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A Different Story

The Fairy Tale in Old Norse Literature

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Abstract

Responding to the rapid growth of interest in the intersections between folklore and Old Norse literature in the field of Old Norse studies in recent years, this study aims at renewing and expanding the discussion on the relation between the fairy tale and medieval Icelandic literature. This scholarly discourse reached its peak around 1900 but declined in the twentieth century when the closely related fields of folkloristics and medieval studies separated and diverged in their research goals. Although the interest in the folkloric method and approach has returned to Old Norse studies, the fairy tale and its connections to Old Norse literature have not gained much interest so far. Meanwhile, the field of folkloristics has turned its back on the historical development of folktales after spurious claims on a literary origin of the fairy tale sparked a fierce debate amongst folklorists and scholars of literature in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

The present thesis engages and revisits prior discourses on fairy tales and their medieval counterparts. It aims at examining fairy-tale material in medieval Icelandic saga texts and clarifying whether entire tale types or smaller narrative units similar to fairy-tale motifs can be found. To what extent does fairy-tale material in Icelandic saga literature equal its much more recent counterpart from the nineteenth century, and to what degree do they differ? Finally, some discussion on the possible meaning and purpose of those fairy-tale elements will follow in the concluding chapter of this thesis. The present PhD thesis constitutes an article-based dissertation (compilation thesis) and consists of three peer-reviewed articles, all of which have been accepted for publication. The three papers provide case studies examining the relation between fairy-tale material and Icelandic saga literature. The introductory chapter and the concluding chapter of this thesis will provide a thorough introduction to the scholarly background as well as a final discussion, putting the findings in a broader perspective.

Overall, the results suggest that fairy tales as we know them today looked different in medieval times, arguably due to their undergoing literary treatment and adaptation by medieval writers. However, despite their differences with modern fairy tales, they usually display the same core principles and symbolic language as later fairy tales, namely, by metaphorically hinting at the cyclic logic of enchantment and disenchantment. The recurring and stable motifs concerning the displacement and substitution of the hero/heroine, as well as the identification of the rightful heir or romantic match by recognition tokens, suggest that the fairy tale had an important role to play in the conception and production of medieval Icelandic sagas and cannot be waved aside as a more recent and less meaningful addition by later writers or compilers of Icelandic sagas.

Ágrip

Í þeirri ritgerð sem nú er lögð fram til doktorsprófs við Háskóla Íslands verður leitast við að rannsaka og leggja fram ný rök í umræðunni um tengsl ævintýra og íslenskra miðaldabókmennta, ekki síst í ljósi sívaxandi áhuga á tengslum þjóðfræðaefnis og norrænna miðaldabókmennta hin síðari ár. Rannsóknin, sem er þá eins konar innlegg í yfirstandandi umræðu, á sér þó einnig sögulegan grunn, í fræðilegri umræðu sem náði hápunkti sínum um aldamótin 1900. Á 20. öld dró á hinn bóginn verulega úr samanburðarrannsóknum miðaldabókmennta og ævintýra, þegar hin tvö svo mjög skyldu fög, þjóðfræði og bókmenntafræði, greindust að og þróuðu með sér áherslur í ólíkar áttir. En jafnvel þótt áhugi miðaldafræðinga á aðferðum þjóðsagnafræðinnar hafi aukist aftur, eins og mörg dæmi sýna, hafa nýjar rannsóknir enn ekki náð, nema að litlu leyti, til ævintýra og tengsla þeirra við eldri texta. Á sama tíma hafa fræðimenn innan þjóðsagnafræðinnar snúið baki við kenningum um fornar rætur ævintýra og til að mynda hafa nýlegar kenningar um bókmenntalegan uppruna ævintýra getið af sér harðar deilur á milli þjóðfræðinga og bókmenntafræðinga.

Í ritgerðinni er leitast við að varpa ljósi á þá víðu rannsóknarsögu sem að baki liggur, auk þess að gera grein fyrir mismunandi viðhorfum fræðimanna til þeirra eininga innan ævintýra síðari alda sem eiga sér hliðstæður í miðaldaheimildum. Markmiðið er að greina þetta ævintýraefni og sýna með hvaða hætti það birtist okkur í hinum eldri textum, og hvort um er að ræða heilar ævintýragerðir eða smærri frásagnareiningar á borð við minni (e. motifs). Spurt er að hvaða marki þetta efni sé sambærilegt yngri tilbrigðum úr þeim ævintýrum sem skráð voru eftir munnlegri geymd á 18. og 19. öld og hvernig það greinist að? Að lokum verður leitast við að varpa ljósi á merkingu ævintýraefnis í íslenskum miðaldabókmenntum, sem og tilgang þeirra sagnaritara sem nýttu sér efni úr ranni ævintýranna í bókmenntaverk sín.

Doktorsritgerðin er safn greina og samanstendur af þremur ritrýndum fræðigreinum sem hafa allar verið birtar eða samþykktar til birtingar. Í greinunum eru tekin fyrir afmörkuð dæmi (e. case studies) í þeim tilgangi að sýna fram á tilvist ævintýraefnis í íslenskum miðaldabókmenntum. Í ritgerðinni sjálfri er efni greinanna þriggja svo tengt saman og sett í víðara samhengi. Í inngangskafli og lokakafli er farið yfir aðferðafræði og kenningagrunn heildarverksins, dregið er saman efni greinanna, og settar fram heildarályktanir.

Á heildina séð sýna niðurstöður rannsóknarinnar að ævintýri, eins og við þekkjum þau og skilgreinum í dag, birtast okkur með öðru móti í miðaldaheimildum, ekki síst vegna þess að höfundar bókmenntaverka aðlöguðu þau að því bókmenntaformi sem þeir unnu með. Þrátt fyrir að skera sig þannig frá ævintýrum síðari alda, fela þessir þættir þó yfirleitt í sér sömu grundvallarlögmál og sams konar táknmál og finna má í hinum hefðbundnu ævintýrum, t.d. í því hringlaga frásagnarmynstri sem á sér stað þegar álög eru lögð á söguhetju og þegar þeim er aflétt. Þá benda hin algengu og stöðluðu frásagnarminni er varða röskun á félagslegri stöðu söguhetju, jafnt sem staðfestingu á réttmætri stöðu hennar eða vali á viðeigandi maka með einhvers konar kennitáknum, til þess að ævintýrið sem slíkt hafi gegnt umtalsverðu hlutverki þegar kom að sköpun íslenskra miðaldabókmennta og úrvinnslu þess efnis sem lá þeim að baki. Í ljósi þessara niðurstaðna er ótækt að hunsa tilvist þessa mikilvæga þáttar bókmenntanna eða afgreiða hann sem ung og merkingarlítill áhrif úr munnlegri geymd, eða jafnvel síðari tíma viðbætur höfunda eða þeirra sem unnu með efni íslenskra miðaldasagna, eins og tíðkast hefur.

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Introduction

The present PhD thesis is a contribution to the rising scholarly interest in the intersections of folkloristics and Old Norse studies. It provides interdisciplinary research on the fairy tale in Old Norse literature and focuses on the interplay of folklore and literature. The main aim of the research is to investigate the occurrence of fairy-tale material in medieval Icelandic saga literature. The folkloric narratives to be considered for further examination will correspond to the group of “tales of magic” (ATU 300–749) in *The Types of International Folktales* (Uther 2004), commonly known as fairy tales or *Märchen*. This work seeks to answer the question of whether entire folktale types have been incorporated into Icelandic saga literature or whether it is only possible to encounter motifs or small narrative units that the sagas share with later folktales.

The main research questions focus on how fairy-tale material has been integrated in medieval Icelandic saga texts and in which way medieval fairy-tale analogues differ from “classical” or canonical fairy tales, which were collected, re-worked, and published in the surge of nationalism in nineteenth-century Europe, and which have usually been associated with the tale collection of the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812–15). Further questions concern the meaning and function ascribed to the fairy-tale material that has been integrated into Old Norse and medieval Icelandic saga texts. Can evidence be provided that shows that the fairy tale—its structure, style, and characteristic use of symbolic language—was systematically incorporated into saga texts, and if so, for what purpose? This thesis aims at providing a more complex understanding of the existence, meaning, and function of fairy-tale material in Icelandic sagas, which in return will shed light on the interplay of literature and folklore in medieval Icelandic literature.

The PhD thesis constitutes an article-based dissertation (compilation thesis) and consists of three scholarly articles, all of which have been peer-reviewed and accepted for publication: two in scientific journals and one in a collection of articles. This thesis further includes an introductory chapter providing an elaborate overview of scholarly theory in the fields of folkloristics and Old Norse studies, elucidating the need for executing the present study. The thesis closes with a concluding discussion, embedding the three articles in a broader context.

The first article is an in-depth study on fairy-tale motifs and folkloric elements in the Old Icelandic legendary saga *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, especially the first six

chapters, connecting the saga to the Cinderella cycle in folklore. Some of these relations were recognized by folklorists early on, although they have not been treated by scholars in the field of Old Norse studies until recently. The paper will discuss the folkloric depth of *Ragnars saga* as well as the underlying meaning and significance that these early sources may hold for the fields of folkloristics and Old Norse studies alike.

The second article constitutes a broad exploration of various Icelandic sagas, belonging to different saga genres, which all contain a fairy-tale-like episode about noble children who must endure the loss of status and a period of ill-treatment. Those episodes are examined and compared to fairy-tale enchantments, the core principle in fairy tales. The pattern or template established in this article might encourage scholars of Old Norse studies to engage with the folkloric depth of the Icelandic sagas, and it provides further evidence for the existence of fairy-tale material prior to the systematic collection of folk- and fairy tales in nineteenth-century Europe.

The third article shows the striking consistency of folkloric motifs in medieval Icelandic sagas and modern Icelandic fairy tales. Those stable motifs might in some cases be able to shed light on the development of certain tale types in Europe and their variants in general. Here, the examined Icelandic folkloric material provides a clear connection between the Old Breton fabliau about a chastity-testing cloak, known as *Le Mantel mautaillié*, and some of the subtypes of the Cinderella cycle in folklore. This article highlights the meaning and importance of Icelandic narrative material—saga and fairy tale alike—for fairy-tale studies in general.

Together, the three articles provide in-depth studies from different perspectives: the close-range view of a particular saga and its relation to folk- and fairy tales in the first article; the bird's-eye view on a common and widespread folkloric pattern in Icelandic saga literature in the second article; and finally, a panoramic perspective, where Icelandic material is compared to continental literary and folkloric traditions in the third article.

The conclusion in the third part of this thesis will use the findings and conclusions of all three articles to illuminate one another, and it will provide a comprehensive treatise on fairy-tale material in medieval Icelandic literature.

I. THE FAIRY TALE AND THE ICELANDIC SAGA

I.1 On terminology

The fairy tale is traditionally classified as a *folk* narrative that has been transmitted orally. This notion has often been romanticized as an item of folk tradition unconsciously transmitted by primitive or illiterate commoners, who act as mere tradition-bearers without having a creative influence on the tales.¹ In today's understanding of the term, this premise has changed, as stated by Andrew Teverson:

Folk narratives, it is generally agreed by folklorists, are stories which have survived for significant periods of time in popular tradition by being passed on, from storyteller to storyteller, both spatially across cultures and communities, and temporally from generation to generation. They do not, however, need to have loomed up from distant antiquity in order to be classified as such, neither do they need to have been exclusively, or even originally, oral narratives in their modes of transmission. (Teverson 2013, 12)

One of the first attempts to categorize folk narratives was made by the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, who first published the canonical collection of German folk- and fairy tales *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (1812–15) in two volumes. In the introduction to their collection of German legends, *Deutsche Sagen* (1816–18), they state: “Das Märchen ist poetischer, die Sage historischer” (Grimm 1816–18, 1: 5). Later, Jacob Grimm published a treatise on Germanic mythology, *Deutsche Mythologie* (1835), and has thus worked on all three main forms of folk narratives: folktale, legend, and myth.² Ever since, scholars from different disciplines have studied the folktale in relation to these, and other, genres.

Myths as a narrative genre are considered to be ancient, and they explain the origin and creation of worlds, gods, and heroes. In this sense, myths constitute aesthetic representations and symbolic expressions of communities and cultures rather than historical or factual truth (Mr Frog 2018).³ According to William Bascom, they are especially characterized by their sacred value (Bascom 1981, 44). The *legend* is more attached to historical times (as the Brothers Grimm had noticed) and can contain factual

¹ For further discussion on the notion of the “folk” in folklore, see Dundes 1980c.

² American folklorist William Bascom, for example, proposes the usage of the term “prose narrative” to refer to all three categories of folk narratives (myth, legend, folktale). According to Bascom, many American folklorists have applied the German term “Märchen” (rather than “fairy tale”) in order to use “folktale” as an umbrella term for all three categories of folk narratives (Bascom 1981, 96).

³ Mr Frog also stresses the fact that the term “myth” can be defined in various ways today and is not bound to the definition of a narrative genre or category, as I chose to use it in this thesis.

information. Legends can be connected to historical or pseudo-historical characters, like King Arthur, as well as to narratives about historical events and localities which became intertwined with supernatural elements. The legend, similar to the myth, is a narrative category that seeks belief from its recipients.

The *folktale*, as one of the main forms of folk narrative, has proven to be more complicated when it comes to classification. For this reason, it is further divided into seven subcategories, according to the classification system of the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index (ATU index, Uther 2004).⁴ One of its subcategories is the *fairy tale*, referred to as “tales of magic” (ATU 300–749) in the tale-type index. The fairy tale has many names: it is called *conte de fées* in French, *Märchen* in German, *eventyr* in Norwegian and Danish, and *skázka* in Russian. The English term *fairy tale*, however, has often been criticized for its obvious connection to fairies or magical beings. While fairies are common amongst British legends, where they replace children with changelings or become engaged in tragic love affairs with humans, they very seldom appear in the narrative genre of fairy tales. For this reason, some scholars dismiss the term *fairy tale*, while others have argued for its usage because it is a term of common usage with a wide range of English-speaking readers easily understanding its meaning. In an essay named “On Fairy-Stories” (originally published in 1947), the English author J. R. R. Tolkien has argued that the word *fairy* in fairy tales does not refer to the supernatural being itself, but rather to the supernatural realm of fairyland or *Faërie*, where the fairy tale takes place (Tolkien 1964, 15–16; cf. Jones 1995, 9).

Other terms that have been applied by scholars as equivalents for “fairy tale” are *wonder tale* or the German term *Märchen*, which is derived from the Middle High German term *Mär* or *Märe*, meaning “news”, “tidings”, and even “gossip” (Lüthi 2004, 1).⁵ The American folklorist Stith Thompsons describes the *Märchen* as follows:

A *Märchen* is a tale of some length involving a succession of motifs or episodes. It moves in an unreal world without definite locality or definite characters and is filled with the marvelous. In this never-never land humble heroes kill adversaries, succeed to kingdoms, and marry princesses. (Thompson 1946, 8)

⁴ The seven subcategories of the folktale are: animal tales (ATU 1–299), tales of magic (ATU 300–749), religious tales (ATU 750–849), realistic tales (novelle) (ATU 850–999), tales of the stupid ogre (giant, devil) (ATU 1000–1199), anecdotes and jokes (ATU 1200–1999), and formula tales (ATU 2000–2399).

⁵ Cf. Bolte and Polívka 1963, 4: 1–4, who describe the term *Mär* (*mærlin*) as a short narrative not to be believed. For a thorough discussion of the term, see Clausen-Stolzenburg 1995, 3–6.

The *Märchen* can be further divided by adding certain prefixes, as in *Volksmärchen*, which describes a narrative that mainly originated orally and has stayed close to its oral tradition, whereas the term *Buchmärchen* refers to fairy tales that have been edited for publication and is usually used for narratives included in the Brothers Grimm tale collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*.⁶ Another category is the *Kunstmärchen*, which describes some sort of tale hybrid where anonymous folk narratives from oral traditions have been adapted into literary creations by a known author. The genre of *Kunstmärchen* (also called *Märchennovelle*) refers to fairy tales and tale collections, both before the Brothers Grimm and after. One influential collection of *Kunstmärchen* is that of the Italian Giovanni Francesco Straparola, who published his tale collection *Le piacevoli notti* (The Pleasant Nights) in Venice between 1551 and 1553. Straparola's collection was inspired by forerunners like Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decamerone* as well as the literary feature of what has been termed the "frame tale". Different variants of some tales in Straparola's collection, along with other tales, were included in the Italian tale collection of the *Pentamerone* by Giambattista Basile. Basile's work was published posthumously by his sister between 1634 and 1636.⁷ In France, the fairy stories or *contes de fées* by several female writers became extremely popular throughout Europe. Here, one might mention the collections of Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, *Les contes de fées* (1697) and *Contes nouveaux, ou les fées à la mode* (1698). Other female writers who published their fairy stories around the turn of the eighteenth century were Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier, Henriette-Julie de Murat, Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, and Charlotte-Rose de Caumont de la Force.⁸ The French fairy tale collection by Charles Perrault, *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités: Contes de ma Mère l'Oye* (1697), is probably one of the most famous and influential tale collections besides that of the Brothers Grimm. The immense popularity of the French *contes de fées* inspired similar creations by German authors, such as the eighteenth-century authors Christoph Martin Wieland and Benedikte Naubert. Naubert published her tale collection *Neue Volksmärchen der Deutschen* between 1789 and 1792. Her work,

⁶ For more on the term *Buchmärchen*, see Lüthi 2004, 53–4; Pöge-Alder 2011, 135.

⁷ Basile's collection is also known as *Lo cunto de li cunti, ouero Lo tatteniemento de' peccerille, di Gian Alesio Abbatutis* in Italian and in English as *The Tale of Tales*.

⁸ Ásdís Rósa Magnúsdóttir translated some of the early French literary fairy tales into Icelandic (2021a). She has also written articles on the French fairy tales as well as their translation and reception in Iceland (Ásdís Rósa Magnúsdóttir 2018, 2019, 2021b).

however, is largely unknown in Germany today.⁹ The German writer Johann Karl August Musäus, on the other hand, took his inspiration less from French literary works but rather from German oral tradition, and he published his collection *Volksmärchen der Deutschen* between 1782 and 1786; this became one of the most popular folktale collections in Germany. In this thesis, I will use the term *fairy tale* throughout, understanding it as the English equivalent of the German term *Märchen*, which also equals the category of “tales of magic” (ATU 300–749) in the latest revision of the tale-type index (Uther 2004).

Besides the question of proper terminology, scholars have debated on whether to distinguish the genre of literary fairy tales or *Kunstmärchen* from fairy tales collected from oral tradition in the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Harries, for example, pleads for a holistic picture of the fairy tale, which can take on different stylistic modes when treated by different interpreters depending on whether they are classified as authors or storytellers (Harries 2001, 16). Although Straparola and Basile placed their tales in the mouths of old wives and storytellers in their frame tales, and Perrault published his collection of tales as told by Mother Goose—some sort of old nursemaid—under the name of his son, those tale collections are fundamentally different from the collection of the Brothers Grimm. The Grimms collected their folktales from friends, acquaintances, and other contributors, and they were therefore the first to apply an ethnographic/folkloristic perspective rather than a literary one.¹⁰ The Grimms understood themselves as collectors of mainly oral narratives and gave credit to their contributors, although not necessarily by naming them. An exception is the seamstress Dorothea Viehmann, who the Grimms claimed to be their main informant. However, while the tales by early writers are embellished, literary adaptations of folktales, it is possible to recognize the oral folktales behind them, which in many cases can be classified according to the tale-type index. In this thesis, I will employ the term “fairy tale” in the folkloristic sense of an orally transmitted folk narrative, not limiting the term to the emergence of the literary genre of fairy tales in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Other terms that are frequently used throughout this thesis are tale *type*, *variant*, and *motif*. The terms go back to the heyday of folktale scholarship before and after 1900

⁹ Other collections, such as the *Eventyr* by the Dane Hans Christian Andersen, the fairy tales by Oscar Wilde, as well as some gothic stories by the romantic author E. T. A. Hoffmann, are often included in the category of *Kunstmärchen*.

¹⁰ Some amount of research has been published regarding the collection and editing process of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, which the Brothers Grimm edited and revised several times over the course of their lifetime. For thorough and nuanced discussions, see Rölleke 1985; 1988; 2000; 2004; Tatar 1987; Bottigheimer 1987; Paradiž 2005. Critical voices go so far as to accuse the Brothers Grimm of plagiarism and even forgery; see for example Ellis 1983; de Blécourt 2012.

and are the achievement of the historic and geographic method (see discussion in Section I.4). While the tale *type* refers to the abstracted overall folktale—some sort of essence of a tale—the tale *variants* are often manifold, from diverse regions and cultures, as well as from different historical times. The tale type has international validity, while the variants are its regional and local manifestations. The tale type does not exist independently from its variants, but can be understood as an ideal representation, abstracted, and outlined in the tale-type index.¹¹ The term *motif* is more complicated. Thompson, who assembled the *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, states that “a motif is the smallest element in a tale having a power to persist in tradition” (Thompson 1946, 439).¹² Later, when trying to clarify his idea of the *motif* and the purpose of his *Motif-Index*, he stays rather vague: “[The *Motif-Index* is] an index of the smaller parts that make up the tales” (Thompson 1955, 5); he continues, “Certain items in narrative keep on being used by storytellers; they are the stuff out of which tales are made. It makes no difference exactly what they are like; if they are actually useful in the construction of tales, they are considered to be motifs” (Thompson 1955, 7). Thompson’s description of motifs as the “smallest” units in folk narratives is, however, misleading. The motifs listed in the *Motif-Index* can be as small and simple as a magic nut (D985), while they can also encompass entire episodes like the enchantment of a stepson by his evil stepmother (D5.1.1.)¹³ (cf. Goldberg 1986, 167). In this thesis, I often use the term *motif* interchangeably with terms such as *episode*, *sequence*, and *narrative unit* in order to refer more adequately to larger and lengthier episodes in sagas and fairy tales.

This brings us to another common problem in folktale studies concerning the mode or style of fairy tales. While for the most part scholars agree that the fairy tale is characterized by the use of magic (acc. *tales of magic*) and the occurrence of marvellous and magic events (see for example Jones 2002, 8), it becomes difficult to decide whether a text from earlier times is a fairy tale if it features a recognizable tale plot but does not contain magic. Those narratives are usually classified as *novelle* or *novella* (ATU 850–999), another subgroup of the folktale, which does not always include magical events or

¹¹ The first tale-type index was published in German in 1910 by Antti Aarne as *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen*. Later, the American folklorist Stith Thompson revised and translated the index as *The Types of the Folktale* (AT) in 1928 (revised in 1961 by Thompson). In 2004 the index was revised again by the German Hans-Jörg Uther and published as *The Types of the International Folktales* (ATU). The present thesis will make use of the latest revised tale-type index (ATU 2004) but will also refer to other classification systems when necessary.

¹² The *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* was published by Stith Thompson between 1932 and 1936 in six volumes. The catalogue was published again, revised and enlarged, between 1955 and 1958.

¹³ The full title of the motif is *Stepson cursed to stick in grave mound till pretty girl wants to substitute for him* (cf. Boberg 1966).

intervention. The novellas can contain erotic, comic, or satirical incidents, and they are first and foremost associated with the fourteenth-century work of the *Decamerone* by the Italian Giovanni Boccaccio and the *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, as well as the tale collection of the *Arabian Nights*. They most certainly have also influenced the creation of the aforementioned *Kunstmärchen* from the sixteenth century onwards. Katharine Briggs, for example, regards the English tale of *Cap o' Rushes*, a tale variant of the Cinderella subtype ATU 510B *Peau d'Âne*, as a *novella* on the grounds that it does not include magical events or helpers—which the tale variants in the collections by Perrault and the Grimms do include, and which Briggs therefore regards as proper fairy tales (Briggs 2002, 88). This sharp division of categories is problematic because those tale variants belong to the same tale type, featuring the same or at least a very similar plot structure. According to Thompson, some of the novellas can portray great similarities to fairy tales (Thompson 1946, 8).¹⁴ Therefore, it is important to bear in mind that those subcategories of the folktale, as well as the main categories of folk narratives (myth, legend, folktale), are fluid and may overlap, which has led to some polemics between scholars in the past.¹⁵ For Teverson, the answer to the question of what can be considered a fairy tale and what cannot is tightly intertwined with whether we regard the style and mode of narratives as the defining characteristic, or whether the story's plot should be the crucial aspect for classifying fairy tales (Teverson 2013, 44). The American folklorist Alan Dundes is convinced that “[t]ext is less variable than texture and context” (Dundes 1980a, 32), which might be interpreted to mean that the story stays relatively stable over time, while its stylistic features and the context of performance can vary and adapt rather quickly to new circumstances.

The typical fairy-tale style as featured in the French tales by Charles Perrault and the German tales of the Brothers Grimm has been analyzed and described by the Swiss folklorist Max Lüthi, who conducted one of very few stylistic studies on the European fairy tale. Lüthi describes five main stylistic characteristics (*Stiltendenzen*): One-

¹⁴ The Swedish folklorist Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, for example, points out that the tale types of ATU 850 *The Birthmarks of the Princess* and ATU 879 *The Basil Maiden* (previously AT 879 *The Sugar Puppet*), which are classified as “realistic tales”, actually belong to “tales of magic”, despite the fact that they do not include magic (von Sydow 1948b, 70).

¹⁵ See here for example the debate between the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and the Russian formalist Vladimir Propp. The debate was sparked when Lévi-Strauss accused Propp of not using the full potential of his formal analysis of folk narratives by applying it to folktales (specifically, Russian fairy tales) instead of myths, as Lévi-Strauss did himself. Alan Dundes summarizes and discusses this debate further and points out that many narratives Lévi-Strauss used for his structural analysis were not actual myths, but rather folktales (Dundes 1997). It is, however, fair to note that Lévi-Strauss declared that he used all kinds of traditional narratives, such as tales and legends as well as customs and ceremonies, for his structural analysis, instead of being too strict on what is (and what is not) mythical (Lévi-Strauss 1966, 45).

Dimensionality (*Eindimensionalität*), Depthlessness (*Flächenhaftigkeit*), Abstract Style (*Abstrakter Stil*), Isolation and Universal Interconnection (*Isolation und Allverbundenheit*), and Sublimation and All-inclusiveness (*Sublimation und Welthaltigkeit*) (Lüthi 1982; cf. Holbek 1998, 324–25).¹⁶ Although Lüthi's study concentrates on aesthetics rather than on interpretation, it is very useful for identifying fairy tales collected from oral tradition in the nineteenth century. It is important to note, however, that before the nineteenth century the fairy tale was not collected in and of itself. Usually, most of the data connected to folk- and fairy tales that existed in a time prior to their systematic collection is intertwined with literature and even historiography, which has most certainly influenced the stylistic presentation of fairy-tale material (see further discussion in Sections I.5 and I.6).

It is important to bear in mind that, although scholars have tried to distinguish between different categories of folk narratives for the purpose of creating theoretical frameworks and definitions, storytellers and their communities were mostly not interested in classifying their tales, at least not in such a highly specialized manner as scholars have attempted and debated on (Thompson 1946, 7). According to German scholar Hans Kuhn, the blending of different types of oral (and even literary) narratives is particularly noticeable in the Icelandic collection of legends and folktales *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* (1862–64), where fairy tales and legends often seem to be intermingled with each other. Kuhn believes that the writing of Icelandic sagas in the Middle Ages might be the explanation for why the Icelandic oral tradition differs in this point from the oral tradition of other western European countries:

There are [...] two factors at work in Iceland which may have helped to blur the distinctions between different types of folktales. One is that in people's perception, the borderline between the natural and the supernatural may not be the same in Iceland as in Western Europe. Secondly, there has been such a strong tradition, since saga times, for locating stories in time and place that they all, however fictional in origin, tended to take on realistic trappings. (Kuhn 1996, 430–31)

The term *Saga* refers to lengthy literary prose narratives from the Middle Ages as well as post-medieval times and is usually only applied in the literary context of Iceland and Ireland. The Norwegian historian Alexander Bugge, son of the renowned philologist

¹⁶ Lüthi's work was originally published in German as *Das europäische Volksmärchen* (1947).

Sophus Bugge, goes so far as to argue that the fairy tale is the mother of the Icelandic sagas, by lending them its stylistic properties:

Das Märchen, nicht die Sage, ist die Mutter der Saga. Der Stil, der Humor der Saga ist dem des Märchens entlehnt. Beide behandelten nicht eine einzelne Episode, sondern in einer Reihe von Episoden das ganze Leben des Helden. Das Märchen ist dramatisch, die Sprache ist kurz und derb, ganz wie die der Saga. Sagas oder Märchen sind einander alle ähnlich, nur mehr oder weniger gut erzählt. Märchen haben die Norweger wohl schon in der Steinzeit erzählt. (Bugge 1909, 26)

The German medievalist Andreas Heusler rejects Bugge's claims by explaining that the sagas, or more precisely the Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*), constitute the exact opposite of the fairy tale: "Eine streng altertümliche Isländergeschichte und ein vollblütiges Zaubermärchen stehn an den Enden der langen Linie" (Heusler 1957, 224). In his early and important work *Einfache Formen* (Simple Forms) (1930), the German scholar André Jolles defines the Icelandic saga as a special form or subcategory of the *Sage* (e. *legend*). For Jolles, the Icelandic saga is first and foremost concerned with matters of family, tribe, and blood relation—similar aspects that, according to Jolles, also define the legend as a simple form of narration (Jolles 1930, 74–75).¹⁷ Therefore, even if early scholarly opinions diverge when it comes to determining the oral influence of the Icelandic sagas, it may count as evidence that the fields of folkloristics and Old Norse studies were once closely related and connected to each other.

I.2 Folklore and medieval studies

Although the academic fields of folkloristics and medieval studies are independent of one another today, historically they spread from the same soil of romanticism and nationalism by the end of the eighteenth century. This subject has not been discussed much, neither within folkloristics nor medieval studies. Recently, however, John Lindow has addressed the fact that both fields could hardly have been distinguished from one another at the beginning of their existence (Lindow 2018a).¹⁸

Lindow points out that the Brothers Grimm were simultaneously engaged in the collection and publication of folk- and fairy tales and in preparing text editions of Old

¹⁷ On the contrary, Thompson argues that the *Saga* should not be confused with the German term *Sage* (Thompson 1946, 10).

¹⁸ Lindow has published some further articles where he treats similar issues from different perspectives (Lindow 2018b, 2018c, 2021).

High German poems like the *Hildebrandslied* and the *Wessobrunner Gebet* (Lindow 2018, 2). They furthermore produced an edition and translation of the Icelandic *Poetic Edda* (Seidler 2014). One year before the publication of the first volume of their canonical *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, Wilhelm Grimm assembled and translated his collection *Alt-Dänische Heldenlieder und Märchen* (Old Danish heroic lays and fairy tales) with the assistance of the Grimms' friend and colleague, the Danish linguist Rasmus Christian Rask; Grimm was probably under the influence of another friend and teacher, law scholar Friedrich Carl von Savigny, who introduced the brothers to medieval literature and granted them access to his library. There, the Grimms became acquainted with all kinds of medieval literature and poetry but became especially interested in Germanic mythology and heroic epics (Martus 2010, 79–85).

While the Brothers Grimm refer recurrently to the tale collection of the Italian Straparola—where they often find the oldest examples for some of their tales—they also refer frequently to Nordic or Scandinavian tale variants, pointing out similarities with Norse myths and Old Icelandic epics and sagas. The most prominent examples are probably the Valkyrie Brynhildr in *Völsunga saga*, who was stung with a sleeping thorn by the god Óðinn and later woken by the dragon slayer Sigurðr Fáfnisbani. The Grimms identified the story of Brynhildr as the first example of *Sleeping Beauty* or *Dornröschen* (KHM 50, ATU 410) (Grimm 1922, 87; cf. de Vries 1954, 105–8; 1965b; Bolte and Polívka 1963, 1: 434–42). The Grimms also repeatedly cited the work of the Dane Peter Erasmus Müller, *Sagabibliothek*, where Müller discusses the Old Icelandic legendary sagas (*foraldarsögur*) as well as more recent Scandinavian analogues (Müller 1817–20).

Those early examples of later folktales fit the agenda of the Brothers Grimm, who regarded folk- and fairy tales as relics of a bygone past, containing echoes of the myths and epics of former times. With time, however, those myths and epics slowly trickled down to the *folk*, the uneducated peasantry, where the stories became incorporated into oral tradition. The assumed illiterate and uneducated teller then became the tradition-bearer, unaware of the importance and scholarly value of those pieces of Germanic lore and heritage.¹⁹ The German medievalist and folklorist Hans Naumann, for example, defines the term *gesunkenes Kulturgut* (literally, sunken cultural heritage) to describe the devolution of aspects of folklore that he thought originated in the upper stratum of medieval society, but later sank down to the bottom (Naumann 1921). Naumann's student

¹⁹ A similar view on the devolutionary tendencies of folklore can be examined in various writings of folklorists and scholars from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For an elaborate overview on the matter, see Dundes 1969. Some of those theories will be further discussed in Section I.4.

Renata Dessauer develops the concept of *zersingen* (literally, singing to shreds) in her doctoral dissertation, where she is convinced that with each time a poem or folk song would be performed, it would move further away from its original form, thus transforming over time. Hence, folk singers' active performance of songs and poems would change them permanently and for the worse (Dessauer 1928). Assumptions similar to those of Dessauer were shared by early folklorists, as summarized by Dundes: "just as singing songs are presumed to destroy them, so the telling of folktales is thought to run the risk of ruining them" (Dundes 1969, 7–8).

The Grimms compared those imperfect relics to a broken gemstone, its pieces lying scattered on the ground and overgrown with grass and flowers, which only the keener eye (probably belonging to the well-educated scholar) is able to detect (Grimm 1856, 409).²⁰ As the Danish folklorist Bengt Holbek rightfully points out, a broken jewel is still precious, and therefore it is important for the scholar to collect it, study it, and, if possible, reassemble its parts (Holbek 1998, 220). This romantic viewpoint originated in the German collection of folksongs and poems *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern* (1778–79), assembled by the eighteenth-century poet Johann Gottfried Herder. Herder was the first to claim the existence of the spirit of the *folk* (*Volksgeist*), which he believed to be enshrined in folk songs and narratives. Herder believed that the culture of the people was imprinted in its folklore. In a similar vein, the collection of German folksongs and poems *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1806–8), published by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, had a huge influence on the collection of folklore in Germany. The Brothers Grimm assisted Arnim and Brentano with collecting material for the second and third volumes before they began to collect material for their own collection of folk- and fairy tales.

Other early collections of ballads and folktales were, for example, conducted by the British Bishop Thomas Percy in his work *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (1765), where he states that he collected old manuscripts of English ballads, caught before they went up in flames: "I saw it [the manuscript] lying dirty on the floor...being used by the Maids to light the fires" (Friedman 1961, 187). The folkloristic notion of saving folklore just in time before it is forever lost—or the expression "saved from the fire"—may, according to Roger Abrahams, have started with Percy's description (Abrahams 1993, 11). Later,

²⁰ "Gemeinsam allen Märchen sind die Überreste eines in die älteste Zeit hinauf reichenden Glaubens, der sich in bildlicher Auffassung übersinnlicher Dinge ausspricht. Dies Mythische gleicht kleinen Stückchen eines zersprungenen Edelsteins, die auf dem von Gras und Blumen überwachsenen Boden zerstreut liegen und nur von dem schärfer blickenden Auge entdeckt werden."

Francis James Child included many of Percy's ballads in his canonical collection, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882–98), and added his own thorough research on the ballads as well.

Similar to the early collections of ballads, the first compilations of folktales and legends collected from oral tradition in the nineteenth century were hugely influenced by the idea of *popular antiquities*. Especially after the publication of Jacob Grimm's *Deutsche Mythology* (1835), the interest in examining and, to some extent, restoring the collective Germanic narrative heritage expanded to the Nordic countries.

In Sweden, Gunnar Olof Hyltén-Cavallius collected folktales with the assistance of the English philologist George Stephens. Their collection of legends and fairy tales, *Svenska folksagor och äfventyr* (1844–49), is known for its antiquated language; this was an important agenda for Hyltén-Cavallius and Stephens, who aimed to show the ancient roots of the Swedish folktales.²¹ Therefore, they extensively changed the style of the narratives they received from their informants. It also became known that Hyltén-Cavallius burned the folktale manuscripts he received as soon as he had edited them for his collection (af Klintberg 1999, 203). This time, it seems, the flames got hold of the folktale manuscripts and were not saved from them as they were by Percy nearly a century earlier—probably because the contemporary manuscripts of the Swedish informants seemed less valuable than the ideological spirit of longevity and heritage, which the collector himself imprinted on the folktales by editing and revising them. Similar accusations were also brought forward against the Brothers Grimm. One example is the tale of *Frau Holle* (Mother Holda) (KHM 24, ATU 480 *The Kind and the Unkind Girls*), where it has been assumed that the Grimms themselves gave the fairy godmother-like figure of Holle her name, because they consciously wanted to connect her to the Old Norse goddess of Hulda or Perchta in Old Germanic belief (List 1956, 80; Bolte and Polívka 1963, 1: 226–27).

