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The Fiddler and the Waterfall
The Quest for Inspiration in Norwegian Legends of Fiddlers

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Of all the various skills of the rural communities of Northern Europe and North America, those of the midwife[1] and the musician (in particular those of the fiddler, the piper and the Delta blues-guitarist[2]) stand out in the legend tradition for commonly being said to be gifts bestowed on the owner by supernatural beings. This is especially applicable to the legend traditions of Scotland, Ireland and the Nordic countries, and, in the case of fiddle playing, quite understandable when one visits a session at Sandy Bell's and watches the recipient of this *Festschrift* in a session. Perhaps it is something about the eyes and the fingers dancing across the neck of the fiddle.

As those familiar with Scottish legend and fiddle-playing traditions will know, the Northern Isles (and most particularly Shetland), which have close cultural connections with the Nordic world, stand out from other areas in the British Isles with regard to legends and beliefs connecting fiddle music and the supernatural. Many famous fiddle tunes, most of which take the form of fast reels or jigs, are said to have originated from the trows – the Shetlandic equivalent of the Norwegian *huldre*, the Icelandic *álfar* and *huldufólk*, and the Irish fairies.[3] As Katherine Campbell has noted in her excellent book on the Scottish fiddle tradition, the legends in question can largely be divided into two types. In one of these, people hear (and learn) magical trow tunes while walking through a liminal space between farms, often when passing a grave mound or knowe or other archaeological remains such as a stone circle or broch at night, during the autumn or winter, perhaps after a dance or other festive gathering. In the other type, fiddlers returning home (often after dances) are taken into such mounds to play for the trow inhabitants. Here they learn new tunes and other supernatural fiddling skills, and sometimes even gain new instruments. In some cases, they find they have unwittingly stayed with the trows for a number of years, discovering when they eventually return home that the world has changed radically.[4] In his list of Scottish migratory legends, Donald Archie MacDonald classed these two legend types as F101 ('Fairies Teach Piping')/ F102 ('Fairy Song A] or Tune B] Overheard and Learned'); and F24 ('Fiddler Enlisted to Play for Fairy Dancers')/ F21 ('Visit to Fairyland: Visitor Returns after Days, or, more often, Years'.[5]

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[1] Bo Almqvist, 'Midwife to the Fairies (ML 5070) in Icelandic Tradition', in *Legends and Landscape: Articles Based on Plenary Papers Presented at the 5th Celtic-Nordic-Baltic Folklore Symposium*, ed. Terry Gunnell (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2008), 273–322, and references cited there. See also Terry Gunnell, 'The Supernatural Power of Art: Potential Parallels between Skálds, Norwegian Fiddle Players and Robert Johnson', forthcoming.

[2] For example, Robert Johnson and the myth of the crossroads; see Patricia R. Schroeder, *Robert Johnson: Mythmaking and Contemporary American Culture* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 27–42.

[3] Katherine Campbell, *The Fiddle in Scottish Tradition* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007), 102–24 and notes; Ernest Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2004), 34–5; and James R. Nicholson, *Shetland Folklore* (London: Robert Hale, 1981), 76–7 on the various tunes.

[4] Campbell, *The Fiddle in Scottish Tradition*, 102–52.

[5] Donald Archie MacDonald, 'Migratory Legends of the Supernatural in Scotland: A General Survey' in *Sounds from the Supernatural*: *Béaloideas* 62/63 (1994/95), 46, 54–5, and 69. For examples of F24 (sometimes containing

The fact that these legends are mainly found in the Northern Isles and are comparatively rare in England and Ireland (see n. 5 above) raises the possibility that they might have a provenance in Scandinavia, even though, as Alan Bruford notes, the fiddle only became popular in Shetland in the eighteenth century, by which time firm political and cultural ties between Norway and Shetland had been broken for several centuries.[6] Katherine Campbell, drawing on Bruford's earlier conclusions and referring to various translated collections of Nordic folk legends, states quite firmly that 'the Shetland form of the tradition, in which music and musical skills are learned from fairies rather than watersprites, clearly has Scottish rather than Scandinavian traditions…'..[7] To my mind, however, bearing in mind the paucity of material outside Scotland and the focus on Shetland and Orkney, this idea needs a little more attention.

