Geasa and *Álög*: Magic Formulae and Perilous Quests in Gaelic and Norse

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In 1975 the Icelandic scholar Einar Ólafur Sveinsson published a study of a tale found in medieval Icelandic literature in the form of a poem, which he thought dated from the twelfth century, and in a later prose saga, probably of the fourteenth century.[1] The tale concerns a man who is bespelled by his stepmother to seek a certain woman, whose name he is told but not where she is to be found. In the poem his stepmother bespells him after he loses a game of tables or chess to her, while in the saga the bespelling occurs after he has rejected her advances. In the latter an elaborate formula is used for the spell, and the hero retorts by bespelling his stepmother. In both the poem and the saga the hero goes on the quest to find the lady, meets various adventures on the way, and eventually arrives at her home. After overcoming further difficulties he gains her. In the saga he then returns home, and his stepmother is punished.

Sveinsson believed that the tale was not Norse but Gaelic in origin, and that it must have passed to Iceland during the Settlement of the country between the late-ninth and eleventh centuries. It is known that at this time a number of people of Gaelic origin entered Iceland, mainly as slaves, small farmers, and wives to the Norse leaders of the Settlement, and it is not unnatural to assume that they brought tales of this kind with them.[2] The story in question appears to be unknown in mainland Scandinavia except in a single Danish ballad, while the theme of the spell imposed by a stepmother or similarly ill-disposed character, in particular after a game of chess or cards, is commonplace in Gaelic storytelling. The formula used in Iceland for the bespelling and counter-spelling is verbally very close to that used in Gaelic tales. Spells of this kind, especially those employing a set formula, are among the concepts known in Gaelic as *geasa* and in Norse as *álög*.

Sveinsson considers a number of related Icelandic tales that may have Gaelic origins, but his chief concern is with the twelfth-century poem and with the later saga. The saga, *Hjálmthés saga ok Ölvis*, is a complex work in which the story of the quest imposed by the stepmother is interwoven with subsidiary plots. The surviving version also contains interpolations; it was probably rewritten in the fourteenth century from a slightly earlier and simpler version. This earlier version seems to have been used by the author of *Hjálmthésrímur*, a saga in verse which was probably also composed in the fourteenth century (Jónsson 1905–15: II. 1–84). The older variant of the stepmother tale, the twelfth-century poem, has been printed in the collections known as the Elder Edda or

Sæmundar Edda (Bugge 1867: 338–55). It is often obscure and, since its middle section has been lost, was long thought to be two separate works, which were known respectively as *Grógaldr* and *Fjölvinnsmál*. That they were the same poem was first recognised in the middle of the last century, when a Danish ballad, *Ungen Svejdal*, was published as number 70 of the collection *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* (Grundtvig 1853–1976: II. 238–54, III. 841–3). This ballad is related to both *Grógaldr* and *Fjölvinnsmál* and is apparently derived to a large extent from them. The editor also noticed that the poem, the ballad, and *Hjálmthés saga ok Ölvis* all contained a theme similar to that of the Welsh tale *Culhwch and Olwen*.[3] A closer Celtic analogue has since been found by Sveinsson: the medieval Irish tale, *The Adventures of Art Son of Conn* (Best 1907), which in its present form exists only in a fifteenth-century manuscript, but which is mentioned in a list of tales preserved in the twelfth-century *Leabhar na hUidhre*. An even earlier date of *circa* 1000 has been suggested for the list (MacCana 1980: 36,53).

In his discussion of related Icelandic works Sveinsson notes that in Iceland in addition to the use of a spell in order to send the hero on a quest for a certain woman, two other kinds of spells or curses may be imposed, again with the use of the distinctive formula. One of them sends the hero to the trolls, and the resulting tale is usually similar to that of the quest for a woman. The third kind, which is the most common in Iceland, transforms the victim. In this case the theme is international though the formula is not, and although Sveinsson believes that in some of the Icelandic versions there is evidence of Celtic influence, only the bespelling formula they contain will be considered here. The two types of quest he analyses are distinctive, because they are not international, and they are not found in medieval romance literature and are therefore unlikely to have reached Iceland through this medium. Furthermore, although it is known that a number of romances, most of them French, did reach Iceland during the thirteenth century, the age of the earliest Icelandic version, *Grógaldr/Fjölvinnsmál*, almost certainly precludes the possibility of there being some lost French original. The bespelling formula is found only in Ireland, in Gaelic Scotland, in Iceland, and in a single Faroese ballad, *Drósin á Girtlandi* (Djurhuus and Matras 1951–72: II. 108–9, no. 43), in which it is used by a stepmother to transform her stepdaughter, who in turn bespells her. Like several other Faroese ballads it may derive its subject matter from Iceland.

My aim here is to suggest that Sveinsson's arguments can be extended, and that not only the tales of a cruel stepmother who sends the hero on a quest for a certain woman, but also a number of other Icelandic tales that contain the theme of *álög* imposed by one character on another, are of Gaelic origin. Three main kinds of quest tales that appear both in Icelandic and Gaelic may be distinguished. The first concerns a hero sent on a quest to otherworld beings and corresponds to the second of Sveinsson's three types. The next is the tale of the hero sent by his stepmother to seek a certain woman—which is the subject of Sveinsson's main argument. In the third kind of tale a strange woman

places the hero under a spell to seek her. The Icelandic tales in question are sufficiently numerous to indicate that their origins are unlikely to have been in medieval European romance, as it is improbable that a large number of written European romances would have vanished without a single reference to them surviving. It will be possible, I hope, to show that the Irish and Scottish tales are native and not Norse in origin; their development, especially in their use of the formula, can be traced to some extent in Irish literary works, a number of which appear to have been composed originally before the Norse invasions of Ireland. In many ways the modern Gaelic folktales provide the closest analogues to the medieval Icelandic tales, particularly in the wording of the *geasa* formula.

The Gaelic Tales

Many Gaelic tales, both literary and oral, contain some form of *geasa*, but only the three types which are represented in Iceland will be considered here.

(1) A Gaelic example of the first type, *An Tuairisgeal Mór*, *The Great Tuairisgeal*, has been analysed in detail by J. G. McKay (McKay 1927–8; Campbell 1940: I. 504–14), and earlier by G. L. Kittredge (1903), who was particularly interested in the relations between this folktale and the medieval Latin romance *Arthur and Gorlagon* (Milne and Nutt 1904), a work preserved in a fourteenth-century manuscript but believed to be older.

The version of *The Great Tuairisgeal* collected by John Francis Campbell in South Uist in the middle of the last century (Campbell 1940: I. 2–27) can be summarised as follows: One day the son of the king of Ireland is approached by a stranger on horseback who is accompanied by a woman. The stranger asks the hero to play chess with him. The hero wins the game and demands the woman as his prize. The next day he meets the same stranger, plays with him, and gains the horse as his winnings. On the third day the woman warns him that he will lose and that the stranger will put 'binding spells' on him to bring word of how the stranger's father, the Great Tuairisgeal, was put to death. He is in turn to lay 'binding spells' on the stranger to remain lying on the hillside, propped up on one elbow, until the hero returns. Everything occurs as she has said, and she sets him on his quest. After various adventures he is told the tale of a prince transformed into a wolf by his stepmother, and from this he gains the information he requires. He returns home with the head of the Great Tuairisgeal. The stranger, the son of the Great Tuairisgeal, is by now a heap of bones, but he revives as the hero recounts the story. The hero has also brought back the Great Tuairisgeal's sword which his son now demands. The hero makes as if to give it to him but instead strikes off his head. He then goes to look for his lady, who, in this version, has been carried off in the meantime. After further adventures he finds her.