In general, the romantic attitude towards “the folk” assumed that they did not possess the mental capacity to create consciously and were only able to rewrite and recreate narratives that were once composed by genius individuals. Therefore, creativity

²¹ George Stephens also sent a proposition to *Det kongelige Nordiske Oldskriftselskab* (The Society of Antiquities) in Copenhagen in 1845, where he advocated for wider collection of popular antiquities in the Nordic countries. One year later, questionnaires were sent to priests and officials in Iceland requesting, among other things, information on folkloric narratives. On the politics of early folktale collections in northern Europe, see Gunnell 2010. On the topic of clerics as collectors of folklore in Iceland, see Gunnell 2012. For further discussion on clerics and their established networks for collecting folktales in Iceland, see Werth 2015; Werth and Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2017.

was ascribed to individual authors, but not to the general public. Like the Swiss folklorist Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer, many scholars were convinced that “the spirit of the people does not produce, it reproduces” (Hoffmann-Krayer 1958, 70).²² In return, folklore and folktales came to be regarded as popular traditions which were, hence, common property in the public domain, because they did not fit the criterion of an original and author-based creation. The poor and illiterate “old wives” were set forth as “the face of the public domain”, the “constant muse”, and were pictured in the frontispieces of many European folktale collections in the nineteenth century (Valdimar Tr. Hafstein 2014, 27–34; 2015, 24–31; cf. Warner 1995, 12–26). Maria Tatar summarizes and describes the romantic image as “an elderly, careworn peasant woman with a spindle or spinning wheel by her side and a cluster of attentive youngsters at her feet [who] becomes the visual entry point to the world of printed fairy tales” (Tatar 1987, 109). This viewpoint enabled romantic authors and collectors to use folk narratives for their own literary and authored works and to follow their own agendas as they pleased: “In the world of copyrighted book culture, oral tradition was up for grabs—mainly for the sake of nation making in the Herderian sense, but also in other ways” (Anttonen, Forselles, and Salmi-Niklander 2018, 8).

As the Grimms were engaged in the study of Norse myth, Germanic folk belief, and folktales, so were their contemporaries. One of Jacob Grimm’s acquaintances, the English scholar Sir George Webb Dasent, had a huge influence on the perception of the North in Britain through his translation of Snorri Sturluson’s *Prose Edda* (1842) as well as the Icelandic *Njáls saga* (1861), with his accompanying prefaces becoming more influential than the translations themselves. He also published a translation of the Norwegian folktale collection *Norske Folkeeventyr* (1841–44), by Peter Chr. Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, in 1859. Like Jacob Grimm and Jørgen Moe, Dasent stressed the age of folk- and fairy-tale motifs in the Norwegian folktales by regarding them as gradually declining entities, rooted in the same narrative matrix as the Old Norse myths and sagas (especially the *Prose Edda* and *Völsunga saga*). For example, Dasent saw the similarities between the Scottish tale *The Red Bull of Norway* and the Norwegian tale of *Kari Trestakk* (*Katie Woodencloak*) as evidence for a collective northern heritage, manifesting itself in similar motifs and resulting in a shared history of the northwest Scandinavian people (Dasent 1859, xxv; cf. Gunnell 2010, 18–20).²³ While the Sagas of Icelanders

²² Author’s translation of the German “Die Volksseele produziert nicht, sie reproduziert.”

²³ Both tales share the motif of the helping ox and the “ear cornucopia”, where the heroine receives food from the animal’s ear, especially common in tale variants of Cinderella. The Scottish tale is classified as ATU 425A *The Search for the Lost Husband*. The tale of *Kari Trestakk* is classified as ATU 510A *Cinderella* (proper). For variants of the tale of *Kari Trestakk*, see Cox 1893, nos. 30, 83–86.

(*Íslendingasögur*) received increased interest after Dasent's translation of *Njála* that then peaked in the twentieth century, it was, however, another genre of Icelandic literature that became popular in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, namely, the Icelandic legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*).

One of the most influential Icelandic sagas in the early nineteenth century was, surprisingly, the now little-known *Friðþjófs saga hins frækna* (The Saga of Fridthjof the Bold). The saga became popular after the Swedish poet Esaias Tegnér published his poem *Frithjofs saga* in 1824, inspired by the saga text. The poem was translated into almost all western European languages, fifteen times into English alone between 1833 and 1914. One of the translators was the aforementioned George Stephens, who was also the first to translate *Friðþjófs saga* itself in 1839. This was the first translation of a medieval Icelandic saga into the English language.²⁴ However, despite the saga's immense popularity in the nineteenth century, it was neglected and little studied in the twentieth century (Wawn 1994, 220–27; cf. Þórdís Edda Jóhannesdóttir 2021). The popularity of the *fornaldarsögur* rapidly declined and was not revived before the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries.

The viewpoint of the Icelandic sagas as an oral genre quickly and drastically changed in the middle of the twentieth century when the *Íslendingasögur*, which by then had become popular, were mainly regarded as artful works of literature. The main reason for this shift lies in the perception of the sagas as Iceland's cultural property and as individual literary works of art, which resulted in a neglect and even denial of the oral characteristics and properties of the sagas.

I.3 The Old Icelandic sagas and their credibility

In the early days of Old Norse studies, the premise was widely accepted that the sagas were historically reliable sources, referring to actual events that had taken place as described in the saga texts. In those early studies, the importance of the oral transmission and orality of the sagas was stressed. However, only sagas with historical characters and settings, describing seemingly historical events, were considered to have originated in oral tradition (Mogk 1904, 292), whereas folkloric and supernatural elements in the Icelandic sagas were regarded as mere fiction and, therefore, the invention of the saga writer.

²⁴ The saga was translated into English again by William Morris and Eiríkur Magnússon (1871) and John Sephton (1894).

The saga genres which have generally been accepted as historically credible are the Kings' sagas (*konungasögur*), about Norwegian and Danish kings; the bishops' sagas (*biskupasögur*), about Icelandic bishops; and most of the sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*), such as *Laxdæla saga*, *Egils saga*, and *Njáls saga*, which narrate the stories of the early Icelandic settlers, their families, and feuds. The later or post-classical *Íslendingasögur*, however, were for a long time regarded as historically unreliable and spoiled by foreign influences (O'Connor 2017). The Icelandic legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*) are a special case. Although the later *fornaldarsögur* were also regarded as spoiled by foreign influences, as were all post-medieval Icelandic sagas, the oldest representatives of the genre—sometimes referred to as *Heldensagas* or heroic sagas—have been regarded as relatively realistic despite the fact that they include fantastic elements, although to a lesser degree than the later ones (Schier 1970, 73–75). The reason for that may lie in the fact that they connect to the Kings' sagas and refer to events reaching as far back as the migration period in Europe. Besides those sagas, Old Norse translations of chivalric literature and romances (*riddarasögur*) that also reached Iceland via Norway in the thirteenth century. Those translations later sparked similar creations in Iceland, which are referred to as original *riddarasögur*. Similar to the *fornaldarsögur*, the original *riddarasögur* feature many fantastic incidents and are often set in southern European and Middle Eastern regions. Some scholars even prefer to term those sagas *Märchensagas* (literally, fairy tale sagas) because of their fantastic content (Schier 1970, 77–78; Glauser 1983). However, like the later *fornaldarsögur*, the *Märchensagas* do not feature the fairy-tale style or structure, but rather the many-stranded and lengthy saga style.²⁵ Because of the difficulty of defining especially the younger *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*, some scholars have chosen to put them all under the heading of “romances” (Schlauch 1934; Kalinke 1990; Torfi H. Tulinius 2002).

By the middle of the twentieth century, the fields of folkloristics and Old Norse studies had separated and were diverging in terms of research interests, methods, and approaches. While the field of folkloristics moved towards a more performance-based

²⁵ One frequent motif that the *riddarasögur* and romances seemingly share with fairy tales is that of the haughty princess or *maiden king* (O.N. *meykongr*). The maiden king rules the kingdom after the death of her father and is reluctant to marry. She insults all of her suitors until one suitor avenges the insult by raping her (cf. Glauser 1983, 202–7; Kalinke 1990, 66–108; Sif Ríkhardsdóttir 2010; Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2013, 107–33). It is generally agreed that the motif of the maiden king in medieval Icelandic literature shows striking similarities to the tale type of ATU 900 *King Thrushbeard* (Schlauch 1934, 92; Müller 2002; Werth 2019, 55–56). An Icelandic variant of this tale type even appears in the Icelandic collection of folk- and fairy tales called *Meykóngurinn* (The Maiden King) (Jón Árnason 1958, 5: 234–36). On common motifs of ATU 900 in the Icelandic chivalric saga *Clári saga*, see Védís Ragnheiðardóttir 2021. For Eastern parallels of the motif of the maiden king, see Schlauch 1934, 92–94.

approach, including extensive fieldwork, Old Norse studies turned towards a literary approach, dominated by the so-called *book-prose theory* and the scholars of the Icelandic school around Sigurður Nordal.²⁶ The Icelandic school regards the sagas as unique and artistic works of single authors, and the idea of an oral transmission of the Icelandic sagas was almost abandoned (Sigurður Nordal 1942; 1952, 261–62). Furthermore, the Icelandic school regards the classical Sagas of Icelanders or *Íslendingasögur*, assumed to have been produced mainly in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, as the culmination of saga writing. The narratives take place some centuries before they were written, or roughly between 930 and 1030. This period is referred to as *söguöld* (Saga Age) and even *gullöld* (Golden Age). Sigurður Nordal, however, proposed that the period in which the sagas were written should be referred to as the actual *söguöld*, the time which brought forth these incredible works of art (Sigurður Nordal 1942, 134). The *Íslendingasögur* are, however, not authored, unlike the *konungasögur*; this is partly why it was assumed that the *Íslendingasögur* were rather meant for entertainment—like the *fornaldarsögur*, where the author is also unknown. Speculations arose as to who might be the praised author of particular sagas.²⁷ This claim justified and strengthened the argument that the *Íslendingasögur* and the saga manuscripts were cultural property belonging to Icelanders. In return, the interest in how oral tradition and folklore might have influenced and intermingled with Old Icelandic literature and heroic epics declined rapidly by the middle of the twentieth century (Gísli Sigurðsson 2002, 19–20).

Instead of assuming an oral tradition behind recurrent motifs, equivalent personages, and similar phrasing in various sagas, those instances were explained by the concept of *rittengsl* (literally, connections between literary works), a kind of narrow intertextuality. *Rittengsl* assumed that similarities, overlapping events, and the same personages in different saga texts could be explained by the author having other saga manuscripts right in front of him and using bits and pieces of them to write and assemble

²⁶ The book-prose theory challenged the ideas of the free-prose theory, which dominated scholarship of the early twentieth century and claimed that the sagas circulated in a fixed oral form until they were written down around two hundred years after the events described had taken place. Today, most scholars accept the view that the saga writers drew on written and oral sources alike, while the scope of oral influences and folklore is still debated. On the matter of the free-prose theory, the book-prose theory, and new free-prose theory, see for example Bandle 1988, 191–92; Mundal 1993, 52–53; Gísli Sigurðsson 2002, 19–22, 34–36, 40–41, 46; Glauser, Hermann, and Mitchell 2018, 18–19; Phelpstead 2020, 24–28.

²⁷ See for example Sigurður Nordal 1920, where he assumes that Snorri Sturluson, the author of *Snorra Edda* and the *Prose Edda*, was also the author of *Egils saga*. On the same matter, see Torfi H. Tulinius 2004. The recently published collection of articles *In Search of the Culprit: Aspects of Medieval Authorship* (Rösli and Gropper 2021) discusses the matter of the medieval author from a mainly medieval Icelandic perspective. In recent years, computer analysis has been applied in comparing stylistic features in the *Íslendingasögur*; this might help to clarify the matter of authorship for some of the sagas (see for example Jón Karl Helgason et al. 2017; Sigurður Ingibergur Björnsson et al. 2021).

new ones. As has been shown by Icelandic scholar Gísli Sigurðsson, those similarities are, however, more likely to be derived from an active oral tradition behind the sagas, where common and popular oral narratives would be incorporated into a number of sagas without the written saga as a necessity for the transmission of those narratives (Gísli Sigurðsson 2002).²⁸

While the classical *Íslendingasögur* have been highly regarded in saga scholarship, the later post-classical *Íslendingasögur* have not been treated in the same manner, in part because they feature supernatural incidents and folkloric material to a much greater extent. They came to be regarded as of lesser quality and spoiled by foreign influences, which Einar Ól. Sveinsson describes as follows:

De klassiske sagaers objektivitet er forsvundet, deres syntese af realisme og idealisme opløst i en skiften mellem vulgær realisme og blodløs romantik. Forståelsen af den gamle etik med dens hårde æreskrav og tragik forsvinder, og den følelsesløse gladiator bliver helten. (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1962, 507)

The supposed decline of the sagas' literary quality was connected to the political decline of the Icelandic Commonwealth by the end of the thirteenth century, when Iceland lost its independence and became subjugated to Norway (Gísli Sigurðsson 2002, 20). Scholars have regarded the later or post-classical *Íslendingasögur* as some sort of patchwork, where the old saga tradition became intermingled with fantastic and folkloric elements due to foreign influences. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson compares the fantastic influences in the later *Íslendingasögur* to the "symptoms of a malaise" (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1958, 125). It therefore was assumed that the younger *Íslendingasögur* were built upon older manifestations which, however, had not survived but would have been free from supernatural elements. Often, scholars referred to *Landnámabók* or *Sturlubók Landnámu* by Sturla Þórðarson (1214–84), which includes some shorter narratives that are comparable to those told in the *Íslendingasögur* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1958, 41–47; cf. Guðrún Nordal 2013, 203–4; Mundal 2013, 36). Those references were believed to prove the existence of older saga texts and versions that had not stood the test of time and are

²⁸ For further discussions on the oral characteristics of medieval literature, see for example Hofmann 1976; Andersson 1980; Buchholz 1980; Bandle 1988; Gísli Sigurðsson 2000; 2002; Mitchell 1991b; Lönnroth 2017.

not preserved in existing manuscripts.²⁹ However, it is not possible to know whether the narratives mentioned in *Landnámabók* refer to written saga texts or oral narratives. Hence, the belief in a non-extant older saga version requires a leap of faith comparable to the assumptions of early folklorists about the existence of an *Urform* of a tale type.

This brings us to the early explanation of how later influences had reached the supposedly pure and unspoiled original saga. While most scholars believed that the older, more trustworthy saga text had been written by an author who was a creative genius, they ascribed the late influences to the “botch job” of a compiler or copyist, who spoiled the saga text by adding and assembling new and foreign material to the original texts (see for example de Vries 1965a, 326). The negative view on the later compiler is comparable to that of the passive storyteller in folklore studies, also accused of spoiling the traditional and authentic oral tale by their omissions and additions which would lead to changes and flaws in the narrative, corrupting the tale through lack of memory or the storyteller’s “unconscious” narrations.

Despite the scholarly premise that the *konungasögur* are historically reliable, they do include many fantastic features and even refer to Icelandic stepmother tales (*stjúpmæðra sögr*)—narratives of evil stepmothers enchanting their stepchildren—which are common throughout saga literature and represent the largest group of modern Icelandic fairy tales (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2021b; Werth 2019, 52–54). Already in the twelfth century, the Kings’ sagas *Sverris saga* (*The Saga of King Sverrir*) and *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* (*The Saga of King Ólafur Tryggvason*) refer to stepmother tales. In *Sverris saga* it is mentioned that on his journey to Vermaland, Sverrir had to undergo some hardships similar to what is said in ancient tales (*í fornum sögum*) about royal children having to endure their stepmothers’ spells (Þorleifur Hauksson 2007, 12). Note that already in *Sverris saga* those narratives about evil stepmothers are described as old or ancient stories. The same is true of the reference to stepmother tales in *Ólafs saga*, written by the Icelandic monk Oddr Snorrason, where it is stated in the saga’s prologue that stepmother tales had been told by shepherds and that nobody knows if they are true or not (Ólafur Halldórsson 2006, 126). In his *History of Icelandic Literature*, Gabriel Turville-Petre asserts that the incorporation of marvellous encounters in the Kings’ sagas was a conscious decision of the sagas’ author/scribe in order to fill in the gaps, in cases where he had no reliable historical sources at his disposal: “But the events recorded by

²⁹ It is important to note that many of the *Íslendingasögur* survive complete only in manuscripts of a rather late date. Also, all the sagas are preserved in manuscript of a later date than what scholars assumed was the time of their composition (see for example Phelpstead 2020, 49).

the scalds were not sufficient to make a complete biography of Ólafr; they had left no verses about his early years and his wanderings as a child in foreign countries. The gaps were filled by popular tales, and Oddr used them without restraint” (Turville-Petre 1953, 193). Ólafr’s wanderings as a child in foreign countries might then be interpreted as the hero of fairy tales having to leave home and engage in numerous adventures.³⁰ However, many *konungasögur* are structured after similar patterns, where the childhoods of future kings display folk- and fairy-tale-like features (Kuhn 2000, 81–82; Ármann Jakobsson 2004, 5–9).³¹

In *Sverris saga*, young Sverrir, unaware of his royal origin, has to flee from his enemies with his mother and lives for the first years of his life in a monastery on an island. One day, when Sverrir encounters his enemies, he flees into the kitchen and hides in an oven (Þorleifur Hauksson 2007, 5). Here, the unpromising ash lad or coal-biter who later becomes the hero in so many Icelandic sagas and folktales is not difficult to identify. In the case of *Sverris saga*, it is even assumed that the Icelandic abbot Karl Jónsson, the supposed writer of at least the first part of the saga, was supervised by King Sverrir himself, as is stated in the prologue of the saga (Þorleifur Hauksson 2007, 3; cf. Sverrir Tómasson 1988, 234–35). Here, one could draw the conclusion that it was not a lack of historical sources that led the abbot to incorporate fairy-tale adventures or features into the saga as some sort of placeholder or gap filler, because King Sverrir himself could have informed the abbot about his childhood years.

Closely connected to the Kings’ sagas are the shorter narratives of Icelanders (*Íslendingaþættir*; *þáttir* in singular). These were originally incorporated in the *konungasögur*, but they have been published separately in later times, where they have been regarded as shorter versions of the lengthier *Íslendingasögur* (Ármann Jakobsson 2013; 2014). The *þættir* have been shown to feature common folkloric motifs (Harris 1980; 2008; Lindow 1978). Some of them portray Eastern influences, while others contain common features of fairy tales (Strömbäck 1945; Gurevich 2008).³²

The evil spell-casting stepmother returns as a narrative motif in the *fornaldarsögur*, mostly composed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries and known for their fantastical content. Here, the evil stepmother usually turns her stepchildren into

³⁰ In his research from 1909, Alexander Bugge had already identified the fairy tale of *Goldener* (now classified as ATU 314) in the saga of Ólafr Tryggvason (Bugge 1909, 27).

³¹ On different types of childhoods of Icelandic saga heroes, see Kreutzer 1993.

³² The author of this thesis gave a paper on the fairy-tale structure and style of *Þorsteins þáttur forvitna* (*The Tale of Þorsteinn the Curious*), a short prose narrative composed in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, at the 13th International Saga Conference, held 12–17 August 2018 in Reykjavik.

animals or ogres, or they are sent off on a long and dangerous journey. The purpose of those enchantments is for the hero to find his rightful mate whom he is destined to marry. One of the earliest examples of the stepmother in Icelandic literature can be found in *Böðvars þáttur* (*The Tale of Bödvar*),³³ a short episode belonging to the legendary saga *Hrólfs saga kraka* (*The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki*). *Böðvars þáttur* has been dated to around 1300. Some assume the narrative is fairly old, presumably from the thirteenth century, while others believe that in its present form it can hardly be older than from the first half of the fourteenth century (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1975, 158; Finnur Jónsson 1901, 832–33). In *Böðvars þáttur*, an evil queen puts a spell on her stepson, who turns into a bear by day but returns to his human state by nightfall (Finnur Jónsson 1904, 48–55; Byock 1998, 36–37). Similar enchantments occur in later Icelandic fairy tales, where royal children are turned into dogs, black cats, and even ogres. Those enchantments by active spell-casters like the evil stepmother result in the loss of the hero’s status and identity through a period of hardship, whereas disenchantment, usually initiated by the rightful mate or a sibling, restores the former status and physical appearance of the hero. The *fornaldarsögur* draw their material mainly from Norse mythology and ancient Germanic lore. Those narratives are considered to have circulated in oral tradition before the saga-writing took place. The legendary sagas remained popular in Iceland for centuries. Some scholars claim that at some point, the *fornaldarsögur* merged with other literary genres, as for example the chivalric sagas from the late medieval period onwards, as well as oral genres like folktales, fairy tales, and ballads until the beginning of the twentieth century (Schier 1970, 77–78; Torfi H. Tulinius 2002, 21–27; Mitchell 1991b; Driscoll 1997). On the contrary, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir considers the *fornaldarsögur* a rather stable literary genre. Their popularity continued, considering the number of preserved manuscripts as well as *rímur* (metrical romances), where the subject matter of most of the sagas was turned into verse. Their popularity is also evident in similar sagas based on the original *fornaldarsögur*, which according to Aðalheiður might be called *fornaldarsögur síðari tíma* (reconstituted *fornaldarsögur*) (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001, cliv–clxi; 2018, 21).

In 1966, the *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature* by Inger Boberg was published posthumously; Boberg listed Icelandic motifs in accordance with Stith Thompson’s motif index. Boberg only included the post-classical sagas of Icelanders as well as the *riddarasögur* and *fornaldarsögur*. The *fornaldarsögur* in particular show

³³ The tale is also known as *Böðvars þáttur bjarka* and even *Bjarkaþáttur*.

compelling parallels to folk- and fairy tales by dealing with enchantments by evil stepmothers and other supernatural beings like dragons, ogres, and dwarfs. They are, however, not easily classified as specific international tale types under the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index and differ in many respects from modern folk- and fairy tales. It might nonetheless be possible that single chapters and episodes within the legendary sagas are analogous with (or resemble) certain folk- and fairy tale types (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2014, 34–35; see thesis Article 1).

The American scholar Carol Clover assumes that oral narratives can also be identified behind the *Íslendingasögur*; she believes these to be developed from shorter oral narratives in which not every incident and character needs explanation, as they were already well-known in the tightknit community. From these short oral forms or strands, an embellished and lengthy saga text could be assembled and developed (Clover 1986; 2005). Clover’s “long prose theory” is still to this day a very convincing contribution to the question of orality and literacy in the Icelandic sagas.

Today’s scholarship tends to regard the Icelandic sagas as literary works that have been influenced by oral tradition as well as all kinds of sources, learned and lay alike, such that the sagas are regarded neither as reliable oral histories nor as pure literary works of art. However, the question remains as to whether or not people believed in the supernatural elements described in the sagas. In Konrad Maurer’s introduction to his edition of *Gull-Þóris saga (The Saga of Gold-Þórir)*, a post-classical *Íslendingasaga* also known as *Þorskfirðinga saga*, he argues seemingly ahead of his time that despite the fantastic and magical elements in *Gull-Þóris saga*—like prophetic dreams and the killing of dragons—the narrative must be considered credible and historically reliable. Here, reliability is understood not in the sense of a chronicle, but with regard to the saga providing a credible account of people’s mental preoccupation and their beliefs:

Derartige Züge können begreiflich der Glaubwürdigkeit einer Sage keinerlei Eintrag thun; sie sind aus dem Glauben und dem poetischen Sinne der Zeit entsprungen, welcher jene ihre Entstehung verdankt, und knüpfen sich unwillkürlich auf dem Wege der Überlieferung, zumal der mündlichen Überlieferung, an deren geschichtlichen Kern an, ihn ausschmückend und verherrlichend; sie kehren eben darum ziemlich gleichmässig nahezu in allen, selbst den verlässlichsten, Quellen wider. (Maurer 1858, 25–26)

Furthermore, Maurer states that many of the saga's elements and fantastical incidents also occur in other sagas, as well as in Scandinavian and Germanic folklore (Maurer 1858, 37). He mentions, for example, the recurrent folkloric motif of the *eldsætr*, the male Cinderella or coal-biter (Maurer 1858, 25). Maurer prepared the edition of *Gull-Þóris saga* when he stayed for a couple of weeks in Copenhagen before continuing his trip to Iceland in the summer of 1858.³⁴ He had deep knowledge of folklore and folk belief and had already published a collection of folktales from Bavaria, Germany. After his journey to Iceland, Maurer published a collection of Icelandic folk- and fairy tales in 1860.³⁵

While Maurer had already speculated on popular beliefs and their influence on saga-writing, Mikhail Steblin-Kamenskij proposes a reading of the Icelandic sagas where the concept of truth is stretched by going beyond modern distinctions of fiction and non-fiction (Steblyn-Kamenskij 1973, 21–48). He proposes the term “syncretic truth”, which may include fiction to some degree:

A literary work is not something in and by itself, but something in which a certain interpretation is implicit. A work of conscious artistic invention is as a rule intended to be understood as artistic invention. But the family sagas obviously do not belong among such works ... Fiction in the sagas is, so to speak, “latent” fiction, fiction which the saga creators regarded as permissible, remaining within the limits of truth. (Steblyn-Kamenskij 1973, 31)

Diverging from this viewpoint, the Icelandic scholar Vésteinn Ólason is convinced that the saga authors, scribes, or compilers must have been aware of the fact that the fantastic elements in the sagas were literary embellishments rather than factual truth:

It may well be that authors regarded their own additional material as a legitimate part of a true story; that they invented nothing which could not have happened; and that the additions were the expression of truth already inherent in the material. Yet the authors were, of course, aware that the truth of such additional material was of a different order from that embodied in accounts of events which they knew (or believed) had actually happened. (Vésteinn Ólason 1998, 212–13)

³⁴ Maurer wrote travel accounts while staying in Iceland; these were later published in Icelandic (Maurer 1997).

³⁵ The collection was originally published in German as *Isländische Volkssagen der Gegenwart* and was later translated into Icelandic (Maurer 2015). Maurer also assisted the Icelandic collector Jón Árnason with the publication of a two-volume collection of Icelandic folktales and legends, *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* (1862–64), in Leipzig, Germany. For more on Maurer's contribution to the collection and publication of Icelandic folktales, see Sigrún Gylfadóttir 2015; Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2022.

The problem with this statement is that very little is known of the mentalities of people from the Middle Ages or Late Middle Ages. Therefore, it is not possible to imprint a modern viewpoint and awareness onto the saga writers when considering whether such elements belonged to the realm of the fantastic or not, as proposed by Steblin-Kamenskij. According to Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, it is not important whether people believed that the supernatural events had occurred or not, because those events belonged to the language of the mind and gave expression to internal matter, rather than belonging to the language of historical events or outer circumstances:

Regarding the marvellous dimension, it does not really matter whether people believed that some things were possible and others not, whether trolls, dragons, dwarfs and revenants really existed or not, and whether they were of the supernatural or the “fantastic” kind; they simply belong to the language of the mind. While they represent the “other”, they represent ourselves and our conception of the world we live in. (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2014, 36)

Aðalheiður also points out that the *fornaldarsögur* feature many supernatural and marvellous elements which, however, did not keep people from claiming that some of the legendary saga heroes were their forefathers and ancestors, similar to characters who were historically accounted for (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001, clvi; cf. Mitchell 1991b, 122–26).³⁶

Stephen Mitchell asserts that magic described in the sagas might be related to the time difference between the events described in a saga and its composition. According to Mitchell, the greater the distance between the time of composition and the events being described, the more fantastic or magical elements appear; whereas in more contemporary sagas such as *Sturlunga saga*, which was composed around the same time as the events taking place, those elements appear to a lesser degree:

On the one hand, medieval Christian writers in Iceland generally thought, and wanted their audiences to think, that witchcraft and magic in earlier

³⁶ Note that even during the collection of folkloric material in the 1950s and 1960s in Iceland, which was executed by the Árni Magnússon Institute in Reykjavik, some of the informants believed fairy tales to be true stories, although stories that had taken place in olden times or far-away countries. The storyteller Guðríður Finnbogadóttir, for example, believed that the stories of the *Arabian Nights* were credible accounts (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011, 128).

eras, or in far-off places, was rife. On the other hand, they did not much see such phenomena as having the same sort of major role in the course of events in their own day. (Mitchell 2011, 102)

While Mitchell's observation is intriguing, I have demonstrated in Article 2 that at least the cyclic principle of enchantment and disenchantment is present in *Sturlunga saga*, where marvellous incidents are, however, explained by natural means and causes rather than magic.

While the credibility of the Icelandic sagas was an important benchmark for evaluating their value and importance, the main research questions in the field of folkloristics oscillated around the topic of the age and stability of folktales, as will be discussed in the following section.

I.4 The origin of the fairy tale and its stability

According to the Brothers Grimm, the fairy tale evolved around Germanic mythology (*urdeutscher Mythos*), which according to Jacob Grimm was also the origin of folk legends, games, proverbs, and nursery rhymes (Grimm 1835, 11). Later, other scholars as well considered myths to be the origin of folklore and folk narratives. Around 1900, scholars of the mythological school assumed that myths were nature allegories, explanations of natural phenomena such as thunder and lightning, which then came to shape popular oral tradition (Lüthi 2004, 64; Holbek 1998, 220–29). The German scholar Max Müller, originator of the solar theory, argued that the phases of the sun—especially dawn and sunset—are the main subject of myths (Müller 1872; cf. Cocchiara 1981, 277–95). It was also believed that animals played an important role in the creation of myths, which governed the interpretation of animal motifs in myths and fairy tales (de Gubernatis 1872).

The romantic idea of fairy tales as the remnants of a glorious golden age of narration, located in a nebulous mythological past, was replaced by more positivistic theories by the late nineteenth century. In the wake of publication of folktale collections throughout Europe, the Grimms' own research and comparison of folktales from different countries led to Wilhelm Grimm's statement that the possibility could not be excluded that fairy tales had spread from one nation to another: "Ich leugne nicht die Möglichkeit ... des Übergangs eines Märchens von einem Volk zum anderen." (Grimm 1850, 1: lxiii).

The further interest in the dissemination of fairy tales arose within the wider context of *diffusionism* in the field of cultural anthropology.³⁷

Theodor Benfey, a German scholar of Indian studies and Sanskrit, proclaimed India as the cradle of the fairy tale. Benfey's theory resulted from his research on the ancient Indian literary work of the *Panchatantra*, a collection of Indian fables or animal tales, which led to his claims that all fairy tales originated in India and later spread to Europe. For Benfey, most of the extant fables in Europe are derived from the Aesopian tales, with more or less variation.³⁸ He believed that the fairy tale, on the other hand, was transmitted orally from India westwards by travellers and merchants prior to the tenth century, then subsequently primarily in written form through Byzantium, Italy, and Spain (Benfey 1859, xxvii; cf. Thompson 1946, 378). The idea that tales could migrate great distances only through oral dissemination did not seem possible at that time. Instead, Benfey claims there was only a small number of especially European fairy tales in the beginning, but that they later mixed and mingled in a kaleidoscope-like manner such that a small corpus of tales (*Grundformen*) was enlarged by borrowing motifs from the *folk* but also from single individuals.³⁹ According to Benfey, the fairy tale in particular had spread throughout Europe after the publication of Straparola's Italian tale collection of the *Pleasant Nights*, from which the fairy tale was adopted into oral tradition (Benfey 1859, xxvi). Benfey's theory had its admirers, such as the French scholar Emanuel Cosquin, who in his *Contes populaires de Lorraine* (1886) accepts an Indian origin for most of the European fairy tales; however, Cosquin diverges from Benfey's theory in that he believes the fairy tale was transmitted mainly via oral sources. He further states, "La question de l'origine des contes populaires est une question de fait" (Cosquin 1886, 1: xv). Cosquin therefore takes the Indian origin of a particular tale for granted, as long as it can be identified in a modern Indian tale collection.

Benfey was one of the first to describe the dissemination of folktales, which had a lasting impact on the study of folk- and fairy tales in general. He mainly relied on methods such as textual criticism, commonly applied in nineteenth-century philology. For that reason, the value of folk- and fairy tales as a theoretical and scholarly subject grew;

³⁷ The term was first introduced by Leo Frobenius in his work *Der westafrikanische Kulturkreis* (1897/98).

³⁸ According to Benfey, only a few animal tales in Europe go back to Indian tales. Their main difference is that Aesopian tales feature animals who behave according to their own character/nature, whereas animals in Indian tales behave like disguised humans, without accordance to animals' own nature (Benfey 1859, xxi).

³⁹ The metaphor of the kaleidoscope has been used extensively in the field of folkloristics in order to explain the existence of great variety emerging from a fixed set of finite parts. For further discussion on the kaleidoscopic model in folkloristics and cultural studies, see Georges 1979.

this in turn led to the development of new approaches in the field of folkloristics concerning the study of the origin and dissemination of folk narratives and characterized by philological accuracy and meticulous working methods. Therefore, Benfey is sometimes called the godfather of the scholarly movement known as the historical and geographical method, which prevailed in the field of folkloristics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and is also known as the Finnish school or method. Bengt Holbek, however, points out that the Finnish method is not Finnish, but rather belongs to the overall agenda that dominated the humanities, especially philology, in the second half of the nineteenth century and in the beginning of the twentieth (Holbek 1992, 5).

Like many of the scholars belonging to the Finnish school, the Finn Kaarle Krohn was a convinced follower of Benfey's theory on the migration of the fairy tale to Europe from India. In 1907, Krohn founded the *Folklore Fellows Communications* (FFC) at the University of Tartu (Tartu Ülikool) together with the Dane Axel Olrik, the German Johannes Bolte, and Carl Wilhelm von Sydow from Sweden. The Finnish school regards the fairy tale as having originated only once at a particular time and place, from where it was disseminated like a ripple in the water. However, just as the ripple becomes weaker the farther it moves away from its point of origin, so too was the fairy tale believed to lessen in quality the farther it migrated. The aim of scholars was, therefore, to determine the time and place a tale type came into existence—to find a particular tale's original form, the *Urform*, from which all other tale variants would stem. According to Krohn's student Antti Aarne, the oldest and simplest form of a tale was assumed to be the most precious one. Only when the *Urform* was located and analyzed would it be possible to interpret the tale itself. The method and approach of the Finnish school is that of classical philology: the oldest manuscript of a text was considered to be the most credible one, whereas later copies were regarded as inherently spoiled by younger foreign and literary influences as well as the oral tradition itself and, consequently, of lesser value. As in classical philology, the Finnish school around Kaarle Krohn regarded the restoration of the hypothetical Urtexts as the main goal of their research, where oral variants collected in the nineteenth century and preserved in folktale collections and manuscripts were regarded as more or less corrupted testimonies to the original hypothetical texts (Vaz da Silva 2017). Still, such an undertaking was difficult in its execution, demanding thorough and painstaking working methods in locating and accessing tale variants from all over the world. The major achievements of the Finnish school are therefore the tale-type index and the motif index, which provide an overview and outline of tale types and motifs as

well as supplying information on where to find tale variants and motifs. The indices are, however, not free from error. The tale types, as neatly as they are presented in the type index, cannot be so easily distinguished from other types, because many of them are closely connected and overlap is frequent. The Urtexts supposedly corresponded to tale types, and the empirical fact that many oral tales do not correspond to tale types was assumed to be due to errors in the transmission. However, the indices have proven to be the main tools for folklorists engaging in the study of folk- and fairy tales by providing a solid basis for comparison (Goldberg 1984, 6–9).

While advocates of the Finnish school claimed a *monogenesis* for the origin of the fairy tale, the anthropological school believed in a *polygenesis* of such tales, where similar oral narratives might have developed in different places at the same time without a direct connection or influence. Already, Wilhelm Grimm stated:

Es gibt aber Zustände, die so einfach und natürlich sind, daß sie überall wieder kehren, wie es Gedanken gibt, die sich wie von selbst einfinden, es konnten sich daher in den verschiedensten Ländern dieselben oder doch sehr ähnliche Märchen unabhängig von einander erzeugen. (Grimm 1850, 1: lxii)

While the Finnish school relied mainly on methods and approaches from traditional philology, advocates of the anthropological school pursued an evolutionist outlook and approach. In this manner, the Englishman Edward Burnett Tylor regarded folk- and fairy tales as the products of primitive societies; they became remnants of their primitive past as soon as those societies evolved into culturally and socially advanced ones. Tylor termed these cultural remnants *survivals*, which he describes as

processes, customs, and opinions, and so forth, which have been carried on by force of habit into a new state of society different from that in which they had their original home, and they thus remain as proofs and examples of an older condition of culture out of which a newer has been evolved. (Tylor 1871, 1: 15)

In a similar vein, the English anthropologist Andrew Lang assumed that people at a primitive stage share the same ideas on superstition and myths without ever having been in touch with each other. According to Lang, being at the same stage of societal development also means being in the same state of mind and consequently having similar ideas about the world: “Similar conditions of mind produce similar practices, apart from

identity of race, or borrowing of ideas and manners” (Lang 1884, 21–22). The fairy tale, therefore, was still regarded as some sort of trace or remnant—not as the highly advanced product of a forgotten golden age, but rather as the leftovers of primitive cultures. Based on the analogy that so-called savages (or primitives) are to civilized elites as children are to adults, the fairy tale remained suitable for children, but lost its status as appropriate reading material and a scholarly subject for intellectuals. As Holbek has rightfully pointed out, the devolutionary premise in folklore scholarship, as mentioned above, has much in common with evolutionary theories in cultural anthropology: “The only change necessary is to assume that the crumbling and decaying folklore contains the survivals from a savage past instead of the noble ‘reliques’ of a lofty mythology” (Holbek 1998, 230). However, while the perception of the fairy tale as a historical and valuable relic resulted in the need to preserve the narrative treasure trove of the past, even if imperfect and scattered, the survival theory led to a neglect of folk- and fairy tales insofar as they did not appear very valuable to scholars: “The demise of these survivals is not to be regretted because they have yielded to a higher culture“ (Holbek 1998, 230). Furthermore, the idea persisted that primitive people were not aware of the stories they told, but that the narratives themselves somehow operated within their minds. Claude Lévi-Strauss, for example, stated, “I therefore claim to show, not how men think in myths, but how myths operate in men’s mind without their being aware of the fact” (Lévi-Strauss 1969, 12). Anthropological theories on the origin of folktales also impacted psychological research in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially that of Carl Gustav Jung, who believed that a finite number of symbolic images or *archetypes* are collectively shared by all humankind and stored in the *collective unconscious*. In a similar vein as Lévi-Strauss, Jung stated, “The primitive cannot assert that he thinks; it is rather that ‘something thinks in him’” (Jung 1969, 153).