Certainly, clear differences in form exist between the surviving legends from the Northern Isles and the most well-known and widespread migratory legends about fiddlers found in mainland

F21) from Shetland and Orkney, see Campbell, *The Fiddle in Scottish Tradition*, 128–40; Marwick, *The Folklore of Orkney and Shetland*, 34–5; Nicholson, *Shetland Folklore*, 76–7; Alan Bruford and Donald A. MacDonald, *Scottish Traditional Tales* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1994), 331–2 and 472–3 ('The Fiddler o Gord'), and 327–30 and 472 (an example from Glenfinnan); Lawrence Tulloch, *Shetland Folk Tales* (Stroud: The History Press, 2014), 50–3 ('The Fiddler and the Cows), and *The Foy and Other Folk Tales* (Lerwick: The Shetland Times, 2016), 17–22 ('Robbie Anderson'); Tom Muir, *Orkney Folk Tales* (Stroud, The History Press, 2014), 46–9 ('The Fiddler and the Trow') and *The Mermaid Bride and Other Orkney Tales* (Kirkwall: The Orcadian Limited (Kirkwall Press), 1998), 47–50 ('Tam Bichan and the Trow'). For examples of F101/ F102, see Campbell, *Fiddle in Scottish Tradition*, 104–24. Cape Breton storyteller Joe Neil MacNeil told of a family that acquired its fiddling skills – and a fiddle bow – as a gift from a fairy woman the grandfather met on the way home from a wedding; see Joe Neil MacNeil, *Tales Until Dawn: Sgeul gu Latha*, trans. and ed. John Shaw (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1987), 430–431. Various scholars have noted that even outside the Northern Isles in Scotland, such legends are often related to piping tunes: see Lizanne Henderson and Edward J. Cowan, *Scottish Fairy Belief* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2004), 83–4; Campbell, *The Fiddle in Scottish Tradition*, 124–5; and Alan Bruford, 'Trolls, Hillfolk, Finns and Picts: The Identity of the Good Neighbours inn Orkney and Shetland' in *The Good People*: *New Fairylore Essays*, ed. Peter Narváez (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 125–6. Examples of similar legends in Ireland exist, but they are few in number: see Bo Almqvist, 'Crossing the Border: A Sampler of Irish Migratory Legends about the Supernatural', in *The Fairy Hill Is on Fire! Proceedings of the Symposium on the Supernatural in Irish and Scottish Migratory Legends. Béaloideas* 59 (1991), 271, on the MLSIT legend, 'Music Taught by Fairies' (closely related to F101/ F102), examples of which can be found in Kevin Danaher, *Folktales of the Irish Countryside* (Cork: Mercier Press, 1967), 49–51 ('The Magic Fiddle', on a magic fiddle and a magic fiddle tune); and Eddie Lenihan with Carolyn Eve Green, *Meeting the Other Crowd* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2003), 68–9 ('A Musician's Story' on some 'windy, 'twisty' unplayable music heard by a musician one night). Both types of legend are naturally related to motifs G303.25.17.2 ('Playing for the Devil's Dances'), and F262 ('Fairies Make Music') in Stith Thompson's *Motif Index of Folk Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1955–58).

[6] Bruford, 'Trolls, Hillfolk, Finns and Picts', 130. See also Mary Anne Alburger, 'The Fiddle', in *Scottish Life and Society: A Compendium of Scottish Ethnology*, vol. 10: *Oral Literature and Performance Culture*, ed. John Beech, et al., 239, 250 and 263–4. Connections were weakening in the fifteenth century. As Brian Smith has noted to the author in a private communication, there was little economic or intellectual contact between Shetland and any part of Scandinavia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries: see Terry Gunnell, *The Origins of Drama in Scandinavia* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1995), 179.

[7] Campbell, *The Fiddle in Scottish Tradition*, 127–8 and 170–1. See also Reidar Th. Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends: A Proposed List of Types with a Systematic Catalogue of the Norwegian Variants*, Folklore Fellows Communications 175 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia/ Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1958); Jacqueline Simpson, ed. and trans., *Scandinavian Folktales* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988); and Reimund Kvideland and Henning Sehmsdorf, ed. and trans., *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