Apart from the abduction of the woman and the additional adventures which result from it, this version is fairly typical of a story that is widespread in both Ireland and Gaelic Scotland.[4] The main variations that occur concern the object that the hero is sent

to acquire. Most commonly in Ireland it is 'The One True Story', or a named sword (often the 'Sword of Light'), or a combination of these two. Less commonly, the object the hero is sent to obtain might be a particular horse owned by the king of the Western (or Eastern) World; or the head of a certain bull; or *Fáinne na hÓige*, the Ring of Youth, (which can be either an actual ring or the name of a woman). With these last quests, however, there is usually no inset tale of the type found in *The Great Tuairisgeal*, where a character is transformed by his wife or stepmother into a werewolf or other animal and is then subsequently released.

(2) In the second type of tale the opponent of the hero is his stepmother, and this is the theme of the stories discussed by Sveinsson. An example is the tale *Bramble Berries in February*, again collected by Campbell (1940: I. 410–36). The hero is the son of the King of Ireland. His mother dies and his father marries again. The new queen does not at first know of the existence of her stepson. He is pointed out to her by that notorious busybody the hen-wife, who teaches the queen how to cast spells on him to make him undertake a perilous quest. She is obliged in this tale to repeat the spell twice more, as the hero returns, successful, on the first and second occasions. On the third he retaliates for her spell by binding her to stand with one foot on the palace roof and the other on the kitchen roof and to suffer various other discomforts which include being twisted and steered by the wind until he returns. She asks him to lift his curse and she will lift hers; but he refuses and goes off on his quest, which again he accomplishes successfully and in addition acquires a wife. On his return the stepmother falls from the tower and dies.

The stepmother is the archetypal villain and occurs in a wide variety of tales. In those in which the *geasa* are imposed she frequently obtains power over her stepson through gaming episodes, as in *The Great Tuairisgeal* and related tales. These gaming episodes are not found in all versions and are not really needed, since unless it is specifically stated to the contrary, a stepmother is expected to be able to command her stepson: they in fact appear to be a later addition. The punishment meted out to the stepmother here—to stand astraddle two buildings—is more common in tales containing the *geasa* theme than is the punishment given to the male stranger in *The Great Tuairisgeal*—to lie on a hillside. To stand astraddle buildings is the norm in Irish versions, where it is applied to male opponents as well as to female: in Scots ones the type of punishment tends to vary according to the sex of the villain. The stepmother or other female opponent may have crumbled away by the time of the hero's return, as does the villain in *The Great Tuairisgeal*; alternatively, she may fall down to her death when she sees him coming. In some versions he burns her remains for good measure.

The quests that the heroes are sent on are similar to those in *The Great Tuairisgeal* and related tales. The stepmother episode is also very commonly found in Irish versions of the international tale AT 313, 'The Girl as Helper in the Hero's Flight' (AT 1961), of which several hundred versions have been collected in Ireland.[5] In many of these a certain lady is the object of the hero's quest, and in others she is an additional acquisition. Other tales which frequently contain the *geasa* episode involving either a

stepmother or a stranger are *An Gadaí Dubh*[6] and *Madra Bán na Seacht gCos*.[7] Some versions of *Céatach* also contain the theme, as do a large number of other tales including many known simply as *Mac Ríogh Éireann* or by some similar title.[8]

The theme of the villainous female, not necessarily a stepmother, who sends the hero on an impossible-seeming quest, after playing cards, chess, or even on occasions one-to-one hurling, became so popular in Ireland that it is the subject of burlesque. In a number of tales, in most of which the hero is Fionn, a hag arrives not only with a pack of cards but so well prepared for the outcome that she carries her own steeple on her shoulder.[9]

(3) In the third type of story the hero is wandering by the shore when he sees a boat coming to land. In it is a young woman. She puts *geasa* on the hero (in many versions, after the gaming episode) to seek for her, or sometimes, more elaborately, for where she put on her shoes and socks that morning. In the oldest version, the medieval literary tale, *Adventures of the Children of the King of Norway* (Hyde 1899: 50–199),[10] it transpires that the lady has herself been put under *geasa* by her stepmother, and has to take the forms of three different animals in successive years. She visited the hero on the one day of the year in which she was in human shape. The hero and his brothers search for her, but they become embroiled in various battles and apparently forget her existence, a matter that is rectified in some, but not all, of the oral versions. The opening is also found in many versions of the folktale *Loinnir Mac Leabhair*.[11] The lady is scarcely more fortunate in this tale: except in a few (apparently truncated) versions, her whereabouts are discovered without difficulty; and after Loinnir has given help to her father, she is promptly offered to the young man, but Loinnir hands her over to his companion while he sets off to seek an equally desirable and less importunate woman of whom he has heard.

Since the hero, in this third type of tale, is put under *geasa* by a *desirable* woman to seek herself, there is never a counter-curse. Even when villainous hags or men arrive by boat in a similar manner, but with inimical intentions, the counter-curse does not, to my knowledge, occur.[12] This suggests that the version with the desirable woman is the original variant and that the villains, whether male or female, are later adaptations.

In all three types of tale the motivation is provided by *geasa*, magic spells, imposed with the use of a particular formula. This method of initiating a quest is simple and very popular and there are several hundred examples of its use in Gaelic folktales.[13]

The medieval literary examples of use of the *geasa* formula are few. A collection of them has been made by Bruford (1969: 196–7), and from this it can be seen that only brief forms of the formula have been recorded in the literary works. There are no examples of the counter-curse, but it is nevertheless clear that the general concepts of the formula and theme were well-known. The word itself, in particular in its singular form *geis*, is frequently used in early Irish literature, usually to refer to a negative concept which corresponds to the international concept, *tabu*. It can be *geis* for a king to

go to certain places or to perform certain deeds. The positive injunction laid on one person by another appears to be a later development, which is specifically Irish, or at least Celtic. In this case the observation of *geis*, or, in the plural form, *geasa*, has been regarded as a solemn obligation. With both positive and negative *geasa* the supernatural is invoked. According to *Contributions to a Dictionary of the Irish Language* (RIA 1913–76: Fascicule G. 56–8) the word is related to *guidid*, prays, and its meaning is given as a 'prayer or request, the refusal of which brings reproach or ill-luck'. Four main meanings are identified: *tabu* or prohibition; positive injunction or demand; something unlawful or forbidden; and a spell, an incantation. The most comprehensive collection of examples of the literary use of *geis* and *geasa* is that of John Revell Reinhard, who translates the word as 'prayer-demand' (1933: 2–3).

