the existence of some of the narratives of eddic poetry in oral tradition, it is interesting to note that in the itinerary of Abbot Nikulás Bergsson (c. 1154), commonly referred to as the *Leiðarvísir*, there is mention made of both Gunnarr's snake pit and Gnitaheiðr, places known from the heroic cycle of eddic poetry, *Vǫlsunga saga*, and other sources. These sights are well known from the eddic poems *Atlakviða* and *Fáfn*. This suggests, further, that there was a pretextual existence for at least some of the narratives that found their way into eddic poetry. See Magoun (1943, 211–14) and *Alfræði íslenzk* (1908, 12–23).

[7] Gurevich notes some examples of historical events and people that are the subject of the heroic lays of the R manuscript, writing that '[i]t is, however, striking that heroic poetry selected only events connected with the dramatic moments in the history of individual people: the suicide of the Ostrogothic king Ermanarich (AD 375), the death of the Burgundian kings (AD 437), the death of Attila, the leader of the Huns (AD 453). Not simply the turning points in the history of tribes and peoples, but the personal tragedies of their leaders fired their imaginations' (1992, 124).

[8] Bjarne Fidjestøl writes that '[t]he Edda consists of several collections of written texts, all of which were committed to writing after 1200. On the presumption that all or most of them have been orally transmitted before being written down, the written texts are taken to

artificially, that these heroic narratives might have existed in an early manifestation shortly after the deaths of the respective historic characters, attaining greater maturity and altering as the centuries passed. *Vafþr* is not a heroic eddic poem, however, and thus the pre-history of the poem is even more uncertain, but along with the uncertainty there may be a greater freedom to speculate about what the poem's contents might have meant to a 13th-century audience, and indeed what the poem and its interpretation can mean to audiences today. The story is one that is rooted in myth, not in legend.

The corpus of eddic poetry amounts to fifty or so surviving poems in total that relate stories about the gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, and other paranormal beings from Old Norse myth and legend. Together with a few other poems about various subjects that use eddic metres these works comprise the eddic corpus.[9] The stories that made their way into poetic form were brought to Iceland with the settlers during the settlement period, brought home by Icelanders who travelled abroad during the old commonwealth period, and finally brought to Iceland by visitors to the island during the centuries between c. 870 through the middle of the 13th century. Works such as Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum* (c. 1200) and the continental *Nibelungenlied* (c. 1200) demonstrate that much of the subject matter of eddic poetry also found maturity in other narrative traditions, and for that reason the time that elapsed from the settlement period, when the narratives would have started their journey to Iceland, through the 13th century presents a problem when considering the source value of eddic materials. Narratives were altered, and comparison with Saxo, for example, confirms that there were variant traditions. A major question thus presents itself that concerns the intactness of the narratives as they were transmitted through the centuries of oral transmission, presuming that they did indeed originate in the pre-Christian period. Furthermore, the question of how the transition to the written word from an oral form influenced the stories is also a major issue. It is most probable that the introduction of Christianity to northern Europe and Iceland greatly influenced all of the texts

represent the oral texts, which have been composed in different periods of time' (1999, 199).

[9] The exact number of eddic poems depends on which poems are included in the definition of the corpus of eddic poetry. Gísli Sigurðsson (*Eddukvæði*), for example, includes 36 eddic poems in his edition: the 11 mythological poems and 19 heroic poems of R, *Vsp* from Hauksbók (AM 544 4to; H), *Baldrs draumar*, *Rígsþula*, *Hyndl*, *Svipdagsmál*, and *Grottasǫngr*. Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*) present the 30 poems from R, *Vsp* from Hauksbók (AM 544 4to; H), a version of *Vsp* from *SnE*, *Baldrs draumar* (*Bald*), *Rígsþula* (*Ríg*), *Hyndl*, *Hlǫðskviða*, *Grottasǫngr* (*Grott*), *Grógaldr*, and *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*. If one were to add the eddic poems from either of these editions and the loose verses of eddic poetry from the Heusler and Ranisch (1903) edition of *Eddica Minora*, which has 25 entries, the total would reach over 60 eddic poems or fragments of eddic poetry. Thus the traditional number falls somewhere between 30 and 60.

composed or recorded in medieval Iceland, and the mythological materials are no exception.[10] The fact that the narratives were written down in the Icelandic language is the most unmistakable influence from Christianity, for with the introduction of Christianity also came the introduction of writing with Latin characters adapted to the vernacular.

While eddic poems are found in manuscripts that date to over two centuries after the introduction of Christianity in Iceland, they do present narratives that have origins in one form or another in pre-Christian Scandinavia. It is more or less assumed that much of the content of eddic poetry is quite ancient, and taking this into account, it is no surprise that narrative temporality underwent a transformation during the stages of oral transmission and like the dominant belief system the narratives would have changed. The modern audience now reads Christian versions of the eddic narratives that may once have been pagan, resulting in the paradox that the lens through which paganism is viewed is the eddic corpus. The transition to Christianity from paganism was gradual, and there was not a clear dividing line between the pre-Christian and Christian eras in Iceland, nor in Scandinavia. Paganism, in other words, did not suddenly disappear at the time of the conversion, and, conversely, Christianity was present in Scandinavia and Iceland in the centuries prior to the conversion.[11] The two belief systems coexisted during the period of time referred to as the conversion period, or the Christianization of Iceland, and the coexistence has arguably left its mark in the sources. One of the two belief systems conquered the other, however, so it cannot be stated without a doubt that what remains in the sources does in fact represent the coexistence, but

[10] Ármann Jakobsson forwards that '[i]n fact, every written text of a Norse myth that we have may be referred to as a reception, from Tacitus to court poetry to the Edda of Snorri Sturluson. None of these texts comes to us directly from a heathen culture, they all provide an outsider's view, and we have to take this into account when dealing with them. Snorri's Edda was written by a Christian two centuries after Iceland became a legally Christian country. The Eddic poetry is preserved in manuscripts from the thirteenth century or later. The Norse gods also make frequent appearances in legendary sagas and sagas of Icelanders, but these were not composed in the heathen era either. Even the skaldic poetry, though some of it was probably composed before the Christianization of Iceland, comes to us through its inclusion in the kings' sagas from the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, works pervaded by the Christian religion' (2009a, 158). Taking this into account, even if there are some undiluted pagan artifacts among the eddic texts, they are the exception to the rule, and determining which texts are the most undiluted is an impressive, if not impossible task.

[11] Christian men were perhaps the first people to find and inhabit Iceland. Jónas Kristjánsson writes, '[þ]egar norrænir menn komu hingað til lands voru hér fyrir kristnir menn sem þeir kölluðu Papa' (2012, 19). Gísli Sigurðsson concludes that the influence of the *papar* is only negligible, however, writing that '[w]hatever influence these monastic settlements might have exercised on their surrounding hostile and pagan communities, the *papar* could not remain for long in Iceland and must be excluded as major contributors to Icelandic culture' (2000, 25).

the great interest that was present in 13th-century Iceland in Old Norse myth and legend should not be underestimated, as these old stories were deemed important to preserve and write down. Without the narratives that do survive we would be much less aware as to what the people before the introduction of Christianity might have believed than we are as it is now. Bugge (1881–89) argues that Norse travellers to Ireland, for example, picked up a mixture of classical and Christian narrative elements that they then brought home with them and infused into their own Germanic legends. In this sense the classical meets the Christian, a mixture that in turn influenced the Norse tradition. The results are the diverse and advanced Old Norse mythological narratives, among else.[12]

In regards to *Vafþr*, Ármann Jakobsson writes that '[u]nfortunately, it is almost impossible to determine with certainty whether the poem should be taken as a genuine heathen relic, or as representing 13th century Christian views of giants, or something in-between. We have to proceed without that certainty' (2007, 265). There is one thing that is certain: as the poem survives, it is a product of the 13th-century Icelandic literary milieu that either reproduces a narrative from centuries prior rather intact, presents a narrative that has been modified substantially, or is a 13th-century creation that is now thought to be a heathen relic. *Vafþr* does indeed represent some archaic knowledge, but its form is most certainly less archaic than its contents.

Generally speaking eddic poetry survives in one of two forms: narrative form or dramatic form. The narrative form is epic in type and has a direct narrator who relays the action as a series of events or transmits a spoken monologue, while the dramatic form presents two or more speaking characters and it is the direct speech that drives the action forward. There are poems that use both narration and direct speech, and also poems that use more than one poetic metre, and are thus both narrative and dramatic. Although *Vafþr* is composed entirely in *ljóðaháttr*, it is important to be aware of both of the principal metres of eddic poetry, *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðaháttr*, as well as their variants, *málaháttr* and *galdralag* respectively.[13] The present study is a comparative study and other eddic poems that are discussed appear in one or more of the eddic metres.[14] It has been forwarded that all eddic

[12] Webster writes that 'Professor Bugge claims that the legends relative to the gods and heroes of the North give marked evidence of Graeco-Latin influence and that the old tales of the Eddas are more or less mutilated recollections of Greece and Rome' (1890, 445).

[13] Sverdlov argues that *galdralag* is used in *Vafþr*, by Óðinn in stanzas 3, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, and 54. His argument is that it is the four-fold alliteration in the first long line (i.e. lines 1 and 2) of each stanza that mirrors the *galdralag* metre (2011, 49–64).

[14] There are four principle characteristics of the *fornyrðislag* metre. Firstly, there are two stressed syllables in each line of verse, and each line of verse is most often 4 or 5 syllables in length. Secondly, pairs of lines alliterate together, with the first stressed syllable in the second

poems other than *Grípisspá* (*Gríp*) most likely have an oral pre-history, but how the poems were preserved during this oral pre-history is unknown.[15] According to Gunnell, the group of poems that he refers to as 'the dialogic poems in *ljóðaháttr*', including *Skírnismál* (*Skírn*), *Hárbarðsljóð* (*Hárb*), *Vafþr*, *Lok*, and *Fáfn*, all share the feature that in both the R and AM 748 I 4to (A) manuscripts the individual speakers are indicated for the reader in the margins, which supports the proposition that dramatic performance played an important role in the preservation of these works before they were recorded in manuscript form (1995, 203–6). The present study treats *Vafþr* as a dramatic work.

Besides the probable oral prehistory of eddic poetry, the principal manuscripts of eddic poetry that survive are most likely copies of pre-existing written texts that are now lost which were themselves perhaps based on smaller collections that were brought together, ultimately reaching back to oral tradition (Lindblad 1954, 273–76). These hypothetical older manuscripts that have not survived shared a similar fate with any number of other manuscripts that have also perished through the ages. The materials that have survived are thus crucial, and, for that matter, there are significant differences between surviving versions or fragments of the same texts. An example of such discordance presents itself in the differences, both great and small, between the two surviving versions of *Vsp*, the version from the R manuscript and the version from the Hauksbók manuscript (AM 544 4to; H).[16] One

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line alliterating with one or both of the stressed syllables in the first line, while the fourth stressed syllable in the line pairing does not alliterate with the other stressed syllables. Thirdly, stanzas are most often 8 lines in length (equivalent to 4 lines of verse in English), although there are examples of longer stanzas. Finally, it is inferred that over time the form of the metre became increasingly regular, so that poems that demonstrate a more regular form may be younger than poems that have a more irregular form. This trend may be of assistance when trying to date poems that are in this metre. The *ljóðaháttr* metre, on the other hand, has its own set of characteristics. Firstly, there are most often 6 lines in a stanza composed under the metre (equivalent to 3 or 4 lines of verse in English). Secondly, lines 3 and 6 are often longer than the other lines in a stanza. Thirdly, lines 1 and 2 alliterate together, lines 4 and 5 also, but lines 3 and 6 have a particular alliteration. Finally, in other respects the metre is similar to *fornyrðislag*. Apart from these two dominant metres of eddic poetry, both *fornyrðislag* and *ljóðaháttr* have less-common variants. *Fornyrðislag* has as its variant form *málaháttr*, in which more syllables, both stressed and unstressed, are permitted, and it is a more relaxed metre generally. *Ljóðaháttr* has as its variant form *galdralag*, in which there is a repetition of self-alliterating verses. For more on Old Norse poetic metre generally see Whaley (2012, ccviii–ccx) and eddic metre specifically Suzuki (2014).

[15] Einar Ólafur Sveinsson writes, '[t]elja má víst, að allur þorri eddukvæða sé skráður eftir munnlegri geymd. Vera má, að nokkrar vísur í fornaldarsögum séu ortar með penna í hendi. Um Grípisspá kann að genga sama máli, þó að ekki sé það víst. Þetta eru þó án efa undantekningar' (1962, 195); cf. Gunnell (1995, 182n1).

[16] Gunnar Harðarson provides an introduction to the H manuscript: '[l]e *Hauksbók* est un grand manuscript sur parchemin, écrit en partie par l'homme de loi Haukr Erlendsson, auquel il doit son nom. D'origine islandaise, Haukr a fait carrière comme magistrat sous le règne du

significant difference between the two versions is the number and ordering of the stanzas in the poem. *Vsp* in the R manuscript has 63 stanzas, while *Vsp* in the H manuscript has 58 stanzas (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*, 291–316), and there are a number of groups of stanzas that are placed differently, for example *Vsp* R stanzas 21 through 24 appear as *Vsp* H stanzas 27 through 30, and so on (Gísli Sigurðsson 1998, xxiv). Another difference between *Vsp* R and *Vsp* H relates to a stanza that is in the H version, but is not in the R version, namely *Vsp* H stanza 57 (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*, 316), in which the vǫlva foresees that after Ragnarǫk a Christian God will come and rule over the world that is reborn. This Christian God figure does not appear in the R version of the poem.[17] This is one disparity among many but it demonstrates that there is much that we do not know about the versions of texts that may have existed but have not survived from the medieval period, either because oral versions were not recorded into manuscripts at all, or because the manuscripts in which variant versions were once placed have been lost.

A number of eddic poems will be discussed in relation to *Vafþr*. The poem that receives the most attention is, as expected, *Vafþr*, and chapters 3 through 6 are a close and contextual reading of the 56 stanzas of the poem.[18] The theme of the wisdom dialogue is central to the analysis and therefore it is essential to look at other wisdom dialogues in the corpus, such as the one that appears in *Fáfn* between the young Sigurðr and the dragon Fáfnir, as well as the dialogues between Þórr and Alvíss in *Alvíssmál* (*Alv*) and Óðinn and Þórr in *Hárb*. Whereas the wisdom dialogue in *Vafþr* occurs prior to the death of Vafþrúðnir, the slaying of Fáfnir precedes the main dialogue of *Fáfn*, resulting in the primary difference that Fáfnir knows he will die as a result of the interaction before the dialogue begins, while

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roi Hákon Magnússon (1299–1319), d'abord à Oslo, ensuite dans la région de Gulaþing, près de Bergen, sur la côte ouest de la Norvège. A l'origine, le *Hauksbók* comptait au moins 210 feuillets dont 141 seulement ont été conservés. Aujord'hui le manuscrit est divisé en trois parties, portant respectivement les cotes AM 371 4to, AM 544 4to et AM 675 4to. On ne sait si dans son état actuel le manuscrit reflète l'ordre originel' (1995, 39–40). Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason write the following on the appearance of *Vsp* in H: '[e]ins og áður er getið er Völuspá ekki aðeins í K [R] og að hluta í Snorra-Eddu, heldur er sérstök og heilleg gerð kvæðisins í Hauksbók (AM 544 4to, H). Hún er þó skráð í þetta handrit eftir daga Hauks Erlendssonar (d. 1334), eða ekki fyrr en um eða jafnvel eftir miðja 14. öld (2014, 1:25). See also Sverrir Jakobsson (2007, 23–24). Lassen adds that *Vsp* H was added to the H manuscript 'probably by the same scribe who wrote the Codex Wormianus [AM 242 fol.; W] of Snorri's *Edda*' (2013, 8), which, like the R manuscript, is linked to the Þingeyrar monastery (Johansson 2013, 165).

[17] For more on variation between the R and H versions of *Vsp* see Mundal (2012, 359–81). Johansson has studied *Vsp* in relation to the Tiburtine tradition, and in so doing treats *Vsp* R and *Vsp* H as variants of the same *Vsp*, originating from a common written source rather than being independent manifestations of an oral version (2013, 161–84).

[18] Traditionally *Vafþr* has been divided into 55 stanzas, however the *Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit* (2014) edition divides it into 56 stanzas.

Vafþrúðnir finds out his fate at the very end. In *Alv* the winner of the wisdom dialogue, Þórr, claims the life of the dwarf Alvíss, who, like Vafþrúðnir dies by implication after the poem has ended. Alvíss presumably turns to stone with the arrival of the day, although this is not stated outright and is only an interpretation. The dwarf may in fact already be dead at the moment of Þórr's final words. *Hárb* is not a poem in which life or death is at stake, but has Óðinn as the victor—as he usually is—and the only loss on Þórr's part is that he is inconvenienced. Not all wisdom dialogues are a matter of life and death, and, in fact, *Vafþr* is the only eddic poem in which the stakes of the wisdom contest are stated to be life and death at the outset.

Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks has a section known as *Heiðreks gátur* (*Hgát*), in which there is a riddle contest between Gestumblindi, who is actually Óðinn in disguise, and King Heiðrekr. Gestumblindi uses the same question as he does in stanza 54 of *Vafþr* to end the riddle contest with King Heiðrekr. There are also other similarities between *Hgát* and *Vafþr* that will be addressed in the current study, but for the time being the most important features that merit the comparison are the appearance of Óðinn in both sources in disguise, and the use of similar tactics in the wisdom contest in *Vafþr* and the riddle contest in *Hgát*. *Hgát* also invites comparison with *Grímn*, for in both texts Óðinn appears in disguise at the court of a human king, and in both texts there is hostility between the two characters.

SnE is an important work of prose and poetry that draws from eddic poetry for its content and for that matter many quotations from eddic poems are found in it. *SnE* survives in four sections: the *Prologus*, *Gylf*, *Skáldskaparmál* (*Skáld*) and, at the end, the *Háttatal*. The work is attributed to Snorri Sturluson in the version of *SnE* that is found in the Codex Upsaliensis (DG 11 4to; U), a manuscript from c. 1300.[19] In order to interpret skaldic poetry a thorough background in mythological knowledge was required, and as such *SnE* is a comprehensive work of Old Norse mythography. The two most crucial sections of *SnE* for the present study are *Gylf* and *Skáld*. In *Gylf*, within the frame of a wisdom dialogue between King Gylfi of Sweden and Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði—three personifications of the æsir, or even of

[19] On the authorial intentions motivating the composition of *SnE* Faulkes writes that '[a]s a means of preserving the memory of historical events, as well as as an organ of royal propaganda, skaldic poetry was being superseded by the written prose saga [...] and as a part of the ritual and entertainment of the court was being superseded by various kinds of prose narrative, including translated romances; taste in poetry was moving to favour the ballad and its derivatives; in Iceland a new genre, the *rímur*, was to replace skaldic verse as a medium of entertainment both written and oral' (1991, xix). *SnE* served to curb the movement away from skaldic poetry, or at least to extend its influence into the 13th century and beyond. See also Wanner (2008, 140–61).

Óðinn himself—information about the past, present, and future of the mythological cosmos is brought forth for the audience. The frame narrative is strikingly similar to that of *Vafþr*, in that a guest arrives at a hall seeking to engage in a wisdom dialogue that becomes a matter of life or death. *Skáld* also has a great deal of mythological information conveyed within its narrative. While the frame is also presented as a wisdom dialogue it is not a life or death matter, but a casual conversation over dinner between Bragi of the æsir and Ægir. Ægir is an Old Norse deity of uncertain ethnicity and the host of the dinner party at which the dialogue takes place. Both *Gylf* and *Skáld* share storylines in common with eddic poetry, and, what is more, *Skáld* has a particular connection to the heroic poems and *Vǫlsunga saga* (*Vǫls*).

Ynglinga saga (*Yngl*) is the first saga in the large collection of kings' sagas known as *Heimskringla*. The work as a whole gives the history of the kings of Norway from pre-historic, mythical times up to the year 1177, when King Sverrir came to power:

> Snorri begins his history with the pagan God Óðinn, the mythical founder of the dynasty. In contrast to Saxo Grammaticus in Denmark, who devotes a major part of his work to the 'prehistory,' Snorri dismisses the early period rather briefly. The kings from Óðinn, according to Snorri a contemporary of the Roman conquerors (*Yngl.* chap. 5), until the mid-ninth century, are grouped together in the *Ynglinga saga*, which is little more than an extended genealogy. (Bagge 1991, 9)

Like *SnE*, *Heimskringla* is attributed to Snorri Sturluson, but only from the late 16th century onwards.[20] It is thus debatable as to whether or not Snorri Sturluson is the author of this work, as there are no medieval manuscripts that attribute him authorship, unlike *SnE*, which does have a medieval manuscript that attributes authorship to Snorri, the U manuscript. *Yngl* is based to a large extent on the skaldic poem *Ynglingatal* by the Norwegian poet Þjóðólfr ór Hvini,[21] and presents the gods

[20] Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson writes the following: '[þ]að er nú alkunna, að Snorri Sturluson er höfundur Heimskringlu. En ekki eru fyrir því svo einföld rök sem margur mun hyggja. Höfundarins er ekki getið í neinu handritanna. En líkur eru til þess, að hann hafi verið nafngreindur á fremsta blaði Kringlu, þar sem formalin hefir staðið' (1941, vi). Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson continues: '[á]rið 1599 þýddi Peder Claussön, prestur í Undal á Jaðri, Heimskringlu alla. Mun hann ekki hafa þekkt þýðingu Laurents Hanssöns. Ekki þarf annars en bera þýðingu P. Cl. saman við Hkr. á nokkrum stöðum, þar sem handrit Hkr. greinir nokkuð að marki á, til þess að sannfærast um, að P. Cl. hefir ekki farið eftir neinu þeirra. En svo virðist sem handrit hans hafi verið mjög got. Vitað er, að P. Cl. taldi Snorra Sturluson höfund bókarinnar' (1941, vii).

[21] On the poem Whaley provides the following: '*Ynglingatal* "Enumeration of the Ynglingar" (Þjóð *Yt*) in its present form enumerates twenty-six generations of Swedish and Norwegian rulers from Fjǫlnir to Óláfr Geirstaðaálfr "Elf of Geirstaðir", focusing on their manner of death and in some cases on their burial-place.… All the preserved stanzas are contained in

and goddesses of the Norse pantheon as historical human characters who through their great power and impressive deeds and accomplishments came to be revered as deities by their subjects. The model of humans reaching divinity through great and often supernatural deeds is known as euhemerism and it is a topic that is important when considering Old Norse mythological sources generally, especially when taking into account the influence of Christianity, and a similar euhemerism occurs in the *Prologus* of *SnE*, but there is little or no euhemerism at work in *Vafþr*. The first ten chapters of *Yngl* are of primary concern for our present task.

> Í fyrsta kap. Yngl. s. er lýst landaskipun og einkanlega fjallað um „Svíþjóð ina miklu". Sennilegt er, að efni þess kap. sé runnið úr ýmsum áttum. Má vel vera, að þar komi fram hugmyndir um lönd og þjóðir, sem Snorri hafi öðlazt í Odda. Í næstu kap., 2.—10., er sagt frá Ásum, einkum Óðni. Þeir kapítular eru goðfræðingum miklu drýgri náma en sagnfræðingum. Er harðla lítill sannindablær yfir þeim, og hlýtur það að hafa verið fjarri höfundinum að telja sjálfum sér eða öðrum trú um, að þeir hefðu söguleg sannindi að geyma í hvívetna. Þarna eru fornar goðsagnir (m. a. sögnin af Gefjun og Gylfa) og fornar hugmyndir um Óðin bornar fram sem sögulegur sannleiki. Þess konar hugmyndir er ekki unnt að gera sér um mennskar verur – en slík vera er Óðinn ótvírætt talinn í Yngl. s. Hugmyndir þessar má rekja til Eddukvæða að nokkru leyti, og líklegt virðist, að þær séu mestmegnis fornar. Íþróttum Óðins er hvergi annars staðar lýst nándar nærri eins rækilega. (Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941, xxxiii)

Yngl is thus an important mythological source, and an important source for the Odinic figure. Even though in the first ten chapters of *Yngl* there is a historiographical and euhemeristic account of the æsir as the founders of the Norwegian dynasty, the work is ultimately critical of the pagan gods (Lassen 2010, 209–30). Jørgensen forwards that *Yngl* falls between the categories of legendary saga and king's saga, and that it was authored with the intention of providing a mythological bloodline for Haraldr hárfagri:

> *Ynglinga saga* har den tydelige kompositoriske funksjon i helheten at den skal knytte Hårfagre-ætta til et mytisk opphav. Dette grepet er motivert av litterære forbilder innenfor historiografisk tradisjon, og kan betraktes som en norrøn anknytning til klassisk krønikeskriving, slik vi blant anet kjenner den fra Livius. *Ynglinga saga* har primært en kompositorisk funksjon innenfor verket *Heimskringla*, og den er ikke ment å tjene det samme historiografiske formål som de øvrige sagaene. (2009, 58)

Yngl is somewhat of an anomaly when compared to the other sagas in *Heimskringla*. Its function is to narrate a lengthy prehistory, and to set the stage for the narrative accounts of the historical kings of Norway.[22]

Yng [i.e. *Yngl*] where they are cited to illustrate and authenticate the prose narrative' (2012, 3). See also *Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen* (1946–49, 1:4–9).

[22] Mundal contends that *Yngl* does not readily fit into any saga category, but shares more in common with the *Ynglingatal* from which it originates (2009, 64).

The texts outlined above are brought together in this study for the primary purpose of providing comparison for *Vafþr*, particularly to place the poem in its 13th-century Icelandic literary context and also within its mythological context. To learn more about this poem modern narrative theory is also drawn into the conversation to provide a critical lens for the interpretation, and also the scholarship of a number of important critics in the field of Old Norse-Icelandic literature from the past, present, and future. Before introducing some of the prominent scholars whose work on medieval Icelandic literature and *Vafþr* is greatly valuable to the present work, I will introduce the basic interpretive framework for the analysis, comprised of theoretical writings from Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005), Aron Gurevich (1924–2006), and Mircea Eliade (1907–86).

1.2 Theoretical Frame

There are three 20th-century theorists whose works inform the present discussion of *Vafþr* and its critics more so than others. The first is Ricoeur, and his theoretical work on narrative temporality supplies both the foundation from which the present analysis is made and the vocabulary by which the analysis is presented. The second is the medievalist Gurevich, whose criticism of medieval Icelandic literature extrapolates from the texts and reaches into the social, religious, legal, and political spheres of the society in which they were created. Finally, Eliade published work that is indispensable to the present study due to its penetrating observations of temporal organization in both pagan and Christian societies, and his enlightening commentary on the hybridity of temporal organization in medieval societies. It is my argument that medieval Iceland was a place where time was conceptualized to be of a hybrid nature—chronological and nonchronological—and this temporal hybridity can be identified in the narrative of *Vafþr*.[23]

Ricoeur forwards that there are multiple levels of temporality in all narratives, and although time is not always presented chronologically in a narrative that does not mean that time is nonchronological, but rather a deeper experience of time may be at hand. Ricoeur makes three working hypotheses: the first is that time and narrative are closely related. He writes, ‘temporality [is] that structure of existence

[23] Hastrup identifies two types of time: ‘[i]n the discussion of time we have to take into account two kinds of time; firstly, “time” is a universal dimension in which society exists and develops; and, secondly, “time” is something which exists and is developed within society. In the first sense time and chronology provide the frame for the history of the Icelandic Freestate; it is in the course of time that this particular society showed us what it was like. In the second sense time is part of the cultural classifications of the people of the Freestate; as such, it is part of a system of social definitions, subject to change with the passing of years’ (1985, 17).

that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent. Their relationship is therefore reciprocal' (1980, 169). This 'structural reciprocity' is often overlooked, Ricoeur writes, because it is most often taken for granted that narrative takes place within a time that is a linear succession of instants, one following the other, and this is one of the assumptions that he seeks to overturn in regards to narrative time. On the other hand, he continues, philosophers who write on time often overlook narrative when considering time, and turn to physics and cosmology rather than to narrative for their answers. The second working hypothesis is that there are different degrees of temporal organization: the first degree is of time as that 'in' which events take place. This is the linear level of time, a progression of instants. This 'within-time-ness' is different than linear time, but is most often thought of as linear because of its 'datable, public, and measurable nature and as a result of its dependence on points of reference in the world' (170); the second degree is time as 'historicality', which is different than 'within-time-ness' in that it is characterized by 'emphasis placed on the weight of the past and, even more, in terms of the power of recovering the "extension" between birth and death in the work of "repetition"' (171). Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Ricoeur writes, invites us to go beyond historicality 'to the point at which temporality springs forth in the plural unity of future, past, and present' (171). This third degree is time as 'temporality', the deepest level. These two hypotheses, the reciprocity of time and the three degrees of temporality (within-time-ness, historicality, and temporality), are used by Ricoeur to conduct an analysis of both time and of narrative. The third working hypothesis concerns the role of narrative, and is what the present study is most concerned with. Ricoeur states that a plot as a narrative structure connects the action of a story, and thus makes the series of events into a story. The plot also places the reader at the crossing points of time and narrative. With these three working hypotheses in place, Ricoeur now moves on to outline two theories, one for time and the other for narrative.

For his theory of time Ricoeur again refers to 'within-time-ness', specifically to how it is marked by human concern for and preoccupation with time because it means that we are 'in' time. The most natural preoccupation is the daily cycle that is marked by the passage of the sun through the sky, which leads to time being calculated as a progression of instants, of days and derivations of a day.[24] We are led to the conclusion that time is a progression of instants because we have been

[24] Ricoeur writes that '[i]f within-time-ness is so easily interpreted in terms of the ordinary representation of time, this is because the first measurements of the time of our preoccupation are borrowed from the natural environment—first of all from the play of light and of the seasons. In this respect the day is the most natural of all measures' (1980, 173).

guided towards such measurements by the natural environment around us, and not because time is naturally or necessarily arranged in such a way. The same calculations result from observing the phases of the moon, which leads to a lunar conception of time. In the modern age the result has been that time is thought of as a progression, and 'now' is equivalent to what the clock says.[25]

For his theory of narrative Ricoeur forwards that the time of the simplest story does not adhere to the conception of time as merely a series of instants succeeding one after another, as his theory of time argues is the dominant public conception. At its most basic, following a story essentially means to understand the succession of actions, thoughts, and feelings that are presented in a sequence that moves towards a conclusion that rather than being predictable must be acceptable, especially when looking back upon the actions, thoughts, and feelings that led to it (174). The art of storytelling is the placing of a narrative in time, and the characters in stories must themselves reckon with time. Again, as above, the day is the natural referential unit of time in a narrative, and the result is that the time of a narrative is public time, observable by all (177), similar to the human experience of 'within-time-ness'. The narrative genre of the heroic epic is more than any other form the narrative of preoccupation, in that the protagonist must throughout the narrative reckon with time. This is important for the present study, because a number of the texts dealt with, and arguably *Vafþr*, share many features with the heroic epic. In *Vafþr* Óðinn is on a quest, one that he is apparently in control of, and the objective of his quest is to contend with Vafþrúðnir in a wisdom contest. Thus, to begin, it is important to be able to interpret the action that makes up a story, which is often presented in the form of a number of episodes or scenes.

There is more at stake, however, than just recognizing the episodes or scenes that make up the larger story, for a plot is more than just its epsiodes. The plot is the framework for following a story, and, along with the action, functions as follows:

> every narrative combines two dimensions in various proportions, one chronological and the other nonchronological. The first may be called the episodic dimension, which characterizes the story as made out of events. The second is the configurational dimension, according to which the plot construes significant wholes out of scattered events. (178)

The 'episodic dimension' can be referred to as the action of a story, while the 'configurational dimension' referred to as the plot, for that is its function, to

[25] Ricoeur adds that 'as a result of certain practical circumstances, this interpretation [within-time-ness] is bent in the direction of the representation of linear time. Saying "now" becomes for us synonymous with reading the hour on the face of a clock' (1980, 174).

configure the action into the narrative, or, as Ricoeur has it, to allow the plot to assemble (i.e. configure) the action.

The result of this 'twofold structure' of a narrative—plot and action—is that 'the humblest narrative is always more than a chronological series of events and that in turn the configurational dimension cannot overcome the episodic dimension without suppressing the narrative structure itself' (178). It is left to the reader to unfold the narrative structure in order to, firstly, identify the episodic structure (the action) of the narrative—which in the case of *Vafþr* is made up of a number of acts and scenes—and, secondly, to recognize the plot as a sum of the poem's action, but also as something more. The episodic dimension allows for a plot to be seen as a series of events, one occurring after the other, that eventually leads to a conclusion. The configurational dimension, however, having grouped together the action that has led to the conclusion of the narrative into a plot, produces a single 'thought'.[26] The thought may be the theme or point of the narrative, or some other unit of comprehension. Ricoeur continues, '[i]n a word, the correlation between thought and plot supersedes the "then" and "and then" of mere succession' (179). Thus the configurational dimension is just as important as the episodic dimension when it comes to the act of critical interpretation and comprehension on the part of the audience. By understanding the epsiodes of a story and comprehending the thought of the narrative, the story is placed in memory, which then allows for time to be read backwards. For example, if one was to ask another to tell the story of Vafþrúðnir's death, the storyteller might begin by going back in narrative time to the arrival of Óðinn at the hall of Vafþrúðnir, or even further back in narrative time to Óðinn's discussion with Frigg before departing for Vafþrúðnir's hall, and then from that point move forward through the episodes that end in the death of Vafþrúðnir, but it all began with a reference to Vafþrúðnir's death. The beginning of the story can be found in the end, if the thought of the plot that is brought forth by the configurational dimension is understood.[27]

The concepts from Ricoeur that are most important for the present work are those of the episodic dimension of narrative time, i.e. the action, by which the present analysis will proceed in the spirit of close reading, and the configurational dimension of time, by which the plot will be understood as a 'thought', and

[26] Ricoeur writes that '[t]he configurational arrangement makes the succession of events into significant wholes that are the correlate of the act of grouping together. Thanks to this reflective act—in the sense of Kant's *Critique of Judgement*—the whole plot may be translated into one "thought"' (1980, 179).

[27] Ricoeur writes that '[m]emory, accordingly, *repeats* the course of events according to an order that is the counterpart of time as "stretching-along" between a beginning and an end' (1980, 180).

conclusions drawn from the 'thought' of *Vafþr* that relate to medieval Icelandic society and the human condition in general. The close reading of *Vafþr* depends to a great deal on these theoretical principles, and is instrumental in our search for the meaning of *Vafþr* on all three levels cited in the introduction: the literary level, the historical level, and the critical level.[28]

Gurevich, like Ricoeur, argues that the natural environment greatly impacts the primary conception of time held by people living in agrarian societies in the ancient and medieval periods. To a large extent this results from the sun's 'regular repetition, rhythmic and circular, which they [the inhabitants] were in no position to control; and this eternal return was bound to take a central place in the minds of man, both in antiquity and in the Middle Ages' (1985, 98). The eternal return of the sun correlates to an extent with the experience of 'within-time-ness' that Ricoeur discusses, but rather than conceptualized as a linear succession of instants that accumulates one day after another, Gurevich emphasizes the repetition and return of the same cycle over and over again. The 'central place' that Gurevich refers to finds its natural expression in the myth making and story telling of various societies that throughout the history of humankind have sought to understand the cosmogony and eschatology of the world. For the pre-Christian North such expression may have been presented in the supposed original and perhaps oral myths that are the foundation behind the extant Norse mythological texts, which, as they are now, are representative of the 13th-century Icelandic reception of the myths, and are what we refer to here as mythical representations: they are representations of myths, not myths. Experience of the natural cycle of the passing of the sun through the sky, the cycles of the moon, and the change from one season to another and the inevitable return of the seasons influences the human experience of the world for ancient, medieval, and modern humans, and in the medieval period the introduction of the Christian religion in Iceland, for example, had the effect of adding an element to this eternal return. Gurevich continues, writing about the connection between

[28] Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir consults Ricoeur's theory (1975 and 1977) in her study 'Gunnlogi and Hræfrakki: Two ditties in the shorter version of The Saga of Gísli', specifically exploring Ricoeur's emphasis on 'tension' in metaphor. She writes the following: '[i]n Ricoeur's speculations about metaphor he emphasised "tension". Imitating his manner we can assume the significance of four different kinds of tension in metaphoric kennings: 1. tension within the kenning: tension between its metaphoric and non-metaphoric segment(s). 2. tension between tenor and vehicle within the statement, between the focus and the frame of the ditty. 3. tension between the statement and the prose: between the focus and the frame of the prose. 4. tension between the different interpretations offered by the text' (2003, 34). Bergljót S. Kristjánsdóttir's work is important in that it marks the earliest use of Ricouerian theory in relation to Old Norse-Icelandic poetry that I am aware of, although she draws from a different area of his theory than is done so here. See her study in relation to Ricoeur (1975, 310–11; 1977, 247).

human beings and their natural environment, and emphasizes the importance of the influence of nature for the understanding of time: '[i]n an agrarian community, time was determined above all by the rhythms of nature' (94). 13th-century Iceland was indeed an agrarian society. In their narratives the people of medieval Iceland imitated, or tried to understand what they experienced in their everyday lives, but the Christian church also made an impact.

Writing specifically about the eddic poems, Gurevich emphasizes the great age of the poems and how they are a valuable source for the experiences that pagan people might have had in their environment many centuries prior to the manuscript age in Iceland.

> The Elder Edda, which has reached us in manuscripts from the 13th century, represents, as is well known, the last phase of an extremely long existence as an epos throughout the centuries, and this fact raises for us the question of its complicated stratification. In the Eddic songs deep imprints of the turnabouts and the views of life of the Germanic peoples must have been left, stretching over epoques, whose origin will have to be sought in the centuries preceding the Great Migrations, and whose end falls in the High Middle Ages. (1979; cited from Fidjestøl 1999, 191)

The time span is up to eight or nine centuries long and it is a long stretch to state that a poem surviving from the 13th century can provide deep insight into events that occurred that far back in time, but as the present study proceeds it is important to keep this in mind, with caution, because the alleged source value of the eddic poems, and, for that matter, other Old Norse-Icelandic literary texts, is an important topic. Gurevich is one of the foremost theorists to draw on eddic texts to reach grand conclusions about what the poetic and prose works may be able to tell us about their prehistory. As with all grand theories, it is important to tread cautiously, but Gurevich's emphasis on the cyclical nature of time in the medieval period is an important contribution to the present study, and is crucial to the search for the meaning of *Vafþr* on the historical level.

Eliade contends that in the medieval period the cyclical view of time that had primarily been held by those in agrarian societies before the introduction of Christianity, due, of course, to the eternal repetition of the sun, the seasons, and the moon, became incorporated with the linear Christian view. Christianity recognizes definite dates such as the creation of the earth by God in *Genesis* as well as the birth and death days of Jesus Christ and the coming day of judgement from the *Gospels*. These dates fall onto a linear timeline and undercut the cyclical view, resulting in a hybrid view of time prevailing during the medieval period.[29] Regarding the

[29] Borst writes, '[e]ven when the length of a year was still being measured by the orbit of the sun, according to a natural and cyclical phenomenon, the succession of years following

transitional centuries of the medieval period, Eliade writes the following: 'le moyen âge est dominé par la conception eschatologique (dans ses deux moments essentiels: la creation et la fin du monde), complete par la théorie de l'ondulation cyclique qui explique le retour périodique des événements' (1949, 214) ('the Middle Ages are dominated by the eschatological conception (in its two essential moments: the creation and the end of the world), complemented by the theory of cyclic undulation that explains the periodic return of events' (1959, 144)). By the eschatological conception, Eliade refers to the tendency to view the present as a moment in time along a historical continuum, a single moment that will never be repeated, rather than belonging to a cycle that will return many times. The combination of the two world views, the pagan—cyclical—and the Christian—linear—creates a very interesting dynamic when interpreting Old Norse mythological sources, for as the present study hopes to demonstrate there is evidence surviving in the sources, and in *Vafþr*, for two conceptions of time, the eschatological and the cyclical. The cyclical conception of time has not completely faded in the shadow of the eschatological, and recognizing the cyclical element in *Vafþr* may help to shed light on the potential source value of the poem for pre-Christian belief in Scandinavia, and possibly set a precedent for further studies of eddic poetry that would unfold the layers of the narrative in such a manner.

Referring specifically to New Year's rituals, and the symbolic act of re-creation, Eliade forwards the following:

> [c]ette nécessité d'une régénération périodique nous semble en elle-même assez significative. Les exemples que nous allons proposer à l'instant vont néanmoins nous révéler quelque chose de beaucoup plus important, à savoir qu'une régénération périodique du temps présuppose, sous une forme plus ou moins explicite, et en particulier dans les civilisations historiques, une Création nouvelle, c'est-à-dire une répétition de l'acte cosmogonique. (1949, 85–86)
>
> (This need for a periodic regeneration seems to us of considerable significance in itself. Yet the examples that we shall presently adduce will show us something even more important, namely, that a periodic regeneration of time presupposes, in more or less explicit form—and especially in historical civilizations—a new Creation, that is, a repetition of the cosmogonic act. (1954, 52))

In the modern era, now in the 21st century, New Year's rituals remain and have not been replaced by the encroachment of an eschatological world view. Thus, rather than being solely viewed as a transitional time period, the medieval period may in fact be viewed as laying the foundations for the modern era in the West, which hold

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Christ formed into a straight line; one might even call it an arrow, for, starting with the birth of the Saviour, the centuries following aimed straight at his second coming in the Last Judgement, and the end of the world' (1992, 67).

on to the influence of nature and the cyclical repetition of the days, the months, the seasons, and the years, but which also adopt the arrow of time that leads towards the day of judgement.

The transitory nature of the medieval period is also marked by the prevailing medieval conception of time and history as divided into a number of ages. Eliade writes about the theories of great cosmic cycles that were common in archaic civilizations, and how the archaic and the modern meet in the medieval period:

> parce que c'est là que se précisent pour la première fois deux orientations distinctes: l'une traditionnelle, pressentie (sans avoir été jamais formulée avec limpidité) dans toutes les cultures 'primitives', celle du temps-cyclique, se régénérant périodiquement *ad infinitum* – l'autre, 'moderne', du temps-fini, fragment (quoique cyclique lui aussi) entre deux infinis atemporels. Presque partout ces théories du 'Grand Temps' se rencontrent en compagnie du mythe des âges successifs, l''âge d'or' se trouvant toujours au commencement du cycle, près de *l'illud tempus* paradigmatique. Dans les deux doctrines – celle du temps-cyclique infini et celle du temps-cyclique limité – cet âge d'or est recouvrable; en d'autres termes, il est *répétable*, une infinité de fois dans la première doctrine, une seule fois dans l'autre. (1949, 167–68)

> (it is here that two distinct orientations first define themselves: the one traditional, adumbrated (without ever having been clearly formulated) in all primitive cultures, that of cyclical time, periodically regenerating itself *ad infinitum*; the other modern, that of finite time, a fragment (though itself also cyclical) between atemporal eternities. Almost all these theories of the 'Great Time' are found in conjunction with the myth of successive ages, the 'age of gold' always occurring at the beginning of the cycle, close to the paradigmatic *illud tempus*. In the two doctrines—that of cyclical time, and that of limited cyclical time—this age of gold is recoverable; in other words, it is repeatable, an infinite number of times in the former doctrine, once only in the latter. (1954, 112))

The cyclical model did not give way all at once to the linear model, but the linear model limited the number of repetitions of the great world ages to one single repetition. While there was still the possibility for repetition after the introduction of Christianity, it is a fixed repetition rather than an eternal return.[30]

The above three writers, Ricoeur, Gurevich, and Eliade, all present theories that guide the present work, and their ideas will be brought forth below during the close and contextual reading of *Vafþr*, and in relation to the criticism of prominent scholars in the field of eddic studies. Most importantly it will be the task of the present author to relate the interpretation of the source materials to the constructed theoretical framework, and, in sum, to evaluate the methodological principles employed below. To conclude this opening chapter I will outline my critical position in relation to some important writers in the field of Old Norse-Icelandic scholarship.

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[30] See also Kirsten Hastrup (1985, 66–69) and Gurevich (1969, 42–53).

1.3 Critical Position

The primary topics that I aim to address relate to the critical tradition of eddic studies and primarily concern source value, origins, and narrative temporality.

Eddic poems are preserved in manuscripts from the 13th and 14th centuries in Iceland and later, and it can be said that the scholarly tradition of eddic studies begins with *SnE*, c. 1220.[31] The modern critical tradition can be said to begin when the Icelandic bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson (d. 1675) acquired a manuscript of eddic poems in 1643, which was subsequently sent to Denmark as a gift to King Frederik III in 1662. This is the manuscript that is now referred to as the Codex Regius of eddic poetry, or Konungsbók eddukvæða, and bears the shelf mark GKS 2365 4to (R).

The first printed editions of any complete eddic poems were those prepared by Peder Hansen Resen (1625–88) that accompanied his *Edda Islandorum*, an edition of *SnE* with an accompanying Latin translation that appeared in 1665, shortly after the R manuscript came into the possession of King Frederik III.[32] Prior to this stanzas 31 and 32 of *Vsp* had been printed in the Icelandic original with Latin translations by Stefán Ólafsson in Stephan Stephanius' *Notæ Uberiores*, a thorough commentary on Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* (Lassen 2013, 11–12; cf. Faulkes 1977, 73). In Resen's editions, *Vsp* is presented first in full in Icelandic followed by a complete Latin translation. The *Háv* edition is presented with each stanza first in Icelandic followed by a Latin translation of each stanza. Faulkes writes that although the three works—the *Edda Islandorum*, *Vǫluspá*, and *Hávamál*—were originally published as three seperate editions in 1665 they are most often considered to be part of the same work as in many cases the three editions were bound together (1977, 9). The year 1665 serves as an important date for the beginning of the modern period of critical study of eddic poetry, marking the first appearance of complete eddic poems in print, indicative of their newfound accessibility to a wider audience. Resen's publication, however, only contained two eddic poems in whole, and it was not until over a century after his publication that more eddic poetry became available in print.

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[31] Lassen writes, '[t]he oldest preserved witness to a scholarly reception of *Vǫluspá* actually predates the oldest preserved manuscript containing the entire poem by roughly half a century. This scholarly text is Snorri Sturluson's *Edda*, a handbook on poetry written around 1220' (2013, 3). This scholarly reception also extends by association to *Vafþr* and *Grímn*, two eddic poems also quoted extensively in *SnE*.

[32] Resen based his edition of *SnE* largely on the work of Magnús Ólafsson (Faulkes 1977, 23–73). For an introduction to *Edda Magnúsar Ólafssonar (Laufás Edda)* see Faulkes (1980, 15–32).

Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission published the first edition of the corpus of eddic poetry in three volumes over a number of decades. The first volume appeared in 1787 and included *Vafþr* and the other mythological poems that had not been published in Resen's edition of 1665.[33] The second volume appeared in 1818, comprised of the heroic poems including *Vǫlundarkviða* (*Vkv*), and the third volume in 1828, which presented new editions of *Vsp* and *Háv*, along with *Rígsþula* (*Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda* 1787–1828; cf. Halldór Hermannsson 1920, 1). In all three volumes the Icelandic text is given with a facing Latin translation, stanza by stanza. With *Vafþr* now in print, critique of the poem was made possible for a wider audience, and for that reason the 1787 edition marks the beginning of the modern critical debate that would mature over the course of the 19th and 20th centuries.

To a large extent early critical debates about eddic materials concerned the origins and respective ages of the poems, and this was the case in the period when eddic scholarship was beginning to reach a certain level of maturity. Rudolf Keyser (1803–64) and Sophus Bugge (1833–1907), for example, were in a debate as to the respective ages of the eddic poems in the middle and latter parts of the 19th century. Keyser insisted that the eddic poems originated in the period before the middle of the 9th century while Bugge, on the contrary, dated the poems to the period after the 9th century: '[a]lthough Keyser was referring to the origin of the poetry, and Bugge to the poetry as we have it, "den til os bevarede", I think it is fair to say that for Keyser Eddic poetry *per se* is older than 850 A.D., whereas for Bugge it is, in its totality, younger than that date' (Fidjestøl 1999, 5). By the end of the 19th century, however, the debate had largely given way to the latter opinion. On the age of eddic poetry Bugge wrote the following:

> [a]s to the date of these poems, there is now practical unanimity of opinion. The view held by Keyser and Svend Grundtvig that the Eddic poems arose before the discovery and settlement of Iceland, before the days of Harald Fairhair, and even before the Viking period represented by Ragnar Lothbrók, has been discarded. All Old Norse scholars nowadays agree that no one of the Eddic poems in its present form is older than the end of the ninth century. (1899, 2)

By the end of the 19th century eddic poetry was for the most part regarded as younger than had been thought before, and thus the change from the belief of Keyser that the poems were from the 9th century or earlier gave way to the general acceptance that the poems could not be that old in their extant forms. This shift in

[33] The contents of *Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda* (1787–1828, vol. 1) are as follows: Vafthrudnis-mál, Grimnis-mál, För Skrinis, Harbarz-liód, Hymis-qvida, Ægis-drecka, Thryms-qvida, Hrafna-galdur Odins, Vegtams-qvida, Alvis-mál, Fiölvinns-mál, Hyndlu-liód, and Solar-liód.

perception also carried with it the implication that the eddic sources were subject to more foreign influence than had previously been granted. The dating criteria for these 19th-century scholars were for the most part subjective. For Bugge the criteria stem from the assertion that the poets were working under foreign influence:

> [the poems] were shaped by Scandinavian mythological poets who associated with Christians in the British Isles, especially with the English and the Irish. This is true, for example, of the myths of Baldr and Loki, of the ash Yggdrasil, and of *Ragnarøkkr* (the end of the world). These myths in their extant form were shaped at a time when familiarity with Christian European culture, and with Jewish-Christian and classical mythological conceptions and stories current among western races (especially the English and the Irish) had become widespread among Scandinavians, particularly among Norwegians and Icelanders. Such Old Norse stories of the gods are, to be sure, genuine Scandinavian mythological compositions, but they were shaped under the profound influence of foreign conceptions. (1899, xiv–xv)

While acknowledging that the poems are the product of cultures meeting and foreign influnces exerting themselves upon the sensibilities of the Scandinavian poets, Bugge simultaneously asserts that the poems are genuine Scandinavian mythological works. Ultimately Bugge attributes the works to Norwegian poets working in the British Isles, although, he admits, later poems like *Grípˊ* may have originated in Iceland (xviii). The evidence Bugge forwards is linguistic, focusing on loan words in the eddic poems from English.