Scandinavia (mainly Norway and Sweden, rather than Denmark, along with large parts of Finland).[8] Such accounts typically describe people learning the fiddle, such as the man who encounters a male supernatural figure in a waterfall, who, on certain conditions, agrees to teach the visitor to play the instrument, often passing on to him a particularly powerful tune that has the potential to make the furniture move, and people lose their wits, sometimes forcing them to dance down to the water.[9] The supernatural figure in question is variously named *Fossegrimen* (Norwegian: 'the waterfall spirit'), *Näcken* (Swedish: 'a water spirit', cf. Old Icelandic *nykr*), *Strömkarlen* (Swedish: 'the rapids/water current man'), *Strömtussen* (Swedish: 'the rapids/water current spirit'); *Forsgubben* or *Forskarlen* (both Swedish: 'the waterfall man'), *Kvarngubben* (Swedish: 'the watermill man'), *kosenhaltia* (Finnish: 'the spirit of the rapids'), or even – in parts of Sweden and Finland – the Devil.[10]

[8] For an overview of the distribution of the various types of legend, see Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 77–80; Bengt af Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend,* Folklore Fellows Communications 300 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia/ Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2010), 125–7; and Åke Campbell and Åsa Nyman, eds, *Atlas över svensk folkkultur/Atlas of Swedish Folk Culture*, II: *Sägen, tro och högtidssed / Popular Beliefs, Legends and Calendar Customs* 1 (Kartor), 24–7 (maps XI–XII on 'Waterspirits in the Shape of Men: Names'; and 'Waterspirits in the Shape of Men: Teachers of Fiddler'), and 2 (Kommentar), 65–79 (commentary by Åsa Nyman); legends largely found in the south-west of Finland, closest to Sweden, are described in Marjatta Jauhiainen, *The Type and Motif Index of Finnish Belief Legends*, Folklore Fellows Communications 267 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia/ Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1998), 130, 207 and 260. Nyman's commentary on 'Vattenväsen i manlig gestalt /Waterspirits in the shape of men' (Campbell and Nyman, *Atlas*, 67) notes that legends of supernatural music teachers are not known in Denmark or elsewhere on the continent.

[9] The tune in question has a variety of names, such as *älvaspelet* or *älvaleken* (both mean 'the river tune'); *älvadansen* ('the river dance'); *strömkarlns polska* ('the strömkarl's polka'); *näckens polska* ('the näck's polka'); *fans polska* ('the Devil's polka'): see Bengt af Klintberg *Svenska folksägner*, (Stockholm: PAN/ Nordstedt, 1972), 100–102, and Simpson, *Scandinavian Folktales*, 231. Nyman discusses further names, including *fans polska*, in 'Vattenväsen' (69 and 72–3), noting (73) that the word *älven* (usually 'river') can also apply to the supernatural figure, blending with the Old Norse word *álfr* (lit. 'elf'). On the inducement of madness and how the tune could make tables and benches dance, a motif that goes back to the Middle Ages (Nyman, 'Vattenväsen', 67 and 71), see also Olaf Bø et al., eds, *Norske segner* (Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget, 1981), 86–8; af Klintberg, *Svenska folksägner*, 100; Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, *Scandinavian Folk Belief*, 254–5; and Arne Bjørndal and Brynjulf Alver, *– og fela ho let –: Norsk spelmannstradisjon* (Bergen: Universitetsforlaget, 1985), 156–8, who give a possible explanation of the phenomenon. John Lindow's translation of 'The Näck's Reel' from Småland in Sweden paints a wonderful picture: 'both barrels and benches were dancing in the parlor […] they were panting like bull-frogs, and barrels and chairs and cupboards and benches were dancing wildly, and even the cat, who had been lying against the wall, had to join in, and no one could stop'; see John Lindow, *Swedish Folktales and Legends* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 117–8. The motif itself is closely related to wonder tale type ATU 592 ('The Dance Among Thorns') in Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales*, and has parallels in the skills of the Pied Piper of Hamelin as well as the legends of the unstoppable legendary dance at Kölbigk in Germany and Hårga in Sweden; see Dag Strömbäck, 'Den underbara årsdansen', *Arv* 59 (1944): 111–26, and 'Kölbigk och Hårga I', *Arv* 17 (1961): 1–48. (Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this article are those of the author.)