McKay regarded the imposition of *geasa* in the Scottish Gaelic folktales as a similarly solemn affair. The terms of *geasa* are, he notes, punctiliously observed. 'From this it is evident that the *geasan* or spells were deemed to be of a particularly binding or compelling character. Perhaps they had a religious sanction and were enforced by some magic or religious rite now lost' (Campbell 1940: I. 506). Margaret Schlauch took a similar view of the nature of the Icelandic *álög*, which, like Sveinsson, she regarded as being related to *geasa* (Schlauch 1934: 122, 125–34).

A more recent discussion of *geasa* by David Greene (1979) has concentrated on the development of the concept as a literary one, no mention having been made of it in the early Irish laws. While the negative concept may have been derived from royal tabus of the pre-literary period, he suggests that a gradual widening of its meaning took place, leading to the development of the positive concept that one individual can place *geis* (or, as it is usually known in the plural, *geasa*) on another. This development he traces to concepts of honour which are enshrined in the laws. Greene follows a discussion by T. M. Charles-Edwards (1978), who points out that for a hero to reject the advances of a presentable woman is both to expose himself to ridicule and to dishonour her. As her honour is inextricably bound up with that of her male relatives he must by extension insult them. The stories of Deirdriu and Noisiu and of Gráinne and Diarmaid are examples of the dilemma the hero may be caught in and of the ensuing tragedy. *Geis* and *geasa* are the terms used in the later literature to describe the obligation of honour a woman may put on a man, and so the concept of one person placing *geasa* on another appears (see Greene 1979: 17).

Charles-Edwards (1978) gives special consideration to the medieval Irish *Fingal Rónáin*, a tale found in the twelfth-century *Book of Leinster* but which Greene regards as a work of the tenth century (Greene 1955: 2). In this tale the dilemma of Rónán's son, Mael Fhothartaig, is even greater than that of Noisiu or Diarmaid because the woman who desires him is his own stepmother. He avoids her because he fears that she will dishonour him in public; but she pursues him in private. He then reacts violently to her advances and insults her. In revenge she accuses him to her husband, his own father; and as a result Mael Fhothartaig is slain.

The importance of honour in the relations between men and women, and of the honour of the women's male relatives, is obvious in these tales. According to Greene these are the considerations which underlie the themes containing the positive *geasa*, and he believes that the invocation of the supernatural developed later when the considerations of honour had been forgotten.

However, not only presentable women but also hags and male villains impose *geasa*. In tales in which these characters appear the gaming episode often provides the means by which they gain power over the hero. It seems likely that these gaming episodes were originally quite separate from the *geasa* theme, at least in as far as that theme concerned female honour. Playing games in order to place a forfeit on the loser rather than in order to win agreed stakes is itself a motif in Gaelic tradition. Certainly considerations of honour are again involved, but they are not primarily of a sexual nature. In the earliest known version of the gaming episode, in *Tochmarc Étaíne* (Bergin and Best 1938: 174–83), a woman is present at a game between two men: her husband Eochaid, and an apparent stranger who turns out to have been a previous husband of hers. The stranger asks Eochaid to play with him, and he agrees. Eochaid wins the first two games, but loses the third; and the stranger names Étaín as the forfeit. She has not made any advances to him or by any other means put him under the obligations of honour described by Greene; nor are there any supernatural connotations to the game of forfeits played by the two men, or any invocation of *geasa*. Even in a folktale like *The Great Tuairisgeal* where *geasa* are invoked, a woman is commonly among the hero's winnings in the gaming episodes but there is no indication that her honour is in any way at stake. It appears that the theme of gaming for forfeits became attached to the *geasa* theme at some stage in its development—probably at a time when the concepts concerning the woman's honour were growing weaker, and the *geasa* formula was coming to be associated with characters other than attractive women.

The Adventures of Art may represent a transitional stage in the development of the theme, for it contains the gaming episodes which lead to the imposition of *geasa*, but it also contains, albeit in muted form, the older Phædra motif—the attempt by the stepmother to seduce her stepson. A development has occurred in the use of the motif—the stepmother who cannot have the hero for herself sends him to seek a woman who is seemingly unobtainable. This averts the tragedy usually associated with the Phædra motif as there is no need to accuse the hero falsely to his father: the quest which is likely to result in his death (but of course does not) has taken its place.

In *The Adventures of Art* a woman of the *sídhe*, Bécuma, comes to Ireland, having been banished by her own people for adultery. She is seeking Art, with whom she has fallen in love through hearing of him. But she first meets his father, Conn, who makes an oblique proposal of marriage to her. This may have been regarded originally as sufficient to compromise her honour, for she accepts him. At no stage does she make advances to Art—indeed on accepting Conn she insists that he banishes his son for a year. At a later stage in the tale she plays chess with Art. She loses the first game, and is

sent by him to acquire a magic wand (which has no further relevance in the tale). She plays a second game, wins, and using a brief version of the *geasa* formula says.

> '. . . thou shalt not eat food in Ireland until thou bring with thee Delbchaem, the daughter of Morgan.'
> 'Where is she?' said Art.
> 'In an isle amid the sea, and that is all the information that thou wilt get.'
> (Best 1907: 163–5)

As it will be seen, the Icelandic *Hjálmthés saga* (Jónsson 1950: IV. 177–243) appears to represent a slightly earlier stage in the transition, in which the slighting of the stepmother and the insult to her honour retain more significance, although the revenge taken is the same—the imposition of the quest for the seemingly unobtainable woman.

The Icelandic Tales

We may now turn to examine the three kinds of tale found in Iceland which contain the theme of the quest imposed by *geasa*.

(1) We shall start with the kind that appears to have been the latest to develop—that represented in Gaelic by *The Great Tuairisgeal* and similar tales in which the opponent is not necessarily the stepmother. *Vilhjálms saga sjóds*, *Thorsteinn Karlsson and the twelve hags*, and *Ála flekks saga*, are all Icelandic tales of this type. *Vilhjálms saga sjóds* (Loth IV: 1–136) was probably composed in the early fourteenth century. It comprises two distinct stories that have been threaded together (but only the first of them is relevant here). The saga opens with a series of four episodes, in each of which a game of chess is played (*op. cit*: 6–25). The first game is between a king and a strange woman who arrives in his kingdom one day, accompanied by a giant. This serves to initiate the action. Some time later the king disappears in mysterious circumstances, and after another two years have passed the king's son, Vilhjálmr, meets the same giant who asks him to play chess with him. Vilhjálmr wins and demands a full set of armour. The giant arrives on the date Vilhjálmr appointed and gives him the armour, and also a sword. The two play again and Vilhjálmr wins a horse with its trappings and the knowledge that his father is still alive. They play on a third occasion, but this time the giant brings with him a beautiful woman, who he says is his daughter. Vilhjálmr is distracted by her presence and he loses. He is sent to find the giant at the den of ninety trolls, whose whereabouts he does not know, but whose names he is to recite on his arrival; he must also take with him a ring which his father had won in his game with the strange woman and which the giant has been eager to recover ever since.