Finnur Jónsson (1858–1934), writing for the most part after Bugge, estimates that the date of composition for *Vafþr* lay sometime between c. 900 and c. 925, a period during which, he argues, the poems *Grímn*, *Hárb*, and most of *Háv* also appeared in their extant forms (1894, 65–66). This date is similar to that posed by Bugge. Finnur Jónsson's evidence rests on linguistic grounds, but does not agree with Bugge's theory that the eddic poems necessarily originate from contact with the British Isles. He forwards that in comparison with skaldic poetry, eddic poetry shows a distinct lack of contracted forms that are found in later skaldic poems that can be dated to c. 1100 and later (54–55), which in turn provides his main premise that much of the eddic poetry is therefore younger than the later skaldic poems. Finnur Jónsson writes the following:

> [d]isse i almindelighed holdte betragninger, som imidlertid næppe vil kunne bestrides, viser, at Eddakvadenes alder må falde længere tilbage i tiden end til c. 1100 og derefter. Senere end til midten af det 11. årh. synes grænsen for dem ingenlunde at kunne sættes. Af alt det ovenstående følger altså, at Eddadigtningens tid er c. 850 (875)–c. 1050, hvilket jo passer fortrinligt med hensyn til den för omtalte lighed mellem Eddakvad og skjaldepoesi. (55–56)

The general conclusions that can be drawn as to the prominent view on eddic poetry near to the turn of the 20th century is that most of the poems were Norwegian in

origin and came out of an environment that was influenced by Christianity and the cultures of the British Isles, particularly Celtic culture, and were not considered to be Icelandic in origin.

Jan de Vries (1890–1964), writing almost half a century after Bugge and shortly after Finnur Jónsson, dates *Vafþr* to c. 870–c. 1000, during the period of the settlement of Iceland up to the time of conversion to Christianity. In his historical survey of Old Norse literature, de Vries posits two great periods of mythological eddic composition, the settlement period of Iceland, when the tradition presented in the poetry was still thriving, and later, c. 1150–c. 1200, during a period of renewed interest in the old traditions that had faded with the introduction of Christianity. The reason de Vries dates *Vafþr* to the earlier period is as follows:

> ‘[d]ie vollkommene Kunst dieses Meisterwerkes, das einen wunderbar durchdachten Aufbau zeigt, beweist, daß die *Vafþrúðnismál* den Gipfel einer langen poetischen Tradition bilden. Man hat auch niemals daran gezweifelt, daß es noch der heidnischen Periode angehört. So sichere und eingehende Kenntnisse über mythologische Dinge, die uns überdies—mit nur wenigen Ausnahmen—sonst nirgends überliefert worden sind, wird man nur in einer Zeit des lebenskräftigen Heidentums erwarten können. (1941, 153)

De Vries, furthermore, firmly situates *Vafþr*’s time of composition near to the end of the pagan period, shortly before the arrival of Christianity: ‘die *Vafþrúðnismál* gehören deshalb wohl zu der ersten Hälfte des 10. Jahrhunderts’ (153). If this is considered correct, de Vries’ conclusion implies that the poem survived intact for over three centuries, as the R manuscript dates to c. 1270. Such an intact textual transmission, particularly in oral form, would be a great feat. The critical opinions of Bugge, Finnur Jónsson, and de Vries all posit that *Vafþr* is a product of the pagan period and transmits to modern audiences information that is decidedly pre-Christian, although Bugge allows for Christian and Celtic influence. This critical foundation is important when evaluating later 20th-century scholarship. Interestingly, it is de Vries’ interpretation that lends the greatest possibility for origins in Iceland for the oldest of the eddic poems, whereas Bugge posits origins in the British Isles and Finnur Jónsson in Norway.

There continued to be a difference of opinions as to the origins and source value of eddic poetry in the 20th century. Jón Helgason (1899–1986) expresses this divide in relation to *Vafþr* and *Grímn*:

> Vafþrúðnismál og Grímnismál antages som regel, paa grund af deres rent hedenske indhold og mytologiske kundskabsstof, at stamme fra tiden før kristendommen, og da vistnok snarest det 10. aarh., maaske dets første halvdel. Men afvigende opfattelser findes. Hvad Vafþrúðnismál angaar, er det paa den ene side blevet hævdet, at dette digt sandsynligvis er blevet til allerede omkring 600. Paa den anden side mener vor tids alsidigste kender af oldgermansk digtning, Andreas Heusler, at saavel dette kvad som Grímnismál er digtet i den ældeste kristne tid og at man bør betragte dem som et vidne

> om, at den interesse for at bevare mindet om fædrenes tro, som i Snorres Edda fik sit ypperste udtryk, allerede fandtes hos de første kristne slægtled. (1934, 53)

Jón Helgason points out the great divide as to the age of the mythological poems and this divide as to the source value of the poems is still common to the present day. For the present study, however, there is not much more that can be said about the relative dates for mythological eddic poems, other than Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's (1899–1984) conclusions on the relative dates of the poems based on existing research:

> [a]llur þorri goðakvæðanna virðist vera úr heiðni, en torvelt mun annars að tímasetja mörg þeirra nákvæmlega, og jafnvel afstæð tímasetning ekki alltaf auðveld. Hávamál I, sem virðast eldri en Hávamál II (og III) og IV, eru eldri en svo sem 960 – hve miklu verður ekki sagt. Frá ljósaskiptum kristni og heiðni munu Völuspá (vissulega eldri en 1065) og Lokasenna vera. Líklega er Rígsþula eldri en Völuspá, og Þrymskviða virðist geta verið úr heiðni. Alvíssmál eru yngri en Vafþrúðnismál, en eldri en Þulur; ekkert sýnir, að það sé gamalt kvæði. Mjög er torvelt að tímasetja Hymiskviðu, en það er heldur unglegt kvæði. Hyndluljóð virðast ekki eldri en frá svo sem 1050, en ekki yngri en frá 1200. Völuspá skamma og Grógaldur og Fjölsvinnsmál eru mjög ungleg kvæði, þó frá 12. öld. (1962, 228)

As far as the origins of the content of the eddic poems is concerned any speculation beyond this point is irrelevant to the present study. The mythological poems undoubtedly have origins in the pagan period, but the poems as they are preserved stem from well into the conversion period in Iceland. This results in the source value of the mythological poems being somewhat dubious when in comes to learning about the beliefs in the pagan period in Scandinavia. What can be learned from the poems concerns the retention of pagan narrative in Scandinavia generally and Iceland specifically in the early Christian period and particularly in the 13th century.[34] There is a clear change in focus in eddic scholarship in the 20th century, from trying to estimate or prove the origins of the extant forms of the eddic poems to focusing on what the extant texts from the 13th and 14th centuries reveal. Bjarne Fidjestøl (d. 1994) writes the following in regards to the extant texts: '[a]ll extant Eddic texts are written, fixed texts, and as such their age is identical to that of their manuscripts or to the archetype of the different manuscripts. Beyond the fixed texts the poems probably had a non-fixed prehistory, but this is so to speak another state of aggregation, one of whose fundamental qualities is undatability' (1999, 188).

While acknowledging the importance of exploring the pre-history of the eddic texts, for such an exploration does indeed bring up the reasonable expectation that these texts do reveal something about the past beyond their manuscript ages, as far

[34] For the most current overview of the debate on eddic dating see Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 1:49–55).

as the interpretive method used here, that of formal analysis through close and comparative reading, their extant form is what grounds the texts. The above theories on eddic age and origins serve the purpose of setting the stage for the critical evaluation of more contemporary critics, and the present author's movement from time of origin to narrative time.

On the Old Norse conception of fate and death, Clunies Ross writes that time in Old Norse mythology is essentially linear when the narratives are perceived together. Clunies Ross' conception is a configuration in the same manner as for Ricoeur the plot configures action into a story, and thus the narratives brought together in a configured or assembled mythology configure into a larger narrative.

> The picture that emerges from a comparison of the four eddic poems [*Vsp*, *Vafþr*, and sections of *Fáfn* and *Hyndl*] is one that divides elapsed time into five distinct periods whose transitions are marked by significant events. This is an essentially linear conception of time measured in human terms, though there is the presence of a cyclical element, which is not nearly as articulated as the linear concept. (1994–98, 1:235)

The five periods that she refers to are, firstly, the beginning, which extends backward as far as can be remembered. The second period is that of 'active creativity', during which the world is shaped and, near to the end of the period, humankind created. The third period is termed by Clunies Ross as the 'mythical present', the time during which the æsir, jǫtnar, humans, and other supernatural beings all live together. The major events from this period include the war between the æsir and the vanir, after which the vanir are brought into the divine society of the æsir—Njǫrðr along with his children Freyr and Freyja—and the death of Baldr and its consequences. The mythic present leads up to the inevitable destruction of Ragnarǫk. The fourth period is that of the 'near future', a period during which the consequences of the events that transpired in the 'mythical present' are played out, ending in destruction. The fifth and final period in the Norse mythological linear timeline is that which takes place after Ragnarǫk, or in the distant future. There is a renewal after the fourth period, suggesting the possibility for a cyclical repetition, one that may reflect to Eliade's second type of repetition: a single repetition in which a second golden age is possible. In *Vsp*, for example, the vǫlva recounts the ancient history of the world and the shape of her narrative is, as Clunies Ross argues, suggestive of five phases (i.e. episodes if a configurational model based on Ricoeur is adopted), and the five phases form a cycle with the fifth phase appearing as a reincarnation of the former world, linking it back to the first two phases, the beginning and the period of 'active creativity'. The temporal framework suggested by Clunies Ross (229–42) can be critically evaluated using Ricoeur's theory. The five phases that she outlines are essentially episodes comprised of action that can be assembled into a narrative, and it is the constructing of the plot (in this case made

up from a number of eddic poems) that comprises a narrative whole. Such addition, the bringing together of multiple sources, can be problematic, for the texts do not necessarily agree with one another, nor should they. This objection, however, does not necessarily deter the present author from bringing sources together for comparison, and to a large extent I rely on Clunies Ross' model to carry out the contextual and comparative interpretations. As will now be demonstrated by comparing the above model with a similar framework supplied by Lindow, while the episodic dimension of temporality is more flexible (i.e. the division of the whole into parts), ultimately the configuration remains constant, which suggests that the division of the temporal framework of Old Norse mythology into episodes is somewhat arbitrary, and the configuration, on the other hand is essential and innevitable. Furthermore, the act of assembling a configuration may indicate a human tendency to construe whole narratives out of scattered events, a tendency just as much a part of the modern interpretive process as it was a part of the medieval or ancient myth making and preserving process. A temporal model such as Clunies Ross outlines is in fact just as much a creative interpretation of the source texts as the source texts are themselves of the inherited tradition.

Lindow divides the temporal framework of the Old Norse mythological world into three broad periods. Like Clunies Ross' framework, Lindow's model is essentially linear.

> It is helpful to think of three time periods in which the mythology takes place. In the mythic past, the æsir created and ordered the world and joined with another group, the vanir, to make up the community of gods. Somehow this golden age was disrupted in the mythic present. As dwarfs, humans, and occasionally elves look on and are sometimes drawn into the struggle, the æsir and jötnar fight over resources, precious objects, and, especially, women. The flow of such wealth is all in one direction, from jötnar to æsir, and in fact one might divide the narratives of the mythic present into those in which the gods acquire something from the giants and those in which an attempt by the giants to acquire something from the gods is foiled. In the mythic future, this world order will come to a fiery end as gods and giants destroy each other and the cosmos, but a new world order is to follow in which the world will be reborn and inhabited by a new generation of æsir. (2001, 2)

Lindow's division of the temporal framework into three periods is basically the same as Clunies Ross' division into five periods. Each mythic event can be situated into its precise time period: mythic past, mythic present, or mythic future. The myth represented in *Vafþr*, for example, occurs at some time in the mythic present in which the æsir, represented by Óðinn, acquire something from the jǫtnar, in this case knowledge and the loss of Vafþrúðnir's life. Lindow goes further than a simple division into three periods, however, and further subdivides the mythic past into the 'distant past' and 'near past', and also the mythic future into the 'near future' and the 'distant future'. Thus, like Clunies Ross, Lindow's temporal division is

essentialy that of five periods or epsisodes in the mythological cycle, which, in line with Ricoeur's model of narrative temporality configures into a whole that is both linear and suggestive in the fifth and final period (Lindow's distant future) of a cyclical dimension, as per Eliade's single repetition. Lindow futher subdivides the mythic present, allowing for the placement of events as early, undifferentiated, or late in the period (40–43), which results in an arrangement of temporal relativity for the mythic present. The models of Clunies Ross and Lindow are applied for the purpose of comprehending the temporality of the mythological timeline when the sources are configured together to form a coherent whole, and to bridge the divide between the application of modern theory to medieval texts. With the application of their models the action of *Vafþr* can be placed within a temporal framework that is built up from comparative source material and in turn the action of *Vafþr* can be discussed in relation to other mythical representations.

The Old Norse mythological history is thus divided into episodes or phases in both the mythological sources and the critical sources, and *Vafþr* represents the mythological history in its content, and, importantly, mirrors it in its action. A Ricoeurian analysis thus applies here on two levels. On the first level it can be used to comprehend the critical frameworks that have been forwarded by Clunies Ross and Lindow, as demonstrated, and on the second level the Ricoeurian framework is also applicable to the individual dramatic narrative of the poem itself, and could, furthermore, be applied to any one of the eddic mythological poems for the sake of a formal analysis. The first level, as mentioned above, is problematic, for representations of myths do not necessarily agree with one another, and this work hopes to reach a conclusion about the feasibility of bringing potentially divergent traditions together for the sake of comparsion.

McKinnell discusses *Vafþr* in a close reading that explores the possibility that poets who were more or less contemporary with one another could interpret received naratives differently. McKinnell's work is important to the present study in that he makes an interpretation of 'the received story' of the wisdom debate between two paranormal contestants in Old Norse-Icelandic sources, drawing significant conclusions about the connections between *Vafþr* and *Hgát*, concluding that the pattern of the story that is shared by the two medieval Icelandic texts reflects a widespread pattern that varies from one source to another. This leads to the conclusion that both *Vafþr* and *Hgát* are indpendent manifestations of a traditional story, and therefore it is possible that they are merely two expressions that have survived of a story pattern that may have had many more. McKinnell also introduces 'the logical dilemma' of *Vafþr* from the beginning of the poem where Frigg and Óðinn are engaged in dialogue. Frigg is worried about Óðinn making the journey to see Vafþrúðnir, while Óðinn is confident, and, according to McKinnell, as they are husband and wife the two should be equally and mutually confident in

Óðinn's sure prospect of success on his journey, especially taking into account that it is presumable that Óðinn already knows he will meet his end at Ragnarǫk and not before. Both 'the logical dilemma' and 'the received story' are key aspects of the present interpretation. On the date of *Vafþr*, McKinnell writes that '[a]n overall consideration of the poem's argument makes it look heathen in outlook, but whether that heathenism is real or an imaginative construct by the poet must remain a matter of opinion' (2014b, 154). Thus McKinnell opens the discussion of the story presented in *Vafþr* as a narrative that is a manifestation of an inherited or traditional narrative. This invites a comparative study of the poem, and also provides a good model for analysing the poem with a close reading. Ricoeur's theory of configuration applies here in that when the action of the poem is broken down, as McKinnell does break it down, the result is a configured whole: the inherited story of when Óðinn travels as a disguised guest and faces an adversary. In terms of *Vafþr* it is possible to then situate the action of the poem within the framework supplied by the mythological sources—*SnE* and *Vsp*—and the critical tradition—Clunies Ross and Lindow. When, however, the framework of *Vafþr* is compared with *Hgát* the issue is problematized, for the representation may not actually represent a genuine myth (i.e. of Óðinn going to visit Vafþrúðnir), but rather a framework into which mythological information has been placed. Is *Vafþr* a mould in which mythological material has been added, or, is the poem a representation of a mythological event in the Old Norse mythological cycle? It may be both.[35]

Gunnell's work is essential for a number of reasons to the present study, first of all for the reason that *Vafþr* is a dramatic text in which the characters speak, and there are a number of qualities in the poem that support its once having been performed. Gunnell outlines two distinct groupings of eddic poems.

> a. The epic-dramatic poem in *fornyrðislag* which communicates its narrative solely via poetic means, employing an external omniscient primary narrator who dominates the story, and in some cases steps forward to introduce, conclude and comment on the progress of the narrative to his listening audience, as in *Guðrúnarhvöt*, sts 1 and 21. In these poems, the characters are continuously being described for the audience/reader, especially in the descriptive narrative introductions of the "blended" narrative-speech strophes. [and] b. the dialogic poem, where the physical presence of the narrator as part

[35] Machan refers to *Vafþr* as a 'Norse artifact', stating that like other artifacts the poem has survived for our scrutiny and enjoyment by only 'the slenderest means' (2008, 1). This is true, for the manuscript tradition for *Vafþr*, while rich, is not deep, and he adds that *Vafþr* 'is a poem of certainty' and that its 'most distinctive trait…is that its poet apparently has conviction in what he says. If the poet was aware of a spiritual conflict in the tenth century, there is no indication of this conflict in the story, which renders as fully alive the medieval Scandinavian world that *Völuspá* describes as passing away' (45). Machan, like Finnur Jónsson and de Vries before him, views *Vafþr* as a 10th-century poem, and as having been composed prior to *Vsp*.

> of the poem is more open to discussion. Here, it would seem that rather than being told about a past event, the audience actually witness the action of the poem as it progresses; in short, they are not temporally distanced from the speech of the characters by the presence of the narrator. The lack of the narrator results also in the absence of direct character description and indication of setting and action have to be gleamed from the actual speech of the characters (and the prose interpolations). Obviously this kind of work has a great deal in common with drama.
>
> It might be argued, of course, that the prose passages in the dialogic poems serve to replace the external narrator, and thus remove the essential difference between these two types of poem. This is indeed true, to some degree, in the case of the extant manuscripts. Nonetheless, as the following section will show, it is highly questionable whether the prose passages should be considered an intrinsic part of the poems as they were originally performed in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. (1995, 193–94)

Vafþr is a poem that has a narrator who announces him or herself in the 5th stanza of the poem, but, on the other hand, it does not have any prose passages. Gunnell writes that in poems such as *Vafþr* '[t]his results in the strophe becoming an almost self-reliant, dispensable unit which might be considered to be an addition to the original poem', and that '[t]his certainly applies in the case of *Vafþrúðnismál*, st. 5, which only serves to indicate the transition of time and scene' (190). While wholly agreeing with Gunnell that *Vafþr* is a dramatic text—one of the primary assumptions of the present thesis is that it can be interpreted as drama—I argue that the fifth stanza of the poem cannot be discarded so easily, and the fact that it is a stanza of *ljóðaháttr* strengthens an argument that it cannot be overlooked, as it is incorporated into the metrical structure of the poem and is not merely a prose addition. The poem which follows it in the R manuscript, *Grímn*, does have a prose prologue and and a prose epilogue but no stanzas with narrative direction, and this leads the present author to believe that stanza 5 in *Vafþr* was intentionally placed there to mark the change of scene and is not dispensible, but rather reinforces the importance of the first four stanzas of the poem to the whole.[36]

From the above critical interpretations I argue that there is a need for an interpretation of mythological eddic poetry in terms of each poem being a part of the whole mythological cycle. The grounding for this exploration is in the temporal frameworks forwarded by Clunies Ross and Lindow. This allows for *Vafþr* to be situated within the overarching mythological cycle relative to other mythological events from other mythological texts. This is complicated, however, by McKinnell's theory that the narrative of *Vafþr* may be one manifestation of an inherited tradition, which would problematize the placement of the action of *Vafþr*

[36] McKinnell writes the following: 'Terry Gunnell has revived the idea that some mythological eddic poems should be regarded as drama, and even if we no longer see them as rituals of the prehistoric past, it is worth remembering that eddic and skaldic poetry certainly originated as performed genres rather than as written texts' (2005, 20–21).

into the mythical present as it is possible that as a manifestation of an inherited narrative it may never have been intended to be a part of a mythology. In order to determine whether or not *Vafþr* takes place in the mythical present or is only a hollow frame that has been filled, a close and contextual reading is undertaken that treats the poem as a dramatic narrative that does convey a mythological event.

There is a noticeable gap between the theoretical framework that the author has constructed with the ideas of Ricoeur, Gurevich, and Eliade, and the methodology with which the matieral is handled. The primary difference between the two systems—the theory and the methodology—is that the theoretical framework is what situates the present interpretation within the critical tradition, and as such the theoretical framework is also used to evaluate the critical findings of other scholars. The methodology, on the other hand, is the particular manner that the present author uses to approach the text of *Vafþr* in particular, and to some degree the comparative materials that are brought into the discussion. As such, the methodology is firmly grounded in the tradition of New Criticism, wherein the narrative is analyzed by 'walking' through the text from the beginning to the end, taking note of each detail along the way.

A conclusion may be reached that the poem is in fact an empty vessel that has beeen filled, or the conclusion may emphasize the ambiguity of this problem. Either way the poem is dramatic and treating the text with a narrative analysis is bound to bring forth new interpretations of important issues in eddic sholarship. Importantly, however, when considering the mythological sources together, it should be remembered that they are not always consistent with one another when considering the temporal framework of the Norse mythological cycle, or, for that matter, the spatial framework. Sources can even conflict with one another in their accounts of events and the geography of the cosmos. This limit, however, does not dissuade the present author from drawing parallels across sources, and may in fact comprise the most obvious objection to the present endeavour.

The critical tradition and the present investigation are both under the scrutiny of Ricoeur's narrative time, which is the most important aspect of the theory, and the conclusion reached at the end will determine whether or not the 13th-century text *Vafþr* can tell us in the 21st century something about the society which incorporated it into their manuscript culture, and also comment on why we continue to delve into matters of the past, in this case the prehistoric, mythical past. Why did Christian Icelanders preserve pagan materials? And why do we, now in the secular age, reflect back on Christian interpretations of heathenism? Before exploring the poem with a close and contextual reading (chapters 3 through 6), an overview of the sources and their transmission from the medieval period to the modern day is undertaken, which will fully set the stage for the drama that is *Vafþr*.

2. The Road to Modernity

The textual history of *Vafþr* spans eight centuries, beginning in the 13th century and reaching into the present-day 21st century. The only complete extant medieval version of the poem is contained in the medieval Icelandic manuscript known as the Codex Regius of eddic poetry (GKS 2365 4to; R) from c. 1270, although fragments of the poem are preserved in other medieval manuscripts and the poem has a rich history of preservation in post-medieval paper manuscripts. The latest printed edition of the poem appears in *Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit* from 2014.

The invention of the Gutenberg printing press c. 1450 gave rise to an environment that resulted in an increase of access to printed words. This eventually allowed for more extensive textual transmission of eddic poetry along with other texts. Ample print resources in conjunction with the emergence of digital resources in the modern age—just as much a revolution as the printing press was five centuries ago—has resulted in *Vafþr* being widely available to a 21st-century audience. The present chapter discusses the R manuscript, other medieval manuscripts in which fragments of *Vafþr* are found, some of the post-medieval paper manuscripts in which the poem is found, and, finally, print editions of the poem. All of these taken together are the road to modernity that *Vafþr* has travelled.

Due to the unique and important place that manuscripts hold in the cultural heritage of Iceland and other places in the world there is a long-standing tradition of manuscript studies that focuses on their preservation, interpretation, and the transcription of manuscripts into diplomatic, normalized, and modern editions of the texts found within them. Such manuscript work is closely entwined with literary criticism in that it is alongside work with manuscripts that interpretation of the writing found in manuscripts is made possible, and there is no clear dividing line between the two disciplines, although some scholars may specialize in one area or another and sometimes in both. A primary example of the valuable contribution that manuscript studies continues to make to literary criticism, and indeed a testament to how the two academic disciplines are closely related to one another, is made clear with the diplomatic edition of *Konungsbók eddukvæða = Codex Regius: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi Gl.Kgl.Sml 2365 4to.*[1] This edition includes pictures, a

[1] The introduction to this edition is by Vésteinn Ólason, the text edited by Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson and the images prepared by Leifur Þorsteinsson, with a translation of the introduction provided by Robert Cook. See also *Håndskriftet Nr. 2365 4to g. kgl. Samling*, a diplomatic edition of the R manuscript prepared by F.A. Wimmer and Finnur Jónsson.

diplomatic text with medieval characters, and a modernized version of the text of R, and thus provides access to three versions of the text for the reader, whether they are most interested in an analysis of the manuscript, the diplomatic edition, or the normalized edition of the text, or, as may be the case, all three.

Each medieval manuscript that preserves *Vafþr* in whole or in part does so in a particular context and broadly speaking there are two types of medieval manuscripts that preserve the poem. Firstly, there are two medieval manuscripts that preserve it as an eddic poem among other eddic poems, one whole and one fragmentary, and, secondly, there are three medieval manuscripts that preserve fragments of *Vafþr* within the larger context of *SnE*, with quotations from it appearing in the section of that work referred to as *Gylf*, for which *Vafþr* is one of the principal sources. Along with the preservation of the narratives within them, the surviving medieval manuscripts also preserve a part of the world view of the society from which they emerged, and from them it is possible to learn about what was thought significant enough to preserve in writing from the oral culture that preceded the manuscript age in Iceland. Beyond that it is also critical to interpret the significance of what types of materials were collected together for preservation in manuscripts, and in what order the materials were preserved.

The five medieval manuscripts that preserve *Vafþr* in whole or in part are all parchment manuscripts from the 13th and 14th centuries. There is one additional paper manuscript of *SnE* from the late 16th century that is considered to be a copy of a now lost medieval parchment manuscript (Faulkes 2005, xxviii; cf. Einar G. Pétursson 1992, 19). These six manuscripts, the five made from parchment and the one from paper, are the most important manuscripts when considering the early transmission history of the poem.[2] Only one of the five parchment manuscripts preserves the whole of the poem, the R manuscript, while the A manuscript preserves the final two thirds of the text. The four *SnE* manuscripts preserve some scattered stanzas from the poem. All six manuscripts contain within them mythological narratives and it can be concluded from the outset that *Vafþr* was preserved in the medieval period alongside texts that are mythological, and this

[2] There are a number of 17th-century paper manuscripts that preserve eddic poems and much of *SnE*. These paper manuscripts demonstrate that eddic studies were underway before the widespread distribution of eddic poetry and *SnE* was made possible with printed editions. Even after the emergence of print culture there were copies of printed books being made in paper manuscripts, so while the invention of the printing press was a revolution, manuscript culture continued to persevere, in a similar manner to how in the current age while the digital revolution has, on the one hand, resulted in a decreased reliance on printed editions, on the other hand the print industry continues to publish print editions. For more on the paper manuscript tradition in 17th-century Iceland generally see Einar G. Pétursson (1992, 19–34; 1998).

simple observation about its transmission history, or in fact its origins, is the primary reason why the present work is not only concerned with the poem itself, but also with its mythological context. A study of *Vsp* that is founded on the same principles as the present—close and contextual reading—might take a different course, for while it is preserved in the R manuscript, it is also preserved in the H manuscript: a contextual study of *Vsp* might thus require another set of considerations that take into account the preservation of the poem not only in whole in R, select stanzas and sections in *SnE*, but also within the context of H.

The present chapter will open up the contextual discussion of *Vafþr* by introducing the principal contexts in which the poem or fragments of it are preserved and transmitted: on parchment, on paper, and in print.

2.1 Vellum Manuscripts

Vafþr is found in full in the R manuscript of eddic poetry that is now housed at the Árnastofnun (Árni Magnússon Institute) in Reykjavík, Iceland.[3] The original date for the composition of R is established to be c. 1270, and it is believed to be a copy made from two earlier collections of poetry from c. 1240. It is probable that the two groupings of poems, the eleven mythological poems, including *Vkv*, and the eighteen heroic poems were two separate collections prior to the composition of R that the scribe of the manuscript brought together.[4] The manuscript itself is made up

[3] On the transmission history of the R manuscript, Jónas Kristjánsson (1993a) writes, 'Brynjólfur Sveinsson Skálholtsbiskup eignaðist bókina árið 1643, en nítján árum síðar sendi hann hana Friðriki þriðja Danakonungi ásamt fleiri merkum íslenskum fornbókum. Heitið Konungsbók – á latínu *Codex Regius* – hefur hún hlotið af langri vist sinni í safni Danakonunga. Heim til Íslands kom hún aftur vorið 1971, ásamt sagnabókinni miklu Flateyjarbók, þegar Danir hófu að skila íslensku handritunum frá Kaupmannahöfn' (1993a, 23) ('[n]othing is known with certainty about the history of the *Codex Regius* before it came into the possession of Bishop Brynjólfur Sveinsson of Skálholt in 1643. Nineteen years later, in 1662, he sent it, together with other important Icelandic manuscripts, to King Frederick III of Denmark. The designation *Codex Regius* ("King's Codex") refers to its long stay in the keeping of the Danish royal library. It was returned to Iceland in 1971, together with the great saga manuscript *Flateyjarbók*, in the first delivery of Icelandic manuscripts from Copenhagen' (1993b, 23)).

[4] Lindblad asserts that R is a copy made around 1270 from two earlier collections of poetry (1954, 257). Vésteinn Ólason writes that Lindblad was able to deduce that 'these two collections of poems could be dated around or after 1240, and that behind them could be detected traces of earlier copies, none of which, however, on the evidence of the handwriting features, was earlier than 1200' (2001, lix). Dronke writes that '[t]he scribe of the Codex Regius may himself have copied from the two independent collections or he may have followed an exemplar in which the two collections had already been brought together. The clarity with which the distinctive scribal features of the two groups emerge in the Codex Regius would seem to exclude the possibility of more than one intermediary between the two independent collections and the extant Codex' (1969, xii). All three writers, Lindblad,

of 45 leaves (or folios) in 6 gatherings (or quires). The first 5 gatherings have 8 leaves each, and the final gathering has 5 leaves. One whole gathering (i.e. 8 leaves) has been lost from the middle of the volume, resulting in a gap between leaves 32 and 33, where the missing gathering would have been (Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 1:19). *Vafþr* is the third poem in the manuscript that contains twenty-nine poems in total in its present form, but may have contained an additional one or two poems before the missing gathering was lost.[5] There are a number of hypotheses about the production and preservation of R, and a number of scholars seem to think it was produced at the Þingeyrar monestary in northwestern Iceland.[6]

R is the largest medieval collection of eddic poetry that survives and the position of *Vafþr* as the third poem in the manuscript is significant. The texts that precede it are *Vsp* and *Háv* and the text that follows it is *Grímn*. Together these four poems, along with *Hárb*, the sixth poem in R, comprise a group of poems that centre around Óðinn and convey his association with wisdom. It is in *Vafþr* that Óðinn arguably faces his greatest challenge in regards to knowledge, for he must face off with a powerful jǫtunn in a wisdom contest, even though his victory is perhaps a sure thing and Óðinn actually initiates the contest. In *Vsp* Óðinn receives knowledge, in both *Háv* and *Grímn* he expounds his knowledge, and in *Hárb* Óðinn engages in a contest of insults or flyting with Þórr, and both contestants must draw on their wit. Along with these five Odinic poems near to the front of R, the other mythological eddic poems in the manuscript are the primary contextual frame for the interpretation of *Vafþr*.[7]

The first of the five Óðinn poems is *Vsp* and it is perhaps the most prominent of all the eddic poems along with *Háv*. The speaker in the poem, a vǫlva or seeress, recounts the past, provides details about the present, and forecasts the impending

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Vésteinn Ólason, and Dronke agree that the extant manuscript dates to c. 1270.

[5] Scholars have speculated on what may have constituted the lacuna in R, among them Heusler (1902), Andersson (1981 and 1986), and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1962). All three agree that there was most likely a poem titled **Sigurðarkviða in meiri* in the lacuna, due to the fact that later in the collection there is a poem titled *Sigurðarkviða in skamma*. Possible sources for the content of **Sigurðarkviða in meiri* include *Gríp* and *Vǫls* (Vésteinn Ólason 2001, xxv–xxvi and lvi–lvii). Andersson suggests that the contents were for the most part filled with **Sigurðarkviða in meiri*, and that the poem had an analagous role to *Atlamál*, which expands upon its source material, i.e. *Atlakviða*, with the use of dreams, prophecies, and dialogue (1981, 25). See also Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir (2012, 288–89).

[6] See Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 1:19) and Lassen (2011, 309n4).

[7] The 18 heroic poems that follow the mythological collection in R are by no means unimportant when conducting a study of *Vafþr*, and they will be consulted when most appropriate, particularly *Fáfn*, but the subject must be limited, if only artificially, so that the mythological context of Old Norse-Icelandic literature can be applied most effectively to the poem in the present study.

future of the mythological cosmos in the form of a monologue directed at Óðinn, who according to the vǫlva has come to her asking for this information, possibly calling on her to rise from the world of the dead. *Vsp* is often considered to be the primary eddic source for the overarching thematic narrative of the history of Old Norse mythology (i.e. the configured narrative), and is referenced frequently when it comes to the cosmogonic and eschatologic subject matter of Old Norse mythology.[8] There is a clear timeline of mythological events presented in the poem, beginning with the vǫlva's earliest memories (stanzas 1–2), the creation of the world and humankind (stanzas 3–20), including the *dvergatal* or enumeration of the dwarves. The war between the æsir and the vanir is narrated (stanzas 21–26), and events of the mythic present, made up of the events that lead up to the death of Baldr (stanzas 27–32) follow. After the death of Baldr the narrative moves towards the impending Ragnarǫk (stanzas 33–44) and then to the events of Ragnarǫk (stanzas 45–56). After Ragnarǫk there is a rebirth of the world and a small number of the æsir survive (stanzas 57–63). *Vsp* and *Vafþr* share a wealth of subject matter in common, as both are poems with a great amount of information about the cosmos. There are pieces of mythological information in both of the poems that are not shared, however, and, importantly, *Vafþr* is a dramatic poem with three speaking characters across two acts, while *Vsp* is an epic monologue that is continuous, with Óðinn's presence only alluded to by the vǫlva. Most importantly, however, both poems share the structure of the mythological timeline in terms of past, present, future, and then rebirth after Ragnarǫk, but it can be said without a doubt that *Vsp* places more emphasis on Ragnarǫk, and is on the whole more filled with doom.[9] At the end of the poem the gloomy undertone is replaced with hope, however, and there is a description of the world after Ragnarǫk and the æsir who survive are named. Any reading of *Vafþr* begs for comparison with *Vsp*, and such will be the case below.[10]

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[8] *Vsp* is only matched by *Gylf* in its coverage of Norse cosmogony and cosmology and in fact *Gylf* is largely based on *Vsp*, citing in whole or in part, and in this order, stanzas 3, 51, 5, 39–40, 9–10, 11–13, 15–16, 28, 19, 62, 25–26, 44, 45–55 and 37–38. See *Snorri Sturluson: Edda* (vol. 1) for *Gylf* and *Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit* (vol. 1) for *Vsp* R.

[9] Martin, in his study of Ragnarǫk, isolates two primary eschatological themes important to the final battle between the æsir and jǫtnar: '[t]he battle of the gods was seen to be most probably of indigenous origin, although there may have been some Irish influence on the synthesis of various independent encounters into one great *ragnarǫk*, and some Christian influence on the delineation of the conflict. If we take into account the mythological function of these gods and the close connection of some of them with fertility, it seems natural to conceive this battle as arising from the divine struggle for reinvigoration. The second principal theme is the death and resurrection of Baldr' (1972, 139). Both of these eschatological themes are considered below.

[10] As mentioned above, *Vsp* survives in two distinct versions, the R version and the H version. There are a number of important differences between the R and H versions of the

Háv is the second poem in R, and is thought to have originally been a collection of a number of poems—three, four, five, or even six in number, depending on the interpretation—that were placed together by a compiler, rather than a single composition as it is presented in the manuscript (McKinnell 2014a, 59–96). In the poem Óðinn speaks in a monologue during which he passes on moral and ethical wisdom (stanzas 1–79), details his encounter with *Billings mær* (stanzas 95–102) and his encounter with Gunnlǫð (stanzas 103–10), speaks to Lóddfáfnir (stanzas 111–37), lists the runes (stanzas 138–45), and, finally, the magic spells he has learned and learned to create as a result of his knowledge of the runes and an act of self-sacrifice (stanzas 146–63). The information that is transmitted in *Háv* is not mythological, other than the two stories Óðinn presents (stanzas 95–110) and the account of his self-sacrifice (138–40), as it is in *Vsp*, but of a more practical nature. After the first two poems of R the audience is well aware of the nature and breadth of wisdom that Óðinn controls, or of which he is at least aware. Even though the áss was, for example, unsuccessful in his attempt to seduce *Billings mær*, in *Háv* he still portrays himself, assuming he is the speaker, as a powerful and paranormal figure. Lassen forwards an interpretation that Óðinn's lack of adherence to his own advice in narratives in which he acts is a result of the medieval interpretation of the heathen Odinic figure. For instance, '*Hávamál*s Odin er på den ene side en snusfornuftig rådgiver, men han hengiver sig på den anden side til skørlevned og drukkenskab. Den hedenske moralist Odin afsløres således i digtets jegfortællende ekskurser. Her ser vi sandsynligvis et eksempel på middelalderens negative opfattelse af den hedenske Odin' (2011, 348). Even though Óðinn is not able to follow his own advice completely in *Háv*, it is of interest to what degree the advice that is given in the first section of the poem (stanzas 1–79) is applicable to the characters of *Vafþr*.

The first dialogic poem in R is *Vafþr*, and it is also the first dramatic poem.[11] The main part of the poem has Óðinn test the knowledge of Vafþrúðnir, and indeed his own, but it begins with a four stanza dialogue between Óðinn and his wife Frigg. In that short scene Óðinn states that he intends to go and visit Vafþrúðnir and Frigg replies that she would rather have him stay at home, in Ásgarðr. Óðinn, however, full of confidence and curiosity must make the journey to Vafþrúðnir's hall. The discussion is settled with Óðinn embarking on his journey and Frigg

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poem: '[m]ikilvægasti munur textanna er að í H er ekki neitt um fyrri fund völvunnar og Óðins né dauða Baldurs, en hinn bundni Loki skýtur þó upp kolli, án aðdraganda' (Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 1:125).

[11] Gunnell (1995) focuses his study of early Scandinavian drama on the dialogic poems in *ljóðaháttr*: *Skírn*, *Hárb*, *Vafþr*, *Lok*, and *Fáfn*, the five eddic poems that most clearly lend themselves to dramatic performance.

wishing him good luck while he is gone. In the fifth stanza of the poem the narrator explicitly reveals him or herself to the audience: otherwise silent, they state that Óðinn travels to the hall of Vafþrúðnir, arrives there and enters. Stanzas 6 through 10 are comprised of the áss and the jǫtunn greeting one another, during which Óðinn introduces himself as Gagnráðr, and Vafþrúðnir sets the stakes of the contest. It is significant that Óðinn appears at the jǫtunn's hall in disguise, as he does in many other appearances he makes in the corpus of Old Norse-Icelandic mythological and legendary sources. His ability to disguise is crucial to his ability to even participate in these contests, without which his challenge would not be accepted as his true identity would be known. Óðinn's ability to trick others is instrumental to his successes and plays no small part in his victory over Vafþrúðnir.

The next sequence of narrative is the opening of the wisdom contest between the two main characters in the poem, Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir. This is where Vafþrúðnir tests his visitor to determine if Gagnráðr is sufficiently wise to in turn be the one asking the questions. The four questions that the jǫtunn asks the áss all revolve around the configuration of the cosmos, including the origins of the day and the night, the river that runs between the land of the æsir and the land of the jǫtnar, and the field where the æsir and Surtr will battle at Ragnarǫk. Óðinn answers the questions successfully, and the roles are now reversed, Gagnráðr, Óðinn in disguise, in turn questions Vafþrúðnir, and this section of the poem comprises the wisdom contest proper. Óðinn's questions are similar to those posed by Vafþrúðnir, for the most part concerning the cosmos and its origins, including the origins of the earth and the sky, the moon and the sun, the day and the night, winter and summer, the æsir and the jǫtnar, Vafþrúðnir's earliest memory, the origins of the wind, and questions about Njǫrðr, the einherjar, and of the origins of Vafþrúðnir's wisdom. These questions, which are concerned with the mythological past and to some extent the mythological present, comprise the contents of the knowledge Óðinn first tests Vafþrúðnir on. It is in the final round of questioning that the contents of the contest move towards the future, although the future is indeed alluded to with the question concerning the einherjar, who all train in Valhǫll in preparation for the future. Óðinn begins the final round of questions by asking about the humans that will survive Ragnarǫk, then the fate of the sun and who will succeed her, three maidens who will appear when the world is reborn, which æsir will survive Ragnarǫk, and then Óðinn asks of his own fate. Once the jǫtunn has replied that Óðinn will succumb to Fenrir and die at Ragnarǫk, Óðinn sets up the final and decisive question. Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir what it is that Óðinn said into the ear of his dead son at his funeral. Vafþrúðnir says that no man knows the answer to this thing that happened in the past. Vafþrúðnir's response signals to the audience that the wisdom contest is taking place after Baldr's death in the mythological timeline, if the mythological texts are read together. The jǫtunn admits that he is doomed and

acknowledges that he has been contending with Óðinn in wisdom, and that Óðinn is the wisest of beings. With this the contest ends, Óðinn has unmasked himself and is victorious and Vafþrúðnir will lose his life. For the jǫtunn it is the end of the line, and it is assumed that his death follows the end of the poem, taking place offstage.

After the text of *Vafþr* there is another poem that features Óðinn, the fourth such poem in the Odinic sequence in the manuscript, *Grímn*. In this poem, as in *Vafþr*, Óðinn travels away from Ásgarðr and engages in an activity that concerns knowledge, but rather than a contest in knowledge it is a monologue, similar to *Vsp* and especially *Háv*. The poem is framed by a prose passage that has, as in the first verses of *Vafþr*, Frigg and Óðinn engaged in a dialogue. Their conversation results in Óðinn travelling to the court of King Geirrǫðr, a human character. As in *Vafþr*, Óðinn travels away from Ásgarðr and from Frigg, but rather than going in order to test the knowledge of a paranormal being, Óðinn intercedes in the lives of humans, which ultimately results in Geirrǫðr's death and the king's son Agnarr's ascension to the throne. *Vafþr* and *Grímn* form a natural pair, juxtaposed in the manuscript and both dealing with knowledge of the cosmos, and, as Larrington writes, '[a]lthough at one level both poems appear to consist of a multitude of randomly assembled mythological facts, at another level the facts work together to produce further, often subtextual meanings which could be described as "ideological"' (2002, 63).

Skírn is the fifth poem in R and is another dialogic poem, like *Vafþr*, but contains twice as many speaking characters, with six in total: Skaði, Skírnir, Freyr, a shepherd, the giantess Gerðr, and her servant girl. A large portion of the poem is a speech made by Skírnir directed at Gerðr with the intention of convincing the giantess that she should accept Freyr's marriage proposal (stanzas 25–36). Óðinn does not appear in this poem, but in order to convince his messenger Skírnir to help him, Freyr must give away his sword as payment for his services. Freyr's loss of his sword will be significant when the æsir meet the jǫtnar in battle at Ragnarǫk, and Freyr, indeed, is killed by Surtr at the battle. *Skírn* is a love poem, and while Freyr is present at the beginning and end of the poem, the action largely takes place in jǫtunheimr, and in this way the pattern of the narrative that begins in Ásgarðr, then moves to jǫtunheimr, and finally returns to Ásgarðr is shared between *Vafþr* and *Skírn*, although in *Vafþr* Óðinn does not return to Ásgarðr within the narrative, but rather by implication. Like *Vsp* and *Vafþr* before it, *Skírn* foreshadows Ragnarǫk, particularly through the loss of Freyr's sword, an important weapon, and also through the successful proposal to Gerðr on Freyr's behalf, which, like many other events that occur in the mythological present, demonstrates the success of the æsir in their interactions with the jǫtnar, and in this case the æsir take a female jǫtunn.

Skírn, like *Grímn*, opens with a prose frame that is set at Hliðskjálf, the high seat of Óðinn, but rather than Óðinn and his wife Frigg sitting on it, it is Freyr.[12]

The sixth poem in R does not set the æsir against the jǫtnar or foreshadow such an engagement, but rather has Óðinn facing off against Þórr, who is returning from the East. In the poem *Hárb*, Óðinn and Þórr engage in a dialogue in which Óðinn conceals his identity as he does in *Vafþr* and *Grímn*, going under the name Hárbarðr, and as in the other poems Óðinn comes out on top of the situation. Þórr does not uncover his father's identity in the exchange, but Óðinn does not have any evil intentions towards Þórr and in the end settles for making a fool out of him. *Hárb* marks the transition from poems that focus on Óðinn, excluding *Skírn*, to those that focus on Þórr, and this transition is marked by the two figures meeting on opposite sides of a sound, assuming their characteristic roles. While there is no open hostility between æsir and jǫtnar in this poem, it is, as mentioned, stated in the prose introduction to the poem that Þórr is returning from the East, where he has surely been killing jǫtnar. Gurevich writes the following about this poem:

> Harbard openly mocks the simple and none-too-clever Thor, who is dressed like a tramp and who has stuffed himself with herring and oatmeal. Each boasts of his exploits: Thor, who is returning from the country of the giants, of his victories over the enemies of the Æsir and of men; Harbard, of his conquests in love and of his successes in setting princes against one another. (1992, 160)

The poem is light-hearted in tone, and as in *Vafþr* Óðinn demonstrates his great skill to the audience by concealing his identity.[13]

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[12] Magnus Olsen forwards an interpretation of *Skírn* that contends Skírnir is an extension of Freyr: 'Skírnismál er et av minderne om, at Frøi er en gammel gud for himmellyset og for jordens frugtbarhet. Hans tjener Skirne, hvis navn betyder "den straalende", er kun en personifikation av én enkelt av gudens egenskaper; ti Frøi selv kaldes i et andet Edda-digt *skírr* "straalende"' (1909, 20). The poem in which Freyr is referred to as the shining one is *Grímn* 43.5: 'skírum Frey' (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*). Olsen's interpretation supports Freyr's role as a fertility deity, as the shining sun plays an important role in agriculture. Turville-Petre expands Olsen's interpretation and adds that 'Gerð (*Gerðr*), whose name is related to *garðr* (field), personifies the cornfield, held fast in the clutches of winter, i.e. of the frost-giants, among whom is counted *Hrímgrímnir* (Frost-masked). The god and his bride are to meet in the grove Barri. This name, it is said, derives from *barr* (barley)' (1964, 174). See also von See et al. (1997, 45–151) and Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 1:185–200).

[13] Clover writes the following on how the two characters in *Hárb* match up in relation to the genre conventions: '[q]uips and insults form a minor genre in Norse, and the ability to improvise them—or anything else—was by all accounts a highly prized skill. This is Hárbarðr's great advantage: he is able to adjust and react spontaneously to whatever formulations Þórr may utter, whereas Þórr is entirely dependent for his material on the mechanical formulas of a tradition he has not quite mastered. On the verbal as well as the structural level, Þórr plays off the convention, while Hárbarðr plays off Þórr' (1979, 137).

Hym, the seventh poem in R, features Þórr along with Týr making a journey to the home of the jǫtunn Hymir.[14] Once Þórr arrives at Hymir's home the áss and the jǫtunn go fishing and Þórr catches the Miðgarðs ormr in a struggle that is a prelude to Ragnarǫk, where the two will meet again. Hymir cuts Þórr's fishing line, however, and the serpent descends back into the deep sea. On his journey to Hymir's home Þórr retrieves a large cauldron that Ægir requires to brew ale for a feast that he intends to have for the æsir. *Hym* is situated directly after *Hárb*, in which Þórr has returned from a journey to the East, and directly before *Lok*, which at its beginning finds Þórr also in the East. In almost all of the narratives that involve Þórr in R there is a travel to and/or from the East. In *Vafþr* it is not known where the hall of Vafþrúðnir is located, but seeing as he is a jǫtunn, and in the poems of R that involve Þórr interacting with the jǫtnar, at least, it is most often in the East, the possibility that Óðinn travels to the East to meet Vafþrúðnir is probable. In relation to Ásgarðr, without a doubt, Vafþrúðnir's home is on the periphery of the Norse cosmos, as is Hymir's in *Hym*.[15]

The eighth poem in R is *Lok*, a poem that features nearly all of the æsir, Óðinn included, but is best known as the foremost Loki poem in the eddic corpus, although near the end of the poem Þórr comes into the hall of Ægir, where the æsir are gathered, and uses his force to make Loki leave. What is striking in *Lok* is the control that Loki is able to exert over Óðinn, his blood-brother. Óðinn is incapable

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See also von See et al. (1997, 153–252) and Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 1:201–8).

[14] It is perhaps not entirely clear which áss accompanies Þórr on his journey to the home of Hymir. *Edda. Die lieder des codex regius* has Týr as the god that accompanies Þórr, and so do *Eddukvæði*, *Poetic Edda*, Simek (1993, 167), and *Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*. Orchard has taken issue with this interpretation, however, and he writes that '[o]ther translations and interpretations [i.e. those cited above, and others] have assumed that in *Hym* Thor is accompanied by Týr, and that Hymir is Týr's father, although there is no evidence for either identification. The word *týr* does indeed occur in stanza 4, but while it may signify the god's name, it can also simply mean "god" and, given the allusive nature of the language of *Hym* as a whole, one might find the latter more likely' (2011, 293). Orchard continues, after providing some information about stanza 4, writing that 'the god who is described elsewhere as possessing cunning, offering advice, having a giant for a father, accompanying Thor on expeditions to the Giants' Domain, and being present when Egil was forced to offer Thor his children is Loki' (293). Marteinn H. Sigurðsson argues that '*Hymiskviða* employs the common noun *týr* twice in plural, in stanzas 1 (*valtívar*) and 4 (*mærir tívar*). The same word occurs *only twice* in the singular, in stanzas 4 and 33, where it is assumed to be a proper noun, but the word is primarily a poetic term meaning 'god' in Old Norse literature and considerations of alliteration might very well have determined its use in both stanzas. The appellative sense in both cases yields less nonsense and more sense than the proper noun Týr, and I propose *týr* = Loki in stanza 4 and *týr* = Þórr (or Loki, perhaps) in stanza 33, which means that the one-handed Týr plays no part in *Hymiskviða*' (2005, 206–7).