While in the early days of folkloristics the focus was mainly on finding the origin of folk- and fairy tales and trying to explain the existence and dissemination of folktales throughout the world, the twentieth century is characterized by a shift in the field from diachronic approaches and archival research towards a synchronic perspective and fieldwork. As a result, scholars’ awareness shifted to storytellers and their communities, as well as the performative event of storytelling itself.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, more research emphasis was placed on the traditional Russian singers of *byliny*, oral epic folksongs, which became regarded as individual artistic creations of an orally performing artist (Braun 1979). The Russian

scholar Mark Azadovskij adapted this viewpoint to his study on the Siberian storyteller Natalja Ossipowna Winokurova and her folktales. In his work *Eine sibirische Märchenerzählerin* (1926), Azadovskij points out that the narrator's treatment of their tales involves organization and consideration of the narratives that allows the storyteller to develop their own artistic style. According to Azadovskij, it is necessary to observe the artistic and stylistic emphasis of each narrator, in the context of their life story and personal experiences (Azadovskij 1926, 21). Azadovskij's work became very popular in Russia and northern Europe and led to an increased interest in storytellers, their social environment, and the oral performance of the stories. The most influential works on this matter are the studies from the Hungarian school, which is based on extensive fieldwork executed by the Hungarian folklorists Gyula Ortutay and Linda Dégh in the mid-twentieth century. The main focus was placed on the context of the storytelling tradition in the community in question, where "[e]very narrator is the vessel for the tradition of the community which he represents" (Dégh 1969, 52). Therefore, the storyteller is a representative of the narrative tradition of a given society in which the storyteller participates. One of the most influential studies from the Hungarian school is Dégh's work *Folktales and Society* (1969).⁴⁰ Dégh's study focuses on the Szeklers (cf. *Székelys*), an ethnic minority from Kakasd in Hungary, and the storyteller Zsuzsanna Palkó in particular. Dégh was a pioneer in terms of scientific methods and her extensive fieldwork, which she executed over the course of decades. In her study, Dégh was able to show a close connection between storytellers and their audiences, as storytellers not only told the stories that suited *them* best but adapted them to the circumstances of the storytelling event. However, the new emphasis in the field of folkloristics was haunted by its past. In the first chapter of her work, Dégh refers to the medieval past of the Szeklers, who traditionally served in the military and were assigned the respectable historic task of guarding the frontier before their downfall and expulsion from their ancestral homelands; according to Dégh, this shaped their tale-telling tradition:

Though the particular social order, and the privileges, of the Szeklers had practically ceased to exist by that time, the memory of it and the proud knowledge of their former freedom and privileges continued to remain alive among the inhabitants of the Szeklerland. These memoirs are particularly vivid in the tradition of the Szeklers who left their homeland during the second half of the eighteenth century and moved into the

⁴⁰ The work was originally published in German as *Märchen, Erzähler und Erzählgemeinschaft: Dargestellt an der ungarischen Volksüberlieferung* (1962).

Moldavia region or Bucovina, and from there during 1946–47 to Hungary, to the counties of Tolna and Baranya. (Dégh 1969, 5)

Dégh's statement echoes the idea of the Brothers Grimm about the golden age of narration in the Middle Ages and its decline as it became the word-of-mouth tradition of the peasantry. Despite Dégh feeling the need to include the historical introduction to her work, she never applied this to her interpretation.⁴¹ Hence, Dégh's work, amongst others, can be regarded as one of transition from the dusty philology and "armchair anthropology" of the nineteenth century to a more contemporary and fieldwork-based approach in folkloristics. This new direction reached its peak in the latter half of the twentieth century, where it is usually connected to the performance school. Scholars such as Richard Bauman, Roger Abrahams, Dell Hymes, Dan Ben-Amos, and Barre Toelken are particularly noteworthy and proclaimed the shift from textual research on fairy tales to research on the context of the storytelling event, or "from text to context". The folklorist Dan Ben-Amos defines folklore as artistic communication in small or limited groups where, he asserts, "The telling is the tale; therefore, the narrator, his story, and his audience are all related to each other as components of a single continuum, which is the communicative event" (Ben-Amos 1972, 10). The communication and interplay between the performer/storyteller and their audience was considered to be a key factor in understanding the tale-teller's intention to tell stories. For Barre Toelken, who studied an Indigenous American called Yellowman and his legends, the meaning of folktales does not lie in the tale's structure, but rather in its texture: "his [Yellowman's] central consideration is not one of structure/genre but of texture/mode" (Toelken 1969, 224). According to Toelken, Yellowman did not consider the internal structure of his stories, but rather *how* he tells them, e.g., by changing his voice or adding special vocabulary and stylistic features, such as archaisms or humour. However, according to Richard Bauman, not all folkloric material can be considered a performance: "not every 'doing' of an item of folklore is necessarily a performance [...] to perform is to seek the limelight, to claim special skill" (Bauman 2012, 101–2).

From Bauman's viewpoint, it becomes clear that the artistic tale-teller, presenting their unique performing skills to their audience, only replaces the individual and genius author from folkloristic theories of past centuries. In this, the performance school ignored the age-old storytelling tradition and those tellers who do *not* seek the limelight, as for

⁴¹ This obvious discrepancy in Dégh's canonical work is also addressed by Holbek 1992, 17.

example most women, who usually narrated their tales for children in the private sphere of the home while engaging in daily labour (cf. Dégh 1969, 92–93, 112).⁴² While the performance school has been criticized for proposing overly idealistic and romantic ideas of the typical storytelling event (Ward 1990, 34–35), it has also discredited folklore archives, collections, and manuscripts for holding no value for future research, since no information is given on the performative event that only exists in the moment and is thus lost in early folktale collections and recordings. Some folklorists even proposed burning folklore archives (Wilgus 1973, 244–45), while others advocated finding new perspectives on folklore archives and making new meaning and use of them (see for example Gunnell 2013; Anttonen 2013).⁴³

As has been shown in this section, the search for the origin of folk- and fairy tales has not received much interest in folkloristics after the second half of the twentieth century, which was characterized by synchronic and performance-based research. Hence, in Section I.5, early theories on the origin of fairy tales and their intersection with medieval literature and myth will be examined more closely. First, however, I will address some important research on the structure of fairy tales and the communities that helped to shape them.

As discussed above, it is difficult or even impossible to determine the exact age of the fairy tale, especially if we assume that it is first and foremost an oral genre with many different tale variants. Despite the diversity of fairy tales and their variants, folklorists have been intrigued by the “remarkable stability of the essential story in the midst of continually shifting details” (Thompson 1946, 437), since it implies the possibility that the fairy tale as an oral genre has been relatively stable over a great period of time.

Folklorists have assumed a certain stability within oral tradition itself by proposing laws, rules, and patterns that folk narratives, especially the fairy tale, abide by. Axel Olrik, for example, proposed the *Epic Laws of Folk Narrative*, which he believed to have universal validity (Olrik 1908).⁴⁴ He based these laws to a considerable extent on Old Norse literature and Saxo’s heroic narratives, his fields of specialization. Olrik identified a set of eighteen principles for a deeper understanding of the structure and form of oral folk narratives. Amongst them are, for example, “the law of simplicity”, “the law

⁴² Bauman’s misrepresentation of gender within his studies on verbal art as performance is addressed thoroughly by Patricia E. Sawin (Sawin 2002).

⁴³ A roundtable discussion dedicated to that matter was held at the 16th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR) in Vilnius, Lithuania, 29 June 2013.

⁴⁴ For the English translation of Olrik’s article, originally published in Danish, see Olrik 1965.

of two to a scene”, “the law of the single strand”, and “the law of three and the law of repetition”, which for Olrik stand out as the major criteria for folk narratives in general. While Olrik’s study was not much discussed by his contemporaries, it shows, according to Holbek, great validity in most cases (Holbek 1998, 326–27).

By the mid- to late twentieth century, scholars concluded that oral tradition adapts and changes over time and is certainly influenced by written sources to some degree. Mnemonic features as well as simple consistent patterns were regarded as vital for the continuity and stability of oral tradition (see for example Lord 2000; Ong 1982; Goody 1987; Finnegan 1988; Foley 1991; cf. Rosenberg 1991, 25–38). One of the patterns that has repeatedly been pointed out and summarized by various scholars is the hero pattern (see von Hahn 1876; Rank 2004; Raglan 1936; Campbell 1949; de Vries 1954, 137–53; Binder 1964; Redford 1967; cf. Dundes 1980b; Holbek 1998, 328–31).⁴⁵ The various hero patterns summarize and describe the life story of, first and foremost, the mythical hero; some scholars also include pseudo-historical characters such as King Arthur, heroes of chivalric romance such as Tristan, as well as heroes of the folktale. While the details of those heroic biographies vary, the sequence of the hero being exposed and nurtured by animals or raised by humble peasants is common to all of them and has been especially addressed by Johann Georg von Hahn, Gerhard Binder, and Donald Redford. Note that those early studies are male-centric in nature and give little credit to the life stories of heroines in heroic epics and folktales which, however, often proceed in a similar manner to those of their male counterparts, especially regarding the sequence of the exposed or innocent persecuted child.⁴⁶

While those kinds of proposed patterns were early attempts to structure oral narratives and to show some degree of stability and persistence, a proper structural analysis of oral narratives and folktales was not achieved until the pioneering study *Morphology of the Folktale* by Russian formalist and folklorist Vladimir Propp. Propp’s most influential work, originally published in Russian in 1928, is still to this day the major study on defining the structure of fairy tales. Propp’s approach to the formal characteristics of the fairy tale was initiated by his objection of Aarne’s content-based classification, which Propp regards as inconsistent and variable, whereas narrative

⁴⁵ Rory McTurk applies the hero pattern by de Vries on the narratives about Ragnarr loðbrók (McTurk 1991, 62–93).

⁴⁶ In Redford’s study on the literary theme of the exposed child, he mentions the character of Semiramis, queen of Assyria, who was exposed as a child, nurtured by a dove, and raised by a shepherd before she gained power as a queen. Redford assumes that Semiramis, the only woman treated in his study, is one of the four oldest representations of the template of the exposed child (Redford 1967, 212, 228).

structure would be constant (Propp 1996, 10–11; cf. Dundes 2007a, 101–5). After examining the first one hundred tales in the Russian folktale collection by Alexander Afanasyev, Propp sets forth certain rules on how fairy tales are put together. He presents an outline and description of thirty-one *functions*, which constitute the units for each fairy tale (Propp 1996). According to Propp, each function appears in a logical and time-related sequence. Holbek compares this to a route with a fixed number of inns, encountered in an immutable order; the traveller can choose to rest at some of them, while passing others by (Holbek 1998, 333). However, like the various hero patterns, Propp’s functions are also mainly concerned with the active male hero. He further assumes there is only one original folktale pattern upon which all fairy tales are based, namely, the tale of the dragon slayer. Over time and due to a mixing and blending of different variants, a variety and diversity of fairy tales emerged (Propp 1996, 89, 114).

Many of the aforementioned theories and patterns do not take into account the factor of the storytellers: the people who have told, preserved, and transmitted folk narratives over the centuries. Dundes applies the term *superorganic* to folklore, in order to critique the notion that folktales could migrate autonomously without people telling the tales (Dundes 1965, 129). The fairy tale then becomes a mysterious entity, transmitting itself through time and space independent of people’s minds and word-of-mouth. The superorganic notion in early folkloristic studies deliberately resulted from the long dominant theory about people’s minds and memories being faulty and forgetful. Scholars held rather negative attitudes towards storytellers, seeing them as mere tradition bearers who carried stories on without being aware of the storytelling tradition. For a long time, scholars were convinced that changes in oral narratives and folktales stemmed from the forgetfulness of the storyteller: “The first time a change of detail is made in a story is undoubtedly a mistake, an error of memory” (Thompson 1946, 437). How, then, can the fairy tale be considered stable over a long period of time, if the tale-teller tends to forget their tales?

Walter Anderson, a former professor of folklore at Tartu University and an advocate of the Finnish method, developed the concept of the *law of self-correction* (*Gesetz der Selbstberichtigung*). Unlike other scholars of the Finnish school, Anderson does not refer to the *Urform* of a tale, but rather to a “normalized” form (*Normalform*). In doing so, he stands out from his colleagues who wanted to determine the oldest and most original form of a particular tale. Anderson argues that a storyteller who hears a certain narrative many times from different storytellers would instinctively perceive

which form or variation is the most common or “correct” one and could thus amend “flaws” in the narrative, which would keep the narrative tradition relatively stable over time (Anderson 1923, 399–406, cf. Goldberg 1986, 168). While Anderson’s theory sounds plausible, the striking fact has been pointed out by Portuguese folklorist Francisco Vaz da Silva that “there is no original text to revert to” (Vaz da Silva 2015, 99). Nonetheless, Anderson at least considers the active involvement of people in the process of transmission of folk narratives. However, he assumes those processes happen unconsciously for tale-tellers and thus deprives them of the ability of artistic and conscious decision-making.

Another advocate of the Finnish method, the Swede Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, stressed the significance of folktales’ ability to adapt to their cultural environment by introducing the term *oikotype* (or *ecotype*) to folktale studies. The term originated in botany and described the adaptation of a plant of a certain species to a new environment. In the context of folklore, the oikotype refers to the adaptation of certain motifs and tale types to a new social and cultural environment after having migrated to different parts of the world. According to von Sydow, the oikotype absorbs and contains the beliefs, traditions, and customs of the surrounding social environment (*milieu*) each time (von Sydow 1948a; cf. Hasan-Rokem 2016; Valdimar Tr. Hafstein 2001). Although von Sydow distinguishes between the role of active and passive tradition-carriers within the process of dissemination of folktales (von Sydow 1948a, 49–50), he does not focus on individual storytellers. He nevertheless created a framework for increased scholarly interest in the tale-tellers themselves as well as their communities.

Attitudes towards storytellers as unconscious tradition-bearers gradually changed towards a focus on small groups and communities. According to the Russians Peter Bogatyrev and Roman Jakobson, the creativity of “the folk” is rooted in the assumption that people use storytelling in each community to express their own needs and thoughts in their society. For them, “[r]eproduction does not mean a passive appropriation” (Bogatyrev and Jakobson 1982, 40), implying that people themselves can influence the storytelling tradition: they decide which narratives will persist in the community by performing them on a regular basis. At the same time, this means rejecting those narratives that do not prove relevant for the community: “in folklore only those forms will be preserved that prove functional for a given community” (Bogatyrev and Jakobson 1982, 36).

An important milestone in explaining the consistency of folktales over time are the studies by Alan Dundes, who believed that a tale's structure and its symbolic significance supports its stability. Dundes's approach is based on a comparative method, where different variants of a tale type need to be described and analyzed. He then combined Freudian psychoanalysis and Proppian formal analysis in order to demonstrate the equivalence of empirically different motifs—such as nose and phallus, decapitation and castration—in jokes and oral narratives (Dundes 2003). Based on his method, Dundes developed the concept of *allomotifs*, describing mutable motifs that are functionally as well as symbolically equivalent (Dundes 2007b, 319–24). Dundes mainly reasons along Freudian lines by proposing a one-way relationship between the established and consciously used motif (nose, decapitation) and an unconscious and “taboo” motif (phallus, castration). However, Francisco Vaz da Silva has argued that Dundes's concept of allomotifs is by no means restricted to Freudian psychoanalysis and discourse. Instead, the focus should be placed on exploring the common denominator of such motifs, which may be bidirectional as well as used consciously by the tale-teller. Therefore, Vaz da Silva proposes that allomotifs should be regarded as folk metaphors, which are deeply rooted within a society's traditions and would, hence, ensure the stability of folktales (Vaz da Silva 2017).

An interesting contribution in explaining the continuity of recurrent traditional motifs and episodes within Old Norse literature and later folklore is Stephen Mitchell's “mushroom metaphor”, which he describes in several of his works (see for example Mitchell 1991b; 2014). It was, however, Mitchell's wife Kristine Forsgard, an ethnobotanist, who pointed out to him the similarities between the phenomenon of tradition and the way mushrooms reproduce. While the “fruiting body” of fungus is visible and often emerges out of the ground in small groups, sometimes arranged in patterns like so-called fairy rings, the much larger part of the mushroom is invisible and runs through the soil in the form of a web of fine filaments, the mycelium. It then is up to outer circumstances and the surrounding environment as to when and where the fruiting body of the mushroom emerges (Mitchell 1991b, 180–81; 2014, 50–51). While this metaphor is noteworthy in terms of visualizing “invisible” cultural processes, Mitchell is also aware that proposing a biological metaphor is deemed problematic in the field of folkloristics (Mitchell 2014, 50 n. 22; cf. Valdimar Tr. Hafstein 2001). Nevertheless, to conclude with this comparison, the absence of the visible mushroom—the fruiting body—does not prove its nonexistence, which might also be true of the folktale in the

sense that the absence of folktale recordings in a time prior to their systematic collection provides no proof for their nonexistence or instability. On the other hand, the fruiting body of folk- and fairy tales from earlier times might manifest itself in many guises, as for example in the form of literary creations.

I.4.a The case of the Icelandic fairy tale

The earliest Icelandic fairy tales were collected around 1700 by the famous collector of manuscripts, Árni Magnússon. Amongst other material, he collected about five fairy tales, all Icelandic variants of well-known tale types such as ATU 709 *Snow White*. Although Árni Magnússon did not hold such tales in high regard—for example, he stated that the tale variant of *Snow White* was pure nonsense—he recorded information about when and from whom he received them (Bjarni Einarsson 1955, cxxvi–cxliv). About a century or so later, the eighteenth-century author Eiríkur Laxdal wrote two lengthy works, *Ólandssaga* (Saga of No Such Land) and *Saga Ólafs Þórhallssonar*, both inspired by folk narratives. *Ólandssaga* is considered a proto-novel, where Laxdal blends tales known from the later fairy-tale tradition and other narratives similar to later *fornaldarsögur* and romances.⁴⁷ Laxdal was not a man of learning. He grew up in the isolated western parts of Iceland and taught himself to write. Later, he went to Copenhagen, where he went to university but lost his grant and enlisted in the Danish navy. A few years later he returned to Iceland, where he had a small farm. In his late years, Laxdal was a vagabond until his death in 1816. Laxdal’s two works are influenced by foreign popular literature, which he probably came to know in Denmark. He makes extensive use of the concept of the frame tale as it appears in the works of Boccaccio, Chaucer, Straparola, and Basile as well as in the *Arabian Nights* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, lxxiii; 2003, 122–31).⁴⁸ Laxdal also includes the Icelandic tale of *Mjaðveig Mánadóttir*, a variant of Cinderella (ATU 510A), which features the common motif of the evil stepmother and the lost-and-found slipper; according to Einar Ól. Sveinsson, this appears already in the fourteenth-century chivalric saga *Vilmundar saga viðutan* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, 238).⁴⁹ Eiríkur’s work

⁴⁷ Fairy tales that can be accounted for in *Ólandssaga* are *Mjaðveig Mánadóttir* (ATU 510A *Cinderella*), *Vilfríður Völufegri* (ATU 709 *Snow White*), *Kísa kóngsdóttir* (ATU 711 *The Beautiful and the Ugly Twin Sisters*), and *Líneik og Laufey* (AT 870B* *The True Bride Sews a Wedding Dress* (no ATU number)).

⁴⁸ For a list of Icelandic fairy-tale variants in *Ólandssaga*, see Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, 124–25.

⁴⁹ According to the Icelandic tale-type index, the only Cinderella type that exists in Iceland is ATU 510A, commonly known as the tale of *Mjaðveig Mánadóttir* (Mjadveig Moon’s Daughter) (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, 62–64; 2003, 9, 238). However, the male version of ATU 511 also exists and is frequent in Iceland, but due to a confusing classification, the variants are not ascribed to Cinderella in particular.

Ólandssaga will be shown to be an important work regarding the stability and continuity of Icelandic folk narratives, and it is frequently referred to in the articles.

The majority of Icelandic fairy tales was, however, collected in the nineteenth century through the librarian Jón Árnason. The Icelandic collection of folk- and fairy tales *Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og æfintýri* was published in two volumes between 1862 and 1864 in Germany and later revised and enhanced into six volumes between 1954 and 1961.⁵⁰ In 1929, Einar Ól. Sveinsson published the Icelandic tale-type index, *Verzeichnis isländischer Märchenvarianten*, where he classified approximately 550 texts from published folktale collections and unpublished manuscripts under 225 existing tale type numbers in accordance with Antti Aarne's classification system (1910). He also published the first treatment on Icelandic folktales in Icelandic, *Um íslenzkar þjóðsögur* (1940).⁵¹ Although most Icelandic fairy tales constitute variants of international tale types, they have adapted to the Icelandic social and cultural environment; they were also shaped by the personal experiences and the worldview of individual storytellers, as the folklorist Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir shows (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2011). However, they also often portray features that seem rather foreign to Iceland, like mentions of woodlands, castles, bowers, and kings and queens, which did not exist in Iceland (Schier 1987, 239–40). One explanation for the foreign influences in Icelandic fairy tales might be the fact that oral tradition, saga-writing, and the recital of written saga texts and *rímur* were common in Icelandic culture until the beginning of the twentieth century. While saga literature was handwritten and copied long after the medium of print had reached Iceland in 1550, those texts were also read aloud and recited within farmers' homes and communities—often at evening wakes (*kvöldvökur*) during the wintertime, which also was a common platform for oral narratives and popular tales to be told. It thus comes as no surprise that fairy tales were influenced by late saga literature and vice versa (Schier 1987, 252; Werth 2019, 60–61). The Icelandic fairy tale therefore shows some degree of continuity and even shares episodes and motifs found in earlier Icelandic saga literature. In a recent article, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir has demonstrated that some Icelandic fairy tales contain motifs that already appear in the medieval Icelandic *Völsunga saga*

⁵⁰ Icelandic databases on legends and fairy tales can be found online on the website ismus.is. The *sagnagrunnur*, the Icelandic database of folktales and legends, was developed by Terry Gunnell and Trausti Dagsson. The database provides summaries of Icelandic folktales from various collections as well as information on their contributors and cartographic visualization. The *ævintýragrunnur*, the Icelandic database of fairy tales, was developed by Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, with the assistance of some of her students.

⁵¹ This study was later translated into English as *The Folk-Stories of Iceland* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003).

(Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2021c). That fairy tales can also be identified in other cultures from medieval and even ancient times will be discussed in the following section.

1.5 Fairy tales in ancient and medieval literature

The oldest known fairy tale is the Egyptian tale *The Two Brothers*, preserved on papyrus from around 2000 BCE (Thompson 1946, 274). The best-known fairy tale from the classical period is probably the story of Cupid and Psyche, put in the mouth of an old drunken woman in Lucius Apuleius's ancient Roman novel *The Golden Ass* from the second century CE.⁵² The tale is better known today as ATU 425C *Beauty and the Beast*.⁵³

Various scholars have pointed out that fairy tales were incorporated into lengthy prose texts already in classical antiquity. In his book *Fairytales in the Ancient World* (2000), the classicist Graham Anderson compares modern fairy tales with fairy-tale analogues in ancient as well as medieval texts, which, however, differ to some extent from their more recent counterparts. Despite the overall narrative plot being recognizable, Anderson notes that the ancient fairy-tale analogues might lack intrinsic features, such as magical interventions or the slipper test in variants of Cinderella, which are essential to canonical fairy tales (Anderson 2000, 42). The classicist and folklorist William Hansen argues that the differences between tales of magic in ancient texts and later fairy tales are rooted in the literary treatment and purpose of a given narrative. However, it cannot be considered as evidence for the absence of tales of magic in the oral tradition of ancient societies. In the introductory chapter to his book *Ariadne's Thread: A Guide to International Tales Found in Classical Literature* (2002), Hansen states:

The magic tale was a nonhistorical genre, and no fictional genre of traditional story is well represented in ancient literature for its own sake, since ancient authors as a rule did not regard purely fictional narratives as meriting literary treatment, whether traditional or original. That is presumably why we find so little direct evidence for the magic tale in

⁵² On the meaning and function of old wives' tales in classical and anticlassical literature, see Ziolkowski 2002. Gottskálk Þ. Jensson suggests the first-person narrative of the troll woman Arinnefja in the Old Icelandic legendary saga *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* can be classified as a *fabula anilis*, or "old wives' tale": the narrator Arinnefja appears as an old hag or loathly lady, similar to the old woman who narrates the tale of Cupid and Psyche in Apuleius's *Golden Ass*. Like Psyche, Arinnefja must also fetch magical objects from the Underworld to atone for her crimes of passion (Gottskálk Þ. Jensson 2003, 199–200). Carolyn Larrington compares Arinnefja to the Irish motif of the loathly lady (Larrington 2015). For further discussion on this particular Icelandic saga and its classical and folkloric elements, see Lagerholm 1927, xviii–li.

⁵³ For an in-depth study on the tale of *Cupid and Psyche* and its manifold tale variants, consult Swahn 1955.

ancient authors. As a genre, moreover, the magic tale may have been especially popular among the poor and uncultured, expressing the fantasies of the relatively powerless, as we know it has done in certain later times and places. (Hansen 2002, 17)

That folk- and fairy tales can also be examined in medieval literature was demonstrated by the medievalist Jan Ziolkowski, whose research on the folktale in medieval Latin poems is published in his book *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies* (2007). For example, Ziolkowski traces an early variant of *Little Red Riding Hood* (ATU 333), where an exposed little girl is found by a fountain at Pentecost and is given a red tunic by her foster father. The girl is later miraculously saved from wolf cubs, who dare not eat her.⁵⁴ The narrative was adapted into a Latin poem and included in a schoolbook compiled by the priest Egbert of Liège in the eleventh century (Egbert of Liège 2013, 227–28; cf. Ziolkowski 2007, 93–124). The Latin schoolbook, entitled *Fecunda ratis* (*The Well-Laden Ship*), was preserved together with an accompanying letter by Egbert to Adalbold, the Bishop of Utrecht, in which Egbert comments on his choices of the Latin texts he included in his book:

Many people often say many things in ordinary language, and that wisdom of the commoners is proffered in a great many examples that are indispensable to employ. I drank from this font, thinking to myself that among these things were many that are practical (if some how they could be preserved) clear-things which could make listeners of those who were for this reason inattentive: that these things had been written down nowhere to be preserved better in a mindful heart. So, I have gathered up in just two little books whatever things I could think of through the hours of day and night, in single verselets, many times in two, sometimes in three [...], furthermore interspersing them with some new and popular tales and with a few divine ones. For I worked not for those who are already perfected to manly strength by careful attentive reading, but for those timid little boys still subject to discipline in school. (Egbert of Liège 2013, 3–5)

⁵⁴ In this context, Ziolkowski also refers to a short tale of Icelanders, or *Íslendingaþáttur*, namely *Rögnvalds þáttur ok Rauðs* in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar*, preserved in the *Flatexjarbók* manuscript (GKS 1005 fol.). Here, the future hero Gunnarr is exposed as a new-born, dressed in a red tunic. He is found and raised by low-status foster parents, who call the child *Rauðr* (Red) according to the colour of the tunic. Later, the noble birth mother identifies the tunic and, as a result, her offspring. Ziolkowski also compares the *þáttur* to the medieval Breton *lai* of *Le Fresne*, ascribed to Marie de France, where a noble girl is identified by her birth mother by means of a fine cloth (Ziolkowski 2007, 112).

From Egbert's statement, it becomes clear that he uses popular oral narratives in the vernacular, like folktales, as teaching material that his young pupils would likely be interested in and attentive to, in order to ease for them the study of Latin.⁵⁵ According to Ziolkowski, Egbert's variant of *Little Red Riding Hood* as well as other medieval Latin poems that include folk- and fairy-tale elements seem to indicate a trend or shift from sacral accounts of miracles towards popular and vernacular narratives of marvellous or magical incidents ("from miracle to marvel or magic") (Ziolkowski 2007, 232–33).

Many international folktales and folkloric motifs can also be identified in medieval Arthurian literature, as for example in the life story of the legendary British King Arthur as narrated in Geoffrey of Monmouth's pseudohistorical work *Historia regum Britanniae* (1130–36).⁵⁶ Indeed, it seems as if fairy tales often became incorporated into the life stories and genealogies of medieval kings and rulers, where historical figures were seemingly modelled after fairy-tale characters. For example, the story of the mother of Karl the Great or Charlemagne, Bertrada II of Laon, Queen of the Franks, is closely connected to the folktale type of ATU 403 *The Black and the White Bride* (Grimm 1822, 3: 228; Simrock 1853, 122–24; de Vries 1954, 149; Rumpf 1979; Goldberg 1996, 207). The legend of Bertha diverges according to different sources, but the core of the narrative describes how Bertha is supposed to become the wife of King Pipin. On the way to his court, another woman is put in Bertha's place, while the real Bertha is raised by a peasant in the woods. One day when Pipin is out hunting, he stays the night at the peasant's house; he then lies with Bertha, which leads to Karl's conception. Later, Bertha is identified as the true bride by her birth mother, and the false bride is punished (Reinhold 1911). Furthermore, the story of Charlemagne's fourth wife (or mistress), Fastrada, and especially her death—where the emperor is not able to part from the deathbed of his deceased but still beautiful wife—has been identified as an instance of the fairy tale of ATU 709 *Snow White* (Shojaei Kawan 2008, 330).

Another example of fairy tales incorporated into the life stories of European rulers are the narratives of the Anglo-Saxon kings Offa *primi* and Offa *secundi* (King of Mercia), which both are intertwined with the widespread fairy tale of ATU 706 *The Maiden Without Hands*. According to Thompson, "Few collections of any extant in all of Europe from Ireland to eastern Russia fail to have this story" (Thompson 1946, 121).⁵⁷

⁵⁵ For a list of various folktale types and motifs in *The Well-Laden Ship*, see Maaz 1985, 1016–17.

⁵⁶ For further discussion on the nature, origin, and significance of folkloric elements and fairy tale themes in Arthurian literature, see for example Loomis 1958 and Lawson 2015.

⁵⁷ Icelandic tale variants of ATU 706 are *Sagan af Birni bragðastakk* (Jón Árnason 1954, 2: 391–96; 1958, 5: 7–9) and *Gorvömb* (Jón Árnason 1954, 2: 360–64). For further discussion on the Icelandic tale variants,

In the *Vitae duorum Offarum* from the late twelfth century, the legendary King Offa of the West-Angles goes hunting in the forest and encounters a beautiful maiden in noble garb. After he questions her, the maiden reveals to him that she is of royal origin and the daughter of the King of York, who demanded she marry him. After rejecting her father, the maiden was exposed in the wilderness and left to the beasts. Offa makes her his wife and fathers her children; this is followed by the common narrative sequence of the forged letters and the expulsion of the maiden and her children. The tale is mirrored in the life story of Offa de Mercia (Offa II), where a noble maiden is exposed and set adrift in an oarless boat without food and drink. She arrives in Offa's kingdom, where Offa marries her in secret (Suchier 1877; Cox 1893, xlvi–xlix). The two medieval literary variants of ATU 706 belong to the Constance-group, a widespread cycle of medieval tales. The Constance-group draws its name from the English branch of literary variants, where the maiden is usually named Constance. Hermann Suchier has identified this narrative in John Gower's lengthy poem *Confessio Amantis* (ca. 1390) and in *The Man of Law's Tale* in Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1400); both of these are ultimately derived from Nicholas Trivet's *Chronique anglo-normande* (Suchier 1877, 516, 520). While those narratives differ to some extent from each other, the basic plot is more or less stable and might be summarized as follows: A girl of noble birth is set adrift and lands on the shore of Northumberland, where King Ælla finds and marries the maiden. However, because of treachery and forged letters, Ælla is forced to reject the girl. Later, the conflict is solved, and Ælla, the heroine, and her father are reunited in Rome. The narrative was also treated in chivalric romances mainly from France and Brittany, as for example in *Le Roman de la Manekine* (1279) by Philippe de Remi (Sire de Beaumanoir), who brought the Offa legend to France. Other examples are the Middle-High German romance of *Mai und Beaflor*, as well as the French romances *Emaré*—probably inspired by medieval Breton *lais*—and *La Belle Hélène de Constantinople* (Suchier 1877, 517).⁵⁸

ATU 706 has, amongst other folktale types, also been identified in the Middle English romance of *Sir Degaré* from the fourteenth century. Bruce Rosenberg demonstrates that the romance shows an intricate relationship with three folktales (ATU 931 *Oedipus*, ATU 873 *The King Discovers His Unknown Son*, and ATU 706 *The Maiden Without Hands*).⁵⁹ In *Sir Degaré*, a princess exposes her illegitimate son and leaves in his

see Rittershaus 1902, 133–35 and Krappe 1937, 362. For an extensive list of the scholarly treatment of ATU 706, see Dundes 1987, 57–59.

⁵⁸ For further discussion on the fairy tale and its medieval literary treatment, see Däumling 1912; Krappe 1937; Bolte and Polívka 1963, 1: 298–301; Schlauch 1969; Rölleke 1981; Black 2003; Leek 2012.

⁵⁹ On folk- and fairy-tale motifs, especially that of Oedipus, in *Sir Degaré*, see also Colopy 1982.

cradle a pair of gloves along with a letter informing the finder that the boy is of royal descent and is only supposed to love the one who fits the gloves. The boy is rescued and raised in a hermit's hut, where he receives the name Degaré ("the one almost lost"). Later, the gloves fit Degaré's newly wedded wife and identify her as his birth mother, preventing incest at the very last minute.⁶⁰ According to Rosenberg, *Sir Degaré* "is an excellent example of what a talented romance writer can do with shorter stories that come to his or her hands (or ears)" (Rosenberg 1991, 77). For him, the three folktales "are combined with great skill" and are not merely the result of an eclectic combination of a great number of folklore and romance motifs (Rosenberg 1991, 88). Rosenberg suggests that the writer of the romance embedded three autonomous folktales into a new and coherent one, where "motifs appear in the order in which they occur in oral tradition" (Rosenberg 1991, 85). He concludes that the medieval writer skillfully interwove and blended folkloric motifs and sequences into a new unique story, surpassing its constituents.

Whatever fairy tales may have looked like in ancient or medieval times, questions remain as to the meaning and function these early fairy tales fulfilled by being incorporated into literary works. In his study *The Irish Fairy Tale: A Narrative Tradition from the Middle Ages to Yeats and Stephens*, Vito Carrassi argues that the medieval fairy tale might have been regarded as some kind of "intermediate space", a neutral zone and place of transition where popular beliefs, individual creativity, literary works, and historical accounts could meet and mingle (Carrassi 2014, 93–94). He further argues, similar to Turville-Petre and even Mitchell, that early historians and scribes might have utilized the fairy tale in those cases where they wrote about historical events from a distant past and had no historical sources available to them. The fairy tale then served as some kind of stylistic scheme or template to fill in those "empty spaces" (Carrassi 2014, 183). This would indicate that the fairy tale and historiography are closely connected, and that the meaning ascribed to the fairy tale was of a greater importance and significance than that of mere entertainment or precaution.

While a thorough investigation of tale types found in classical and medieval literature would exceed the scope of this thesis, I will provide one example of an international fairy tale that has been accounted for in classical and medieval literature and is of importance for this thesis and its articles, namely, the tale of *Cinderella* (ATU 510).

⁶⁰ The motif of gloves as the recognition token by which the rightful bride is identified is also apparent in the Icelandic legendary saga *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar* (Schröder 1917; Hui 2018b, 362–66).

I.5.a The Cinderella cycle

Cinderella is probably one of the oldest extant fairy tales, as has been pointed out by various scholars throughout the centuries. The first to conduct extensive research on the tale of Cinderella and its variants was the British folklorist Marian Roalfe Cox, who published her ambitious work in 1893. Cox collected and classified 345 variants of Cinderella tales from around the world and even discussed some medieval variants in her preface (Cox 1893, xxv–lxxii). The thread was later picked up by the Swedish ethnologist Anna Birgitta Rooth, an advocate of the Finnish school. Rooth wrote her dissertation on Cinderella variants and their dissemination throughout the world, identifying and locating around seven hundred variants. Rooth was able to show that Cinderella is not one particular tale, but rather a whole tale tradition or cycle that exists throughout the entire world and in almost every culture (Rooth 1951). In a recent publication on Cinderella, American folklorist Cristina Bacchilega emphasizes this notion further: “considering Cinderella as also and perhaps more importantly a cultural text, implies that we realize Cinderella has not been reduced to this one type of story or fantasy, and that its variable meanings have continued to live, adapt, and translate in and across cultures” (Bacchilega 2016, xi). This makes it, however, difficult to draw a distinct line between different Cinderella tale types, which various scholars have classified differently. According to Alan Dundes, “The Cinderella-Cycle refers to several distinct subtypes of the basic tale, that is, a veritable complex of different tales which apparently belong under one single rubric” (Dundes 1982, xiv).

Table 1: Overview of Cinderella tale types and subtypes according to different classification systems.⁶¹

Cox (1893)	Rooth (1951)	Aarne-Thompson (AT 1961)	Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) (Uther 2004)
Type A. <i>Cinderella</i>	Type B	AT 510A. <i>Cinderella</i>	ATU 510A <i>Cinderella</i>
Type B. <i>Cat-skin</i>	Type B I	AT 510B. <i>The Dress of Gold, of Silver and of Stars</i>	ATU 510B <i>Peau d'Âne</i>
Type C. <i>Cap o' Rushes</i>			ATU 510B* <i>The Princess in the Chest</i>
Type D. <i>Indeterminate</i>	Type A	AT 511 <i>One-Eye, Two-Eyes, Three-Eyes</i>	ATU 511 <i>One-Eye, Two-Eyes, and Three-Eyes</i>
Type E. <i>Hero Tales</i>	Type C	AT 511A <i>The Little Red Ox</i>	
		AT 511A* <i>The Helpful Cow</i>	
-----	Type AB	AT 511 + AT 510A	ATU 511 + ATU 510A

⁶¹ The table was originally printed in Dundes 1982, xiv, and is here extended by the last column on the classification of Cinderella tale types in Uther 2004.

The tale type of Cinderella has been classified as ATU 510 according to the latest classification system (Uther 2004, 1: 293), which further divides it into the subtypes A and B. The subtype of 510A *Cinderella* (tale proper) features the innocent, persecuted heroine who is mistreated by her stepmother (stepsisters) and connected to the hearth and ashes. Usually, the heroine loses one of her precious slippers while secretly attending a ball (or church) and is later identified by the very same slipper, which secures her marriage to a nobleman.