In this story, as in *The Great Tuairisgeal*, the hero acquires a horse and a sword as a result of successive chess games. He does not win a woman, but it is significant that a woman appears in the giant's company, though in the saga she is not a help but a distraction to the hero, and in true Norse fashion changes into a troll once her part has been played. The hero is sent on a quest to trolls, who are similar to the giants of the

Gaelic tales; he is also told to return a ring—a reversal of the Gaelic variant in which he is to obtain the Ring of Youth; and his quest includes a search for information, not, as in the Gaelic tales, for information about the father of the character who has sent him on the quest, but about Vilhjálmr's own father—whom he eventually meets at the destination, a captive in the giant's den. More than one Gaelic variant appears to be represented here. The hero does not impose a counter-curse on his opponent to remain in the same place until his return; instead it transpires that the opponent is one of the ninety trolls, all of whom Vilhjálmr slays when he reaches his destination.

The successive chess or board-games are only found in one single Icelandic folktale, *Thorsteinn Karlsson and the twelve hags* (text in Árnason 1954–61: v. 149–51; German summary in Sveinsson 1929: 70–1), which also has other affinities to *The Great Tuairisgeal*. The hero, Thorsteinn, plays a board game on three *consecutive* days, as in the Gaelic tales. Thorsteinn is a reluctant player, but he twice defeats his opponent, a strange woman who lives in an elf-mound. He does not demand any winnings. On the third day the woman pushes the board away from them before the game is finished, and imposes the *álög* on him. The hero replies with a counter-curse, and refuses to lift it when she suggests that they each free the other. He receives advice from his step-mother—a character who is frequently amicable in Icelandic folktales.[14] The quest the hero is sent on is to the woman's twelve sisters, who are trolls, and the remainder of the story is a version of the international folktale AT302, 'The Ogre's (Devil's) Heart in the Egg', versions of which are common in Gaelic and often have the gaming introduction.

One other saga shows certain similarities to *The Great Tuairisgeal* although the gaming episode is absent. This is *Ála flekks saga* (Lagerholm 1927: 84–120), a work probably of the fourteenth century, in which the hero, Āli, is put under *álög* no fewer than four times, each time by a member of the same family. On the first occasion a hag sends him to another hag, her sister Nótt (Night). He arrives at her home, escapes from it and sets out on further adventures. On the second occasion he is transformed into a werewolf, on his wedding night, by the brother of the two hags. On each of these occasions he imposes a counter-curse—the first hag is put in a cave with a fire beneath her, and her brother is condemned to sit on a chest shrieking and to be hanged when Āli is released. Not surprisingly, when Nótt imposes *álög* she does so while Āli is asleep and cannot defend himself. She beats him and causes him to remain ill until he can get another brother of hers to cure him. The brother is finally found and cures Āli willingly but is shortly afterwards slain by his patient. In dying, he puts Āli under *álög* to search for another member of his family, his half-human niece, who has previously assisted Āli.

This tale, though it is motivated by *álög* and concerns various members of the same family, has only general similarities to the Gaelic tales in question—with one exception: it contains an inset tale concerning a man who is transformed into a wolf. While most of the Icelandic quest tales with the *álög* theme also contain characters who have been transformed in some manner, it is not common to find the werewolf motif in Iceland:

elsewhere in medieval Icelandic literature it is found only in *Jóns saga leikara*, which contains an evil stepmother but has no other resemblances to *The Great Tuairisgeal*. The werewolf tale is known in other parts of Europe as an independent tale, and it is possible that it came to Iceland through the medium of romance literature. However neither the version in *Ála flekks saga* nor that in *Jóns saga leikara* is particularly close to any of the mainland European versions, so the suggestion cannot be discounted that it came to Iceland in combination with the theme of the quest imposed by *geasa*, and that the two themes have survived together in *Ála flekks saga*, a work in which a number of other elements of possible Gaelic origins have been noted (see Lagerholm 1927: lvii–lxvii).[15]

(2) The second kind of tale to be examined —which concerns the quest imposed by the stepmother—is represented in Iceland more clearly than the first. In the oldest version of it (*Grógaldr/Fjölvinnsmál*), we get very few details of the relations between the hero, Svipdagr, and his stepmother: she is 'the lascivious woman/who embraced [his] father' (stanza 3)—this may, but need not, imply a knowledge of the Phædra motif. The hero's quest is the result of a board-game with her, as in many of the Gaelic tales in which there is no suggestion of the Phædra motif. She sends him to seek the woman Menglöd, whose whereabouts none know. There is apparently no counter-curse. The audience knows these details because they are recounted by the hero to his dead mother, whom he has woken up in her grave in order to seek her help. She gives this by reciting charms to protect him on his journey. After the *lacuna* between the *Grógaldr* and *Fjölvinnsmál* parts of the poem we find Svipdagr at the castle of Menglöd. After an exchange of riddles with the doorkeeper, he gives his correct name; it transpires that he is expected, and he is made welcome. No details are given as to whether the stepmother is punished. Sveinsson (1975b: 313) suggested similarities between the protective spells woven by the dead mother in the Icelandic poem and the adventures actually undergone by the hero in the Irish *Adventures of Art*; he also noted that the dwelling of the lady in both stories was apparently described in similar terms; and, further, that the Icelandic poem resembles the Welsh poem *Culhwch and Olwen* in that, on reaching his destination, the hero finds that he is expected (Sveinsson 1975b: 317). The latter is also a commonplace in Gaelic and Scots folktales and later Irish romances.

In the Danish ballad, *Ungen Svejdal* (mentioned earlier), in place of the board-game the action begins with a ball-game during which the hero throws the ball so that it lands on the lap of the stepmother as she is sitting in her bower. This provokes her to enchant him; again there is no counter-curse. This incident is obviously not derived from *Grógaldr/Fjölvinnsmál*, at least in its extant form, but it has parallels in certain Gaelic tales.[16] (A similar incident is found in another Icelandic saga, *Hálfdánar saga Eysteinssonar*, which will be considered later.) In *Ungen Svejdal* the woman the hero is sent to seek is herself under enchantment, and when he finally arrives at her land he is

told that only Ungen Svejdal can release her, because she is yearning for him—a theme which shows a correspondence to the manner in which Svipdagr, in the Icelandic poem, is expected. Again as in the Icelandic poem, before leaving on his quest Ungen Svejdal seeks help from his dead mother: she provides him with a series of gifts—which bear some relation to the spells woven in *Grógaldr*. Svejdal finds his lady and releases her, and himself, from enchantment.

A verbal insult is sufficient to incite the stepmother to revenge in *Hjálmthésrímur* (Jónsson 1905–15: II. 1–84), the Icelandic verse-saga derived from an earlier and lost version of *Hjálmthés saga*. A verbal insult is again sufficient in the Faroese *Drósin á Girtlandi*, in which the stepmother retaliates by transforming her victim. However, in *Hjálmthés saga* itself the Phædra motif provides the motivation. The stepmother, Lúda, arrives mysteriously in an open boat, as does the stepmother in *The Adventures of Art*. Lúda has a plausible story, and soon manages to marry the recently bereaved king, Hjálmthér's father. As in very many Gaelic folktales, Lúda does not initially know of the existence of her stepson: Hjálmthér is living in a castle in the forest. Once she has discovered his existence and whereabouts, she seeks him out. For some reason totally inexplicable in terms of the saga but quite acceptable in terms of the Irish analogues, the two are left alone by Hjálmthér's retainers and Lúda can make her advances to her stepson in private. She is of course repudiated violently, and, like the stepmother in *Fingal Rónáin*, though she has been insulted in private she seeks public revenge; however, instead of accusing the hero to his father she seeks revenge through the imposition of *álög*.