[15] See von See et al. (1997, 253–361) and Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 1:209–22).

of defending the æsir from Loki's foul mouth, and the áss himself succumbs to a verbal attack made on him by Loki. It is as if Loki has Óðinn in a bind, possibly based on their shared history together. It is only Þórr who is able to get Loki to leave the feast by using his physical strength and intimidation to scare the accuser away. In stark contrast to the verbal duel between Óðinn and Þórr in *Hárb* where Óðinn is able to manipulate Þórr, when Loki is concerned Óðinn is powerless and Þórr is effective.[16] The thematic emphasis on the coming of Ragnarǫk is made explicit in the prose epilogue to *Lok* where, after Loki has run away from Ægir's feast by having been scared away by Þórr, the æsir catch and bind him. Loki eventually breaks free from his bonds and joins the jǫtnar in the battle to end all battles.[17]

The ninth poem is *Þrym*, the fourth poem that features Þórr in a leading role, after *Hárb*, *Hym*, and *Lok*, and in this poem, contrary to *Lok*, Loki is a friend of the æsir and accompanies Þórr on his journey to jǫtunheimr. Þrymr has stolen Þórr's hammer and demands the hand of Freyja in marriage, which leads to Þórr dressing up as Freyja to retrieve the hammer. Along with *Hárb*, these two poems are perhaps the most comical, both at the expense of Þórr, but in *Þrym* it is Þórr who conceals his identity as he is dressed up as a woman, which is the primary comic element. The most masculine of the gods is feminized. The four poems that feature Þórr in a leading role all make reference, albeit to different degrees, to the struggle between the æsir and the jǫtnar. What is articulated through the wisdom debate between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir in *Vafþr*, the imminence of the conflict that will find its culmination at Ragnarǫk, is illustrated at length in Þórr's endeavours to protect the æsir. In the mythic present the æsir get the better of the jǫtnar at each turn.[18]

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[16] Clover does not necessarily agree that Þórr's success in *Lok* result from his abilities: 'Loki-Þórr thus duplicates the relation Hárbarðr-Þórr. Loki insults, curses, cajoles, and ironizes, whereas Þórr only threatens and boasts. Loki's formulations are flexible and multitoned; Þórr's are rigid. Loki improvises; Þórr relies on formulas. Þórr is, of course, not the only loser in *Lokasenna*; he is preceded by fifteen speakers who have also been verbally worsted by Loki. But his performance is nonetheless uniquely stupid in the poem. Loki's other opponents may be ineffective against him, but they are, with the exception of Byggvir, by no means without forensic talent, and one senses no major intellectual discrepancy. Þórr alone, standing in final position, is ridiculously inept, and a large part of the poem's irony rests on the fact that a specifically verbal form is finally "won" by the most inarticulate participant, if only by virtue of his looming presence' (1979, 138). Þórr's ability to eject Loki from the gathering in Clover's opinion is a hollow victory, at best.

[17] See von See et al. (1997, 364–507), Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 1:222–38), Bonnetain (2006, 162–69), Ármann Jakobsson (2006 and 2009b), and Marteinn H. Sigurðsson (2006).

[18] See von See et al. (1997, 509–75) and Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 1:238–45).

The tenth poem in the R maunscript is *Vkv*, which, although not a strictly mythological poem, as it does not feature any of the æsir, is most often included in the mythological corpus for the reason that in the manuscript it is grouped among the mythological poems.[19] It is about a man, or an elf, named Vǫlundr, who besides being a gifted smith, towards the end of the poem demonstrates his possession of magic by making wings that enable him to fly. In the first part of the poem there are also swan maidens who are able to fly, and together the ability to fly by both male and female characters, which is indeed central to the story, may be a reason why this poem is included among the mythological poems of R.[20] In *Þrym*, for instance, Loki borrows Freyja's wings to be able to fly to the home of Þrymr in jǫtunheimr, and thus the ability for characters to fly appears in these two poems, which are side-by-side in the R manuscript.

The eleventh and final mythological poem in R is *Alv*, a poem that features the dwarf Alvíss and Þórr in a battle of wits that is similar to the one between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir in *Vafþr*. Like *Vafþr* it is a dialogic poem that focuses on knowledge, and at the end Þórr prevails. The manner in which the two æsir—Óðinn and Þórr—go about their victories over the other, paranormal creatures is quite different, however. While Óðinn must be sufficiently wise to engage in the contest with Vafþrúðnir, Þórr must only know what types of questions to ask the dwarf Alvíss, who does not die as a result of his lack of knowledge, as does Vafþrúðnir, but presumably dies due to his exposure to sunlight, as Þórr was able to keep the

[19] *Vkv* eludes definition as either a mythological or a heroic poem. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson writes, '[á] þjóðveldistímanum hefur verið gert safn eddukvæða, sem nær yfir allan þorra goðakvæða, Völundarkviða, Helgakviðurnar þrjár og kvæði um Sigurð, Gjúkunga og Jörmunrek' (1962, 179). Einar Ólafur Sveinsson suggests that the earliest collection of eddic poetry, a prototype of R, contained 10 mythological poems, *Vkv*, the three Helgi poems and the poems about Sigurðr, the Gjúkungar, and Jǫrmunrekr. The implication is that *Vkv* does not fit neatly into the mythological category nor into the collection of heroic poetry. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson states further, while listing the mythological poems of R, that '[n]æst kemur Völundarkviða, sem alla tíð hefur verið talin til hetjukvæða' (181). Contrary to Einar Ólafur Sveinsson's interpretation is that of Lindblad who writes, '[a]v särskild vikt är konstaterandet, att Vkv:s skrift och ortografi icke gör sannolikt, att den tidigare varit ansluten till hjältedikterne' (1954, 261). Lindblad continues (in the English summary): '[o]f great interest is also the observation that the Vǫlundarkviða with regard to writing and spelling, on the whole, is closer to the lays of the gods than to the heroic lays, which makes it less likely that the song was earlier combined with the heroic lays' (326). Lindblad's primary point is not that *Vkv* is a mythological poem but that it is not one of the heroic poems when the orthography and paleography of the R manuscript are considered in depth. See also Vésteinn Ólason (2006, 16), von See et al. (2000, 77–265), and Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 1:246–57).

[20] In *Lok* it is stated in the prose introduction to the poem that elves are present along with the æsir at the hall of Ægir. The inclusion of the elves at the gathering demonstrates that there is an association between the elves and the æsir that lends itself to interpreting the inclusion of *Vkv* among the mythological material in R as logical. See Hall (2007, 34–53).

dwarf talking until after the break of day. When read together the mythological events that are depicted in the mythological poems of R demonstrate that the æsir get the better of their opponents, whether the opponents are giants, dwarves, or even humans.[21] The 10 mythological poems, when *Vkv* is excluded, can all be said to take place within the mythical present, and as such the flow of goods is towards the æsir.

Following the mythological poems in the R manuscript are the heroic poems that most prominently feature the human heroes of the Vǫlsung dynasty and their legendary contemporaries, with particular narrative attention given to Helgi Hundingsbani, Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, Brynhildr Buðladóttir, and Guðrún Gjúkadóttir. There is an obvious connection between the mythological and the heroic poems in the manuscript, for Óðinn, arguably the áss who is most prominently featured among the mythological poems, also appears among the heroic poems, intervening in the action of various narratives, and for that matter the Vǫlsungar all descend from Óðinn.[22] As the patriarch of the legendary line, he also makes the greatest number of interventions into the lives of the human heroes, who, although human, are superior to common humans and possess some paranormal abilities. *Fáfn* is a particularly important poem from the heroic cycle in relation to *Vafþr*, for in it there is a wisdom dialogue between Sigurðr and Fáfnir that is similar to the dialogue between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir in that the protagonist arrives at the abode of the paranormal other, engages in a wisdom dialogue, and the paranormal other is killed by the protagonist. Sigurðr kills Fáfnir immediately while Óðinn kills Vafþrúðnir after some delay, and therefore the two acts of killing are inverted in relation to one another.

Vafþr is only one poem of many in the R manuscript of eddic poetry that, as noted, contains both mythological and heroic poems, and some conclusions must be drawn about the place of the poem in its mythological context in the manuscript, as it is important to understand the whole to understand its parts. The fact that the compiler of the manuscript brought together mythological and heroic eddic poems may seem illogical to a modern interpreter, but it still stands that the compiler did find it appropriate. Therefore *Vafþr* can most logically be read in context with the other mythological poems, outlined above, and to some degree in relation to the

[21] See von See et al. (2000, 267–375) and Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (2014, 1:258–64).

[22] In *Vǫls* Óðinn is said to have a son named Sigi, who had a son named Rerirr, who in turn had a son named Vǫlsungr. Not only is Óðinn the father of Sigi but Óðinn also aids Rerirr and his wife in the conception of Vǫlsungr by providing an apple that boosts their fertility. *Vǫls* is inextrcably linked with the heroic poems of R, and the saga is instrumental in reconstructing the lost pages of the lacuna.

compilation as a whole, including the heroic poems, as must then be the case for each poem. In regards to the configurative act of bringing together the individual narratives of Old Norse mythology, it is most important to introduce all of the medieval materials that are mythological in nature. Thus, for the purpose of the present work rather than introducing the heroic poems of R, it is more fitting to explore other preserved fragments of *Vafþr* in parchment manuscripts, before moving on to the paper manuscript tradition.

The A manuscript dates from c. 1300 and it preserves the texts of five eddic poems that are also found in R, three of which are incomplete in A, as well as the only medieval text of the eddic poem *Bald*. The A manuscript is twenty-eight leaves in length in four gatherings. The first gathering, six leaves, features eddic poems that are closely related to the texts preserved in R.[23] The first text in the manuscript is an incomplete version of *Hárb*, beginning at stanza 19 line 7 and continuing to the end of the poem at stanza 60. The next poem is *Bald*, an important eddic poem that is not preserved elsewhere in any medieval manuscript.[24] It is also a poem that features Óðinn in a knowledge-seeking role, particularly like *Vsp* and not unlike *Vafþr*. After Baldr has awoken from troubling dreams the æsir decide that Óðinn will travel to Hel to inquire about the meaning of the dreams, and, as in *Vsp* and *Vafþr*, Óðinn learns information about the future. Óðinn also learns about the imminent death of Baldr, an event that will have dire consequences for the æsir. The event of Baldr's death takes place before the action of *Vafþr* when the sources are configured together, or, using the framework of Lindow (2001), in the early mythic present, for it is said in *Vafþr* that Baldr's funeral took place in the past (stanza 55). Like Vafþrúðnir, the character that Óðinn is speaking to in *Bald* unmasks the áss near to the end of the poem. Following *Bald* in A is a partial version of *Skírn*, containing stanzas 1 through 27, but the remainder of the poem is

[23] Wessén writes the following: 'AM 748 I now consists of 28 leaves in all. They are distributed over four gatherings. The first gathering (leaves 1–6) now contains 6 leaves, but after leaf 2 a leaf has been lost; hence there were originally 7 leaves' (1945, 12). Wessén, on the first gathering of AM 748 I 4to, continues: '[t]he 6 leaves form 3 sheets and constitute one gathering. It should be noted, however, that after leaf 2 there is a lacuna in the text. Here, it is obvious, there has once been a single leaf which has been lost, and so the gathering must originally have comprised 7 leaves' (16). Einar Ólafur Sveinsson writes the following about the A manuscript: '[þ]að er íslenzkt, talið ritað um 1300, en Árni Magnússon fékk brotið frá Bæ í Flóa. Úr eddukvæðum eru hér sex blöð, hitt er úr Snorra-Eddu og fl.' (1962, 180). On the comparative dating of the R and A manuscripts, Wessén concludes that '*R* can with a high degree of certainty be ascribed to the time around 1270. *A* is younger by a generation or somewhat more' (1945, 16).

[24] *Bald* is, however, preserved in numerous post-medieval manuscripts, such as Rask 21 a., a paper manuscript from the 17th or 18th century (Kålund 1889–94, 2:514) and NKS 1866 4to, a paper manuscript from 1750 (Kålund 1900, 251).

not there, as there is a missing leaf at this place in the first gathering of the A manuscript, and presumably *Skírn* would have continued.

The final two-thirds of the text of *Vafþr*, stanza 20 line 2 through the end of stanza 56, are found next, on the third leaf of the first gathering and presumably picking up the text where the missing leaf would have left off. This is the portion of the poem during which Óðinn, disguised as Gagnráðr, questions Vafþrúðnir. Besides the incomplete nature of the poem, as it is missing roughly the first third of the stanzas that are found in the extant version in R—the dialogue between Óðinn and Frigg (stanzas 1–4), the single stanza of narration (stanza 5) and the opening of Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir's dialogue (stanza 6 through stanza 20 line 1)—there is little difference in the part of the poem that remains in A. After *Vafþr* there are complete texts of *Grímn* and *Hym*. Finally, a fragment of the prose introduction to *Vkv* concludes the mythological material in the A manuscript.[25]

The preservation of *Vafþr* in the A manuscript is chiefly of interest to the present study due to the context in which it is preserved, particularly the other eddic poems that are collected with it and how they are ordered in relation to one another, as the arrangement is somewhat different than in R.[26] The connection between *Vafþr* and *Grímn* is thus confirmed as strong and the juxtaposition of the two poems in both the R and A manuscripts suggests that they were read in relation to one another in the 13th and 14th centuries, and in both cases *Vafþr* is placed before *Grímn*. Although fragmentary, the A manuscript provides an alternate ordering of some eddic poems in relation to one another, demonstrating that the arrangement of the poems in R is not the only possible distribution of the mythological eddic poems. This example is important to take into account when emphasis is placed on the prominent position of *Vafþr* as the third poem in R.[27]

The A manuscript exemplifies the remarkable importance of each manuscript that survives from the medieval period, and how all of the materials that do survive are important for the act of interpretation. In R, for example, *Vafþr* follows *Vsp* and

[25] See Malm (2007, 135–55).

[26] Wessén writes that '[t]hus, in *A* we find nothing of the system and order of *R*. There does not seem to be any system at all. There are two other features which seem noteworthy. One is that the fragment terminates with *Vǫlundarkviða*, the first of the heroic lays in R. We may conjecture from this that *A* too contained heroic lays, and that a first division of the lays into mythical and heroical was also found in this manuscript. The other feature is that *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Grímnismál* are placed together in the same sequence as in R' (1945, 17–18).

[27] Ármann Jakobsson, on the placement of *Vafþr* in R, writes, '[i]t also has a distinguished place in the Codex Regius MS, coming directly after the well-known and obviously significant poems *Vǫluspá* and *Hávamál*' (2007, 264). The A manuscript serves as a reminder that what survives in manuscript form does not necessarily completely represent what was present around the time of composition, only what has survived.

Háv and is followed by *Grímn*, while in A *Vafþr* follows *Skírn* and is followed by *Grímn*. Larrington writes, regarding the pairing of *Vafþr* and *Grímn* in the manuscript evidence, that '[t]he two poems provide evidence for the belief that Óðinn travels through the world in disguise, both testing out the wisdom of others and revealing it himself to the chosen auditor. The mythological information outlines the history and geography of the universe for the attentive listener' (2002, 60). The two poems are indeed complementary to one another. *Vafþr* provides a temporal history of the Old Norse mythological cosmos, giving details from the past, the present, and the future of the mythic cosmos, while *Grímn* details the spatial dimensions of the cosmos, and names many of its inhabitants, places, and things. Together the R and A manuscripts provide the most comprehensive and detailed context for a study of *Vafþr* among works of the same genre, eddic poetry. As mentioned above, however, fragments from *Vafþr* survive in three other medieval manuscripts, all of which are manuscripts of *SnE*.[28] As this work unfolds it will become more evident that although *Vafþr* is an eddic poem, and there are a number of comparative avenues between it and other eddic poems, some of the richest material for comparison lies in *SnE*, which is itself a configurative mythographical work.

SnE is a prose work that to a large extent draws on the eddic poetry found in R. In its presentation of the myths, *SnE* has no parallel for its detailed and in-depth exposition of the eddic materials, and, therefore, any discussion of eddic poetry that looks at its mythological context must take *SnE* into consideration.[29] Where the R and the A manuscripts leave off, *SnE* picks up. The work is not only significant in that it is a primary part of the mythological context for a study of *Vafþr*, but it is also significant due to the fact that nine stanzas or partial stanzas of the poem are cited in *Gylf*. The three medieval parchment manuscripts that preserve *SnE* are the Codex Upsaliensis (DG 11 4to; U) from c. 1300, the Codex Regius of *SnE* (GKS 2367 4to; SnR) from the first half of the 14th century, and the Codex Wormianus (AM 242 fol.; W) from the second half of the 14th century. These three medieval manuscripts survive along with a paper manuscript from the late 16th century that is preserved in the University Library in Utrecht, Holland, and is for that reason

[28] There are, furthermore, a number of fragments of *SnE* that have survived from the medieval period in which a single stanza or two of *Vafþr* might be found.

[29] McKinnell writes about the influence *SnE* has had on the configurative process of interpreters of Old Norse mythology: 'the largest distortion of pre-Christian mythology in *Snorra Edda* is that it gives the impression of describing a single, coherent religious system. This may have been an inevitable result of trying to make the whole of Old Norse mythology available in a single handbook, but it has given rise to a powerful impulse among later mythologists to try to "make everything fit." If we are to understand the shifting currents of Old Norse mythology, this temptation must be resisted' (2005, 45).

known as the Codex Trajectinus (Traj 1374; T), believed to be a copy from a now-lost parchment manuscript from the 13th century.[30] Together, these four manuscripts are the surviving medieval texts of *SnE* that can be traced back to the 14th century or earlier. There were, however, many later redactions, with the result that these four examples are not the only sources, but are the oldest and most complete versions of the work.[31]

The first main section after the prologue of *SnE* is *Gylf*,[32] a collection of mythological stories and pieces of mythological information that were most likely brought together for the first time in that work.[33] On *Gylf*, Heimir Pálsson writes: '[h]eimildir höfundar í þessum hluta hljóta að hafa verið munnsögur, frásagnir sem hafa verið til hingað og þangað, sama sagan á fleiri stöðum en ekki orðrétt eins á tveim' (2013, 59) (The author's sources in this part must have been oral tales in prose or poetry that existed here and there, the same stories in various places but not identical in any two (Heimir Pálsson 2012, xliv)). Heimir Pálsson here assumes that Snorri was not working from a manuscript of eddic poetry, but that at the time of composition of *SnE*, c. 1220, the eddic poems would still have been in oral form, or, if they did exist in manuscript form were otherwise unavailable to him. Regardless of whether the author's sources were written or oral, the narratives of some eddic poems—particularly *Vsp*—and *Gylf* share much in common, and the fragments of *Vafþr* that are preserved in *Gylf* are strikingly similar to the text as it is preserved in the R and A manuscripts of eddic poetry, suggesting that either *Vafþr* existed in much the same form c. 1220 as it did c. 1270 and later, or, rather, that the fragments that are preserved in *Gylf* were adjusted at some point between the time of composition, c. 1220, and the appearance of *SnE* in manuscripts that have survived.

Although the characters are different, the frame narrative of *Gylf* is similar to the frame narrative of *Vafþr*, in that there is a guest who arrives as a disguised visitor at a hall and asks to come inside so that he may engage in an activity that has

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[30] Eeden Jr., on the T manuscript, writes that '[h]et Utrechtsche Edda is een afschrift van een verloren membraan, dat ook de bron is geweest van den codex regius' (1913, 3) and, continues, stating that '[h]et jaar van vervaardiging is hoogstwaarschijnlijk [15]95' (v). The assertion is that although T is a late 16th-century manuscript, it is most certainly a copy of a now-lost manuscript that was also the source for the SnR manuscript. For a detailed description of the T manuscript see Faulkes (1985, 9–16).

[31] Vésteinn Ólason adds that besides these four versions of *SnE* '[a]uk þess eru nokkur brot úr Eddu varðveitt í miðaldahandritum, oft ásamt málfræðiritgerðum eða skyldu efni' (2002, xxxi).

[32] The title *Gylfaginning*, like the attribution of authorship to Snorri Sturluson, only appears in the U manuscript.

[33] Heimir Pálsson writes that unlike other literature being produced in 13th-century Iceland, such as the sagas of Icelanders, '[t]he *Edda* has no storyline except that based on *Völuspá* in *Gylfaginning*' (2012, xliv).

to do with knowledge with his intended host or hosts. In both *Vafþr*, where Gagnráðr asks most of the questions, and *Gylf*, where Gylfi asks all of the questions, it is the guest who receives most of the knowledge. The three æsir in *Gylf*, or their representatives—Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði—answer Gylfi's questions about the origins, geography, and future of the cosmos. *Vafþr* plays an important role in *Gylf*, and in one manuscript—the SnR manuscript—Vafþrúðnir is named.[34]

One striking difference between the frame narrative of *Vafþr* and the frame narrative of *Gylf*, however, is that in the eddic poem it is the guest who gets the better of his host, resulting in Vafþrúðnir's death, whereas in *Gylf* the æsir do not die when they are unable to answer Gylfi's final question, but disappear. According to chapter 53 of *Gylf*, after the æsir have told as much as they know about the distant future, the following transpires:[35]

> Því næst heyrði Gangleri dyni mikla hvern veg frá sér, ok leit út á hlið sér. Ok þá er hann sésk meir um, þá stendr hann úti á sléttum velli, sér þá ønga hǫll ok ønga borg. Gengr hann þá leið sína braut ok kemr heim í ríki sitt ok segir þau tíðindi er hann hefir sét ok heyrt. Ok eptir honum sagði hverr maðr ǫðrum þessar sǫgur. (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda*, 1:54)

> (Next Gangleri heard loud noises coming at him from all directions. He looked to one side and, when he looked back again, he was standing outside on a level plain, where he saw neither the hall nor the fortress. He left and travelled back home to his kingdom, where he told of the events that he had seen and what he had heard. And after him, people passed these stories down from one to the other. (*Prose Edda*, 78))

In both of the narratives the hosts are unable to provide any more information, but the æsir are able to use their paranormal abilities to leave Gylfi alone, 'á sléttum velli'. It is important, however, to remember the frame in which Gylfi's visit to the Æsir takes place. In chapter 2 the following is narrated as Gylfi is travelling to Ásgarðr: '[e]n Æsir váru því vísari at þeir hǫfðu spádóm, ok sá þeir ferð hans fyrr en hann kom, ok gerðu í móti honum sjónhverfingar' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:7) (But the Æsir, because they had the gift of prophecy, were the wiser in such matters. Before his arrival they foresaw his coming and, in preparation for him, they conjured up visual illusions (*Prose Edda*, 10)). The 'sjónhverfingar' are most likely optical illusions (Cleasby-Vigfusson 1874, 535), and thus the whole of the

[34] Heimir Pálsson writes, '[v]itnað er í vísur sem við þekkjum úr Vafþrúðnismálum en kvæðisheitið er aldrei nefnt í DG 11 4to [U] og í GKS 2367 4to [SnR] er þess aðeins getið einu sinni að svo segir Vafþrúðnir jötunn (Snorra Edda 1931: 13)' (2013, 64) ('Verses are quoted that we know as part of *Vafþrúðnismál*, but the poem's name does not appear in DG 11 4to [U] and in Gks 2367 4to [SnR] it is only said once that "so says the giant Vafþrúðnir" (Finnur Jónsson 1931: 13)' (2012, xlviii).

[35] Chapter divisions of *Gylf* vary from one edition to the next. Chapter references in the present work are to those in *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*, edited by Anthony Faulkes (2005).

encounter in *Gylf* is the result of a paranormal spell that the æsir control. As will be seen, Vafþrúðnir must succumb to the rules of the contest that he set in the first place. The following is an overview of the instances in *Gylf* in which words or verses from *Vafþr* appear.

In chapter 2 of *Gylf*, Gylfi arrives at Valhǫll under the name Gangleri and is brought inside the hall. Once Gangleri meets the three rulers—Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði—Hár invites the guest to drink and eat but Gangleri replies that he will first ask them questions to see if there is a wise man among them. This is similar to Óðinn's arrival at Vafþrúðnir's hall, where Vafþrúðnir invites him to enter further into the hall, but in the eddic poem the guest says that he will remain on the floor of the hall, and indeed he must undergo some preliminary questions from the jǫtunn. Gangleri, on the contrary, questions his hosts from the outset. To Gylfi's initial statement that he will ask them some questions, Hár replies that Gangleri will not leave the hall unless he grows wiser during his visit. It seems that Hár's response to Gangleri is a confident challenge and there is a notable similarity at this point between *Gylf* chapter 2 and *Vafþr* stanza 7, where Vafþrúðnir states that if the guest is not as wise as the host, then he will not leave his hall alive. The two instances are similar, and indeed Gangleri, like Gagnráðr, ends by defeating those he questions in that he asks them a question that they cannot answer, even though he is tricked by them.

The questions and answers continue, and in chapter 5 Gangleri asks of the origins of life, specifically of the races that inhabit the world. From Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði, Gangleri hears about the Ginnungagap from which Ymir, the ancestor of the hrímþursar, who is also referred to as Aurgelmir, originates. It is also said that Ymir and all of his descendants are evil. From his own body were born his offspring, in fact from his own sweat. It is clear that the jǫtnar are even older than the æsir, indeed they are their ancestors, and *Vafþr* stanzas 30 and 31 are quoted in this chapter, used as evidence to corroborate the explanation that has been provided to Gangleri.

The next reference to *Vafþr* comes in *Gylf* chapter 7, in which it is told how the sons of Bor—Óðinn and his brothers Vili and Vé—killed Ymir, and how from the flow of the jǫtunn's blood all but one of the hrímþursar were killed. Bergelmir and his wife escaped on a wooden box, a *lúðr*, and they are the ancestors of the hrímþursar. Stanza 35 of *Vafþr* is referenced at this point to corroborate the myth. It is tempting to find a parallel with the story of Noah's ark in the great flood of *Genesis*, and Snorri was writing under the influence of Biblical narrative, and in fact the *Prologus* to *SnE* starts out with the Biblical narrative and the flood is mentioned, although the ark is not. The next reference to *Vafþr* appears in chapter 18, when Gangleri asks from where the wind comes. Hár replies that a jǫtunn named Hræsvelgr sits at the northern edge of the world in the shape of an eagle and

beats his wings and from this motion comes the wind. *Vafþr* stanza 37 is quoted as reference, and it is notable that it is at the northern edge of the world where this creature sits, for the North is associated with the jǫtnar. Later, in chapter 41 Gangleri asks about what activities the einherjar engage in to occupy themselves when they are not drinking in Valhǫll. Hár replies that every day the einherjar go outside into the courtyard and battle each other, returning home afterwards. Here *Vafþr* stanza 41 is quoted. It is at this point, in both *Gylf* chapter 41 and at *Vafþr* stanza 41 that events are moving towards the mythic future and to the events of Ragnarǫk.

In chapter 51 of *Gylf* Gangleri asks about Ragnarǫk and what there is to be said about that event. Hár replies that there is much to be said about Ragnarǫk and a quotation from *Vsp* stanza 44 is given. More events are related by Hár and 9 more stanzas from *Vsp* are quoted, somewhat fragmented versions of stanzas 45 through 55, and then to finish the chapter *Vafþr* stanza 18 is inserted, a description of the field where the final battle of Ragnarǫk will take place, Vígríðr. The final verse quotations from *Vafþr* appear in *Gylf* chapter 53. Gangleri asks about what will come after Ragnarǫk, which æsir will survive, and what will happen to the earth and the heavens. Hár replies and cites *Vafþr* stanza 51 in reference to the æsir that survive. Next Hár cites *Vafþr* stanza 45 in reference to the survival of humankind and finally *Vafþr* stanza 47 in reference to the emergence of the daughter of the sun who will take her mother's place in the sky. After this Hár says that this is as far into the future as can be foretold and the æsir disappear. It is appropriate that these final verse quotations from *Vafþr* focus on the regeneration and rebirth of the world after Ragnarǫk, for that is a prominent theme in the poem and Old Norse mythological cosmogony and eschatology on the whole, indicating the suggestion of a cyclical representation of time like what is forwarded by Elaide and Gurevich, the eternal return of the sun, the moon, and the seasons, which in the medieval period was merging with the more linear structure of temporality under the influence of Christianity. The three texts, *Vsp*, *Gylf*, and *Vafþr*, all share the same thematic structure in regards to the cosmological information that is relayed in them. *Vsp* is the most direct as the question and answer frame is suspended, although implied, whereas in both *Gylf* and *Vafþr* the cosmological knowledge is conveyed as a result of the question and answer framework. The respective structures of the two latter works are the method by which the thematic shape of the temporal cosmos is presented, and having seen where *Vafþr* appears in *Gylf* prepares the reader for a close reading of the eddic poem.[36]

[36] Lindblad writes that 'Vafþrúðnismál- och Grímnismál-versionerna i Snorre-Eddan och Regius företer vissa avvikelser. Dessa är av den art, att de förutsätter skriftlig förbindelse

Vafþr is never found alone in the manuscript evidence and this poem must always be interpreted in context with the texts with which it is most closely and logically associated. The placement of fragments of the poem within the text of *Gylf* illustrates how the works of Old Norse mythology can be configured together into a narrative cycle, for in this prose work there are a number of poetic fragments from individual poems brought together for the purpose of presenting a coherent pre-Christian belief system, although the presentation is not necessarilly pre-Christian at all. The modern understanding of Old Norse mythology relies on a very small number of texts, which, although they do provide a great deal of information, in no way can be said to fully, completely, or accurately represent what the people may have believed in the pre-Christian era, as they are representations and reinterpretations of what may have been believed by pagan people, and the factors that motivated the recording of the narratives into manuscripts in the 13th century remain unknown to a modern audience.

Now that the contents of the parchment manuscripts that preserve *Vafþr* have been introduced, it is important to discusss the transmission of *Vafþr* through paper manuscripts, for even though the manuscripts R, A, SnR, U, and W have survived—all manuscripts made from animal skin—a paper manuscript tradition also emerged that was important to the preservation of eddic poetry and Old Norse mythological texts, among else. Developed after the skin manuscript period in Iceland, the paper manuscript tradition served the purpose of bridging the gap between the medieval period and modernity.

2.2 Paper Manuscripts

The most obvious debt that *Vafþr* has to the paper manuscript tradition is the T manuscript of *SnE*, for in that manuscript stanzas from *Vafþr* are found within the context of *Gylf*. Besides the T manuscript, *Vafþr* appears in a number of paper manuscripts, a few of which are mentioned here. The paper manuscript groupings that are presented are based on Lassen's groupings (2011a), all of which contain *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*. The outline presented is thus only a sampling of the wide and diverse transmission of *Vafþr* in paper manuscripts, but serves to introduce the reader to the importance of the tradition.[37]

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mellan resp. versioner men snarast på sådant sätt, att dessa återgår på gemensam skriftlig källa. Denna måste då vara äldre än Snorre-Eddan' (1977, 16).

[37] AM 747 4to, a paper manuscript from the 17th century, is an example of a manuscript that does not contain *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, but rather presents *Vafþr* along with *SnE*, *Ríg*, and grammatical works (Kålund 1889–94, 2:173). AM 738 4to is a paper manuscript from 1680 that also does not contain *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, but does contain other eddic poems, and indeed pairs *Vafþr* and *Grímn* together, among mixed contents (Kålund 1889–94, 2:167–70).

The first group of paper manuscripts introduced here can be referred to as the A group of paper manuscripts. The paper manuscript referred to as Stockh. papp. 8vo nr. 15, was written in the 2nd half of the 17th century, is 124 leaves in length, written in Gothic and cursive script, and bound in a leaf from an antiphonary from c. 1300. It contains eddic poems in the following order: *Sólarljóð*, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, *Vsp*, *Háv*, *Vafþr*, *Grímn*, *Alv*, *Lok*, *Þrym*, *Hárb*, *Skírn*, *Hym*, *Bald*, *Vkv*, then all of the heroic poems in the same order as in the R manuscript of eddic poetry. After the heroic poems are found *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*, *Hyndl*, *Grógaldr*, and *Grott*. The manuscript was brought to Sweden in 1681 by Guðmundur Ólafsson (1652–95), who likely acquired it at Skálholt (Lassen 2011a, 29). Another paper manuscript known as Stockh. papp. fol. nr. 34, was written in 1684, contains 506 leaves and is half-bound in leather. It contains *SnE* and the eddic poems in the same order as Stock. papp. 8vo nr. 15. In this manuscript, however, the eddic poems are accompanied by a Latin translation, which demonstrates that the scribe intended to reach out to an international audience that did not know Icelandic. The part of this manuscript that contains eddic poems was used in Guðmundur Magnússon's edition (*Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda* 1787–1828), by Rask (*Edda Sæmundar hinns fróða* 1818), and also, to some extent, by Bugge (*Norræn fornkvæði* 1867) (Lassen 2011a, 30–31). The paper manuscript known as NKS 1870 4to also contains the eddic poems in the same order as Stock. papp. 8vo nr. 15, is leather bound, 162 leaves in length, and was also written towards the end of the 17th century. It, like Stockh. papp. fol. nr. 34, has an Icelandic text with parallel Latin translation, further establishing an awareness of an international audience. It also contains some extracts from Resen's Latin preface to Guðmundur Andrésson's *Lexicon Islandicum* (1683) (Lassen 2011a, 31–32). The manuscript known as UUB R 691 is 49 leaves in length, and was created in the 18th century by a single hand. It also has an Icelandic text with a Latin translation, and the text derives from Stockh. papp. fol. nr. 34, but the eddic poems appear in a different order: *Þrym*, *Skírn*, *Bald*, *Vkv*, the *Rúnatal* from *Háv*, *Vafþr*, *Grímn*, *Alv*, *Lok*, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, and *Sólarljóð* (Lassen 2011a, 32). Another paper manuscript, UUB R 682, is 83 leaves in length, was written at some time in the 18th century, and is attributed to a single hand. It, like most of the others listed above, is in Icelandic with an accompanying Latin translation, and the poems in it appear in the following order: *Sólarljóð*, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, the *Rúnatal* from *Háv*, *Vafþr*, *Grímn*, *Alv*, *Lok*, *Þrym*, *Hárb*, and *Skírn* (Lassen 2011a, 32). In all of the examples from this group of paper manuscripts—like in the R and A vellum manuscripts—*Vafþr* is paired with *Grímn*, and, furthermore, it can be noted that with the emergence of the paper manuscript tradition the inclusion of a Latin translation signals that a wider audience was surfacing for eddic poetry.

The second major group of paper manuscripts can be referred to as the B group. The manuscript known as Lbs 1562 4to has a table of contents that lists what the

contents of the manuscript were, in the following order: *Sólarljóð*, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, *Vsp*, *Háv*, *Vafþr*, *Grímn*, *Skírn*, *Hárb*, *Lok*, *Þrym*, *Bald*, *Vkv*, the heroic poems up to and including *Hamðismál*, then *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*, *Hyndl*, *Grógaldr*, *Grott*, and, finally, *Hgát*. This manuscript is fragmented, however, and is now comprised of a number of fragments from various paper manuscripts. *Vafþr* is found after the final section of *Háv*, in its regular place before *Grímn* (Lassen 2011a, 35–36). There are many other paper manuscripts in this group, all with the R poems in the order that they are found in the R manuscript, demonstrating that even in different manuscript groupings in the paper manuscript tradition it was common to, firstly, pair *Vafþr* and *Grímn* together, and, secondly, retain the ordering of the poems found in R.

There are a few more paper manuscripts from the B group that deserve mention. JS 648 4to is a paper manuscript that contains mixed contents, the last part of which contains the eddic poems *Hárb*, *Sólarljóð*, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, and the beginning of *Vafþr*, and this part of the manuscript is likely from the early 18th century (Lassen 2011a, 51). Lbs 1588 4to is another paper manuscript that contains the R manuscript poems, among mixed contents, and is from c. 1770. Lbs 1689 4to also contains the R poems, but after *Þrym* the poems *Bald*, *Grott*, *Grógaldr*, *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*, *Hyndl*, and *Hrafnagaldur Óðins* are inserted, before *Vkv* and the remaining R poems. Furthermore, another interesting manuscript is the manuscript known as Adv. 21.6.7 that is now housed at the National Library of Scotland, and is in 3 volumes that are now bound together. In volume 2 are found the eddic poems *Sólarljóð* and *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, followed by *Vsp*, *Háv*, *Vafþr*, *Grímn*, *Alv*, *Lok*, *Þrym*, *Hárb*, *Skírn*, *Hym*, and *Bald*. The heroic poems of R then follow in the same order as in R, then after *Hamðismál* the following poems appear: *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*, *Hyndl*, *Grógaldr*, *Grott*, and *Hgát*. These paper manuscripts further reinforce the placing of *Vafþr* within the context of the contents of R, but demonstrate some flexibility as to the ordering of the R poems, and, furthermore, the inclusion of non-R poems within the context of collections of eddic poetry. The manuscript known as Lbs 818 4to, a further example from the so-called B group, contains a number of eddic poems in a non-standard order (Lassen 2011a, 62–63). Besides these manuscripts, which are paper copies of vellum manuscripts and perhaps earlier paper manuscripts, there was a practice after the emergence of print media of composing paper manuscripts based on the contents of printed books.

ÍBR 36 4to is a paper manuscript from 1829, is 208 leaves in length, and is bound in leather. The scribe was Einar Bjarnason (1782–1856), and the manuscript contains eddic poems and later poems in eddic style. It is a copy of the first full edition of eddic poetry that appeared in print: *Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda* by *Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission*, 1787–1828 (Lassen 2011a, 71–72). The manuscript JS 494 8vo is 189 leaves in length and is a copy of Rasmus Christian Rask's edition

of *Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda* from 1818. The 2nd part contains eddic poems including *Hugsvinnsmál*, *Háv*, *Vsp*, *Vafþr*, *Grógaldr*, *Sólarljóð*, and more, in an order that is not the same as in R (Lassen 2011a, 73). ÍBR 24 8vo is another paper manuscript that contains eddic poems in an order that differs from R: *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, *Vsp*, *Vafþr*, *Grímn*, *Skírn*, *Háv*, *Hárb*, *Hym*, and more. Intrestingly, in many paper manuscripts that vary the order of the eddic poems from what is found in R, most often *Vafþr* and *Grímn* still appear alongside one another, which further supports their partnership, even when other poems are placed in a different order.[38] Besides these, however, there are many paper manuscripts that contain *Vafþr* among mixed contents. GKS 2366 4to is somewhat unique, however, for in it the poem appears in fragmentary form up to and including stanza 45. These 45 stanzas comprise the whole of the contents of this manuscript (Kålund 1900, 44). NKS 1883 4to is a paper manuscript that is 109 leaves in length and is divided into 2 parts, and was composed in the 18th century. In the second part of the manuscript *Ríg* appears in whole followed by a fragment of *Vafþr* (Kålund 1900, 258). Of particular interest are NKS 1873 4to, which is 69 leaves in length and was composed in the second half of the 18th century (Kålund 1900, 255), and Thott 1499 4to (Kålund 1900, 335), which is 91 leaves in length and was composed in the 18th century. Both are manuscripts with mixed and diverse contents in which *Vafþr* appears alongside *Hgát*. These manuscripts which the author does not assign to either of the A or B groups of paper manuscripts are interesting for the reason that besides appearing in its usual place, either in the order of the poems that is found in R, or at least alongside *Grímn*, *Vafþr* was also beginning to appear in new contexts, notably alongside *Hgát* in NKS 1873 4to and Thott 1499 4to. A thorough outline of the transmission of *Vafþr* through the paper manuscript tradition would require a great amount of space, as the number of paper manuscripts that contain the poem or fragments of it is extensive, to say the least (see also Kålund 1889–94).

With the arrival and spread of printed editions of eddic poetry there was less of a need for paper manuscripts, however the practice was not discontinued completely. Lassen writes that

> [a]fter the appearance of the Arnamagnæan edition in 1787, copying of compilations of eddic poems continued, but now to a lesser extent. In Iceland in the nineteenth century, we see a new kind of scribal activity or a different attitude to compilation, in that there

[38] Besides this brief and incomplete listing of paper manuscripts that contain eddic poetry and in particular *Vafþr*, there are a large number of lost manuscripts. The great Copenhagen fire of 1728, for example, is known to have destroyed a large number of manuscripts, both paper and parchment, and a considerable number of printed books. Lassen writes about the collector Árni Magnússon, stating that 'no fewer than fifteen collections [of eddic poetry] he owned were destroyed in the fire in 1728' (2011a, 77).

> come to be examples of anthologies of a more varied content than had appeared before. We also find copies of the Arnamagnæan edition, and also of Rask's and Scheving's editions, and the latest manuscript is a copy of Bugge's edition with an English translation. (2011a, 80–81)

The paper manuscript tradition demonstrates that the transmission of *Vafþr* was for the most part a stable process, but not completely so. In many of the examples listed above, particularly in the groups referred to as the A and B groups, the poem appears in its standard context, after the final part of *Háv* and before *Grímn*. The paper manuscript tradition also exemplifies that the mythological and heroic eddic poems are independent entities. When preserved together, they are commonly juxtaposed to one another as groupings, and there is no indication that the poems that belong to the R grouping of mythological eddic poems were ever found intermingled with the R grouping of heroic poems. They are complementary to one another, and their distinctive subject matters is reflected in their different placements in the transmission history of eddic poetry in both the vellum manuscript tradition from the medieval period and the paper manuscript tradition from the post-Reformation period.

2.3 Editions

In 1665 P.H. Resen published the first editions of *SnE* and the first two poems in the R manuscript, *Vsp* and *Háv*. In his introduction to the facsimile edition, Anthony Faulkes writes, 'P.H. Resen's first edition of Vǫluspá and his edition of Hávamál were printed together with his *Edda Islandorum* (i.e. the Prose Edda) and were published in the same year, and in many copies all three works were bound together, though their order varies' (1977, 9). This set the standard for centuries of scholarship that followed, favouring *Vsp* and *Háv* over poems that follow them in R. The first appearance of any fragment of *Vafþr* in print is from the great study of 1689 by Thomas Bartholin (titled *Antiquitatum danicarum de causis contemptae a Danis adhuc gentilibus mortis libri tres*) in which stanza 41 appears in the context of a larger block quote from *SnE* (1689, 564). In the study Bartholin grants a lot of attention to other eddic poems such as *Vsp*, *Háv*, and *Grímn*, but suprisingly little to *Vafþr*. Rather than indicating a lack of interest, however, this most likely points to the great wealth of information that was becoming available during the latter half of the 17th century in Copenhagen, as Old Norse-Icelandic manuscripts were being brought over from Iceland.

Grímur Jónsson Thorkelín (1752–1829) published an edition of *Vafþr* with a Latin translation that appeared in 1779, and the inclusion of a Latin translation alongside the Icelandic text implies that Grímur Thorkelín was reaching out to an international audience for the poem, as the paper manuscript tradition also

illustrates was a trend in the 18th century.[39] This edition is little known and uninfluential in comparison to the editions that come after it, however it is important as a landmark first edition of the poem. The text begins with a Latin introduction and then the poem appears in Icelandic with each facing page in Latin translation, and Latin footnotes accompany both the Icelandic and Latin texts. After the Icelandic and Latin texts there is an extensive index of proper Icelandic nouns that appear in the poem which functions primarily as a glossary. Shortly after Grímur Thorkelín's edition a Danish translation of eddic poems by Bertel Christian Sandvig (1752–86) appeared, titled *Forsøg til en Oversættelse af Sæmunds Edda* (1783–85) and is in two volumes. *Vafþr* is found in the first volume, after *Sólarljóð*, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, *Vsp*, and *Háv*, and, as usual, *Grímn* follows the text of *Vafþr*.[40] This ordering of the poems reflects one of the typical arrangements in the paper manuscript tradition, beginning with *Sólarljóð* and *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, late eddic poems, followed by the R poems. While transmitting *Vafþr* faithfully, the paper manuscript tradition left an impact on early print editions and translations as far as context is concerned, by including later poems under eddic meter (i.e. *Sólarljóð* and *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*) with R poems.

Vafþr appears in the first edition of eddic poetry that was published by *Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission* that was released in three volumes in 1787, 1818, and 1828 (*Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda*). Volume 1 (1787) includes *Vafþr* and the other mythological poems that had not been published in Resen's editions of *SnE*, *Vsp*, and *Háv* in 1665. With the arrival of the first volume most of the mythological poems were now available in print for a wider audience than had previously had access to the material. The volume begins with a general introduction in Latin, followed by a biography of Sæmundr fróði by Árni Magnússon. *Vafþr* is the first poem in the volume and there is a short introduction to the poem, also in Latin, before the Icelandic and Latin texts are given, stanza by stanza. Notes are provided in Latin throughout the text of the poem. After *Vafþr* is *Grímn*, followed by *Skírn*, *Hárb*, *Hym*, *Lok*, *Þrym*, *Hrafnagaldur Óðins*, *Vegtamskviða*, *Alvíssmál*, *Fjǫlsvinnsmál*, *Hyndluljóð*, and as an appendix *Sólarljóð*. The volume concludes with an extensive glossary and an index of Latin proper nouns.[41]

[39] A review of Grímur Thorkelín's work appeared in *Nye kritik* journal (1779, 185–88), where the edition is described, and the poem essentially sumarized (Fidjestøl 1999, 29).

[40] For a detailed list of translations that appeared between 1785 and c. 1920 see Halldór Hermannsson (1920, 9–24); during this time period translations appeared in Danish, Dutch, English, French, German, Hungarian, Italian, Latin, Norwegian, Polish, Spanish, and Swedish.

[41] There are a large number of editions of eddic poetry that have appeared over the course of the past two centuries since the landmark edition by *Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission*. The present review attempts to describe only a few, and the reader is directed to Halldór

Bugge's edition of eddic poetry (*Norræn fornkvæði* 1867) is in a single volume and includes not only poems found in the R manuscript of eddic poetry but also a selection of other eddic poems from other manuscripts, and, in fact, Bugge's edition remains an important work for any critic of eddic poetry due to his extensive notation to all of the poems, in which he includes variations between particular points in different manuscripts, both parchment and paper, references to comparative materials, and commentary. To open the edition Bugge provides multiple versions of *Vsp*, the first of which is eclectic, the second from R, the third from H, and then he provides the verses of *Vsp* from manuscripts of *SnE*. *Háv* is the second poem in Bugge's edition, and then *Vafþr*. The significance of this arrangement is that although Bugge incorporates materials from various manuscripts, as illustrated in his multiple versions of *Vsp*, the overall shape of the edition is modelled on R, reflected in the ordering of the poems. In addition to the R poems, Bugge provides editions of *Bald*, *Ríg*, and *Hyndl* at the end of the mythological section. While adhering to the general format of R, Bugge has taken a step towards the liberties that modern editorial and publishing practices allow for, namely the appropriation of manuscript evidence for the purpose of reinterpretation. Like his predeccessors (see *Edda Sæmundar hinns Fróda* by *Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission* above, for example), Bugge provides editions of the post-medieval poems *Sólarljóð* and *Hrafnagaldr Óðins*.

Gustav Neckel's edition of eddic poetry (1914, 1926, 1936) that was later revised by Hans Kuhn (1962, 1983), known as *Edda. Die lieder des codex regius nebst verwandten denkmälern*, has for a great part of the last century been the most popular edition of eddic poetry among scholars. The most current version of the Neckel-Kuhn edition of the *Edda* is the 5th edition from 1983. This edition presents the poems of R in the order that they appear in the manuscript and then adds as an appendix some poems not found in R, namely *Bald*, *Ríg*, *Hyndl*, *Grott*, and *Hlǫðskviða*. There is, furthermore, a poem about Hildebrand from *Ásmundar saga kappabana*, and, finally, some poetic fragments from *SnE* and *Vǫls*. Like Bugge (1867), Neckel-Kuhn (1983) brings together the eddic poems of the R manuscript with eddic poems from other maunscripts in a single edition, but the Neckel-Kuhn (1983) edition does not mix the two together, and thus adheres to the shape of the R manuscript even more so than Bugge (1867).

There are a number of other important editions that deserve mention, including that by Finnur Jónsson (*De Gamle Eddadigte* 1932), significant primarily for the commentary that he makes for each of the poems. Almost all of the intricate details

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Hermannsson for editions up to 1914 (1920, 1–9), and Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason for a comprehensive bibliography of editions up to 2014 (2014, 2:205–11).

of the text of *Vafþr* are commented on in the footnotes that appear alongside the poems, and taken together with Bugge (1867) many of the most important issues concerning the text of *Vafþr* are addressed. Gísli Sigurðsson's (*Eddukvæði* 1998) edition of eddic poetry is, like Finnur Jónsson's (1932) edition, important for its notes, which supply critical information to its readership. This edition, furthermore, has the advantage of being accessible to the reader of modern Icelandic due to editorial principles that normalize much of the orthography into modern Icelandic. This edition is less concerned with specific textual problems than Bugge (1867), Finnur Jónsson (1932), and Neckel-Kuhn (1983), but more concerned with providing accessibility of medieval narrative for a modern audience (Gísli Sigurðsson 1998, lii–lvii). The diplomatic edition of R, titled *Konungsbók eddukvæða = Codex Regius: Stofnun Árna Magnússonar á Íslandi Gl.Kgl.Sml 2365 4to*, edited by Vésteinn Ólason and Guðvarður Már Gunnlaugsson (2001), is an indispensible resource for an in-depth study of *Vafþr* or, for that matter any eddic poem found in R, most importantly for its diplomatic text and facsimile images of the manuscript for those who are unable to view the manuscript in person. The modernized text that accompanies the diplomatic text is remarkably similar to the edition by Gísli Sigurðsson (1998), but does not include any content notes. The inclusion of the modernized Icelandic text alongside the diplomatic text is helpful for the reader of modern Icelandic.

Tim William Machan (*Vafþrúðnismál* 2008) prepared an edition of *Vafþr* that includes extensive paratextual material and is to my knowledge the only in-depth study other than Grímur Thorkelín's (1779) lesser-known study that is dedicated solely to the poem.[42] Machan's text relies primarily on the R manuscript, but does at points collate text from the A manuscript and the fragments of *Vafþr* from *SnE* manuscripts. By aiming to preserve the integrity of the R manuscript Machan has accordingly preserved that manuscript's orthography, with the result that his text echoes the diversity of medieval manuscript orthography, and is not ideal for a reader who aims to interpret the narrative, but is a significant landmark edition for the reader interested in the development of eddic orthography in relation to *Vafþr* in particular. Machan (2008) and Gísli Sigurðsson (1998) are thus at opposite ends of

[42] Machan, on his aims with his edition, writes that 'this edition does not attempt to recover the lost archetype from which the various authorities descend. The manuscripts themselves are our only reliable witnesses to how medieval literature existed, and without a critical apparatus medieval readers often would not have known that the text they were reading contained "scribal contaminations." In a very real sense the author of the *Poetic Edda* is not whoever originally composed the poems but whoever collected and presented the versions found in the Codex Regius and in AM 748 I 4to. If modern readers are to recover and appreciate medieval meanings, the integrity of the manuscripts needs to be respected' (2008, 54).

the editorial spectrum, with one pole marking adherence to the integrity of the manuscript evidence and the other pole marking readerly accessibility.

Jónas Kristjánsson (1924–2014) and Vésteinn Ólason prepared the most current edition of eddic poetry (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit* 2014). Published by Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, this edition marks a compromise between the two poles represented by Machan (2008) and Gísli Sigurðsson (1998). The ÍF text is intended to be the primary edition of eddic poetry for international research and discussion, and the editorial principles adhere to the ÍF series precedent (Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 2:202–3). In short it is the belief of the present author that the ÍF edition is the most appropriate edition for the current study, and will in fact become the internationally recognized standard edition of eddic poetry.[43] This conclusion is reached for a number of reasons. Firstly, the ÍF edition has the most current paratextual materials, including an up-to-date bibliography, an extensive introduction, and notes to the texts that build upon the long tradition of printed editions. While presenting a text that is grounded in the 13th century, the ÍF edition does not adhere to the manuscript evidence at the expense of accessibility, which, I argue, is the case with Machan (2008), but rather presents issues of orthography in the notes.

Vafþr possibly has a prehistory in oral culture and then found its place in the parchment manuscript tradition of medieval Iceland in the late 13th century. Luckily the R manuscript has survived up to the present day, but the poem still underwent a great process of transmission through paper manuscripts, and now continues to appear in printed books. The narrative of the poem has all along the way become entwined in the textual culture of the ages it has passed through, and is now accessible to modern readers in a number of editions, many of which are accessible through digital media, particularly those that are out of copyright. The textual history of the poem is important in that it provides the foundation upon which a modern interpretation of the poem is to be made, but more importantly what the textual transmission of the poem has facilitated over the past seven centuries is the critical scholarship that surrounds the poem.