The oldest known variant of ATU 510A was for some time believed to be the Chinese tale of Ye Xian, written by Duan Chengshi around 850–60 CE (Waley 1947, 226). However, older variants have been identified in literature from classical antiquity. The story of the girl Rhodopis, mentioned by the Greek historian Strabo in the first century CE as well as by Herodotus five centuries earlier, shows striking parallels to the modern fairy tale. Strabo briefly mentions Rhodopis, who is bathing when an eagle takes one of her sandals and flies with it to the pharaoh in Memphis. The pharaoh starts longing for the girl who owns the other shoe, until his men find her in the city of Naucratis; she then becomes the pharaoh's wife. A somewhat different narrative about Rhodopis is mentioned by Herodotus: the slipper test is missing, but other common Cinderella incidents—such as the motif of the persecuted heroine, where Rhodopis is a slave and courtesan—can be identified (Anderson 2000, 27–29; Hansen 2002, 85–89; cf. Rooth 1951, 69–71).

Anderson detects further early literary variants of Cinderella, for example, the tale of Aspasia of Phocaea by Aelian from the second or third century CE.⁶² The story of Aspasia has been preserved in the *Varia Historia* (12.1), a miscellany of curious facts, where it was adapted into a moral anecdote or *exempla* in which virtue and modesty are rewarded. For Anderson, this narrative is a significant variant of Cinderella in which the genres of fairy tale, romance, and even historiography come together. Although the slipper test is missing, the tale of Cinderella is still recognizable: a precious necklace functions as a recognition token, and an ugly growth on the heroine's face as well as her appearance in black mourning garb resembles Cinderella's ugly disguise (Anderson 2000, 29–33). Aelian also included a version of Strabo's story of Rhodopis in his *Varia Historia*

⁶² According to Anderson, the name Aspasia means “welcomed” in Greek, which does not fit the usual connection of the name to the hearth or a servant's position. However, Anderson points out that the pronunciation of the name shows some resemblance to common Cinderella names like *Aschenputtel* in German or *Ashiepatle* in English (Anderson 2000, 31).

(13.33), which according to Anderson makes him the only ancient author who included two Cinderella stories in a single work (Anderson 2000, 33).

Anderson also points out some medieval variants of Cinderella, as for example the story of Asenath, preserved in a Hellenistic manuscript from the sixth century. The story is linked to the biblical tale of Joseph and Asenath, where Asenath, an Egyptian princess, becomes the wife of the Israelite leader Joseph. As in the ancient tale of Aspasia, Asenath dresses in black mourning garb and rubs her face with ashes and cinders. Later, an angel or supernatural helper gives her advice on how she can become Joseph's wife, which requires Asenath to convert to Judaism. In order to prove her worthiness, Asenath washes Joseph's feet, a common wedding custom in Judaism which, according to Anderson, constitutes an altered version of the slipper test meant to fit the belief system (Anderson 2000, 33–37). In von Sydow's terms, the adaptation of the slipper test to a more suitable alternative can be regarded as oikotypification of a particular folkloric motif that has adapted to a different cultural or religious environment.

Anderson further suggests that the Breton *lai* of *Le Fresne* (Ash Tree) from the twelfth century ascribed to Marie de France is a medieval variant of Cinderella.⁶³ In the *lai*, the heroine is placed under an ash tree as a new-born, rather than sitting in ashes and cinders. Later, her birth mother recognizes the heroine by some royal tokens, a fine brocade, and a ring, which reveals the highborn origin of the girl and enables her to marry a nobleman. For Anderson, the finding and recognition of this particular Cinderella variant is “an important signpost in the European history of Cinderella”, not only because it is the first western European variant to have survived in the vernacular, but also because of the stylistic changes made to the tale that identify it as a romance rather than a fairy tale (Anderson 2000, 41–42). The *lai* of *Le Fresne* will be important for this study, for it was translated into Old Norse in the thirteenth century and might have influenced the Cinderella tradition in Iceland, as well as saga literature in general (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2014, 125; Hui 2018b, 357–60).⁶⁴

Most scholarship on early variants of Cinderella is concerned with the tale type of ATU 510A, or simply Cinderella proper. However, the Cinderella cycle also consists of

⁶³ The existence of fairy-tale elements in the *lais* by Marie de France was further recognized by Whalen 2008, 62 and Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2012, 266.

⁶⁴ Another medieval variant of Cinderella (ATU 510A) was identified by Juliana Dresvina in the hagiography of the holy virgin Margret of Antioch, who was devoured by a dragon but escaped through the monster's womb. She later became the patron of pregnant women and childbirth (Dresvina 2009). The narrative was also translated into Old Norse as *Margrétar saga* (Unger 1877, 1: 474–81; cf. Jón Steffensen 1975, 208–15).

the B-type *Peau d'Âne* (Catskin-type), which proceeds somewhat differently than the A-type. In tale variants of ATU 510B, the heroine flees from home after being confronted by her incestuous father, who demands she marry him; he had promised his dying wife he would only marry the woman who looks strikingly similar to her, or implicitly, their daughter. The heroine disguises herself by dressing in a fur cloak, animal hide, wooden clothes, or even human skin. She becomes the kitchen maid of another king, who later marries the maiden after discovering her identity.⁶⁵ The B-type also features the subtype ATU 510B* *The Princess in the Chest* (Hiding-box-type), where the heroine is persecuted by her own father who wishes to marry her. She escapes by being locked up in a wooden container and shipped to another kingdom, where a king discovers and marries her.⁶⁶

The tale types of ATU 510B and 510B* have not been the focus of Cinderella scholarship in the same way the A-type has. Early literary variants seem to be especially rare, since many medieval variants have been classified as belonging to the aforementioned folktale of *The Maiden Without Hands* (ATU 706) instead. This is because ATU 510B/B* and ATU 706 share the same narrative sequence in which a father demands to be married to his own daughter, who then flees from home and either hides in the wilderness or is exposed by her rejected father in a wooden vessel at sea (Uther 2004, 1: 379, cf. Dundes 1987, 58). According to Uther, the Italian tale of *Doralice* in Straparola's sixteenth-century collection is the oldest known variant of ATU 510B* *The Princess in the Chest* (Uther 2004, 1: 296; cf. Rooth 1951, 129). However, the American folklorist Alexander H. Krappe regards *Doralice* as belonging to the Constance-group or ATU 706 (Krappe 1937, 362). The same holds true for the aforementioned medieval legends of the two Offas as well as the French romance of *Emaré*, which are regarded as

⁶⁵ The heroine's disguise is one of the main features in the B-type variants of Cinderella and is usually referred to in their titles, such as *Peau d'Âne*, *Donkeyskin*, *All Kinds of Fur*, *Prinzessin Mäusehaut*, *La Bella Maria del Legno*, and *Kari Trestakk*. For more on the B-type from cultural and gender perspectives, see Mulhern 1985; Goldberg 1997; Muhawi 2001; Jorgensen 2012.

⁶⁶ According to the Icelandic tale-type index by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, the B-types of Cinderella do not exist among Icelandic fairy tales. However, some common motifs of the B-types, such as the heroine hiding in a tree (ATU 510B) and being shipped to another kingdom where a king finds and marries her (ATU 510B*), are present in Icelandic tale variants of AT 870B* *The True Bride Sews a Wedding Dress* (no ATU number). In the Icelandic tale *Sagan af Lineik og Laufey* (The Tale of Lineik and Laufey), Princess Lineik and her brother Sigurður hide from their evil stepmother in a red tree and a green tree, which are hollow on the inside and can be closed in such a way that the entrance is invisible from the outside. The King of Greece later finds the trees, cuts them down, and ships them to his castle, where they become bed pillars in the king's chambers (Jón Árnason 1954, 2: 318–23). Note that in Straparola's tale of *Doralice*, it is also the King of Greece who acquires the closet chest and discovers the heroine inside it. In the Icelandic tale *Ásmundur kóngsson og Signý systir hans* (Prince Ásmundur and His Sister Signý), Prince Ásmundur carves an entire home into a tree by installing all kinds of rooms inside it. His sister Signý keeps all the jewels and riches belonging to their deceased mother inside the tree, which later becomes their hiding place from their evil stepmother (Jón Árnason 1954, 2: 324–25).

belonging to the Constance-group. Cox, however, classifies these medieval narratives as variants of the Catskin-type (now ATU 510B) of Cinderella (Cox 1893, 1–li).

The subsequent tale type of ATU 511 *One-Eye, Two-Eyes, and Three-Eyes* is also part of the Cinderella cycle, where the hero can be male or female. The motif of mistreatment at the hands of a stepmother/stepsisters is enhanced by the common motif of the stepmother/stepsisters spying on the hero/heroine by pretending to be asleep, while one eye is still watching. Usually, the hero/heroine is accompanied by a helping animal, often a cow or an ox, but a ram in some French and Irish variants (Bolte and Polívka 1963, 3: 60–66). An ancient variant of ATU 511 was pointed out by Rooth, where Zeus's secret mistress Io is spied upon by the giant Argus Panoptes and his many eyes, until the god Hermes distracts the giant by lulling him to sleep and slaying him. Rooth explains the differences between the ancient narrative and the later fairy tale by stating that the fairy tale had to be adapted in order to fit the pre-existing narrative structures and relations of the Olympian deities:

Ich kann mir die Ähnlichkeit zwischen dem Mythos und dem Volksmärchen so erklären, daß sie traditionell verbunden sind. Ihre Verschiedenheit dagegen kommt daher, daß das bestimmte Rollenmuster des Götterolymps nur das verwenden kann, was zu diesem Pantheon paßt. Märchen und Mythos können darum nur teilweise übereinstimmen. (Rooth 1984, 35–36)

An ancient variant of the same tale type, namely, its subtype AT 511A *The Little Red Ox*, was identified by Krappe in the ancient story of Phrixos and his sister Helle. The siblings escape from their evil stepmother Ino with the help of a golden-fleeced ram, which flies with the children over the sea. The golden fleece of the ram later becomes the legendary object Jason and the Argonauts set out to acquire (Krappe 1923; cf. Rooth 1951, 143–45).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ According to the Icelandic tale-type index by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, this tale type is quite frequent in Iceland, but due to a confusing classification, it has not been ascribed to Cinderella in particular. Einar Ólafur classified all existing Icelandic variants as type 302I* (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, 5–8), which corresponds to the tale type of AT 302B* *The Red Bull* in the Aarne-Thompson index, where only the nine variants from Iceland are listed (Aarne-Thompson 1961, 95). Under the previous Cinderella type AT 511A *The Little Red Ox*, the relation to Sveinsson's 302I* was especially emphasized. In his later revised tale-type index (Uther 2004), Hans-Jörg Uther omitted this particular subtype, where only ATU 511 *One-Eye, Two-Eyes, and Three-Eyes* exists as a distinct tale type number and incorporates the male variant of AT 511A *The Little Red Ox* (Uther 2004, 1: 296–97). Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir at the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies in Reykjavik is currently preparing a revised edition of the Icelandic tale-type index, and she classifies all existing Icelandic variants of *The Red Bull* (EÓS 302I*/AT 302B*) as ATU 511.

To conclude, scholars such as Anderson, Hansen, Ziolkowski, Rosenberg, Cox, Rooth, Krappe, and Carrassi, who have identified folk- and fairy tale types and motifs in literature from classical antiquity as well as the Middle Ages, regard the fairy tale to be mainly an oral genre. Those fairy tale types, motifs, and narrative units in early literature are regarded as literary manifestations of an otherwise flourishing oral tradition that reaches far back in history; they have left their marks and traces within literary creations of former times.⁶⁸ The Cinderella cycle in folklore constitutes an apt example of a fairy tale and its manifold variants which have been identified by various scholars in ancient and medieval literature alike. Interestingly, the common Cinderella motifs, such as the slipper and the slipper test, are not mentioned in any of the early variants. Instead, they have been replaced by other recognition tokens or are adapted to different cultural or religious conventions, as the more recent folktale variants also tend to do.

In the following section, the focus will be on early research on folk- and fairy tales in Old Norse and medieval Icelandic literature. While I have already referred to fairy-tale motifs in medieval Icelandic literature in previous footnotes, I will now focus on the scholarly discourse on fairy tales in Old Norse literature, which came to an abrupt end in the mid-twentieth century.

I.6 The fairy tale in Old Norse and medieval Icelandic literature

As I have demonstrated in previous sections, the academic fields of folkloristics and medieval studies, although independent of one another today, spread historically from the same soil of romanticism and nationalism. This is also true of the study of fairy tales and their supposed connection to Old Norse literature and mythology, which was widely debated by the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. In general, the accepted premise was that many Germanic and Old Norse mythological narratives, sagas, and heroic epics featured folkloric elements, known from the later folk- and fairy-tale tradition. Opinions, however, diverged as to whether the fairy tale was the source material for heroic epics and sagas, or if the folktale motifs had been later additions and embellishments to the sagas. Very little research on this matter has been conducted in recent decades, and little discussion on those early theories can be found. This might be due to the fact that the majority of those early studies are published in German. After World War II, German scholars had little to no interest in reviving the study of fairy tales

⁶⁸ The opposite opinion also exists, claiming that fairy tales never constituted an oral genre in the first place, but have been invented by single authors and were first introduced to oral tradition at a rather late date (see discussion in Section I.7).

in connection to a romanticized Germanic/Nordic past, as this was formerly misused in national-socialist propaganda in the Third Reich (see for example Kamenetsky 1972; Zipes 2006, 134–69). A further reason for the neglect of this narrative material in particular is the shifting interest in Old Norse studies and folkloristics alike. As I have already discussed above, the view on the Icelandic sagas as mainly an oral genre—or at least heavily influenced by oral tradition—drastically changed when, under the lead of the Icelandic school, scholars such as Sigurður Nordal regarded the Icelandic sagas as artful literary works by single authors. At the same time as the research interest in Old Norse studies turned towards literary criticism, where the identification of the unknown medieval authors of the sagas was of great importance, folklorists began to focus on tale-tellers and their communities as well as the performative event of storytelling. Research on the dissemination and historical development of folk- and fairy tales as conducted by the Finnish school became of little interest. In this section, I will discuss early scholarship on the interconnections and relationships between the Old Icelandic sagas, Norse mythology, and fairy tales.

As I pointed out earlier, the Brothers Grimm were already convinced that the Old Icelandic legendary saga *Völsunga saga* contains a variant of the fairy tale of *Sleeping Beauty*, where Brynhildr is stung with a sleeping thorn by Óðinn and then awoken by Sigurður Fáfnisbani. Furthermore, the Grimms proposed that the narrative about the Norwegian King Haraldr hárfagri (e. *fair-hair*), who reigned c. 872–930 and is narrated in the Icelandic chronicle *Ágrip af Noregs konunga sögum* (ch. 2–4), is a variant of the fairy tale of *The Wild Man* (KHM 136, later *Eisenhans* (Iron Hans), ATU 502 *The Wild Man* + ATU 314 *Goldener*).⁶⁹ The Grimms argue that the abduction of young Haraldr by the giant Dofri, who then raises the boy, is reminiscent of the abduction of the noble boy by the “wild man” in the fairy tale (Grimm 1922, 219; cf. von der Leyen 1899, 53).⁷⁰ It

⁶⁹ For an elaborate overview of the Goldener tale type, see Panzer 1901, 251–67; Bolte and Polívka 1963, 3: 94–114, Uther 2004, 1: 198–200).

⁷⁰ The Grimms further regarded this particular narrative as a male Cinderella story of some sort, similar to the German fairy tale of *Allerleirauh* which belongs to the B-type of the Cinderella cycle (ATU 510B, KHM 65) (Grimm 1822, 229). After the Grimms, various scholars have proposed an equivalence between the tale types of Goldener and Cinderella in Old Norse literature (von der Leyen 1899, 36; Panzer 1901, 255, 257, 259; Honti 1931, 31). The German Friedrich Panzer believed that the Germanic narrative of Hilde and her daughter Kudrun is derived from the tale type of *Goldener* (ATU 314) (Panzer 1901, 250–350; cf. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2021a, 1: 185 n. 188). Another Old Norse analogue of the Goldener tale was identified by Emil Benezé in his *Sagen- und literarhistorische Untersuchungen 2* (1897), where he argues that the *Goldenermärchen* was used for the last part of the legendary *Örvarr-Odds saga* (The Saga of Arrow-Oddr) (Benezé 1897, 98–103). Oddr is of royal decent but is fostered by a peasant as a child. In one of his later adventures, Oddr travels to Russia (*Garðaríki*), where he dresses in birch bark from head to toe and names himself Næframaður (e. *birch-bark man*), not revealing his real name and identity to King Herraudr. While attending Herraudr’s royal court, Oddr wins an archery, swimming, and drinking contest

is then up for speculation as to whether or not the king's byname "fair-hair" is a reference to the golden-haired boy in the fairy tale (cf. Panzer 1901, 266 n. 1).⁷¹

One of the first to engage in more serious research on the fairy tale in Old Norse literature was the Dane Axel Olrik. In his habilitation treatise, Olrik explores the influence and significance of folk- and fairy tales in the pseudo-historical work *Gesta Danorum* (Deeds of the Danes) by the medieval Danish chronicler Saxo Grammaticus from around 1200.⁷² Olrik discusses four examples: the story of Amlethus (Amleth) (books III and IV), the narrative of Syritha (Sigrid) and Otharus (Othar) (book VII), the story of Drotam (Drott) or the tale of the princess confined in the mound (book VII), and the youth of King Iarmericus (Jarmunrik) (book VIII). According to Olrik, these are all derived from known fairy tales and even exhibit the characteristic form of modern fairy tales: "Hier fanden wir kein Märchen in seiner Entwicklung; die uns bekannten Märchen liegen schon den Heldensagen Saxos voraus" (Olrik 1892, 373). However, in two of the four examples—the narrative of Sigrid and Othar as well as the early adventures of King Jarmunrik—Olrik points out that Saxo consciously avoided the usage of supernatural elements, which are an intrinsic part of the related modern fairy tales. According to Olrik, this is seemingly rooted in "einer durchgreifenden rationalisierenden Umdeutung der Märchenmotive" (Olrik 1892, 373). The fact that some of Saxo's heroic narratives do not feature magical or marvellous incidents does not dissuade Olrik from the assumption that "proper" fairy tales underlie Saxo's writings.⁷³

by always wearing his heavy disguise. He is later identified by two of his companions, who encounter Oddr's fine and costly garments shimmering through the birch bark (Boer 1888, 118–68). In the chivalric saga *Sigurðar saga þögla* (The Saga of Sigurd the Taciturn), the highborn but silent youth Sigurðr also dresses in birch bark in order to hide in the woods after a haughty princess orders his death (Loth 1963, 2: 189). The birch bark disguise reappears in some Icelandic folktale variants of ATU 870 *The Princess Confined in the Mound*, where the heroine disguises herself and changes her name to Næfrakolla (e. *birch-bark head*) (see for example Jón Árnason 1954, 2: 308–12).

⁷¹ The English term "fair-haired" refers to blonde hair, while the Old Norse term translates rather as "beautiful hair". While the translation of the byname as *fair-hair* is widely accepted, some translate it as "fine-haired" or "fine-hair" (Jesch 1996, 139 n. 62; Cormack 2007, 203; Phelpstead 2013, 5). In Chapter 23 of *Heimskringla*, an explanation is given for the king's byname, which had previously been *lúfa*, or "shock head", because Haraldr had not cut or combed his hair for ten years. It was Earl Rögnvaldr Eysteinsson who gave Haraldr his new byname after Haraldr washed and cut his hair (Snorri Sturluson 1941, 122). Note that not combing or cutting one's hair and beard for a considerable amount of time constitutes a folkloric motif as well and is, for example, prominent in the German tale of *Der Bärenhäuter* (The Bear-skiner) (KHM 101, ATU 361 *Bearskin*).

⁷² Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* is an important work for scholars of Old Norse studies and medieval Icelandic literature because many of the stories narrated in Saxo's work are also treated in the Icelandic *foraldarsögur*. However, in most cases those Icelandic narratives differ to some extent from Saxo's. It is known that Saxo relied on Icelandic sources and informants, such as an Icelander named Arnaldur or Arnhallur (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2021a, 2: 96–111).

⁷³ On this topic in Danish, see Olrik 1892–94, 2: 304–16. Karsten Friis-Jensen comes to a similar conclusion as Olrik, stating that Saxo strengthened the credibility of his narratives by providing plausible explanations (Friis-Jensen 2009, 75). Cf. the discussion in Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2021a, 2: 109.

Unlike Olrik, the German scholar Friedrich von der Leyen was convinced that the fairy tale, as we know it today, was not known in Iceland before the twelfth century (von der Leyen 1911, 134; cf. Heusler 1914, 41–42). Like many scholars of folktale studies at that time, von der Leyen was a supporter of Theodor Benfey’s theory on the Indian origin of the fairy tale and its transmission by mainly written sources to Europe in the twelfth century. In his habilitation treatise, *Das Märchen in den Göttersagen der Edda* (1899), von der Leyen compares some of the mythological narratives in Snorri Sturluson’s prosaic *Edda* from c. 1220–30 with instances in later fairy tales.⁷⁴ He concludes that the lays of the older *Poetic Edda* would be free from fairy-tale motifs, whereas the younger mythological narratives in *Snorra Edda* or *Prose Edda* were full of them: “So war die ältere [Sage] immer von Märchenmotiven frei, die jüngere ganz damit behangen” (von der Leyen 1899, 63). Von der Leyen explains this with the fairy tale’s late migration to the North when, perhaps not before 1200, the fairy tale first became incorporated into mythological narratives. He also claims that the fairy tale as it appears in *Snorra Edda* had not yet received a stable form and that the motifs seemed faded or estranged from what is known in later fairy tales; this would also explain why the narratives in Snorri’s *Edda* and Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* differ from each other (von der Leyen 1899, 62–68). For example, von der Leyen assumes that the motif of the giantess Skaði choosing her husband amongst the Norse gods by only being allowed to evaluate their feet is derived from the aforementioned fairy tale of *Goldener* (ATU 314), where the hero is sometimes identified by a wound on his leg. Von der Leyen regards this motif as a clumsily incorporated addition of later times: “Jedenfalls kann das Motif der Geschichte von Njörðr und Skaði nicht ursprünglich angehört haben, es ist vielmehr sehr ungeschickt heineingearbeitet” (von der Leyen 1899, 37).⁷⁵ He sees a more distinct version of the same motif in Saxo’s narrative about Hadingus and Regnilda (*Gesta Danorum*, book I), where the girl Regnilda also has to choose a husband by his feet. Earlier, however, Regnilda took care of Hadingus and put a golden ring into his wounded leg. When choosing her husband, Regnilda touches the legs of several men until she feels the ring in Hadingus’s leg and can identify him (von der Leyen 1899, 36, cf. Olrik 1892–94, 1: 40).⁷⁶

⁷⁴ For more on von der Leyen’s perception and theories on the fairy tale in the *Prose Edda*, see Seidler 2017.

⁷⁵ Rooth refers to the narrative of Skaði in the *Prose Edda*, regarding it as related to the slipper test in variants of Cinderella proper (Rooth 1951, 107).

⁷⁶ Georges Dumézil argues that the narrative of Hadingus in Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum* is derived from the mythological narrative of Njörðr and Skaði (Dumézil 1973a). Like the hero in the *Goldener* tale as well

Von der Leyen further acknowledges Olrik's observation on the tendency of rationalization of marvellous elements in *Gesta Danorum*, which for von der Leyen stems from the fact that those marvellous and folkloric elements did not originally belong to Germanic and Norse mythological narratives but were incorporated into the *Prose Edda* as soon as the fairy tale finally migrated from India to the far north of Europe (von der Leyen 1899, 68–69).

Von der Leyen's premise on the late dissemination of fairy-tale motifs into Norse mythology has been harshly criticized by the German scholar Adeline Rittershaus, who in 1898 was the first woman to receive a PhD from the University of Zurich. In the same year, Rittershaus went to Iceland, where over the following years she studied the by then still unpublished folk- and fairy tale manuscripts in Jón Árnason's collection. In 1902, she published her habilitation treatise, *Die neuisländischen Volksmärchen* (The Modern Icelandic Fairy Tales).⁷⁷ Rittershaus did not produce exact German translations of individual folktales, but rather summarizes 127 fairy tales and jocular tales (of which around forty were published for the first time) as well as some of the tales' variants.⁷⁸ Rittershaus also compares incidents and motifs with those of other European folktales as well as medieval and Old Icelandic literature, notably, in a time prior to the publication of the tale-type index and motif index. This accomplishment was especially praised by Antti Aarne, who admires Rittershaus for having consulted around fifty works for her study; Aarne regards it as an encompassing treatise on the Icelandic fairy tale (Aarne 1914, 30–31).

In her introduction, Rittershaus disapproves of von der Leyen's viewpoint on the late influence of fairy tales on Old Icelandic literature. Von der Leyen's argument—that the younger narratives of the *Edda* were laden with fairy-tale motifs that were absent from the *Poetic Edda*—was answered by Rittershaus, who pointed out that the oldest Eddic poems, such as *Brymskviða* and *Völundarkviða*, also contain fairy-tale episodes that can be compared with incidents in later folktales (Rittershaus 1902, xx). Concerning von der Leyen's statement that the folktales had not yet received a stable form when incorporated into Old Icelandic texts, Rittershaus comments that not even modern folk- and fairy tales

as Haraldr hárfagri, Hadingus is raised by a giant, who later assists him in battle (Bolte and Polívka 1963, 3: 106).

⁷⁷ Little has been written on Rittershaus's accomplishments. For a short overview of Rittershaus's works and career, see Glauser and Flühmann 1995. The life story of Rittershaus, her daughter Ingibjörg, and her granddaughter Vera are narrated in a recently published book by Dóra S. Bjarnason (2019).

⁷⁸ A similar approach had been chosen by the German Konrad Maurer, who published his collection of Icelandic folktales some forty years prior to that of Rittershaus.

possess a stable form, which is why they exist in numerous variants and variations (Rittershaus 1902, xx–xxi). According to Rittershaus, von der Leyen’s study is only able to unequivocally prove that fairy-tale motifs, as we find them in modern fairy tales, had already existed in the mythological narratives of the *Edda*, which could only have been transmitted orally before their writing in the thirteenth century (Rittershaus 1902, xxi). She believes fairy tales had been circulating in Iceland since medieval times which, therefore, would rule out the possibility of an Indian origin as well as a migration to Europe via written sources, as Benfey had proclaimed it (Rittershaus 1902, xviii, xlii). Rittershaus shares this viewpoint with Jón Árnason, who states that the Icelandic fairy tale, especially the *stjúpusögur* (e. *stepmother tales*), had been circulating in Iceland since the settlement (e. *landnáma*) around the year 980 (Jón Árnason 1954–61, 2: 299).

Similar to Jón Árnason and Rittershaus, the Icelandic scholar Einar Ól. Sveinsson—student of the aforementioned Axel Olrik—was convinced that the fairy tale had arrived from Norway along with the first settlers to set foot on the island. Einar Ólafur assumed fairy-tale material had been transmitted orally to Iceland, where it was adapted to the Icelandic narrative and cultural environment over time (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, xxv, lxii). He was one of only a few Icelandic scholars who wrote extensively on both the Icelandic folktale and Icelandic saga literature. It is therefore interesting to examine his diverging opinions when it comes to fantastic and supernatural incidents in the Icelandic sagas, commonly regarded as late and foreign influences and additions by saga scholars of that time (see Section I.3). Like many of his colleagues, Einar Ólafur was convinced that the fantastic narrative elements would spoil the extraordinary literary quality of the Icelandic sagas. However, he also held the Icelandic folktale in high regard, which is why he stresses its orality and persistence in oral tradition. He argues that even though the fairy tale had arrived early in Iceland, it had not been incorporated into Icelandic literature, and he claims the absence of fairy-tale motifs in Icelandic literature between 1200 and 1550 (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, lx). This allows him to regard the Icelandic sagas as purely literary creations, while at the same time believing that the fairy tale was flourishing in oral tradition.

Einar Ólafur further assumes that the fairy tale had mainly been consumed amongst lower social ranks and was rejected by the saga writers, who were writing for a higher social milieu (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, lx). He describes the actual *Märchen* as “literaturfremd” (i.e., *alien to literature*) because it did not fit the realistic taste of the audience: “Es herrschte damals eine wissenschaftliche Richtung in der Literatur und ein

sehr wählerischer, vernunftsgeprägter Geschmack, auf Grund dessen man diese „verlorenen Geschichten“ nur mit Geringschätzung betrachtete” (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, lx). Similar to Olrik and von der Leyen, Einar Ólafur stresses the fact that the fairy tale often appears very different from how it is known in later times: “in den meisten Fällen erscheint das Märchen nicht in seiner ursprünglichen Form; sowohl der Stil als auch die ganze Aufmachung wird bis zur Unkenntlichkeit verändert [...] Dies zeigt, dass das Märchen in seinem ursprünglichen Zustand nicht buchfähig war” (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, lxi).

What the works of von der Leyen, Rittershaus, and Einar Ól. Sveinsson have in common is that, in most instances, they refer only very briefly and superficially to parallels between Old Norse/Icelandic literature and modern folk- and fairy tales. The reader of those early studies will gain a broad overview of how common and widespread folkloric motifs appear in medieval Icelandic literature; however, they are not sufficient to make any assumptions about the use or depth of folkloric material in the sagas. Some of these motifs might rather stem from folk belief or legend and do not necessarily belong to the fairy tale in the narrower sense. Those early studies can at times seem a bit too far-fetched for the modern reader.

A thorough investigation on the relationship between the heroic epic and the fairy tale was conducted by the German scholar Friedrich Panzer, who considers the fairy tale to be at the core of some Germanic/Norse epic narratives. While his forerunners usually only discussed single motifs or small narrative units, Panzer goes into more depth when he tries to derive Old Germanic heroic epics and Icelandic sagas from entire fairy tale types. He is, for example, convinced that the narrative of Beowulf and related Icelandic sagas and tales, such as *Grettis saga* and *Böðvars þáttur*, were derived from the fairy tale of the bear’s son (*Bärensohnmärchen*, relating to ATU 301 *The Three Stolen Princesses* and ATU 650A *Strong John*) (Panzer 1910–12, 1: 249–404; 2: 17–27, 271–73). Panzer’s theories were harshly criticized by his contemporaries. The aforementioned folklorist Carl Wilhelm von Sydow, for example, regards his studies as insufficient because of his eclectic comparison of the plot structure of heroic epics and modern fairy tales, which might not have looked the same in former times (von Sydow 1911; 1923).⁷⁹ Although von Sydow recognizes strong parallels between the fairy tale of the bear’s son and the

⁷⁹ See also the thorough discussion of Panzer’s theory on the bear’s son tale in Magnús Fjalldal 1998, 88–95.

epic of Sigurðr, he is not inclined to believe that the fairy tale is the origin of the epic as assumed by Panzer (von Sydow 1918, 16–23).

In more recent scholarship, however, Panzer's theories find their admirers, for example, in Stephen Mitchell, who praises his work on the bear's son tale as "[o]ne of the most thorough investigations of the relationship between traditional literature and Germanic heroic materials" (Mitchell 1991b, 58). According to Mitchell, Panzer's contentions are strengthened by the fact that many scholars after Panzer identified the bear's son tale pattern in other Old Norse texts (see for example Lawrence 1928, 181–91, 317–18; Schlauch 1930; 1934, 109–12; Harris 1973; Pizzaro 1976–77, 281, McKinnell 2005, 126–46; Fox 2020). Therefore, Mitchell regards the bear's son tale as a "heroic template", applied in various sagas in order to narrate the life and adventures of numerous saga heroes (Mitchell 1991b, 59).

Grounded mainly in Panzer's studies, the today little-known Hungarian folklorist János (Hans) Honti published his work *Volksmärchen und Heldensage* (Fairy Tale and Heroic Epic) in 1931 within the Folklore Fellows monograph series when he was only twenty-one years old. Despite his young age, Honti had already published an index of Hungarian folktales (Honti 1928).⁸⁰ Honti regards Panzer as the founder of the fairy tale theory in the heroic epic and attempts to clarify the relationship between the fairy tale and the Germanic heroic epic further. While for Panzer the fairy tale was the soil from which the heroic epic emerged, Honti concentrates on the extent to which the fairy tale is a suitable subject for providing narrative material for the heroic epic (Honti 1931, 3). According to Honti, the fairy tale was not regarded highly by the aristocratic readership, which craved ever new creations. However, the poet then had no choice but to draw on circulating oral material such as fairy tales, which were an easy-to-access source material (Honti 1931, 58). Like Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Honti seems to assume the fairy tale was merely entertainment for lower social classes and was not regarded as suitable for upper-class narration.

Another scholar who investigated the relationships between the fairy tale, heroic epics, and myths was the Dutchman Jan de Vries, a philologist with strong interests in Old Norse literature and Germanic religion. Differing in opinion from the research described above, de Vries rejects the theory that heroic epics are derived from fairy tales or that fairy-tale motifs have been incorporated into heroic epics. He rather assumes that

⁸⁰ Later, Honti also worked on the Icelandic sagas, but his study *Insellegenden* (Legends of Islands) could not be finished before his untimely death in a concentration camp in 1945, only a few days before the end of World War II.

both the heroic epic and the fairy tale are derived from myths, which would, according to de Vries, explain why fairy-tale-like incidents occur in both narrative genres: “Die motivische Gleichartigkeit beruht auf einer Verwendung gleichartiger ‘Archetypen’” (de Vries 1954, 167). Here, de Vries refers to the influence of Jung’s writings on the study of religion, where he regards the archetype as some sort of *Urform* of a particular event. De Vries rejects the common idea of a gradual decline from the aristocratic heroic epic to the fairy tale of the peasantry by suggesting that the fairy tale also had an aristocratic origin and golden age, which declined rather quickly and was then taken up by lower social classes, where it was preserved rather well (de Vries 1954, 173, 178–79). However, while heroic epics and fairy tales might both have emerged in a higher social environment and developed parallel to each other, they diverge with the heroic epic being a more negative and destructive form, whereas the fairy tale is optimistic in nature (de Vries 1954, 175).

Contrary to what de Vries proclaimed in his earlier work, he later states—in a manner similar to that of von der Leyen and Honti—that fairy-tale episodes in Icelandic sagas are mere narrative building blocks of a rather late date, which a saga writer could make use of when assembling a saga: “Es liegt auf der Hand, daß dies nur jüngere Zusätze sind, schnell erfunden, wenn ein Erzähler eine Sage zusammendichten wollte” (de Vries 1965a, 297). Recall that Turville-Petre also describes the marvellous incidents in the *konungasögur* as a quick-fix solution for a saga writer to fill in the gaps with popular tales when he had no historical accounts at hand (see Section I.3).

De Vries shares similar ideas with the Austrian scholar Albert Wesselski, who argued that the fairy tale could only have come into existence at more advanced cultural stages and was, therefore, a much younger phenomenon than the Finnish school had proposed. Furthermore, Wesselski claims the fairy tale to be a product of literature, rather than one of an age-old primitive oral tradition. For Wesselski, the circumstances and environment at the time the fairy tale first came into existence must have been much more elaborate and culturally advanced (Wesselski 1925, xvi; 1931; cf. Kiefer 1947, 51–53). The premise of a literary origin of the fairy tale has not gained much popularity amongst folklorists. However, this premise had its revival around two decades ago and stirred up a fierce debate amongst folklorists and scholars of literature.

I.7 The (new) literary approach in fairy-tale studies

As discussed above, early scholars such as Benfey, de Vries, and Wesselski assumed that the invention of the fairy tale had taken place in a culturally advanced and literary society,

which they sought evidence of in medieval times. A somewhat different and more extreme point of contention was brought forth almost two decades ago by the literary scholar Ruth Bottigheimer, who asserts that the fairy tale is a literary creation no older than from the sixteenth century. In her book *Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale Tradition* (2002), Bottigheimer claims the fairy tale is a genuine literary creation of an individual author, namely, the Italian Giovanni Francesco Straparola, who published the two-volume tale collection *Le piacevoli notti* (Pleasant Nights) between 1551 and 1553 in Venice (Bottigheimer 2002, 3). She restates this claim in a second book with the sensationalist title *Fairy Tales: A New History* (2009), where she argues that the fairy tale was transmitted from Venice via inexpensive chapbooks throughout Europe. The literary creations by Straparola were then adapted by his successors, such as Basile as well as the writers of the *contes de fées*, until those narratives became an integral part of European oral tradition:

If we look forward from Straparola toward the tale future, we see a publishing phenomenon with printed texts carrying fairy tales from one place to another. The ubiquitous and mysterious folk and nursemaids remain, but as consumers of fairy tales rather than as producers. (Bottigheimer 2009, 103)

In addition to her claim that the entire fairy-tale tradition is derived from one Italian tale collection, Bottigheimer states that Straparola also invented the specific plot structure of the modern fairy tale, which she refers to as “rise tale”. The rise tale describes a character’s ascent from the initially low social status of the hero of humble birth and upbringing, who finally elevates his status by marrying into royalty after having accomplished some difficult tasks with the help of magic donors. Those “from-rags-to-riches” narratives were, according to Bottigheimer, preceded by so-called “restoration tales”, where the initially high status of the noble-born hero declines, but can be restored by the hero’s wits or magic towards the end of the tale (Bottigheimer 2002, 5–27; 2009, 10–13). While she believes the restoration tales to be assembled by Straparola from popular medieval romances, she regards the rise tale as Straparola’s own unique creation and legacy, which shaped an entire cultural and social movement (Bottigheimer 2002, 2; 2009, 92–93, 115). However, Bottigheimer regards only thirteen out of the approximately seventy tales in Straparola’s collection as “magic tales”, and only six of these are classified as actual rise tales (Bottigheimer 2002, 1; 2005, 25; cf. Vaz da Silva 2010, 404, 420).