The choice of revenge by imposing *álög* rather than by accusing the hero to his father is particularly significant in Iceland, where in most other types of tale it would be normal to expect the female character to play a part more passive than that of the male counterpart. However, in nearly all the Icelandic stepmother tales of this kind, as in most Gaelic folktales, the king's part in the story is complete on his marriage and he has no further part to play. (The main exception in Iceland is *Hrólfs saga kraka* in which the Phædra motif is used, but again in conjunction with the *álög* theme, which in this case results in transformation of the hero. The stepmother approaches her stepson Björn while his father is absent, but Björn repudiates her, so she transforms him into a bear who ravages his father's land. When the father comes home the queen does not accuse the son, nor does she tell the king that the bear is his son, but she incites him to slay it; thus the king is responsible for his son's death, albeit unwittingly.)

When the stepmother actually imposes the *álög* in *Hjálmthés saga* the similarities to the Gaelic tales become very clear—similarities not to the the tales in medieval literary works which contain only very brief versions of the *geasa* formula, but to the oral tales collected in Ireland and Gaelic Scotland during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Reidar Christiansen (1959: 17–18) gives the following examples of *geasa* from Ireland:

> 'I put you' [the stepmother] said, 'under *geasa* and under the affliction of years not to sleep a second night in the same bed, and not to eat a third piece of bread at the same table, until you bring me the head of the Brown Bull of the Western World.'

And as a counter-spell:

> '. . . I request the command according to my bargain, that the queen shall stand on the highest tower of the palace until we come back, or she finds out that we are certainly dead, with nothing but a sheaf of corn for her food and cold water for her drink, if it should be for seven years and longer.'[17]

Similar formulae are found again and again in the folktales, though in Scotland frequently in a more elaborate form. The essential elements are that the hero is not to sleep two nights in one bed or eat two meals from one table until he achieves his quest, while the stepmother is to stand in a high place, more often than not spread-eagled, sometimes between two buildings, with scarcely anything to eat or drink until the hero's return. The stepmother may then suggest that they each lift their curse, but the hero always refuses.

In *Hjálmthés saga*, Lúda says:

> 'I lay it on you that you shall nowhere have peace, neither night nor day, until you see Hervör, the daughter of Hundingr . . .'
>
> He retorts:
>
> 'You shall lay no more on me for your mouth shall stand open, for I think it of no worth to yearn for a king's daughter. There are two high crags standing down by the ship berths. There you shall stand with one foot on each crag, and four of my father's thralls shall kindle a fire beneath you, and on nothing shall you live but what the ravens bring you until I return.'[18]

In *Hjálmthésrímur* the stepmother then suggests the lifting of both curses, but this is, of course, rejected.

In *Hjálmthés saga*, as in the Faroese *Drósin á Girtlandi*, the stepmother's place of punishment is the shore, not a building or buildings as is customary in the Gaelic tales, while in *Thorsteinn Karlsson* she is again condemned to stand straddling natural features, in this case her own elfmound and a mountain. The setting may have been changed to natural features owing to a scarcity of suitable buildings for the stepmother to stand on in Iceland and the Faroes; but in *Illuga saga Grídarfostra* (Jónsson 1954: III. 422), it reverts to buildings. A princess, Grídr, and her daughter are put under *álög* by Grídr's stepmother, Grímhildr: Grídr is to become a troll and the daughter is to live with her. The daughter retaliates, by saying:

> 'I would like, Grímhildr, to pay you for your *álög*, and I declare that with one foot you stand on this bower, and with the other on the king's palace. Thralls shall kindle a fire right between your feet. That fire shall burn both night and day, and below you shall be all burnt by the fire and above you shall freeze, so that you never have peace. But if we, mother and daughter, come free of the *álög*, then you shall die and fall down into the fire.'[19]

In addition to the torments imposed on the villain in the Gaelic tales, two more are to be found in the Norse. One is that she, or he, is to be left with an open mouth. This occurs in *Illuga saga*, in *Ála flekks saga* and in a slightly later romance saga, *Sigrgards saga frækna* (Loth V: 39–107), in which a villainous queen transforms her three step-

daughters (p. 48). The open mouth is not an uncommon Norse motif: dying villains sometimes have their mouths forced open to prevent them speaking and cursing their slayers. The other additional torment is the fire between the villainous woman's legs. This is found in *Hjálmthés saga*, *Ála flekks saga*, *Illuga saga* and the folktale, *Thorsteinn Karlsson*. This is appropriate as a punishment only in *Hjálmthés saga* in which the stepmother is lascivious, but it appears to have become part of the formula in Iceland and this would account for its use in other tales. It may possibly be derived from medieval vision literature describing the punishments of the damned.

In Icelandic folktales a stepmother may be a benevolent character but in most of the medieval literary tales no sympathy is shown for her; she is merely a stock villain. Only very rarely is there any hint of the underlying tensions on which the theme must be based. Her stepsons will take precedence over her own sons, at least by virtue of being older and therefore more powerful. Any desire on her part to marry the heir to avoid being one day dependent on his goodwill, or ousted by his wife, is given no consideration. In the case of a daughter whom the stepmother has ousted in status and position a direct struggle for power is to be expected and this is hinted at in *Sigrgards saga frækna*.

To return to *Hjálmthés saga*, the quest resulting from the imposition of *álög* shows a general correspondence to the Gaelic folktales; and when the destination is reached by the hero, there are some direct correspondences to *The Adventures of Art*. In each tale the lady to be won has a parent with a name derived from the word dog—in Icelandic the father is named Hundingr, from *hundr*, dog, and in Irish the mother is named Coinchend, Dog-Head. In the literature of both countries the name in question occurs elsewhere, and in respect of each tale it has been suggested independently that the name derives ultimately from the mysterious race, the Cynocephali of Isidore of Seville. While the occurrence of such similar names in both stories could be coincidental, it is also possible that it provides a further link between the two.[20] Moreover, in the Irish tale Coinchend is fated to die at the marriage of her daughter, while in *Hjálmthés saga* Hundingr is actually slain during the escape of the heroes and Hervör, and Hervör herself takes a part in his slaying.