Does *Vafþr* give the modern reader a glimpse into a prehistorical past? If it does that would mean that the theories of Eliade and Gurevich are plausible, in the sense that in the medieval period in Europe there was a confluence of the pagan,

[43] Other notable editions include the two facsimile editions, firstly by Wimmer and Finnur Jónsson (*Håndskriftet Nr. 2365 4to g. kgl. Samling* 1891) and secondly by Finnur Jónsson (*Handskriftet Nr. 748 4to* 1896), as well as the edition by Detter and Heinzel (*Sæmundar Edda* 1903), the popular edition with explanatory notes by Finnur Jónsson (*Sæmundar-Edda. Eddukvæði* 1905), the two-volume edition by Guðni Jónsson (*Eddukvæði (Sæmundar-Edda)* 1949), and the three-volume edition by Jón Helgason (*Eddadigte* 1952–62).

cyclical, eternal return and the linear conception of time as past, present, and moving towards a definite future. An interpretation of *Vafþr* on the narrative level that uses the tools supplied by Ricoeur will amount to a conclusion that either, yes, in the Christian work of 13th-century Iceland the traces of paganism can be perceived, or, no, by the time these supposedly oral narratives were transmitted on parchment the pagan conception of time, among everything else, had faded into the past. Keeping the theories of Gurevich and Eliade at the forefront, it is now time to turn to Ricoeur, and to a close reading of our chosen text.

3. Act One: At Home

From this point, the present interpretation moves forward by close and contextual reading of the poem *Vafþr*, stanza-by-stanza, act-by-act, and scene-by-scene towards Vafþrúðnir's eventual death. The jǫtunn's death occurs after the conclusion of the poem, but the whole of the narrative is a movement towards the inescapable end. The foundations of the study include the poem's comparative sources, particularly other eddic poems and prose works such as *Gylf* and *Skáld* from *SnE*. The interpretation is made possible by the application of Ricoeur's narrative theory, which is twofold: that a narrative's action breaks down into units of time known as episodes (referred to here as acts and scenes) and that the action of a narrative is grasped together to make a coherent whole that is the plot. Finding meaning on this formal level is the primary drive of the study.

On the secondary level it is also hoped that from the formal analysis some conclusions can be drawn about the society for which these poems were important enough to write in manuscripts, 13th-century Iceland. Bits of mythological information that are uncovered during the formal analysis will provide grounds for discussing their possible significance in light of medieval culture. And, on the third level, throughout the the close and contextual reading of the poem, prominent scholarship on the poem will be considered in light of the theoretical framework established with Ricoeur, Gurevich, and Eliade that has to do with both the formal analysis and the cultural significance of the mythological information. In the current chapter the three characters in the poem are introduced at some length, namely Óðinn, Frigg, and Vafþrúðnir, and the first act of the poem, the Óðinn-Frigg scene at home in Ásgarðr is discussed in conjunction with the introduction of the characters through comparative material. In this sense the present chapter is a composite of close reading with contextual exploration, as are the three chapters that follow.

Óðinn, Frigg, and Vafþrúðnir all appear as speaking characters in *Vafþr*, but never all together at the same time. The first scene of the poem is made up of four stanzas of dialogue between Óðinn and Frigg, while the three remaining scenes which make up the Óðinn-Vafþrúðnir encounter are made up of 51 stanzas of dialogue between Gagnráðr, who is actually Óðinn in disguise, and Vafþrúðnir. For the purpose of the present study, the disguised Óðinn is referred to as Gagnráðr when the stanzas in which he presents himself as such are being discussed. There are, accordingly, only seven stanzas in total, of the fifty-six in the poem, in which Óðinn is without a mask, stanzas 1–5, and in the final two stanzas, 55 and 56, after

Óðinn has revealed himself to Vafþrúðnir.[1] When discussing the character of Óðinn generally, or the Odinic character in other narratives, he is referred to as Óðinn. There is a fourth voice in the poem, that of the narrator, who speaks directly to the audience in stanza 5, and the fact that the stanza appears in *ljóðaháttr* verse—the only case of direct *ljóðaháttr* narration in the eddic corpus (Gunnell 1995, 216–17)—rather than as a prose insertion, is significant in that it suggests either the original poet or the 13th-century compiler found it necessary to include this fourth voice, that of the narrator, within the metrical structure of the poem. The first five stanzas provide the frame of the poem, after which Óðinn masks himself. The often overlooked, but utterly important, act one adds a layer of irony to the whole of *Vafþr*, for without it the audience would know much less, specifically the identity of Óðinn as Gagnráðr, and would be left to deduce the intentions of the visitor who arrives at Vafþrúðnir's doorstep. This first act is made up of only one scene and the action of the remainder of the poem takes place in a different land, to which the chorus-like stanza 5 ferries the audience along with Óðinn. In act one the characters are in Ásgarðr and in act two Óðinn confronts Vafþrúðnir in jǫtunheimr.

It is important at this point to briefly return to this work's methodology. The present approach invites a certain kind of addition that is not accepted by all scholars, namely that the information that is presented in the poem is mythological information that may be added to other mythological information gathered from other sources. This is a choice, but does not represent what all interpretations may allow or invite. As such, it is from this type of 'addition' that a configured narrative of Old Norse mythology is made possible, but at the same time it is important that all configurations are grounded in what is available in the texts of the manuscripts that are being interpreted. This sense of reserve is required, for it is possible that during the medieval period the Old Norse mythological texts did not represent parts of a whole, but were perhaps seen as independent manifestations created by individual poets or authors across various traditions.

As most of the poem is in the form of dialogue the text lends itself to interpretation as being dramatic in character, with the two characters in each scene speaking back and forth, trading stanzas of speech. Regarding the arrangement of dramatic eddic texts, Clunies Ross writes the following:

> in poetic texts like *Vafðrúðnismál* and *Þrymskviða* the *dramatis personae* are made explicit by the compiler, often when there is a change of speaker; in other poems, such as *Skírnismál*, the compiler's role is more extensive and embraces other functions

[1] *Vafþr* has traditionally been divided into 55 stanzas. The new ÍF edition, however, divides the poem into 56 stanzas. The present work adopts this new interpretation of the poem which has created the new stanza by dividing the lengthy stanza 55 into stanzas 55 and 56. Stanza 54 remains the same in all editions.

> beyond that of specifying the actors. These stage directions make the subordination of the poems' dialogues to the otherwise hidden narrative frame quite clear. (1988, 220–21)

The speaking characters of *Vafþr* are, as noted by Clunies Ross, made explicit in the margins of the R and A manuscripts, but these bits of extrametrical marginalia only begin at stanza 18 (stanza 20 in the A manuscript), continuing until the end of the poem.[2] The stage directions in the margins thus act as a fifth voice that is directional in nature, in addition to the three speaking characters and the narrator. The marginal notations are the mark of the compiler or of a later scribe, and without them critics such as the present author and audiences both medieval and modern with access to the manuscript or diplomatic version would have very little to go on. The marginal notations and the narratorial voice in stanza 5 are different voices: the narrator's is inside the narrative and the scribe's is outside of the narrative, and as such the fifth stanza is even more integral to the action of the poem. Contrary to the marginal notations, whose outsideness is marked by their placement in the margin, the narratorial voice is embedded directly into the narrative.[3] In sum, the marginal notations left by the compiler or scribe further reinforce the potential for dramatic performance of the poem.

The domestic scene between Óðinn and Frigg introduces the contest between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir. Rather than being an addition, as suggested by Jan de Vries (1934, 14–15), the opening to the poem can be seen as the foundation for what follows. Maria Elena Ruggerini writes that

> [t]he first four stanzas of the poem, which make up a prologue to the wisdom challenge between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir, are not strictly necessary from a narrative point of view to the scene which unfolds itself immediately afterwards in the giant's hall; but they do serve a different function, on the level of psychological motivation and the deliberate evocation of a tense and dramatic atmosphere. (1994, 145)

While emphasizing the narrative independence of the first scene from what follows, Ruggerini also connects the first scene with the main action of the poem by stating that it serves the function of building 'a tense and dramatic atmosphere'. It does exactly that, by providing the audience with an awareness of Óðinn's intentions in his encounter with Vafþrúðnir. Ruggerini continues, writing that it helps the audience 'to understand the motives that drive Óðinn to behave according to a

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[2] Machan writes, '[b]eginning with this stanza [18], the abbreviations *o.q* and *v.q.* accompany the dialogue in the margin of R' (2008, 82).

[3] Gunnell has speculated on the intentions of scribes who have added marginal notes to manuscripts of eddic poetry and other medieval dramatic texts and, much like Clunies Ross, argues that it is to explicitly indicate a change in speaker and is strongly indicative of the dramatic character of the eddic poems in *ljóðaháttr* (1994, 7–29; cf. Gunnell 1995, 206–12).

predetermined tactical plan when he enters the giant's hall' (147). The man of the house, in this case Óðinn of the æsir, consults with his wife Frigg about a proposed journey that he both wishes and intends to take. In *Grímn*, coming directly after *Vafþr* in both the R and A manuscripts, the two æsir are again found together in Ásgarðr speaking with one another in a domestic setting, although in a prose introduction to the poem. The juxtaposed poems mirror one another in that Óðinn's journeys begin at home with his wife, and in both there is a subtle disagreement between the couple. The primary difference that cannot be overlooked is that in *Vafþr* the introductory scene is in verse, while in *Grímn* it is in prose, and, even more importantly, in *Vafþr* Frigg shows concern for her husband's safety, while in *Grímn* Óðinn is placed in danger as a direct result of Frigg's actions.

The first character who opens the dialogue of *Vafþr* is Óðinn, and it is to him that we first turn, before exploring what there is to be known about Frigg and then Vafþrúðnir himself. Like a medieval audience most likely did, a modern reader also enters this text with some knowledge of its characters, and for that reason while we interpret the opening stanzas of the poem we will also explore some contextual sources for the characters.

3.1 Odinic Quest

In the opening stanza of the poem Óðinn addresses his wife Frigg, and he initiates their conversation by letting her know that he wishes to speak with her and in turn receive her advice.[4]

1 „Ráð þú mér nú, Frigg,
alls mik fara tíðir
at vitja Vafþrúðnis;
forvitni mikla
kveð ek mér á fornum stǫfum
við þann inn alsvinna jǫtun."

(Advise me now, Frigg, since I feel keen to go to visit Vafthrúdnir; I'm very curious to contend in ancient lore with that all-wise giant.)

[4] Beginning here and continuing forward through the close of chapter 6, all fifty-six stanzas of *Vafþr* are quoted in full. At each instance the stanza number will appear immediately to the left of the stanza, much as it would in an edition. The intention is to match the critical reading of the narrative with the standard version of the text from the *Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit* edition. All other quotations of eddic poetry are also taken from the ÍF edition, but are not numbered in the same manner. Andy Orchard (2011) has made a recent translation of eddic poetry into English, and his translation accompanies the ÍF edition in all instances where eddic poetry is quoted.

The first stanza immediately alerts the audience to Óðinn's intention in *Vafþr*, that he wishes to go on an Odinic quest to test Vafþrúðnir and obtain knowledge from him. The first word of the stanza, 'Ráð' (from *ráða*), is the Old Norse-Icelandic verb for 'counsel' or 'advise', which indicates that the áss wishes his wife to advise him. The most important word is 'alls' (since), and it indicates the reason why he is asking Frigg for advice, because 'mik fara tíðir' (I want to go), or, in other words: Óðinn wants advice from Frigg because he intends to go to Vafþrúðnir. In these first six lines all three characters that appear in the poem are present, but to different degrees: the áss who speaks, Óðinn (although his presence is not confirmed until stanza 2), Frigg, who is named specifically as the addressee, and the jǫtunn that the speaker wishes to visit, Vafþrúðnir. In the first stanza of the poem the underlying theme of the whole poem is introduced, which is Óðinn's intention to test Vafþrúðnir in the form of a contest in knowledge. Óðinn has sought out knowledge in other sources from the mythological corpus, and this poem further confirms that one of his defining characteristics is his extremely large appetite for wisdom from sources far and wide.

Two mythic narratives about Mímir and Óðinn are informative about Óðinn's long-standing association with knowledge.[5] The first narrative that is of particular interest for a reading of *Vafþr* is presented in *Yngl*, in which Óðinn appears as a human king with many paranormal and magical powers. Óðinn is in this case so powerful that he comes to be revered as a god by his subjects as a result of their impression of his abilities. In chapter 4 of the saga it is said that Óðinn initiates a war with the vanir that turns out to be fierce, with both sides gaining victories over the other. Eventually there is a peace agreement reached that requires each side to give hostages over to the other as pledges of peace. The æsir first send Hœnir to the vanir in exchange for Njǫrðr, along with his son Freyr, and secondly, Mímir leaves the æsir in return for the clever Kvasir. A little while later the vanir realize that

[5] The most notable or prominent texts in which Óðinn is a character are *Yngl*, *SnE*, and numerous eddic poems. Besides the Icelandic sources, a figure resembling Óðinn appears in Tacitus's *Germania* (98 CE) as Mercury, and then later also as Mercury in Paulus Diaconus (720–99), whereas, much later, Adam of Bremen (d. 1081) identified Óðinn with the classical god Mars. In *riddarasǫgur* Óðinn appears under pseudonyms, heiti, and kennings, and he also appears as a guest in a number of kings' sagas, including *Saga Óláfs konungs hins helga*, both *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonn*ar by Oddr Snorrason and *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* in *Heimskringla*, and *Bǫglunga saga*. Óðinn, or figures that strikingly resemble him, make interventions and appearances in *fornaldarsǫgur* such as *Skjǫldunga saga*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Vǫls*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Gautreks saga*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, *Ǫrvar-Odds saga*, *Egils saga einhanda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*. There are also references to Óðinn in skaldic poetry, and, of course, Saxo Grammaticus has much to say about Óðinn, the human king, in his *Gesta Danorum* (c. 1200). Lassen (2011) has written the most comprehensive study of the Odinic figure across the wide range of relevant sources. See also Faulkes (1978–79).

Hœnir is not capable of making any decisions without having Mímir by his side and they become greatly angered by this and believe that the æsir have sent them a lame chieftain. The vanir then behead Mímir and send his head to the æsir. Upon receiving the head of Mímir, 'Óðinn tók hǫfuðit ok smurði urtum þeim, er eigi mátti fúna, ok kvað þar yfir galdra ok magnaði svá, at þat mælti við hann ok sagði honum marga leynda hluti' (Ynglinga saga, 13) (Óthin took it and embalmed it with herbs so that it would not rot, and spoke charms over it, giving it magic power so that it would answer him and tell him many occult things (Saga of the Ynglings, 8)).[6]

The characterization of Óðinn in *Yngl* is thus as a crafty and wise ruler, for he is able to trick the vanir into giving the æsir both Njǫrðr and Freyr in exchange for Hœnir, perhaps a lame chieftin, and then he is also able to use Mímir's head that is sent back to him in anger from the vanir for his own benefit. Even though Mímir is dead, Óðinn can receive advice from the severed head. The vanir do not end up gaining a competent chieftain in the exchange, as they killed Mímir and gave his head back to the æsir, and Hœnir, being lame as he may, indirectly contributes to Óðinn's increased abilities by his very lameness. Everything works to Óðinn's advantage in this story, and even though this representation is not the same as the Óðinn we meet in *Vafþr*, the myth of Mímir's head from *Yngl* demonstrates his great resourcefulness. He is able to cheat his opponents and continue to make gains even after he has been exposed as unfair, which may be a quality of Óðinn in *Vafþr*, particularly with his final question to the jǫtunn. Óðinn's increased abilities are described later in *Yngl* chapter 7, when he is said to carry Mímir's head with him in order to receive important information about other worlds from it: 'Óðinn hafði með sér hǫfuð Mímis, ok sagði þat honum mǫrg tíðendi ór ǫðrum heimum' (Ynglinga saga, 18) (Óthin had with him Mímir's head, which told him many tidings from other worlds (Saga of the Ynglings, 11)). The Óðinn of *Yngl* is

[6] There are other examples of dismembered heads that continue to speak. Williams provides a few examples in relation to the story of Dionysius (i.e. St. Denis): '[t]he story of Dionysius combines two wonderous elements, that of the carrying of the severed head and that of the so-called *lingua palpitans*, the disembodied tongue that speaks. The events of decapitation and the speaking of the severed head are related to the subjects of death and life and to the nature of discourse and understanding, not only in the story of St Denis but in the many mythical uses of the severed head theme that precede the hagiographic version. Polycritos, an Etolian leader who died four days after his wedding, returns as a spirit to devour his new-born, hermaphroditic son, who is threatened by the crowd with death. The child's head, the only body part left by the father, begins to prophesy and specifies the locus of its own resting place. The head of the Welsh King Bran continues to converse with his companions after it is cut from his body, and, later ensconced in London, it exercises a magical resistance against invasion. The Scandinavian god Odin regularly consults the severed head of Mimer, a wiseman, which he has had encased in gold' (Williams 1996, 298–99). See also Lassen 2011b, 235–65).

resourceful and demonstrates the ability of the Odinic figure to work events to his own advantage, and to the advantage of the æsir.[7]

Although greatly skilled in magic, the Óðinn of *Yngl* relies on an external source for much of his knowledge, Mímir's head, perhaps indicating that one of his defining characteristics in regards to knowledge is his ability to harness external sources for his own benefit. In fact, all of Óðinn's sources of knowledge seem to be exterior. In *Vsp* and *Gylf* this theme is carried further, as there is an association among Óðinn, Mímir, and knowledge, but not in the same manner as in *Yngl*, and the Mímir of *Vsp* may even be a different Mímir than that of *Yngl*. In stanza 28 of *Vsp* from the R manuscript the vǫlva recounts how Óðinn gave his eye to Mímir in order to drink from his well:

> Ein sat hon úti,
> þá er inn aldni kom,
> yggjungr ása,
> ok í auga leit:
> „Hvers fregnið mik?
> Hví freistið mín?
> Allt veit ek, Óðinn,
> hvar þú auga falt:
> í inum mæra
> Mímisbrunni."
> Drekkr mjǫð Mímir
> morgin hverjan
> af veði Valfǫðrs.
> Vituð ér enn – eða hvat?
>
> (Alone she sat out, when the aged one came, the Dread One of the Æsir, and she looked in his eye: 'What do you ask me? Why do you try me? I know it all, Odin: where you hid your eye, in the much-famed fountain of Mímir; Mímir sips mead every morning from Corpse-father's pledge. Do you know yet, or what?')

Here Mímir is the owner of the well 'Mímisbrunnr', and Óðinn pledges one of his eyes to the well, and Mímir himself is said to drink from it each morning. In fact, it may be that because Óðinn has given his eye to Mímir's well, and thus added sight to the well, that the liquid which comes from it is full of wisdom (Clunies Ross 1994, 221). Lassen argues, however, that

> [d]et er ikke sandsynligt, at Mimer skulle have fået sin visdom fra Odins øje, da dette er i uoverensstemmelse med skildringen af Mimer i *Ynglinga saga*. Hvis der bag vølvens ord er underforstået, at Odins øje og vandet i Mimers brønd gensidigt har påvirket hinanden, er det mere oplagt at læse vølvens henvisning til pantsætningen som en forklaring på, hvorfra kraften i Odins øje stammer. (2003, 97)

[7] See Ármann Jakobsson for more on Óðinn as a sorcerer in *Yngl* who is able to trick his followers into worshiping him (2011, 7–8).

Such an interpretation agrees with the assertion that Óðinn's sources of knowledge always seem to be exterior, for in *Gylf* it is said that Óðinn drinks from the well.[8]

Mímir's well, according to *Gylf* chapter 15, lies under one of the roots of Yggdrasill, the Ash tree that stands at the centre of the Norse mythological cosmos. There are three roots that run from the world tree, one of which goes to the æsir, a second to the hrímþursar and a third to Niflhel. It is under the root that runs to the hrímþursar that Mímir's well is located. In the words of Jafnhár:

> 'En undir þeiri rót er til hrímþursa horfir, þar er Mímis brunnr, er spekð ok mannvit er í fólgit, ok heitir sá Mímir er á brunninn. Hann er fullr af vísindum fyrir því at hann drekkr ór brunninum af horninu Gjallarhorni. Þar kom Alfǫðr og beiddisk eins drykkjar af brunninum, en hann fékk eigi fyrr en hann lagði auga sitt at veði'. (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:17)

> ('Under the root that goes to the frost giants is the Well of Mimir. Wisdom and intelligence are hidden there, and Mimir is the well's owner. He is full of widom because he drinks of the well from the Gjallarhorn. All-Father went there and asked for one drink from the well, but he did not get this until he gave one of his eyes as a pledge'. (*Prose Edda*, 24–25))

In this account Óðinn receives a drink from Mímir's well, and must pay dearly for it with his eye, and his drink from the well gives him wisdom and intelligence. An aspect of this mythic narrative that deserves emphasis is that in *Gylf* Mímir's well lies under the root of Yggdrasill that runs to the the hrímþursar, introducing an association between the the jǫtnar and knowledge. Furthermore, Mímir is said to be full of wisdom because he drinks from the well in advance of Óðinn's pledge. In both of these Mímir narratives, the *Yngl* as well as the *Vsp* and *Gylf* versions, Óðinn gains wisdom from his association with Mímir, an external source. In the *Yngl* myth he takes full advantage of the dead Mímir's head, making the best out of what has happened, and in the *Gylf* myth he sacrifices his own eye in order to increase his wisdom through drink.

In *Vsp* of the R manuscript stanza 45 (*Vsp* of the H manuscript stanza 39), with the coming of Ragnarǫk, Óðinn seeks knowledge by speaking with Mímir's head:[9]

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[8] Schjødt also writes about Óðinn's acquisition of paranormal or numinous knowledge, in particular in relation to the myth of Kvasir and Óðinn's theft of the mead of wisdom from Gunnlǫð. Schjødt writes, '[u]den her at ville postulere, at den nordiske myte om tilegnelsen af visdomsmjøden er eller nødvendigvis oprindelig har været en såkaldt ritualmyte, så mener jeg, at det er påfaldende, i hvor høj grad den giver en mytisk "forklaring" på fænomener, der eksisterer i forskellige ritualer, og herunder især den kategori, vi kan betegne som "shamanindvielser", og det forekommer mig derfor sandsynligt, at myten her - sammen med andre - har fungeret som den forklaringsfaktor, der har gjort initiations-symbolikken acceptabel i nordboernes ideologi' (1983, 96).

[9] This may in fact be a source for the *Yngl* myth about Mímir's head.

> Leika Míms synir,
> en mjǫtuðr kyndisk
> at inu galla
> Gjallarhorni;
> hátt blæss Heimdallr,
> horn er á lopti,
> mælir Óðinn
> við Míms hǫfuð.
>
> (Mím's sons sport, the wood of destiny is kindled at the ancient Sounding-horn.
> Heimdall blows loud, the horn is aloft, Odin speaks with Mím's head.)

When the horn has been blown by Heimdallr, sounding the arrival of Ragnarǫk, it is to Mímir's head that Óðinn turns for advice, just as it was from Mímir's well that he drank to increase his wisdom in *Vsp* 28 of the R manuscript. Furthermore, the first line of *Vsp* R stanza 45, 'Míms synir', may also be read as 'Míms sýnir', which would refer to the visions of Mímir (Lassen 2003, 101), which leads to an interpretation that is more in line with the *Yngl* version of the Mímir myth, that it is the head of Mímir that gives wisdom, and sight or visions come from the eyes.[10] One of the most prominent parallels in all of the Mímir myths is the inclusion of Óðinn, and that in all cases the access to and transmission of wisdom is paramount.[11] Although this may seem like a long digression about Mímir, it is instrumental when considering the character of Óðinn in relation to tasks that involve wisdom. The representation of the áss in parallel texts and contexts in which he is seeking wisdom from something exterior leads to the conclusion that his desire to go to Vafþrúðnir is logical considering his character across sources: Vafþrúðnir might have something Óðinn desires. There are a few other texts that deserve brief consideration before moving beyond stanza 1 of *Vafþr*.

The origins of Óðinn's paranormal and magical abilities are also the main subject of the Rúnatal and Ljóðatal sections of *Háv*. The Rúnatal begins at stanza 138 and continues to stanza 144, and the Ljóðatal runs from stanza 146 through stanza 163. The speaker throughout is Óðinn and stanza 145 of *Háv* serves as a transition from the Rúnatal to the Ljóðatal. Stanzas 138 through 141 describe the áss' self-sacrifice where he sacrifices himself to himself by hanging from a windy tree and as a result acquires the runes. The tree is none other than Yggdrasill,

[10] Simpson writes that the 'problems concerning Mímir are never likely to be resolved, but the parallels presented here do at least make it probable that the various passages concerning him are merely presenting different facets of a single, though complex, figure, and that the approaches to understanding his significance are not blocked by any irreconcilable contradictions' (1962, 53).

[11] See further *Sigrdrífumál* stanza 14 line 4, where Mímir's head is once again a source of information. See also McKinnell (2005, 208) for more information on Mímir.

‘Yggr’ being a *heiti* for Óðinn, and ‘drasill’ a poetic name for ‘horse’, which together form the *kenning* Yggdrasill. It is not stated outright, but a possible interpretation of stanza 138 is that in his hanging Óðinn undergoes a voluntary death so that he will be able to learn nine magic spells. Stanza 140 of *Háv* clarifies how he learns of the spells:

> Fimbulljóð níu
> nam ek af inum frægja syni
> Bǫlþórs, Bestlu fǫður,
> ok ek drykk of gat
> ins dýra mjaðar,
> ausinn Óðreri.
>
> (I had nine mighty songs from that famed son of Bölthor, Bestla’s father, and one swig I snatched of that glorious mead drained from Frenzy-stirrer.)

While hanging and—by interpretation—visiting the world of the dead, Óðinn receives ‘Fimbulljóð níu’ from Bǫlþórn, his maternal grandfather who is a jǫtunn. The drink of the mead that he refers to in the second half of the stanza is a reference to another myth of Óðinn that appears earlier in the poem, when he seduced Gunnlǫð to get a drink of the precious mead. In *Háv* stanza 105 Óðinn confesses the following:

> Gunnlǫð mér um gaf
> gullnum stóli á
> drykk ins dýra mjaðar;
> ill iðgjǫld
> lét ek hana eptir hafa
> síns ins heila hugar,
> síns ins svára sefa.
>
> (Gunnlöd gave me on the golden throne a drink of the dear-won mead. In return I gave her bad recompense, for her whole heart, for her sorrowful soul.)

The mythical narrative of Óðinn taking advantage of Gunnlǫð in order to acquire the mead of poetry is presented with greater detail in the *Skáld* of *SnE* (see *Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 2:4–5). Another possible explanation for the reference to the mead is that Óðinn receives a drink of it while hanging—or in the world of the dead—where he acquired the nine magic spells, and is therefore not making reference to his encounter with Gunnlǫð. Most importantly, both sources of wisdom, the mead and the runes, come from the exterior and are acquired by Óðinn.

In addition to the nine magic spells that he gains, Óðinn also becomes empowered to create nine additional magic spells, and all eighteen spells are enumerated in stanzas 146 through 163. In this case the pledge Óðinn makes is much more than an eye, as it was in the case of Mímir’s well, but his whole body,

hanging on the tree as Christ hung on the cross, and, accordingly his return to the world of the living, if he died on the tree, is triumphant. From his sacrifice Óðinn has gained knowledge that he would not have been able to gain otherwise, and he is more powerful than he was before. The knowledge Óðinn acquired during his hanging proves valuable to the wisdom contest in *Vafþr*.

Among the other exterior sources of Óðinn's wisdom are his ravens Huginn and Muninn. In *Grímn* stanza 20, Óðinn, disguised as Grímnir, says that each day Huginn and Muninn, Óðinn's ravens, are sent out around the world to gather information.

> Huginn ok Muninn
> fljúga hverjan dag
> jǫrmungrund yfir;
> óumk ek of Hugin
> at hann aptr né komit,
> þó sjámk meirr um Munin.
>
> (Hugin and Munin fly every day across the Gaping Ground. I worry that Hugin may not return, but I am more worried about Munin.)

The expressed concern that the ravens may not return one day suggests that without the assistance of his two ravens the chief of the æsir might be lacking some of the wisdom he relies on. Huginn refers to thought or something of the mind, and Muninn to memory (Simek 1993, 164 and 222; cf. Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson 1931, 292 and 414).

Óðinn has had success in his endeavours to gain wisdom in all of these narratives, and at the beginning of *Vafþr*, he announces to Frigg that he seeks her advice since he wishes to go and visit Vafþrúðnir to contend in matters of wisdom. There must be something for Óðinn to gain from his proposed journey, and the audience does not have any reason to think that he will be unsuccessful in his quest, as other sources that present Óðinn do so in a favourable manner in regards to his abilities. There are many mythical narratives about Óðinn and from each of them it is possible to interpret the story in relation to his characteristic association with wisdom and the means of its acquisition, but the above examples serve to introduce this theme sufficiently for the present discussion. At this point in *Vafþr* one can only expect that Frigg will encourage Óðinn on this journey, for, as briefly outlined, he is successful in many ventures and can harness exterior forces for his own advantage. What his wife thinks, however, may be another matter all together.

3.2 Matters of the Heart

Frigg is the second speaker in *Vafþr*, and she is an important member of the Old Norse pantheon, the wife of Óðinn, and the mother of Baldr. In *Vsp* stanza 33 of the

R manuscript it is said that Frigg resides at Fensalir. While Váli, Baldr's brother who was born to avenge his death, is seeking vengeance, Frigg weeps where she resides.

> Þó hann æva hendr
> né hǫfuð kembði
> áðr á bál um bar
> Baldrs andskota;
> en Frigg um grét
> í Fensǫlum
> vá Valhallar.
> Vituð ér enn – eða hvat?
>
> (He never washed hands nor combed his head, till he put to the pyre Baldr's foe; but Frigg lamented in Fen-halls, for Slain-hall's woe: do you know yet, or what?)

Here Frigg is seen in the role of grieving mother, saddened by the loss of her child Baldr, the most beautiful of the æsir, but she is not only grieving for her child. As Ingunn Ásdísardóttir writes, Frigg's concern runs even deeper: 'Frigg grætur hér dauða Baldurs; en hún grætur meira en einungis lát sonar sins, hún grætur líka "vá Valhallar", þ.e. örlög goðheimsins alls sem mun farast í ragnarökom' (2007, 131). Frigg will also lose her husband Óðinn during the events of Ragnarǫk and most of the æsir will perish. She knows Baldr's death is the beginning of the downfall of the æsir, and once Ragnarǫk begins Óðinn will meet Fenrir the wolf in battle and succumb to the strength of the beast. In *Vsp* stanza 52 of R (*Vsp* stanza 46 of H) Frigg is mentioned in relation to Óðinn's death, where the name Hlín appears as a *heiti* for Frigg:[12]

> Þá kømr Hlínar
> harmr annarr fram,
> er Óðinn ferr
> við úlf vega,
> en bani Belja
> bjartr at Surti,
> þá mun Friggjar
> falla *angan*.
>
> (Then there comes for Hlín a second sorrow, when Odin goes to fight the wolf and Beli's bright bane against Surt: then when Frigg's beloved must fall.)

Once again Frigg will lose a beloved, her husband, and will be greatly affected by his death. Both stanzas 33 and 52 from *Vsp* of R present an image of Frigg as a

[12] Simek asserts that '[i]n *Völuspá* 53 Hlín merely appears to be another name for Frigg' (1993, 153).

grieving mother and wife, and as the matriarch of the æsir. This double suffering of Frigg is referenced directly in the first two lines of *Vsp* stanza 52, cited above: her first woe is the death of her son and the gained foreknowledge of the end of the æsir; the second is the death of her husband and the deaths of most of the æsir.

Frigg's first appearance as a speaker in the R manuscript is in *Vafþr*. It is in this poem that her role as Óðinn's wife and sought-after adviser is important. Frigg only has two stanzas of speech in *Vafþr*, but the dialogue between her and Óðinn foreshadows the longer dialogue between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir. After Óðinn approaches Frigg and has asked for her advice Frigg replies by giving her counsel.

Frigg kvað:
2 „Heima letja
ek mynda Herjafǫðr
í gǫrðom goða,
þvíat engi jǫtun
ek hugða jafnramman
sem Vafþrúðni vera."

(I'd rather keep home Host-father within the courts of the gods; for I count no giant the match in might of that Vafthrúdnir.)

Frigg expresses concern for Óðinn's welfare, as the first thing that she says is that he ('Heriafǫðr') should remain in Ásgarðr ('í gǫrðom goða') rather than travel to visit Vafþrúðnir.[13] Her advice is clear, and her concern may suggest that she actually may not be in possession of foreknowledge of the fate of the æsir, even though *Vsp* stanza 33 of R suggests that she knows they will perish at Ragnarǫk. If, however, she did know the fate of the æsir then she would be aware that Óðinn is not placing himself in grave danger on a journey such as the one he now proposes to undertake. In this instance she must not foresee the future as Óðinn does. She does not encourage Óðinn to go on his journey to Vafþrúðnir, as she might if she

[13] Björn Magnússon Ólsen suggests that in stanza 2 line 1 *letja* (to dissuade) should be switched with *hvetja* (to encourage), resulting in the meaning that Frigg encourages her husband to stay at home. His assertion is based on a comparison with *Atlamál* stanza 48 line 2, in which *letja* and *heima* also appear together. Björn Magnússon Ólsen writes, '[f]ejlen stammer sikkert fra den mundtlige overlevering. Et overleveringsmedium, som ikke forstod at *kvetja heima* kunde betyde at "råde til at blive hjemme", men som på den anden side indså, at Friggs replik gik ud på at afholde Odin fra hans forehavende, synes at have indsat *letja* for *hvetja*' (1922, 196). Finnur Jónsson notes that '*Hęima lętja* er en ejendommelig udtryksmåde' (1932, 53), reinforcing Björn Magnússon Ólsen's skepticism from a decade earlier. Machan notes that Magnus Olsen (1964, 11) 'suggests that the unusualness of the phrase results from Frigg's awareness of Óðinn's resolve to travel, which enables her to express her displeasure with the intended journey by *letia* alone' (2008, 73). It is also tempting to read *Heima letja* in light of the runic alphabet, in which the *l* is similar to the *s* rune, and the *e* and *i* runes are very similar, leading to a possible interpretation that reads *Heima sitja*.

knew he was in no danger, but, rather, encourages him to stay at home. She is concerned that Vafþruðnir is extemely strong,[14] and, as the event of Baldr's death is referred to as an event in the narrative past—according to *Vafþr* stanzas 54 and 55—she may find it prudent to be extremely wary of losing another of her close family, as she has already lost Baldr. This interpretation, however, goes against what we know from *Lok* stanza 29: '[s]vo virðist sem Frigg sé eitthvað efins um að Óðinn muni hafa betur í vísdómskeppninni við Vafþrúðni, en það stangast nokkuð á við Lokasennu 29 þar sem segir að Frigg viti öll örlög (Ingunn Ásdísardóttir 2007, 134–35).

In *Gylf* there is an episode in which Frigg features prominently that, when *Vafþr* is considered in its mythological context, provides good grounds for her need to take great care for members of her family when they face potential dangers. If Frigg does not know that Óðinn will die at Ragnarǫk, her concern about the danger of his proposed journey to see Vafþrúðnir is justifiably high and related to Baldr's death, a central issue in *Vafþr*, especially as we know that Baldr's death is in the past in relation to the narrative present of *Vafþr*. In *Gylf* chapter 49 it is said that after Baldr's troubling dreams in which he sees that his life is threatened Frigg takes precautions and procures oaths from all things both living and dead to not harm Baldr: 'ok Frigg tók svardaga til þess að eira skyldu Baldri eldr ok vatn, járn ok alls konar málmr, steinar, jǫrðin, viðirnir, sóttirnar, dýrin, fuglarnir, eitr, ormar' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:45) (Frigg took oaths that Baldr would not be harmed by fire and water, iron and all kinds of metal, stones, the earth, trees, diseases, animals, birds, poisons and snakes (*Prose Edda*, 65)). After the oaths are procured the æsir engage is blatant hubris by pelting Baldr with all of the objects that had sworn not to harm him. Needless to say, Baldr is unharmed as the oaths that Frigg procured hold strong. Loki, disguised as a woman, however, goes to visit Frigg to garner knowledge about what precautions she has taken to protect Baldr, seeing that the æsir are all throwing things at him without harm. Frigg reveals to the woman that there is one thing that she did not receive an oath from: '[v]ex viðarteinungr einn fyrir vestan Valhǫll. Sá er mistilteinn kallaðr. Sá þótti mér ungr at krefja eiðsins' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:45) ('A shoot of wood grows to the west of Valhalla. It is called mistletoe, and it seemed too young for me to demand its oath' (*Prose Edda*, 66)).[15] The woman then promptly dissappears. Loki then goes quickly to retrieve

[14] Ruggerini writes that '[t]he adjective *rammr*, here applied indirectly to the giant, has a particular force: it denotes a special kind of strength, not merely physical but also indicating magical power, which we may assume comes from the knowledge of the runes, from ritual drinks such as mead, and from the practice of prophecy or the enhancement of one's psychic powers' (1994, 146).

[15] This is one example of Loki shape-shifting in order to reach a goal. For a detailed list of

the mistletoe at the place where Frigg said it grew and brings it to the assembly where the æsir continue to throw projectiles at Baldr. With the assistance of Hǫðr, the one who throws the mistletoe, Baldr is killed. According to *Gylf*, Baldr's death comes about as a result of Loki's ill intentions and Hǫðr's compliance to Loki's direction. An important part in the action, however, is Frigg's lack of foresight. Perhaps unknowingly she assists Loki in the killing of her own son, which may account for the extreme nature of her grief, as cited above in reference to *Vsp* R stanza 33, although it is without a doubt that the loss of a child would lead to extreme grief for most mothers, regardless of the circumstances. It is important not to underestimate the malicious nature of Loki's involvement in the mythical narrative of Baldr's death, however, for he is a force to be reckoned with. Dieterle argues that it is due to Loki's uniquely aerial nature (i.e. Loki Loptr) that he is able to command the mistletoe, and thus Frigg could not foresee that it could possibly be a weapon potent enough to harm Baldr. Were it not for Loki, in other words, Frigg might not have made a mistake by not procuring an oath from the mistletoe. Dieterle writes that '[i]t is this aerial role that gives Loki command of the lofty mistletoe, although we must suspect that the significance of this power reaches farther than we have yet grasped' (1986, 301). Frigg did not grasp it either, and if in fact the event of Baldr's death precedes Óðinn's journey to Vafþrúðnir (as mentioned, *Vafþr* stanzas 54 and 55 suggest this) she cannot afford to lose her husband as she lost her son. This reading requires a configuration of the mythological narratives that can be problematic, however, as *Vafþr* and *Gylf* are not necessarily complementary texts (*Vafþr* is a source for *Gylf*), but they are worth comparing for an increased understanding of Frigg's possible characteristics.

It is also possible that Frigg was unaware of what the æsir were doing at the assembly where Baldr would eventually die. At the assembly they were throwing projectiles at the áss that would normally have killed him. Lindow writes the following:

> [w]hen the disguised Loki arrives, somehow Frigg does not know (or pretends not to know) what is going on at the þing, and she asks for information. This strange request, which has elicited little comment in the vast Baldr literature, probably indicates that the activities at the þing take place in the public arena, to which females like Frigg ordinarily do not have access. (1997, 59)

If Frigg was indeed kept in the dark about what occurs at the assemblies that the æsir held, then the possibility that she does not know about the fate of the æsir is even more conceivable, for even though she is a deity, she is not a male, and was

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instances where Loki makes such actions see Ármann Jakobsson (2009b, 35–37). See also Bonnetain (2006, 110–20).

kept out of certain activities. This does not mean that she still does not wield great influence, even over her husband Óðinn. There is another instance in the eddic corpus where she challenges him openly, and more effectively than at the beginning of *Vafþr*.

In the prose introduction to *Grímn*, Frigg plays a role that is very similar to the one she has in *Vafþr* stanza 2, that of doubting or challenging Óðinn.[16] The prose introduction states that there are two brothers, the sons of King Hrauðungr, one of whom, Geirrøðr, is fostered by Óðinn and the other, Agnarr, is fostered by Frigg. When the two boys are grown up Óðinn sends them off in a ship back to their father's kingdom. When they arrive there, Geirrøðr jumps out of the boat and sends his brother back into the sea with the ship and ultimately off to live with a troll woman. King Hrauðungr is now dead and Geirrøðr inherits his kingdom. Óðinn is proud of his foster son and speaks to Frigg about how Geirrøðr has done well for himself while Agnarr is less accomplished and has even married a troll. Óðinn says the following to Frigg: „Sér þú Agnar fóstra þinn, hvar hann elr bǫrn við gýgi í hellinum? En Geirrøðr fóstri minn er konungr ok sitr nú at landi?" (Do you see Agnar, your foster-son, raising children with a troll-wife in a cave? But Geirröd, my foster-son, is a king and now rules over his land). Frigg, however, does not accept Óðinn's statement and replies to him with the following: „Hann er matníðingr sá at hann kvelr gesti sína ef honum þykkja of margir koma" (He's mean with food, and abuses his guests, if he thinks too many have come). Óðinn does not believe Frigg's claim, and the couple decides to put their dispute to the test and Óðinn travels to Geirrøðr's court to check on his hospitality. *Grímn* comes directly after *Vafþr* in R and again has Óðinn leaving Ásgarðr on a journey, but this time Frigg is the instigator who urges Óðinn to leave, while in *Vafþr* she was reluctant to see her husband depart. The main reason for her confidence in his safety in *Grímn* is most certainly that in the poem Óðinn is in the world of humans, a place where he can succeed in the face of his challenges, while in *Vafþr* his travels take him into the world of the jǫtnar, where such success may be less certain. Frigg actively works against Óðinn in *Grímn*, as the prose introduction reveals that she sends word to the king to beware of a figure who matches Óðinn's description. This places Óðinn in danger, but it is only a human danger that the áss can get himself out of with the help of the young Agnarr. It is most likely that Frigg did not intend to place Óðinn in grave danger, but to teach him a lesson.

[16] Gunnell writes that 'the *Grímnismál* introduction is so complete in itself that it could have been drawn from a seperate source in the form of an independent prose tale, or *þáttr*' (1995, 194).

Although Óðinn is successful in his contest with Vafþrúðnir, the answer to the second-to-last question that he asks, confirming Óðinn's coming death at Ragnarǫk, is the first time within the context of the poem that it can be said for sure that Óðinn will not perish in Vafþrúðnir's hall, even though it is a next-to-sure thing due to Óðinn's record of success in verbal duels and quests that have to do with wisdom. In *Vafþr* Frigg ultimately submits to Óðinn's will to travel to the hall of Vafþrúðnir, although it is doubtful that she ever had a realistic chance of preventing her husband from leaving Ásgarðr in the first place, and she does not challenge him in the same manner that she does in *Grímn*, where her challenge and subsequent subversion in fact places Óðinn in danger, although relatively benign. In *Vafþr* Óðinn is very assertive and responds to Frigg's advice with a phrase that will be repeated later in the poem as a refrain. It is perhaps most potent when it is considered as a direct statement, Óðinn pressing on his opponent, in this case his wife who has advised him not to embark.

Óðinn kvað:
3 „Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaða,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hitt vil ek vita,
hvé Vafþrúðnis
salakynni sé."

(Much have I travelled, much have I tried, much have I tested the powers: one thing I'd know: what company is kept within Vafthrúdnir's hall.)

In Óðinn's response to Frigg in stanza 3 he states that he is well-travelled, well-experienced and has tested the powers before, confirming for the audience, at last, that the speaker is Óðinn.[17] Little is left to the imagination as to his intentions and it appears that Óðinn will not take any advice from his wife, the same advice he has just asked her for. It may seem confusing why he approached Frigg in the first place. It is possible that the opening scene is used as a frame narrative to foreshadow what will occur in the main action of the poem, and it further allows for the "Fjǫlð ek fór, / fjǫlð ek freistaða, / fjǫlð ek reynda regin" pattern to be used for the first time, as it will recur as a refrain as the poem draws towards its close. After three stanzas the audience is aware that Óðinn is going to travel away from Ásgarðr

[17] Ruggerini writes that '[t]his first occurence in *Vm*. of the lines "Much have I travelled, etc." is thus important in that it marks out the speaker as Óðinn for the reader or audience beyond any shadow of doubt. Óðinn's re-use of the *helmingr* as the second refrain when the poem is approaching its climax represents a challenge to the giant, a chance for him to unmask the adversary he has before him. But he lacks the necessary sharpness of wit, fails the test, and goes on towards his defeat' (1994, 162).

on a seemingly dangerous journey to the hall of Vafþrúðnir. Tension is high in the interaction between the divine couple, and the audience must wonder how Frigg will react to being first asked for her advice and then told that her advice is not required. Óðinn's confidence calls forth some of the subject matter that has been transmitted in *Háv*, where details from some ordeals that Óðinn has gone through to acquire the knowledge that he posesses are given. Óðinn, as described in the Rúnatal section of *Háv* (stanzas 138 through 144), has travelled to the world of the dead—or at least hung on a windy tree for nine nights—to acquire wisdom. Óðinn's ability to harness exterior sources of knowledge bolsters his confidence in his journey to contest with the powerful jǫtunn, and it is most likely that Óðinn already knows he is fated to die at Ragnarǫk.

Frigg replies to Óðinn's assertive statement by wishing him well on his journey, and does not protest her husband any further to remain in Ásgarðr. Whether motivated by concern or not, she supportively sees him off.

Frigg kvað:
„Heill þú farir!
heill þú aptr komir!
heill þú á sinnum sér!
œði þér dugi,
hvars þú skalt, Aldafǫðr,
orðum mæla jǫtun."

(Go in one piece; come back in one piece; stay in one piece on your trip. I hope your wit's up to it, Father of Men, when you bandy words with that giant.)

The phrase 'orðum mæla' indicates that Frigg is aware of the nature of the intended meeting between her husband and his adversary, that it will be a contest of words. Her use of a formula in parting is a response to Óðinn's statement that he is well travelled and experienced, perhaps indicating that she still thinks he needs to be wished good luck. Ruggerini writes that with her words, Frigg 'makes a mental counterpoint to the threefold formula used by the god in the preceding stanza, in the shared knowledge that his "much travelling", "much asking" and "much testing" are always associated with dangers, trials and hardships' (1994, 147). What is more, in her reply, Frigg also matches the alliterative pattern that Óðinn initiated in stanza 3.[18] Perhaps the confidence he displays with his words has convinced Frigg that he

[18] Läffler (1913) suggests that in stanza 4 line 2 *aptr* should be changed to *fram*. This assertion is a result of the pattern that '[i]n the *Edda*, whenever anaphora is used in the first three lines of *ljóðaháttr*, there are two different sets of alliterating sounds in the two short lines' (Machan 2008, 74). Salberger disagrees, however, and suggests that rather than change *aptr* to *fram* in stanza 4 line 2, an insertion of *af* in front of *farir* in stanza 4 line 1 would take away the confusion caused by the anaphora (1974, 23–30). Salberger concludes that

will fare well on his journey, or, on the other hand, his assertiveness has possibly left Frigg with no choice but to accept that he is in fact going on the journey regardless of her advice. She may still be concerned for his safety while he is gone, considering the death of Baldr and her exclusion from the courts of men, and knows that she must give him the best send off that she can, whereas in *Grímn* even though she challenges him and seemingly sends him into a dangerous situation that she makes worse, she knows that he will be alright because he will only face human dangers. Frigg's response is a resignation from her opposition of stanza 2, and all that Frigg can do is hope that Óðinn's journey goes well, for Óðinn has demonstrated that he will travel as he sees fit. Ingunn Ásdísardóttir defines Frigg's role in the poem as one of safety: 'Frigg er fulltrúi öryggisins hér og vill ekki taka áhættu. Hún er þannig andstæða jötunheima og þeirrar óreiðu (*kaos*) sem þeir standa fyrir. Jafnframt er mynd hennar kyrrstæð, en það rímar við myndina af henni í Völuspá þar sem hún situr í Fensölum og grætur. Í því tilliti er hún alger andstæða Freyju' (2007, 135).

Sverdlov has made a detailed analysis of the metrical constructions of the *ljóðaháttr* stanzas in *Vafþr* and in particular the refrain 'Fjǫlð ek fór, / fjǫlð ek freistaða, / fjǫlð ek reynda regin' that Óðinn declares seven times. Sverdlov's conclusion is that the construction is in fact a crafty and magical manouever by Óðinn to force Vafþrúðnir into forgetting the rules of the contest (2011, 69–70). Taking this into consideration, it is notable that the same formulaic phrase is used in stanza 3 by Óðinn in his dialogue with Frigg, which may foreshadow Óðinn's ability to steer the course of events with his own determination and crafty use of language. In this sense, Óðinn's success in getting Frigg on his side in *Vafþr* stanzas 1 through 4 foreshadows his eventual success in the wisdom contest that follows. Assuming this to be the case, Óðinn may have in fact tricked his wife into accepting that he is leaving Ásgarðr and embarking on his journey to Vafþrúðnir's hall, just as he will later trick Vafþrúðnir into conceding the contest.

Frigg also appears in *Yngl* chapter 3, and her role in that narrative may, like the other mythological sources, help support the interpretation of Frigg's character in *Vafþr*. In *Yngl* it is said that while Óðinn is away on a long journey his two brothers Víli and Vé separated his inheritance between them and also shared his wife Frigg between them.

> Óðinn átti tvá brœðr. Hét annarr Vé, en annarr Vílir. Þeir brœðr hans stýrðu ríkinu, þá er

'[k]onjekturen skänker—med varsamhet mot den traderade texten—kongruens mellan de både verbfraserna: [*af*] *farir—aptr komir* och självständig allitteration mellan de både kortversarna. Helmingen framträder efter konjekturen med en finare symmetrisk konstnärlighet' (30).

> hann var í brottu. Þat var eitt sinn, þá er Óðinn var farinn langt í brot ok hafði lengi dvalzk, at Ásum þótti ørvænt hans heim. Þá tóku brœðr hans at skipta arfi hans, en konu hans, Frigg, gengu þeir báðir at eiga. En litlu síðar kom Óðinn heim. Tok hann þá við konu sinni. (Ynglinga saga, 12)
>
> (Óthin had two brothers. One was called Vé, and the other, Víli. These, his brothers, governed the realm when he was gone. One time when Óthin was gone to a great distance, he stayed away so long that the Æsir thought he would never return. Then his brothers began to divide his inheritance; but his wife Frigg they shared between them. However, a short while afterwards, Óthin returned and took possession of his wife again. (Saga of the Ynglings, 7))

In *Yngl* Frigg appears as a subservient wife to Óðinn so that even in his absence she is a part of his property and is under the protection of his brothers until his return. She did not have a say in the matter, as she ultimately does not have a say about whether Óðinn travels or does not travel in *Vafþr*. It is thus quite probable—if the sources are read together—that rather than having to trick Frigg into accepting his plan, Óðinn simply needed to exert his authority over her to make her accept his plan. The story of Frigg as the shared property of Óðinn's brothers in his absence is presumably referred to in *Lok* stanza 26 when, while accusing all of the æsir of their misdeeds, Loki tells Frigg that while she was Óðinn's wife she had slept with his brothers Víli and Vé, meaning it to be an insult on her character.