[10] The most common widespread names seem to be *Fossegrimen* and *Näcken*, a word which is also used for a water-horse in Norway (*nökken*) and Iceland (*nykur*). As Nyman notes ('Vattenväsen', 66), the Swedish names *Strömkarlen*, *Forsgubben* and *Kvarngubben* are more commonly found in the north of the country. See also Campbell and Nyman, *Atlas* II: 1: map XI, 'Waterspirits in the Shape of Men: Names'. On the Devil, see Bjørndal and Alver, *– og fela ho let*, 155; Jauhiainen, *Index of Finnish Belief Legends*, 207; and Lindow, *Swedish Folktales and Legends*, 118. As Nyman notes ('Vattenväsen', 66), the involvement of the Devil in these legends was probably a late development as the church tried to suggest that all supernatural entities were fallen angels or fundamentally demonic. The relationship is also implied by another migratory legend in which the waterfall spirit, viewed as a fallen angel, is heard crying because it has no chance of salvation: see Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 88–90 (ML 5050: 'The Fairies' Prospect of Salvation'); also Nyman, 'Vattenväsen', 68.

Classified in Norway by Christiansen as Migratory Legend (ML) 4090 ('Watersprite Teaches Someone to Play') and in Sweden by af Klintberg as Swedish legend types F111-30 ('Water Spirit [*Näck, Strömkarl*] as Master Musician'), the legend in question specifies a number of strict conditions.[11] The setting must be right, such as a north-flowing river, or a waterfall where four rivers meet like a cross.[12] The nocturnal timing of such incidents is commonly three Thursday nights, but may also coincide with turning points of the year such as Christmas, Midsummer and New Year. Various types of sacrifice can be required of the would-be musician, from the 'top limb of the fiddler' (af Klintberg type F117), to three drops of blood (af Klintberg type F112); a black animal – often a cat (af Klintberg type F111); and a good leg of lamb (af Klintberg type F113) – which, if it is too small or already gnawed, will ensure that the fiddler, if he learns anything at all, will only learn how to tune his instrument.[13] As the strict conditions suggest, the activity is fraught with danger. Some Swedish and Finnish legends stress the need for student and teacher to attach their belts to each other, the teacher's plan being to drag the student into the waterfall or rapids with him at the end of the class, with the student only escaping by cutting his own belt at the last minute.[14] On occasion, the fiddler will also gain a new instrument with supernatural qualities.[15]

As several scholars have noted, the motif is likely to be very old, and was originally connected with harp playing.[16] Indeed, according to Åsa Nyman, the oldest example of a music-playing *näck* is found amongst other mythical beings on a painting from c. 1475 in Hävarä church in Uppland, Sweden.[17] Perhaps most interesting, however, is a line from the fourth stanza of the poem *Jómsvíkingadrápa* composed by Bjarni Kolbeinsson (1150/60–1222/3), Bishop of Orkney (1188–1222/3), preserved in the Codex Regius manuscript of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* from the early fourteenth century.[18] The line, part of an attestation by the poet that his skills are all human rather than gained by supernatural means, runs as follows: *varkak fróðr und forsum* (lit: 'I was/ did not become not wise under waterfalls'), implying that the poet knows of others who believed they had attained knowledge – apparently relating to poetic inspiration – by visiting waterfalls. It deserves to be placed alongside an account in the early

[11] Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 77–80; af Klintberg, *Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*, 125–7.
[12] This is naturally reminiscent of the Robert Johnson legend.
[13] On these conditions, see further Bjørndal and Alver, *– og fela ho let*, 153–6; Christiansen, *The Migratory Legends*, 77–80; Jauhiainen, *Index of Finnish Belief Legends*, 207; and Nyman, 'Vattenväsen', 69–70. For examples of these legends, see af Klintberg, *Svenska folksägner*, 100–3 ('Farligt att hora älvaspelet', 'Näcken skulle ha en svart katt'; 'Näcken stämde fiolerna, 'En blodsdroppe i lön för spelkonsten', 'De dansande kunde inte sluta', 'Älvdansen', and 'Det avgnagda köttbenet'), and 298–300 (notes); Bø, et al., *Norske segner*, 86–8 ('Fossegrimen') and 264 (notes); Rikard Berge, *Norsk sogukunst* (Oslo: Noregs boklag, 1976), 121 ('Fossegrimen'); Bjørndal and Alver, *– og fela ho let*, 153–67; and Nyman, 'Vattenväsen'. For translations, see Simpson, *Scandinavian Folktales,* 230–31 ('The Näck's Fiddle', 'The Dancers Could Not Stop'); Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, *Scandinavian Folk Belief*, 253–6 ('Learning to Play the Fiddle', 'He Gave a Gnawed Off Bone to the Water Sprite', 'They Had to Keep Dancing'); and Lindow, *Swedish Folktales and Legends*, 117–9 ('The Näck's Reel'). For a map of the distribution of the various motifs, see Campbell and Nyman, *Atlas*, II: 1: map XII 'Waterspirits in the Shape of Men: Teachers of Fiddlers'; and maps 12 and 13 in Nyman, 'Vattenväsen' on the effects of the music. For other articles on the subject, see Maja Bergstrand, 'Näcken som musikaliskt väsen', *Folkminnen och folktankar* 23 (1936): 14–31, and Jören Sahlgren, 'Strömkarlen spelar', *Nam och bygd* 23 (1935): 42–55.
[14] See af Klintberg, *The Types of the Swedish Folk Legend*, 126 (F118); Jauhiainen, *Index of Finnish Belief Legends*, 207 (Type E 1051); and 260 (type L51); Nyman, 'Vattenväsen', 70; af Klintberg, *Svenska folksägner*, 101.
[15] Nyman, 'Vattenväsen', 70; Bjørndal and Alver, *– og fela ho let*, 155.
[16] Nyman, 'Vattenväsen', 67; Bjørndal and Alver, *– og fela ho let*, 154; Sahlgren, 'Strömkarlen spelar'.
[17] Nyman, 'Vattenväsen', 67.
[18] For the verse in question, see https://skaldic.org/m.php?p=text&i=1122.