Bottigheimer's claim that Straparola invented the canonical fairy tale, which supposedly had not existed in oral tradition before the publication of his collection, has been criticized by several notable folklorists and became the subject of polemics in the field of folkloristics. An entire issue of the *Journal of American Folklore*, published in autumn 2010, was dedicated to the debate, where Dan Ben-Amos (2010), Francisco Vaz da Silva (2010), and Jan Ziolkowski (2010) discuss Bottigheimer's claims and methods, followed by a response by Bottigheimer (2010). The main arguments against Bottigheimer's theory concern her disregard of decades-long research in the field of oral tradition and oral tale dissemination, as well as her inability to provide sufficient evidence to unequivocally prove that all modern fairy tales, mainly collected in the nineteenth century, are derived from a meagre handful of Straparola's rise tales. Vaz da Silva, for example, points out that early literary variants by Straparola and his later emulators only account for 12% of the tale types presented in the group of "tales of magic" in Uther's (2004) international tale-type index. However, for most of the tale types, no literary sources or variants are recorded (Vaz da Silva 2010, 401–2), therefore making it seem impossible that Straparola's literary tales could be responsible for the existence of the entire corpus of fairy tales within less than 300 years. As Holbek had already pointed out earlier, the early literary tale variants had seemingly limited impact on the oral tale tradition, with hundreds of tales that cannot be derived from literary texts (Holbek 1998, 253). Furthermore, many tale variants included in Straparola's collection appear very different in the collections by Straparola's successors such as Basile and several French *litterati*, and it seems indeed very questionable that those tales are derived from Straparola's work (Vaz da Silva 2010, 413–19). Vaz da Silva and Ziolkowski also provide many examples of fairy tales and tale types that were already incorporated into much earlier literary works than that of Straparola's (Vaz da Silva 2010, 411–13; Ziolkowski 2010, 381–84).⁸¹

A much more comprehensive approach in exploring a possible literary origin for a folktale has been carried out by Stephen Mitchell. According to Mitchell's study on the Swedish fairy tale of *Gråkappan* (Grey-Cloak), a variant of ATU 425 *The Search for the*

⁸¹ Other scholars who have proposed a literary origin of the fairy tale around the same time as Bottigheimer are Elizabeth Harries, who in her book *Twice Upon a Time: Women Writers and the History of the Fairy Tale* (2001) claims that the female writers of the *contes de fées* in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had invented the fairy-tale tradition or are at least responsible for the huge success of fairy-tale novellas throughout Europe at this time. The Dutch scholar Willem de Blécourt holds the Brothers Grimm alone responsible for the invention of modern fairy tales by "forging" them, as he describes in his book *Tales of Magic, Tales in Print: On the Genealogy of Fairy Tales and the Brothers Grimm* (2012). For an extensive discussion and criticism of the works of Bottigheimer and de Blécourt, see Zipes 2012, 157–89.

Lost Husband, the narrative originated most likely as a chapbook authored by the romantic writer Carl Jonas Love Almqvist and was only later introduced to oral tradition (Mitchell 1991a, 270–78). In his article, Mitchell compares four later oral variants of the tale. While two of them show a close resemblance to Almqvist’s literary tale and are probably derived from it, the other two of Mitchell’s *multiforms* do not seem to have a direct connection to the chapbook and might have originated in oral tradition (Mitchell 1991a, 279–86). However, also with regard to the two variants that might be derived directly from the literary source, Mitchell states that the storytellers adapted them into an oral folktale. While Almqvist’s work constitutes a lengthy and embellished tale with flowery language, the narrative recorded from the informant Anders Backman is much shorter and features the traditional style of oral folktales (Mitchell 1991a, 280–81, 288). Vaz da Silva points out that, although the chapbook might be the source text for some of the oral variants, the other variants seem to derive from oral tradition. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that those oral variants constituted the source material or inspiration for Almqvist’s literary work in the first place, as the author was interested in using “traditional materials as poetic resource”, as Mitchell states (Vaz da Silva 2010, 405–6; Mitchell 1991a, 273). I agree with Vaz da Silva on this point and would like to add that a seemingly literary novella that can be classified according to the ATU index, belonging to a tale type whose subtypes and variants have been attested for from classical antiquity onwards (cf. “Cupid and Psyche”, ATU 425C *Beauty and the Beast*), can hardly be considered solely literary and the work of a single author.⁸² Judging by Mitchell’s summary of the literary tale of *Gråkappan*, the novella not only consists of type ATU 425, but really is a combination of this type and ATU 710 *Our Lady’s Child*; or, *Gråkappan* might have been wrongly classified all along, because it fits Uther’s typology of ATU 710 perfectly (Uther 2004, 1: 385). According to Hansen, some features of ATU 710 can also be attested for in literature from classical antiquity, namely, the story of Gyges and Kroisos, where the episode of Kroisos being rescued from the pyre by the god Apollo equals that of the maiden being rescued from the flames by the end of the folktale (Hansen 2002, 319).⁸³

⁸² See also the critical discussion by Satu Apo on the oral and literary dissemination of the tale of *Beauty and the Beast* in Finnish folklore (Apo 2007).

⁸³ Some motifs and episodes in *Gråkappan* are also dominant within other tale types. The father promising his daughter to a monster is common in ATU 425C, whereas some elements also belong to the *Bluebeard* tale type (ATU 312 *Maiden-Killer*), especially the motif C611 *Forbidden Chamber*. The accusations against the heroine of having killed her children is a common sequence in variants of ATU 706 *The Maiden Without Hands*.

It seems as if Almqvist has indeed written a literary adaptation of a folktale derived from oral tradition in the first place. Here, Mitchell's own mushroom metaphor might have been put to good use, where Almqvist's novella only constitutes a literary "fruiting body" of an otherwise flourishing, but "invisible", oral tale tradition that was not recorded for its own sake before the nineteenth century. However, its persistence in oral tradition, and the disposition and ability of the storyteller Anders Backman to easily adapt the chapbook into an oral tale, makes it very likely the tale originated in oral tradition, enabling the teller to "re-translate" it.⁸⁴

Unlike Bottigheimer, Mitchell does not assume the entire Swedish fairy-tale tradition is derived from chapbooks or other literary sources (cf. Vaz da Silva 2010, 405). His nuanced example shows that the mode of transmission and the interplay of literary and oral sources are not always easy to explain:

Despite their origins in a printed medium, the traditional multiforms of *Gråkappan* give ample testimony to the durability and vitality of the Swedish oral tradition, to the synthesizing capacity of that tradition, and to the sustained artistry of its raconteurs, as well as to the continued diversity of their artistic designs. (Mitchell 1991a, 291)

The debate and polemics around Bottigheimer's sensationalist claims marked folklorists' last serious engagement with the age and origin of fairy tales. Although this topic has not been popular amongst folklorists since then, it was taken up in other fields of research.⁸⁵ A different story, however, can be told about the field of Old Norse studies and literature where, since the last decade or so, the interest in the folkloristic method and approach has returned and is constantly growing.

⁸⁴ Max Lüthi observed that storytellers were able to adapt the elaborate literary style of the *Kunstmärchen* by the eighteenth-century German author Johann Karl August Musäus into a simpler style common in oral tradition: "In folk narratives based on Musäus, one can perceive that the folk version tends to revert spontaneously to a uniform stylization" (Lüthi 1982, 49).

⁸⁵ Here, I am particularly referring to the work of the cultural anthropologist Jamshid J. Tehrani and his colleagues, whose claims—no less sensationalist than those of Bottigheimer's—have caught the interest of popular media (see for example Samoray for *ScienceNews*, 19 January 2016). Tehrani claims that fairy tales in general might be over six thousand years old and stem from the Bronze Age, while many well-known tales, such as *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast*, are around 2,000–4,500 years old. He adapted a computer-based comparative phylogenetic approach, used in research in evolutionary biology, for tracing the age and origin of "tales of magic" (ATU 300–749). From this starting point, he uses digital approaches to create a tree-like structure, visualizing the relationship between single traits and tale variants (Tehrani 2013; Graça da Silva and Tehrani 2016; Tehrani and d'Huy 2017). While folklorists have taken notice of Tehrani's claims and engaged with them in informal discussions (see for example the discussion on "Fairytale Genetics" on William G. Pooley's blog, posted on 22 January 2016), Tehrani's theories have had little impact on folktale theory to this day.

I.8 The (re)turn to the folkloristic approach in Old Norse studies

The re-engagement with folklore in Old Norse studies was sparked by the new emphasis on and interest in the post-classical sagas of Icelanders as well as the *fornaldarsögur* and *riddarasögur*. These were previously not deemed worthy of attention precisely because of their proximity to oral tradition and folklore, apparent from their magical and supernatural elements. By the end of the twentieth century, scholars such as Davíð Erlingsson, Rosemary Power, and Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir were first to engage in the research of the *fornaldarsögur* in connection to oral tradition and folklore.⁸⁶ Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir edited and published the Icelandic legendary saga *Úlfhams saga* in 2001, where she analyzed the saga according to folkloric motifs (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001, clxvi–clxvii).

The renewed emphasis on folkloristic methods and approaches within Old Norse studies can further be linked to the founding of the Retrospective Methods Network at the 14th International Saga Conference in Uppsala in 2009.⁸⁷ However, even though the fields of Old Norse studies and folkloristics separated and diverged in terms of their research interests and goals in the twentieth century, there have always been scholars combining both fields in their research. Here, one might mention Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson, Dag Strömbäck, Bo Almqvist, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, Terry Gunnell, Ármann Jakobsson, John Lindow, Joseph Harris, Stephen Mitchell, Mr Frog, Daniel Sävborg, Carolyne Larrington, and Merrill Kaplan (cf. Gunnell 2014, 26). The network focuses on using source material from a more recent period, mainly the eighteenth through early twentieth centuries, for developing a new understanding of equivalent or corresponding phenomena in an earlier period. In this, the network moves beyond the belief that it is merely the Icelandic sagas' historical credibility or literary quality that is of value to the scholar: “[I]t is only fair to say that sagas broadly speaking present a worldview that pays attention to much more than realism, hard facts, and objective truths. Supernatural, fantastic, symbolic, and metaphorical aspects are present

⁸⁶ Davíð Erlingsson taught post-graduate courses on folktales at the University of Iceland, where he became an important influence on and mentor to prolific scholars such as Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir and Ármann Jakobsson, who dedicated his book *The Troll Inside: Paranormal Activity in the Medieval North* (2017) to Davíð. Rosemary Power focused on the Old Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* and their relationship to Scottish and Gaelic folklore. She wrote her doctoral dissertation on the motif of the quest in the *fornaldarsögur* (Power 1982) as well as several articles on related topics (see for example Power 1985; 1987; 2006). Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir published an article on the motif of the evil stepmother in the *fornaldarsögur* (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 1995) before engaging further with the topic in her doctoral dissertation (2001). Over the following decades, Aðalheiður has produced a large corpus of scholarly articles and books on the *fornaldarsögur* and folklore, which are frequently cited throughout this thesis.

⁸⁷ The network features the e-publication *Retrospective Methods Newsletter* (RMN) as well as two separate research networks, the Austmarr Network and the Old Norse Folklorists Network (ONF), founded in 2011.

with what one might justifiably call folkloric tenacity” (Sävborg and Bek-Pedersen 2014, 7–8).

In 2011 the Old Norse Folklorists Network (ONF) was founded, with conferences, workshops, and by now three publications featuring this revival. The anthology *Folklore in Old Norse/Old Norse in Folklore* was published in 2014, and the continuing volume *Supernatural Encounters in Old Norse Literature and Tradition* was published four years later in 2018, both edited by Daniel Sävborg and Karen Bek-Pedersen. While in the first publication the focus is mainly on *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, a post-classical *Íslendingasaga*, the second publication features as many as four articles on the medieval narrative about an evil female spirit or ghost named Selkolla (e. *seal-head*), which is narrated in the Icelandic *biskupasaga* of *Guðmundar saga Arasonar* as well as in later folklore.

In connection to the network, one might also mention the anthology *New Focus on Retrospective Methods*, published in the FFC monograph series in 2014, where the problem of the long-abandoned folkloristic viewpoint in saga scholarship is addressed. In their introduction, Eldar Heide and Karen Bek-Pedersen point out the neglect of folkloric material within saga scholarship: “When studying Old Norse literature, it has not been common to check nineteenth and early twentieth century folkloric material for parallels that can throw light on motifs found in old texts” (Heide and Bek-Pedersen 2014, 11).

Recently, another anthology dedicated to the fantastic and supernatural elements in Icelandic sagas was published by Ármann Jakobsson and Miriam Mayburd. The title of the book, *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150–1400* (2020) is, according to the editors, meant to be provocative, where the focus lies on paranormal experiences in the sagas and how they might have been perceived by the audience or readership: “The paranormal thus emerges as inseparable from the human mind and thereby an integral part of what constitutes medieval experiential reality” (Ármann Jakobsson and Mayburd 2020, 3).

The recent volume *Folklore and Old Norse Mythology* (2021), edited by Mr Frog and Joonas Ahola, bears evidence of how the interest in folklore and Old Norse has grown exponentially in the last couple of years. The twenty-two authors provide cross-disciplinary research by combining the three concepts of *Old Norse*, *Folklore*, and *Mythology*. One section in particular focuses on motifs and their usage across genres and cultures, as well as their existence in medieval sources and more recent traditions.

As a result of the rising scholarly interest in the younger saga genres, attention has naturally been drawn to the fantastic and supernatural beings and adventures that often dominate those sagas. Therefore, the shift towards a renewed interest in the folkloristic method and approach was only the next logical step. Supernatural beings like trolls, elves, and ghosts frequently appear in those later sagas and could now be compared to the similar beings that also appear in later Icelandic and Scandinavian folklore. While the revival and, in a way, a new collaboration between the fields of folkloristics and Old Norse studies has been welcomed, the focus of the network is for the most part limited to legends, folk beliefs, and practices—folkloric genres which imply at least some sort of historical truthfulness and are believed to possess a “kernel of truth” (cf. Gunnell 2014, 24)—while the fairy tale has hardly been addressed (see for example Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001; 2014b; 2020; 2021b; 2021c). This comes as a surprise, considering that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the subject of the fairy tale in Norse mythology, heroic epics, and the sagas was widely debated. This might be explained by the fact that the scholars active within the network have placed their research focus on the supernatural and fantastic narrative elements in the sagas by seemingly excluding the possibility that many non-magical episodes might also be derived from folk- and fairy tales. As Olrik pointed out early on, some episodes in *Gesta Danorum* that he believed to be derived from fairy tales were deprived of magical or supernatural events and were explained to have arisen from natural causes or human interferences. Von der Leyen, Einar Ól. Sveinsson, and de Vries also stated that the literary manifestations of particular folk- or fairy tales were usually quite different from how they appeared in oral tradition, despite the fact that many episodes and motifs showed an incredible degree of stability. Therefore, it is not sufficient to only examine beings or events in the sagas that can easily be connected to later folklore due to their supernatural qualities. It is moreover important to acquire the folkloristic knowledge needed to recognize folk- and fairy tales in the first place. Only then is it possible to make assumptions about the real magnitude and significance of the folkloric depth in Icelandic saga literature, which cannot be limited or reduced to supernatural elements or beings. Hence, in addition to the application of folkloristic methods and approaches, the focus should also be directed to folklore and folk narratives as such, where students of Old Norse literature must become familiar with folk- and fairy tales as well as being trained in the usage of the main folkloristic tools—the tale-type and motif indices.

II. ARTICLE ABSTRACTS

The following abstracts summarize the three scholarly articles constituting the actual case studies of this thesis. The original publications are attached in the appendix.

II.1 Article 1

The Serpent and the Crow: Reassessing Fairy-Tale Motifs in the Old Icelandic *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, published in *Folklore*, 2022.

This article examines folkloric motifs and motif clusters in medieval Icelandic literature with a special focus on *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (*The Saga of Ragnarr Shaggy Breeches*), composed in the thirteenth century. While *Ragnars saga* has previously been mentioned in connection with the fairy tale of Cinderella, this article provides an in-depth study of the saga's fairy-tale characteristics, which may further illuminate the literary link between *Ragnars saga* and the Old Icelandic *Völsunga saga* (*The Saga of the Völsungs*). However, while Cinderella variants from the modern fairy-tale tradition are comprehensible and single-stranded narratives, the Cinderella paradigm in *Ragnars saga* proves to be adapted for a many-stranded, complicated, interlaced literary saga text.

In the second article, the story of Áslaug as narrated in *Ragnars saga* will be evaluated again in connection to fairy-tale material, but this time from the broader perspective on noble children in Old Icelandic literature in general, where the childhood of several noble children in the Icelandic sagas will be examined in the light of fairy-tale enchantments.

II.2 Article 2

“What’s in a Name?” Metaphorical Enchantments of Noble Children in Old Icelandic Literature, published in *Disenchantment, Re-Enchantment and Folklore Genres*, edited by Nemanja Radulović and Smiljana Djordjević-Belić. Belgrade: Institute of Literature and Arts, 2021.

In the last decade, there has been a return to folkloristic methods in saga scholarship, leading to the focus on fantastic and supernatural elements in medieval Icelandic literature. Beyond such overtly supernatural elements, medieval Icelandic saga texts also feature various seemingly realistic episodes that work according to the cyclic logic of enchantment and disenchantment—the core principle of fairy tales. It is often the case in

Icelandic sagas that noble children are bereft of their highborn status by being abducted, exposed, or exchanged, then raised by ugly and poor peasants. They must undergo a period of ill-treatment and/or a change in their physical appearance—like the shaving of the head, wearing dark and ugly clothing, or a change of name—which emphasizes their low status. After having endured this period of hardship in their childhood, these heroes and heroines finally ascend to their heroic purpose.

The main argument of this article is that such a temporary loss of status by noble children in Icelandic literature is a realistic rendering of the enchantment and disenchantment common in fairy tales. The main principles of such renderings of fairy-tale-like enchantments in the realistic settings of medieval Icelandic sagas are then explored.

In the third article, the fairy tale of Cinderella and its influence on Icelandic literature returns. In this article, however, the focus will be on the recognition tokens, such as a pair of slippers, which are a perfect fit for only one particular woman. However, the perfect fit of items of clothing also occurs in other medieval traditions and might provide evidence for a vital borrowing and dissemination of folkloric motifs.

II.3 Article 3

The Fleece of the Ram: Cinderella in Iceland and the Narrative Tradition of the Chastity Cloak, accepted by *European Journal of Scandinavian Studies*, forthcoming 2023.

The fairy-tale tradition of Cinderella in folklore (ATU 510) does not seem to have much in common at first with the medieval Breton fabliau of a magic chastity-testing cloak, known as *Le Mantel mautailé* (The Ill-fitting Cloak), and its various analogues. However, both narrative traditions contain an intriguing episode about an item of clothing—a delicate slipper and a magic cloak, respectively—which is a perfect fit for only one particular woman. This article will show that Icelandic medieval literature and modern fairy tales sharing the image of a colourful fleeced ram are at the crossroads of Cinderella and the mantle tradition and will help bring them into mutual illumination.

III. CONCLUSIONS

The following concluding chapter examines the findings of the three articles and puts them into mutual illumination. This final chapter will enhance the understanding of the overall research by shedding new light on the matter of fairy tales in Old Icelandic literature and by offering a broader perspective, assisting future researchers in navigating the folkloric depth of the Icelandic sagas.

III.1 On patterns and patches: Fairy tales in medieval Icelandic literature

III.1.a Stylistic devices

When starting this project, one of the main questions was whether entire tale types can be shown to have been incorporated into Icelandic saga literature, or whether it is only possible to encounter motifs or small narrative units that the sagas share with later folklore. This question is still difficult to answer. Even though the case studies discussed in the articles show striking resemblances between instances of well-known sagas and fairy tales from later centuries, the early examples usually do not feature the typical fairy-tale style of their more recent counterparts. This makes it difficult to detect and identify fairy-tale material in the sagas, for such material has been subject to literary adaptation at the hands of the saga writer and adjusted to fit the native narrative tradition, such as the Icelandic sequence of the evil stepmother.

It is interesting in this regard that Margaret Schlauch came to a very similar conclusion when she examined the Eastern features in Icelandic romances. She states that Eastern elements in the Icelandic sagas are difficult to detect because of their tendency to adapt to the Nordic and Scandinavian cultural sphere and setting (Schlauch 1934, 69). Schlauch's observation can be compared to Carl Wilhelm von Sydow's concept of the oikotype in folklore, discussed in the introductory chapter, where folktale variants have the tendency to adapt to a new social and cultural environment when disseminated from one place to another. The same is true for the fairy-tale elements. As described in the introductory chapter, the international folktale type only constitutes an outline or prototype of a tale, whereas the manifold variants are the cultural representatives of the overall type. The variants can differ from each other in accordance with the surrounding social and cultural environment, as well as with the dominant belief system and customs. In the sagas, another layer of adaptation is added, namely, that of the saga writer and his

tendency to integrate a tale variant into a saga text by adapting the traditional tale to a literary creation in order to serve a certain purpose. The saga writer has further literary tools at his disposal in order to integrate folkloric material. As I have demonstrated in Article 1, there is a tendency for events to be mirrored in *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, for example, the recurrent fairy-tale pattern of a hero fighting a dragon and thereby winning a bride. In *Ragnars saga*, Ragnarr loðbrók kills a dragon, which leads to marriage with his first wife, Þóra. This resembles Sigurðr's killing of Fáfnir in *Völsunga saga*, which leads him to his first love, Brynhildr. Recall also that both dragon slayers become enamoured with women who are connected to the deer or hind. This very interesting example seems to argue for fairy-tale patterns underlying the work of saga writers. The mirrored events and instances ensure the sagas' continuity on both a narrative level—where narrative units can recur throughout the sagas in manifold ways and variations, just as folktale variants do—as well as on the level of kinship, where recurrent and mirrored events communicate ongoing lineage, reinforcing the importance of genealogy bonds and heredity in the sagas by means of narratological devices. Claude Lévi-Strauss makes the simple but striking observation that “resemblance means kinship” (Lévi-Strauss 1954, 107). This holds true regarding biological or genealogical matters, for example, when Ragnarr's cooks point out the resemblance of Þóra's beauty to Áslaug's, presenting Áslaug as Þóra's successor. On the narratological plane, however, this reinforces the notion of narratological ties and relations, where the cooks' statement is causally determined by the motif of the deathbed promise; this is only implied in *Ragnars saga*, but it is further developed in the later ballad tradition of Ragnarr loðbrók as well as in Cinderella variants of the B-type.

Another common stylistic feature is the split of common fairy-tale motifs between different saga characters. In *Ragnars saga*, for example, I have shown that the characters of Ragnarr and Áslaug run parallel to each other in many respects. They both portray common Cinderella motifs—Áslaug endures a period of hardship in a serving position, and Ragnarr presents the matching part of an object. The split of folkloric motifs, which Graham Anderson examines in literature from classical antiquity and terms “romantic symmetry”, is usually divided between the male and female protagonists who are destined to form a romantic relationship. Like the mirrored episodes, the split of motifs would also reinforce the notion of genealogy. Just as the set of motifs form a coherent narrative unit, so too are the saga characters destined to form a meaningful relationship within the lineage. To some extent, this explains why it is difficult to identify folktales in the

Icelandic sagas, for it requires the saga researcher to be familiar with a large body of folk- and fairy tales—international and local alike—and possesses the knowledge necessary to apply the main tools of folktale research, the tale-type and motif indices. Furthermore, the researcher needs to re-engage with older studies on folktales in Icelandic sagas and to scrutinize long-established but outdated premises on the nature and function of folkloric elements in saga texts.

III.1.b Fairy-tale patterns and patches

As described in Section I.6 of the introductory chapter, it was the conviction of Friedrich von der Leyen, Hans Honti, and Jan de Vries that the fairy tale was a necessary resource for the saga writer in order to be able to quickly create and assemble new sagas. Those authors assumed that narratives from oral and popular tradition had been widely utilized by saga writers—who, however, had adapted those vernacular narratives to meet the “realistic taste” of Icelanders, as proclaimed by Einar Ól. Sveinsson, or to meet the expectations of an aristocratic and sophisticated audience, as argued by Honti and de Vries. However, the notion of the fairy tale as a “quick-fix solution” also runs the risk of assuming the saga is a rag rug assembled from various patches and pieces that do not belong together. Jan de Vries, for example, clearly differentiates between the heroic source material of Ragnarr killing Þóra’s serpent and the *Märchen* episode of Áslaug’s meeting with Ragnarr in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*. According to de Vries, those episodes were not produced as one coherent unit, but must have been combined and assembled in later times: “Eine Sage, die nach der heroisch anmutenden Þórageschichte unmittelbar in das Märchenhafte verfällt, kann nicht aus einem Guß entstanden sein” (de Vries 1965a, 301). For de Vries, those later additions must be regarded as the botch job of a compiler and not those of the original saga writer: “Das ist nicht die Arbeit eines Sagaschreibers, sondern die Pfuscheri eines Kompilators” (de Vries 1965a, 326). Like de Vries, most scholars regard those folktale elements as additions made by later compilers who were unaware of the unique literary creation of the original saga writers and, thus, ruined the hypothetical “authentic” original. Like de Vries, Rory McTurk argues that the character of Áslaug/Kraka has not belonged originally to the tradition of *Ragnarr loðbrók* and was not part of the older *Ragnars saga* but has entered the tradition at a later stage (McTurk 1991, 146–47, 149, 165, 182). Whether that is true or not, it deserves stressing that a later addition or change does not have to be less meaningful than an earlier creation. The role of Áslaug in linking the two sagas is pivotal for the narrative and its function in creating

an unspoiled lineage from the god Óðinn to the Norwegian king Haraldr hárfagri. The possibility might also be addressed that the story of Áslaug had always been part of an oral tradition, but was omitted in an earlier stage of the saga. However, the studies by de Vries and McTurk seem both to be rooted in the assumption of the devolutionary development of tradition and its representatives, in this case the Icelandic sagas, as was commonly assumed by scholars of the Icelandic school in the early twentieth century.

A different viewpoint and approach on folkloric elements in medieval literature has been presented by Bruce Rosenberg. As discussed in the introductory chapter, Rosenberg demonstrates how three distinct folktale types were textually interlinked in the medieval romance *Sir Degaré* by preserving the logical structure and order of the folktales and motifs in question. Rosenberg therefore dissents from the common opinion that medieval writers randomly assembled various folktale motifs and combined them in an eclectic manner. Instead, he argues that the way in which medieval writers embedded folktales into their literary creations was a consciously and carefully executed endeavour (see Section I.5).

In a similar vein as Rosenberg, I demonstrate in Article 1 that *Ragnars saga* is a carefully and artistically interlaced saga text with several narrative strands, which are all interconnected and make use of the same symbolic matrix or intertext. I furthermore provide evidence that chapters two to four of *Ragnars saga*, which previously had not been part of the scholarly discussion on Cinderella in the saga, also contain common folktale motifs belonging or related to the tale of Cinderella, such as the exceptional growth of a serpent as well as the perfect-fit motif of Ragnarr's spear. Hence, the folkloric elements in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* are not the result of a saga writer or later compiler spicing up the narrative by adding younger and more folkloric material, but rather the result of artful interlacing and adapting a widespread fairy tale into the saga form.

III.1.c Fairy tales as gap-fillers and the rationalization of fairy-tale motifs

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Gabriel Turville-Petre assumes that fairy-tale material was used in the sagas as some sort of gap-filler, especially in those cases where no reliable historical sources were available to the saga writer. He argues that the folkloric elements in the Icelandic Kings' sagas—which have been regarded overall as historically reliable and credible texts—were used to replace missing historical information, especially concerning the childhood years of future rulers and kings (see Section I.3). Axel Olrik and later also Hans Kuhn and Ármann Jakobsson point out the tendency of

fairy-tale material to become entangled with the king's childhood, as they could demonstrate in the narratives of King Jarmunrik in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* as well as in the narratives about King Haraldr hárfagri, King Sverrir, and King Ólafr Tryggvason. This is interesting in respect of the fact that the fairy tale is a narrative form concerned first and foremost with the coming of age of the hero or heroine. In Article 2, I have demonstrated the existence of a folkloric pattern or template in the Icelandic sagas that concerns the childhood of the future hero or king by metaphorically implying the cyclic logic of enchantment and disenchantment, intrinsic to the fairy tale. This pattern is very frequent throughout Icelandic saga literature and not restricted to a particular saga genre. It usually contains the narrative sequence of a noble-born child who is abducted, exposed, or exchanged shortly after birth or in early childhood. The pattern applies to both male and female children but is more frequent amongst male heroes. The child is then fostered and raised by the abductors or by humble peasants, who sometimes display otherworldly characteristics. The noble hero grows up under poor conditions involving a change of name, an ugly appearance, and a period of hardship. After this period has passed and the noble hero has become an adolescent, he or she is usually identified by the birth parents by means of various tokens—most commonly a golden ring—and becomes reintegrated into the rightful family or receives the rightful social status. Those episodes in the sagas are always free of supernatural and fantastic elements, which is in accordance with Olrik's early observation that fairy-tale material in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* appears to be rationalized and historicized. According to Olrik, Saxo consciously avoided the usage of supernatural incidents, even though Olrik was convinced that Saxo relied heavily on the oral fairy-tale tradition as a source material for *Gesta Danorum*. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Olrik, von der Leyen, and Einar Ól. Sveinsson noticed that the fairy tales found in Old Norse and medieval Icelandic literature are different from how they appear in more recent times and often lack supernatural and magical elements, abiding by the style of the saga genre in question each time.

Although fairy-tale material in the Icelandic sagas might for the most part be deprived of supernatural elements, it seems to have preserved certain themes, motifs, and chains of logic that appear very similarly in later fairy tales.

III.2 Displacement and recognition as core themes in fairy tales and sagas

As stated in the introductory chapter, Vladimir Propp has demonstrated that the morphology of the fairy tale consists of thirty-one functions. However, as Francisco Vaz

da Silva points out, Propp never asks what the “minimal condition that a fairy tale must fulfill might be” (Vaz da Silva 2021, 34; cf. Tenèze 1970, 22; Lüthi 1982, 130). Propp himself states that the two most necessary functions are 8/8a *Villainy/Lack* and 18 *Victory/Liquidation of Lack* (Propp 1968, 92; cf. Holbek 1998, 332–33). In other words, the most basic fairy tale only consists of one binary opposition, where a problem calls for its solution. For Lüthi, however, the reduction of Propp’s morphology to only two functions seems too broad: it would be valid for all kinds of narratives and even real-life situations, and it does not determine the basic structure of the fairy tale in particular (Lüthi 1982, 130). Lüthi, however, makes the remarkable but simple observation that in the fairy tale, “everything ‘clicks’” (Lüthi 1982, 31), as if two parts perfectly match each other; this also means that everything works out smoothly for the fairy-tale hero, for example, when he receives assistance as soon as he needs it. Marie-Louise Tenèze, who compares the morphological analysis by Propp and the stylistic investigation by Lüthi, observes further that in fairy tales the answer or solution is often provided before the problem is announced or the question asked. Here, one might mention the situation in which the fairy-tale hero receives a magic item before he even knows its purpose or when to use it. I regard Tenèze’s statement regarding the “inversion de l’ordre normal, donnant ainsi la réponse avant la question, le moyen avant sa destination” (Tenèze 1970, 21) to be a crucial and characteristic mechanism in fairy tales, for it explains their optimistic nature in general, where the positive outcome is already an integral part from the outset of the narrative. Hence, the fairy tale aims to emphasize the impossible by overcoming chance, where everything falls into place *as if* by magic. This might perhaps be considered the true magic or marvel of the fairy tale, even when actual magic is absent. However, it requires an initial situation characterized by the displacement of the hero/heroine. This is often communicated by the fairy-tale hero/heroine being identified as the youngest child who is not held in high regard amongst family members, or as a child seemingly born with a physical or mental impairment and, therefore, regarded as unlikely to accomplish great deeds. In the end, however, the hero proves himself to be successful in overcoming adversity and marrying into royalty. Displacement is also implied by the intrinsic tendency of the fairy-tale hero to be a wanderer, navigating through space by crossing biological, geographical, and social barriers without restraint (cf. Neemann 1999, 45). Francisco Vaz da Silva argues that the hero’s journey is the metaphorical description of coming-of-age processes (Vaz da Silva 2021, 32). The journey then implies the physical, psychological, and emotional development of the hero, which is externalized in fairy tales

and communicated through the hero's actions rather than initiated by the hero's inner motivation and emotional state; the latter is usually not addressed in fairy tales (Lüthi 1982, 15; Neemann 1999, 45). In the context of more complicated narratives such as the Icelandic *fornaldarsögur*, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir states that curses by stepmothers “are also a means used by the author to provide the protagonist the experience he needs in order to prove himself as a hero, and therefore to move him along the path towards a higher stage of development” (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2015, 48). I further regard the common incident where the hero/heroine gets stuck in a situation or physical state through enchantment, ill-treatment, or imprisonment as a variation of the hero's journey, communicating the coming of age of the hero/heroine as well (as discussed in Article 2). It seems as if the initial displacement of the hero/heroine is the crucial condition from which he or she progresses during the journey and finally ascends to his or her rightful position.

A similar mechanism is discernible in some Icelandic sagas, where the hero/heroine's displacement, recognition, and final (re)integration into the rightful position constitute the core theme in all three articles presented. This core mechanism of displacement and recognition is usually bound to particular objects and tokens that help to identify the hero/heroine and, therefore, initiate the process by which the protagonist evolves to his or her rightful purpose.

III.2.a Displacement and substitution

As mentioned throughout this thesis, the motif of the *kolbíttr*, *eldsætr*, or ash lad is extremely frequent throughout Icelandic saga literature and not restricted to a particular saga genre. As in fairy tales, the ash lad or male Cinderella is underestimated by his family in his childhood years, but later in life deploys great potential. The *kolbíttr* or *eldsætr* receives his name because he sits by the fireside in ashes and barely talks.⁸⁸ He is, in a way, caught in the “wrong” place and often stuck indoors. In the Icelandic sagas as well as in fairy tales, it is especially the name (or, in sagas, often the byname) that further

⁸⁸ The ash lad also exists in the Norwegian folktale tradition, where he is usually named Askeladden or Oskeladd; *oske* translates as ‘ash’ and *ladd* as ‘hair sock’, with the latter also connected to the Old Norse *loðinn* (hairy, shaggy), as in Ragnarr's byname *loðbrók* (Bergdal 1929, 167–68, 171). Another example is the unpromising ash lad Assipattle in Orcadian and Scottish tales, where the unpromising hero kills a giant sea monster, rescues a princess, and receives a sword once owned by the god Odin (Muir 1998, 3–9; *Scottish Fairy Tales* 1999, 195–215; cf. Künzler 2021). Lévi-Strauss observes that the ash lad or male Cinderella also exists in tales from Native American cultures, where the hero is called Fire-Boy or Ash-Boy. Lévi-Strauss points out that these names usually have a phallic connotation, similar to the female names of Cinderella, which often refer openly to the female sex (Lévi-Strauss 1954, 106–7; cf. Rooth 1951, 112).

emphasizes the wrong position in which the hero/heroine is stuck. As I have examined in Article 2, the noble children of Icelandic sagas often receive a “new” but “unfit” and derogatory name which usually refers to animals, trolls and/or the colour black, further emphasizing the child’s marginal position. Therefore, the children are displaced from where they originally belong, creating the starting point from where they must evolve and ascend in order to regain their initial position as the offspring and heirs of noble families. Like the noble children who become detached from their families and reintegrated into new ones of low social status, the heroine in fairy tales and sagas is often substituted by another woman who takes her place. This results in the heroine being stuck in a low social position, usually involving hardship and mistreatment.

In fairy tales, the motif of the substituted bride is widely distributed and embedded in several tale types, such as ATU 403 *The Black and the White Bride*, ATU 480 *The Kind and the Unkind Girls*, ATU 510 *Cinderella*, ATU 511 *One-Eye, Two-Eyes and Three-Eyes*, ATU 533 *The Speaking Horsehead*, ATU 711 *The Beautiful and the Ugly Twin Sisters*, ATU 870 *The Princess Confined in the Mound*, and AT 870B* *The True Bride Sews a Wedding Dress* (no ATU number). Those types and their variants have in common the feature of two contrasting girls or women, of whom one is beautiful and kind-hearted while the other is usually ugly and devious. The good girl then becomes embodied or substituted by the bad girl, where they change places, or where the good girl is forced to serve in a profession that does not suit her highborn origin, such as a kitchen maid, servant, or shepherdess. The same is true for the male hero in the tale type of ATU 300 *The Dragon Slayer*, where an imposter or false hero claims to be the slayer of the dragon by providing parts of the slain creature. Jan de Vries observes the equivalent properties of the false claim brought forth by the false hero or the false bride (de Vries 1954, 149–50). As pointed out in Article 1, the claim of the false slayer is absent from *Ragnars saga* but exists in some of the Danish and Faroese ballads belonging to the Ragnarr tradition. The tale type of *The Black and the White Bride* also seems to have influenced *Ragnars saga*, when dark Kráka takes the place of the beautiful princess Þóra after her sudden death. Here, however, no false claim is made, and no enmity exists between the two princesses, who never meet or interact with each other. The theme of the substituted bride seems to be more strongly developed in a later chapter of *Ragnars saga*, when Ragnarr is given a strong alcoholic substance at the Swedish court of King Eysteinn; this is arguably reminiscent of the forgetfulness drink Sigurðr receives in *Völsunga saga*. The next day, Ragnarr finds himself engaged to Eysteinn’s daughter, Ingibjörg. Áslaug

is, however, able to protect her marriage by revealing her true parentage and by giving birth to a fifth son, who bears the special mark of his grandfather in his eye and provides the ultimate proof of Áslaug's rightful claim and lineage. As mentioned in Articles 1 and 3, the name "Kráka" is absent from later variants of Cinderella in Iceland, where the heroine is called Mjaðveig Mánadóttir (Mjadveig Moon's Daughter) instead. The name "Mjaðveig" refers to an alcoholic substance. Interestingly, Georges Dumézil points out that the Indian queen Mādhavī, mentioned in the ancient Sanskrit epic of the *Mahābhārata*, and the Irish sovereignty queen Medb bear both names related to drunkenness, fermented drinks, and intoxication.⁸⁹ Dumézil argues that both queens represent kingship, and the men whom they choose to marry or sleep with become kings and/or produce royal lineages (Dumézil 1973b, 81–99).⁹⁰ Einar Ól. Sveinsson points out that the earliest Icelandic source mentioning a king named Máni is the Icelandic poem or *sagnakvæði* called *Bryngerðarljóð*, a composition from the sixteenth or seventeenth century (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, 248; Ólafur Davíðsson 1898, 4: 84–91). However, it is not only the name of Máni that appears, but also that of his daughter, called Mánadóttir. According to Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, *Bryngerðarljóð* features the same story as *Völsunga saga*, where Queen Grímhildr hands Sigurðr Fáfnisbani a forgetfulness drink, resulting in Sigurðr forgetting about his beloved Brynhildr and marrying Grímhildr's daughter Guðrún instead (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2012, 268 n. 3; 2013, 16). In *Bryngerðarljóð*, the mother of Prince Hálfðan intends to prevent a marriage between her son and his beloved Bryngerður by preparing a drink of forgetfulness for Hálfðan, who then will only seek a marriage with Mánadóttir (Ólafur Davíðsson 1898, 4: 84–91, see especially st. 34). This suggests that the name of Mjaðveig Mánadóttir refers to the strong alcoholic potion or forgetfulness drink, as it appears frequently in Icelandic sagas; it also implies the motif of the false or substituted bride, which is a core theme in the Mjaðveig story.