> „Þegi þú, Frigg!
> þú ert Fjǫrgyns mær
> og hefir æ vergjǫrn verit,
> er þá Véa ok Vilja
> léztu þér, Viðris kvæn,
> báða í baðm um tekit."
>
> (Shut your mouth, Frigg, you're Fjörgyn's daughter, and have always been mad for men, while Vidrir's wife, after all, you took Vili and Vé, both of them, into your arms.)

Yngl chapter 3 adds to this account that when Óðinn returns from his journey he reclaims his wife. Ingunn Ásdísardóttir concludes her account of Frigg in *Yngl* with the following words:

> [s]ennilega er vísað til þessarar sagnar í Lokasennu 26 þar sem Loki sakar Frigg um að hafa lagst með Vilja og Véa. Í frásögunni í Ynglinga sögu virðist Frigg því hafa afskaplega lítið að segja um sín eigin örlög, þeir ráðstafa henni að vild, bræðurnir þrír. Þetta er reyndar nokkuð áberandi hvað Frigg varðar í verkum Snorra: hún er tiltölulega óvirk persóna alls staðar nema í sögninni um dauða Baldurs. (2007, 171)

Ingunn Ásdísardóttir suggests that there is a probable connection between *Yngl* and *Lok* that in some manner demonstrates that it can be constructive to compare narratives from the mythological sources.

Of the narratives that have been drawn together that include Frigg it can be said that overall she is a supportive wife of Óðinn—taking the prose prologue to *Grímn* as an exception—and she is ultimately supportive of him in *Vafþr* wishing him well on his trip to see Vafþrúðnir, while also demonstrating concern and ultimately hope that he will return in one piece. It is possible that Frigg is indeed wise in trying to disuade Óðinn from making his trip to jǫtunheimr to engage Vafþrúðnir, for in defeating the jǫtunn Óðinn is moving closer to his own defeat by Fenrir, and possibly bringing the rest of the æsir closer to their own deaths. In this sense, knowledge of the future may only draw the future closer to the present. That is, however, Óðinn's primary motive in the poem: to prepare for the end.

Although a minor character in the poem with only two stanzas of speech, Frigg's role in the narrative is emblematic of the coming of Ragnarǫk, as is the poem on the whole. The first four stanzas serve as a prelude to the verbal battle between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir, and the battle between the áss and the jǫtunn foreshadows the final battle between the æsir and the jǫtnar. Frigg is scared for her husband at the beginning and no one can blame her for it, but ultimately she concedes to his will. These four introductory stanzas provide the frame within which Óðinn makes his journey to Vafþrúðnir's hall, who, although not yet present, is already known by the audience to be a powerful figure.[19]

3.3 Object of the Intellect

Vafþrúðnir only appears as an active speaking character in the eddic poem *Vafþr* and thus our understanding of his character is based solely on this one poem. Verses from the poem, as stated above, are cited in *Gylf*, and the name 'Vafþrúðnir' appears in the *þulur*, or lists of names that are found in manuscripts of *SnE*, appended to *Skáld*. The following verse is found in the *þulur*, among a long list of names of jǫtnar:

> Kǫttr, Qsgrúi
> ok Allfarinn,
> Vindsvalr, Víparr
> ok Vafþrúðnir,
> Eldr, Aurgelmir,
> Ægir, Rangbeinn,
> Vindr, Víðblindi,

[19] Frigg appears in other sources, including works by Paulus Diaconus and Saxo Grammaticus, which, as each source that is brought into an argument does, may alter the image of her character as it has been depicted here. This highlights, once again, that all constructions are subject to further modification as more information is brought together, and also reminds the author, and no doubt the reader, that the primary issue with a construction is that it may in fact be arbitrary. Once again, the present author is not dissuaded.

Vingnir, Leifi. (*Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen* 1:324)[20]

That Vafþrúðnir's name is attested here does not mean that he was known from any source other than the poem, as, for example, the name Aurgelmir is likewise only attested in *Vafþr* and the *þulur*. Furthermore, as Faulkes writes, '[s]ome of the *þulur* contain foreign words (Latin, French, Greek); this confirms their learned character and implies that they were mostly compiled in the twelfth century or later' (1998, xvii). Thus the *þulur* most likely do not originate from a period that could be much earlier than the appearance of *Vafþr* or *SnE* in manuscripts, and the names 'Vafþrúðnir' and 'Aurgelmir' here most likely derive from a version of *Vafþr* that was extant when the *þulur* were composed.

The fact that Vafþrúðnir is not attested in other narratives leads Simek to assert that the jǫtunn is the result of artistic license: '[t]he giant Vafþrúðnir is a purely literary creation in order to present Odin with a sparring partner. Further proof that giants in Germanic heathendom could be considered wise – in contrast to medieval and later poetry where they are usually shown to be rather stupid – is the giantess Hyndla and also Mímir' (1993, 344). This is potentially the case, as there is no surviving evidence that suggests Vafþrúðnir was known outside of the eddic poem *Vafþr*, and the association of jǫtnar with wisdom is logical in the context of Old Norse mythology.[21] As it stands, Vafþrúðnir is one of the only jǫtnar who speak in the poetry of R. Gerðr has 8 lines of *ljóðaháttr* speech in *Skírn*, Hymir has some verses in *Hym*, and Þrymr a few verses in *Þrym*. Otherwise, most of the speaking verses in the mythological poems of R are alloted to members of the æsir, the vǫlva in *Vsp*, and the dwarf Alvíss in *Alv*. *Vkv* has elves and humans speaking in the poem, but as noted above that poem eludes definition as either mythological or heroic. Vafþrúðnir's role as a prominent speaker in a mythological poem in R who is not of the æsir is therefore significant, reinforcing the potential threat that the jǫtunn poses to Óðinn.

Frigg's vocal concern for Óðinn's proposed journey and her statement that she does not know of a more powerful jǫtunn demonstrates that indeed Vafþrúðnir must be very powerful, for he elicits concern among the æsir. The fact that Frigg, who is

[20] On the nature of the *þulur* see Faulkes (1998, xv–xviii) and Elena A. Gurevich (1992). Clunies Ross writes that '[t]he *þula* (pl. *þulur*) was a special form of versified list, which often used the *fornyrðislag* metre most commonly employed in Eddic poetry. *Þulur* contained collections of poetic *heiti* for the major subjects of skaldic verse, such as gods, men, ships and weapons, ordered in strophic form. The evolution of *þulur* can probably be attributed to the need of skaldic poets to have access to versified *aides-mémoire* which functioned like rhyming dictionaries' (1987, 81).

[21] Traditonally giants across literary and folkloric traditions have been protrayed as evil, representing the other, or anti-human. Stephens concurs, writing that 'traditional Giants were portrayed as evil in every way' (1989, 66).

perhaps more familiar with Óðinn's abilities than any other, is concerned for his safety on the proposed journey suggests that from what she has heard of Vafþrúðnir, Óðinn may be no match for him.[22] This would mean that Vafþrúðnir's reputation would have been mighty, for Óðinn is the most intellectually powerful áss, and the æsir tend to get the better of the jǫtnar in the mythical present when the sources are considered together (Clunies Ross 1994–98 and Lindow 2001). From amongst the mythological poems of R a number of examples can be put forward where the æsir retain the upper hand in their dealings with other paranormal beings: Óðinn is able to take advantage of Gunnlǫð to gain access to Suttungr's mead (*Háv* stanzas 104 through 110); Þórr is able to secure Hymir's cauldron for the æsir (*Hym*), retrieve his hammer from Þrymr (*Þrym*), and outwit Alvíss, the dwarf who wishes to marry his daughter (*Alv*); and, furthermore, it is most probable that Freyr secures the love of Gerðr, bringing her from the world of the jǫtnar into the society of the æsir (*Skírn*). Óðinn, as the poem's audience can expect, appears confident and this suggests that he knows he will be able to outwit Vafþrúðnir, and thus, although the jǫtunn is undoubtedly quite powerful it can be concluded from the frame dialogue between Óðinn and Frigg that he is not as powerful as Óðinn.

Most of what is known about the character of Vafþrúðnir is revealed through his dialogue with Óðinn in the main action of the poem, the wisdom dialogue. Vafþrúðnir permits Óðinn to enter his hall, not knowing that the guest is disguised, and thus from the beginning of their interaction it is apparent that the jǫtunn does not possess any particular skill that allows him to see through deceit and disguise. Óðinn outwits him from the outset, and this may be due to Óðinn's great ability to disguise himself, rather than Vafþrúðnir's ignorance, but it also demonstrates that the guest has the upper hand over the host from the outset. In stanza 9, furthermore, Vafþrúðnir can be seen to be a gracious host, inviting his guest further into the hall. While this is a challenge, as the further into the hall the guest moves the more difficult it will be for him to leave, it is also a gracious gesture on the part of the host. Vafþrúðnir even offers his guest a seat and can be said to reflect the guidelines that Óðinn has set out in *Háv* stanzas 3 and 4 for what a guest is in need of upon his arrival at the hall of a host. After Vafþrúðnir asks four questions of his guest who goes by the name of Gagnráðr, the jǫtunn again invites the guest to a seat, this time beside him. At this moment, full of confidence, Vafþrúðnir sets the stakes for the

[22] Schulz, on the connection between the jǫtnar and wisdom, and in particular Vafþrúðnir and wisdom, writes, '[d]ie Epitheta, mit denen diese Eigenschaften ausgedrückt werden, sind vor allem *fróðr* und *víss*. In Vm. wird der Riese wiederholt als *alsvinnr* oder *svinnr* bezeichnet. Auch *rammr* "stark" wird sich auf die Geistesstärke beziehen, wenn Frigg Odin in Vm. 2 vor einem Wissenswettstreit mit Vafþrúðnir warnt, da sie keinen Riesen wisse, der *iafnrammr* "ebenso stark" – wohl in mythischem Wissen – sei' (2004, 61).

contest, which are life and death. Vafþrúðnir is confident in the early stages of his encounter with his guest, in a similar way that Óðinn is confident before departing from his home. With two contestants so confident at the outset of the meeting the events that follow are sure to be significant and reach a climax, and, what is more, the audience is able to foresee that there will undoubtedly be a reversal of fortune for Vafþrúðnir. In the end Vafþrúðnir will come to the realization that his fortunes are not what he thought they were.

Another characteristic that is revealed about Vafþrúðnir during his dialogue with Óðinn is his age. In stanza 34 Gagnráðr asks his opponent what his earliest memory is, and Vafþrúðnir replies in stanza 35 that before the creation of the earth he remembers when Bergelmir 'var á lúðr um lagiðr'. This piece of information signifies a very old age for Vafþrúðnir, as Bergelmir was the grandson of Aurgelmir/Ymir and was born before the creation of the earth, as is revealed in stanzas 28 and 29. The word *lúðr* has been interpreted either to mean cradle or coffin, but Machan (2008) interprets it to mean cradle, in accordance with an early memory of a birth. Whether stanza 35 means that Vafþrúðnir remembers the birth or the death of Bergelmir is significant, for at least it means that he was alive either at the end or beginning of the lifetime of that very ancient jǫtunn. In *Gylf* chapter 7, moreover, it is said that when Ymir was killed to make the earth and the heavens all of the hrímþursar other than Bergelmir and his wife perished, and that it was from that couple that the new race of hrímþursar descend. As mentioned above, *Vafþr* stanza 35 is quoted in *Gylf* chapter 7 to corroborate this myth, and this may indicate that either Vafþrúðnir was an exception to the many deaths that took place, if he was alive at Bergelmir's birth, or that he was a descendant of Bergelmir and remembers his death, which would mean that the birth of Vafþrúðnir occurs after the creation of the world. The interpretation of the myth in *Gylf* is influenced by the story of the great flood and Noah's ark from *Genesis*, however. The piece of information that is important here is that Vafþrúðnir is confirmed as being very old, and if he was present at the time of Bergelmir's birth he may be much older than Óðinn, for Bergelmir was, according to *Gylf*, born before the death of Aurgelmir/Ymir, which was the primordial and creative act in which Óðinn and his brothers took part. While it is tempting to read *Vafþr* in light of *Gylf*, the addition of the two mythological representations does not necessarily lead to a tenable conclusion.

Besides his great knowledge of the past, Vafþrúðnir is also in possession of knowledge of future events, and is able to answer all of the questions about the future that Gagnráðr asks of him. The jǫtunn knows what will take place at Ragnarǫk and the circumstances surrounding the death of Óðinn. One question that hangs in the air when considering Vafþrúðnir's knowledge of the future is whether or not he knows that he will not be present at Ragnarǫk, and, further, whether he

realizes that his death is so near. To be able to see into the future, as Vafþrúðnir is able to, must indicate that he also knows about his own future, but this may not be the case. Óðinn, after all, has sought out Vafþrúðnir to learn about his own fate, or at least to confirm it.

Vafþrúðnir is ultimately a character who meets his end graciously. When Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir what Óðinn said into the ear of his dead son on the funeral pyre in stanza 54, Vafþrúðnir finally grasps that he has been participating in a contest with Óðinn himself. He admits that no one knows the answer to that question and understands that he is doomed. His final words are that it is Óðinn who is the wisest of men: „þú ert æ vísastr vera“ (stanza 56). Vafþrúðnir accepts death as an honourable gentleman might, having lost the contest to Óðinn in his own home. He is wise enough to recognize that he cannot change the course of events as they have played out in front of him, as he was himself a willing and enthusiastic participant in the contest that has led to his demise. If Vafþrúðnir did know that he would meet his end in the contest with Óðinn he conceals this knowledge during the whole of the dialogue, and in his dying act has professed the object of the intellect: mythological wisdom.

It is clear that in the first scene of the poem (stanzas 1 through 4) Frigg is concerned for Óðinn's safety on his proposed journey, as Vafþrúðnir is known to be powerful. Óðinn is relentless, however, and, as demonstrated in other mythological sources, is also very powerful and resourceful. He insists that he will travel to see Vafþrúðnir and in turn test his knowledge. From the outset Óðinn appears confident and this confidence is illustrative of how the áss always seems to have the upper hand, until, that is, he meets Fenrir at Ragnarǫk. Óðinn is skilled in wisdom and warfare, and in the mythic present the æsir tend to get the better of the jǫtnar.

Now that the cast of characters has been introduced and the action of *Vafþr* is underway, with the first and introductory scene complete, the narrator of the poem speaks in stanza 5, after which the first act is complete.

5 Fór þá Óðinn
at freista orðspeki
þess ins alsvinna jǫtuns;
at hǫllu hann kom
ok átti Íms faðir;
inn gekk Yggr þegar.

(Then Odin went to test the word-wisdom of that all-wise giant; he came to the hall that Ím's father owned: Dread promptly entered it.)

The name Ímr also appears in the *þulur* as a giant name (*Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen* 1:325), and Yggr is a well-known *heiti* for Óðinn.[23] This stanza ties the two acts of the poem together: the journey that Óðinn announced to Frigg is now underway and he has arrived at Vafþrúðnir's hall and is inside. Gunnell argues that stanza 5 is a verse insertion of material that is usually found in the form of a prose insertion in the other dialogic eddic poems.

> *Vafþrúðnismál* and *Hárbarðsljóð* are somewhat different to *Fáfnismál* and *Skírnismál* in that they are more limited in setting, and concentrate on simple, largely static two-man dialogue. Perhaps in consequence of this, the prose in both cases is fairly limited. Indeed, in *Vafþrúðnismál*, it is totally absent, although it might be argued that the narrative st.5 is equivalent to the superfluous prose comments in the other poems. …the information provided in the strophe is again based on the verse surrounding it. (1995, 232)

Gunnell later adds to his assertion that stanza 5 may be a superfluous addition and not integral to the poem on the whole. While discussing the role of the first five stanzas of the poem, he writes the following:

> [i]n many ways, this external framework created by the first five strophes seems to be totally unnecessary to the main business of the poem, and many scholars have viewed this introductory section as being a later interpolation. There can be little doubt that this is true with regard to the narrative st.5 which tells of Óðinn's journey to Vafþrúðnir's hall. This is the only purely narrative *ljóðaháttr* strophe in existence, and like many of the prose passages in the Edda manuscripts, it appears to be totally superfluous. However, the first four strophes of the poem, in which Frigg tries to dissuade Óðinn from leaving, have so many direct links to the main body of the poem itself that they appear to have been an essential feature of the work from an early stage. (277)

This interpretation leads to the question of why the poet or scribe who composed *Vafþr* chose to put this information in verse as opposed to prose. One possibility is that *Vafþr* is older than other dialogic poems that have this type of information in prose, and over the years the additional material became integrated into the metrical structure of the poem, resulting in the narrative stanza 5 being indispensable.

Machan notes that Óðinn's arrival at the hall of Vafþrúðnir has parallels in other Old Norse-Icelandic sources.

> The poet here draws upon what might be called the ritual of entrance in Norse literature. That is, many diverse texts employ an episode wherein an unexpected and unknown guest arrives in a hall and provides the inhabitants with information or engages them in a question and answer exchange. The inhabitants, in turn, receive the guest almost ceremoniously and offer food and drink to him. (2008, 37–38)

[23] For a discussion of the name *Yggr* see Lassen (2011, 183–85).

Parallels that Machan notes are in *Nornagests þáttr*, another narrative where Óðinn appears as a disguised guest; *Gylf*, as noted above, has Gangleri, King Gylfi of Sweden in disguise, arriving at Ásgarðr; and even *Lok* has a ritual of entrance when Loki arrives at Ægir's hall. As the narrator helps the audience in the transition from Ásgarðr to somewhere in Jǫtunheimr, and, for that matter, from act one to act two, the main action, the poem itself becomes more complicated. Leaving Frigg behind, Óðinn enters the hall of a hostile adversary of the æsir, but it is quite likely that even when hearing the poem for the first time the audience trusts that Óðinn will succeed in his quest. Considering all of the information that is available to the audience of the poem, the first five stanzas in fact give away the basic plot structure of the whole, which will see Óðinn as the successful contestant in the wisdom contest that he undertakes with Vafþrúðnir. What is not known at this point is how the áss will go about enticing the jǫtunn to engage in the contest, and what method he will use to gain the victory. In other words: how will Óðinn strike down Vafþrúðnir?

The analysis has now been brought up to the conclusion of act one of the drama of *Vafþr*. The form of the poem is easily divisible into a two-act play, with the second act being much more lengthy than the first. The first act is a domestic scene among the æsir, and may have represented for a 13th-century Icelandic audience the human quality of the divine beings. As may happen in marriages and partnerships there are often disagreements, and in this case the male gets his way and embarks on a journey that he sees as important. Frigg chooses to support her husband, or is coerced into it, and the audience will now learn about why it was so important for Óðinn to embark on his quest. Among the more interesting of the critical points is the relative importance that scholars have placed on the first act of the poem. In order to view *Vafþr* as a complete drama the domestic scene is essential, for it brings the action down to earth and makes it relatable for a medieval and a modern audience. The narrative stanza 5 importantly serves as a stage direction or takes the place of the chorus, and the fact that it is presented in *ljóðaháttr* indicates that the narratorial voice has been worked into the form of the poem and may indicate that the poem is older than other eddic poems in which narratorial intervention is in the form of prose inserted between stanzas. Along with the Odinic figure the audience now enters the hall of Vafþrúðnir. Is our divine protagonist able to topple a giant? Now we will move on to act two.

4. Act Two Scene One: On the Floor

The second act of *Vafþr* covers the remainder of the poem and is divisible into three scenes. Act two scene one takes place with Óðinn on the floor of the jǫtunn's hall; during both the second and third scenes of act two Óðinn sits near Vafþrúðnir on the jǫtunn's bench and the marker of the change from act two scene two to act two scene three is when Óðinn switches from numbering his questions to using the refrain 'Fjǫlð ek fór, / fjǫlð ek freistaðak, / fjǫlð ek reynda regin' to introduce his final six questions. Óðinn does make a change in his refrain with his tenth numbered question, but as he continues to number his questions through the twelfth question the present author has made the choice to mark the change in scene to that point. In total the áss asks eighteen questions of his host. The main characters of the poem have all been introduced in act one, but the audience has still not heard directly from Vafþrúðnir, the titular character. The second act is structurally more intricate than the first act, and the first scene of act two is comprised of Óðinn's entrance into the hall and Vafþrúðnir's vetting of his guest in order to determine if Gagnráðr is wise enough to in turn question the jǫtunn himself. In whole the first scene of the second act is comprised of stanzas 6 through 19.

One of the most distinguished figures of Old Norse-Icelandic literary criticism in the 20th century was Sigurður Nordal (1886–1974), who made the following statement in reference to *Vafþr*: '[t]he *framework* of *Vafþrúðnismál* is an independent tale and in no way fused with the matter of the poem. Whatever speakers there might be could exchange parts, and there is no difference between Óðinn's manner of speech and Vafþrúðnir's' (1970–73, 103–4). Rather than agree, the present author asserts, on the contrary, that the framework of the poem and its content are in fact fused together and indeed inseparable.[1]

[1] Finlay has in fact voiced the opinion that most contemporary scholars dissent from Sigurður Nordal's viewpoint on *Vafþr* (2011, 91–92). Finlay then goes on to 'investigate the ways in which *Vafþrúðnismál* provides a mythic model for the *hǫfuðlausn* story told by Egill Skalla-Grímsson and other poets. The question-and-answer format of the eddic poem, with both participants interrogated and measuring their wits is of course rather unlike the forced production of a poem at the bidding of an offended ruler, but the association of Óðinn with poetry as well as with wisdom sketches a parallel between the god's powers and the life-saving verses the poets are able to produce' (92). The most prominent parallel, of course, is the wagering of heads, and in *Vafþr* 'Óðinn's achievement is not so much the acquisition of information, for he must already know the answers to the questions he poses', but rather to establish himself as a worthy opponent to Vafþrúðnir (106).

The division of the poem established in the current work—into two acts, with the second act having three main scenes—is not a simple division. Observation of the poem's structure leads me to forward that there may be more to the *framework* of the poem, and that there is a connection between the form and the content of *Vafþr*. The structure of the poem elegantly mirrors both its content and the mythological cycle of Old Norse mythology. Sigurður Nordal adds to his above statement, however, focusing on what he sees as discordance between form and content in the poem:

> [t]he *organisation of content* and the cohesion of *Vafþrúðnismál* show this even better. Óðinn's first question (st. 20) is, it is true, about the origin of heaven and earth, and his next to last (st. 52), about his fall in Ragnarök, but in st. 17 there is talk of the battlefield of Surtr and the gods, in st. 48, right in the middle of other material, of the norns, and so on. The poem is a jumble of odd fragments of erudition without any proper organisation, and no attempt is made to trace the causal connection of events. (104)

Sigurður Nordal's critique of *Vafþr* may have been influenced by his deep admiration for the structure and content of *Vsp*, and how the form and the content work together almost flawlessly in that poem. Rather than seeking to find what does work well in *Vafþr* he may be, on the contrary, commenting on how *Vafþr* does not repeat what *Vsp* has already done, and the fact that to a large degree the two poems share similar content invites such a comparison. *Vafþr* is a dramatic poem whereas *Vsp* is a strictly narrative poem in the form of a monologue, and both should be judged independently in terms of how their form and content are related, as a monologue surely calls for a different interpretation than a drama. The present interpretation argues that when *Vafþr* is interpreted as a dramatic poem in which the actors play out the larger context of the mythological cosmos on the small stage in Vafþrúðnir's hall, the content is directly related to the poem's form and far from 'a jumble of odd fragments'. Furthermore, responding to Sigurður Nordal's assertion that the reference to the battlefield of Surtr and the gods in stanza 17 is out of place, I argue that it is in fact in an appropriate place, for in Vafþrúðnir's vetting of his guest during act two scene one, the scene focused on in the present chapter, the jǫtunn is tracing a cosmological framework for questions that Óðinn will follow when he in turn questions Vafþrúðnir in act two scene two. The questions that Vafþrúðnir asks of his guest are expanded upon and they in fact lay the foundation for the wisdom contest proper that begins at stanza 20 when Gagnráðr assumes the role of questioner. In the same manner that the poem as a whole mirrors the cosmological cycle, the two question-and-answer sequences mirror one another, or, more accurately, Gagnráðr's question sequence is based upon the framework established by Vafþrúðnir.

The temporal framework for the action of *Vafþr* within the larger context of the mythological cycle is that of a series of events (here divided into two acts) that have their own place in mythical time, occurring sometime after the death of Baldr, as indicated in stanzas 54 and 55 where reference to that event as having taken place in the past is made, but before the beginning of Ragnarǫk, as there are references to events that will transpire in the future at Ragnarǫk or after it in stanzas 44 through 53. The framework and the mythological content of the poem are not independent from one another, and, what is more, the content and form of the poem are directly tied to the configured mythological cycle as a whole. *Vafþr* is a central mythological event in relation to Ragnarǫk: it confirms what has already been said in *Vsp*—that Óðinn will perish at the great battle between the æsir and jǫtnar—and introduces more mythological information about the impending battle, even though there are no actions in the poem that lead to Ragnarǫk itself, although the death of Vafþrúðnir prepares Óðinn for his own death. The poem reflects upon one of the major events that leads to Ragnarǫk, Baldr's death, foresees the events of Ragnarǫk itself and its aftermath, all the while reinforcing that in the mythological present the æsir continue to maintain the upper hand in their antagonistic relationship with the jǫtnar.

If Sigurður Nordal's interpretation of the poem as a disjointed narrative were to be taken as an accurate interpretation, then the structure of the poem must be viewed as merely a vehicle for its content—the cosmological knowledge that is transmitted in the dialogue between the two main characters—and not as an independently significant story or mythical representation that is told in its own right. The framework, however, is significant on its own: during the entire dialogue between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir, the whole second act of the poem, Óðinn conceals his identity up until his final question, which is something that Vafþrúðnir cannot do, and thus the psychological dynamic between the two speakers is active and a certain textual irony is invoked. This psychological dimension alone reinforces that the poem is a significant story in and of itself and that its framework and matter—form and content—are fused together significantly. In this poem Óðinn is on a quest to gain knowledge about the past, the present, and the future, a future in which he dies. What is significant about the acquisition of knowledge when at the end of a life the keeper of knowledge and wisdom must succumb to death him or herself?

Einar Ólafur Sveinsson (1899–1984), another distinguished literary critic of Old Norse-Icelandic literature from the 20th century, found much to praise in *Vafþr*, and he cites the jǫtunn names Bergelmir, Þrúðgelmir, and Aurgelmir as three examples of mythological information that are not known from any other source, but he still found something lacking in the overall artistry of the poet: '[a]f þessu ofaukna, sem Voltaire þykir nauðsynlegt og gerir Grímnismál svo auðug, er ekkert í þessu kvæði. Mundi ekki sumum fara sem þeim, er þetta ritar, þykja kvæðið skorta

eitthvað, sem skáldskapur má ekki án vera?' (1962, 276). This question is an important one, but if *Vafþr* is lacking something that poetry cannot be without, does this lack make it less valuable artistically? Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, like Sigurður Nordal, although praising the wealth of information provided by the text, does not find the text to be a particularly valuable work of art but an important storehouse of mythological information. The lack that he detects may be of interest to the present analysis, for in the poem's minimal presentation there is an increased emphasis on all of the dramatic actions made by the characters, especially if the poem is considered in its entirety with both acts considered equally important to the narrative. There is no doubt that this poem holds an important place in the catalogue of texts that involve Óðinn, and the primacy that Vafþrúðnir holds among mythological jǫtnar is also obvious, as he is given the most extensive speaking role of any jǫtunn in the mythological poetry of the R manuscript. The narrative of *Vafþr* itself, however, in the heat of 20th-century Old Norse-Icelandic scholarship did not fare well. This neglect has been remedied from the 1990s forward, however, making up for lost time, and the present interpretation has the advantage of building on a two-pronged tradition: a tradition that has, like Einar Ólafur Sveinsson and Sigurður Nordal, among others, focused on the mythological information available in the poem, and on the other hand a tradition that focuses on the poem as a drama, as Gunnell has done, and as a primary source for information about the Odinic figure.

Óðinn conceals his identity on a number of occassions in different sources and in *Vafþr*, *Grímn*, and *Bald* he arrives at his respective destinations in disguise, and in all three of these poems his true identity is revealed near to the end of the poem. It can be stated outright that disguise is an Odinic motif, and, what is more, he remains in disguise for the whole of *Hárb*, choosing not to unmask himself, but rather to make a fool out of his son Þórr who is unable to see the true identity of his adversary. The use of disguise is similar to Óðinn's use of paranormal means in the acquisition of knowledge, as Óðinn often relies on the paranormal elements at his disposal, such as Mímir's head, along with his own cunning to gain wisdom. Combined with the motif of disguise, his command over the arts of trickery becomes more obvious when parallels are drawn between mythological texts. This makes him an inherently untrustworthy character who is highly skilled in magic and disguise, although he is often portrayed in a favourable light to the audience of mythical narratives. It is difficult to not have some sympathy for Vafþrúðnir in *Vafþr*, an old being who will lose his life as a result of Óðinn's intrusion into his home, but this sympathy may be a modern interpretation. In the world view of the mythological texts the æsir are the protectors of Miðgarðr and the jǫtnar are the hostile others who inhabit Útgarðr, a place on the periphery. Vafþrúðnir is no

innocent bystander, however, ignorant as he may be to the nature of his guest's visit. The jǫtunn invites the despair he eventually meets.

In *Vafþr* Óðinn uses deceit to gain entrance into the hall of his host and this deception helps him to control the encounter, for he has the advantage over his opponent who thinks that he is dealing with a mere traveller and not with Óðinn of the æsir. Vafþrúðnir is unaware of his guest's true identity until it is too late, yet the audience is well aware, and are in fact hoping for Óðinn's success. The domestic scene in Ásgarðr that opened up the poem encourages the audience to sympathize with the æsir for it is a scene that humans can relate with. It is easier for humans to understand Óðinn the husband than this very old jǫtunn, for even though they are paranormal beings, the æsir are closer to humans than their counterparts.

Óðinn now draws Vafþrúðnir into his trap, which will result in a wager of life and death being made. Following the theory of Ricoeur our close and contextual reading continues by focusing on temporal units within the narrative, which in the case of a dramatic narrative are acts and scenes.

4.1 Psychological Games

As he did in the first act with Frigg, Óðinn again initiates the dialogue in the second act with Vafþrúðnir. This is to be expected, as it is Óðinn who is in the role of the guest and has come to call on the jǫtunn. As has been transmitted by the narrator in stanza 5, Óðinn promptly enters the hall of Ímr's father when he arrives there, and once on the inside of the hall, Óðinn speaks directly to the jǫtunn.

Óðinn kvað:
6 „Heill þú nú, Vafþrúðnir!
nú em ek í hǫll kominn
á þik sjálfan sjá;
hitt vil ek fyrst vita,
ef þú fróðr sér
eða alsviðr, jǫtunn."

(Hail now, Vafthrúdnir; now I've come to your hall, to see your very self. The first thing I'll know is whether you're wise, or really all-wise, giant.)

When Óðinn tells Vafþrúðnir that he will know if he is *fróðr* or *alsviðr*, wise or very wise, he is telling the jǫtunn that he intends to know exactly how wise Vafþrúðnir is, and it can be said that this is the initial challenge.[2] Óðinn has quickly

[2] Machan writes the following: '*eþa*, Detter and Heinzel note (*Sæmundar Edda*, 155), is not disjunctive; Óðinn is not so much asking Vafþrúðnir if he is wise or very wise but rather "just how wise are you," and in doing so Óðinn in effect issues a challenge, which the giant quickly accepts' (2008, 75).

taken control of the situation by stating what he intends to do on his visit, and his opening words provoke the jǫtunn to engage with him, which Vafþrúðnir will eventually agree to. Ruggerini writes that in relation to normal patterns of entrance, where a stranger requests admission and hospitality, here '[t]he traditional roles appear to be reversed: the stranger who has just arrived from outisde dares – without even having declared who he is – to begin by putting an unusual, almost rude question to the person who has yet to decide whether or not to allow him hospitality' (1994, 166). This tactic is most certainly intentional and gives Óðinn the upper hand by irritating the host, drawing forth curiosity as to who has come to him and entered his home in such an aggressive manner. It must be a fool, Vafþrúðnir might conclude, for the jǫtunn is seduced into the wisdom contest that leads to his death, and he would presumably only enter into such a contest if he thought himself to have the upper hand. Thus, by entering in such an aggressive manner Óðinn has placed pressure on Vafþrúðnir, effectively cornering him. As Finnur Jónsson writes, 'Odin buser straks ud med sit ærinde i en overlegen tone, beregnet på, at jætten vil fare op og udæske ham til kappestrid; derved vandt han, at Odin blev den spörgende, hvad jo var en lettere opgave. Herved viser Odin straks sin ånindleg smidighed. Jætten er dum trods sin viden' (1932, 54). It is the first trick that Óðinn plays on Vafþrúðnir, and his sense of superiority, reflected in the 'overlegen tone', will later be echoed in his victory. From the outset Óðinn is in full control and by demonstrating his confidence from the outset, as the audience has already seen him do with his wife Frigg in act one, Óðinn plays a psychological trick on the jǫtunn at the beginning of their interaction.

In response Vafþrúðnir asks who his visitor is, as his foremost concern must be to determine the identity of his guest, something he will not be able to do until it is too late. Such a concern on the part of the host is understandable, for not only has he been provoked and issued a challenge, but such provocation has come from someone he has not met previously, and who is of an unknown identity. The aggressive nature of the guest's entrance must be startling in the mind of the jǫtunn, but he chooses to counter the guest's entrance with an aggression of his own. Vafþrúðnir speaks back to the guest who has entered his hall without an invitation with the express purpose of finding out how wise he is.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
7 „Hvat er þat manna
er í mínum sal
verpumk orði á?
Út þú né komir
órum hǫllum frá,
nema þú inn snotrari sér."

(What kind of person do I address inside my very hall? You'll never walk away from these walls unless you're the fuller of wisdom.)

Vafþrúðnir implicitly accepts the challenge made by his guest in the form of the threat that the challenger will not leave the hall alive if he is not as wise as his host. It is as if Vafþrúðnir throws any concern about the danger of letting this guest into his home to the side, and instead meets the guest's outward confidence with his own robustness. The host, feeling challenged, replicates the aggressive nature of Óðinn's entrance, and, most importantly, introduces the matter of life and death. Vafþrúðnir must feel confident that he is wiser than whoever has come and called at his door, although the jǫtunn has not yet put his own life on the line. Ruggerini writes that '[t]hese points and the following development of the scene show, I believe, that Óðinn's opening insult was deliberate. The use of this tactic has allowed him to achieve the aim of irritating the giant and rousing his curiosity, to the point of inducing him to accept the idea of measuring himself in a wisdom contest' (1994, 167).

In the next stanza Óðinn provides a name in order to pacify Vafþrúðnir, calling himself Gagnráðr, and adds that he is in need of drink and hospitality. The guest's tone has become notably less aggressive, indicating that he has backed off somewhat from his contentious entrance, at least on the surface.

Óðinn kvað:
8 „Gagnráðr ek heiti,
nú emk af gǫngu kominn
þyrstr til þinna sala;
laðar þurfi
hefi ek lengi farit
ok þinna andfanga, jǫtunn."

(Gagnrád is my name; now I've come in my travels thirsty to your hall; I've been a long way in need of welcome, and of your reception, giant.)

Óðinn has thus craftily concealed his identity by using a *heiti* that refers to one of his many names, and feigns tiredness. Ejder writes, '[n]är jätten intar en hotande attityd, låtsar Oden som om han blir förfärad, ödmjukar sig, kallar sig för att invagga jätten i säkerhet för "en trött vandrare" och håller till godo med att bli utfrågad först' (1960, 7–8). At this point in the scene both characters are playing psychological games, Vafþrúðnir threatening death, and Óðinn supplying a false identity.

The name Gagnráðr is ambiguous, which may be Óðinn's intention, and can be interpreted as either 'The One Who Counsels Victory', which is what Bugge forwards, 'Den som raader for Seier', (1867, 66) or 'The Victorious One', which would be in line with Óðinn's role as the most powerful of the æsir, the chooser of

the slain, and the ruler of Valkyries, wherein he distributes victory and defeat. The ambiguity of the *heiti* is only heightened, however, based on the appearance of an alternative form of the *heiti* for Óðinn in manuscripts of *SnE*: in the *Þulur* the slightly different name Gangráðr appears in a list of *heiti* for Óðinn (*Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen* 1:337) and the preservation of the two forms suggests that either they are two different *heiti* for Óðinn, or that the form as it appears in R is a mistake, as has been put forward by Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson in both editions of the *Lexicon Poeticum* (1913–16, 167; 1931, 168), by R.C. Boer (*Die Edda mit historisch-kritischem Commentar* 2:52), and by Finnur Jónsson (1932). If the form of the *heiti* that is preserved in the *Þulur* is the correct interpretation then the name Gangráðr may mean 'The One Who Counsels Travel' or 'The Wanderer', as Finnur Jónsson has forwarded: 'som råder for gang' or 'vandrer' (1932, 52). This interpretation fits with Óðinn's portrayal of himself as a tired traveller in this scene. In sum, on the name Óðinn supplies to Vafþrúðnir, there are two possible interpretations, which, for matters of simplification can be considered as, firstly, that of Bugge (1867) or, secondly, that of Finnur Jónsson (1932). The present study, while giving due consideration to both possibilities will use Gagnráðr, as per Bugge (1867), as that is the form that appears in R, and since the A manuscript version of *Vafþr* begins at stanza 20 line 2 it cannot help us to clarify the problem. Both possible names conceal the speaker's true identity and fit the role of the Odinic character within the poem, although if Vafþrúðnir is very wise he may recognize the *heiti*, particularly Gagnráðr, and in this sense stanza 8 is Óðinn's first test of the breadth of the jǫtunn's knowledge. This assertion—that Óðinn is testing the breadth of Vafþrúðnir's knowledge by supplying a *heiti*—would be called into question if the alternative Gangráðr is the accepted form, as then Óðinn would be reinforcing that he is a tired traveller, although the term does appear in the *Þulur* as a *heiti* for the áss.

If Gagnráðr is accepted as the true form of the name then there is a further alternative meaning that is possible. Gagnráðr can be broken down into the adverbial prefix *gagn-*, meaning 'counter-' (Cleasby-Vigfusson 1874, 187), and the noun *ráð*, meaning 'counsel', which would result in a *heiti* for Óðinn meaning 'The One Who Is Against Counsel', 'The Disputant' (Machan 2008, 77), or even 'The One Who Counsels to the Contrary'. 'The Disputant' has been accepted by McKinnell (1994, 89) and Ruggerini (1994, 167) as a likely interpretation of the *heiti*, and is consistent to Óðinn's role in *Vafþr*, where he is at first against the counsel that Frigg gives him in act one, even though he asked for it in stanza 1, and then, in the second act he clearly plays the role of a disputant with Vafþrúðnir,

getting into a contest with him that results in death. The name Gagnráðr may also mean the one who gives good counsel, and in sum the ambiguity remains.[3]

In stanza 8 Gagnráðr portrays himself as a tired traveller who is thirsty and in need of hospitality, matching the description of what a traveller may be in need of in *Háv* stanzas 3 and 4. After his somewhat aggressive entrance in stanza 6 and the jǫtunn's equally aggressive reaction in stanza 7, the guest backs off a bit, asking for his host's grace. Finnur Jónsson notes Gagnráðr's change in attitude: '[e]fter at Odin har opnået hvad han vilde, lader han nu, som han bliver forskrækket og ønsker hellere mad og drikke, men jætten vil ikke høre noget om det' (1932, 54). Óðinn did not exactly lie to Vafþrúðnir by providing a *heiti* in place of his actual name, but he also did not tell him the complete truth, and this deception is of great assistance to the áss in getting closer to securing the contest in knowledge that is the objective of his quest. It is important that Óðinn has allowed his host to feel that he is in control of the situation by feigning tiredness and thirst. At this point the encounter is a game of psychological positioning and wit.[4] Óðinn provides Vafþrúðnir with a false sense of security and has in no way stopped calculating exactly how to engage his opponent.

Not fearing Gagnráðr, Vafþrúðnir invites the stranger into the hall, asking him why he has not yet entered further, making it clear that Óðinn's tactics have had their intended result by placing Vafþrúðnir off of his guard. The jǫtunn states that they will determine who is more wise, and in so doing gives to Óðinn his sought-after contest of wits.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
9 „Hví þú þá, Gagnráðr,
mælisk af gólfi fyr?
Farðú í sess í sal!
Þá skal freista
hvárr fleira viti,
gestr eða inn gamli þulr."

(Why then, Gagnrád, do you speak from the floor? Take a seat in the hall; we must find out which one knows more: the guest or the ancient sage.)

[3] Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason supply the follwoing information on the issue: '*Gagnráðr:* Óðinsheiti sem aðeins kemur fyrir hér, skýrt „sá sem gefur ráð er að gagni koma". Sumir útgefendur hyggja að þetta muni ritvilla fyrir *Gangráðr* (förumaður) sem einnig er Óðinsheiti í Þulum' (2014, 1:357).

[4] Machan writes that '[i]n order to get what he desires (entrance to Vafþrúðnir's hall) Óðinn assumes the posture of a tired, hungry, and almost frightened guest. If slightly less hostile, however, Óðinn is still calculating: in the ritual of entrance, the host must accede to the guest's request, so that Óðinn is here guaranteeing himself entrance further in to the hall and thus moving inexorably towards the wisdom contest' (2008, 77).

Vafþrúðnir is taking the bait that Óðinn has set for him. The jǫtunn appears confident, and must be, for he is being hospitable to the stranger as a good host should. The jǫtunn invites the traveller further into his hall, reconfirming that he accepts the guest's challenge. With this action Vafþrúðnir is stating more solidly that there will be a contest than he did in stanza 7, when he threatened that the guest will not leave unless he is the wiser of the two. Vafþrúðnir refers to himself in stanza 9 line 6 as 'inn gamli þulr', a wise man, indicating that he thinks highly of himself and by implication less so of his guest. While thinking himself to be wise the jǫtunn is unaware of the true identity of his guest, and Óðinn's initial hint in providing a *heiti* that may be an initial test of the jǫtunn's knowledge has gone right over Vafþrúðnir's head. If Vafþrúðnir did not think himself more wise he would not be entering dangerous intellectual territory by inviting his adversary into his hall.

In stanza 10 Gagnráðr's tone is even more humble than it was in stanza 8, further drawing Vafþrúðnir into the trap he has set. Heeding advice given in *Háv* stanza 19 that a man should be sparing of speech, Gagnráðr thus answers Vafþrúðnir's invitation to advance into the hall.

Óðinn kvað:
„Óauðigr maðr,
er til auðigs kømr,
mæli þarft eða þegi;
ofrmælgi mikil
hygg ek at illa geti
hveim er við kaldrifjaðan kømr."

(The poor man, when he visits the rich, should be sparing of speech or shut up; too much talk I reckon works none too well, when one comes up against a cold heart.)

In this stanza Gagnráðr reassures the jǫtunn of his submissiveness and inferiority as a stranger in the home of his host, placing Vafþrúðnir in the role of the rich person being visited by the poor traveller. Answering the question that Vafþrúðnir posed in stanza 9 lines 1 and 2 as to why he has not entered further into the hall, Gagnráðr states that it is because as a guest he must remain humble.[5] Again, as in stanza 8, Gagnráðr's humbleness is feigned, for, recalling the confidence with which Óðinn prepared to leave Ásgarðr in stanza 3, Óðinn's thoughts are not actually humble. Rather, he is the aggressor and believes himself to be the superior of the two. The audience views the scene from the perspective of Óðinn, the protagonist, and can see that his psychological tactics are working on the seemingly ignorant Vafþrúðnir.

[5] *Háv* stanza 19 line 3 reads 'mæli þarft eða þegi' (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*), further reinforcing the connection between the two poems.

It is now Gagnráðr's time to be tested by his host. Having brought himself humbly to the feet of the jǫtunn after the outburst he made in stanza 6 that led to the desired result of getting the jǫtunn to act aggressively, Gagnráðr now submits himself to being questioned. The adjective *kaldrifjaðr*, literally 'cold-ribbed', from the final line of stanza 10 is placed there strategically by Gagnráðr, and may be a subtle indication that he finds Vafþrúðnir to be malicious, cunning, or even hostile.[6] The ribs are close to the heart and if one has cold ribs it is likely that they also have a cold heart. Even though our sympathies lie with the æsir, we might ask from the audience, who is more cold-hearted: the guest who intrudes on the old host in order to kill him, or the host who is forced to defend himself?

4.2 Preliminaries

Once Óðinn has gained entry into the hall of the jǫtunn, Vafþrúðnir proceeds to ask a series of four questions, and for each question Gagnráðr provides a suitable answer. It is here that Vafþrúðnir must determine if his opponent is wise enough to merit a full contest of knowledge. Stanzas 11 through 18 act as a preliminary contest to the primary contest of wits that is to follow.[7] The subject matter that will be dealt with when Gagnráðr turns to questioning Vafþrúðnir is introduced in this preliminary round, but is developed in much more depth later.

Wasting no time Vafþrúðnir puts forward his first question to Gagnráðr, which is a cosmological question. What has up to this point been a poem that is mostly dramatic in nature, now also becomes encyclopedic, and the calling forth of meaning on the second level, that of the historical level, comes closer to the surface, as the audience is provided with cosmological knowledge.

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[6] Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson note that the adjective *kaldrifjaðr* literally means 'med kolde ribben', but can also carry the connotation of 'fjendsk, ondskabsfuld' (1931, 333). Sprenger has also written on the adjective, forwarding that the appearance of the word in *Vafþr* points to a late date for the poem, a time no earlier than the beginning of the 13th century (1985, 188). McKinnell argues against Sprenger, stating that the emotional sense that she identifies in the adjective *kaldrifjaðr* can be seen in earlier examples of skaldic poetry, for example in instances of *brjóst* and *hjarta* (1994, 88). Sprenger concludes the following: 'mag es genügen, daß sich anhand von *kaldrifjaðr* und einigen anderen Ausdrücken warscheinlich machen läßt, daß die im Regius vorliegende Version der Vafðrúðnismál nicht alt sein kann' (1985, 205).

[7] Kragerud writes that '[s]tr. 11–18. I den innledende fase spørres om daghesten og natthesten, om grenseelva mellom guder og jotner og om vollen hvor deres kamp skal stå. Spørsmålen er ikke tilfeldige stikkprøver i allmenn mytekunnskap men danner tilsammen en omskrivning av den kosmologiske dualisme; de hører parvis sammen i a) motsetningen mellom lys og mørke, og b) motsetningen mellom guder og jotner' (1981, 32–33). Kragerud interprets the opening round of questions that takes place with Gagnráðr on the floor to set up oppositions, between light and darkness, the áss and the jǫtunn, and between the æsir and the jǫtnar.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
11 „Segðu mér, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á gólfi vill
þíns um freista frama,
hvé sá hestr heitir
er hverjan dregr
dag *of* dróttmǫgu.“

(Tell me, Gagnrád, since you wish from the floor to make a test of your talents, what's the name of the horse who always drags the day over troops of men?)

The refrain that Vafþrúðnir uses to introduce each of his four questions confirms that his guest Gagnráðr remains on the floor of the hall, 'á gólfi', as he was in stanza 9, and thus has not come any further into the hall, choosing to keep his distance from the jǫtunn and remain in the role of the humble guest. Óðinn's placement on the floor from stanza 6 through stanza 19 is the primary marker for act two, scene one. The first question that the host has for his guest concerns the name of the horse that draws day to mankind, directly concerning the passage of time and the movement of the cosmos. Gagnráðr's first response demonstrates his intelligence.

Óðinn kvað:
12 „Skinfaxi heitir,
er inn skíra dregr
dag um dróttmǫgu;
hesta beztr
þykkir hann með
*H*reiðgotum,
ey lýsir mǫn af mari.“

(He's called Shining-mane who always drags the day over troops of men. The glorious Goths think him the best horse: his mane shines always aflame.)

The day is drawn by the horse Skinfaxi, a horse who the '*H*reiðgotar' ('*H*reiðgotum' in the poem) find to to be the finest of horses. The term appears in R as Reiðgotum, but an initial H is required for alliteration. Thus it can refer either to the 'Reiðgoths' specifically, i.e. the Danes, or to the 'Austgoths', but it most likely refers to humans in general, or good riders (Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 1:358).[8] It is no surprise that the best horse is the one that brings the day to the people of the world.

[8] Gísli Sigurðsson writes the following. '*Reiðgotar*: menn frá Reiðgotalandi, hér líklega menn almennt' (1998, 58). Machan notes that '[i]n almost every modern edition, *Reiðgotom* and *reka* are emended to, respectively, *Hreiðgotom* and *vreka*, their historical forms' (1992, 219).

The most basic unit of time—what we now refer to as the twenty-four-hour period—is made up of two parts: the day and the night. Kirsten Hastrup writes that '[i]n Iceland the basic temporal unit was the *day*. The day was defined by the visible movements of the sun, and this was directly acknowledged in the name given to this particular unit of physical time; *sólarhringr*, "sun-ring" or "sun-course"' (1985, 19). Thus, in the mythological context, the sun would still be travelling during the night, and the night during the day. Logically, Vafþrúðnir's next question for Gagnráðr is to name the horse that draws night from the east.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
13 „Segðu þat, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á gólfi vill
þíns um freista frama,
hvé sá jór heitir
er austan dregr
nótt *of* nýt regin."

(Tell me, Gagnrád, since you wish from the floor to make a test of your talents, what that steed is called who draws from the East night over the gifted gods.)

The night, like the day, is also drawn by a horse, referred to here as a '*jór*', a poetic term for horse. The indication that the two halves of the 'day', that is day and night, are drawn respectively to men, as was the case with the sun, and to the gods, as is the case with the night, indicates that there is a strong connection between gods and men, at least as far as the cosmos is concerned. Humans and gods (referred to in the present work as æsir) live together in Miðgarðr, and share the same sky. Knowledge of what draws the sun to men seems to serve as a prerequisite for knowledge of what draws the night to the gods, and this connection confirms that in fact humans and gods live together, and it may be the case that the æsir are human, albeit paranormal or supernatural humans. Gagnráðr handily replies to the question.

Óðinn kvað:
14 „Hrímfaxi heitir
er hverja dregr
nótt *of* nýt regin;
méldropa fellir
hann morgin hvern,
þaðan kømr dǫgg um dala."

(He's called Frost-mane who draws in turn each night over the gifted gods. Foam from his bit falls each morning, from which comes the dew in the dales.)

Gagnráðr not only supplies the name of the horse that draws the day to the gods, Hrímfaxi, but also provides additional information. By providing extra information,

more than seems to be required by Vafþrúðnir, Gagnráðr is demonstrating that he is in fact wise enough to be in conversation with the jǫtunn.