Art is obliged to fight Delbchaem's relatives in order to win her; but Hjálmthér and his companions stay a winter at the court of Hervör's father, and during this period they are required to perform certain impossible-seeming tasks which Hjálmthér's magic helper Hördr ensures are done. They then escape with Hervör at a time during which, she has told them, her father will sleep for three days. She accompanies them, but Hundingr's sleep is not sufficiently deep for he pursues them as they journey across the sea and attacks them, in the form of a whale. Hördr, with the assistance of Hervör, defeats him and they continue to a land to which Hördr directs them. Here Hjálmthér and his foster-brother Ölvir leave Hervör and accompany Hördr on a journey. It transpires that Hördr and his two sisters have themselves been under enchantment; they are now released, and Hördr discloses that he himself is a king's son and not a slave as he

appeared to be. The terms of Hjálmthér's enchantment were that he was to yearn for Hervör until he saw her; we may presume that he did so no longer than was required because she now marries Hördr (who actually won her), while Hjálmthér and Ölvir marry Hördr's two sisters. It even turns out that Hördr and his sisters were victims of Hjálmthér's own stepmother.

These episodes may largely be accounted for when the saga is compared with Gaelic versions of the international tale-type AT 313, 'The Girl as Helper in the Hero's Flight', which often open with gaming and *geasa* episodes. In tales of this type the hero is employed by the woman's father and is told to perform certain impossible-seeming tasks, with which the woman gives him magical assistance. When these are completed the two flee together, and the woman uses her knowledge of magic to provide means by which her father is hindered in his pursuit of the couple. The two lovers usually part company for some reason once they have evaded the father, and the hero forgets about the heroine and only recognises her again as he is about to be married to another woman. This confusion, in the folktale, over the bride may have occasioned the change-over at the end of *Hjálmthés saga* when Hervör marries Hördr.

In *The Adventures of Art* the hero returns with Delbchaem to his own land, and his stepmother is driven away. In *Hjálmthés saga*, as in the Gaelic folktales containing the *geasa* formula, she dies on the hero's successful return: in the Gaelic folktales she falls to her death from her tower (unless she has crumbled into dust before he returns), while in the saga she falls into the fire between her legs and dies.

(3) The third kind of tale under consideration is that in which the lady herself puts the hero under *geasa* or *álög* to search for her. In Icelandic literature marriageable women, with the exception of a few who are warriors, are rarely permitted actually to initiate action as opposed to merely inciting their menfolk. It is therefore no surprise that the third theme occurs in only one saga, *Hálfdánar saga Eysteinssonar*, a work probably of the late thirteenth century (Schröder 1917).

The opening episodes of the saga are in fact closer to the medieval Welsh tale *Culhwch and Olwen*, in which the stepmother imposes *geasa* on the hero, than they are to the Gaelic tales already outlined. As in *Hjálmthés saga*, *Hálfdánar saga* opens with a bereaved king, but unlike Hjálmthér's father who mopes until the arrival of the new queen, Hálfdán's father goes to war to cure his grief. He slays a neighbouring king and forcibly marries his wife, as does the king in *Culhwch and Olwen*. The similarities become even closer, for, once the queen in the Welsh tale has discovered the existence of her stepson, she has him brought to court and suggests to him that he marry her daughter; while in *Hálfdánar saga* the woman the hero seeks and finally marries is his stepmother's daughter. While the suggestion made in the Welsh tale is a very rational one it is unusual since the practice in real life was probably subject to canonical objection (see Charles-Edwards 1980: 31). When Culhwch rejects his stepmother's offer she tells

him that he will have no other wife than Olwen, daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant (Jones 1949: 96). He falls in love with her on hearing of her, and so we may assume that he yearns for her until he wins her. Like Coinchend in *The Adventures of Art* Ysbaddaden is fated to die at his daughter's marriage. The stepmother is not referred to again.

In *Hálfdánar saga* the queen falls in love with her new husband and is actually on good terms with her stepson Hálfdán. But her daughter Ingibjörg and Ingibjörg's foster-father arrive at court in disguise, and one day during a ball-game the foster-father throws the ball so that it rolls under the queen's chair. Ingibjörg seeks it and whispers a few words to the queen. That night the queen leaves unlocked the chamber where she and the king sleep and the foster-father slays the king. The same night, Hálfdán comes across Ingibjörg asleep. She has taken off the gloves she usually wears and Hálfdán sees the most beautiful hand he has ever seen and on it a gold ring. He falls asleep and awakes to find her looking at him. She tells him: 'For this hand, ring and glove you will search and yearn, and never find peace until the one who now takes it from you lays it as willingly in your hand again.'[21] She then leaves him. In the morning he discovers that his father has been slain that night, and the quest he goes on is ostensibly for his father's slayer, Ingibjörg's foster-father, but it is clear that under the terms of the *álög* he is searching for Ingibjörg. He in fact arrives at their castle at the critical stage in a battle between the foster-father and certain supernatural enemies. He is reconciled with Ingibjörg and she sends him off to help her foster-father. This has a parallel in the Irish folktale *Loinnir Mac Leabhair*, where the woman gives no explanation when she puts *geasa* on the hero but it transpires when he reaches her land that she requires his aid for her father, who has supernatural enemies. The search by Hálfdán for Ingibjörg's hand, ring and glove has some resemblance to the search of the hero under *geasa* in many versions of *Loinnir Mac Leabhair* for where the heroine put on her shoes and socks that morning.[22]

Conclusion

The tales containing the theme of *geasa* or *álög* are so similar that it must be assumed they are related. From this assumption certain conclusions may be drawn. First, it was the opinion of Sveinsson, who examined only one of the three groups in question, that the tales were Gaelic, not Norse, in origin. The distribution itself strongly indicates that the tales are not native to Scandinavia, while Greene's analysis of the development of the *geasa* theme in early Irish literature indicates that the theme is native to Ireland. Further support is given to Sveinsson's arguments, since not one but three groups of tales containing variants of the *geasa* theme may be distinguished in Iceland, each of which corresponds to variants found in Ireland and Gaelic Scotland, where they appear to have developed from the same pool of tradition.

Secondly, the Icelandic versions of the theme can to some extent be used to date the stages of development of the Gaelic literary and oral tales. We have seen that the earliest

of the written Icelandic versions may date from the twelfth century, while the others were probably composed no earlier than the second half of the thirteenth century. However, the stories must have been in Iceland in oral form for some considerable time before they were used in the prose works, for a certain redistribution of incidents between the three main themes has occurred, and the stories have been adapted to the Norse social and physical setting, and have acquired some additions. While there is some possibility that they reached Iceland early in the post-Viking period, at a time when some contact remained with the Gaelic world, it is much more probable that they arrived there during the Viking Age, the period of the greatest contact. It may be assumed that quite a large number of Gaelic oral tales arrived—if we are to account for the degree of variation found in Iceland in these stories.

If the tales reached Iceland during the Viking Age the Icelandic tales must indicate the stage of development which the Gaelic tales had reached at this time. While the Irish literary tales discussed in the context of the *geasa* theme may be known only from manuscripts that post-date the Viking Age, it can be assumed in many cases that the stories were originally composed in the pre-Viking or Viking period. The origins of the theme, according to Greene, were the concepts of sexual honour invoked by a woman who declares her interest in the hero. When these concepts were lost the supernatural element was added to the invocation of *geasa*. It appears that at the same time the theme of gaming for forfeits was also added to the *geasa* theme, and as a result the character who imposed the *geasa* was no longer required to be a woman with a sexual interest in the hero. Furthermore, once the theme of the hero rejecting the woman's advances ceased to be central to the story, or, indeed to be present at all, there was no need for direct revenge to be taken by the opponent—instead she (or he) could put the hero under *geasa* to undertake an impossible-seeming quest.