The motif of the substituted or replaced bride is also apparent in Icelandic romances, such as *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, where the troll-like kitchen maid Öskubuska changes places with Princess Sóley, later identified as the rightful princess by a golden

⁸⁹ The Irish queen Medb appears as the loathly lady and sovereignty goddess (Dumézil 1973b, 81–99). The Irish motif of the loathly lady/sovereignty goddess has also been identified in the Icelandic legendary saga *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana* (Larrington 2015) as well as in *Laxdæla saga* (Brady 2016).

⁹⁰ Einar Ól. Sveinsson suggests that the name is a corrupted version of a Celtic source, but he does not specify any further the name to which he refers (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, 248).

slipper.⁹¹ Similarly, in the legendary saga of *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar*, Princess Ingigerðr, who is fostered by an earl named Skúli—said to be the brother of King Heimir, the foster father of Áslaug in *Ragnars saga*—changes places with the daughter of a thrall who is also named Ingigerðr. While the thrall’s daughter, Ingigerðr Kolsdóttir (e. *coal’s daughter*), is said to be as beautiful as Princess Ingigerðr, she is not as morally sublime. Later, Princess Ingigerðr is identified as the rightful bride by means of a glove. The motif of the substituted bride or even the black and the white bride, as I have already examined in *Ragnars saga* (Article 1), is obviously present in those examples. However, they diverge from later fairy tales in that they do not feature female enmity or rivalry between the two women, who are not contesting each other in marrying the hero.⁹²

In Article 3, I demonstrate that the rightful maiden, the only woman who fits the magic chastity cloak in narrative analogues of the mantle tradition or a slipper in the German Cinderella tale of *Aschenputtel*, is absent from the fitting spectacle and is encountered in another room or part of the building. The girl is therefore caught in the wrong or invisible spot at first, but in the course of action she shifts towards the limelight, where she is able to prove her rightfulness as the chaste maiden who fits the mantle or the true bride who fits the slipper. This brings us to the second part of the operating mechanism in fairy tales and the Icelandic sagas, where the displacement or substitution of the hero/heroine can only be resolved through recognition or identification of his or her rightfulness as heir and/or romantic partner by means of special objects or special bodily features.

III.2.b Objects of identification and mechanisms of recognition

The recognition of the hero through tokens is extremely frequent in folk- and fairy tales and plays a significant part in all three articles in this thesis. As examined in Article 2, a golden ring is the most common recognition token revealing the true identity of the highborn child in the Icelandic sagas. Additionally, golden rings are sometimes mentioned to be wrapped in costly brocades; this indicates a relation between the Old French *lai* of *Le Fresne*, or a widespread oral tradition of this motif, and Old Icelandic literature. In other cases, the child is recognized by bodily features such as birthmarks, as

⁹¹ In Chapter 12 of *Völsunga saga*, Princess Hjördís, the mother of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, exchanges her clothes and name with those of a kitchen maid. She is later identified as the rightful princess by solving a riddle (Olsen 1906–8, 28–31). Krappe assumes this episode was imported from Eastern sources, but was modified to fit the plot of the saga (Krappe 1931; cf. Schlauch 1934, 70).

⁹² The motif of the substituted bride and the forgetfulness drink is also apparent in the wider Icelandic Tristan tradition in saga, ballad, and folktale (Schach 1957–61, 121–29; 1964).

is the young lad Áli in *Ála flekks saga*, as well as Sigurðr ormr-í-auga, the fifth son of Áslaug and Ragnarr in *Ragnars saga*.⁹³ Furthermore, the extraordinary strength of precocious children in some Icelandic sagas identifies their true lineage, as in the cases of the boy Urðarköttr in *Finnboga saga ramma* and the brothers Geirmundr and Hámundr in *Geirmundar þáttur heljaraskinn* in *Sturlunga saga*. The identification of noble children through recognition tokens and bodily characteristics in the sagas equates to the phase of disenchantment in fairy tales, usually restoring the high social status of the children and reintegrating them into the rightful family. Hence, recognition tokens and other physical features ensure the continuity of noble ties and genealogies.

In a similar vein, the identification and recognition of the rightful romantic partner proceeds in fairy tales and sagas alike. The objects by which the right romantic match is identified can vary. Although they are often items of jewellery or clothing, such as golden rings, shoes, gloves, dresses, and even weapons, physical characteristics can also fulfil the identifying function. A special subcategory of recognition in fairy tales and sagas is the perfect fit, where it is emphasized that those items of clothing fit a particular person perfectly and thereby indicate the best sexual fit, especially in cases where sexual rivals appear on the scene. The folktale type of ATU 510A *Cinderella* is probably the best-known instance of this in folklore, where the perfect fit by a slipper is the common identifying mechanism; the misfit of the very same slipper exposes Cinderella's stepsisters as unfit sexual partners, visualized by the symbolic imagery of blood in the shoe. In the Icelandic sagas discussed in the three articles, only two examples of a perfect fit exist: the parts of Ragnarr's broken spear that fit back together in *Ragnars saga*, probably a phallic symbol emphasizing his qualities as future ruler and husband to Princess Þóra; and the chastity cloak in *Samsons saga fagra* that is only a perfect fit for Princess Valentína, who is hence recognized as the best marital match for Prince Samson. However, in the later ballad tradition of Ragnarr loðbrók, the motif of the perfect fit is also evident when Áslaug fits into Þóra's dress perfectly, as well as her shoes. In *Ragnars saga* itself, the perfect fit of Þóra's costly dress is absent, for Áslaug rejects the gift, perhaps a literary adaptation of the saga writer in order to postpone the recognition of Áslaug until a later stage in the saga. While in fairy tales, especially in variants of *Cinderella*, the misfit and the perfect fit of Cinderella's slipper constitute a semantic unit

⁹³ Note that in the medieval *Ála flekks saga* (discussed in Article 2), Áli's birthmark is not mentioned when his birth mother, the queen, recognizes him as her son. Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir suggests this incident in the saga might be considered a blind motif (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2022, 17). However, she points out that in a later Icelandic folktale from the twentieth century, Áli flekkur (here: Álaga flekkur) is explicitly recognized by his birthmark (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2022, 29–30).

and meaningful whole, the misfit of objects at the expense of other possible romantic partners is not described in detail in neither *Ragnars saga* nor *Samsons saga*.

Interestingly, the recognition of a romantic partner through items of clothing also exists in some Icelandic romances, where the perfect fit is often only implied but not fully developed as in later folktales. One example is the aforementioned *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, where the lad Vilmundr finds in the woods a golden slipper belonging to Princess Sóley. Later, the lost-and-found slipper leads to a marriage between Vilmundr and Sóley, although Sóley never tries the shoe on. The same is true for the legendary saga *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinsonar*, where a glove is mentioned that identifies Princess Ingigerðr as the rightful bride. The glove is never tried on, but Ingigerðr takes the glove off of her hand and gives it to Hálfðan before she disappears, requesting that he find the same hand again. A similar incident occurs in the aforementioned romance of *Sir Degaré*, featuring an Oedipal hero who identifies a maiden by a pair of well-fitting gloves—a maiden who later turns out to be Sir Degaré's own mother. Here, the recognition of the rightful mate and the birth mother are combined in an interesting way and induced by one and the same recognition token: a pair of gloves. Cheryl Colopy points out that the gloves in the romance operate like Cinderella's slipper by ensuring the recognition of the proper mate (Colopy 1982, 31). Both *Vilmundar saga* and *Hálfðanar saga* share many similarities and are closely related. They have previously been regarded as Old Icelandic variants of the fairy tale of Cinderella (Schröder 1917, 83–84; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, xlii; 2003, 248; Hui 2018b, 362–66). The slipper as a recognition token also appears in the Icelandic chivalric saga *Vilhjálm's saga sjóðs*.⁹⁴ Close to the end of the saga, Vilhjálmr sets out on a quest to rescue some abducted maidens. When he crosses a boggy land, he encounters a golden slipper that is recognized by his companion Reginbald as belonging to his sister, who is amongst the abducted women. After having traversed the bog, the companions find the second shoe and, shortly thereafter, the abducted maidens as well (Loth 1964, 4: 119–21). Here, the pair of golden slippers only seems to be the precursor of the owner rather than ascribed with a particular testing function, like that of the slipper in variants of Cinderella proper. Why the perfect-fit incidents in the Icelandic sagas are not as strongly developed as in later folktales is not easy to explain. Perhaps this is connected to the fact that the motif of female rivalry, where one girl is recognized at the expense of another, is not much emphasized in the sagas either. Hence, no situation is initiated that

⁹⁴ I mention the saga briefly in Article 2, for it also contains the naming riddle in which Vilhjálmr must guess the names of ninety trolls.

would require an actual perfect-fit episode, which consequently makes the misfit of those items superfluous as well. What is striking, however, is the fact that the hero/heroine receives the recognition tokens before they prove useful, or in Tenèze's words, the answer is given before the question is asked. The exposed children have their items of final recognition already when they are exposed, or they are born with the biological and bodily features their rightful parents recognize them for, such as special birthmarks or extraordinary beauty or strength. In all cases, they already hold the answer to their future fortune. In cases where the romantic partner is identified, the hero is often in the possession of the identifying item, although he does not know it yet; for example, Ragnarr kills the serpent and keeps the spear shaft, which later proves his deeds by perfectly fitting the spear head. Another case is found in *Vilmundar saga*, where Vilmundr finds the golden slipper before meeting its rightful owner. This is the true marvel of the fairy tale, where actual chance is absent and the positive outcome is already enshrined in the tale from the start. The crucial physical feature or recognition token is already in the possession of the hero/heroine when facing times of hardship, constituting a humble but optimistic reminder of the final positive outcome. This shows that detecting fairy-tale motifs in the sagas is relevant, as is finding the influence of particular tales or tale types. However, even more important is the identification of the distinctive core mechanism of fairy tales in the sagas providing strong evidence the sagas have been heavily influenced by them, although real magic is usually absent. Even so, recall the magical or marvellous growth of a serpent in *Ragnars saga*, as well as the chastity-testing mantle in *Samsons saga* that magically adjusts its size, as examined in Articles 1 and 3.

Sometimes, a comparative outlook can confirm the presence of an embedded fairy tale. The theme of Þóra's serpent outgrowing its box in *Ragnars saga* has an echo in the legendary Persian tale *The Story of Haftvad and the Worm* (Ferdowsi 1967, 263–69). The narrative is part of the *Shahanama* (Book of Kings), a national epic written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi around 1010 CE. The tale narrates the story of the commoner Haftvad's unnamed daughter, who goes out every day to fulfil her spinning task in the mountains. One day, she finds an apple, and within the apple a little worm. The girl puts the worm into her spinning chest and soon finds that her spinning increases drastically. At the same time as the spinning increases and Haftvad's family becomes respectable and rich, the worm increases in size. The worm is placed in a bigger chest, but soon it reaches the size of an elephant and later inhabits a pool inside Haftvad's fortress on a high mountain, with Haftvad's daughter as its guardian. The worm and Haftvad's family are later killed by

King Ardashir I and his men.⁹⁵ As Kinga Márkus-Takeshita has argued, the story combines the folktale types of ATU 300 *The Dragon-Slayer* and ATU 500 *Rumpelstiltskin*, as well as the closely related type of ATU 501 *The Three Spinners* (Márkus-Takeshita 2001, 203–14). However, as examined in Article 1, the motif of the little serpent that magically increases in size belongs to a tale type that has not yet been assigned its own number, but which Isabel Cardigos identifies as the tale type of *The Little Snake* (AT 533*/ATU 404). Apparently, Márkus-Takeshita did not know of Cardigos's work, and Cardigos did not refer to the Persian narrative of Haftvad and the worm in her study. Both studies in combination, however, prove the tale type of *The Little Snake* that is also evident in *Ragnars saga* is indeed old, and that the folkloric theme of the overgrown snake was known in Persia and Scandinavia in the Middle Ages.⁹⁶ Interestingly, de Vries regards the episode of Ragnarr killing Þóra's serpent as more authentic and older than the episode of Ragnarr meeting Áslaug, as mentioned above. However, through the research by Márkus-Takeshita and Cardigos, it becomes evident that the Þóra episode in *Ragnars saga* is also derived from an age-old fairy tale.⁹⁷

Another folkloric sequence exists that seems very much related to the overgrown serpent, namely, the miraculous growth of a flea or louse. In Basile's Italian tale collection, the tale of *Lo Polene* (The Flea, 1/5) directly precedes his Cinderella variant of *La gatta Cenerentola* (The Cinder Cat, 1/6). In the narrative, a flea is nurtured by the king's blood until it becomes the size of a lamb and outgrows its quarters. The king skins the flea and promises his daughter in marriage to the man who guesses correctly the animal to which the hide belongs. According to Stephen Mitchell, the tale type of ATU 857 *The Louse-Skin* (previously AT 621) and its related motifs are common amongst Swedish folktales and can also be found in Danish and Norwegian folktale collections (Mitchell 1991a, 282). Most variants of the growing worm, snake, flea, or louse have in common that they are built around a father–daughter relationship, where the killing of the

⁹⁵ The similarities between the giant worm in the Persian story of Haftvad and Þóra's serpent have previously been pointed out by Krappe 1941–42; Mundt 1993, 111–12.

⁹⁶ Recall that in the Chinese Cinderella story from the ninth century, a little fish drastically increases in size when fed by the heroine, as mentioned in Article 1.

⁹⁷ Interestingly, a similar story forms the introductory sequence of an Icelandic folktale collected in the nineteenth century, namely, the legend of the Lagarfljótsormur (the worm of the lake Lagarfljót), the Icelandic equivalent to the Loch Ness Monster in Scotland. Here, a girl gets a golden ring from her mother, who advises her to put a little snake on top of the item in order to increase the gold. The girl follows her mother's advice and puts the ring, along with a little snake, in a wooden chest. When she later looks inside the chest, the snake has increased in size—so much that the fear-stricken girl throws the box into the lake Lagarfljót, where the creature continues to grow. The serpent becomes a huge monster that spits poison (Jón Árnason 1954, 1: 638–39). The Icelandic legend combines the different variants in an interesting way by featuring the increasing gold caused by a worm or snake lying upon it, as in *Ragnars saga*, as well as the growing serpent that finally lives in a lake or pond, as in the Persian story of Haftvad.

serpent or the solving of a riddle by the princess's suitor results in a marriage between the princess and the male protagonist. As suggested by Walter Scherf, the flea feeding on the king's blood might constitute a symbol for incest (Scherf 1995, 1: 326–30). Scherf's statement coincides with Cardigos's observation that the growing serpent in tale variants of *The Little Snake*, where the snake is usually given by a father to his daughter, bears strong sexual overtones (Cardigos 1996, 138). As discussed in Article 3, the animal hide and the cloak made from various animal skins also play an important role in tale variants of ATU 510B and is usually given by a father to his daughter as a wedding gift. Furthermore, I demonstrate in the article that the cloak of animal skins seems to be related to the widespread narrative tradition of the magic chastity-testing mantle which, similar to the overgrown serpent, increases in size when taken from a small container.

As a rule, in fairy tales and in Icelandic sagas the recognition through a token and/or a perfect fit is followed by the reintegration into the rightful lineage, where the child receives the rightful name and status while the rightful romantic partner marries into the royal family. As a deviation from this common folktale pattern in the sagas, the reintegration of the hero/heroine into the rightful lineage is sometimes postponed. For example, Ragnarr marries Áslaug even though she still bears the name Kráka and has not yet revealed her true parentage, and Urðarköttr in *Finnboga saga* does not receive his rightful name until a few years after his parents have recognized and accepted him. Those instances might be ascribed to the literary treatment of the folkloric template, which enables the saga writer to add further adventures to the narrative until the final integration is completed.

I have found in the Icelandic sagas the mechanism of displacement and recognition corresponding to the core fairy-tale mechanism of enchantment and disenchantment. As in fairy tales, those narrative units in the sagas are often connected to the childhood or youth of future heroes, kings, and rulers. The intriguing frequency with which this template is distributed throughout the Icelandic sagas, in addition to the staggering stability of even small details (such as the instance where the new-born receives a piece of bacon to suckle on), cannot be explained by the phenomenon of *rittengsl*, or written connections. It also seems unlikely that fairy tales were incorporated for embellishment or as gap-fillers exclusively. Therefore, the possible usage and purposes of those fairy-tale sequences in the sagas will be addressed further in the following section.

III.3 The fairy tale in the context of ideology and political agenda

One main stylistic characteristic of the fairy tale is its ability to sublimate and encompass the worldview and entire sphere of everyday human life. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Max Lüthi terms this particular property of the fairy tale *Sublimation and All-Inclusiveness* (Sublimation und Welthaltigkeit), meaning the fairy tale assimilates and represents all possible contents of the world—from rites, customs, beliefs, and practices to erotic subjects and worldly matters and materials (all-inclusiveness)—by simultaneously emptying them of their predetermined purpose (sublimation) (Lüthi 1982, 66–80). In his research on nineteenth-century Danish fairy tales, Bengt Holbek is convinced that magic incidents in particular in these fairy tales refer to the imagination and daydreams of the common populace in rural Jutland with regard to important events in their lives, such as marriage, childbirth, and the raising of children (Holbek 1998, 594, 602). While the fairy tale sublimes certain realities, daydreams, personal experiences, and preferences of tale-tellers and their communities, it appears to be emptied of everything that would fix the tale to a particular time and place. Lüthi's term *Depthlessness* (Flächenhaftigkeit) refers to the way in which most fairy tales operate on only one plane, with no references to time or place and avoiding detailed description (Lüthi 1982, 11–23). This characteristic of the fairy tale results in its *Isolation and Universal Interconnection* (Isolation und Allverbundenheit): the fairy-tale hero is an isolated figure (isolation), which in turn allows him to connect and interact with all possible entities between heaven and earth, for example, when the hero asks the sun and the moon for assistance on his quest (universal interconnection) (Lüthi 1982, 37–65). As the fairy tale can contain the whole world, while simultaneously remaining simple and devoid of all explicit references, it constitutes a perfect vessel for any kind of ideology and can be laden with a political agenda. Thus, it does not come as a surprise that the fairy tale has been used repeatedly with political intention. As discussed in the introductory chapter, the Brothers Grimm, for example, utilized German fairy tales to claim and appropriate an independent Germanic culture and heritage. Folklore has in fact been used in several instances in the act of nation-building, establishing national and political claims in the wake of nationalism and romanticism in the nineteenth century; this was especially true of those countries and ethnic minorities that had not yet achieved political independence (Giolláin 2000, 63–93). William Bascom proclaims that one of the four functions of folklore is to maintain conformity by “applying social pressure and exercising social control”, making it henceforth perceived as deeply conservative

(Bascom 1954, 346). In the Weimar Republic and Nazi Germany, fairy tales were for example laden with the political agenda of the Third Reich and reinterpreted in the light of Nazi ideology, especially in order to indoctrinate children with the new values of the political system and to give them a sense of their Nordic heritage (Zipes 2006, 141–44; Kamenetsky 1972; 1977, 169). On the contrary, Marxist interpretations regard folklore and fairy tales first and foremost as the vernacular voice of the proletariat and the common populace, allowing the expression of dissent and even holding a utopian kernel for political change (Zipes 1984, 331–32; cf. Teverson 2013, 127–34). Hence, the fairy tale is by no means an “innocent” genre of folk narrative or children’s literature, but has been used for political purposes, cultural appropriation, and indoctrination, at least since the beginning of its systematic collection in the nineteenth century. According to Jack Zipes,

Folktales and fairy tales have always been dependent on customs, rituals, and values in the particular socialization process of a social system. They have always symbolically depicted the nature of power relationships within a given society. Thus, they are strong indicators of the level of civilization, that is, the essential quality of a culture and social order. The effectiveness of emancipatory and reutilized tales has depended not only on the tales but also on the manner in which they have been received and their use and distribution in society. (Zipes 2006, 79)

Considering Zipes’s statement, it must be asked whether the political potential of fairy tales was already recognized by the medieval writers of Icelandic sagas, who then utilized fairy-tale material as a means to legitimize and disseminate political concepts and ideas amongst their audiences. This question can hopefully shed some light on the possible meaning and purpose of fairy-tale elements in medieval literature.

III.3.a The fairy tale as a means for communicating an ideology of kingship in the sagas

As discussed above as well as in Article 1, the combined sagas of *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* create an uninterrupted narratological and genealogical chain from the Norse god Óðinn of a mythological past to the hero Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, his daughter Áslaug and son-in-law Ragnarr of a legendary past, and their children and grandchildren of a historical past. This continuing lineage provides the Norwegian royal

house with political power and an unspoiled bloodline.⁹⁸ The fairy tale, however, constitutes the narrative link between the lineages as some kind of mediator. While in *Völsunga saga* the narrative of Sigurðr and Brynhildr combines the fairy tales of ATU 300 *The Dragon Slayer* and ATU 410 *Sleeping Beauty*, *Ragnars saga*, on the other hand, features several narrative units of Cinderella-cycle tale types as well as the unclassified tale of *The Little Snake* (AT 533*/ATU 404), ATU 403 *The Black and the White Bride*, and ATU 875 *The Clever Peasant Girl*. However, the narrative of the Norwegian king Haraldr hárfagri—the great-great grandson of Sigurðr orm-í-auga (*Sigurd Snake-in-the-eye*), Ragnarr and Áslaug’s fifth son—incorporates motifs of well-known fairy tales. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the Brothers Grimm compared Haraldr’s abduction and upbringing by the giant Dofri to the fairy tale of ATU 314 *Goldener*; the narrative of the death of Haraldr’s wife Snæfríðr (literally, *Snow Beauty*), said to be the daughter of a giant from Lappland (Finnmörk), shows great similarities to the fairy tale of *Snow White* (Shojaei Kawan 2008, 329–30).⁹⁹ The episode where Haraldr is unable to leave the death bed of his deceased wife is also incorporated into the story of Karl the Great or Charlemagne and his fourth wife, Fastrada (Shojaei Kawan 2008, 330).

The historian Else Mundal interprets the episode of Haraldr and Snæfríðr in the light of heredity and the legitimation of the Norwegian kings and their successors, with the integration into Norway’s population of the Sami as “the others” implied by the fact that Snæfríðr is from Lappland (Mundal 1997; cf. Schulz 2004, 275). Gro Steinsland, on the other hand, interprets the marriage and sexual relationship between Haraldr and Snæfríðr as a literary manifestation of *hieros gamos*, the sacred marriage of a god and a giantess, which she also examines in the origin myth of the Eddic poem of *Skírnismál*. According to Steinsland, the mythological marriage between a god and a giantess played a central role in establishing royal ideology, where the sexual encounter with a giantess becomes a symbol of the king’s intimate relationship with his land (Steinsland 1991, 349; 2011, 30–32; cf. Orning 2020, 116). Interestingly, the false bride or evil stepmother in Icelandic sagas and later fairy tales is usually a troll woman in disguise, who tricks the king into marriage. This circumstance might also explain why Ragnarr marries Áslaug while she is still in hiding and bears the name of a troll woman (Kráka), deliberately implying the mythological concept of *hieros gamos*.

⁹⁸ On the significance, frequency, and moral implications of genealogical links especially to Sigurðr Fáfnisbani in Old Icelandic literature, see Ashman Rowe 2006.

⁹⁹ Note that the narrative of Haraldr and Snæfríðr also includes the motif of the strong magic potion, which Haraldr receives before he marries the giant’s daughter. As discussed above, the love potion or forgetfulness drink in sagas and fairy tales usually results in the hero marrying or becoming engaged to the false bride.

As Katja Schulz points out, the sacred connection between the king and his land could be established not only by marriage or sexual relations with a giantess, but also through fosterage (Schulz 2004, 278). Haraldr is, for example, fostered and raised by the giant Dofri, just as several noble children in the Icelandic sagas are raised by poor commoners who are often described as having trollish and otherworldly characteristics, as examined in Article 2. According to Steinsland, medieval writers transformed the pagan image of giants, who were now perceived as the land's primeval people, representing native traditions, exceptional abilities, and great wisdom (Steinsland 2011, 44, 52). The hero then receives a new but unfit name and is incorporated into a new family, with the common reference of his being raised as the foster parents' own child. In some cases, the foster mother even stages a birth. Through this narrative pattern, the future hero/king comes into contact with the margins of society but is also introduced to the wisdom of the land before he even learns of his noble parentage. The future hero/king therefore appears pure and modest because he is absent from the royal court and does not partake in the splendour, just as the heroines in the mantle *lai* and the German fairy tale of *Aschenputtel* are not present when the chastity of treacherous women is tested. In addition, Áslaug in *Ragnars saga* rejects Þóra's shirt and chooses rather to dress in dark and dirty rags. This resonates with Anderson's observation that in ancient variants of folk- and fairy tales, the modest behaviour of the heroine often alternates with the motif of the "bride show" (Anderson 2000, 160). The modesty and humility of the future hero/king in his childhood years and his initiation by reintegration might have been perceived as valuable qualities of a future ruler, who then becomes a figure of mediation between royal and political matters and the interests of the common populace. How better to win over the common people than through an entertaining and popular tale?

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, Egbert of Liège, the priest and writer of an eleventh-century Latin schoolbook, stated in his letter to the bishop that he was convinced he would ease his pupils' study of Latin by incorporating popular and ancient tales, which his students would already be familiar with and attentive to. The strategic incorporation of popular tales from oral tradition might have also been successful in the Icelandic sagas, where the audience and recipients would recognize the traditional narratives behind the saga or at least the narrative structure or formula. For example, whenever a lazy and taciturn youth sitting by the fireside is introduced, an experienced audience would recognize the narrative motif of the *kolbíttr*, which in return would build their expectation of the further development of the unlikely hero and of the saga as

such.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, this would enable skilled storytellers to readapt and reintegrate a saga or portions thereof into oral tradition, ensuring the popularity of a given narrative but also its longevity, especially in a time when oral storytelling was commonly practised and manuscripts could easily go up in flames or be destroyed by mould. The close proximity of the writing and reading of the sagas to oral tradition and storytelling, as it is known to have been practised in Iceland until the twentieth century, is therefore favourable, because it ensures the dissemination of information via various media. In other words, it is more promising for medieval saga writers and their principals to put their eggs in different baskets by ensuring transmission of a narrative via written and oral channels alike, instead of relying on the written medium exclusively. While those assumptions and interpretations are secondary to this thesis and do not necessarily clarify the way in which fairy tales were presented in medieval Icelandic texts, they might give us hints about the potential usage and perception of those folkloric narratives in medieval times. They might also provide a different perspective on why this material appeared differently in medieval Icelandic texts, which brings us back to Bottigheimer's claims and her definition of the rise and restoration tale.

III.3.b Rise and restoration in the Icelandic sagas

In light of the possible political usage and the strategic incorporation of fairy tales in Old Icelandic literature, I will also propose a new view on Ruth Bottigheimer's claim that the particular rise structure of fairy tales was invented by the sixteenth-century Italian writer Giovanni Straparola, while the "restoration tales", on the other hand, were assembled by Straparola from medieval popular romances, as discussed in Section I.7.

As stated by Bengt Holbek, fairy tales "were the voice of the proletariat in the 19th century and probably had been exactly that since Antiquity. This [...] fully explains why they could not make their way into written literature until a method was found of pulling their teeth" (Holbek 1998, 605). Holbek's statement resonates with the observation by Einar Ól. Sveinsson and Honti that the fairy tale was not suitable for the respectable audience of upper-class narration and had to be adapted towards the form of the heroic epic and the saga genre. While the highborn origin of a king is obligatory and indisputable, the initially low social status of the hero of the rise tale could only be

¹⁰⁰ According to Richard Bauman, the recipients' expectation plays an integral part of each performance, where certain codes—or what Bauman describes as "keying of performance"—offer valuable information to the recipient. For example, he mentions formulas such as "Once upon a time...", informing the audience immediately of the narrative's nature (Bauman 1984, 21).

achieved by the noble hero losing his high status and becoming somehow detached from his lineage. This is exactly the case in the examples examined in Article 2, where noble saga heroes are fostered and raised by poor peasant couples. I would like to argue that those narrative implications in the Icelandic sagas, hinting at the enchantment and displacement of the fairy-tale hero, are the only possible way to deprive the noble hero of his identity and put him on the same structural level as the initially humble hero of the rise tale. The restoration tale might therefore be considered a literary alteration and adaptation of the orally transmitted rise tale, enabling medieval writers to incorporate fairy-tale material into the noble lineages of kings and queens. Although I am aware my argument is debateable, Icelandic medieval literature also provides proof that the rise tale came into existence much earlier than Bottigheimer proposes. The aforementioned *Vilmundar saga víðutan* from the fourteenth century not only constitutes an early literary variant of Cinderella, but also follows Bottigheimer's rise structure: the youth Vilmundur, a saga hero of actual humble birth, finds a golden slipper and sets out on a quest for his father's goat Gæfa, but finds himself a wife instead and marries into royalty.

The same holds true for several shorter tales of Icelanders (*Íslendingaþættir*), which are concerned with the hero's journey abroad (*útanferð*). Usually, a common Icelander travels abroad to meet with the king. He offends the king or breaks an interdiction, which leads to enmity and alienation. The hero, however, manages to reconcile with the king by accomplishing a difficult task or mission by means of his wits or the help of a donor. In the end, the Icelander is favoured by the king, obtaining riches and the status of a nobleman. Joseph Harris compares the *þættir* to Propp's morphology of fairy tales, concluding that the nucleus of alienation and reconciliation in the *þættir* corresponds to Propp's main functions of 8/8a *Villainy/Lack* and 26 *Solution* (Harris 1972, 7–8). While those *þættir* can be described as rise tales of some sort, the matter of romantic love and marriage is usually not at the forefront. However, Harris's concepts of *Alienation* and *Reconciliation*, which he relates to the two Proppian functions of *Villainy* and *Solution*, very much resonate with the overall findings of this thesis and the proposed concept of *Displacement* and *Recognition*, further enforcing the proximity of the Icelandic sagas to folktales.

III.4 Laxdal's *Ólandssaga* and the continuity of fairy-tale motifs

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the stability and continuity of fairy tales over a considerable period of time was questioned and even denied by scholars of literature or

explained by certain laws and patterns by early folklorists. The Icelandic fairy tale, however, shows great stability, where common narrative sequences such as the evil stepmother or the coal-biter appear in saga literature and later fairy tales alike. Other Icelandic fairy tales and their motifs are not as easily identified in the sagas, for which the eighteenth-century proto-novel *Ólandssaga* by Eiríkur Laxdal was a very useful tool to apply in this research. As mentioned in the introduction, *Ólandssaga* contains many fairy tales known from the nineteenth-century Icelandic fairy tale collections. The work can be described as the somewhat neglected child of Icelandic literature and folklore. It is not as old and precious as the Icelandic sagas and not genuine enough to be considered among authentic folk narratives. Even relatively recent scholarship refers to *Ólandssaga* as a work that “attracted folklorists who mistook it for a relevant source” (Lansing 2014, 200). Unlike Teresa Lansing, I would like to argue that *Ólandssaga* is indeed a very relevant source for folklorists and Old Norse scholars alike, but perhaps in a different way than was previously assumed. Lansing’s statement refers to the opinion held by Jón Árnason, the Icelandic collector of legends and folktales, who acquired the only existing manuscript of *Ólandssaga* from Þorsteinn Þorsteinsson á Hamri but never returned it to its owner.¹⁰¹ At first, Jón was excited to receive Laxdal’s work, for he knew it contained a variant of his favourite fairy tale of *Vilfríður Völufegri*—an Icelandic variant of ATU 709 *Snow White*¹⁰²—which he was never able to find as he had heard it in his childhood. As *Ólandssaga* could not deliver the version Jón was craving, he dismissed the work altogether for its literary style. *Ólandssaga* has not received much interest from scholars of Icelandic literature, either. It was edited and published by Þorsteinn Antonsson and María Anna Þorsteinsdóttir in 2006, but the edition does not live up to scholarly standards.¹⁰³ No translations of the work exist, which is why *Ólandssaga* is barely known outside of Iceland.

As examined in Articles 1 and 3, *Ólandssaga* provides a number of relevant and significant links between the medieval Icelandic sagas and the modern Icelandic fairy-

¹⁰¹ Þorsteinn Þorsteinsson á Hamri was a lay scribe in the nineteenth century and copied Laxdal’s *Ólandssaga*. The copy of *Ólandssaga* in his handwriting is the only one that still exists. Þorsteinn’s copy is incomplete, and it is not known whether Laxdal ever completed the saga.

¹⁰² See for example the letter by Jón Árnason to Jón Borgfirðingur from 26 September 1859, where he emphasizes his interest in receiving *Ólandssaga* (Finnur Sigmundsson 1950–51, 1: 145). In another letter to Jón Borgfirðingur from 10 November 1859, Jón Árnason confirms he has received *Ólandssaga*. However, he says he does not intend to include any of its stories in his collection, because he regards them as not genuine enough and lacks oral variants of the tales for comparison (Finnur Sigmundsson 1950–51, 1: 162–63).

¹⁰³ A review of the work was written by Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir, who points out various flaws in the edition (Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir 2008).

tale tradition. Without those links, the relation and continuity of medieval and modern narratives might not have been as easily established. In Article 1, it is shown that the earliest variant of the Icelandic Mjaðveig story, preserved in *Ólandssaga*, features an evil stepmother called Gríma and her supposed daughter, Kráka. The same names are intrinsic to *Ragnars saga* and seem to carry important symbolic meaning, as examined in the articles. Those names are, however, absent in later oral variants of the Cinderella tale of Mjaðveig Mánadóttir, except for one variant in which the evil stepsister is called Króka. Therefore, the Cinderella variant in *Ólandssaga* provides us with a direct link between the narrative in *Ragnars saga*, an acclaimed early literary variant of Cinderella, and the later Icelandic fairy-tale tradition of Cinderella. The same is true for Article 3, where I have shown that Laxdal's Mjaðveig story also provides a link between the medieval Icelandic chivalric saga *Samsons saga fagra* and nineteenth-century oral variants of Mjaðveig Mánadóttir with the image of a colourfully fleeced ram. In *Samsons saga*, the ram provides the source material for a chastity-testing magic cloak, known from a widespread European narrative tradition about a magic mantle. In *Ólandssaga*, the colourful ram belongs to Princess Mjaðveig and is described in detail, whereas in the oral variants of the tale, the ram is mentioned in a well-known verse. The Cinderella variant in *Ólandssaga*, however, not only connects medieval Icelandic saga literature and later Icelandic fairy tales, but also provides a connection between the fairy tale of Cinderella in general and the European narrative tradition of the chastity-testing cloak.

Because of its stylistic characteristics, *Ólandssaga* can be regarded as a semi-literary work at the crossroads of Icelandic literature and folklore, constituting an important benchmark for the incredible degree of continuity from medieval Icelandic literature to later folklore. While this thesis only focuses on Laxdal's Mjaðveig variant, *Ólandssaga* might contain many more such links and prove to be a useful tool for exploring interconnections between medieval literature and modern folklore. Consequently, *Ólandssaga* should receive its rightful place in Icelandic literature, for it certainly yields many opportunities for further research for folklorists and scholars of Old Norse studies and literature alike. Laxdal's *Ólandssaga* must also be put on the map of international scholarship by means of a scholarly edition of the text as well as the preparation of an English translation, which would ensure broader reception and engagement with this significant Icelandic work.

III.5 Final remarks

As stated in the introduction, this doctoral thesis is intended to identify fairy-tale material in medieval Icelandic saga literature. The findings in three articles, as well as the introductory and concluding chapters, indicate the Icelandic sagas rely to a considerable degree on an oral tradition, such as folktales and fairy tales. However, as a rule, the folkloric material is applied by abiding by the stylistic and structural characteristics of the particular saga genre and its function and purpose each time. Reassessing the folkloric motifs in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* has brought to light that the saga, especially the first six chapters, is largely influenced by fairy-tale motifs commonly ascribed to the Cinderella cycle in folklore as well as closely related tale types, such as ATU 403 and ATU 480, connected by the motif of the false bride/heroine. This holds also true for chapters two to four of the saga, which were disregarded in previous research on Cinderella motifs in *Ragnars saga*. While Cinderella variants of the later fairy-tale tradition are comprehensible and single-stranded narratives, the fairy-tale motifs in *Ragnars saga* have been adapted into an elaborate and many-stranded literary saga text. This process can be ascribed to the conscious, well-executed reworking by the saga writer, and it is not the product of a later compiler, clumsily adding more recent folkloric material. The later Scandinavian ballads of the *Ragnars saga* cycle have proven to be useful intertexts for illuminating the underlying traditional folkloric pattern and its connection to the fairy tale of Cinderella.