Gagnráðr's two answers share their subject matter with Hár's response to a question made by Gangleri in *Gylf.*[9] There it is said that Nǫrfi or Narfi, a jǫtunn, had a daughter named Nótt, who was married to Naglfari and then to Dellingr. With Dellingr, who was of the æsir, they had a son named Dagr. It is then said that Alfǫðr took Nótt and Dagr and gave them two horses and two chariots and placed them in the sky to ride around the earth every twenty-four hours. Nótt, it is said, rides first with Hrímfaxi, and Dagr follows with Skinfaxi. This same story, of the origins of the night and the day and the two horses that pull them through the sky, is recounted in more detail in Vafþrúðnir's answers to Gagnráðr later in the poem, but the added detail in *Gylf* demonstrates that the myth was most likely common knowledge in the 13th and 14th centuries when these works were being composed in manuscripts. As in *Vsp*, and for that matter *Genesis*, it is significant that the mythological information addressed first concerns the origins of time. Without the alternating periods of light and darkness time would not pass. In cosmological narratives it is primary to account for the origins of the mechanisms for the passing of time. Vafþrúðnir's questions and Gagnráðr's answers in stanzas 11 through 14 introduce themes that will be among Gagnráðr's first questions to Vafþrúðnir. The mechanisms of time in the cosmology of the poem are horses. Gurevich writes, '[f]ew factors in a culture express the essential nature of its world picture so clearly as its way of reckoning time: for this has a determining influence on the way people behave, the way they think, the rhythm of their lives and the relationships between them and things' (1985, 94). It may be argued further that the use of horses in the mythical representation of the mechanisms of time demonstrates a high regard for horses in 13th-century Iceland, unless it is a remnant from the classical tradition.

After the two questions concerning origins, Vafþrúðnir then questions his guest about a current geographical landmark that is significant in relation to the sociopolitical orientation of the mythological cosmos, marking a movement in the jǫtunn's questions from the past towards the present, and, most striking, the question is the first that addresses the relationship between the æsir and the jǫtnar.

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[9] 'Nǫrfi eða Narfi hét jǫtunn er bygði í Jǫtunheimum. Hann átti dóttur er Nótt hét. Hon var svǫrt ok døkk sem hon átti ætt til. Hon var gipt þeim manni er Naglfari hét. Þeira son hét Auðr. Því næst var hon gipt þeim er Annarr hét. Jǫrð hét þeirra dóttir. Síðarst átti hana Dellingr, var hann Ása ættar. Var þeira son Dagr. Var hann ljóss ok fagr eptir faðerni sínu. Þá tók Alfǫðr Nótt ok Dag son hennar ok gaf þeim tvá hesta ok tvær kerrur ok setti þau upp á himin at þau skulu ríða á hverjum tveim dœgrum umhverfis jǫrðina. Ríðr Nótt fyrri þeim hesti er kallaðr er Hrímfaxi, ok at morni hverjum døggvir hann jǫrðina af méldropum sínum. Sá hestr er Dagr á heitir Skinfaxi, ok lýsir allt lopt ok jǫrðina af faxi hans' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:13).

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
15 „Segðu þat, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á gólfi vill
þíns um freista frama,
hvé sú á heitir
er deilir með jǫtna sonum
grund ok með goðum.“

(Tell me Gagnrád, since you wish from the floor to make a test of your talents, what that river's called that cuts off the land of the giants' sons from the gods.)

The division between the æsir and the jǫtnar is physical, political, and personal. It is also the central theme of *Vafþr*, where an áss and a jǫtunn meet in direct confrontation, although Vafþrúðnir is unaware for most of the dialogue that he is in fact speaking with Óðinn. The division between the two groups of paranormal beings is so marked that it is embedded in the geography of the earth, and this is a primary example of how the *framework* of the poem—Óðinn travelling to Vafþrúðnir and engaging him in dialogue that leads to the jǫtunn's death—is in fact connected to its content. The conflict that is being played out in the two-act drama of *Vafþr* is the same division that in the mythological cosmos is represented by a physical boundry.

Óðinn kvað:
16 „Ífing heitir á
er deilir með jǫtna sonum
grund ok með goðum;
opin renna
hon skal um aldrdaga,
verðrat íss á á.“

(That river's called Ífing that cuts off the land of the giants' sons from the gods; it runs unchecked throughout all time: on that river no ice will form.)

The river Ífing is only mentioned in *Vafþr* and Machan writes that '[s]ince this is the only occurence of this word, the initial *i* is uncertain, as, indeed, is the meaning of the name itself'; the meaning may be, Machan continues, 'Yew River', or 'The Violent One', and '[t]he river that is free of ice and ever-flowing is an archetypal symbol of life' (2008, 81). It is notable as a piece of information because it provides a physical boundary between the æsir and the jǫtnar and serves as a metaphorical front between the hostile groups. The jǫtnar live on the periphery of the mythological cosmos, most often in the East or the North, so Ífing may run between Miðgarðr and one of these two cardinal directions. Machan's interpretation that an ice-free river that is ever-flowing is an archetypal symbol of life reflects the impression that the mythological cosmos as it is presented in the sources contains an animosity that is central to it. When the two opposing sides meet at Ragnarǫk

and destroy one another the world itself is destroyed, and presumably the river Ífing with it. The world will be reborn, but there is no mention of the jǫtnar in the new world, and the proposition that the younger generation will not repeat the actions of the older may not require such a river to exist. If the modern world is anything to judge by, there is little hope that such a frontier between antagonistic groups will not arise again.

Vafþrúðnir's final question for his guest turns to the future. Having already asked about the past and the present, the jǫtunn challenges his guest to tell him the name of the field where the æsir and the jǫtnar will meet. This question naturally follows the previous question. In the present it is a river that divides the two groups, but in the future they will meet on a field that is not divided, but on which they will battle. This question, which was pointed to by Sigurðar Nordal as being out of context with the structure of the poem, is directly in context, however, when compared to the three questions that precede it, not to mention that this preliminary round of the wisdom contest introduces the structure of the main wisdom contest that begins at stanza 20: questions about the past, then about the present, and then about the future. The first two questions of the preliminary round had to do with origins, the third question with the contemporary geography of the mythological world, and, now, the fourth question refers to the geography of the future.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
17 „Segðu þat, Gagnráðr,
alls þú á gólfi vill
þíns um freista frama,
hvé sá vǫllr heitir
er finnask vígi at
Surtr ok in svásu goð."

(Tell me, Gagnrád, since you wish from the floor to make a test of your talents, what the place is called where battle will be joined between Surt and the splendid gods.)

Vafþrúðnir is here asking for a very specific kind of knowledge from his guest, knowledge of the future. It is one thing to be in possession of knowledge of things past and present, but something else altogether to know what will occur in the times that are still yet to come. It is with this final question that Vafþrúðnir confirms his guest is up to the challenge of entering a wisdom contest. What is most interesting is that as Gagnráðr is able to answer Vafþrúðnir's question successfully, it may seem strange that the jǫtunn does not show any concern that his opponent is so wise that he can see into the future.

It is at stanza 18 in the R manuscript that marginal markings introduce the speakers with alternating statements of *Óðinn qvað* (*o.q.*) and *Vafþrúðnir qvað* (*v.q.*).[10] On the indicating of speakers in the margins of the R and A manuscripts, Gunnell writes that '[w]hile the speakers certainly do appear to have been regularly named in the sections of the manuscripts containing these poems, the naming was obviously not regarded as being an integral part of the poems themselves' (1995, 208). Rather than being integral to the texts themselves, Gunnell argues that the marginal notations, while they were recorded into the manuscripts at the same time as the rest of the text (208), indicate that 'the naming of speakers was seen by the redactor or scribe as something completely extraneous to the text of the poems themselves' (210), and, most importantly, 'the notation is primarily a silent *reader's* aid (or perhaps, more interestingly, meant for guidance in a spoken recitation), placed there by the scribe or redactor in the form of an 'editorial' comment that was felt to be necessary' (212). Gunnell's argument is that poems such as *Vafþr* were originally performed, and that when they were recorded into manuscript form they required the marginal notes to guide the reader: '[i]n short, they must have regarded the dialogic poems as a kind of popular vernacular drama, designed for performance by more than one speaker' (329). An enigma that remains, however, is why the marginal notations in *Vafþr* begin at stanza 18 and continue through the remainder of the poem, alongside each stanza of speech, but are not present in the margins alongside the first seventeen stanzas in R, which are, apart from stanza 5, no less dialogic in structure. It may be that the exemplar from which the scribes of R and A copied did not contain marginal notations prior to stanza 18, or that it is the main wisdom contest that begins at stanza 20 that was the focus for performance and the hand that made the marginal notations did not see the need to add any notation before stanza 18, firmly establishing the order of speech. A further possibility is that it was merely an oversight. While it is possible to speculate on the past, we can only be sure of the present, and taking all that we know, try to predict the future.

Gagnráðr replies to Vafþrúðnir's final question with no difficulty, and with his answer satisfies the jǫtunn's curiosity as to the breadth of his guest's knowledge. Gagnráðr answers Vafþrúðnir's question by referring to the fateful field where Surtr and the æsir will meet in the future.

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[10] Machan writes that '[b]eginning with this stanza, the abbreviations *o.q.* and *v.q.* accompany the dialogue in the margin of R. Similar attributions are marginally (and extrametrically) added in *For Scírnis*, *Harbarðzlióð*, and *Locasenna*' (2008, 82). Modern editions of the poem vary in their inclusion of the marginal notations prior to stanza 18. The ÍF 2014 edition includes extrametrical speaker indications throughout the whole of the poem, whereas the Neckel-Kuhn (1983) edition begins at stanza 18 with the speaker indications, as does the Machan (2008) edition.

Óðinn kvað:
18 „Vígríðr heitir vǫllr
er finnask vígi at
Surtr ok in svásu goð;
hundrað rasta
hann er á hverjan veg,
sá er þeim vǫllr vitaðr.“

(The place is called Vígríd, where battle will be joined between Surt and the splendid gods; a hundred leagues in every direction it spreads, as all who know can tell.)[11]

Vafþruðnir's interest in the impending battlefield and Gagnráðr's sharp response to the question, signals that both contestants are very wise, possessing knowledge not only of the past and the present, but also of the future. Stanza 18 is quoted in *Gylf* chapter 51, where Ragnarǫk is described in detail. Óðinn's words from *Vafþr* close that chapter in the form of a stanza quotation.[12]

The four questions posed by Vafþrúðnir concern the past, the present, and the future and are a prelude to the wisdom contest proper that is about to get underway. The origins of day and night, the physical front between the worlds of the æsir and the jǫtnar, and the theme of Ragnarǫk have all been introduced, and are all expanded upon later in the contest. On the first round of the wisdom contest, in which Vafþrúðnir poses questions to Gagnráðr, Ruggerini writes:

> [f]rom the point of view of time, we have here in miniature the same progression as will emerge during the wisdom contest proper: from hinting at an event in the remote past which has consequences and perpetuates itself in the present (the creation of day and night), we pass on to a situation which concerns the present of the gods and guarantees their security (the setting of a boundary between their realm and that of their enemies), and finally come to the mention of a place whose purpose will become clear only in the distant future (because it is there that the gods will fight at the end of the world). (1994, 170)

In the drama that is playing out in *Vafþr* stories from the history of the mythological cosmos are being presented as bits of wisdom within the larger narrative of the

[11] Orchard's translation is here misleading. Rather than 'as all who know can tell', Larrington (*Poetic Edda* 1996) has 'that is the ordained field'. In sum, 'this field is meant for them' conveys what the Icelandic text reads.

[12] The size of Vígríðr is also interesting in terms of time, for it is measured in terms of the length of a röst. Gurevich writes, '[t]he length of a journey is measured in time (the number of days spent at sea or travelling on dry land). There was no need for anything more precise. It occurred to no one to imagine a journey between two points, in abstraction from a traveller making that journey. When measurements of distance are mentioned, it turns out that these measurements do not correspond to any sort of fixed or standard units. Thus, *röst*, which is sometimes translated as "mile", really indicates the distance between two halting places (cf. English "rest")' (1985, 102).

poem. It is through the question-and-answer scheme between the two opponents that the mythological cycle is narrated, embedded in the drama. This is similar to how the vǫlva recounts and accounts for the past, the present, and the future of the mythic cosmos when Óðinn comes to her in *Vsp*. Both poems connect their form and content, and in the case of *Vafþr* the task may have been especially challenging for the poet, heathen or Christian, as the form is that of a dialogue rather than a monologue. If there is any indication of who may win the contest, in terms of rhetorical skill, it appears that the two opponents seem to be equally matched, but in stanzas 16 and 18 Óðinn has demonstrated particular poetical skill. Vafþrúðnir may not be as wise as he thinks he is, for with his next stanza of speech he puts everything on the line.

4.3 The Wager

Vafþr is primarily regarded as a contest in knowledge between an áss and a jǫtunn that has as its stakes the head of the loser. It is the wager of life or death that gives the poem its suspense. Frigg's objection to Óðinn's proposed journey in the first act of the poem is precisely because she fears that Óðinn may lose his life in the contest, although the audience should know that Óðinn is successful in quests such as this one. In addition to the presentation of much knowledge that pertains to the mythological past, the mythological present, and the mythological future, a deadly match is taking place between the two contestants in the narrative at hand that is itself a prelude to Ragnarǫk, where the two opposing sides of the mythological cosmos will destroy one another. Vafþrúðnir's hall is the small stage on which the battle between the æsir and jǫtnar is rehearsed by two representatives, and what they reveal in their dialogue is a foreshadowing of the battle between the very same forces that plays out on the large stage of the mythological world when the sources are configured together. The struggle between cosmic forces, as has just been announced, will end at Vígríðr.

Stanza 19 concludes act two scene one of the drama, and this is where Vafþrúðnir acknowledges his guest's wisdom and takes the major step of wagering their heads on the outcome of the wisdom contest. The stanza also serves the important function of marking the transition to the main part of the wisdom contest—the core of the poem—and the exchange of roles by the two contestants. The jǫtunn is confident in his ability to succeed in the contest, hence the wager, and is also impressed enough by Gagnráðr's answers that he will submit to being questioned himself. With the wager Vafþrúðnir brings about his own death sentence.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
19 „Fróðr ertu nú, gestr,

> far þú á bekk jǫtuns,
> ok mælumk í sessi saman;
> hǫfði veðja
> vit skulum hǫllu í,
> gestr, um geðspeki.“
>
> (Now you’re wise, guest: come join the giant’s bench; and let’s speak together on the seat. We shall wager our heads inside the hall, guest, on riddling wisdom.)

Vafþrúðnir considers his invitation for Gagnráðr to come and sit on the jǫtunn’s bench to be an honour for the guest, but does not realize that he is inviting a dangerous áss into his hall. What is more, by bringing his guest further into the hall, Vafþrúðnir likely thinks that he is further entrapping his guest, but he is really only inviting his enemy to come closer. Vafþrúðnir then states the stakes of the contest that they will undertake, their heads, and in so doing puts his own life on the line, whereas in stanza 7 Vafþrúðnir only confirmed that his guest would lose his life if he turned out to be less wise. The movement of Óðinn further into the hall is confirmed, for it can be assumed that a condition of the main part of the contest will be that he takes up the seat that is offered to him on the bench, and this brings the two contestants onto a level playing field. It is this movement further into the hall and onto the bench that marks the transition from act two scene one to act two scene two. This transition is further enforced by the appearance of the word *Capitulum* (i.e. chapter) in red ink in the manuscript after the word *geðspeki*.[13]

Reflecting back on the preliminary round of the wisdom contest the following can be said, in sum. Gagnráðr has been asked a series of four questiones. Two of the questions concerned the origins of the cosmos, the questions about the horses Skinfaxi and Hrímfaxi, while one concerned the geography of the great divide between æsir and the jǫtnar, and the final question concerned the site of the battle at Ragnarǫk. With his answers to these four questions the disguised guest has qualified himself for a competition with Vafþrúðnir, and from the point of view of the audience, the question that poses itself most obviously is the following: why does Vafþrúðnir permit his guest further into his hall, endangering himself so

[13] Machan writes, ‘[t]here seems to be little if any difference between *geðspeki* and *fornom stǫfom* (1.5), at least as they are displayed in this poem. *geðspeki* occurs about two thirds of the way into a line in R; *capitulum* is written in red in the remaining space’ (2008, 83). Machan (*Vafþrúðnismál*), Gísli Sigurðsson (*Eddukvæði*), and Bugge (*Norrœn fornkvæði*) all include the *Capitulum* that is found in the R manuscript, while Finnur Jónsson (*De Gamle Eddadigte*) and Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*), for example, do not, continuing immediately to stanza 20, although in the ÍF edition there is mention made of the *Capitulum* in the notes. The *Capitulum* is significant, for it is a physical mark on the manuscript suggesting that the compiler thought the break in the scene important enough to mark it.

greatly? Either Vafþrúðnir is confident in his ability to defeat the guest in the wisdom contest that will follow, or Vafþrúðnir knows that he has reached his time to die and chooses to demonstrate his great wisdom on his way out.

Óðinn has craftily lured the jǫtunn into a trap in the jǫtunn's own home by getting the jǫtunn to think he is luring the guest Gagnráðr into a defeat. The áss has breached the jǫtunn's defenses without revealing his true identity and without letting the jǫtunn know he has in fact made the breach. The name Gagnráðr, however, alludes to the guest's true identity (unless the alternative Gangráðr is accepted, which would reinforce the disguise) and Gagnráðr has in fact proven himself very wise in answering Vafþrúðnir's four questions with great poetic skill. Óðinn was able to do all of this efficiently, and now he is about to start questioning Vafþrúðnir, which is the reason why he left Ásgarðr in the first place.

The struggle between the æsir and the jǫtnar that permeates the mythological narratives of the R and A manuscripts and *SnE* is about to play out on the small stage. The confrontation between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir is only a small part of the grand narrative. The next two chapters closely analyze the wisdom contest that is the primary subject of this work, and in the sense that the pen is mightier than the sword, this contest in words will be the demise of the giant Vafþrúðnir. On the way to his death, of which it appears he has no foreknowledge, although that is not known for sure, Vafþrúðnir reveals to his guest and to the audience a great deal of important mythological wisdom that pertains to the past, the present, and the future.

By giving close attention to the episodes (here referred to as acts and scenes) that comprise the plot of the poem we are pulling apart the action of the poem and opening it up for interpretation. The methodology is based on Ricoeur's configurational model in two important ways. The episodes of the narrative of *Vafþr* configure into a whole, and in that sense, after the close and contextual reading of the poem is complete the episodes will be brought together to find meaning on the three levels introduced at the beginning: formal, historical, and critical levels. Ricoeur's theory is also active in the present author's configuration of multiple mythical narratives into a coherent whole (coherent may be used only artificially here). While being wary of the fallacy of adding these narratives together, narratives that may in fact represent divergent traditions, it is still academically sound, I argue, to exercise the critical faculty of comparing these narratives alongside one another. For now the close and contextual reading continues: on to act two scene two.

5. Act Two Scene Two: On the Bench

The following quote from Eliade suggests to the reader that the cosmogonic act and its representation in narratives was a part of the collective consciousness of Icelanders during the settlement period. The stories that they may have carried with them from Scandinavia would have been reinvigorated with the transformation of the barren Iceland into an island that was settled completely in under a century.

> L'établissement dans une contrée nouvelle, inconnue et inculte, équvaut à un acte de création. Lorsque les colons scandinaves prirent possession de l'Islande, *land-náma*, et la défrichèrent, ils ne considérèrent cet acte ni comme une œuvre originale, ni comme un travail humain et profane. Leur enterprise n'était pour eux que la répétition d'un act primordial: la transformation du chaos en Cosmos par l'acte divin de la Création. En travaillant la terre désertique, ils répétaient en fait l'acte des dieux, qui organisaient le chaos en lui donnant formes et normes. (1949, 27)

> (Settlement in a new, unknown, uncultivated country is equivalent to an act of creation. When the Scandinavian colonists took possession of Iceland, *Landnáma*, and began to cultivate it, they regarded this act neither as an original undertaking nor as human and profane work. Their enterprise was for them only the repetition of a primordial act: the transformation of chaos into cosmos by the divine act of Creation. By cultivating the desert soil, they in fact repeated the act of the gods, who organized chaos by giving it forms and norms. (1954, 10))

While it is not the aim of the present work to comment on the historical significance of the settlement in relation to the representation of acts of creation in narratives surviving from medieval Iceland, Eliade's words remind the reader that for medieval Icelanders the settlement of the island and establishment of their commonwealth was in the recent past in the 13th century and the representation of that formative period is one of the central topics for the saga literature of the period, a period during which the commonwealth was fading under the ever-growing presence of the Norwegian monarchy. The settlement marked a new beginning for the settlers. In *Vafþr* there is also a new beginning after the 'capitulum', from which point onwards Vafþrúðnir will be questioned by his guest Gagnráðr. The two characters are now sitting on the bench in Vafþrúðnir's hall and the questions begin with the distant past.

The text of *Vafþr* that is found in the A manuscript begins at stanza 20 line 2 (at the word *æði*), and thus neatly matches the third and final section of epsiode 2.[1]

[1] There is a missing leaf in the A manuscript directly prior to where *Vafþr* picks up, which suggests that originally the A manuscript contained the whole of the poem.

This section, which makes up the bulk of the poem, roughly two-thirds of its verses, is the main wisdom contest, and is the section that often receives the greatest deal of attention.

Act one scene one, the chorus-like stanza 5, and act two scene one supply the frame narrative in which the wisdom contest takes place. By the end of stanza 19 the audience is aware that Óðinn has left Ásgarðr on a journey to test the wisdom of a wise jǫtunn named Vafþrúðnir. To do so he prepared for his journey in his short dialogue with Frigg, during which she expressed direct concern for his proposed journey. Óðinn then travelled to and arrived at the hall of Vafþrúðnir, introducing himself under a *heiti* in place of his true name and was granted entry on somewhat false pretenses. Under the name Gagnráðr, Óðinn is then questioned by Vafþrúðnir and is permitted further into the hall. Vafþrúðnir finally set the stakes of the contest as life or death. Óðinn has not given away his true identity or seemed overly wise, which has led Vafþrúðnir to feel confident that he will be victorious. The final two scenes are the most suspensful, which is natural as the build up of the dialogue leads towards a climax near the conclusion. But the rising action results from what the first 19 stanzas have set in place, which is a dramatic interaction between two paranormal mythological beings that are talking about the very events that will lead to the destruction of the cosmos. It can be anticipated that there will be a reversal of fortune for Vafþrúðnir in the denouement and resolution of the plot. Vafþrúðnir is in for a great surprise, and the audience is in the position of watching the fall of the old, wise, and powerful jǫtunn.[2]

5.1 Origins

Returning to Eliade to begin the wisdom contest further reminds the reader that each time a drama is performed, its contents are recreated.

> A vrai dire, dans certaines cosmogonies archaïques le monde a pris existence par le sacrifice d'un monstre primordial, symbole du Chaos (Tiamat), ou par celui d'un macranthrope cosmique (Ymir, Pan'Ku, Purusha). Pour assurer la *réalité* et la *durée* d'une construction exemplaire: la Création des mondes et de l'homme. (1949, 42)

> (In fact, in certain archaic cosmogonies the world was given existence through the sacrifice of a primordial monster, symbolizing chaos (Tiamat), or through that of a cosmic giant (Ymir, Pan-Ku, Purusa). To assure the reality and the enduringness of a

[2] Kragerud writes: 'Str. 20–43. Annet avsnitt markeres gjennom nummereringen fra én til tolv og ved det epilogiske spørgsmål om kilden for den frodes viten, som den egentlige utprøving av jotnens visdom' (1981, 33). Stanzas 20 through 43 indeed provide an encyclopaedic version of Vafþrúðnir's knowledge, and concludes with the source of his knowledge.

> construction, there is a repetition of the divine act of perfect construction: the Creation of the worlds and of man. (1954, 20))

When the story of the cosmogony is told, as it is in *Vafþr*, it is a repetition of the originary act. Gagnráðr begins his questioning of Vafþrúðnir by turning to origins, as Vafþrúðnir did in his first two questions for Gagnráðr in stanzas 11 and 13, but here it is all the way back to the origins of the world.

The very first question that Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir is about the creation of the earth and the sky, and in so doing addresses the very origins of the cosmos. Vafþrúðnir knows very little about his opponent. He knows that his name is Gagnráðr and has tested him on some mythological knowledge, and he has deemed him to be sufficiently wise to enter the wisdom contest, having answered the four preliminary questions that were posed. Óðinn, on the other hand, may know more about his opponent than he did upon his arrival at the hall, for in the four questions that Vafþrúðnir asked of his guest, Óðinn was introduced to Vafþrúðnir's knowledge base, not necessarily in its entirety, but at least its outline.

Óðinn kvað:
„Segðu þat it eina,
ef þitt œði dugir
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan jǫrð um kom
eða upphiminn
fyrst, inn fróði jǫtunn."

(Tell me one thing, if your wit is up to it, and you, Vafthrúdnir, know: from where did the earth come, and heaven above, first of all, you wise giant?)

Gagnráðr has numbered his question, something Vafþrúðnir did not do, stating 'Segðu þat it eina', indicating that he intends to ask more questions, and he will in fact number his first twelve questions. The phrase 'ef þitt œði dugir' is also interesting, for it is a challenge that is direct, and may even suggest that the one asking the questions has some doubt as to whether or not his contestant is up to the task of the competition: 'ef hugur þinn býr yfir nægri visku' (Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 1:359). Vafþrúðnir did not include a numbered phrase in his questions in the preliminary round of the contest, but rather included the phrase 'alls þú á gólfi vill / þíns um freista frama', which indicates that it is the guest who is seeking to contest the host. Gagnráðr appears more confident, and indeed is the aggressive guest. Schjødt argues that in Óðinn's questions, which begin here, there is a clear indication of a chronological ordering of time: '[i] Vafþrúðnismál f.eks. er der i Odins spørgsmål (trofe 20 ff) en klar kronologisk orden, der begynder med skabelsen, omhandler elementer i verdensbilledet (bl.a. Njords mytiske udvikling)

og slutter med hændelserne efter Ragnarok' (1981, 93). Step by step the question and answer sequence draws the audience through a history of the cosmos.

Vafþrúðnir is aware of what took place in the long distant past, and his answers to the guest's questions supply the cosmological information for both Gagnráðr and the audience.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
21 „Ór Ymis holdi
var jǫrð um skǫpuð
en ór beinum bjǫrg,
himinn ór hausi
ins hrímkalda jǫtuns,
en ór sveita sjór."

(From Ymir's flesh the earth was formed, and the rocks from out of his bones; the sky from the skull of the ice-cold giant, and the sea from his blood.)

Like Gagnráðr in the preliminary round of questioning in act two scene one, Vafþrúðnir has provided more information than was asked of him, adding additional information about the origins of the rocks and the sea on top of what was asked about the earth and the sky. The creation myth involving Ymir is found in other sources that provide a parallel to it, and add to what is given here in the jǫtunn's response. In *Grímn* stanza 40 the same information is provided, but in a different order, and in stanza 41 of that poem additional information is provided beyond what Vafþrúðnir provides. There it is added that from his brows Miðgarðr was formed and from his brain clouds were made for the sky.

Although the same information is given, in *Grímn* it is Óðinn who provides it, whereas in *Vafþr* it is Óðinn who questions the jǫtunn about it, and Vafþrúðnir who supplies the information with his answer. Óðinn must have known the answer before asking the question, however, otherwise he would be unable to evaluate the correctness of the answer, an essential aspect of a wisdom contest. The similarity in content between the two poems suggests that they developed together—as they are found together in both vellum manuscripts of eddic poetry—and it is not only the similar information that is provided in the two poems, but also the fact that both take Óðinn as the favoured protagonist in his encounters with his adversaries, whether jǫtnar or human. The two poems form a pair of Óðinn-voyage poems. Larrington writes that '[s]ince the two poems are clearly biased in favor of Óðinn, placing the audience on his side in the wisdom-performances he stages, the ideology of Vafþrúðnismál and Grímnismál is Æsir-centred' (2002, 63). The wisdom performance that Óðinn stages in *Vafþr* is the contest itself, particularly stanzas 20 through 55, the main contest that occurs after he has gained entrance to the hall and been vetted by Vafþrúðnir. In *Grímn* Óðinn dictates a monologue of

cosmological knowledge to the human king Geirrøðr, who has taken him captive, and the king's son. The respective images of the cosmogony presented in each of the two poems match one another closely, and the fact that in both poems the cosmological information is relayed in the form of a wisdom performance supplies strong evidence that the two poems support one another.[3] Thus, the allegiance of the poems to one another is reflected in content, juxtaposition in the manuscript tradition, and is further reinforced by Snorri's extensive use of both poems in *Gylf*.

In *Gylf* chapter 8, Hár, who is another representation of Óðinn of the æsir, recounts the same cosmogonic myth. The trio of Hár, Jafnhár, and Þriði host Gangleri, who asks about many things that concern the mythical cosmos during his visit to Ásgarðr. One of his questions is about the actions of the sons of Bor, who are in fact Óðinn and his brothers Vili and Vé, during the creation period when the earth and the sky were being formed. About the sons of Bor, Hár says that they took Ymir and moved him into the middle of Ginnungagap and from his body they made the world. From his blood the sea and the lakes were made, and from his flesh the earth was fashioned, and mountain cliffs from his bones. Beyond that they made stones and gravel from his teeth, molars, and the bones from his body that were broken. At this point Jafnhár adds that the blood that gushed freely from his wounds was used to make the sea, and by fashioning the sea around the periphery they belted and fastened the earth. The sea is so large, it is added, that most men would think it impossible to cross.[4] The creation story in *Gylf* continues, but it is evident that the same cosmogonic myth is accounted for in all three of these texts in similar versions, and the conjecture can be forwarded that it was a reliable 13th-century account of the pre-Christian myth of the cosmogonic act. Of particular interest is that in *Gylf* it is said that the sons of Bor took Ymir and created the earth, the sea, and the sky with his body. The sons of Bor are, according to *Gylf*, Óðinn and his brothers Vili and Vé. If the mythic narratives are configured together, Gagnráðr (i.e. Óðinn) is asking Vafþrúðnir to tell him something that he would be well aware of, not just because he as the questioner possesses knowledge of it from his extensive

[3] Lindblad writes, 'Vm och Grm åt och skiljer sig från omgivande dikter framför allt 1) betr. storbokstäver. […] 2) betr. teckenformer. […] 3) betr. tecknen' (1980, 158). The fact that Lindblad interprets the similarities between the two poems in terms of capital letters, letter shapes and the use of special characters suggests that these two poems may have been first recorded into manuscript form together before being transcribed into the R manuscript.

[4] 'Hár segir: "Eigi er þar lítit af at segja. Þeir tóku Ymi ok fluttu í mitt Ginnungagap, ok gerðu af honum jǫrðina, af blóði hans sæinn ok vǫtnin. Jǫrðin var gǫr af holdinu en bjǫrgin af beinunum, grjót ok urðir gerðu þeir af tǫnnum ok jǫxlum ok af þeim beinum er brotin váru".

Þá mælir Jafnhár: "Af því blóði, er ór sárum rann ok laust fór, þar af gerðu þeir sjá þann er þeir gerðu ok festu saman jǫrðina, ok lǫgðu þann sjá í hring útan um hana, ok mun þat flestum manni ófœra þykkja at komask þar yfir"' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:11–12).

storehouse of wisdom, but because he, as Óðinn, would know of it from personal experience. It also confirms that Óðinn is in fact very old, for if he was an active member in the cosmogonic act, he would have existed when there was nothing more than the Ginnungagap. The creation is also interesting for in it Óðinn and his brothers kill their maternal relative Ymir. As Óðinn, Vili, and Vé are the sons of Bor, Bor was the son of Búri, the first áss who was created by Auðhumla, the primeval cow, who licked him out of salt. It is said that Búri married Bestla, who was the daughter of the giant Bǫlþorn. Lindow (2001) suggests that it is tempting to think of Bǫlþorn as one of the original offspring of Ymir (2001, 324). It is important to be wary of this configuration, however, because the similarities may represent divergent narratives that are good for comparision, but not necessarily for addition.

In *Vsp* stanzas 3 and 4 the creation myth is given in a slightly different version than the version that is related in *Vafþr*, *Grímn*, and *Gylf*. In those stanzas of *fornyrðislag* the vǫlva recounts how it was a long time ago that Ymir made his home, when there was no sand, sea, or cooling waves. There was no earth to be found, she recalls, sky or grass, but only a gulf. Then she says that Bur's sons, like in the account from *Gylf*, made the earth, Miðgarðr specifically. Then the Sun shone from the south and the ground grew with the leek's green growth.[5] In *Vsp* stanza 3 it is said that Ymir 'byggði', made his home, and then in stanza 4 that the sons of Bor 'bjǫðum um yppðu', brought up the lands, to create Miðgarðr. There is only the recognition of Ymir's existence at the time when there was nothing but the Ginnungagap and that Bor's sons were the ones who were involved in the creation, but it is not specifically said that it was from Ymir's flesh, bones, and blood that the world was created. As a result, the account given in *Vsp* (both the R and H versions provide a similar account) does not contradict the accounts from the other three sources, but it does not corroborate them either. It does appear, however, that all four of these sources for the Norse mythological cosmogony essentially relate the same creation myth, which is that it was the giant Ymir who existed before the cosmogony and that it was Bor's sons who performed the cosmogonic act, three of the sources indicating that it was from his body that the earth was created.[6] The fact that the cosmogonic myth survives in four sources, even though somewhat

[5] Ár var alda, / þar er Ymir byggði, / vara sandr né sær / né svalar unnir, / jǫrð fannsk æva / né upphiminn, / gap var ginnunga / en gras hvergi.

Áðr Burs synir / bjǫðum um yppðu, / þeir er Miðgarð / mæran skópu; / sól skein sunnan / á salar steina, / þá var grund gróin / grœnum lauki. (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*).

[6] Clunies Ross writes that the killing of Ymir is a sacrifice that is made by the æsir, and it is a sacrifice of the type that 'is a collective act in which a recognisable social group sacrifices an alien individual to promote the good of their own society or avert an impending disaster' (1994, 190). In this case the good that comes from the sacrifice is the creation of the earth.

divergently, demonstrates the importance of the creation myth to the people of medieval Iceland. The creation myth was important to the medieval Icelanders for it represents the placing of the elements in order. Gurevich writes, '[t]ime is as real and tangible as the whole world. Consequently it is possible to order and to divide time. This the gods did in creating the world—they made the earth and the heaven, they divided time and established its count' (1969, 52). With the creation of the earth and the sky the æsir created the space in which the instruments that are used to measure time could be placed.

The second question that Gagnráðr asks of his host is about the origins of the moon and the sun, which is a natural progression in subject matter, considering that the first question he posed was about the creation of the earth, and there could be little on the earth without the introduction of the sun and the moon.

Óðinn kvað:
22 „Segðu þat annat,
ef þitt œði dugir
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan máni um kom
svá at ferr menn yfir,
eða sól it sama."

(Tell me a second thing, if your wit is up to it, and you, Vafthrúdnir, know: from where did Moon come, that passes over men, and likewise Sun the same?)

This second question is numbered like the first one, which stresses that the questions will continue to be numbered and that they are perhaps being asked in an order that is significant. As will become more apparent as the questions continue, the order mirrors the chronology of the mythological past, the mythological present, and the mythological future. There is, in other words, an internal logic to the presentation of the subject matter: it is chronological. After the creation of the earth and the sky, it is the celestial bodies that are asked about. In response to Gagnráðr's second question the jǫtunn is once again clear.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
23 „Mundilfœri heitir,
hann er Mána faðir
ok svá Sólar it sama;
himin hverfa
þau skulu hverjan dag
ǫldum at ártali."

(Mundilfœri he is called, who is the father of Moon, and likewise of Sun the same; they must sweep through the sky every day, to mark off the years for men.)

Gagnráðr's question and Vafþrúðnir's answer are related to the first two questions that Vafþrúðnir asks of his guest during his vetting process in act two scene one. Gagnráðr's questions for Vafþrúðnir ask the giant to reveal more than was revealed previously, but they continue to build on the cosmogonic theme, and the putting in place of the instruments by which time is measured. Machan (*Vafþrúðnismál* 2008) interprets the name of the father of máni and sól to be *Mundilfœri*, as do Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit* 2014); however, in other editions the spelling is different.[7] Finnur Jónsson (*De Gamle Eddadigte* 1932) interprets the name as *Mundilfari* and Sveinnbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson attribute to the name the following meaning: 'navnet betyder "den der bevæger sig efter bestemte tider" og er egl. navn på månen selv' (1931, 413). The one who moves according to fixed times is Mundilfœri, and accordingly his children, máni and sól, moon and sun, are two celestial bodies that move accross the sky according to fixed times. After the creation of the earth, the intsruments by which time is kept track of come into existence.

As Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir questions he is finding out the breadth of the jǫtunn's knowledge. This accords to his proposed purpose for the journey that he stated in stanza 1, when he tells Frigg his intentions while asking for her counsel. Óðinn states this further when he arrives as an unknown visitor at the hall of Vafþrúðnir in stanza 6. Besides what the dialogue reveals about the characters in the contest, the questions and answers also reveal to the audience what was known or thought about the distant mythological past in medieval Iceland, whether believed or not. Beyond being a mythical representation about Óðinn's travels to Jǫtunheimr to visit Vafþrúðnir, *Vafþr* is also a storehouse of mythological knowledge. The stories are metaphors for how humankind interprets the origins of the natural environment and in turn expresses it collectively. In the case of 'Mundilfœri', its meaning may be directly related to keeping time, and as the father of both the moon and the sun (or, the creatures Máni and Sól, depending on the interpretation) he is in fact the ancestor of time.[8] Significantly it is the keeping of

[7] The different spellings in editions of the poem can be attributed to different spellings in the manuscripts: '*Mundilfœri:* Mynd nafnsins er vafasöm. Í K [i.e. R] er skr. *–fǫri* (*ǫ* táknar líkl. *æ*), í A *–fœri*. Í SnKW [i.e. SnR, W] er skr. *–fari* (raunar leiðr. úr *–fœri* í SnK [i.e. SnR]). Nafnið er torskýrt hver myndin sem valin er' (Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 1:360).

[8] Different editors and translators take *máni* and *sól* to either be proper nouns or to simply refer to the celestial objects, sun and moon. Machan (*Vafþrúðnismál* 2008) interprets them as referential nouns, while Orchard (*Elder Edda* 2011) considers them to be proper nouns. The result of considering them as proper nouns is to capitalize the initial letter of each. Many such editorial decisions can influence the meaning of a poem. McKinnell adds, '[i]n Old Norse poetry it is often difficult to decide whether *Sól* is a name or a common noun (see, for example, *Vafþrúðnismál* 23, 1–3, where she and *Máni* "Moon" are children of Mundilfœri)'

time that is stressed as being important in Vafþrúðnir's answer, which may suggest that for the people who created this myth and those who transmitted representations of it, the moon and the sun were important for the sake of keeping time, as they are today in the 21st century, but perhaps less so for some people. The medieval person's primary connection with the moon and the sun would have been exposure to the natural environment in the forms of the movement of the sun across the sky, which indicates the progression of the day, and the phases of the moon, which indicate the progression of a month and the transition from one month to the next.[9]

After asking about the origins of the moon and the sun, Gagnráðr digs deeper into the cosmogony, posing a question about the origins of the day and the night, expanding further on the division of time and exploring even further the theme introduced in the preliminary round of the wisdom contest about the alternation of light and darkness in the natural environment.

Óðinn kvað:
24 „Segðu þat it þriðja,
alls þik svinnan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan dagr um kom,
sá er ferr drótt yfir,
eða nótt með niðum."

(Tell me a third thing, since they call you smart, and you, Vafthrúdnir, know: from where did Day come, that passes over people, or Night and the phases of Moon?)

Gagnráðr picks up on Vafþrúðnir's answer about the Sun and the Moon, and indeed expands upon the answer that he had given to the jǫtunn earlier, asking for more information about the day and the night, which together form the cycle of the day, the most natural unit of time.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
25 „Dellingr heitir,
hann er Dags faðir,
en Nótt var Nǫrvi borin;
ný ok nið
skópu nýt regin

(2005, 13). Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason interpret Máni and Sól to be proper nouns (2014, 1:360).

[9] *Gylf* has a somewhat different version of the myth of Máni and Sól than *Vafþr*, in which Mundilfœri was a man who had two children, one named Máni and the other Sól. As a punishment for the hubris of naming his children after the celestial bodies the æsir sent both children up into the sky where they must assist the celestial bodies. Máni controls the waxings and wanings of Moon, while Sól drives the horses that pull Sun (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:13–14).

> ǫldum at ártali.“
>
> (Delling he is called, who is the father of Day, but Night was born of Nör, New-moon and Moon-wane the gifted powers created to mark off the years for men.)

Vafþrúðnir's answer provides names, which, together with what the jǫtunn said in stanza 23, expands on the genealogy of the instruments of time.[10] The reference to the phases of the moon is directly indicative of time, and that the phases were created so that humans could count time.[11] Finnur Jónsson suggests that Dellingr may in fact be a name for day itself (1932, 57). *Gylf* expands on the myth that is recounted in stanzas 24 and 25 of *Vafþr*, adding that Dellingr and Nótt—who, according to the poem both descend from Nǫrvi (Nǫrfi)—marry each other and have a son who is named Dagr (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:13).

The moon is historically an important measure of time, perhaps even more so than the sun, and together they form the basic pair by which humans have traditionally measured time. Returning to Eliade, the reader is reminded of this:

> Il nous suffira de rappeler ici que si la Lune sert en fait à 'mesurer' le temps (dans les langues indo-européennes la majorité des termes désignant le mois et la lune dérivent de la racine *me-*, qui a donné en latin aussi bien *mensis* que *metior*, 'mesurer'), si ses phases révèlent—longtemps avant l'année solaire et d'une manière beaucoup plus concrète—une unité de temps (le mois), elle révèle en même temps l''eternel retour'. (1949, 129–30)
>
> (Here it will suffice to recall that, if the moon in fact serves to 'measure' time, if the moon's phases—long before the solar year and far more concretely—reveal a unit of time (the month), the moon at the same time reveals the 'eternal return'. (1954, 86))

Eliade emphasizes the importance of the moon as a measure of time, which he forwards is even more primary than the sun as a measure. This is a result of the lunar cycle being shorter in length than the solar year and thus a smaller unit of time. It is made up of a number of days, and all of its phases are important: '[l]es phases de la lune—apparition, croissance, décroissance, disparition suivie de réapparition au bout de trois nuits de ténèbres—ont joué un rôle immense dans l'élaboration de conceptions cycliques' (1949, 130) (The phases of the moon—

[10] See *Alv* stanza 29, where Þórr poses a question to Alvíss that resembles Gagnráðr's question to Vafþrúðnir in *Vafþr* stanza 24, asking who night is, that was born to Nǫrvi. In *Alv* stanza 30, Alvíss replies that Nótt is the name of night among men.

[11] Ciklamini writes that '[t]hough *Vsp*., 4, seems to differ on the manner in which the fertile world developed, it corroborates Snorri's account that the gods then regulate the path of the sun and the moon and affix the stars to the sky. They also institute day and night and name the parts of the day. They introduce the concept of time. *Vm*. 21–25 indicates the same sequence by citing the regulation of the sun, moon, day, and night immediately after the stanza on the fashioning of the universe' (1963, 142–43).

appearance, increase, wane, disappearance, followed by reappearance after three nights of darkness—have played an immense part in the elaboration of cyclical concepts (1954, 86)). The fact that in *Vafþr* these basic cyclical elements are emphasized in the cosmogonic myth indicates that for the medieval audience there was at the very least an appreciation of the cyclical origins of time that were in the 13th and 14th centuries being displaced by the linear, Christian conception of time as moving forward from a fixed time in the past towards a fixed time in the future.[12]

In his next question Gagnráðr asks of the origins of winter and summer, extending the genealogy of time to all possible cyclical units, moving from the monthly phases of the moon, through the daily cycle of light and darkness, to the larger units of the seasons. The first four questions provide the basic cosmogonic information about the creation of the earth and the structuring of the temporal order. The Norse language area was to a great degree a two-season environment, being very high in the northern hemisphere, so that as Dagr and Nótt form the unit of the day, summer and winter together form a whole year.

Óðinn kvað:
26 „Segðu þat it fjórða,
alls þik fróðan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan vetr um kom
eða varmt sumar
fyrst með fróð regin.“

(Tell me a fourth thing, since they call you wise, and you, Vafthrúdnir, know: from where did Winter come, or warm Summer, first of all among the wise powers?)

As has been the case with the three previous answers to Gagnráðr's questions, Vafþrúðnir's answer to the fourth question refers to the names of fathers.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
27 „Vindsvalr heitir,
hann er Vetrar faðir,
en Svásuðr Sumars.“

(Wind-cool he is called, who is father of Winter, but sweetness that of Summer.)

[12] The genealogy of the cosmos as presented in *Vafþr* involves a number of fathers: Ymir, the father of the earth, Mundilfœri the father of Máni, Dellingr the father of Dagr and Nǫrvi the father of Nótt. It is interesting that, as Ármann Jakobsson argues, there are two cosmic fathers who appear as the contestants in the poem: Óðinn the father of the æsir and Vafþrúðnir the older father figure of the poem. Óðinn will eventually defeat Vafþrúðnir, but in so doing becomes increasingly aware of his own status as a father who will be defeated at Ragnarǫk (2007, 266–72).

Vafþrúðnir's answer that Vindsvalr (Wind-cool) is winter's father and Svásuður (Mild One or Mild South) is the father of summer closes the cosmogonic section of the wisdom contest.[13]

Stanza 27 cuts off after only three lines, and there have been speculations as to what was contained in those lines, although it is impossible to know with certainty what the words were, if any.[14] The present author estimates that it is quite possible that the three final lines of the stanza might have been quite similar to those in stanzas 23 and 25, with the final line being 'ǫldum at ártali', for it is natural that the three sets of answers that relate to the passing of time would be similar in content, but, like Bugge's (1867) reconstructions (see note 14 below) it can only be a case of conjecture. The same myth is described in *Gylf* chapter 19 and putting aside any desire to reconstruct possibly lost lines, additional information can be taken into account by consulting that passage.

On the first four questions that Gagnráðr poses to Vafþrúðnir, Larrington writes the following:

> [a]s Óðinn questions Vafþrúðnir about these phenomena, he establishes the origins of the very mechanisms by means of which Time passes and in which history is formed: the daily revolution of the sun; the moon in its phases marking out the months; day and night, winter and summer, and the alternating seasons which make up the year. (2002, 66)

The placement of these questions at the beginning of Óðinn's questioning of Vafþrúðnir demonstrates the connection between the celestial bodies and the natural environment with the measurement of time and the importance of the capacity for such measurement to humans. Notably, time is addressed immediately after the creation of the world in the order of questioning, and it may be said that with the creation of the earth and the celestial bodies it became possible to interpret time. There was life before the creation of the world, as we have learned about Ymir and

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[13] Mundal writes the following about the personification of the seasons as descendants of the jǫtnar: [m]ange slags makter of fenomen, ok ikkje berre negative, vert i dei førestellingane personifiserte som jotnar og jotunkvinner' (1990, 7). The association between the jǫtnar and nature is thus emphasized in *Vafþr*, but as Mundal points out it is not necessarily a negative association, and the association between the jǫtnar and chaos must be called into question, considering that the descendants of the jǫtnar in *Vafþr* are indeed associated with the fundamental ordering of time.

[14] Bugge notes the following in regards to the truncated stanza 27: 'Hverken R eller A antyde herefter nogen Lacune. Flere Papirafskrr. og alle Udgg. inskyde: "ár of bæði þau / skulu ey fara, / unzrjúfask regin." Jeg formoder, at vi have en prosaisk Gjengivelse af de tabte Verslinjer i følgende Ord i SnE: ... "Vindsvalr, hann er Vásaðar son, ok váru þeir áttungar grimmir ok svalbrjóstaðir, ok hefir Vetr þeirra skaplyndi." Verslinjerne kunne kanske have havt omtrent følgende Form: "Vindsvals faðir / var Vásuðr of heitinn, / öll er sú ætt til ötul"' (1867, 69).

his direct descendents as well as Búri and his descendants, but all of these creatures were paranormal. Humans were not created until after the cosmogony, as we know from *Vsp* stanzas 17 and 18 (once again, if we configure the sources together). What is more, the genealogy of the cosmogony is given in terms of father figures who have had offspring. The earth had a father, although perhaps a reluctant one, Ymir, as do Máni, Sól, Dagr, Nótt, Vetr, and Sumar. The distant mythological past, reminding ourselves of the timelines introduced by Clunies Ross (1994) and Lindow (2001), may therefore be considered to have been within time, as per Ricoeur's (1980) first degree of temporal organization, but time could not have been measured before the creation period as the tools for measuring it were not yet in place.

In *Vafþr* there is not only narrative time in the sense of Ricoeur's theory, made up of acts and scenes, essentially sequential time, and configurational time, essentially the plot that holds a narrative together, but there is also cosmological time, the origins of which are revealed in the first four questions Gagnráðr asks of Vafþrúðnir. The creative act or genesis of the Norse cosmos is the principal subject of stanzas 20 through 27, and by discussing the creation myth the characters reveal in their dialogue how time is measured, not only by the paranormal beings in the mythical cosmos but by all humans; that is, we measure time based on a system that ultimately relies on the celestial bodies, including the earth, the sun, and the moon. Up to the present day it is common to read time from a sundial and to gauge the passing of the months by the phases of the moon and also the coming and passing of the seasons in relation to the calendar year. The represented myths reveal accepted truths about the human perception of the environment.

These stanzas also relate events that occurred in the distant past in relation to the time period in which the story is taking place in the mythic present. So far in the poem the past, the present, and the future are all being called forth in the action, which places the narrative time within the mythological time of the Old Norse mythological cycle. In Gagnráðr's first four questions and Vafþrúðnir's first four answers the origins of the mythological past have been posited, and, before turning to the future, the two will continue discussing ancient matters.

5.2 Giants

After four questions and answers about the fathers of the cosmos, the origins of the earth and the celestial bodies, Gagnráðr turns to questioning Vafþrúðnir about the early history of the æsir and the jǫtnar, the two groups of paranormal beings who inhabit the world in the mythic past, the mythic present, and the mythic future along with humans and other paranormal beings. Although antagonists in the mythic

present, the æsir and jǫtnar share common origins in the past, and as a result the two contestants share common ancestry.

In his fifth question, holding fast to the theme of paternity, Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir who was the oldest ancestor of the æsir and jǫtnar.

Óðinn kvað:
28 „Segðu þat it fimmta,
alls þik fróðan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hverr ása elztr
eða Ymis niðja
yrði í árdaga.“

(Tell me a fifth thing, since they call you wise, and you, Vafthrúdnir, know: who was the eldest of the kin of Ymir or the Æsir to appear in ancient days?)