The three kinds of tale discussed here all show different ways in which the theme was used. The third kind, in which the presentable woman imposes the *geasa* on the hero to search for herself, and the second kind, which seems to have developed from the use of the Phædra motif, are perhaps more archaic than the first kind, where the opponent is a male stranger whose motive for sending the hero on his quest is neither desire for him nor even necessarily revenge.

All three kinds of tale, though known from modern Gaelic oral tradition, appear to have been in circulation in the Viking Age as they have been preserved in Iceland. This is borne out by the actual wording of the *geasa* or *álög* formula: the forms used in the Icelandic tales are closest, not to the wording found in the Irish literary versions, but to that used in the modern Gaelic oral tales. This formula therefore must also have been in circulation during the Viking Age, and have been used in oral tales not unlike those which survive in Gaelic tradition. In contrast, the tales in the Irish literary accounts, and the forms of the *geasa* formula used there, appear archaic. The stage to which the *geasa* theme had already evolved by the end of the Viking Age is thus reflected in these Icelandic tales.

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NOTES

1 The complete study is 1975b. Reference will be made here to 1975a, a shorter version in English. Sveinsson refers in these two articles to earlier work on the subject by himself and others. Particularly important are the discussions by Lagerholm (1927: lvii-lxvii) and Christiansen (1959: 17-20, 226). Sveinsson (1929: xxviii-xxxiii, 70-8) discusses and summarises the relevant Icelandic folktales, which he classifies as AT556B.

2 The degree of Gaelic (*i.e.* Irish and Scottish) influence on the literature of medieval Iceland has been disputed. The arguments of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are summarised by Theodore M. Andersson in *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins* (New Haven and London 1964) pp. 56-61. A survey of later work on the subject and a discussion of some of the areas in which literary and other relations may be found is by Michael Chesnutt in 'An Unsolved Problem in Old Norse-Icelandic Literary History', *Mediaeval Scandinavia* I (1968): 122-37. See too J. H. Delargy (Séamus Ó Duilearga) *The Gaelic Story-teller* (London 1945. Reprinted from the *Proceedings of the British Academy* pp. 37-43.)

3 The first editor of *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*, Grundtvig, noted the similarities between the openings of the ballad, *Grógaldr*, and of *Culhwch and Olwen*; and Sophus Bugge in an appendix to *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser* (Grundtvig 1853-1976: II. 667-73) noted the relationship to *Fjölvinnsmál*. The ballad is classed as Type A45 in *The Types of the Scandinavian Medieval Ballad*, by Bengt R. Jonsson and others, Skrifter utgivna av Svenskt Visarkiv 5 (Stockholm/Oslo/Bergen/Tromsø 1978), where references to the Swedish and Norwegian versions are given.

4 Other versions include one published by Mackay (1927-8: 14-51); those listed by Mackay (*op. cit*: 7-13); *Folk and Hero Tales*, edited by D. MacInnes, Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition II (London 1890), pp. 94-125; K. C. Craig, *Sgialachdan Dhunnchaidh* (Glasgow [n.d.]; tales collected 1944) pp. 59-72; [J. G. Campbell,] 'Mar a chaidh an Tuairisgeul Mor a chur gu Bàs', *Scottish Celtic Review* I (1881): 61-77; II: 140-1. See too Alfred Nutt, 'Notes on the Tuairisgeul Mòr', *Scottish Celtic Review* II:137-40. (All four volumes of the *Scottish Celtic Review* were later bound together in one. Title page: Glasgow 1885.) Irish versions include: Patrick Kennedy, *Legendary Fictions of the Irish Celts* (London 1866) pp. 255-71 [a translation]; William Larminie, *West Irish Folk-Tales and Romances* (London 1893) pp. 10-30, 252-3 [a translation of a compilation from two informants, used and summarised by Kittredge (1903)]; *Béaloideas* I (1928): 97-106, 276-82; II (1930): 35-46; IV (1934): 155-63, 321-30; V (1935): 293-303; XI (1941): 6-11.

5 References to Irish versions are under Type AT 313 in Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen 1963. See Reidar Th. Christiansen, 'A Gaelic Fairytale in Norway', *Béaloideas* I (1928): 107-14. Occasionally the lady-to-be-sought, rather than the stepmother, puts the *geasa* on the hero—see *Béaloideas* 29 (1961 [1963]): 1-7. Scottish, including Gaelic, versions of AT 313 have been discussed by Hamish Henderson in 'The Green Man of Knowledge', *Scottish Studies* II (1955): 47-85.

6 See Myles Dillon's 'An gadaí dubh: the black thief' in *Tire shrinker to dragster*, Texas Folklore Society Publications 34 (Austin, Texas 1968), pp. 103-16; and *Béaloideas* IV (1934): 182-90; VII (1937): 238-43; X (1940): 152-60 and 200-1. The last example is from *The Royal Hibernian Tales*, a chapbook in English published before 1825. *An Gadaí Dubh*, 'The Black Thief', is sometimes part of Irish versions of AT953, 'The Old Robber Relates Three Adventures', of which 211 versions are listed in Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen 1963.

7 Summarised in Ó Súilleabháin 1942: 605-6 (number 22). It is mentioned by Bruford (1969: 64, 155, 243-4).

8 Summaries of the relevant tales are in Ó Súilleabháin 1942: 594 (number 23—*Céatach*); 602 (numbers 10 and 11); 603 (number 15); see too 590-1 (number 7) and 601 (number 9). Some of these, and other relevant tales are referred to by Bruford (1969: Index, *s.v. geasa*).

9 Several of these have been catalogued under Type AT556B, for which there are only references for Ireland and Iceland. See Ó Súilleabháin and Christiansen 1963. There is no burlesque of the theme in Iceland.

10 The folktale, which is usually known as *Cod, Cead agus Mí-Chead*, is summarised by Ó Súilleabháin (1942: 593 number 21). Printed versions include *Béaloideas* III (1932): 381–7, 397–8; and Mac Giollarnáth (1936: 120–46). There is a discussion in Bruford 1969: 72, 79–84.

11 Summarised by Ó Súilleabháin (1942: 604, number 18) and Bruford (*Béaloideas* XXI (1963 [1965]): 18). Printed versions include Mac Giollarnáth 1936: 1–36, and *Béaloideas* IX (1939): 116–24, 131–2. Some twenty-five versions in Irish have been collected. The story does not appear to have been known in Scotland.

The woman is particularly unfortunate in the related *Tóruigheacht Gruaidhe Griansholus* (edited by Cecile O'Rahilly, Irish Texts Society 24 [London [1922] 1924] pp. 4–15). She arrives in a boat and declares herself to be a princess in flight from a giant. She asks Cúchulainn for aid, but at that moment the giant arrives; kicks Cúchulainn and carries her off. A negative *geis* of Cúchulainn's has here been violated—that a combatant should leave him without his retaliating—so he sets off in pursuit.