twelfth-century Icelandic *Landnámabók* ('Book of Settlements'), which tells of a man living in Rangá in southern Iceland called Þorsteinn *rauðnefur* ('red-nose') Hrólfsson, who apparently made sacrifices to waterfalls – a detail that offers an interesting early parallel to the later legendary accounts mentioned above of fiddlers offering blood-sacrifices of various kinds.[19]

The implications of the above are that the later legends telling of supernatural music teachers, which many Nordic fiddlers seem to have told about themselves, and even believed in,[20] developed from a central belief, also known in Orkney at an early point, that running water – particularly in the form of waterfalls – had the potential of providing artistic inspiration, something that brings us back to the number of Shetland legends which refer to running water in the form of streams, watermills or the shore.[21] Indeed, as Arne Bjørndal and Brynjulf Alver note in their central work on Norwegian fiddling traditions, it is natural that one should hear music in waterfalls or mill stones.[22] The same idea is echoed in Tommy Goudie's account of the Trowie Burn between Lerwick and Skalloway, quoted by Katherine Campbell:

> Here it is said that you could hear the sound of fiddles playing, but Tommy Goudie explained that 'mainly it was the water running over the stones and making a nice tinkling sound'. This was meant to be the fiddles. He continued: 'Quite often, I think, people, well I know my mother once said that once coming from a wedding, walking home, and they went past there and of course the music was still in their ears, as you might say, the fiddle music, and they sat down there and they thought they could hear the fiddles playing'.[23]

This brings us back Scottish legend type F102 ('Fairy Song or Tune Overheard and Learned') and the knowes and gravemounds that are so often associated with fiddler legends and music in Shetland and Orkney. Here, too, it is hard to ignore very strong parallels in Norway, Sweden and even Denmark.[24] As I have noted in an earlier article, a widespread belief existed in Norway, Denmark, Shetland and Orkney that farm grave mounds were the home of protecting spirits. In Norway, these were probably initially viewed as being the spirits of Bronze or Iron Age forefathers who cleared the land and later came to be referred to as *nisse* or *tomte*, and even came to be connected to the more widespread underground nature spirits known as *huldre* or *underjordiske*.[25] In Norwegian legends, as in Shetland and Orkney lore, grave mounds may

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[19] Jakob Benediktsson, ed., *Landnámabók*, in *Íslenzk fornrit* (Reykjavik: Hið islenzka fornritafélag, 1968), 358. The earliest manuscripts (Sturlabók manuscript, ch. 313; Hauksbók manuscript, ch. 313) date to the second half of the thirteenth century.

[20] See Bjørndal and Alver, – *og fela ho let*, 158. Nyman ('Vattenväsen', 69) notes how often *bygdens berömda spelmän sags ha lärt sig spela eller ha haft fiöl stämd av det övernaturliga väsendet eller annars ha haft förbindelse med detsamma* ('the community's most renowned fiddle players would say they had learned from, or had their fiddle tunes by the supernatural being, or had some other connection with them'), adding that *Mången spelman sökta själv bättra på ett sådant rykte genom att utnyttja folktron* ('many players sought to improve themselves by using such a rumour, making use of folk beliefs'). One is once again drawn to think of the blues players like Robert Johnson.