This question builds on the first question that Gagnráðr posed to Vafþrúðnir about the creation of the world (stanza 20) and its corresponding answer, (stanza 21), where it was said that from Ymir's flesh the world was created by the æsir. Here the question concerns who among Ymir's relatives or the æsir was the first to appear in ancient days. This question links the æsir and the jǫtnar by suggesting a common origin and not asking who was the oldest from each group, but the oldest from either group.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
29 „Ørófi vetra
áðr væri jǫrð skǫpuð,
þá var Bergelmir borinn,
Þrúðgelmir
var þess faðir
en Aurgelmir afi.“

(Countless years before the earth was created: then was Bergelmir born; Thrúdgelmir was that one's father, and Aurgelmir grandfather.)

Vafþrúðnir states that Bergelmir was the oldest jǫtunn or áss that appeared in ancient days.[15] The giant names Bergelmir, Þrúðgelmir, and Aurgelmir are only attested in *Vafþr*, which is valuable knowledge about the oldest jǫtnar and their lineage.[16] Vafþrúðnir, being very old himself, possesses the knowledge of the oldest of his kin.

[15] Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason note the following on the three names: '*Bergelmir:* (líkl.) sá sem öskrar í bergi (þ.eþ *Berggelmir*); *Þrúðgelmir:* sá sem öskrar kröftuglega; *Aurgelmir:* sá sem öskrar í auri; hann er hinn elsti jötunn, Ymir' (2014, 1:361).
[16] Bergelmir is also attested in *Gylf* chapter 7, where *Vafþr* stanza 35 is quoted (*Snorri*

Simek writes that ‘Aurgelmir is probably identical to the primordial giant Ymir’ (1993, 329). This assertion is also in line with Finnur Jónsson’s interpretation that ‘Aurgelmir er = Ymir’ (1932, 57). McKinnell further points out that ‘Snorri states that Aurgelmir is identical with Ymir (*Gylfaginning* ch. 5), though we do not know whether this is based on a lost source, or is merely his own assumption’ (2005, 11). In any case, the fact that Vafþrúðnir says that the grandfather of the most ancient jǫtunn is Aurgelmir makes it highly likely that Ymir is indeed equivalent to Aurgelmir, for it is from Ymir that the earth and sky were made, and it is most likely that it was from the oldest living being at the time that the material for the creation of the world was drawn.

Having learned the genealogy of the oldest jǫtunn ancestors, Gagnráðr then asks for more information about them. Digging deeper into Vafþrúðnir’s memory, Gagnráðr ploughs for more knowledge about the origins of Aurgelmir, the grandfather of Bergelmir and according to Vafþrúðnir’s testimony in stanza 29, the first living being.

Óðinn kvað:
„Segðu þat it sétta,
alls þik svinnan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan Aurgelmir kom
með jǫtna sonum
fyrst, inn fróði jǫtunn.“

(Tell me a sixth thing, since they call you smart, and you, Vafthrúdnir, know: from where did Aurgelmir come among giants’ sons, first of all, you wise giant?)

This sixth question challenges Vafþrúðnir to go beyond mere lineage with his response, and to explain how Aurgelmir arose from the elements that would have existed in the days of the long distant mythical past, at a time when there was nothing other than the Ginnungagap.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
„Ór Élivágum
stukku eitrdropar,
svá óx, unz varð ór jǫtunn;
þar órar ættir
kómu allar saman,
því er þat æ allt til atalt.“[17]

Sturluson: Edda 1:11). Aurgelmir, Þrúðgelmir, and Bergelmir all appear as giant names in the *þulur* (*Den norsk-isländska skaldediktningen* 1:323–24). Thus, *Vafþr* is the only narrative source where these jǫtunn names are independently attested, as the mention of Bergelmir in *Gylf* relies on *Vafþr*. The *þulur* are non-narrative sources, lists for skaldic poets to draw from.

[17] Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason write that ‘*31. vísa* er einnig í Gylf, 5. kap., 4–6

> (From Élívágar dripped venom-drops, which grew till a giant formed, [from there came all our lines together: so all is ever too awesome.])

According to Vafþrúðnir poison is the primeval source of the jǫtnar, and thus also the æsir. The *órar* from line 4 is inclusive and indicates both æsir and jǫtnar. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson writes that '[t]his element of similarity between the gods and the giants implies a god-like quality to the giants, who nonetheless retain their close links with nature' (1998, 24). The close link of the jǫtnar with nature is also reflected in the use of the parts of Ymir's body to make the earth and the heavens, and, what is more, that they are often depicted as living on the periphery, away from the human world of Miðgarðr. Eldevik writes that Vafþrúðnir's answer 'would seem to provide a reason for the gods' efforts to keep most giants at a distance and/or destroy them – though one still wonders why the Æsir themselves, sharing blood kinship with giants as they do, are not similarly affected by the "venemous drops" in their ancestry' (2005, 94).[18]

The myth of the origins of Aurgelmir from the Élivágar is also related in *Gylf* chapter 5, where Gangleri asks how things were arranged before the different families came into being and humankind increased in number: 'Hversu skipaðisk áðr en ættirnar yrði eða aukaðisk mannfólkit?' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:9) (How were things set up before the different families came into being and mankind increased? (*Prose Edda*, 13)). The response expands considerably on Vafþrúðnir's answer, and Hár replies that when the rivers called the Élivágar came a long way from their source, the poisonous flow that came from them hardened into ice.[19] As the ice solidified, poisonous drops spewed out and froze into an icy rime. Then layer by layer, the ice grew within Ginnungagap.[20] Ginnungagap continues to be described by Jafnhár and then Þriði, and it is given in detail how the warmness from Múspell met with the coldness coming from Niflheimr. Ginnungagap continued to thaw and then there was a quickening in the flowing drops and life arose, taking its

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vo. aðeins þar (með smávegis orðamun í handritum)' (2014, 1:361).

[18] Ciklamini asserts that although the origins of the giants are from venom-drops, it is not necessarily the case that giants are solely malicious: '[t]his is a sweeping statement from the wise old giant, for giants may be grim, but are also helpful, a conception frequently expressed in the sagas, and occassionally in the mythological material as well' (1962, 94). While Óðinn has come to contest with Vafþrúðnir, he also seeks something from him, which I argue is confirmation of future events.

[19] Motz writes '[t]he giant Aurgelmir was miraculously born of icy waves' (1982, 76), which goes against the most common interpretation that the Élivágar are a series of rivers.

[20] 'Þá mælti Hár: "Ár þær er kallaðar eru Élivágar, þá er þær váru svá langt komnar frá uppsprettunni at eitrkvikja sú er þar fylgði harðnaði svá sem sindr þat er renn ór eldinum, þá varð þat íss, ok þá er sá íss gaf staðar ok rann eigi, þá héldi yfir þannig úr þat er af stóð eitrinu ok fraus at hrími, ok jók hrímit hvert yfir annat allt í Ginnungagap"' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:9–10).

strength from the source of the heat. What looked like a man then appeared whose name was Ymir. The frost giants call him Aurgelmir, and from him descend the clans of frost giants.[21] Here Aurgelmir is equated with Ymir, the first jǫtunn from whom the world was created. Gangleri then asks more about Ymir-Aurgelmir, wondering if he was considered to be a god. Hár replies that Ymir-Aurgelmir was in no way considered a god, and that he was evil, and all his descendants are evil likewise.

Élivágar also appear in the eddic poem *Hym* stanza 5, where the god Týr is quoted as saying that the jǫtunn Hymir, who he also says is his father, lives to the east of Élivágar. In this case Élivágar appears to be a single river that has the function of separating the world of the æsir form the world of the jǫtnar, much like Ífing does in *Vafþr* stanza 16. In both cases, *Vafþr* stanza 31 and *Hym* stanza 5, Élivágar (or perhaps 'Élívága') is associated with the jǫtnar: in *Vafþr* with origins, and in *Hym* with geography. Élivágar (again, perhaps Élivága) also appears to be a single river in *Skáld* chapter 17, where, after Þórr has dueled with Hrungnir and had a whetstone lodged in his head, he goes to see Gróa, who helps to remove it for him. During this sequence the following is narrated: 'þá vildi hann launa Gró lækningina ok gera hana fegna, sagði henni þau tíðindi at hann hafði vaðit norðan yfir Élivága ok hafði borit í meis á baki sér Aurvandil norðan ór Jǫtunheimum' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 2:22) ([w]anting to please and reward Groa for her healing, he told the story of his return from the north, and how he had waded across the river Elivagar, carrying Aurvandil southwards from Giant Land on his back in a basket (*Prose Edda*, 89)). Here, as in *Hym*, Élivágar appears to be a single river that separates Miðgarðr from Jǫtunheimr, but rather than lying in the east, as it does in *Hym*, in *Skáld* chapter 17 Élivágar is to the north.[22]

There is a further reference to Élivága in *Bergbúa þáttr*[23] where the rivers (or river) are again located to the North, once again on the periphery. The stanza in which the reference appears is as follows:

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[21] 'Ok þá er mœttisk hrímin ok blær hitans svá at bráðnaði ok draup, ok af þeim kvikudropum kviknaði með krapti þess er til sendi hitann, ok varð manns líkandi, ok var sá nefndr Ymir. En hrímþursar kalla hann Aurgelmi, ok eru þaðan komnar ættir hrímþursa' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:10).

[22] The placement of the jǫtnar to the east and to the north is discussed by Ármann Jakobsson, where he writes in reference to *SnE*, '[l]ocating the giants in the East and North may indeed seem to reflect an archaic and Norway-centric view of the world, as East and North to Norwegians would mean heathen and somewhat unfamiliar races whereas to the West and South were Christians and more Norwegians' (2006, 107).

[23] *Bergbúa þáttr* is preserved in AM 564 a 4to, a parchment manuscript from Vatnshyrna. For more on *Bergbúa þáttr* see Þórhallur Vilmundarson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (1991, cciii–ccxii).

Stíg ek fjall af fjalli,
ferk opt litum, þopta;
dýpst ferk norðr et nyrðra
niðr í heim enn þriðja;
skegg beri opt sás uggir
ámr við minni kvámu,
brýtk við bjarga gæti
bág, í Élivága,
bág, í Élivága. (Bergbúa þáttr, 446–47)

On this stanza, the seventh of twelve in the sequence, and the reference here to Élivágar, Lindow writes that 'the poet says that he travels north down into the third netherworld, and there someone fears his arrival at the Élivágar. The poem is sometimes difficult to understand, but here at least the peripheral location of the Élivágar is assured' (2001, 109). Thus, while in *Vafþr* and *Gylf* the Élivágar are the source of the first life form, the primeval jǫtunn Ymir-Aurgelmir, in other sources Élivágar retain a connection to the periphery, separating the world shared by the æsir and humans from the world of the jǫtnar.

Having confirmed that Ymir-Aurgelmir originated from poison drops that came from the Élivágar, Gagnráðr challenges Vafþrúðnir to produce information about how the ancient jǫtunn was able to reproduce and generate offspring of his own. Óðinn's questions continue to press into Vafþrúðnir's knowledge of the history of paranormal beings in the mythological world, and particularly his jǫtnar ancestors.

Óðinn kvað:
32 „Segðu þat it sjaunda,
alls þik svinnan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvé sá bǫrn gat
inn *baldni* jǫtunn
er hann hafðit gýgjar gaman."

(Tell me a seventh thing, since they call you smart, and you, Vafthrúdnir, know: how did that grim giant get a child, when he had no joy of a giantess?)

To ask how it was possible for reproduction to happen without a female jǫtunn but just one male is significant, as it does not seem natural that one male jǫtunn could give birth on his own, although because only one figure emerged from the Ginnungagap, this androgyny—the combination of male and female sexual roles—was essential to the production of the second generation of life in the mythological world.[24] To be sure, however, it also does not seem natural that the first primeval

[24] Mundal writes that '[t]he androgynous Ymir is a more striking symbol of chaos where everything in the beginning of time existed in embryo and unseparated than the concept of a pair of giants, one male and one female' (1998, 8). Clunies Ross breaks with the tradition of

being would originate from drops of poison, but in the world of mythical representation the metaphorical interpretations of the paranormal past become the reality of the world of the text. In response to this question about the first births in the history of the cosmos, Vafþrúðnir tells of how the primary jǫtunn was able to make his own children.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
33 „Undir hendi vaxa
kváðu hrímþursi
mey ok mǫg saman;
fótr við fœti
gat ins fróða jǫtuns
*sex*hǫfðaðan son.“

(They said that under that frost-giant's arm, at the same time a boy and girl grew; one leg with another of that wise giant got a six-headed son.)

It is a tale of monstrous births, perhaps more frightening than the account of Ymir-Aurgelmir's own origins. Expanding on the information provided by Vafþrúðnir, in *Gylf* chapter 5 Hár states that 'Ok svá er sagt at þá er hann svaf, fekk hann sveita. Þá óx undir vinstri hǫnd honum maðr ok kona, ok annarr fótr hans gat son við ǫðrum. En þaðan af kómu ættir. Þat eru hrímþursar. Hinn gamli hrímþurs, hann kǫllum vér Ymi' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:10–11).[25] This account adds that the giant was sweating when he slept, which is similar to how the Ginnungagap was sweating when Ymir-Aurgelmir was created, but there is no mention made of a six-headed son in the *Gylf* account, only that a son was created from his two legs mating together.[26] The androgyny of Ymir-Aurgelmir has led to the group known as the jǫtnar, who come from very paranormal origins. According to *Vafþr* stanza 29, Aurgelmir had a son named Þrúðgelmir, which may have been the son created from his mating legs, or the boy created from under his arm.

Gagnráðr's eighth question moves towards establishing an approximate age for Vafþrúðnir himself, after having learned about the origins of the jǫtnar generally, who were created in the long distant mythic past, a time before the creation of the

viewing Ymir-Aurgelmir as androgynous or bi-sexual, writing that 'the Old Norse sources do not support the conceptualisation of a being with both male and female reproductive organs' (1994, 152). It is the view of the present author that even though the sourcs, as Clunies Ross correctly points out, do not make mention of the dual physiology of Ymir-Aurgelmir, that does not mean that abstractly the figure is not androgynous.

[25] ('It is said that as he slept he took to sweating. Then, from under his left arm grew a male and a female, while one of his legs got a son with the other. From there came the clans that are called the frost giants. The old frost giant, him we call Ymir'. (*Prose Edda*, 14–15))

[26] Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason note the following about the six-headed son of Ymir-Aurgelmir: '*sexhǫfðaðan*: þannig A, *sér hǫfðaðan* K [i.e. R]' (2014, 1:361).

world and the instruments used to measure time. Gagnráðr asks his host about his earliest memory.

Óðinn kvað:
„Segðu þat it átta,
alls þik *svinnan* kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvat þú fyrst *of* mant
eða fremst um veizt,
þú ert alsviðr, jǫtunn.“

(Tell me an eighth thing, since they call you smart, and you, Vafthrúdnir, know: what first you recall, or earliest know? You are all-wise, giant!)

In his answer to the question Vafþrúðnir indicates that he is very old, for in his response he is able to reach back very far, and shows that he was alive during the lifetime of Bergelmir, who, as was told in stanza 29, is the most ancient of the giants.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
„Ørófi vetra
áðr væri jǫrð um skǫpuð,
þá var Bergelmir borinn;
þat ek fyrst um man
er sá inn fróði jǫtunn
var á lúðr um lagiðr.“

(Countless years before the earth was created: then was Bergelmir born; the first I remember was when that wise giant was first placed in a cradle.)

The movement of Bergelmir into a *lúðr* is the earliest of Vafþrúðnir's memories, which confirms that Vafþrúðnir was alive during the time that Bergelmir was alive, two generations removed from the most ancient jǫtunn, Ymir-Aurgelmir. The interpretation of *lúðr* is problematic, however, for it could mean, for example, cradle, ship, or coffin, all of which can lead to drastically different interpretations of the meaning of the stanza. If *lúðr* is interpreted as cradle, it would mean that Vafþrúðnir remembers when Bergelmir was born, or, conversely, if it is taken to mean coffin, it would mean that Vafþrúðnir remembers the death of Bergelmir.[27]

An account of the Bergelmir myth is also given in *Gylf* chapter 7, and it is helpful to consult the relevant passage, which returns to the cosmogonic myth of the

[27] Machan writes the following: '[e]ither "cradle" or "bier" is thematically acceptable, though one might argue that in answer to a question about an earliest memory, recollection of a beginning, suggested by a birth, is more thematically and stylistically appropriate' (2008, 90), which leads Machan to favour 'cradle' as an interpretation of *lúðr*.

creation of the earth through the death of Ymir, where it is said that the sons of Bor killed Ymir. When Ymir was killed so much blood gushed from his wounds that with it the hrímþursar were all drowned except for one who escaped with his household, Bergelmir. Bergelmir and his wife climbed up onto a wooden box, 'fór upp á lúðr', where they kept themselves safe from the flood, and it is from them that the hrímþursar descend.[28] Snorri interprets the *lúðr* to have been a vessel in which Bergelmir and his family sought refuge from the flood that came from Ymir-Aurgelmir's blood after the cosmogonic act, and the story obviously parallels the story of Noah's Ark from *Genesis*. Lindow writes that

> Snorri clearly understood the *lúðr* as something that would float, and the word might in fact have meant "coffin" or "chest" or some wooden part of a mill; the expected meaning, of a cumbersome musical instrument something like an alphorn, makes no sense either in Snorri or his poetic source. If there is any consensus here, it is that what Vafthrúdnir remembered was the funeral of Bergelmir, and what Snorri made of it was an analogue to the Judeo-Christian flood story. (2001, 75)

If Vafþrúðnir's earliest memory is the funeral of Bergelmir, the most logical interpretation of stanza 35 would be that Vafþrúðnir was alive towards the end of Bergelmir's life, and could then be one of his descendants.

On the connection between the story of the flood from Ymir-Aurgelmir's blood and the Biblical flood, Turville-Petre writes, '[i]t has often been said that there was no flood in the Norse creation myth, and that Snorri, knowing the story of Noah, felt the need of one. It must, however, be admitted that Snorri's story is altogether unlike the biblical one, and has closer affinities with some recorded among primitive peoples' (1964, 276). Like much that is presented in *Vafþr*, the exact age of the jǫtunn himself remains unknown. One thing that can be stated for certain about the extrapolation or expansion of the Bergelmir myth that is made in *Gylf* is that *Vafþr* does not corroborate the myth of the flood resulting from the death of Ymir-Aurgelmir.[29]

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[28] 'Synir Bors drápu Ymi jǫtun. En er hann fell, þá hljóp svá mikit blóð ór sárum hans at með því drektu þeir allri ætt hrímþursa, nema einn komsk undan með sínu hýski. Þann kalla jǫtnar Bergelmi. Hann fór upp á lúðr sinn ok kona hans ok helzk þar, ok eru af þeim komnar hrímþursa ættir' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:11).

[29] There are pronounced parallels between Old Norse mythology and ancient Hebrew tradition. Stephens describes the inheritance in the medieval period of ancient Hebrew ideas about giants (1989, 64–72). Eldevik writes the following: '[w]hen the Norse portrayal of giants is juxtaposed with that in the Judeo-Christian scriptures, a comparable situation obtains (*mutatis mutandis*, of course, for in a monotheistic context there are bound to be differences from what occurs in polytheistic myths): the Book of Genesis describes giants as the offspring of rebel angels who mated with human women in antediluvian times, thus giving biblical giants a quasi-familial relationship to God himself and reasons for envious resentment toward Heaven and its denizens similar to that of the classical giants toward

5.3 Dead Heat

After revealing much about the distant past with four sets of questions and answers about the cosmogony and then four more sets of questions and answers about the ancestral origins of the æsir and jǫtnar, Gagnráðr changes his line of questioning and asks about the wind, something that relates to the mythic present. Still challenging Vafþrúðnir to reveal information about origins, the guest asks his host about the source of the wind.

Óðinn kvað:
36 „Segðu þat it níunda,
alls þik svinnan kveða
ok þú, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan vindr um kømr,
svá at ferr vág yfir;
æ menn hann sjálfan um sjá.“

(Tell me a ninth thing, since they call you smart, and you, Vafthrúdnir, know: from where comes the wind, that passes over the waves? Men never see the thing itself.)

The wind would have been an important natural element to the medieval Norse-speaking people, most of whom lived close to the sea, some of whom sailed over it to other lands, and many of whom harvested fish from its waters. The answer that Vafþrúðnir provides has a visual quality to it that is highly metaphorical. The giant replies to his guest and tells him about the source of the wind.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
37 „Hræsvelgr heitir,
er sitr á himins enda,
jǫtunn í arnar ham;
af hans vængjum
kveða vind koma
alla menn yfir.“

(Corpse-swallower he is called, who sits at heaven's edge, a giant in eagle's form; from his wings, they say, the wind does come over every man.)

Beyond being highly visual, the metaphor is also poetically logical. For a listener, the vision of a large eagle sitting where the sky and the earth meet, on the horizon, beating its wings with the result that wind blows across the sea makes good sense from a mythological point of view. Such an explanation might register to an audience in a similar manner as the metaphor of the horses Hrímfaxi and Skinfaxi,

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Olympus and the Olympians, or of the Norse giants toward Ásgarth and the Æsir. Each of the three traditions involves a gigantomachy in which divine forces must defend celestial territory against the giants' violent efforts to encroach upon it' (2005, 86).

respectively, pulling the moon and the sun across the sky. Although we now know much about the origins of wind and ocean currents through scientific discovery, the Norse poetic expressions for the elements are impressive for their quality, and it can be said that metaphors such as this are lost in modern scientific explanations that account for wind currents and prevailing winds in the modern age.

Gylf chapter 18 again draws on Vafþruðnir's answer and adds to it. Gangleri asks the question in a strikingly similar fashion to Gagnráðr: 'Hvaðan kemr vindr? Hann er sterkr svá at hann hrærir stór hǫf ok hann œsir eld en svá sterkr sem hann er þá má eigi sjá hann. Því er hann undarliga skapaðr' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:20) (Then Gangleri said: From where comes the wind? It is so strong that it whips the great oceans and stirs up fire. But as strong as it is, no one can see it, so wondrously is it made (*Prose Edda*, 29)). Hár responds to Gangleri's question by saying that 'Á norðanverðum himins enda sitr jǫtunn sá er Hræsvelgr heitir. Hann hefir arnar ham. En er hann beinir flug þá standa vindar undan vængum honum' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:20) (At the far northern end of heaven sits a giant named Hræsvelg [Corpse Gulper]. He has the shape of an eagle, and when he beats his wings to take flight, the winds blow out from under them (*Prose Edda*, 29)). *Gylf* has here added that the jǫtunn is at the northern end of the sky and that it is when that jǫtunn in the shape of an eagle wishes to fly that the wind is produced. As for the meaning of *Hræsvelgr*, it is translated by Orchard (*Elder Edda*) as Corpse-swallower and Byock (*Prose Edda*) as Corpse Gulper, both of which, according to Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson are part of a long tradition of translating the name in this manner. Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson asserts, however, that a more accurate translation of *Hræsvelgr* is as follows: 'the one who swallows shipwrecks and other kinds of flotsam adrift on the ocean, and causes them to be sucked down into the depths' (1998, 27).[30] His reasoning is etymological in that the two words in the compound, *hræ* and *svelgr*, suggest this meaning, and it is also contextual within the framework of the question and answer pairing presented in stanzas 36 and 37 of *Vafþr*, which have to do with the sky and the sea, on the edges of which the jǫtunn shaped as an eagle sits.

Gagnráðr's tenth question is about the origins of the god Njǫrðr of the vanir. The transition from Hræsvelgr to Njǫrðr is logical, as the jǫtunn controls the wind coming over the waves of the sea—the waves a product of wind meeting water—and Njǫrðr is the deity of the sea.[31] The transition from a question about a jǫtunn to

[30] Eldevik contends that Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 'fails to account for Hræsvelg's eagle form' which leads Eldevik to advocate a connection between Hræsvelgr and the Beasts of Battle (2005, 100).

[31] Ármann Jakobsson contends that Njǫrðr's inclusion in the topics of discussion in *Vafþr* is connected to his control over the elements: '[t]he earth and the sky, the moon and the day,

one about a member of the æsir (although he is of the vanir) marks the movement of the questions towards the concerns of the æsir.

Óðinn kvað:
38 „Segðu þat it tíunda,
alls þú tíva røk
ǫll, Vafþrúðnir, vitir,
hvaðan Njǫrðr um kom
með ása sonum
– hofum ok hǫrgum
hann ræðr hunnmǫrgum –
ok varðat hann ásum alinn.“

(Tell me a tenth thing, since the fate of the gods, Vafthrúdnir, you wholly know: from where did Njörd come among the sons of the Æsir? Temples and shrines he rules by the hundred, but he was not raised among the Æsir.)

The æsir-vanir war is directly referenced here, as the exchange of hostages between the two groups that took place to conclude it resulted in the incorporation of Njǫrðr into the divine society of the æsir, who, as the question makes clear, were distinct from the vanir. In *Vsp* the exchange of hostages takes place in the early mythic present, shortly after the creation of the first human pair, Askr and Embla, and in that sense, even though the question is about Njǫrðr's origins, it is also the first question Gagnráðr poses that touches upon an event that takes place in the mythic present (as per Clunies Ross and Lindow), although the transition was aided by the question about the wind, which is an element that is of importance to any present time.

Gagnráðr's refrain has also been altered considerably from his previous nine questions, where it was said that Vafþrúðnir was wise or smart, 'fróðan' or 'svinnan'; here Gagnráðr states that Vafþrúðnir is said to know the fate of the gods, 'tíva røk / ǫll'. The change in the refrain as well as in the subject matter indicates that Óðinn intends to hear not only about the history and origins of the cosmos, the æsir, and the jǫtnar, but also to hear about the future, and, as will be the case, the fate of the æsir. It could be argued that the change in refrain at this point in the scene could mark a scene change, but the present author argues that because the áss continues to number his questions through the twelfth question there is a continuity to the sequence of twelve numbered questions and their corresponding answers that

summer and winter, the wind and the god Njǫrðr, who may be included since, according to *Snorra-Edda*, he has control over the elements (the wind, the sea and fire)' (2007, 271). Ármann Jakobsson then refers to *Gylf* chapter 23 to demonstrate Njǫrðr's connection to the elements.

overrides any impulse to mark a change in scene. In response the host supplies more ancient knowledge and the name of Njǫrðr's place of origin.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
„Í Vanaheimi
skópu hann vís regin
ok seldu at gíslingu goðum;
í aldar røk
hann mun aptr koma
heim með vísum vǫnum."

(In Vanaheim the clever powers created him, and gave him as hostage to the gods; at the end of time he will return home to the clever Vanir.)

The knowledge that Njǫrðr comes from Vanaheimr is confirmed and Vafþrúðnir adds that he will return to the vanir at the end of time, a piece of mythological information that is not known from any other source. There is a combination of the past, that Njǫrðr was created in Vanaheimr, and the future, that he will return there, or at least to be among the vanir. This shift further traces the movement from concerns of the past into concerns of the present, and then towards the future.

In the two primary sources for the mythical representation of the origins of Njǫrðr, *Yngl* and *Gylf*, his movement from the realm of the vanir into the company of the æsir is narrated along with descriptions of his two children, Freyr and Freyja, and his failed marriage with the giantess Skaði, but there is no indication in either of the sources of his return to Vanaheimr in the future.[32] In *Yngl* chapter 4 it is told how Njǫrðr along with his son Freyr and daughter Freyja were sent by the vanir to the æsir in exchange for Hœnir. The exchange was thought unfair, as Njǫrðr was the foremost of the vanir, and Hœnir proved to be an unworthy exchange as he was unable to make any decisions without the aid of his hostage partner Mímir. This led to the beheading of Mímir, who had been sent to the vanir in exchange for Kvasir. It is also said that Óðinn appointed Njǫrðr and Freyr as priests and the two were considered gods among the æsir. In Gagnráðr's question to Vafþrúðnir in stanza 38 it is likewise stated that although Njǫrðr was not raised among the æsir there are many temples and shrines in his honour. The account given in *Gylf* chapter 23 is much the same as that provided in *Yngl*. The information provided by Vafþrúðnir adds information about the deity's later return to Vanaheimr. There is no mention made of Njǫrðr in the descriptions of Ragnarǫk in the various sources, and that makes it possible that he does indeed return to Vanaheimr, keeping him out of the

[32] On the marriage of Skaði and Njǫrðr see Lindow (2008, 165–81, esp. 178–79), Clunies Ross (1989, 7), and McKinnell (2005, 62–64).

final battle between the jǫtnar and the æsir, but this, of course, is extra-textual conjecture.

The next question Gagnráðr asks Vafþrúðnir deals explicitly with the mythological present, uses a present-tense verb formation, and also alludes to the future. The guest challenges the jǫtunn to reveal what he knows about the preparations being made for the coming battle between the æsir and the jǫtnar.

Óðinn kvað:
„Segðu þat it ellipta,
– – –
hvar ýtar túnum í
hǫggvask hverjan dag.“[33]

(Tell me an eleventh thing: in what enclosures do warriors fight together each day?)

The place where men fight each day is Valhǫll, preparing for Ragnarǫk in the mythic future. In his response to his guest's question, Vafþrúðnir further demonstrates his wide range of knowledge about the geography of the mythic present. Not only does he know about the river Ífing—for the jǫtunn asked his guest about this great divide in the vetting sequence—he also knows about what takes place in Ásgarðr, the home of the æsir.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
„*Allir einherjar*
Óðins túnum í
hǫggvask hverjan dag;
val þeir kjósa
ok ríða vígi frá,
sitja meirr um sáttir saman.“

([All the Einherjar in Odin's enclosures fight together each day;] they choose the slain and ride from the fray: they sit settled together the more.)

It is the einherjar who practice each day in Óðinn's enclosures, preparing for Ragnarǫk. Gagnráðr did not mention the einherjar or Óðinn by name in his question, but Vafþrúðnir specifically indicates both in his answer, showing the reach of his wisdom. Gagnráðr is clearly starting to tread on dangerous ground, for

[33] Bugge makes a rendering of stanza 40 lines 2 through 6 from paper manuscripts that reads: 'alls þú tíva rök / öll, Vafþrúðnir, vitir: / hvat einherjar vinna / Herjaföðrs at, / unz rjúfask regin?' (1867, 71), which Machan translates as: 'Tell that eleventh, Vafþrúðnir, since you might know all the fates of the gods: what do the champions of Óðinn do until the gods are destroyed?' (2008, 95).

it seems that Vafþrúðnir might soon become aware of who is asking him such detailed questions.[34]

In the context of *Gylf* chapter 41, where this stanza is quoted, the example of the einherjar serves to demonstrate Óðinn's power, as he has such a large army ready at his command, and the fact that Vafþrúðnir knows this indicates that the impending battle between the æsir and the jǫtnar is important knowledge, and combined with Vafþrúðnir's question to Gagnráðr in stanza 17 about the site of the battle between Surtr and the æsir further indicates that Vafþrúðnir is concerned about the future, as is Óðinn. As *Vafþr* progresses, Óðinn's imminent success in the contest is becoming more certain, for there is little chance that the áss who rules over the einherjar will die before Ragnarǫk, especially after Vafþrúðnir has confirmed that in the courts of Óðinn, 'Oðins túnum í', the warriors train each day, which emphasizes that the mythical representation taking place in *Vafþr* is happening within the time frame of the mythological cycle.

As for the number of einherjar who are preparing for Ragnarǫk, in *Grímn* stanza 23 Grímnir states that in Valhǫll there are five hundred and forty doors and through each door eight hundred einherjar will walk when they go to battle the wolf at Ragnarǫk. Five hundred and forty multiplied by eight hundred equals a total of 432,000 einherjar (unless, of course, the hundred here is the long hundred, i.e. 120) that will follow Óðinn to battle at Ragnarǫk, yet the áss will still perish in his struggle with Fenrir.[35] While the æsir are able to dominate the present, and Óðinn

[34] The textual problems with stanzas 40 and 41 are exstenive. On their rendering, Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason write the following: '[h]ér virðist talsvert hafa fallið brott í K [R] og A. Sennileg er tilgáta Jóns Helgasonar að hlaupið hafi verið frá *hǫggvask hverjan dag* í v. 40 til sömu orða í v. 41, en hún er heil í SnE, og er f.hl. tekinn þaðan' (2014, 1:363).

[35] Joseph Campbell has made note of the significance of the number 432,000 in his comparativist work: '[s]ome notion of the whole, profoundly conceived, macro-micro-cosmic import of such courtly mimes may be gained from a consideration of the mathematics of the mythological and actual cycles of the calendars to which such rites are attached. For example, in the Hindu sacred epics and puranas (popular tellings of ancient lore) the number of years reckoned to the present cycle of time, the so-called Kali Yuga, is 432,000; the number reckoned to the "great cycle" (*mahayuga*) within which this yuga falls being 4,320,000. But when reading one day the Icelandic Eddas, I discovered that in Othin's (Wotan's) warrior hall, Valhöll, there were 540 doors, through each of which, on the "Day of the Wolf" (that is to say, at the end of the present cycle of time), there would pass 800 divine warriors to engage the anti-gods in a battle of mutual annihilation. 800x540 = 432,000' (1985, 35). Campbell then continues to draw further parallels in ancient mythological traditons where the cosmic cycle is equal to 432,000 years, or some derivative of that number. The most glaring gap in Campbell's logic is that in Valhöll it is said that there are 432,000 einherjar, which is not a number of years in a cosmic cycle, but rather the number of individual warriors who will fight with Óðinn at Ragnarǫk. Einar Pálsson absorbed Campbell's comparativist method and devotes some considerable work to furthering the numerological arguments initiated by Campbell, particularly in relation to the number 432,000. See Einar Pálsson (1978, 185–97 and 335–41).

win the contest over Vafþrúðnir, no matter what strength the æsir can muster for Ragnarǫk the jǫtnar will be too much of a challenge to overcome, and many of the æsir will perish.

The twelfth numbered question that Gagnráðr asks of Vafþrúðnir is very precise, directly challenging the jǫtunn about how he knows of the fate of the æsir and is able to speak of so many secrets. Vafþrúðnir is put on the spot by Gagnráðr, who asks him to reveal the source of his own knowledge. Up until this point the guest has been asking about mythological facts, but now the question is personal.

Óðinn kvað:
42 „Segðu þat it tólpta,
hví þú tíva røk
ǫll, Vafþrúðnir, vitir;
frá jǫtna rúnum
ok allra goða
segir þú it sannasta,
inn alsvinni jǫtunn.“

(Tell me a twelfth thing: how the fate of the gods, Vafthrúdnir, you wholly know? Of the secrets of giants and all of the gods you tell the whole truth, you all-wise giant.)

This question, like those preceding it, is logical in relation to what has come before it. After Vafþrúðnir has been able to answer many questions about the past and is even aware of events that will transpire in the future, Óðinn might be wondering at this point if his decision to come and test the giant was a wise one. Vafþrúðnir knows about what happens in Ásgarðr, and if there is a point where the áss is concerned about the outcome of the contest it might be here. Now, the jǫtunn is asked to reveal how he knows what he knows. However, with foreknowledge of his own fate, Óðinn has made this step in asking the question.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
43 „Frá jǫtna rúnum
ok allra goða
ek kann segja satt,
þvíat hvern hefi ek heim um komit;
níu kom ek heima
fyr Niflhel neðan,
hinig deyja ór helju halir.“

(Of the secrets of giants and all of the gods, I can tell the truth, since I have travelled into every world, nine worlds I have travelled below Niflhel, where men die down from Hel.)

Vafþrúðnir has visited the world of the dead, as has Óðinn also, arguably, when he hung on the windy tree for nine nights in a sacrifice that is detailed in *Háv* stanzas 138 through 141, athough this is only an interpretation.[36] These nine worlds may be the same ones that the vǫlva speaks about in *Vsp* stanza 2, when she remembers nine worlds and nine wood-dwelling witches and the seed of Yggdrasill.[37] The vǫlva has most likely risen from the world of the dead, Óðinn is known to have travelled to the world of the dead (by interpretation), and now Vafþrúðnir states that his travels there are his source of knowledge. Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir are not so different, it appears.

Although the audience is well aware of Óðinn's fate—it is accepted that he will die at, and not before, Ragnarǫk—the suspense of the action is rising as Vafþrúðnir reveals his most ancient wisdom. Óðinn appears to have met someone who is well matched to him, and the audience now knows that the two share at least one similar experience in regards to attaining knowledge. As McKinnell writes, '[f]ew can share the knowledge which Óðinn has pursued among the dead by his sacrifice of himself on Yggdrasill' (1994, 101). Óðinn has found out how wise Vafþrúðnir is, and his statement in his twelfth question confirms this, as he calls Vafþruðnir *inn alsvinni jǫtunn*, indicating he thinks that Vafþrúðnir is wise, not just saying that he has heard others say that about him. This mirrors what Vafþrúðnir said to Gagnráðr in stanza 19, after he has vetted him: *Fróðr ertu nú, gestr*. Now that both contestants have established that they hold the other in high esteem, all that is left is to determine who is more wise. The final six questions will decide the contest.

In the series of twelve questions and answers that have been analyzed in this chapter, Gagnráðr first asks Vafþrúðnir four questions that concern the cosmogony, including the creation of the earth, the ordering of the celestial bodies, and the genealogy of the seasons. The jǫtunn supplies answers that are informative about that period in the distant mythological past. Next there were four questions and answers about the ancestors of the æsir and the jǫtnar, the origins of the paranormal beings who play out the events in the mythological past, present, and future. The final four questions and answers add content about the mythological present and

[36] The interpretation that during Óðinn's nine nights of hanging he visited the dead can be countered with an interpretation that during those nine nights he was undergoing a sacrifice and remained alive, enduring the initiation so that he could then learn the secrets of the runes. Lassen compares Óðinn's hanging with Christ's hanging, arguing for an interpretation that Óðinn's ordeal is an inverted crucifixion, 'serving to illustrate that Old Norse paganism is a flawed misunderstanding of Christianity. Thus the stanzas of Óðinn's hanging seem to be consistent with the doctrine of paganism as misunderstood or inverted Christian doctrine' (2009, 241).

[37] Ek man jǫtna / ár um borna, / þá er forðum mik / fœdda hǫfðu; / níu man ek heima, / níu íviðjur, / mjǫtvið mæran / fyr mold neðan. (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*)

amplify the suspense of the poem, allowing Vafþrúðnir to demonstrate his vast knowledge, and perhaps making Óðinn wary of his quest. These last four questions tell the myths about Hræsvelgr, the jǫtunn that controls the wind and the sea, about Njǫrðr, the deity of the sea, about the army of einherjar who will support the æsir and Óðinn at Ragnarǫk, and, last and not least, about the source of Vafþrúðnir's wisdom in the form of his journey to the worlds of the dead. Gagnráðr still has six more questions with which he will challenge Vafþrúðnir, all concerning the mythological future.

The first twelve questions and answers are a detailed history of the mythic cosmos up to the mythological present and the connection between the information transmitted in the dialogue and the narrative of the story is clear, as they both reflect the cosmological cycle of the mythological world view, that of past, present, and future. The background has been set for the contest that is underway, between the áss and the jǫtunn who share common origins and are in a battle of words to the death. On the arrangement of questions by Gagnráðr, Larrington writes:

> Óðinn's interest in past history throughout the greater part of Vafþrúðnismál is not simply a series of red herrings, meant to lull Vafþrúðnir into a false sense of security while Óðinn takes an indirect approach to the crucial question. Vafþrúðnismál sets out an allusive exploration of the origins and history of the cosmos, with all that entails for and explains temporal power. It shows how, with the authority which their knowledge of the origins of the created world gives them, the giants come to be pre-eminent at the close of the mythic present and the coming of the *ragna rǫk* era. (2002, 68)

The line of questioning that Gagnráðr has put to Vafþrúðnir certainly has brought the subject from the distant past into the mythological present. The shape of the poem mirrors the cosmological cycle found in the Old Norse mythological sources, with a movement from cosmogony to eschatology, which reinforces the connection between the content of the poem and its form. The twelfth question is where the two contestants are most evenly matched, as the æsir and jǫtnar will be at Ragnarǫk. Some of the æsir will survive the final battle and inhabit the renewed world, just as Óðinn will survive the wisdom contest. Vafþrúðnir is still unaware of who his guest really is, or if he has his suspicions he does not voice them. I contend that at the end of the first twelve questions and answers that Gagnráðr has put to Vafþrúðnir, the jǫtunn is still confident in his ability to win the contest.

The second scene of act two concludes at this point, after Gagnráðr has asked a series of twelve numbered questions and received twelve answers in return from Vafþrúðnir. As will be shown in the next chapter, Gagnráðr's change in refrain marks the final major structural division in the narrative that calls for a change in scene. This two act play is heavily weighted towards the second act, where there are three scenes, the final of which it is now our pleasure to explore.

6. Act Two Scene Three: The Final Attack

The final scene of act two is where *Vafþr* reaches its climax and undergoes its speedy denouement. Ultimately Vafþrúðnir loses his life after the final question that Gagnráðr poses, for he can provide no answer to it. Óðinn will presumably return to Ásgarðr after having accomplished his goal of finding out where his host's wisdom reaches its limit. Revisiting the critical approach of the present work, which has been to divide *Vafþr* into two acts, the first act comprised of the scene with Óðinn and Frigg, and the second act comprised of three scenes bewteen Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir, it is clear that the drama is soon to end, and the curtain fall on the wisdom contest. In these final twelve stanzas the subject decidedly turns to the mythological future, and the final question, which relates to an event that occurred early in the mythological present, in fact determines Vafþrúðnir's future, or lack thereof. Even though Baldr's death is an event that occurred in the past in relation to the wisdom contest, its consequences permeate the mythological present and indeed are the origins of the events that will transpire in the mythological future, leading eventually to Ragnarǫk, and indeed, in the case of *Vafþr*, to Vafþrúðnir's defeat and death. The event of Baldr's death is central to *Vafþr*, as it is to *Gylf* and the mythological cycle generally.

Finnur Jónsson writes the following in regards to this final scene of *Vafþr*, highlighting the uniqueness of the final question that Óðinn poses to his host, who, it seems, is caught by surprise:

> Herpå følger 5 spörsmål, som alle begynder med "Vide jeg fór, meget jeg prøved, meget har jeg prøvet magterne", og handler om de sidste tider, men jætten kan svare rigtig også på dem. Odin ser nu, at han for at frelse sit hoved må gribe til noget afgörende, og han giver så jætten tilsidst det dræbende spörsmål: "Hvat sagde Odin i sin söns øre, förend den blev båren på bålet?" Da det under enhver vædestrid som denne må forudsættes, at spörgeren selv kunde svare på sit eget spörsmål – ellers havde han ikke lov til at stille det – indser jætten øjeblikkelig, at det var Odin selv, han har givet sig i lag med. (1920, 140–41)

Rather than focusing on the fact that the final section has six sets of questions and answers, Finnur Jónsson emphasizes that there are five questions about the future, all of which Vafþrúðnir can answer. These questions about the future are presumably Óðinn's primary purpose for his journey. After these five questions there is a sixth and final question that turns back to the past. The focus of the question is an event that has more influence over the course of events than others—the death of Baldr—and specifically what Óðinn said to his son at his funeral. The final question is not a question, but more of a final statement that Óðinn makes to

convey to Vafþrúðnir that the contest is over, and in so doing reveals his true identity. Vafþrúðnir, for his part, is gracious in defeat, and he may have known that if he met Óðinn he would perish, but does not find out until it is too late.

The final six questions and their respective answers can be grouped into three sets.[1] The first four questions and their answers deal with the regeneration of the world after Ragnarǫk. Then there is one question-and-answer pairing that deals with the death of Óðinn. The final question is, of course, the question that refers to Baldr's death. All of the questions share the structural feature of the refrain *Fjǫlð ek fór, fjǫlð ek freistaðak, fjǫlð ek reynda regin*.

6.1 Regeneration

After reviewing the cosmic history of the Norse mythological world in order to determine the extent of Vafþrúðnir's wisdom, during the course of which events that pertain to the mythic past, the mythic present, and even somewhat to the mythic future were brought forth, Gagnráðr now makes a noticeable change in the form by which he poses questions to the jǫtunn. Gagnráðr alters his refrain at stanza 44 and uses the same refrain for his six final questions. The refrain that he employs is the same one that he used when speaking to Frigg in stanza 3 of the poem after she expressed her concern for his proposed journey to go and visit the giant Vafþrúðnir. As Óðinn may be acknowledging his recognition of the host's great wisdom with his use of the refrain, for in it Gagnráðr asserts his own experience in a way that may be an assertion of his ability to contest with Vafþrúðnir, he may also be trying to move towards an efficient end to the contest, demonstrating his confidence and experience. The refrain may, what is more, reflect the change in attitude that Óðinn, still in disguise as Gagnráðr, might have undergone after hearing in stanza 43 that Vafþrúðnir has travelled through all the worlds and the nine worlds of the dead in order to gain his wisdom. In order to defeat Vafþrúðnir, Óðinn will call on his own experience.

The next four questions all relate to the mythic future and are no longer concerned with the history of the æsir and jǫtnar, nor the landscape or action of the mythological present. The change in subject is reflected by the change in form, and, as Machan forwards, '[i]t is the information on the Ragnarǫk about which Óðinn has presumably been most curious all along, and so the switch from indirect to direct questioning perhaps reflects greater interest and intensity on Óðinn's part'

[1] Kragerud writes: 'Str. 44–54. Betydningen av den nye innledninsformel, *fjǫlð ek fór, fjǫlð ek freistaðak, fjǫlð ek reynda regin*…. Formlen er i form og funksjon besvergende og lar Odin vokse I velde' (1981, 34). Although the questions can be divided into three groups, all six have the same refrain, making it an over-arching group.

(2008, 98). When Óðinn employs this refrain earlier in the poem in stanza 3, when he directed it at Frigg, the intensity registered with her, as she knew that there was nothing that she could do to prevent Óðinn from going on his proposed journey, and the same kind of intensity is palpable here.

Óðinn kvað:
44 „Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hvat lifir manna,
þá er inn mæra líðr
fimbulvetr með firum?“

(Much have I travelled, much have I tried, much have I tested the powers: which folk will live on when the famed Great Winter comes to pass among men?)

By asking which humans will survive the great storm that will precede Ragnarǫk, Gagnráðr is essentially asking which humans will survive Ragnarǫk, as here *fimbulvetr* appears to stand for Ragnarǫk itself.

Stanza 44 contains the first direct reference made to humans in the poem, other than when Vafþrúðnir asks what man had come into his hall in stanza 7 line 1 and the ‘ýtar’ of stanza 40, who are, Vafþrúðnir clarifies in stanza 41, the ‘einherjar’. The introduction of humans into the poem coincides with the first question that directly asks for information about the mythic future, particularly about the distant future after Ragnarǫk. The fimbulvetr is mentioned in *Gylf* chapter 51, when Hár describes to Gangleri the events of Ragnarǫk, saying that first there will be a winter called fimbulvetr, during which snow will come from all directions. During the fimbulvetr the cold will be severe and the winds fierce, and the sun will be of no use. Three of these winters will come, one after the other, and there will be no summer in between. But before that there will have been another three winters, during which great battles will take place throughout the world.[2]

Although evoking the image of the great series of winters, Gagnráðr is in fact most interested in hearing what the jǫtunn knows about the humans that will survive Ragnarǫk. In his response Vafþrúðnir demonstrates that he does know about what will transpire in the future.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
45 „Líf ok Lífþrasir,

[2] ‘Þau in fyrstu at vetr sá kemr er kallaðr er fimbulvetr. Þá drífr snær ór ǫllum áttum. Frost eru þá mikil ok vindar hvassir. Ekki nýtr sólar. Þeir vetr fara þrír saman ok ekki sumar milli. En áðr ganga svá aðrir þrír vetr at þá er um alla verǫld orrustur miklar’ (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:49).

> en þau leynask munu
> í holti Hoddmímis;
> morgindǫggvar
> þau sér at mat hafa,
> þaðan af aldir alask.“
>
> (Life and Life-eager, and they will hide in Hoddmímir's wood; morning-dew they will have as their food – from them races will be raised.)

Líf and Lífþrasir are the only two humans who will survive the fimbulvetr and the ensuing Ragnarǫk. Even though the great battle will eradicate much, it will not take all human life from the earth. 'Hoddmímis holt' is most likely the world tree Yggdrasill, as Mímir's well is associated with Yggdrasill. Simek writes, 'Hoddmímir can most likely be identified with the trunk of the world-tree Yggdrasill, as Mímir and his spring are associated with Yggdrasill' (1993, 154). If the two humans that survive Ragnarǫk have done so in the trunk of Yggdrasill, then it is probable that the world tree has also survived the Ragnarǫk. Líf, according to Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson is 'den eneste kvinde der overlevede ragnarök', and Lífþrásir 'den eneste mande der overlevede ragnarök' (1931, 376), which suggests that the first human couple of the world as it is reborn after Ragnarǫk will be parents to children who will undergo a natural human conception and birth, unlike the first descendants of Ymir, who were androgynously reproduced from the primeval jǫtunn's own body.[3]

If there is to be human life in the post-Ragnarǫk world there will also have to be natural elements to sustain such life, and the world will be largely destroyed in the great battle between the æsir and the jǫtnar. The second question from Gagnráðr's final six questions challenges Vafþrúðnir to reveal that a sun will come into the sky in the world that is reborn, for Fenrir will take the sun from the sky when the time for Ragnarǫk arrives. The introduction of Fenrir indicates that Gagnráðr is bringing the questions into a more personal sphere, for the audience is well aware that the guest is Óðinn in disguise, and presumably knows from *Vsp* that Óðinn will meet Fenrir in battle at Ragnarǫk and succumb to the monster's strength. Here, repeating the refrain he has used so convincingly with Frigg and now for the second time with Vafþrúðnir, Gagnráðr asks for more information about the future.

[3] Lífþrasir appears in R as Lífðrasir, which, according to Machan means '"Persistent Life" (an agent noun literally meaning "the one who fights for life") or, if derivation from *þrasa* ("to rage") is presumed, something like "raging or impetuous life"' (2008, 99). There are different forms in different manuscripts, however. Machan continues, writing that 'Læifþrasir in [A, SnR, and W] would mean something like "Persistent Remnant" or "Persistent Survival"' and, finally, 'Leidþrasir ("Persistent Way") in T is nonsensical in context and so must be a scribal error' (99).

Óðinn kvað:
46 „Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hvaðan kømr sól
á inn slétta himin,
þá er þessa hefir Fenrir farit?“

(Much have I travelled, much have I tried, much have I tested the powers: how will a sun come into smooth heaven once Fenrir has overtaken this one?)

Without the sun there is no possibility of life continuing, and the days of Líf and Lífþrasir would be limited. Furthermore, as outlined in Gagnráðr's earlier questions and Vafþrúðnir's corresponding answers, without the sun the days could not be kept track of, and the ability to keep track of time would not be possible (see stanzas 24 and 25). The world might thus remain in a state like it was before the cosmogonic act. Long before Iceland was settled, in his *Timaeus* Plato reflected on the essential connection between the celestial bodies and temporality. He wrote, '[t]ime, then, came into existence along with the Heaven, to the end that having been generated together they might also be dissolved together, if ever a dissolution of them should take place' (77–79). With the loss of the sun the ability to measure time would also be lost, but with the regeneration of the sun, time will then again be measured and the eternal return can continue and the regenerated world can thrive anew.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
47 „Eina dóttur
berr Álfrǫðull,
áðr hana Fenrir fari;
sú skal ríða,
þá er regin deyja,
móður brautir mær.“

(Elf-disc will bear a single daughter before Fenrir overtakes her: she shall ride, when the powers die, the daughter, her mother's paths.)