12 A hag arrives in a boat, in 'Fionn agus Inghean Rí na Gréige' (*Béaloideas* I [1927]: 97–106). She loses the first game she plays with Fionn and he loses the second. She places him under *geasa* to be her husband for seven years. A man arrives in a boat, in 'Art, King of Leinster' (*Folktales of Ireland*, edited and translated by Sean O'Sullivan [London 1966] pp. 97–117, 266; see especially 107–8). This tale from Kerry is a version of *The Great Tuairisgeal* but the opening episodes show a number of correspondences to *The Adventures of Art*, though the *geasa* theme is not used in this context.

13 A large number of both Scottish and Irish folktales containing the *geasa* formulae are in print and there are many more in manuscript. References to only the more accessible versions are given in this article. Although a number of the versions collected in the nineteenth century are known only in English translation, the stories in question were probably never told in English.

14 In another Icelandic folktale, *Himinbjargar saga*, collected in the eighteenth century, the hero is sent by his dead mother on a quest to trolls. The leader of the trolls is a princess who, together with her eleven companions, has been enchanted by her stepmother. The hero frees her. See *Gráskinna in meiri*, edited by Sigurdur Nordal and Thorbergur Thórdarson (2 vols., Reykjavik 1962) vol. I pp. 26–36. It was summarised by Sveinsson (1929: 70).

15 The views of Kittredge (1903) on the background to the tales containing the werewolf theme were commented on by Nutt (Milne and Nutt 1904: 60–7), Henry Goddard Leach (*Angevin Britain and Scandinavia* [Cambridge, Mass. 1921] pp. 210–15), and Schlauch (1934: 82–3, 102). Bruford (1969: 158–9, 214) discusses the Gaelic versions of the werewolf's tale, which he considers one of a number of modern folktales that are possibly derived from lost literary tales. He notes that there are two œcotypes of the tale in Gaelic folklore. In the œcotype studied by Kittredge the man has been transformed into a wolf by his faithless wife, while in the other, to which all the Scottish versions belong, he is enchanted by his stepmother.

16 For example *The Fians*, edited by John Gregorson Campbell, Waifs and Strays of Celtic Tradition, Argyllshire Series (London 1891) vol. IV pp. 260–79; see especially 260. This tale, a version of *Céatach*, contains a number of relevant motifs.

A very faint resemblance occurs in the opening to the English ballad *Little Sir Hugh*, Number 155, in Francis J. Child, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (5 vols., New York 1892–8) vol. III pp. 233–54.

17 The first has been taken from a Galway tale and the second from *The Royal Hibernian Tales* (*Béaloideas* X (1940): 154). Bruford (1969:196–7) gives examples of *geasa* taken from the medieval and later literature of Ireland and modern Gaelic folk tales. Folktale examples, in addition to those already referred to, include *Béaloideas* I (1928): 382; II (1930): 296–7; III (1933): 448–9; IV (1934): 321–2, further references p. 453; Jeremiah Curtin, *The Hero-Tales of Ireland* (London 1894) p. 96; John F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* (4 vols., London 1960–2) vol. I pp. 1–3, 13–14; vol. II pp. 328–9, 341, 420, 431.

18 'That legg ek á thik, at thú skalt hvergi kyrr thola, hvorki nótt né dag, fyrr en thú sér Hervöru Hundingsdóttur, nema á skipum thínum ok í tjaldi.' The last phrase, which means 'except on your ships and in your tent (or awning)', refers to an episode which has been interpolated into the existing version

of the prose saga, in which Hjálmthér is given a magic tent. This episode comes between the attempted seduction by the stepmother and the *álög*. In Hjálmthésrímur the episode with the tent is absent and is not mentioned in the *álög* formula, which is given directly after the seduction scene.

Hjálmthér's counter-curse is 'Ekki skaltu fleira á mik leggja, thví at kjaftr thinn skal opinn standa, en that thykkir mér einskis vert at threyja eftir eina konungsdóttur. Hamrar hávir standa nidr vid skipalægit. Thar skaltu á stíga sînum fæti, en fjórir thrælar födur míns skulu kynda eld undir thér, en vid ekki skaltu lífa nema that, sem hrafnar færa thér, thar til ek kem aftr.'

19 'Vilda ek, Grímhildr, at ek launadi thér thín álög, og that mæli ek um, at ödrum fæti standir thú á skemmu thessari, en ödrum heima á konungshöll. Thrælar skulu thar kynda bál mitt í milli fóta thér. That bál skal standa bædi nætr ok daga, ok öll skaltu nedan af eldi brenna, en ofan frjósa, at aldri fáirthú thína ró. En ef vit mædgur komumst ór thessum álögum, thá skaltu deyja ok detta ofan í bálit.'

20 In Isidore's *Etymologies* the Cynocephali are a race who have dogs' heads and bark like dogs (Bk. 11 Ch. 3 Section 15). Dillon (1941) discusses the *conchend* in Irish literature. In Norse literature a number of kings have the name Hundingr without having any dog characteristics. In *Sturlaugs saga starfsama* however there is a king Hundólfr who rules Hundingjaland, where the people have chins grown down to their breasts and where they bark like dogs (pp. 19-20). Drawings of the Cynocephali are found in a twelfth-century Icelandic manuscript containing a translation of the *Physiologus*—see *The Icelandic Physiologus*, Facsimile edition, edited by Halldór Hermannsson, *Islandica* XXVII (Ithaca, New York 1938) pp. 13, 14, and unnumbered illustrations. Adam of Bremen, writing in the twelfth century, also mentions a northern land in which men who bark like dogs may be found—see Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen*, translated by Francis J. Tschan (New York 1959), pp. 200-06. This may have provided the source for *Sturlaugs saga starfsama*. Another medieval Icelandic saga, *Sigurdar saga thögla* (Loth: II) also refers to the Cynocephali—the Ceneofali—who bark like dogs and have dogs' heads, and dog-headed men are again referred to in the fourteenth-century compilation *Alfrædi Íslenzk*—for both references see Schlauch 1934: 44-5. A dog-king is mentioned in Book 7 of the Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus—see *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes*, translated by Peter Fisher, edited by Hilda Ellis Davidson and Peter Fisher (2 vols. Cambridge 1979), vol. I p. 220, vol. II pp. 116-17.

21 'Eftir thessari hendi, gulli og glófa skaltu leita ok threyja ok aldri nádir fá, fyrir en sá leggr jafnviljugr aftr í thinn lófa, sem nú tók á burtu' (Schröder 1917: 258).

22 Closely related to *Hálfdánar saga* but without the *álög* theme is *Vilmundar saga vidutan* (Loth: IV. 137-201). In this saga one of the two heroines, while living in the wilds, loses her shoe. Her foster-mother tells her that it is impossible for her to seek it herself for fear of the trolls: the heroine says that she will marry the man who finds it. The conversation is overheard by the hero, who has already found the shoe, so there is no quest. He finally discovers who the lady is and marries her (Loth: IV. 153). There is a possibility that the motif here is another version of the shoes-and-socks motif used in Gaelic tales such as *Loinnir Mac Leabhair*.

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