[21] Campbell, *The Fiddle in Scottish Tradition*, 108–10, 115–8, 149; Nicholson, *Shetland Folklore* (on Gilbert Laurensen learning 'Old Gibbie's Tune' in a mill). See also Muir, *The Mermaid Bride*, 48 ('Tam Bichan and the Trow'), where it is noted that 'the strip between high and low water is the domain of the Devil and all of his subjects', and underlined that it was here that Tam met a mound dweller when walking home one 'Johnsmas'.

[22] Bjørndal and Alver, – *og fela ho let*, 164.

[23] Campbell, *The Fiddle in Scottish Tradition*, 117.

[24] Nyman, 'Vattenväsen', 67.

[25] Terry Gunnell, 'Nordic Folk Legends, Folk Traditions and Grave Mounds: The Value of Folkloristics for the Study of Old Nordic Religions', in *New Focus on Retrospective Methods: Resuming Methodological Discussions: Case Studies from Northern Europe,* ed. Eldar Heide and Karen Bek-Pedersen, 17–41 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia / Academica Scientiarum Fennica, 2014).

be associated with music which is heard within and can sometimes be learnt. Bjørndal and Alver note a number of legends, commonly memorates, that tell of people – usually musicians, but sometimes women – walking home after playing at a dance and hearing strange, wonderful music often issuing from a grave mound, and they learn the music; in the Nordic legends they rarely enter the mound.[26]

Comparatively typical is a late nineteenth-century memorate from Sogn telling of how music could often be heard coming from a local gravemound in which a *huldre* man lived with his family:

> *... me høyrde slik utruleg fin klang inni denne haugen, slikt framifraa felespil, at det baade var til aa verta glade og sorgal af. Som eg segjer: det var reint makalaust altsaman... [...] høyde me berre kor indarleg fint dei spilade derinne.*
>
> … we heard these unbelievably fine sounds in the mound, such excellent fiddle playing, that it could make you both happy and sad at once. And as I said: it was all without equal. […] we could hear them playing such wonderful music playing in there.[27]

As with the Shetland tunes,[28] the tunes said to be learnt from such experiences are often famous, as with the tunes 'Fornesbrunen', from Telemark; 'Tusseslåtten' (lit. 'the spirit air'), said to have been heard in the mountains; and 'Malmangernuten' which was reportedly heard on the way to a wedding.[29] A fine example of this type of legend – once again related to water – is 'She Whistled the Tune', told by a woman from Setesdal in Aust-Agder:

> Once I was sitting by Women's Creek, tending cattle. I clearly heard a *grim* playing a tune. As soon as he had finished, I ran home and whistled the tune to my husband, who, at that time, was still a bachelor and a fiddler.[30]

Since the legends of this type are often short, one can understand why they were not included in Christiansen's *Migratory Legends* as a type.

Like Shetland legends of the F101/102 and the F21/F24 type, their Nordic counterparts focus on the learning of music skills and/or particular tunes. Norwegian legends of this kind typically describe musicians, often on their way home from playing at a wedding or other festive gathering, journeying through the wild, through liminal space, and often at a liminal time; these journeys usually take place at night, and often, as with the legends of music teachers, at a turning point in the year. [31] As Bjørndal and Alver note, one can understand how such memorates come about, with adrenaline, exhaustion and the mental echoes of repetitive tunes combining with beliefs about gravemounds and nature