The findings of the three articles indicate that oral storytelling has had a much greater impact on Icelandic saga literature than scholars have previously assumed. Again, the “magic” component of magic tales is rarely present in the examples provided in the articles. Fantastical and magical events and characters have been the main benchmark for comparison of saga literature and later folklore so far. The present thesis, however, demonstrates the folkloric depth of the sagas is by no means restricted to magical and supernatural incidents, but is deeply rooted within Icelandic saga narratives themselves. The folkloric template examined in Article 2 suggests that many of the Icelandic sagas, belonging to various saga genres, feature metaphorical enchantments. Those sequences usually do not include magical or supernatural events but apply the cyclic logic of enchantment and disenchantment that is indispensable to the fairy tale. The unvarying theme of a noble-born child deprived of its high-born status and cast into an enchantment-like state, almost forfeiting its humanity, is found throughout Icelandic saga literature, which indicates the popularity of this common narrative pattern. The metaphorical

enchantments of noble children as well as the usage of fairy-tale material in *Ragnars saga* seem to apply the logic of fairy tales in accordance with the narrative conventions of the Icelandic sagas, enforcing the notion of family ties, kinship, and heredity.

The extent to which the Icelandic sagas are suitable for clarifying narrative links between European medieval literature and later fairy tales is explored in Article 3, where I demonstrate that the fitting spectacle of the chastity cloak matches the perfect-fit sequence in Cinderella variants of ATU 510A, where the perfect fit is commonly provided by a slipper. The Old Norse translation of *Möttuls saga* (Saga of the Mantle), the Icelandic chivalric saga of *Samsons saga fargra*, and the Icelandic Cinderella variants of Mjaðveig Mánadóttir intersect folklore and medieval literature and provide evidence of the continuity of folkloric motifs, recurring within different folkloric and literary traditions.

The present thesis might encourage folklorists to reengage in the study of early literary manifestations of well-known folk- and fairy tales. This research will hopefully also prove useful for scholars of Old Icelandic literature and Old Norse studies further exploring the folkloric depth of Icelandic saga literature. As this study has shown, the folkloric depth of the Icelandic saga opens new layers of meaning and significance. Important connections between saga episodes and characters, not plainly described by the words written on the page, are often implied in the underlying fairy-tale intertext. This symbolic matrix does not necessarily hold historical or factual truths but encompasses ideas and values bound to the social conventions of a given society at a given time. In this regard, the fairy tale has deliberately supported political ideas by promoting a favourable ideology of kingship. By incorporating fairy-tale motifs and folkloric patterns, the saga writers strategically ensured the popularity and longevity of the sagas. In my view the fairy-tale matrix in the sagas is not intended to fill in the gaps where historical sources are lacking. Indeed, it tells quite a different story; the fairy-tale matrix lends the sagas symbolic and metaphorical depth.

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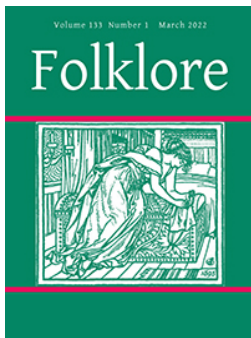
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V. PUBLICATIONS

Article 1



The Serpent and the Crow: Reassessing Fairy-Tale Motifs in the Old Icelandic *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Serpent and the Crow: Reassessing Fairy-Tale Motifs in the Old Icelandic *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*

Romina Werth

Abstract

This article examines folkloric motifs and motif clusters in medieval Icelandic literature with a special focus on *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (The Saga of Ragnarr Shaggy Breeches), composed in the thirteenth century. While *Ragnars saga* has previously been mentioned in connection with the fairy tale ‘Cinderella’, this article provides an in-depth study of the saga’s fairy-tale characteristics, which may further illuminate the literary link between *Ragnars saga* and the Old Icelandic *Völsunga saga* (The Saga of the Völsungs). However, while ‘Cinderella’ variants from the modern fairy-tale tradition are comprehensible and single-stranded narratives, the Cinderella paradigm in *Ragnars saga* proves to be adapted for a many-stranded, complicated, interlaced literary saga text.

Introduction

In the early days of saga scholarship, the connection between the fairy or wonder tale, Norse mythology, and heroic epic was widely debated (Olrik 1892; Leyen 1899; Rittershaus 1902; Panzer 1910–12; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, 2003; Honti 1931; Vries 1954). However, the interest in how folktales, especially fairy tales, might have influenced and intermingled with Old Icelandic literature declined rapidly in the second half of the twentieth century, when supernatural and marvellous features in Icelandic sagas came to be regarded as late influences, which had led to the degeneration of the classical Icelandic saga (see Sigurður Nordal 1952, 261–62). Recent scholarship in Old Icelandic literature has returned to folkloristic methods and approaches, with a focus on supernatural and fantastic elements (Heide and Bek-Pedersen 2014; Sävborg and Bek-Pedersen 2014; Ármann Jakobsson and Mayburd 2020). Despite renewed emphasis on using folklore from later centuries to shed new light on older saga texts, scholars for the most part deal with legends in this regard. From Jacob Grimm’s early observation, ‘The fairy tale is more poetic, the legend is more historical’ (Grimm 1816–18, 1: v), we might assume that, as comparative material, the legend is more trustworthy because of its historical depth, which the fairy tale on the other hand seems to lack. This may be the reason why renewed

interest in exploring and applying folkloristic tools and methods, especially within The Retrospective Methods Network, has focused on the legend while the fairy tale has hardly been addressed (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2014).¹ The fairy tale, however, communicates through a specific symbolic code with its own logic, but still containing meaning, such as norm codes, values, and underlying thought patterns. Thus, while the fairy tale may not provide historical or factual truth, it contains specific sets of ideas, communicated through symbols and narratological images. These symbolic implications can be of great value to the study of Old Icelandic saga literature and should not be underestimated nor neglected.

In this article, the focus lies on *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (The Saga of Ragnarr Shaggy Breeches), composed in the thirteenth century, and on its fairy-tale characteristics. *Ragnars saga* is closely related to *Völsunga saga* (The Saga of the Völsungs), which forms part of the Nordic branch of the Nibelungen cycle. Both sagas are early representatives of the literary genre of Old Icelandic *fornaldarsögur* (legendary sagas), which were composed in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The unknown authors of the legendary sagas drew their material mainly from Norse mythology and ancient lore. Those narratives are considered to have circulated in oral tradition before the saga-writing took place. The legendary sagas remained popular in Iceland for centuries by merging with other literary genres, as for example the *riddarasögur* (chivalric sagas) from the late medieval period onwards, as well as oral genres like folktales, fairy tales, and ballads until the beginning of the twentieth century (Schier 1970, 77–78; Torfi H. Tulinius 2002, 21–27; Mitchell 1991; Driscoll 1997).² *Ragnars saga* and *Völsunga saga* are combined in a vellum manuscript from approximately 1400, with *Ragnars saga* conceptualized as a sequel to *Völsunga saga*.³ Although *Ragnars saga* is directly connected to *Völsunga saga* in this particular manuscript, it also forms a narrative cycle of its own. Somewhat different versions of the story are narrated in the ninth book of Saxo Grammaticus's *Gesta Danorum* (c.1200) and in the legendary saga *Þáttr af Ragnars sonum* (The Tale of Ragnarr's Sons), preserved in a manuscript from the early fourteenth century. The story of Ragnarr has also been reworked in various later Scandinavian ballads; for example, in the Danish ballads *Regnfred og Kragelil* and *Karl og Kragelil*, and the Faroese ballad *Ragnars kvæði*.

The connection between *Ragnars saga* and *Völsunga saga* is first and foremost established through the character of Princess Áslaug. Áslaug is the orphaned daughter of the famous dragonslayer Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, a direct descendant from the god Óðinn, and the Valkyrie Brynhildr in *Völsunga saga*, who becomes the second wife of the Viking ruler Ragnarr in *Ragnars saga*. In both sagas, the emphasis on genealogy and kinship is important from a literary as well as a political perspective. According to Klaus von See, the combined sagas about Ragnarr and the clan of the Völsungs provides the Norwegian royal house with an unspoiled lineage from Óðinn to the Norwegian King Haraldr Fairhair (850–933), including the prestigious myth of the dragonslaying hero (See 1994, 584–85). The marital bond between Ragnarr and Áslaug, therefore, provides an important genealogical link between the mythico-legendary characters of Sigurðr and Brynhildr and the historical figures of

Ragnarr's and Áslaug's sons and grandchildren, who became the rulers of European royal houses.

In this article, I will show that the literary and political link between the two sagas is established by the use of motifs and symbolic intertext known from the modern fairy-tale tradition. Those fairy-tale motifs can clarify some aspects of (especially) *Ragnars saga*, which are not communicated directly in the saga. This exploration starts with a discussion of the scholarly discourse, which identifies some of the main characters of both sagas as similar to well-known fairy-tale personae.

A Fairy-Tale Family Tree

In his work on Sigurd in Germanic heroic epic, Friedrich Panzer demonstrates that the story of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani in *Völsunga saga* is derived from the fairy tale of the bear's son (*Bärensohnmärchen*) (Panzer 1910–12, 2: 17–27 and 271–73), which also shows great resemblance to the dragonslayer tale type, ATU 300. The Grimms had already identified Brynhildr, who is pricked with a sleeping-thorn by Óðinn and woken by Sigurðr, as the first instance of 'Dornröschen' (KHM 50/ ATU 410 'Sleeping Beauty').⁴ They further compare the magical fire (*Flammenwall*), which Sigurðr has to surmount in order to find Brynhildr, with the thorn hedge that the prince has to pass in the fairy tale (Grimm 1819–22, 3: 87). In *Ragnars saga*, the life and adventures of Sigurðr's and Brynhildr's daughter Áslaug have been discussed by various scholars as corresponding to 'Cinderella' (ATU 510), which would imply that the Cinderella-like heroine in *Ragnars saga* is the child of the dragonslayer and sleeping beauty in *Völsunga saga*.

Áslaug's resemblance to Cinderella was originally pointed out in Marian Roalfe Cox's ambitious work on 'Cinderella' and its manifold variants in folklore and medieval literature. For Cox, *Ragnars saga* is such a clear example of 'Cinderella' that '[i]t is unnecessary to point out the striking parallels ... to the common incidents of the folktale' (Cox 1893, xl). 'Cinderella', however, is not only one particular tale about a girl who fits a slipper, as many people tend to know it, but rather a complex tale cycle with hundreds of variants existing throughout the world (Rooth 1951, 30). In the revised index of international folktale types, the Cinderella tale type is divided into three subtypes (Uther 2004, 1: 293–96).⁵

- ATU 510A 'Cinderella' (tale proper): featuring a heroine connected to cinders and ashes. She is ill-treated by an evil stepmother (stepsisters), but later marries a nobleman after being the only girl who perfectly fits a precious slipper.
- ATU 510B 'Peau d'Âne' (Catskin-type): featuring a heroine persecuted by her own father, who wants to marry her. She flees home wearing a furry animal hide, human skin, or wooden clothing and becomes a kitchen maid in another kingdom, where the king marries her after discovering her real identity.
- ATU 510B* 'The Princess in the Chest' (Hiding-box-type): featuring a heroine persecuted by her own father, who wants to marry her. She escapes by being locked up in a wooden container and shipped to another kingdom, where a king discovers and marries her.

Although Cox seemed to regard *Ragnars saga* as matching the overall typology of ‘Cinderella’, her colleague, Edwin S. Hartland, who assisted her in finding source material for her monograph, was convinced that *Ragnars saga* is the oldest European example of the Catskin-type, ATU 510B (Hartland 1982, 67–68). Later, Anna Birgitta Rooth identified all three subtypes within *Ragnars saga* (Rooth 1951, 126–34).⁶ Recently, Jonathan Hui has suggested that *Ragnars saga* is the oldest occurrence of ATU 510A in Iceland (Hui 2018b, 361–62). Considering the aforementioned research, it seems clear that motifs or narrative units of different ‘Cinderella’ subtypes have been incorporated in *Ragnars saga*, but according to Christine Goldberg this does not necessarily indicate that different ‘Cinderella’ types had been stable and fully developed in *Ragnars saga* at that early point in time (Goldberg 1997, 43–44, n. 14). However, the fact that an Old Icelandic saga contains different aspects and motifs of tale types, which many centuries later have been classified as belonging to the ‘Cinderella cycle’, is interesting enough and should qualify *Ragnars saga* for an in-depth study of its fairy-tale characteristics.

Until now, the scholarly focus on Cinderella motif clusters in *Ragnars saga* has only concerned the life of Áslaug, corresponding to the first chapter of the saga (on Áslaug’s childhood) and chapters five and six (addressing the meeting and marriage of Áslaug and Ragnarr). Chapters two to four, where Ragnarr kills a dragon and marries his first wife Þóra, have not been included in earlier studies. These chapters, however, offer the possibility for a deeper understanding of the fairy-tale influences on *Ragnars saga*. To provide a detailed overview of the first six chapters of the saga, a summary precedes the discussion.

Summary of *Ragnars Saga loðbrókar* (Chapters One to Six)

Áslaug and Heimir (Chapter One)

Ragnars saga begins with King Heimir being concerned about the safety of his three-year-old foster-daughter Áslaug after her parents’ death. He decides to leave his kingdom and riches behind to escape with Áslaug to Norway. Heimir carries Áslaug in a specially constructed harp, along with fine garments and jewellery. Inside the harp, Áslaug is provided with a special herb (*vínlaukur*, ‘wine-leek’), which keeps her from starving. Heimir and Áslaug arrive in Norway at the isolated farm Spangarheiði, where the ugly peasant woman Gríma and her husband Áki live. Gríma grants Heimir accommodation for the night, but becomes aware of a golden ring on his hand and the riches in the harp. When Áki gets home from woodcutting, Gríma convinces him to kill Heimir and to break the harp open. Within the harp they find the little girl, who never speaks a single word and does not reveal her lineage. The couple decide to raise Áslaug as their own daughter. Because of Áslaug’s outstanding beauty and Gríma’s ugliness, Gríma worries that people may ask questions about this obvious contradiction. Therefore, Gríma shaves Áslaug’s head and smears it with tar, so that her blonde hair cannot easily grow back. She dresses the girl in dark rags and calls her Kráka (Crow), which had been the name of Gríma’s own mother. Kráka now

enters a period of hardship and ill treatment, where she herds the goats and serves the couple as a kitchen maid.

Ragnarr and Þóra (Chapters Two to Four)

Áslaug is not mentioned. Instead, the narrative shifts to Þóra *borgarhjörtr* (Thora Town-Hart), the daughter of the Swedish earl Herraudr, and the Viking Ragnarr. One day, the king gives his daughter a little snake (*lingormr*), which Þóra puts in a small chest on top of some gold. Soon, the snake outgrows the box and becomes a beast of abnormal size, which encircles Þóra's bower. The king gets concerned and promises the gold and Þóra in marriage to the man who can kill the creature. Ragnarr, a young warrior and son of a king, hears about Þóra's serpent and dresses himself in shaggy breeches and a furry cloak, which were boiled in pitch and rubbed in sand, and which later protect Ragnarr from the poisonous blood of the serpent. At nightfall, Ragnarr goes to Þóra's bower and kills the serpent. In the fight, Ragnarr's spear breaks in half. The spearhead remains in the wound, but Ragnarr keeps the shaft. Before Ragnarr leaves the scene, Þóra addresses him from her bower and asks about his identity. Ragnarr answers with a mysterious stanza, where he only reveals his age: fifteen. The news spreads, and Þóra's father invites the mysterious slayer to reveal the missing spear shaft. Ragnarr and other men attend the assembly, but only Ragnarr can present the matching spear shaft. Ragnarr marries Þóra and they have two sons. After a short while, Þóra grows ill and dies and Ragnarr engages in sea piracy.

Ragnarr and Áslaug (Chapters Five and Six)

Áslaug has now become a young woman of outstanding beauty. One day, she discovers Ragnarr's ships on the shore and washes herself, against Gríma's interdiction. When Ragnarr and his men arrive at the beach, Ragnarr instructs his cooks to bake bread at the nearby farmstead. At the farm Spangarheiði, Ragnarr's men are allowed to bake bread, with Áslaug's assistance. They get distracted by Áslaug's beauty, which results in the bread burning in the oven. When Ragnarr asks his men why the bread is burnt, they tell him about the beautiful maiden they just encountered and state that she is indeed as beautiful as his former wife Þóra was. Now, curious about Áslaug, Ragnarr demands to meet the girl on the condition that she attends neither clad nor unclad, neither fed nor unfed, neither alone nor accompanied by a man. Áslaug manages to fulfil Ragnarr's requests by dressing herself in a fishing net and covering herself with her long hair. She is biting a leek and she takes Áki's dog with her. Ragnarr decides to marry Áslaug right away and presents her with an embroidered shirt, which Þóra once owned. Áslaug rejects the gift and asks Ragnarr to finish his errands in Norway. After some time, Ragnarr returns to Áslaug and lies with her the first night, disregarding Áslaug's interdiction to wait for three nights before consummating their marriage. The broken

interdiction leads to their first son Ívarr being born without bones. Later, they have three more sons, who are born healthy.

It is not until later in *Ragnars saga* (chapter nine) that Áslaug reveals her true identity as the daughter of the famous dragonslayer Sigurðr. While Ragnarr stays at the Swedish King Eysteinn's court, he is given a strong alcoholic drink and finds himself engaged to Eysteinn's daughter Ingibjörg the next day. Áslaug, who like her father understands the language of birds, learns about Ragnarr's engagement from birds that had overheard his conversation in the woods. When Áslaug confronts Ragnarr with her knowledge, she reveals her royal parentage to him. Ragnarr decides to stay with Áslaug, if she can prove her claim. Áslaug foresees that she will bear Ragnarr a fifth son, who will have a snake in his eye, a mark which connects him to his grandfather. When their fifth son is born, he bears the mark, as Áslaug had predicted, and is named Sigurðr *ormr-í-auga* (snake-in-the-eye). Ragnarr later dies disgracefully in a snake-pit at King Ella's court in Northumbria (chapter fifteen).

The Hiding Box

According to Rooth, King Heimir hiding his foster-daughter Áslaug along with his riches in a specially constructed harp corresponds to the motif of the hiding box belonging to the 'Cinderella' subtype ATU 510B* 'The Princess in the Chest' (Rooth 1951, 126–31; Uther 2004, 1: 296). The oldest known variant is the tale of 'Doralice and Her Incestuous Father, Tebaldo' in the tale collection *Le piacevoli notti* (The pleasant nights) of the Italian Giovan Francesco Straparola, from 1550 to 1555 (Straparola 2012, 1: 223–31). The girl Doralice tries to escape her lecherous father Tebaldo, who wants to marry his own daughter after the death of his wife. Doralice escapes by hiding in her late mother's wooden closet chest, provided with a special liquor, which keeps her from starving while travelling to another kingdom. Rooth suggested that the liquor in the tale of Doralice is the equivalent to the *vínlaukur*, the special herb Áslaug receives from King Heimir in *Ragnars saga*. According to Rooth, the hiding box type originated in Southern Europe and the Near East, but is rather uncommon in Scandinavia, which makes the appearance of this particular tale type in a medieval Icelandic saga text peculiar (Rooth 1951, 129).⁷

Áslaug's decision not to speak, or her inability to do so, when Gríma releases her from the harp is also a common symbolic trope in folktales. In the saga, it is emphasised that Áslaug does not answer the question concerning her lineage, 'hverar ęttar hun veri' (Olsen 1906–1908, 115), 'of what race she was sprung' (Schlauch 1930, 190). This incident mirrors Áslaug's father Sigurðr in *Völsunga saga*, who at first does not reveal his parentage to the dragon Fáfnir (Olsen 1906–1908, 42).

The hiding box motif in combination with Áslaug's muteness belong to a symbolic matrix in fairy tales, which according to Vladimir Propp refers to the heroine having to undergo a period of symbolic death: 'Often a mute maiden in the forest is found by the prince in a tree. She is usually naked and covers herself with her hair, resembling a bird; sometimes she is even covered with feathers. All this points to the source of the motif. A girl in a tree or inside a tree is the same as a girl in a coffin or one in a

temporary state of death' (Propp 1983, 323).⁸ According to Propp, the temporary symbolic death of the heroine must be understood as a precondition for marriage as well as for achieving power (Propp 1983, 323), which certainly holds true for Áslaug. From Propp's description, we recognize other parallels in addition to Áslaug's muteness; for example, the covering of her nearly naked body with her long hair when she first meets Ragnarr in chapter five, as well as her close association with birds, as she understands their speech and receives the name Crow.

The Crow and the Evil Stepmother

According to the first chapter of *Ragnars saga*, Áslaug is raised by the peasant couple Áki and Gríma. Because of Gríma's concern that Áslaug's beauty could give away her royal origin, she dresses the girl in dark rags, shaves her head, smears it with tar, and calls her Kráka from then on. Henceforth, Áslaug serves the couple in the kitchen and by herding the goats.

According to Rooth, the episode of Áslaug being a captive of the ugly peasant couple consists of motif clusters of ATU 510A 'Cinderella' proper and ATU 510B 'Peau d'Âne'. Áslaug's serving position as well as her ill treatment at the hands of Gríma refer to ATU 510A, whereas Áslaug's dark and ugly appearance as well as her Crow-name refer to the nature of the heroine's disguise in variants of ATU 510B. Rooth points out further that the Crow-name, as well as a disguise connected to the crow, are common in later Scandinavian 'Cinderella' variants, which can be divided into two distinct groups. The first group includes variants where the heroine wears a cloak or dress made of crow skin or even beaks. The second group, on the other hand, consists of tales that feature the Crow-name, which is in all instances attached to the evil stepmother or stepsister but never to the heroine as in *Ragnars saga* (Rooth 1951, 132–34). Both groups, however, seem to correspond to *Ragnars saga*. Áslaug, dressed in dark rags and her head smeared with black tar, may be reminiscent of a crow, but offers a more realistic and saga-like solution to the extravagant and marvellous crow-disguise in later fairy tales.⁹ The name Kráka is given to Áslaug by Gríma, whose own mother bore the same name, implying certain family ties, further strengthened by Gríma's wish to raise the girl as her own daughter. The names Gríma and Kráka are both listed amongst the names of ogresses in the thirteenth-century *Snorra Edda* or *Prose Edda* (Faulkes 1987, 156). Hence, the Crow-name belongs to a lineage of evil ogresses and connects the name Kráka to the concept of the evil stepmother in Old Icelandic literature, as well as in later Icelandic fairy tales, where the stepmother is an ogress in disguise.

In later Icelandic 'Cinderella' variants, the heroine is usually named Mjaðveig Mánadóttir (Mjadveig Moon's-daughter) and is not connected to cinders or crows.¹⁰ The earliest attested variant of the tale of Mjaðveig has survived in the lengthy proto-novel *Ólandssaga* (Saga of no-such-land), written around 1777 by the Icelandic author Eiríkur Laxdal. The complicated interlaced literary work combines motifs from the legendary sagas as well as tales known from Iceland's nineteenth-century fairy-tale tradition. In *Ólandssaga*, Princess Mjaðveig is persecuted by her evil

stepmother Gríma, who has a daughter of her own, a half-troll called Kráka. Kráka later wears one of Mjaðveig's precious dresses and pretends to be the princess when meeting with Prince Hrómundr (Eiríkur Laxdal 2006, 393–98 and 402–10). It seems that Eiríkur Laxdal attaches the names Gríma and Kráka from *Ragnars saga* consciously to the Icelandic 'Cinderella' tradition of Mjaðveig, where the name Kráka is attached to the stepsister, which seems to be the more traditional Scandinavian usage of the name. In two variants of the tale *Krákudóttir og kalsdóttir* from the Faroe Islands, the heroine is only referred to as the farmer's daughter (*kalsdóttir*), but her evil stepsister is called Crow's daughter (*krákudóttir*) and her mother therefore 'Crow' (Jakobsen 1898–1901, 309–17).

In the Icelandic variants of the tale of Mjaðveig Mánadóttir, collected from oral tradition in the nineteenth century, the names Gríma and Kráka do not appear. There is, however, one variant where the daughter of the stepmother is called Króka ('devious, crooked') (Jón Árnason 1954–61, 2: 305–307). The pronunciation of the name is very similar to the names of the stepmother in Norwegian 'Cinderella' variants (Kråke or Kraake) and in a Swedish variant (Kråka). It might also be connected to a second meaning of the Icelandic term *kráka*, which refers to a crooked or curved shape (Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, 499–500, definitions 2–3). It is, however, not only the name Kráka that connects Áslaug to an ogress or evil stepmother, since on the structural level of the saga, Áslaug seems to resemble the Icelandic version of the evil stepmother.

The stepmother motif is common in Old Icelandic literature as well as in later Icelandic fairy tales, where it often provides the introductory sequence of the tale. The motif features a king and his queen having a child/children, but after the queen's sudden death, the king is advised to take a new wife. The new queen is usually found on a peninsula or island, where she plays the harp or combs her hair. The beautiful woman is, however, an ogress in disguise, who is either alone or accompanied by her supposed daughter, often an abducted princess. As soon as she becomes queen, she gets rid of the king by sending him to war or to collect taxes. This enables the evil queen to enchant her stepchildren, at which point the introductory sequence usually ends and the individual tale unfolds (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001, clxvii–clxxii; Werth 2019, 52–54).¹¹ Considering the Icelandic tale tradition of the evil stepmother with regard to *Ragnars saga*, it becomes clear that Áslaug as Kráka is structurally in the same functional or 'motifemic' slot, where an Icelandic audience would expect the evil stepmother/stepsister to appear in the fairy tale. Ragnarr and his wife Þóra have two sons, but soon she falls ill and dies. Ragnarr engages in piracy, and he at one point arrives at the shore of a Norwegian peninsula or island. There, his men introduce him to the beautiful maiden Kráka, who, although not playing the harp, had travelled in one in the first chapter. Kráka later becomes the second wife of Ragnarr and, therefore, also a stepmother to his first two sons. Later in the saga, however, it is emphasized that Kráka is a good stepmother who cries tears as red as blood and as hard as hailstones after she learns about her stepsons' deaths (Olsen 1906–1908, 142).

Áslaug as Kráka almost seems to have a Janus head with black and white sides. On one side, Áslaug acts as the persecuted and ill-treated heroine, but on the other she

resembles an ogress by structurally representing the evil stepmother/stepmother from the common stepmother sequence. The double-faced character of Áslaug/Kráka creates a certain ambiguity to Áslaug in *Ragnars saga*. The same ambiguity is, however, also present in ‘Cinderella’ variants, where the heroine is often perceived as two different characters at once. At first, she is a dirty cinder girl, who stays at home in the ashes, but appears later as the beautiful and unrecognized maiden, who dances with the prince at the ball. In variants of the B-type, the heroine is a kitchen maid, dressed in all sorts of rags, but at the same time appears as a beautiful woman in dresses of silver, gold, and stars. The heroine then becomes a living enigma, who cannot be unveiled until her hide falls off (Vaz da Silva 2002, 213). The fairy-tale tradition, however, often deals with this sort of ambiguity by presenting a split, where contradicting characteristics like good/bad, diligent/lazy, beautiful/ugly, and bright/dark are projected onto two different characters; for example, a princess and her evil stepsister. In the end, the good girl is rewarded and marries the prince, whereas the bad girl is punished (Holbek 1998, 435–37). In *Ragnars saga*, a possible counterpart to dark Kráka might be found in the Swedish earl’s daughter Þóra, who makes her appearance in the second chapter of *Ragnars saga*.

The Little Snake and the Black and White Bride

In the next three chapters of *Ragnars saga*, Áslaug is not mentioned, but she reappears in the fifth chapter. In the meantime, the story shifts to the Swedish princess Þóra borgarhjörtr, who receives her byname because she is the most beautiful of women, like the deer is the most beautiful animal, and who becomes the first wife of Ragnarr loðbrók. This inserted tale, which disrupts the narrative about Áslaug, is excluded from the aforementioned scholarly discussion of Cinderella features in *Ragnars saga*. It is, however, equally important for an understanding of the development and diversity of various fairy-tale motifs in the saga.

Like the first chapter of *Ragnars saga*, the second chapter starts with some kind of box motif. Instead of Heimir’s hiding box intended for his foster-daughter Áslaug, Princess Þóra receives a little snake from her father King Herraudr, which she puts in a small chest filled with gold. With time, the little snake becomes a huge serpent, which outgrows the chest and encircles Þóra’s bower. A similar motif can be found in a Chinese variant of ‘Cinderella’ from the ninth century, which was for some time considered the oldest variant (Waley 1947, 226). Here, the heroine Ye Xian finds a little fish in a spring. She keeps the fish, but with time it outgrows every bowl the girl puts it into. One day, the fish is moved to a nearby pond, where Ye Xian feeds it, until the creature is killed by Ye Xian’s evil stepmother. The heroine keeps the bones of the fish, which provide her with jewellery, fine clothing, and food.

The motif of the marvellous growth of a serpent or fish, which outgrows small containers and bestows riches on its owner, is not commonly attested in the oral ‘Cinderella’ tradition. However, it seems to belong to a group of folktales, mainly from Southern Europe, which has not yet been assigned its own tale-type number in the Aarne–Thompson–Uther index. Isabel Cardigos identifies this group as the type of

'The Little Snake', which often consists of combinations of types AT 533* 'The Snake Helper'¹² and ATU 403 'The Black and the White Bride' (Cardigos 1996, 125–26). In this group of fairy tales, studied by Cardigos, the little snake which outgrows its container is often given by a father to his daughter, as is the case in *Ragnars saga*, which represents the father's patriarchal power over his daughter and bears strong sexual overtones. According to Cardigos, the little snake can be regarded as some sort of baby, developing and growing inside an external womb and cared for by the princess. Therefore, 'the snake is the object of the girl's potential motherhood' (Cardigos 1996, 137). The image of Þóra taking care of her serpent-baby which outgrows its box is juxtaposed with the image of Áslaug in a wooden box, which is opened by Gríma, who becomes the girl's surrogate mother until Áslaug becomes a grown woman. Áslaug, lying literally on Heimir's riches until she is released from the harp, structurally corresponds to Þóra's little snake and presumably hints at Áslaug's connection to the serpent as the daughter of the dragonslayer Sigurðr.¹³

To make matters even more interesting, the tale of the little snake as described by Cardigos is in the majority of cases intermingled with ATU 403 'The Black and the White Bride'. In these tales, the white, goodhearted bride is impersonated by the black, evil bride, because the black bride wears the clothes of the white one or they look alike. In the Old Icelandic chivalric saga *Vilmundar saga viðutan* from the fourteenth century, which Einar Ól. Sveinsson identified as an early variant of 'Cinderella', Princess Sóley exchanges her clothes with an evil troll-like kitchen maid called Öskubuska (Cinderella) and takes her place in the kitchen (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 2003, 235 and 248; Loth 1962–65, 4: 148–49). The same motif also appears in *Ólandssaga*, where Princess Mjaðveig gives one of her dresses to her stepsister Kráka, who wears the garment when reviving Prince Hrómundr, who believes Kráka to be Mjaðveig (Eiríkur Laxdal 2006, 398 and 404). The same incident occurs in one variant of the Mjaðveig story from the nineteenth century, where Mjaðveig is forced by her stepmother to exchange clothes with her stepsister (Jón Árnason 1954–61, 2: 299–305). In the second part of this particular 'Cinderella' variant, the tale type switches from ATU 510A to ATU 403, where Mjaðveig, now queen, has to exchange her dresses with an ogress again. According to Einar Ól. Sveinsson, the combination of ATU 510 and ATU 403 in a single tale is common in Icelandic tale variants, where ATU 403 usually follows the 'Cinderella' type (Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1929, 37–38). An affinity between 'The Black and the White Bride' and *Ragnars saga* is also evident in the Grimms' fairy tale 'Die weiße und die schwarze Braut' (The white and the black bride) (KHM 135/ATU 403). Here, the white bride has a brother called Reginer, which is reminiscent of 'Ragnarr' and its variations Regner or Reginheri. Reginer in the fairy tale is thrown into a snake-pit for treason, which also happens in *Ragnars saga*, where Ragnarr is killed in a snake-pit at King Ella's court in Northumbria. In the fairy tale, Reginer is later rescued by his sister, the white bride. Furthermore, the German fairy tale also features the comparison of beauty, where the king states that the white bride is as beautiful as his deceased wife was, just as occurs in *Ragnars saga* (see further later). Despite the fact that the relations between characters are different in the fairy tale (cf. Reginer and the white bride as brother and sister), there is a strong

resemblance between *Ragnars saga* and the fairy tale. A further investigation of their relation would, however, exceed the scope of this article. It seems nonetheless possible that the white bride relates to Þóra borgarhjörtr, with her byname supposedly referring to a white hind, as is common in fairy tales and Icelandic saga literature, whereas Áslaug as Crow certainly represents the black bride. However, as soon as Þóra dies and Áslaug's hideous hide falls off, she also represents a white bride, emphasised by the comment that she looks just as beautiful as Ragnarr's former wife.

Having clarified the relation of chapters one and two in *Ragnars saga* through fairy-tale symbolism, the focus will now shift to Ragnarr and the theme of the dragonslayer.

The Dragonslayer and His Dragon Father

The tale of the dragonslayer who rescues a princess from a dragon is, according to Propp, the oldest fairy tale theme existing, underlying every other fairy tale (Propp 1996, 89 and 114). Be that as it may, in the third chapter of *Ragnars saga*, Ragnarr kills Þóra's serpent and marries her. As discussed earlier, Þóra's serpent is not an antagonist per se, who kidnaps a princess, but rather acts as Þóra's guardian and protector of her virginity, by representing her father's patriarchal power over her. Hence, for a marriage between the princess and the hero to take place, the serpent has to disappear (Cardigos 1996, 140 and 146; Larrington 2010, 58–59). In other words, the slayer has to overcome the dragon in order to replace him and establish his own lineage, or as Propp puts it: 'the one who was born of the dragon kills the dragon' (Propp 1983, 363).¹⁴

Ármann Jakobsson argues in a similar vein, when he states that 'the dragon becomes a kind of paternal figure to the dragonslayer, also in the sense that the dragon (and his death) is the making of the hero' (Ármann Jakobsson 2010, 48). He further points out the interesting circumstance that after the slaying of Fáfnir, Sigurðr in *Völsunga saga* has a conversation with the dying dragon about his paternity and the role of midwives (Ármann Jakobsson 2010, 48). This appears to be an unusual conversation between a dragon and its slayer, but in the context of Sigurðr being introduced to sexual matters by his dragon father, the incident becomes more plausible, especially in the light that shortly after the slaying of Fáfnir, Sigurðr wakes up Brynhildr.

After killing Fáfnir, Sigurðr acquires certain traits of the dragon. After tasting Fáfnir's blood, he is able to understand the language of birds and overhears a conversation of nuthatches. According to Propp, the motif of acquiring the birds' language after being swallowed and devoured by a dragon or by eating or licking parts of the slain dragon is common in myth and folklore, and may be regarded as a narrative reference to an initiation rite (Propp 1983, 303–304).¹⁵ In *Völsunga saga*, the nuthatches reveal Reginn's betrayal to Sigurðr, which leads to Reginn's death, but Sigurðr also learns about the sleeping Brynhildr through the birds. The ability to understand the birds' language is later inherited by Áslaug, who like many heroines in 'Cinderella' variants is able to communicate with birds. In chapter nine of *Ragnars*

saga, the birds tell Áslaug about Ragnarr's betrayal and his intent to marry the Swedish princess Ingibjörg in order to elevate his status. This finally convinces Áslaug to reveal her true identity and royal origin to Ragnarr, which secures her marriage.¹⁶ In variants of the Icelandic Mjaðveig story, however, it is the prince who understands the language of birds, and overhears them referring to the blood in the shoe, which leads to the exposure of the false bride and to the discovery of the right one. In all three cases, the birds expose deceit, which likewise leads to the revelation of the rightful mate.

In *Völsunga saga*, Sigurðr is described with such a piercing gaze that few people dared to look into his eyes (Olsen 1906–1908, 56). The same trait is inherited by Ragnarr's last son, who is therefore named Sigurðr ormr-í-auga. Ragnarr is a dragonslayer as well, who later dies in a snake-pit, whereas Sigurðr is deceitfully killed by his brothers-in-law. The two dragonslayers' disgraceful deaths are in line with Ármann Jakobsson's argument that the career of the dragonslayer declines rapidly after his highest deed—the killing of the dragon—is accomplished (Ármann Jakobsson 2010, 42 and 50). While the fairy tale features a happy ending right after the slaying of a dragon, the heroic saga continues until the dragonslayer's tragic demise.

The two dragonslayers taking on properties of the dragon and returning to the serpent's essence (see Ragnarr dying in a snake-pit), must be understood in the light of a rejuvenating cycle, where the dragonslayer kills his dragon-father and becomes the dragon himself, who will be replaced by his successor.¹⁷

A Dragonslayer with Cinderella Traits

Having described the symbolic relation between the dragon and its slayer, it is interesting to note that the dragonslayer sometimes presents traits similar to Cinderella. In medieval Icelandic literature, the male hero often displays Cinderella-like characteristics in his childhood, when he lies in the ashes, nibbles charcoal, and barely talks. The so-called *kolbítr* (coalbiter) is usually very fond of his mother but despises his father. This Oedipal hero later succeeds at heroic deeds, with dragonslaying being one option (Driscoll 1992, lxxi; Ásdís Egilsdóttir 2005, 87–100).¹⁸

Despite the fact that Ragnarr is not described as a *kolbítr*, he too displays Cinderella-like traits in *Ragnars saga*. Ragnarr's furry clothes, a cloak and breeches, are reminiscent of the animal disguise common to the tale type ATU 510B, where the heroine, confronted with her incestuous father, usually disguises herself in a furry animal skin. The nature of the disguise can vary greatly, but it is always meaningful to the fairy tale, which is why the disguise is often represented within the title of the particular tale: for example, 'All-Kinds-of-Fur', 'Prinzessin Mäusehaut' (Princess Mouse-skin), 'Donkey Skin', and 'She-Bear' (Goldberg 1997, 29). The same is true for Ragnarr, whose byname is *loðbrók* (shaggy breeches), which appears in the title of the saga. In this regard, it is relevant that in his study on Ragnarr *loðbrók*, Rory McTurk concludes that Ragnarr's byname *loðbrók*, a feminine gendered noun, was probably first connected to a fertility goddess (Lopkona/Loðbróka) and might have

belonged to a woman with five sons, before it was ascribed to Ragnarr or Reginheri, the Viking ruler who led the attack on Paris in the year 845 (McTurk 1991, 49).¹⁹ In the later ballad tradition of the *Ragnars saga* cycle, it is usually the lost girl who wears furry clothes instead of the hero. In the Danish ballad *Regnfred og Kragelil* (DfG 22AB), King Sigurd sends Regnfred to find his lost daughter Kragelil (Little Crow). Regnfred discovers the maiden in the woods, wearing a dress of goatskin and a fur cloak (Grundtvig 1853, 331, v. 8 and 333, v. 14). In variants of the related ballad *Karl og Kragelil* (DfG 23A), the girl is said to wear torn clothes made of little patches (Grundtvig 1853, 335, v. 11 and 340, v. 10), reminiscent of the disguise in the Grimms' 'Cinderella' variant 'Allerleirauh' (All-Kinds-of-Fur) (KHM 65/ATU 510B) where the heroine wears a cloak patched together from all kinds of animal skins.