The sun, here referred to as Alfrǫðull, as it also is in *Skírn* stanza 4, will give birth to a daughter before Fenrir captures her, and the daughter, the new sun, will take the place of her mother in the sky. The regeneration of the sun mirrors the regeneration of the reproductive cycle of humanity, making the mother and daughter couple anthropomorphic. Like with humans, the offspring replaces the parent; as a mother bears a daughter, the daughter will in turn bear another daughter and the natural cycle of life continues. Ragnarǫk is an extreme example of a myth of generational succession, where the children must take the place of their dead parents. Perhaps for those who originally composed the poem it meant something in regards to the death that each human must face, and provides some kind of reassurance that after the

older generation is gone, no matter how devastating it may seem, those who succeed will continue on. It is also said that the new sun will rise after Ragnarǫk is concluded, after the æsir have perished: *sú skal ríða, þá er regin deyja*.

Gagnráðr continues to press Vafþrúðnir for knowledge about the future. The guest, who is much less humble now than when he entered the hall of his host—not counting his abrupt arrival—asks for information about maidens who will arrive at some point in the future.

Óðinn kvað:
48 „Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hverjar ro þær meyjar
er líða mar yfir,
fróðgeðjaðar fara?“

(Much have I travelled, much have I tried, much have I tested the powers: who are those maidens who pass over the sea, travelling with wisdom of mind?)

The identity of *þær meyjar* is ambiguous, but they do recall the image of the three *þursa meyjar* who arrive in *Vsp* stanza 8. In *Vsp* their arrival signals an end to the golden age of the æsir and, as a result, the beginning of the period of the mythic present. The æsir were said to have been together in the meadow playing board games and making merry after the creation of the world, with much gold, until the arrival of three giant maidens.[4] It may be possible, then, that these three maidens come again after Ragnarǫk as a signal of the end of the golden age of the æsir who will survive Ragnarǫk. The cycle that has played out in the mythic past, the mythic present, and the mythic future—resulting in Ragnarǫk and the rebirth of the world—will be played out again, and those who inhabit the reborn world will be condemned to repetition of the former. Machan notes, however, that '[t]he words *fródgediaþar* and *hamingior* [see stanza 49], in the context of a discussion of the new and better world to come, would seem to suggest that the *meyiar* are beneficent beings' (2008, 102). Machan refers to Boer who asserts that rather than representing the three maidens who arrive in *Vsp* stanza 8, 'Sie bilden ein verklärtes gegenstück zu den *þursa meyjar*, welche Vsp 8 das unglück in die welt bringen' (1922, 2:58). One would hope that the wise Vafþrúðnir would help to clarify the obscurity of stanza 48, but, unfortunately, the contents of the contest are reaching so far into the future that even the jǫtunn's response does not clarify things completely.

[4] Teflðu í túni, / teitir váru, / var þeim vettergis / vant ór gulli, / unz þrjár kvómu / þursa meyjar / ámáttkar mjǫk / ór jǫtunheimum. (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*)

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
49 „Þrjár þjóðár
falla þorp yfir
meyja Mǫgþrasis;
hamingjur einar
þeira í heimi eru,
þó þær með jǫtnum alask.“

(Three of the race of the maidens of Kin-eager come to descend over dwellings; they alone are the guardian spirits of the world, though they were raised among giants.)

Mǫgþrasir is a figure only known from this poem, and it cannot be said with certainty that he is a jǫtunn, so even though Vafþrúðnir answers that the three maidens were raised among the jǫtnar, it is uncertain of where their origins ultimately lie.[5] A likely interpretation, however, is that these three maidens, from whatever lineage, may represent the Norns—those who control the fates of humankind—in the world after Ragnarǫk. As fate is such a prevalent and dominating force in the mythic past, the mythic present, and the mythic future, there is no reason to doubt that the world as it is reborn after Ragnarǫk would not have the Norns in it. Lindow writes that 'these females appear to be the norns, or perhaps simply the fetches of humans, as the variant reading in AM 748 I 4to has it: "hamingior einar þær í heimi ero" ("they are fetches alone in the world"). The feminine remains associated with fate, as with procreation' (1997, 173). As the post-Ragnarǫk world is inhabited by humans and members of the younger generation of the æsir, it can be expected that the Norns who control the fate and

[5] Machan writes the following: '*Mǫgþrasis*: "Persistent Son" (an agent noun literally meaning "the one who fights for a son") is another obscure figure unique to *Vafþrúðnismál*. The element *þrasir* suggests that he may be related to *Lífðrasir*, and indeed Boer (*Die Edda*, 2: 58) contends that the two are one and the same' (2008, 103). Boer writes: '*Mǫgþrasir* ist dieselbe person wie *Lífþrasir*. Solange er í *holti Hoddmímis* verborgen bleibt heisst er *Lífþrasir*. 'wer zu leben wünscht'; in der neuen welt, welche er mit söhnen bevölkern wird, heisst er *Mǫgþrasir*' (1922, 2:58). See also Gering (1927, 177). One primary issue appears to be which word the gentive case of Mǫgþrasir connects with: meyja or þorp. If Mǫgþrasir construes with þorp, then the three maidens of stanza 49 come over Mǫgþrasir's land or dwelling (i.e. the world reborn), and Mǫgþrasir is most likely equal to Lífþrasir; if construed with meyjar, then Mǫgþrasir is most likely a jǫtunn. Machan's interpretation of the meaning 'Persistent Son', is most likely accurate for either reading, as being alive after Ragnarǫk demonstrates persistence. Sturtevant writes, '[h]owever we may interpret this passage, it is evident that in *Mǫg-þrasir* the element *–þrasir* has a derived sense just as in *Líf-þrasir*. Gering [1927] probably comes nearest to the literal sense of *Mǫg-þrasir* when he translates it by "der einen sohn sich ertrotzende." The basic sense of *-þrasir* "One who rages" passed over into the secondary sense of "One who is stubbornly persistent," which, as we have seen, is a sense in keeping with *-þrasir* in *Líf-þrasir*' (1948, 134). Simek writes that '"the one striving for sons" would seem to give more or less the correct meaning' and that '[t]he supposition that Mǫgþrasir and Lífþrasir are one and the same mythological person has little to be said for it' (1993, 221).

destinies of humans and æsir would also need to be present for the re-born world to progress as the pre-Ragnarǫk world did.

Another interpretation is possible, however, when reference is made to *Hgát*. In the *Hgát* the following stanza is found, where Gestumblindi, Óðinn in disguise once again, challenges the king with the following riddle:

> „Hverjar eru þær meyjar,
> er ganga margar saman
> at forvitni föður;
> hadda bleika
> hafa þær, inar hvítfölduðu,
> ok eigut þær varðir vera?“ (Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks, 222)

> (‘Who are those maidens / going many together, / by their father unceasing sought; / pale their hair is / and their hoods are white, / yet these maidens know no man?’) (*Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra*, 40)

In response, Heiðrekr answers: ‘Þat eru bylgjur, er svá heita’ (‘Those are the waves that are thus named’). The form of the two questions, the one posed by Gagnráðr and the one posed by Gestumblindi, is similiar and it is possible that they can inform one another, for at this stage of the wisdom contest of *Vafþr*, the guest may be asking a riddle of his host rather than a question that strictly asks about the mythic future.

Before considering this further, however, it is also informative and instrumental to consult *Bald*, in which a similar question is asked. In that poem the áss Óðinn, again in disguise, this time as Vegtamr, goes to question a vǫlva about the bad dreams that his son Baldr has been having. His final question to the vǫlva is given after she says *nú mun ek þegja*. Although the vǫlva wishes to be still, Vegtamr persists and gets his way.

> „Þegjattu, vǫlva,
> þik vil ek fregna,
> unz alkunna,
> vil ek enn vita:
> Hverjar ro þær meyjar
> er at muni gráta
> ok á himin verpa
> hálsa skautum?“ (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*)

> (Don’t be still, seeress, I wish to question you until all is known, and I wish to know: who are those maidens who weep as they will, and fling their cloth-flaps up to the sky?)

The vǫlva responds by unmasking Óðinn, saying that he is not Vegtamr. Óðinn in turn responds by saying that the vǫlva is not a vǫlva at all, but Loki, the *þriggja þursa móðir*. For some reason this question, which is similar to the two other

examples from *Vafþr* and *Hgát*, unmasks the speaker as Óðinn to the vǫlva. The similar question does not have the same effect on either Vafþrúðnir or King Heiðrekr, however, and in both of those cases the dialogue continues with Óðinn retaining his disguise.

Ruggerini, on the vǫlva'a recognition of Vegtamr as Óðinn in *Bald*, writes that '[i]t seems to me that this unexpected recognition is due to the fact that the prophetess has the immediate impression that this question is peculiar, different from those that have gone before, and that it is not really a wisdom question at all, but more of a riddle' (1994, 186). According to Ruggerini it is due to Óðinn being known as an asker of riddles that the vǫlva is able to unmask him.[6] The implication that these two examples—*Hgát* and *Baldr*—have for *Vafþr* stanzas 48 and 49 is that what Óðinn is asking Vafþrúðnir may not be so much a wisdom question fit for a wisdom contest, but rather a riddle, as the example from *Hgát* is, firstly, in the frame of a riddle contest, and, according to Ruggerini's logic, Vegtamr's introduction of that riddle-type question in *Bald* is what unmasks him as Óðinn to the vǫlva in that poem. In *Vafþr*, Gagnráðr may be asking Vafþrúðnir a question that tests his wits and not merely his wisdom, by asking him a riddle. Vafþrúðnir, as indicated in his response, answers the question in the terms of the wisdom contest, and the result is an answer that is obscure. On this note, Ruggerini writes:

> [i]t is now difficult if not impossible for us to be sure whether Vafþrúðnir's answer is mythologically well-founded or not. We must be content with appreciation of the subtle but effective contrast between Óðinn's wit and Vafþrúðnir's blind seriousness (that is, his lack of intuition). The god had unexpectedly used a riddle formulation in the middle of a wisdom challenge; the giant – unwittingly fooled, but not taken aback – can conceive an answer which we can trust to be correct and learned, but is not able to respond to Óðinn's cunning verbal challenge. (1994, 187)

Ruggerini's suggestion is certainly plausible, especially when considering the parallel examples in *Hgát* and *Bald*, where similar questions are posed within the frame of a riddle contest.

Gagnráðr now asks Vafþrúðnir directly about which æsir will survive Ragnarǫk and inhabit the world that is reborn.

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[6] Beyond the two examples that involve Óðinn, in *Fáfn* stanza 12, the young hero Sigurðr, an Odinic figure as well as a descendant of Óðinn, asks a strikingly similar question: „Segðu mér, Fáfnir, / alls þik fróðan kveða / ok vel margt vita: / Hverjar ro þær nornir / er nauðgǫnglar ro / ok kjósa mœðr frá mǫgum?" (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*). Here, rather than making reference to *þær meyjar*, as Óðinn has done in all three examples where he appears in disguise and asks a question similar to this one (*Vafþr*, *Hgát*, and *Bald*), Sigurðr asks directly about *þær nornir*, having used the same formula to introduce his question. Fáfnir replies: „Sundrbornar mjǫk / hygg ek at nornir sé, / eigut þær ætt saman; / sumar eru áskunngar, / sumar álfkunngar, / sumar dœtur Dvalins" (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*).

Óðinn kvað:
„Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hverir ráða æsir
eignum goða,
þá er slokknar Surtalogi?“

(Much have I travelled, much have I tried, much have I tested the powers: which Æsir will govern the gods' effects when Surt's fire has died down?)

This question further confirms that Ragnarǫk will eventually end, and that afterwards there will be a new beginning with a new world inhabited by humans and divine beings. The new beginning will retain parts of the old world, as Líf and Líþrasir were both alive before the fimbulvetr, and Mǫgþrasir's maidens may represent the return of the Norns to the world, or at least their persistence. Some of the æsir will also survive, according to Vafþrúðnir, specifically those of the younger generation.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
„Víðarr ok Váli
byggja vé goða,
þá er slokknar Surtalogi;
Móði ok Magni
skulu Mjǫllni hafa
Vingnis at vígþroti.“

(Vídar and Váli will inhabit the gods' shrines when Surt's fire has died down; Módi and Magni shall have Mjöllnir to wield when war has waned.)

Víðarr and Váli are Óðinn's sons. Víðarr, according to *Vsp* stanza 53 and *Vafþr* stanza 53 is present at Ragnarǫk and avenges the death of his father by killing Fenrir. Móði and Magni are the sons of Þórr and are said to inherit their father's hammer. Magni appears in *Skáld* chapter 17, after Þórr has killed the jǫtunn Hrungnir. Magni assists his father by moving Hrungnir's leg off of him: 'Þá kom til Magni, sonr Þórs ok Járnsǫxu. Han var þá þrívetr. Hann kastaði fœti Hrungnis af Þór' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 2:22) ([t]hen Magni, the son of Thor and Jarnsaxa, arrived; he was three years old at the time. He flung Hrungnir's leg off Thor (*Prose Edda*, 89)). Both Magni and Móði are also named as the sons of Þórr in *Skáld* chapter 4 (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 2:14), when kennings for Þórr are being listed, as he is said to be the father of Magni, Móði, and Þrúðr. Magni seems to be a personification of Þórr's strength, as demonstrated by his ability to move Hrungnir's gigantic leg off of his father, and Móði perhaps of Þórr's disposition towards bravery, as Sveinbjörn Egilsson and Finnur Jónsson suggest his name

means ‘den modige’ (1931, 411). These four sons, according to Vafþrúðnir, the two sons of Óðinn and the two sons of Þórr, will survive Ragnarǫk.

The æsir that will survive the great battle with the jǫtnar are those of the younger generation, who will continue the divine lineage into the new world, even though their parents have died. In *Vsp* R stanza 60 (*Vsp* H stanza 54), however, it is said that Baldr and Hǫðr will return after Ragnarǫk to inhabit the new world. Baldr will rise from the dead and Hǫðr will accompany him and they will live in Valhǫll, *Hropts sigtóftir*.[7] *Vsp* and *Vafþr* thus agree that it is the younger generation of æsir that will survive Ragnarǫk, but in the account given in *Vsp* Baldr and Hǫðr resurrect, returning from the world of the dead to the world of the living. In *Vsp* R stanzas 31 and 32 Baldr is killed by the mistletoe that was shot by Hǫðr, and in *Vsp* R stanzas 32 and 33 it is said that Óðinn bore another son to avenge Baldr’s death. The son’s name is Váli who, according to *Bald* stanza 11, was borne by Rindr in the period of a day to avenge the killing of Baldr by Hǫðr. According to Vafþrúðnir, however, Óðinn’s two sons that survive are the avengers: Víðarr is the avenger of his father Óðinn, and Váli is the avenger of his half-brother, who he never knew, Baldr, the most beautiful of all of the æsir.[8]

Óðinn’s two sons who have avenged the deaths of their relatives will survive along with the sons of Þórr, who, inheriting his hammer, will serve roles similiar to their father. Martin, on the death of Þórr and the survival of his sons, writes,

> [t]he god who sustains life has fallen, and his sons renew the attributes of his power and the means of making them effective. The fact that they may be personifications of aspects of the god’s nature and that their significance is only eschatological does not detract from the importance of their function in myth. The return of Magni and Móði after the fall of the gods means that the new order can be established. (1972, 135)

As with the daughter of the sun who will replace her mother, Óðinn’s and Þórr’s sons will replace their fathers. There is, however, no mention of any female æsir that will survive Ragnarǫk.

6.2 Fate

In the penultimate question of the wisdom contest between áss and jǫtunn, Gagnráðr asks of Óðinn’s fate at Ragnarǫk. Still masked, the visitor asks the host of

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[7] Munu ósánir / akrar vaxa, / bǫls mun alls batna, / Baldr mun koma; / búa þeir Hǫðr ok Baldr / Hropts sigtóptir / vel, valtívar. / Vituð ér enn – eða hvat? (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*).
[8] Váli has survived the killing of Hǫðr and now, it is said, will survive Ragnarǫk. See McKinnell (2005, 159). See also McKinnell (2005, 162), where he draws a comparison between Víðarr, son of Gríðr, and Váli, son of Rindr. Both are takers of vengeance, and, as it happens, both are survivors.

his own fate. Vafþrúðnir is known to be wise, has proven his wisdom in the contest so far, but remains none the wiser as to who he shares his hall with. Óðinn may indeed be reaching the primary goal of his quest, the reason for which he made his journey to Vafþrúðnir's hall: to confirm his own fate. To do so, he must ask Vafþrúðnir about one of the main events that will take place at Ragnarǫk.

Óðinn kvað:
52 „Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hvat verðr Óðni
at aldrlagi,
þá er rjúfask regin?“

(Much have I travelled, much have I tried, much have I tested the powers: what end of life will Odin have when the powers are rent?')

The einherjar who train each day in preparation for Óðinn's battle with the wolf will be unable to help Óðinn when he meets Fenrir, and it is probable that the áss already knows this piece of mythological knowledge about his own fate, but he seeks to confirm it by asking Vafþrúðnir. The jǫtunn has already shown himself to have foreknowledge of events to come.

Vafþrúðnir kvað:
53 „Úlfr gleypa
mun Aldafǫðr,
þess mun Víðarr *v*reka;
kalda kjapta
hann klyfja mun
vitnis vígi at.“

(The wolf will swallow the Father of men; this Vídar will avenge: he'll rip apart the wolf's cold jaws in battle with the beast.)

Fenrir the wolf will swallow Óðinn, and Víðarr will avenge his father by splitting the wolf's jaws.

The myth of Óðinn's death and Víðarr's vengeance for it is elaborated in *Gylf* chapter 51, where Hár also says that Fenrir will swallow Óðinn, leading to his death. Immediately afterwards Víðarr will come forward and thrust one of his feet into the lower jaw of the wolf. On that foot Óðinn's son wears the shoe that has been assembled through the ages by collecting the extra pieces that people cut away from the toes and heels when fashioning their shoes, and thus, it is said, those who want to help the æsir should throw these extra pieces away. With one hand Víðarr

takes hold of the wolf's upper jaw and rips apart its mouth. With this thrust Víðarr kills the wolf and avenges his father.[9] Within the narrative of *Gylf*, as in *Vafþr*, Ragnarǫk is in the mythic future, but in the version of the myth of Víðarr's vengeance taken from *Gylf*, there is the additional practical element about the shoe that he wears. This fable states that those who wish to help the æsir can contribute by throwing away the extra pieces of their shoes that they cut away. This suggests that the sources from which Snorri Sturluson drew upon in his composition of *Gylf* considered Ragnarǫk to be in the future from the time of composition, as it instructs those who would like to help the æsir to aid them with the extra material that they can contribute. Even if the assertion is not in earnest, it still demonstrates that at some point these stories might have been living myths for early audiences, which would suggest that people actually did believe in these divine beings and also that they may have somehow lived alongside them.

It is astonishing that up until Gagnráðr's second-to-last question Vafþrúðnir still does not know who is questioning him, as Gagnráðr has been asking questions with increasing specificity, narrowing the topic all the way down to the fate of Óðinn at Ragnarǫk. One of the most important aspects of Óðinn's death at Ragnarǫk is that it is not his first death, but his second—if, as discussed above, his self-sacrifice is interpreted as a death or journey to the world of the dead. In the myth of Óðinn's self-sacrifice as it is told in the *Rúnatal* section of *Háv* during stanzas 138 through 141 the speaker recounts how he left the world of the living and entered the world of the dead. This myth details one of the great sources of Óðinn's knowledge, for while on his journey he gained knowledge of the magic runes, which in turn gave him control over magic spells and the ability to make his own magic. One question that arises at this point is to what extent does Óðinn gain any new wisdom from his encounter with Vafþrúðnir, if any? Turville-Petre proposes, however, that the áss does in fact learn much valuable information from the jǫtunn:

> Óðinn, god of poetry, runes and magic, acquired much of his wisdom from his giant relatives, and particularly from the wise giant Vafthrúðnir. Vafthrúðnir could tell the secrets of the giants and of all the gods for he had travelled through all the nine worlds; he had even penetrated Niflhel, into which men pass from the world of death (Hel), as if dying for a second time. (1964, 49)

[9] 'Úlfrinn gleypir Óðin. Verðr þat hans bani. En þegar eptir snýsk fram Víðarr ok stígr ǫðrum fœti í neðra keypt úlfsins. (Á þeim fœti hefir hann þann skó er allan aldr hefir verit til samnat: þat eru bjórar þeir er menn sníða ór skóm sínum fyrir tám eða hæl. Því skal þeim bjórum braut kasta sá maðr er at því vill hyggja at koma Ásunum at liði.) Annarri hendi tekr hann inn efra keypt úlfsins ok rífr sundr gin hans ok verðr þat úlfsins bani' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:50–51).

If Vafþrúðnir is in fact a source of wisdom for Óðinn, perhaps it is because he does actually have more experience than Óðinn. Vafþrúðnir is destined to enter the world of the dead for a second time, from which we presume he will not be able to return. Óðinn will join Vafþrúðnir with his own second death at Ragnarǫk, a death from which he also will not return.

Turville-Petre's assertion that Óðinn acquires wisdom from Vafþrúðnir opens the possibility for a whole new interpretation of the poem, for it is most often considered to be a wisdom contest in which the contestant who is asking the questions must be in possession of the answer to the question that he asks, or else he would not be able to evaluate the correctness of the answer. However, if Óðinn is gaining wisdom from Vafþrúðnir he would therefore not be in possession of the answers, but be learning new information with each question-and-answer pairing. Either the áss is able to trick the jǫtunn into believing that he is in possession of the answers, or the two contestants are not holding a wisdom contest as such, but rather it is an interrogation, and during the second and third scenes of act two Óðinn is interrogating Vafþrúðnir for knowledge of the past, the present, and the future.

6.3 Defeat

The final question that Gagnráðr poses to Vafþrúðnir is more of a statement than a question. With the question the veil over the face of the guest is lifted and Gagnráðr reveals his true identity: Óðinn of the æsir. The audience has been aware of this fact during the whole of the contest, the second act of the two-act drama, and Vafþrúðnir now learns it as well. To do so, in true Odinic fashion, Óðinn must ask a question that nobody but the foremost áss and his dead son can possibly know.

Óðinn kvað:
„Fjǫlð ek fór,
fjǫlð ek freistaðak,
fjǫlð ek reynda regin;
hvat mælti Óðinn,
áðr á bál stigi,
sjálfr í eyra syni?“

(Much have I travelled, much have I tried, much have I tested the powers: what did Odin himself say into the ear of his son before he mounted the pyre?)

It is here that Gagnráðr reveals himself to be Óðinn by asking what Óðinn said into the ear of his son at his funeral, before he mounted his pyre. The son is Baldr, for there is no mention of any other of Óðinn's sons who die and have a funeral, and this knowledge can only be known by Óðinn and Baldr, as it was said from one to the other: *í eyra syni*. There is no other mythological source that mentions Óðinn having said anything to Baldr on his funeral pyre.

The most detailed description of the funeral, and particularly the moment when Baldr is put on the pyre, is in three passages from *Gylf* chapter 49. The first passage is as follows: 'En Æsirnir tóku lík Baldrs ok fluttu til sævar. Hringhorni hét skip Baldrs. Hann var allra skipa mestr. Hann vildu goðin fram setja ok gera þar á bálfǫr Baldrs'. Then the following passage: 'Þá var borit út á skipit lík Baldrs, ok er þat sá kona hans Nanna Nepsdóttir þá sprakk hon af harmi ok dó. Var hon borin á bálit ok slegit í eldi'. And, finally, the third passage from *Gylf* chapter 49: 'Óðinn lagði á bálit gullhring þann er Draupnir heitir. Honum fylgði síðan sú náttúra at hina níundu hverja nótt drupu af honum átta gullhringar jafnhǫfgir. Hestr Baldrs var leiddr á bálit með ǫllu reiði' (*Snorri Sturluson: Edda* 1:46–47).[10] As can be seen from the *Gylf* description of Baldr's funeral, there is no mention of Óðinn whispering anything into Baldr's ear, even though Snorri Sturluson was familiar with at least parts of *Vafþr*, and most likely the whole poem, as he quotes it extensively. Not only are the words which Óðinn might have whispered into the ear of his dead son a mystery, but the very event of Óðinn whispering in Baldr's ear is also a mystery.[11]

There is, however, another instance from the Old Norse-Icelandic poetic corpus where Óðinn asks this same question, which constitutes a second indirect reference to the event in question, namely, what Óðinn said into the ear of his dead son. In *Hgát* it is the final question that Gestumblindi poses to King Heiðrekr. There, in a similar manner to what is written in *Vafþr*, Gestumblindi—the one whose identity is hidden to others, or who guests do not discern—poses a riddle to the king.

Þá mælti Gestumblindi:
„Segðu þat þá hinzt,
ef þú ert hverjum konungi vitrari:
Hvat mælti Óðinn

[10] ('The Æsir took Baldr's body and carried it to the sea. Baldr's ship was called Ringhorn and it was the greatest of all ships. The gods wanted to launch it and use it for Baldr's funeral pyre [....] Baldr's body was carried out on to the ship, and when his wife, Nanna Nep's daughter, saw this, her heart burst from sorrow and she died. She too was carried on to the funeral pyre, which was then set on fire [....] Odin laid the gold ring Draupnir on the pyre. It had the characteristic afterwards that, every ninth night, eight gold rings of equal weight dripped from it. Baldr's horse, with all its riding gear, was led onto the pyre'. (*Prose Edda*, 67))

[11] Olsen writes: 'Begge disse digte [*Háv* and *Vafþr*] munder ud i en antydning af den dybeste viden, som runeidrættens repræsentant blandt guderne sidder inde med: Odin kan galdr, hvormed han vinder Rind's kjærlighed og derigjennem opreiser Balder en hevner (Ljóðatal); Odin ved, hvad der blev hvisket i Balder's öre – sikkert ord om hevn og gjenkomst efter Ragnarok –, förend denne steg paa baalet (Vafþrúðnismál)' (1921, 207–8). Olsen's interpretation that Óðinn spoke to Baldr about the revenge that will be taken for his death and his second coming after Ragnarǫk is incredibly compelling, but as with most interpretations must be based on conjecture.

> í eyra Baldri,
> áðr hann vær á bál hafiðr?“ (Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks, 225)
>
> (‘Tell me this then last of all, if you are wiser than any other king’: What said Ódin / in the ear of Balder, / before he was borne to the fire? (*Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra*, 44))

The question in *Hgát* is the same in content as the question posed in stanza 54 of *Vafþr*, if it can be accepted that in *Vafþr* the son that Gagnráðr refers to is in fact Baldr, which it most certainly is. This similarity suggests that either the two sources derive from a common source, or that one was based off of the other. McKinnell writes, on the ending of *Hgát*, that it is

> unlikely that the author of *Heiðreks saga* (who uses much ancient material not found elsewhere) derived it from *Vafþrúðnismál*: the name Gestumblindi, the confrontation with a king rather than a giant (which is shared by the prose epilogue of *Grímnismál*) and the story of why the falcon has a short tail all suggest an independent Odinic source, now lost. (2014, 160)

The more likely scenario, McKinnell forwards, is that both the wisdom contest in *Vafþr* and the riddle contest in *Hgát* represent a common story pattern, and are independent manifestations of that pattern. In both cases Óðinn uses the same question to end the contest, but this does not mean that one was based off of the other; rather it points to the likelihood that they come from a common tradition of Odinic wisdom dialogues, of which only a few are extant, while others were lost.

When he responds to Óðinn’s final question Vafþrúðnir knows that he is defeated, for Óðinn has revealed himself by asking a question that only he can know the answer to, if he actually did whisper some words into the ear of his dead son.

> Vafþrúðnir kvað:
> 55 „Ey manni þat veit,
> hvat þú í árdaga
> sagðir í eyra syni;
> feigum munni
> mælta ek mína forna stafi
> ok um ragna røk.“
>
> (No one knows what you said in ancient days into the ear of your son; with a doomed mouth did I tell my ancient lore and speak of Ragnarök.)
>
> Vafþrúðnir kvað:
> 56 „Nú ek við Óðin deildak
> mína orðspeki;

> þú ert æ vísastr vera.“[12]
>
> (It was with Odin I’ve now traded my wits: you are always the wisest of men.)

And thus the poem ends with Vafþrúðnir defeated and Óðinn having accomplished his goal of contending with the jǫtunn in wisdom, and in the end bringing about his death. From the moment that Óðinn entered Vafþrúðnir’s hall until the last question is delivered, the jǫtunn did not know that he was contending with the áss, but when Gagnráðr’s true identity is revealed to be Óðinn, Vafþrúðnir can do nothing but admit defeat, for Óðinn has proven his prowess in knowledge. *Vafþr*, placed after *Háv* in the R manuscript, has thus built on the theme of Óðinn as a character that has much to do with knowledge. In *Grímn* Óðinn will again overtake an adversary on a trip away from Ásgarðr, during which he will profess knowledge, and in *Hárb*, Óðinn will outwit Þórr of the æsir. Þórr, however, is not very intelligent, so arguably Óðinn’s outwitting of him is not a great feat, but it may demonstrate the power of wit over that of strength. In his encounter with Vafþrúðnir, it can be said with certainty that even though Óðinn is in control of the encounter for the duration of the contest, he has indeed faced a great challenge. Vafþrúðnir has, like Óðinn, travelled into the world of the dead and gained knowledge from it, and Vafþrúðnir is—or was—wise enough to realize that he cannot contend with Óðinn.

King Heiðrekr does not prove to be as humble in defeat as Vafþrúðnir, however, and his response to Óðinn is markedly different, to say the least. Like Vafþrúðnir, it is with the final question, which relates to what Óðinn said into Baldr’s ear, that the contest is ended.

> Heiðrekr konungr segir: „Þat veiztu einn, rög vættr.“ Ok þá bregðr Heiðrekr Tyrfingi ok höggr til hans, en Óðinn brást þá í valslíki ok fló á brott. En konungr hjó eptir ok af honum vélifiðrit aptan, ok því er valr svá vélistuttr ávallt síðan. (Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks, 225)
>
> (‘You alone know that, vile creature!’ cried Heidrek, and he drew Tyrfing and slashed at Ódin, but he changed himself into the shape of a hawk and flew away; yet the king, striking after him, took off his tailfeathers, and that is why the hawk has been so short-tailed ever since. (*Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra* 44))

Although the two questions posed by Óðinn are essentially the same in both *Vafþr* and *Hgát*, the responses from the defeated contestants are extremely different.

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[12] Jónas Kristjánsson and Vésteinn Ólason (*Eddukvæði. Íslenzk fornrit*) print *Vafþr* in 56 stanzas, a break from the traditional division of the poem into 55 stanzas. The only difference is that Vafþrúðnir’s final stanza of speech is rather long, and while traditonally considered one lengthy stanza of *ljóðaháttr*, the ÍF editors break it into two stanzas, with stanza 56 constituting a half-stanza.

Whereas Vafþrúðnir is humble in his defeat, realizing that he has lost the contest to Óðinn and that there is no way he can escape his fate, King Heiðrekr is extremely angry and still tries to harm Óðinn, although with no real success. The retreating Óðinn, who takes on the shape of a hawk, is struck by the magical sword Tyrfingr, and the fable of why hawks have short tail feathers is the result.

The ending to *Vafþr* is not without its drawbacks for Óðinn. While defeating the jǫtunn in his own hall, Óðinn also confirms his own death at Ragnarǫk by the jaw of Fenrir. Confirmation of this knowledge was the final question-and-answer pairing in the poem before Óðinn terminates the contest with his final and unanswered, or indeed unanswerable, question about Baldr's funeral. Ármann Jakobsson, working within a Freudian framework that compares the mythical representation in *Vafþr* with the Oedipus myth, writes that '[t]he son's victory over the father is double-edged, for the father role brings with it certainty of death. For the son, the father's death is tantamount to facing his own mortality' (2007, 274). In this case Óðinn is the son and Vafþrúðnir the father, and while Óðinn is powerful enough to overcome Vafþrúðnir, he, the æsir, and the einherjar will not be able to overcome the forces of the jǫtnar at Ragnarǫk, who will have Loki and his children on their side. This is representative of how during the mythological present the æsir are able to defeat the jǫtnar, but when Ragnarǫk arrives—the immanent mythological future—the two opposing forces will all perish. The only survivors are two humans, Líf and Líþrasir, and a handful of æsir from the younger generation. There is no mention made in the sources of a younger generation of jǫtnar, although Mǫgþrasir's maidens—if we interpret them to belong to this obscure character, and we interpret this obscure character to be a jǫtunn—may represent the parallel continuation of the jǫtunn lineage in the world that is reborn.

The fact that the death of Baldr occurs in the early mythological present, before the narrative of *Vafþr*, when the myths are configured together, indicates that in the world of the texts Ragnarǫk is at hand. The end of *Vafþr* leaves its audience aware of the mortality of the paranormal and supernatural jǫtnar and æsir. The dramatic work draws its audience through its two acts and four scenes by providing a complete-in-itself timeline of the Old Norse mythological cosmos. Time does move in a line, from the creation to the destruction, but there is a regeneration that urges the audience to wonder if after death there is a new life, and, if so, how many times does the cycle of destruction and regeneration repeat itself?

Ricoeur's narrative framework supplied the basic analytical tool by which I have pulled apart the narrative by seperating it into temporal units that are based on a progression of time (i.e. action) through the plot. The plot can also be divided in terms of space, which has been indicated in the chapter headings. It is my hope that the core of this dissertation has been a full exposition of the text. In the conclusion we will revisit the primary thesis that began the present work, that literary criticism

can bring forth meaning on three levels. The first level is the formal level, and all that is left for us on that level is to sum up our findings about the dramatic character of the text of *Vafþr*. The second level is the historical level, and by recalling the instances in the poem that are most important when considering the theories of Gurevich and Eliade, some comment can be made about how in this poem we can see remnants of the pagan belief system that have been absorbed by the Christian culture of 13th-century Iceland. Finally, the present work will reach its climax with a conclusion situating this work within the critical field. To my knowledge, *Vafþr* was awaiting a narrative analysis that placed a heavy emphasis on close reading and the placement of the contents of the poem in context with other sources. In so doing there has been a great degree of configuration, assembling, and blending of narratives. At each point where comparisons are made there is an awareness of the method, and thus an exploration is made of both the merits and limits of comparative criticism performed within the context of close reading.

7. Conclusion

It is an important task to study the remnants from cultures of the past, and it is my hope that the present work has been carried out in a manner that demonstrates respect for those who have so carefully sculpted the critical tradition of eddic studies and medieval Icelandic studies. Through the interpretation of the stories, the art, and the architecture that survives from centuries past it is possible to learn about ways of thinking other than our own. Lévi-Strauss speaks about what perception may mean from a point of view other than our own.

> So this totalitarian ambition of the savage mind is quite different from the procedures of scientific thinking. Of course, the great difference is that this ambition does not succeed. We are able, through scientific thinking, to achieve mastery over nature – I don't need to elaborate that point, it is obvious enough – while, of course, myth is unsuccessful in giving man more material power over the environment. However, it gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he *does* understand the universe. It is, of course, only an illusion. (1978, 17)

What has been lost in the present day is the illusion that Lévi-Strauss speaks about. With gained scientific knowledge there is an increase in technology, but a loss of the perception that the universe can be explained through a mythology. Although *Vafþr* is a 13th-century text that may have roots in pagan times it is not pagan itself. By analysing the narrative as closely as possible in the spirit of New Criticism we have been able to learn about the form of the poem itself, about the society from which it stems, and about the modern critical interpretation of the poem.

The task of the present work has been to treat *Vafþr* with a close and contextual reading that considers the poem as a drama that might have been performed in the medieval period in Iceland—an assumption that is based primarily on the work of Gunnell (1995). The narrative interpretation has been grounded in the temporal theory of Ricoeur, and as such the primary issue that must be addressed at the conclusion of this work is whether the narrative theory of Ricoeur is appropriate for application to an eddic text such as *Vafþr*, and if it may also, or generally, be possible to apply such narrative theory to other medieval Icelandic texts, dramatic or epic. Only some of the many possible avenues for interpretation have been explored, however, as it would have been possible to draw from a large body of other comparative sources, such as the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus, a work that treats many of the same characterters in similar and dissimilar storylines, or other works from the medieval Icelandic canon. By choosing to read other mythological texts with *Vafþr*, namely *SnE* and other eddic poems, a context has been chosen for *Vafþr*.

Taking a closer look at the results of our interpretation, one important question to address is the nature of Óðinn's motivations. If Óðinn's goal was to confirm that he will die at Ragnarǫk and then to kill Vafþrúðnir, he is decidedly victorious and has accomplished the task that he set out to complete when he left Ásgarðr. As a result of his journey, however, both the áss and the audience are reminded that although Óðinn is divine, he is not immortal. The mortality of the æsir is connected to the fact that the text belongs to the Christian culture of 13th-century Iceland, and by that time in Iceland the divinity of the Norse pantheon was being actively undermined to emphasize Christian values. The limited divinity of the Norse pantheon is thus a paradox. For while it is likely that the pantheon is a remnant of the past and pagan culture of the North, the Christian culture of the 13th century still attributes supernatural and paranormal qualities to their gods and goddesses in the narratives while keeping them on a human level by assigning mortality to their fate. All of the Norse deitites from the older generation perish at Ragnarǫk in sources that deal with the eschatological myth, and as such they are a reflection of what is utterly human in the past, the present, and the future: the certainty that death will visit us all.

Vafþrúðnir dies at the end of *Vafþr*, but it is not an event that occurs within the action of the poem, but rather the audience concludes that the death of Vafþrúðnir takes place after the action is concluded, following his final stanza of speech. One major unknown that the audience of the poem is left with at the end is the manner of Vafþrúðnir's death. Does the wise jǫtunn take his own life? Or, does the unmasked Óðinn overpower and kill him? Vafþrúðnir may just vanish as do the words of the poem, his existence washed away with no trace other than the poem itself, and to be clear, there is no world of gods and giants outside of the extant texts, so the proposition that Vafþrúðnir does vanish once the action of the poem is concluded is the truest answer. It might also be assumed—taking liberty with conjecture and the addition of narratives—that after Óðinn's victory over Vafþrúðnir the áss returns to Ásgarðr and to his wife Frigg. In the prose introduction to *Grímn*, the next poem in both the R and A manuscripts, Óðinn and Frigg are once again found together in Ásgarðr, this time on Hliðskjálf, engaged in another discussion that precedes Óðinn's departure from the home of the æsir. It is my conclusion that *Vafþr* is more than an 'empty vessel' to which a poet at some point in the medieval North added the details of the poem as we now have it. This assertion is supported by the intricate structure of the poem that has been exposed and illustrated through the close and contextual analysis that has been carried out in the spirit of New Criticism. By giving such close and detailed attention to the poem, and ultimately concluding that the structure of the poem mirrors its content, the present author concludes that it can be considered to be a representation of a myth that may have once been a part of an active and living mythology.

Larrington writes that 'Vafþrúðnir's defeat in the poem mimics the defeat of the giants in Time despite their priority in the universe; it is a defeat which Vafþrúðnir is forced to admit' (2002, 67). This statement is important for our conclusion to the discussion of how *Vafþr* can be read in its mythological context because, as Óðinn defeats Vafþrúðnir, it is also the æsir who will prevail in the mythological cycle, with members of the younger generation surviving the Ragnarǫk. Although many of the æsir are defeated by the jǫtnar at Ragnarǫk—Óðinn by Fenrir, Þórr by the Miðgarðsormr, Heimdallr by Loki, and Freyr by Surtr—there are æsir who survive, those from the younger generation mentioned in the conflicting accounts from *Vsp* and *Vafþr*. There is no clear or particular mention of any jǫtnar that survive. We know that Fenrir is killed by Óðinn's son Víðarr, the Miðgarðsormr is killed by Þórr, Loki is killed by Heimdallr, and Surtr is killed by Freyr. Many of the major battles at Ragnarǫk, as can be seen, are mutually destructive in the same manner that the great battles and wars that plague history are also mutually destructive. What is interesting about the æsir, however, is that they do not all perish, but are given a second chance in a new age, the younger generation at least, and as in *Vsp*, the mythological information in *Vafþr* is encouraging and hopeful. Violence was pervasive in medieval Iceland, as it is today, but the actions that are made in the present need not plague the future for the children of the next generation. It can be said that violence is never beneficent, except perhaps when it is incurred to prohibit further violence.

In the Ragnarǫk phase of the mythological cycle and immediately after there is a reversal of fortune for the jǫtnar. Throughout the mythological present—once again, we are greatly indebted to Lindow (2001) and Clunies Ross (1994) for their clear temporal frameworks for Old Norse mythology—there is a trend that the æsir most often get the better end of the deal in their interactions with jǫtnar, highlighted, for example, by Óðinn's victory over Vafþrúðnir. As Ragnarǫk approaches the greatest misfortune to befall the æsir, the death of Baldr, occurs and the jǫtnar begin to take back some of the ground that they have lost in their struggles with the inhabitants of Ásgarðr. The descendants of the æsir who survive Ragnarǫk demonstrate the ultimate superiority of the æsir both in time, in that they live on into the next generation, and space, in that they occupy the world after it is reborn. The mythological cycle thus has a double reversal, from favouring the æsir, then the jǫtnar, and once again the æsir, whose legacy survives with the continuation of the younger generation in the new world. The new beginning that the æsir receive in the renewed world is, I conclude, the perseverance of the cyclical dimension of temporality that was being replaced by the linear temporality of the Christian theological system that spread through the North in the medieval period. In this manner two conceptions of temporality coexist in *Vafþr*, the linear and the cyclical.

Treating *Vafþr* in its mythological context proves to be challenging, however, because although it is possible to situate the poem in mythical time in relation to other well-known myths that occur in the temporal framework of the mythological cycle—namely in relation to the creation period, the death of Baldr, Ragnarǫk, and the subsequent rebirth—there still remains the fact that in no other source is it possible to find reference to Óðinn's visit to Vafþrúðnir's hall. This leaves the distinct possibility that rather than being a representation of a myth—as I conclude *Vafþr* is, due to the intricacy with which its form and content are both weaved together and mirror one another—the poem still lends itself to being an independent narrative, a wisdom dialogue intended to store and transmit mythological knowledge, but not a myth that was believed to have happened. McKinnell (1994 and 2014) points to this as a strong possibility for the poem, and Ruggerini has stated exactly this:

> [t]his kind of dialogue is therefore not part of mythic narrative, but of a literary episode which uses mythological schemes and characters. In other words the wisdom debate between Óðinn and Vafþrúðnir is a thematic nucleus in itself, but one which could be varied, for example as to the number of questions and perhaps even their content; from a certain point of view, this can also be seen as a formulaic narrative structure. The poet was not elaborating a pre-existing myth about a specific occasion on which Óðinn, beset by doubts about whether or not to visit a wise but fearsome giant, sought advice from his wife Frigg and then decided on the journey and defeated Vafþrúðnir in a wisdom contest, with the myth ending in the giant's death. (1994, 156)

The same statement could also be made about *Grímn*, for that matter, and it may be possible, due to the late nature of the source matieral, to deconstruct the whole mythological corpus in such a manner. Like *Vafþr*, *Grímn* is a poem in which the primary result of the action is the elucidation of mythological information, and in both cases mythological knowledge is transmitted to an audience internal to the narrative, i.e. the characters engaged in the dialogues, and an audience external to the narratives, i.e. the medieval Icelandic audience. The frameworks of both poems are independent of the mythological cycle, and, for example, *SnE* does not make reference to either of the narratives in terms of being mythological events worth recounting, but references them as sources of knowledge in *Gylf*. That said, however, both poems are primary Óðinn poems, and they do not necessarily require parallel reference or corroboration in the sources of Old Norse mythology to be considered independent mythical representations. They survive as mythical representations, and that is what counts most, and that is where the present author rests his case on the matter. Treating *Vafþr* as a myth, in other words, is one of the intended contributions of this work to the scholarly community.

The present study of *Vafþr* aims further, however, and hopes to inform the modern understanding of the Old Norse mythological cosmos on two more crucial

points. Firstly, as is well accepted the poem is an important source of information pertaining to Norse cosmology. The knowledge that is revealed in the dialogue describes events in the mythic past, the mythic present, and also foretells some key events that will transpire in the mythic future that lead up to, include, and even follow Ragnarǫk. *Vafþr*, along with *Vsp*, *Grímn*, and *Gylf*, draws a history of the mythological cosmos that might have been well known during the pagan period in Scandinavia and Iceland, although with a different understanding than what now survives. It is possible to view the pagan cosmos as portrayed in *Vafþr* both independently and in conjunction with these other sources, and this study has attempted to do both simultaneously: that is, draw the image of the cosmos as it is presented in *Vafþr* through the close reading and to combine it with other Old Norse mythological sources to form a composite image. This approach, of close reading in conjunction with contextual reading has highlighted some important textual issues, and could possibly lead to a wider study focusing on all four of these sources. Furthermore, this application of New Critical practice alongside comparativism can provide new relevancy for the close reading of Old Norse mythological texts.

Secondly, and just as significantly, when *Vafþr* is considered to be a mythical representation—the story of Óðinn meeting Frigg and then leaving Ásgarðr to travel to the hall of Vafþrúðnir—the implications of its action further adds to the whole understanding of the mythological cycle. This story, like the myth of Baldr's death or any other major event represented in the sources, is situated within the cosmological history that is contested in the poem's central dialogue between the áss and the jǫtunn. *Vafþr* foreshadows the end of the older generation of the æsir and the eradication of the jǫtnar, and as such the poem is an example of the cosmos looking in on itself in self-reflection, and is in fact microcosmic. As stated at the outset: within the narrative frame of the poem the cosmos is represented in miniature. In *Vafþr* the jǫtunn loses the contest that his guest initiates or tricks him into initiating, and Óðinn is assured of his own pending death at Ragnarǫk with the answer Vafþrúðnir provides in stanza 53. The jǫtunn has lived a long life, remembering far into the past, and Óðinn is also extremely old, and knows that he will not live forever. Neither player can put off death forever, and the poem demonstrates that the eddic deities are fated to die, as are humans, even though their lifespan is long and its contents definitely paranormal. This is significant, for it demonstrates that the paranormal must eventually succumb to the natural forces of life. In the end the æsir die as humans do, succumbing to forces that are greater than they are. Medieval Icelanders found it important to transmit these myths about pre-Christian gods that ultimately reflect the futility of the paranormal when it is faced with the normal, the supernatural with the natural. There are issues that announce themselves when narratives from the Old Norse mythological sources are 'added' together, but I hope that at each instance where such 'addition' may be taking place

in the interpretation, which has allowed for the concept of cosmos and microcosm to be considered, it is being done in a conservative and self-aware fashion. It is a human impulse to add information together, and being aware of such an impulse brings us one step closer to understanding its origin.

The representation of the human condition in literature is a quality that is common to many ages of storytelling in societies, whether ancient, medieval, or modern. Eliade writes the following:

> A tous les niveaux de l'experience humaine, si humbles qu'on les suppose, l'archétype continue de valoriser l'existence, et de créer des "valeurs culturelles": l'Ile des romans modernes ou l'Ile de Camoëns n'est pas moins une valeur de culture que tant et tant d'îsles de la littérature médiévale. (1953, 369)

> (At all levels of human experience, however ordinary, archetypes still continue to give meaning to life and to create "cultural values": the paradise of modern novels and the isle of Camoens are as significant culturally as any of the isles of medieval literature. (1958, 433))

And, at a different time, Eliade touches a note that is at the heart of the present work:

> L'histoire est ainsi abolie, non pas par la conscience de vivre un éternel présent ni par le moyen d'un rituel périodiquement répété, mais elle est abolie *dans le futur*. La régénération périodique de la Création est remplacée par une régénération périodique de la Création est remplacée par une régénération *unique* qui aura lieu dans un *in illo tempore* à venir. (1949, 166)

> (History is thus abolished, not through consciousness of living an eternal present, nor by means of a periodically repeated ritual—it is abolished in the future. Periodic regeneration of the Creation is replaced by a single regeneration that will take place in an *in illo tempore* to come. (1954, 111–12))

Each time *Vafþr* or any of the other Norse cosmogonic sources are read, either aloud or in silence, the cosmological cycle that is recounted and foretold repeats itself. In this manner the possible pre-Christian belief system that is represented in its contents continues to live into the present, into an age where there is no continual cycle of regeneration other than the New Year, but a supposed single regeneration in the unknown future after the Day of Judgement. For a medieval audience these two conflicting notions, the linear and the cyclical, met in the Old Norse mythological materials, and particularly in the eddic poems that relate stories of the Norse pantheon. In sum, the conflicting notions ultimately meet in the single regeneration that has replaced the cyclical repetition. The younger generation of the æsir will inhabit the world that is reborn, but the generation after them, if there is one, may not be so lucky.

In the present day here in the West the universal belief in the doctrine of the Christian church is waning and the secular age is gaining ground and a return to the literary remnants of the distant past that have survived for us through the medium of Christian manuscript culture is most welcome. Through mythology humankind is able to understand more about the world in which we live, whether the information that is presented to us is true or not in terms of explanatory value for the natural world, it can tell us something about how humans in the past have perceived the world exterior to them, and perhaps even sought to discover their own place in it. In our specific case, as it pertains to the present work, it is possible to conclude that in 13th-century Iceland Christians were still interested in the pagan past, and this work is involved in the critical practice of interpreting medieval Iceland's interest in and preservation of the pagan past. The medieval interest in the past manifested in the reinterpretation, and perhaps even the invention of pagan myths in the form of eddic poetry along with prose works such as *SnE*. In these sources a hybrid understanding of temporality is identifiable, indicating that while a general understanding of time as linear had been integrated into the representation of the mythological cycle in the sources, the individual pieces of mythical information in *Vafþr* reveal at least an acknowledgement of Eliade's eternal return and Gurevich's interpretation of agrarian societies as being subject to the influence of the natural exposure to the sun, the moon, and the seasons. Finally, Ricoeur's acknowledgement of narrative as a primary source for understanding temporality could not be more true than when *Vafþr* is considered, for, as mentioned, the cyclical dimension is represented in the mythical information and perseveres in the single regeneration illustrated in the world reborn, but ultimately the poem profoundly recognizes the task of those existing in the present as one that carries the weight of the past in preparation for the future. Óðinn, indeed, has as his primary task in *Vafþr* to confirm that he will die at Ragnarǫk. In the sources the áss only ever hears about his future death in the jaws of Fenrir the wolf, and must spend his time anticipating his eventual fall. Now in the present we all also know that we will die, but we can, like our protagonist, prepare for the end, and the study of the past is the best way to prepare for the future. This has been, now ends, and will remain, a narrative study of *Vafþrúðnismál*.

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