[26] Similar legends are also noted in Sweden, but are commonly related to waterfalls or rivers. Af Klintberg classes them as common Swedish legend types F120 ('Fidder Hears the *Näck*'s Tune') and F121 ('Bewildered by Hearing the *Näck* Playing'). See af Klintberg, *Types of the Swedish Legend*, 127.
[27] Olav Sande, *Segner frå Sogn* (Bergen: Bokreidingslag, 1992), 68–9.
[28] See Campbell, *The Fiddle in Scottish Tradition*, 117.
[29] Bjørndal and Alver, *– og fela ho let*, 160-3.
[30] Trans. Kvideland and Sehmsdorf, *Scandinavian Folk Belief and Legend*, 254.
[31] Regarding liminal spaces in legends, see Gunnell, 'Narratives, Space and Drama: Essential Spatial Aspects Involved in the Performance and Reception of Oral Narrative', *Folklore: An Electronic Journal of Foklore* 33 (2006), 7–26; 'Legends and Landscape in the Nordic Countries', *Cultural and Social History* 6.3 (2009), 305–22; 'An Invasion of Foreign Bodies: Legends of Washed Up Corpses in Iceland', in *Eyðvinur*: *Heiðursrit til Eyðun Andreassen*, ed. Malan Marnersdóttir, Jens Cramer og Arnfinnur Johansen (Tórshavn: Føroyja Fróðskaparfelag, 2005), 70–9; and 'On the Border: The Liminality of the Sea Shore in Icelandic Folk Legends of the Past', in *Northern Atlantic Islands and the Sea: Seascapes and Dreamscapes,* ed. Andrew Jennings, Silke Reeploeg and Angela Watt (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017), 10–31.

spirits and with the natural sounds of the landscape, especially when water is involved.[32] This pattern is effectively outlined by Honko, whose important article 'Memorates and the Study of Folk Beliefs' describes how strange experience is interpreted in a narrative by reference to existing cultural concepts, cultural vocabulary and local tradition.[33]

Considering the above evidence from the Northern Isles, particularly that of the early linkage between artistic inspiration and waterfalls in Orkney legends, I think it likely that stories asserting the supernatural origins of fiddling skills and tunes goes back to a shared Nordic, rather than mainland Scottish, tradition which has developed over the centuries in slightly different directions in line with other local folk narrative forms. In Scotland, the account has clearly become connected with those Gaelic legends telling of a hero entering a fairy hill or mound where he stays, playing or dancing, for a number of years before returning. In the Nordic countries, the basic idea of artistic inspiration being associated with waterfalls has become personified in the idea of the demonic supernatural teacher of the waterfall, who receives blood sacrifices like those apparently offered in ancient Iceland for other purposes. In both cases, the fiddle is clearly a comparatively late feature of the accounts, taking over from other skills such as poetry or harp-playing.

Perhaps most interesting is the way in which, as noted above, musicians in both the Northern Isles and the Nordic countries not only actively passed on these traditions, but believed in the accounts they told. As Bjørndal and Alver note, Norwegian musicians would sometimes make use of the legends and beliefs associated with them to gain a well-deserved break from a long session by threatening to play the supernatural tune they had learnt – something which could have dire consequences. Often, it was told, the only way to bring a halt to such a dangerous melody was to cut the strings of the fiddle.[34]

At the heart of all of the legends, we find human wonder at the musician's art and the physical effect that music can have on both players and listeners – an emotion often expressed in legends describing Northern Isles fiddlers, which tell how 'spring after spring flowed effortlessly from his fiddle, and he found himself playing tunes he had never heard before';[35] or how 'the music that flowed from his fiddle was an intoxicating as wine, […] strange tunes they had never heard before';[36] or how one fiddler was 'playing the fiddle like a demon. His fingers flew over the strings as if they had a life of their own'.[37]

As Bjørndal and Alver suggest:

> *Musikken og opphavet til musikken høyrde til det usanselege og det dulde. Spelemannen vart på vis sett på som ein heksemeister, og slåttane hans var trollskap sem han hadde lært av underjordsfolket.*
>
> Music and the origin of music belonged to the field of the unseen and the mystical. The fiddler was in some ways seen as a magician, his tunes being a magical skill that he had attained from the people of the underworld.

To this degree, we are essentially talking about an attempt to put into words the eternal, universal question of where art originates. The suggestion that the answer lives in liminality, in nature and with the forefathers is surely as good as any.

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[32] Bjørndal and Alver, *– og fela ho let*, 161–4; also Campbell, *The Fiddle in Scottish Tradition*, 150.
[33] Lauri Honko, 'Memorates and the Study of Folk Beliefs' in *Nordic Folklore: Recent Studies*, ed. Reimund Kvideland and Henning K. Sehmsdorf (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 100–109.
[34] Bjørndal and Alver, *– og fela ho let*, 156–60.
[35] Tulloch, *The Foy and Other Folk Tales*, 19 ('Robbie Andersen').
[36] Muir, *Orkney Folk Tales*, 48–9 ('The Fiddler and the Trow').
[37] Muir, *The Mermaid Bride*, 48 ('Tam Bichan and the Trow').

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