It is, however, not only Ragnarr's shaggy clothes that connect him to Cinderella, but also his weapon, a spear with which he kills Þóra's serpent. When Ragnarr fights the creature, his spear breaks in half. The spearhead gets stuck in the deadly wound of the dragon, while Ragnarr takes the shaft with him. Later, Ragnarr is able to show that the shaft fits the spearhead, which identifies him as the dragonslayer. According to the *Motif-Index of Early Icelandic Literature* by Inger M. Boberg, the broken spear in *Ragnars saga* matches the motif H101 'Identification by broken weapon' (Boberg 1966, 149). This particular motif, according to Boberg's index, appears only in *Ragnars saga*.²⁰ In the Faroese ballad *Ragnars kvæði*, however, a slave takes the part of the weapon that stuck in the serpent's wound and claims to be the dragonslayer until Ragnarr comes forth. The identification by broken weapon is not directly addressed in the ballad or is at least uncertain (Djurhuus and Matras 1951–63, 1: 215–43; McTurk 1991, 237–38). From a folkloristic viewpoint, a false hero claiming to be the slayer of a dragon until the real hero proves his deeds by providing parts of the slain dragon, often its tongue or teeth, is the common or traditional treatment of the theme, which plays also an integral part in ATU 300 'The Dragon-Slayer' (Uther 2004, 1: 174).²¹ In *Ragnars saga*, the claim of a false hero is missing, rendering Ragnarr's broken spear superfluous, as he could have revealed his identity right after the slaying when Þóra addresses him from her bower. Instead, Ragnarr runs off from the fighting scene without revealing his name, which does not seem very heroic, but resembles Cinderella's flight from the ball, where she loses one of her shoes, which later identifies her as the rightful bride. Ragnarr later attends Earl Herrauðr's assembly, where he is one out of many men trying to bring forth a fitting spear shaft, but only Ragnarr is able to provide the right shaft. In the very same manner, Cinderella usually verifies the rightfulness of her claim by proving that the lost slipper fits her foot only. From a Freudian perspective, it has been argued that Cinderella's slipper symbolizes the heroine's vagina and her intact virginity, whereas the blood in the shoe, caused by Cinderella's evil stepsisters cutting off parts of their feet in order to fit the delicate slipper, marks the stepsisters' spoiled virginity and hence their inappropriateness as wives for the prince (Bettelheim 1975, 265–72; Dundes 1987, 60–61). Cinderella's tiny slipper, which represents a vagina, is then equivalent to Ragnarr's fitting spear parts, representing an erect phallus. Therefore, Cinderella's slipper and Ragnarr's spear must be regarded as 'allomotifs', a term

introduced by Alan Dundes to refer to mutable motifs which fulfil the same function for the course of action, but which may also be symbolically equivalent (Dundes 2007, 319–24). Both, the perfect fit of Cinderella’s slipper and Ragnarr’s spear, reveal the identity of the hero/ine within the plot, but also hold the same underlying symbolic meaning of a sexual ‘fit’. Therefore, the spear-test in *Ragnars saga* and the slipper-test in ‘Cinderella’ tales proper may be considered allomotifs for male and female recognition of rightfulness as spouses. With this interpretation in mind, it becomes clear that both Aslaug and Ragnarr display motifs common to the Cinderella cycle, which presumably is the saga’s way of foreshadowing and communicating that Ragnarr and Áslaug are meant for each other as a pair (see further later). Therefore, the insertion of the narrative of Ragnarr marrying his first wife Þóra must be addressed further.

Of Dragonslayers and Deer Ladies, of Fathers and Mothers

The narrative of Ragnarr and Þóra, interposed between the story of Áslaug’s childhood and her marriage with Ragnarr, seems to mirror Áslaug’s parents Sigurðr Fáfnisbani and Brynhildr in *Völsunga saga*. Like Sigurðr, Ragnarr becomes a dragonslayer and marries a woman connected to deer. In *Völsunga saga*, Sigurðr finds the sleeping Brynhildr on a mountain called *Hindarfjall* (Mountain of the hind), whereas Þóra’s byname borgarhjörtr connects her to the hart.²² The serpent, which encircles Þóra’s bower and is later killed by Ragnarr, can then be compared with the magical fire surrounding the mountain, which Sigurðr has to surmount in order to find Brynhildr. The two dragonslayers, who later take on properties of the serpent, and their deer ladies clearly refer to the serpent/stag symbolism, which was widely recognized in the medieval world. The two animals were usually considered opposites or enemies, with the stag as the killer of the serpent (Heinzmann 1999, 600–601). This holds true for Sigurðr and Brynhildr, whose relationship is characterized by betrayal and death in *Völsunga saga*. Ragnarr and Þóra, however, seem to live a happy marriage until Þóra’s sudden death.

Ragnarr and Þóra also mirror Áslaug’s parents with regard to the Cinderella tradition. As discussed earlier, the dragonslayer shares certain traits with Cinderella. This is also true with regard to the dragonslayer overcoming his dragon father like Cinderella succeeds her mother, who has usually died before the heroine reaches puberty (Vaz da Silva 2002, 168). This becomes especially clear in Cinderella variants of the B-type, in which the queen demands on her deathbed that her husband only marry another woman who is as beautiful as she was or whom a ring fits, which then turns out to be her own daughter. From this perspective, Þóra is reminiscent of the dying queen, whereas Ragnarr would fill in the motifemic slot of the so-called ‘unnatural father’, who keeps the deathbed promise and demands the hand of his daughter in marriage, who would then translate to be Áslaug. In *Ragnars saga*, an actual deathbed promise is missing and Áslaug, who is offered Þóra’s shirt, rejects it by reciting a stanza where she emphasizes her unworthiness as Crow, wearing only dark rags.

However, the ballad tradition of the *Ragnars saga* cycle seems to have preserved the more traditional treatment of the theme. In the aforementioned ballad *Ragnars kvæði*, the deathbed promise is present, when Þóra (here: Tóra) explains to Ragnarr that he can only marry a woman whom her dresses fit and—interestingly with regard to the Cinderella tradition—also her shoes (Djurhuus and Matras 1951–72, 1: 217, vv. 43–44 (A) and 229, vv. 51–52 (D)). Furthermore, Áslaug (here: Ásla) accepts Tóra’s dresses and even fits into her shoes (Djurhuus and Matras 1951–72, 1: 230–31, vv. 83–86 (D)). Rooth suggested that the acceptance of Þóra’s dress by Áslaug in the ballad tradition features the traditional outcome of the marriage test common in Cinderella variants (Rooth 1951, 128). In another Faroese ballad mentioned by Peter Erasmus Müller in his *Sagabibliothek*, Áslaug (here: Osla) also accepts Þóra’s shirt (Müller 1817–20, 2: 481). Interestingly, the Grimm brothers refer to the same incident in Müller’s work in their annotations to ‘Allerleirauh’. The Grimms regard the shirt-motif as equivalent to tale variants where the king will only marry a woman who has the same hair as his former wife, which means that the Grimms indirectly compare aspects of *Ragnars saga* with Cinderella variants of the B-type (Grimm 1819–22, 3: 120).

The use of fairy-tale motifs and clusters belonging to the tale types of ‘Cinderella’ and ‘The Black and the White Bride’ seems to reinforce the notion that Áslaug and Þóra are symbolically connected through either a mother–daughter relationship or as competitors as black and white brides. Both possibilities, however, lead to the same outcome, where Áslaug is symbolically presented as Þóra’s successor, an equivalence strengthened by the comparison between the beauty of Áslaug and Þóra that Ragnarr’s men draw. To conclude this exploration: Áslaug succeeds Þóra in the same manner as the dragonslayer succeeds his dragon father, which provides us with the striking insight that the characters of Áslaug and Ragnarr are deliberately juxtaposed in *Ragnars saga*.

Ragnarr and Áslaug: Romantic Symmetry and Kinship

Examining ancient and medieval literary variants of ‘Cinderella’, Graham Anderson observed that the pair is sometimes treated as parts of a single organism, which Anderson describes as ‘romantic symmetry’. Here, common fairy-tale motifs are split up and divided between the male and female characters, who are destined to form a romantic relationship, whereas the fairy tale concentrates on the individual hero/ine from beginning to end (Anderson 2000, 157). Hui made a similar observation in *Vilmundar saga viðutan*, where he applies the Jungian term *syzygy* to describe the pairing up of the evil cinder-named characters Kolr (Coal) and Öskubuska (Cinderella), who are designated for one another, as is implied by their close relation to cinders and ashes as well as the colour black (Hui 2018b, 368–69). The same is true for *Ragnars saga*, where the author splits up common motifs, belonging especially to the Cinderella cycle, and ascribes them to both Ragnarr and Áslaug in order to juxtapose them on a symbolic as well as a structural level:

- Ragnarr and Áslaug wear special clothing that associates them with animals, with the intention to hide or protect themselves. The appearance of their

clothes correlates with their names Loðbrók and Kráka, and a sticky black substance is applied to either the hair/head (Áslaug) or the furry clothing (Ragnarr), which may be reminiscent of ashes (Torfi H. Tulinius 2002, 131).

- Ragnarr and Áslaug are both connected to the serpent: Ragnarr as the dragonslayer who later dies in a snake-pit; Áslaug as the dragonslayer's daughter who exhibits certain traits of the serpent, including knowledge of the language of birds and 'lying' upon gold in a box, like Þóra's little snake.
- Áslaug is put in the motifemic slot of the persecuted and ill-treated heroine, but also exhibits features of the evil stepmother or stepsister. Ragnarr, on the other hand, resembles a Cinderella with regard to the perfect-fit sequence of his spear that identifies him as the dragonslayer.
- Ragnarr and Áslaug both hide their identity from their initial partners by reciting a mysterious stanza, not revealing their names or kin. Ragnarr only reveals his age of fifteen to Þóra, whereas Áslaug introduces herself as Kráka to Ragnarr.

By juxtaposing Ragnarr and Áslaug in this way, they almost appear to be two perfectly matching pieces of a puzzle. What we know about Áslaug—regarding her early childhood—we do not know about Ragnarr; what we know about Ragnarr—regarding his adolescence—we do not know about Áslaug.

The paralleling of the two saga characters culminates in the bride-revealing episode in chapter six, which is probably the most famous incident in *Ragnars saga*. Ragnarr demands to meet Áslaug neither clad nor unclad, neither full nor hungry, and neither alone nor in the company of a man. The paradoxical task of the 'neither/nor' kind as imposed by Ragnarr is an international motif first identified by the brothers Grimm as belonging to an episode of the folktale 'Die kluge Bauerntochter' (KHM 94/ATU 875 'The Clever Peasant Girl') (Grimm 1819–22, 3: 175–77).²³ The solving of a difficult task or riddle is common in folktales. Like the recognition of a token, riddling and problem-solving often has the function of identifying the rightful mate, commonly followed by marriage (Propp 2012, 238). In those instances, the solving of a difficult task or riddle can be regarded as the equivalent recognition mechanism to the fitting weapon in *Ragnars saga*, as well as Cinderella's fitting slipper in the fairy tale (Torfi H. Tulinius 2002, 131). In other words, the correct answer to a riddle 'fits' its question, as do the parts of Ragnar's broken weapon or as Cinderella's foot fits her shoe.

In *Ragnars saga*, Áslaug's and Ragnarr's wedding night is addressed shortly after the bride-revelation episode. Áslaug asks Ragnarr to wait for three nights before consummating their marriage, as otherwise their firstborn will be born without bones. Ragnarr breaks the interdiction and, as a result, their son Ívarr is born with gristle where the bones ought to be and receives the byname *inn beinlausí* (the boneless). Áslaug's imposition of three nights of marital abstinence refers to the cultural phenomenon of the 'Tobias Nights', where intercourse is prohibited for the first night, or first three nights, of marriage. The Tobias Nights draw their name from the biblical story of Sarah and Tobias in the apocryphal *Book of Tobit*, where Tobias delays the consummation of his marriage in order to overpower Sarah's demon, which has killed her seven former husbands on the wedding night (Frazer 1918, 1: 499–501). The custom was practised in France and other parts of Europe in the Middle Ages

(Gennep 1980, 555–56; Vries 1956, 187). According to Pierre Saintyves, the Tobias Nights are rooted in the belief that a woman's bloodshed during defloration on the wedding night can be harmful to her husband and especially his seed (Saintyves 1934, 281; Vaz da Silva 2002, 176–80). The seed, however, is according to folk belief and ancient ideas of procreation the crucial material for producing the white hard and form-giving parts of a child (the bones), whereas the blood in the mother's womb was believed to produce the red soft and formless parts (Ott 1979, 707; Vaz da Silva 2014, 29–31). Ívarr's conception during the tabooed period of the Tobias Nights, causing his boneless body, deliberately stems from the father's seed being overpowered by the mother's blood and, therefore, her lineal line, which in the case of Áslaug is the lineage of the Völsungs and the dragonslayer. Hence, Ívarr being born boneless certainly hints at the serpent qualities of his mother and grandfather, also echoed in the birth of Áslaug's and Ragnarr's last son Sigurðr, who bears his grandfather's mark in the eye. Since Áslaug and Ragnarr both feature common Cinderella traits, they may be seen as providing a special link, which binds together the mythico-legendary past and the historical past from the god Óðinn to Sigurðr Fáfnisbani to Ragnarr's sons. The Cinderella cycle in folklore, therefore, acts as mediator, creating not only a narrative link between mythology and history, but also an unspoiled biological/genealogical link, ever rejuvenating within the dragonslayer lineage.

Conclusions

What does the reading of *Ragnars saga* through the lens of fairy-tale motifs add to our understanding of the story? It opens up another layer of meaning to the saga text, as well as clarifying important connections between episodes and saga characters, which are not described by the words written on the page, but through a symbolic matrix that is indispensable to the fairy tale. This symbolic matrix does not necessarily hold historical truth, but encompasses ideas which are bound to the social norms and values of a given society at a given time. By considering the folkloric motifs, it becomes clear that *Ragnars saga* has been largely influenced by tale motifs belonging to the Cinderella cycle especially, which is also true for chapters two to four, disregarded in previous research on Cinderella motif clusters in *Ragnars saga*. However, Cinderella variants of the later fairy-tale tradition are comprehensible and single-stranded narratives, whereas the Cinderella cycle in *Ragnars saga* has been adapted to an elaborate, many-stranded, complicated, and interlaced literary saga text. The later Scandinavian ballad tradition of the *Ragnars saga* cycle has, therefore, proved to be useful in clarifying the underlying traditional folkloric pattern and its connection to the fairy tale of Cinderella.

While this case study has been presented as extended research on the 'Cinderella'-like characteristics of *Ragnars saga*, the exploration might also prove useful for scholars of Old Icelandic literature who might want to explore further the folkloric depth of the *fornaldarsögur* and other late medieval Icelandic literature. Finally, I hope it can also be an encouragement for folklorists to re-engage with early examples of literary manifestations of well-known folktales and fairy tales.

Notes

- ¹ The Retrospective Methods Network (RMN) focuses on using evidence from one period for developing an understanding of the same or a corresponding phenomenon in an earlier period. The *RMN Newsletter* is published by Folklore Studies/Department of Philosophy, History, Culture and Art Studies, University of Helsinki, Finland.
- ² Contrary to this scholarly assumption about the hybridization of the fornaldarsögur early on, Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir considers the legendary sagas a rather stable literary genre, mostly created in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and perhaps somewhat later. Their popularity continued, considering the number of preserved manuscripts and *rimur* (metrical romances), where the subject matter of most of the sagas was turned into verse. Their popularity is also evident in similar sagas, based on the original fornaldarsögur, which might be called *fornaldarsögur síðari tíma* (reconstituted fornaldarsögur) (Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir 2001, cliv-clxi; 2018, 21).
- ³ The manuscript which combines *Völsunga saga* and *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, known as the Y-version, is preserved in Copenhagen, Det Kongelige Bibliotek, MS NKS 1824b 4to. This article makes use of the scholarly edition by Olsen (1906–1908). For English translations of the two sagas, consult Byock (1990) and Schlauch (1930).
- ⁴ KHM is the common abbreviation for the Grimms' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. Each tale within the collection is assigned a reference number.
- ⁵ The related tale type ATU 511 'One Eye, Two-Eyes, and Three-Eyes' belongs to the Cinderella cycle as well; this type is not used as comparative material in this article.
- ⁶ Rooth uses her own classification system, where ATU 510A resembles B (Rooth) and ATU 510B resembles BI (Rooth), ATU 511 + ATU 510A = AB (Rooth).
- ⁷ The same motif also appears in another Icelandic fornaldarsaga, namely *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs* (The Saga of Bósi and Herrauð) (McTurk 1991, 237). In this saga, the protagonist Bósi rescues a princess by hiding her inside a harp. He smuggles her out of a castle and takes her with him on a ship. Bósi gains access to the castle by putting on the human skin of a harpist and distracting the courtly audience by playing the harp (Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1985, 219–21). According to Goldberg, dressing in human skin is a common form of disguise in 'Cinderella' variants from Southern Europe, especially Italy, and North Africa. It is equivalent to the heroine's animal hide and might even be its prototype (Goldberg 1997, 33–38). In a previous adventure, Bósi and his companion Herrauðr kill a heifer and stuff its skin in order to gain access to a temple. Furthermore, *Bósa saga* connects itself through genealogical links to both *Ragnars saga* and *Vilmundar saga víðutan* (Hui 2018b, 370). The saga also shares a few other motifs with *Ragnars saga* (Hui 2018a, 479–81). An English translation of *Bósa saga* is Hermann Pálsson and Edwards (1985, 199–227).
- ⁸ Author's translation of the French: 'La jeune fille muette de la forêt est souvent découverte par le tsariévitch sur un arbre. Elle est généralement nue, recouverte de ses longs cheveux, et ressemble à un oiseau, parfois même elle est couverte de plumes collées. Tout ceci montre l'origine de ce motif. La jeune fille dans l'arbre ou sur l'arbre, c'est la même chose que la jeune fille dans la tombe, la jeune fille en état de morte temporaire'.
- ⁹ The motif of a princess turning into a crow also appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Princess Coronis is transformed into a crow by Minerva, to prevent her from being raped by Neptune (Ovid 1958, 49).
- ¹⁰ The name 'Mjaðveig' is a combination of the Icelandic terms *mjöður* (mead, honey wine) and *veig* (strong alcoholic drink), which are both Icelandic terms for alcoholic substances or even magic potions. The surname Mánadóttir identifies her as the daughter of a king named Máni, which is also the Icelandic term for 'moon'. Note, that the name Máni bears mythological overtones, for it is also mentioned in *Snorra Edda*, where Máni is the personification of the moon (Faulkes 1987, 14).
- ¹¹ The motif of M411.1.1. 'Curse by Stepmother' can be found in a number of Old Norse-Icelandic sagas (see Boberg 1966, 196).
- ¹² The tale type corresponds to ATU 533 'The Speaking Horsehead' (Uther 2004).

- ¹³ Carolyne Larrington argues that Áslaug shows similar features to the medieval European folktale character of Mélusine, a pre-Christian water fairy often depicted with a serpent tail. Mélusine's husband also violates an interdiction and Mélusine's offspring show bodily deformations, similar to Áslaug's sons Ívarr and Sigurðr (Larrington 2010, 60–62).
- ¹⁴ Author's translation of the French 'celui qui est né du dragon tue le dragon'.
- ¹⁵ The tale of 'Die weiße Schlange' (The White Snake) (KHM 17/ATU 673 'The White Serpent's Flesh') is another from the collection of the brothers Grimm that addresses the ability to understand the language of birds and other animals by eating a snake. In book five of Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*, Kráka (here: Craca) cooks a white snake and a black snake for her son and her stepson. The white snake is supposed to give strength, whereas the black one takes strength. The black snake, which Craca prepared for her stepson, is mistakenly eaten by her own son. Motifs connected to a taboo of eating food of certain person (C250–C279 in the *Motif-Index*) are common in folklore.
- ¹⁶ Further on the theme of the knowledge of the birds' speech in Old Norse tradition, see Bourns (2012).
- ¹⁷ The same sort of cycle can be observed in *Gull-Þóris saga* (The Saga of Gold-Thorir), a post-classical Saga of Icelanders, where the hero Þórir kills two dragons, which were once human (father and son). The saga ends with Þórir turning into a dragon himself.
- ¹⁸ The kolbíttr-motif in connection with the slaying of a dragon is, for example, present in the chivalric saga *Sigurðar saga þögla* (The Saga of Sigurd the Taciturn) and the legendary saga *Ketils saga hængs* (The Saga of Ketill Trout).
- ¹⁹ Another suggestion for the origin of Ragnarr's byname is made by Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, who states that the fatal dysentery, suffered by the historical Reginheri, might have caused his diarrhoea, which then became the black and sticky substance that stained and encrusted Ragnarr's breeches in *Ragnars saga* (Ashman Rowe 2012, 165).
- ²⁰ However, the same motif appears also in the late Icelandic romance *Jóns saga leiksveins* (also known as *Jóns saga leikara* [The Saga of Jón the Player]), which Boberg includes in her motif-index but to which she does not assign the motif of H101. In the romance, the spearhead as well as the dragon's tongue are used as proof of the dragonslaying-deed (Hui et al. 2021). For related motifs of identification in Icelandic sagas, consult Boberg (1966, 149).
- ²¹ McTurk points out the similarities between the recognition token sequence in *Ragnars saga* and *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar*, a Norse prose translation of Thomas's *Tristan* from 1226 (McTurk 1991, 235–39). In *Tristrams saga* (ch. 35–45), Tristram kills a dragon and cuts out his tongue, but later a rival cuts off the dragon's head and claims to be the slayer. Tristram comes forth with the tongue and is recognized as the true slayer. According to McTurk, some variants of the Tristan legend also feature a broken spear, but the tongue usually identifies the slayer (McTurk 1991, 238). In *Ragnars saga*, however, no false claim is made (Larrington 2012, 262).
- ²² It is worth mentioning that the Icelandic word *borg* in Þóra's byname *borgarhjörtr*, commonly translated as 'town' (see earlier), also translates as 'rocky hill' in which case the byname's meaning equals that of *Hindarfjall* (Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989, 72, definition 1). Note, that Sigurðr too is connected to the stag (Heinzmann 1999, 605–606). However, Ármann Jakobsson's statement that the career of the dragonslayer declines after the slaying (see earlier) might be interpreted in the light of the dragonslayer seemingly taking on attributes of the dragon afterwards.
- ²³ Other scholars have discussed the similarities between the folktale and the incident in *Ragnars saga* in more detail (Rooth 1951, 128–31; Vries 1928; McTurk 1991, 204–11).

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Biographical Note

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Article 2

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“WHAT’S IN A NAME?” METAPHORICAL ENCHANTMENTS OF NOBLE CHILDREN IN OLD ICELANDIC LITERATURE

Abstract: In the last decade, there has been a return to folkloristic methods in saga scholarship, leading to the focus on fantastic and supernatural elements in medieval Icelandic literature. Beyond such overtly supernatural elements, medieval Icelandic saga texts also feature various seemingly realistic episodes that work according to the cyclic logic of enchantment and disenchantment—the core principle of fairy tales. It is often the case in Icelandic sagas that noble children are bereft of their highborn status by being abducted, exposed or exchanged, and raised by ugly and poor peasants. They have to undergo a period of ill-treatment and/or a change in their physical appearance, like the shaving of the head, wearing dark and ugly clothing, or a change of name which emphasizes their worthlessness and low status. After having endured this period of hardship in their childhood, these heroes and heroines finally ascend to their heroic purpose.

The main argument of this article is that such a temporary loss of status of noble children in Icelandic literature is a realistic-style rendering of the enchantment and disenchantment common in fairy tales. The main principles of such renderings of fairy-tale-like enchantments in the realistic settings of medieval Icelandic sagas are then explored.

Keywords: Icelandic sagas, fairy tales, enchantment, childhood

INTRODUCTION

In the last decade or so, there has been a return to folkloristic methods in saga scholarship, leading to the focus on fantastic and supernatural elements in medieval Icelandic literature. One element is the evil spell-casting stepmother, a narrative motif, common amongst the literary genre of the legendary sagas (*fornaldarsögur*), mostly composed in the 13th and 14th

centuries and known for their fantastical content. The evil stepmother usually turns her stepchildren into animals or ogres, or they are sent off on a long and dangerous journey. The purpose of those enchantments is that the hero finds his rightful mate whom he is destined to marry. The enchantment by wicked stepmothers is also widely attested in later Icelandic fairy tales (Guðmundsdóttir¹ (forthcoming); Werth 2019: 52–54).

This article, however, suggests that beyond such overtly supernatural elements and enchantments, medieval Icelandic sagas also feature various seemingly realistic episodes that work according to the same cyclic logic of fairy tales, which leads the hero from non-enchantment to enchantment and back to non-enchantment, representing the core principle of fairy tales (Cardigos 1996: 14).

It is often the case in Icelandic sagas that noble children are bereft of their highborn status and raised by ugly and poor peasants. They have to undergo a period of ill-treatment and/or a change in their physical appearance, as well as a change of name which emphasizes their marginalized status. After having endured this period of childhood hardship, these male and female saga protagonists finally ascend to their heroic purpose after their true identity is revealed. This particular motif concerning the childhood of saga characters is not limited to the legendary sagas and later Icelandic romances, as are the enchantments by wicked stepmothers, but is also found in other saga genres, such as the Sagas of Icelanders (*Íslendingasögur*) and shorter tales of Icelanders (*Íslendingaþættir*); the motif seems to have appealed to a broad audience.

This article will provide three main examples of saga heroes who lose their highborn status in their childhood: the abducted princess Áslaug in the 13th century legendary saga *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* [The Saga of Ragnar Lodbrok], the exposed Finnbogi in *Finnboga saga ramma* [The Saga of Finnbogi the Strong], a 14th century Saga of Icelanders, and the exchanged twin brothers Geirmundr and Hámundr heljarskinn in the 13th century *Sturlunga saga* [The Saga of the Family of the Sturlungs].² Additionally, minor examples from a wide range of sagas of different genres will be given. The

¹ Icelandic names are usually cited in full length, starting with the first name, since Icelanders don't have family names, but rather patronymics (*son/dóttir*, "son"/"daughter").

² *Sturlunga saga* is similar to *Íslendingasögur* with the difference that the stories narrate events that happen at the time of writing, whereas the *Íslendingasögur* tell of events that happened some centuries before writing. Therefore, *Sturlunga saga* is sometimes referred to as *samtíðarsaga* or "contemporary saga."

material will show that the temporary loss of the status of noble children in Icelandic saga literature is a realistic-style rendering of the enchantment and disenchantment characteristic of fairy tales. Before discussing the chosen cases, the nature of enchantments in fairy tales will be addressed.

FAIRY-TALE ENCHANTMENTS

While it lies beyond the scope of this article to discuss the scholarly discourse on the origin and interconnections between myths, heroic epics, and the fairy tale in detail, it should be noted that the boundaries between the different genres are fluid. Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966: 45), for example, declared that he used all kinds of traditional narratives like tales and legends, as well as customs and ceremonies for his analysis, instead of being too strict on what is (and what is not) mythical. Enchantments in fairy tales, however, differ from the curses and metamorphoses found in legends and myths, since fairy-tale enchantments last only temporarily and will be resolved by the end of the narrative. In fairy tales, the enchantment is usually part of the hero's childhood or adolescence and, in the majority of tales, is intended to lead the hero to his/her rightful mate. Therefore, the state of enchantment can be interpreted as a phase of the hero's and heroine's coming of age and maturing until they are fit for marriage. According to Max Lüthi's (1986: 11–23) concept of *depthlessness* (*Flächenhaftigkeit*) as a stylistic characteristic of fairy tales, the process of aging or maturing, as well as the heroes' internal and psychological state are not addressed directly, but instead externalized, where they become the intrinsic parts of the narrative plot itself. The cyclic movement of enchantment and disenchantment, along with the development of the hero, can therefore be represented through actual movement, where usually (but not exclusively) the male hero undertakes an adventurous journey. This journey can then be seen as a metaphor for coming-of-age processes (cf. Vaz da Silva (this vol.)). However, in many fairy tales, enchantment is accompanied by the hero being caught in a state of fixation or passivity, where the prince is, for example, turned into stone or swallowed by a fish, whereas the heroine is locked up in a chest or tower, eventually caught in a death-like sleep. According to Vladimir Propp, those instances of passivity represent a temporary and metaphorical state of death (Propp 1987: 309).³

³ For further discussion on royal children who are hidden and locked away in fairy tales, see Propp 1987: 39–51.

It may, therefore, seem peculiar that this metaphorical or symbolical death should signify the hero's internal development and growth. However, the death metaphor connects the maturing process of the protagonist with Arnold van Gennep's (1960: 11, 65–115) concept of the rites of passage and Victor Turner's (1977: 93–111) theory on *liminality*, where a person is betwixt and between two life stages, already separated from the initial stage, but not yet incorporated into a new one, which is often exemplified through the metaphor of death and re-birth (cf. Vaz da Silva (this vol.)). It seems as if both the active journey as well as the fixed state denote the potentiality of the hero and heroine, by undergoing the transition from the stage of childhood to the stage of adulthood. As soon as this period has passed, the hero ascends to his true purpose by finding the rightful mate and ruling a kingdom.

Enchantment in fairy tales often includes a temporary transformation of the hero into an animal. Similar to the death-like state of fixation, the animal shape deprives the hero of his or her human state, forcing him to persist in nature and the wilderness for a certain amount of time. Only when the hero has been disenchanting, and the furry animal hide or second skin is cast off, is he able to get married. The enchantment of humans into animals is especially common amongst the Icelandic fairy tales (Sveinsson 2003: 246). One of the earliest examples of shape-shifting through enchantment can be found in an episode belonging to the legendary saga *Hrólfs saga kraka* [The Saga of King Hrolf Kraki] from around 1400, namely *Böðvars þáttr* [The Tale of Bödvar]. In *Böðvars þáttr*, an evil queen puts a spell on her stepson, who turns into a bear by day but returns to his human state by nightfall (Byock 1998: 36–37). Similar enchantments occur in later Icelandic fairy tales, where royal children are turned into dogs or black cats and even nonhuman creatures like ogres. Those enchantments by active spell-casters like the evil stepmother, result in the loss of the hero's status and identity by undergoing a period of hardship, whereas disenchantment, usually initiated by the rightful mate or a sibling, restores the former status and physical appearance of the hero.

Despite these clear examples of enchantments in Icelandic sagas and fairy tales, there is another pattern in the sagas that is not as easily recognized as enchantment, due to the lack of actual shape-shifting or magic. Instead of a proper enchantment, realistic processes seem to mimic and metaphorically represent fairy-tale enchantments. Those instances usually involve children of royal or noble birth, who lose their status. At this point, it is worth mentioning that patterns concerning the biography of the

mythical or legendary hero have been described by various scholars.⁴ The “hero patterns” usually focus on the first half of the hero’s life, his conception, birth, and early childhood, which often includes the hero’s exposure and a humble upbringing before he accomplishes heroic deeds. While the hero pattern proposed by the German scholar Otto Rank (2004: 72) shows probably the closest resemblance to the pattern examined in this article, it, however, diverges in Rank’s Freudian inspired aspect of the hero striving to revenge his father. As will be shown, the heroes in the discussed Icelandic sagas, on the other hand, seek reconciliation and re-integration into the rightful family. The hero’s individual concern of reuniting with his family must then be regarded as characteristic of the fairy tale rather than myths (Meletinsky 1969: 18).

The following examples are divided into three groups: (1) abducted children, (2) exposed children, and (3) exchanged children. Despite the varying narratives of how the children get detached from their family, those instances can be considered equivalent, since they lead to the unvarying circumstance that the children are taken captives or fostered by strangers. This period can include a change of the children’s physical appearance, like the shaving of the head or wearing dark or furry clothing, which emphasizes their low status. A peculiarity concerning the name and parentage of the youngster is mentioned in the majority of cases, where the name is either kept secret and/or replaced by another one. This period of hardship comes to an end as soon as the true identity is revealed and the hero regains his noble status.

ABDUCTED AND PERSECUTED CHILDREN

The theme of persecuted royal children has long been a part of Old Icelandic literature. Already in the Kings’ sagas (*konungasögur*) from the 12th century, royal children are persecuted and forced to run from their enemies. Usually, those children are accompanied by their birth mother, and live temporarily under humble circumstances in remote places, commonly on islands, before claiming the throne. According to Ármann Jakobsson, those incidents in the Kings’ sagas show great resemblances to fairy tales, in which the royal hero or heroine is confronted with persecution and adversity in their childhood, and have to prove his/her worth, until he/she is able to seize

⁴ For an overview of the different patterns and approaches, see, for example, Dundes 1980: 229–240; Holbek 1998: 328–331.

the throne (Jakobsson 2004: 7, 19). In the following examples, the theme of abducted children, who are raised by strangers in an unfamiliar place, where they are kept in solitude and keep silent will be examined.

In *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, princess Áslaug travels with her foster father King Heimir from Sweden to Norway inside a specially constructed harp with a special leek as the only source of food. At a remote farm in Norway, Heimir is killed by an ugly peasant couple, Áki and his wife Gríma, who find Áslaug inside the harp. Áslaug does not speak and, therefore, does not answer Gríma's question about her parentage "hverar ęttar hun veri" (Olsen 1906–8: 115; cf. Waggoner 2009: 4). As it turns out later, Áslaug is entirely capable of speaking and even understands the language of birds. Gríma raises the girl as if she were her own. In order to prevent suspicions, Gríma makes Áslaug as ugly as she is herself and dresses her in dark rags, shaves her head, and smears it with tar. Additionally, Áslaug receives the name Kráka [Crow], the same name that Gríma's mother bore. From then on, Kráka serves the couple in the kitchen and herds the goats. Áslaug is later discovered by the Viking ruler Ragnarr, who takes her as his second wife. It is, however, not before Ragnarr is about to leave Áslaug for a Swedish princess in order to secure his royal status that she reveals her real name and highborn origin as the daughter of the famous dragon slayer Sigurðr Fáfnisbani. Áslaug's claim is later verified by her fifth son, bearing the mark of the snake in his eye, which connects him to his grandfather.

This episode in *Ragnars saga* has been identified by various scholars as an early instance of *Cinderella* (Cox 1893: xl; Hartland 1982: 67–68; Rooth 1951: 126–134) and has recently sparked renewed interest by the scholars of Old Norse literature and folklore (Hui 2018; Werth (forthcoming)). The Swedish folklorist Anna Birgitta Rooth was the first one to recognize that Áslaug, travelling inside the harp, is a variant of the hiding-box-type, now classified as ATU 510B* *The Princess in the Chest*, a subtype of the *Cinderella* tale type ATU 510 (Uther 2004, 1: 296). According to Rooth, the dark rags Áslaug is wearing, as well as the name of the crow she receives, refers to the B-type of the *Cinderella* cycle (ATU 510B *Peau d'Áne*), where the fairy-tale heroine usually disguises herself in animal skins and furs. Interestingly, the crow disguise as well as the Crow-name are common in many later Scandinavian *Cinderella* variants (Rooth 1951: 132–134). The names *Kráka* and *Gríma* are both listed amongst the names of ogresses in the 13th century *Snorra Edda*, where they are traditionally connected to witchcraft (Faulkes 1987: 156).

Áslaug's refusal to speak and to reveal her parentage mirrors the incident when her father, Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, does not reveal his parentage

to the dragon Fáfnir in *Völsunga saga* [The Saga of the Volsungs] (Byock 1990: 63).⁵ In the heroic Eddic poem *Fáfnismál* [The Lay of Fafnir], which also concerns the killing of Fáfnir by Sigurðr, it is stated that the revelation of one's name to a dying creature is dangerous, because the words of the dying one are powerful and can cause harm if he curses one by name (Larrington 2014: 153). Therefore, Áslaug's refusal to reveal her name could be regarded a strategic decision, which keeps her from further harm. The motif of the hiding of the name is probably best-known from later folklore, namely the tale type of ATU 500 *The Name of the Supernatural Helper* or *Rumpelstiltskin*, where a supernatural creature requests that the hero discovers its peculiar name. Behind the naming riddle lies the ancient idea that a person's name can provide access to their soul and should, therefore, not be revealed to strangers (Clodd 1898; von Sydow 1907; Sveinsson 2003: 58).⁶

Áslaug receives a name which connects her to ogresses in Old Icelandic literature as well as to a black bird. The change of name and outer appearance signifies a metaphorical enchantment in *Ragnars saga*, where the heroine embodies an animal while becoming attached to the lineage of ogresses (recall that Gríma's mother bore the same name that Áslaug receives). Those instances symbolize the loss of the human state, further highlighted by Áslaug being a goat-herd, traversing the rocky shore all day long with the goats being her only companions.

Another saga character that shows significant similarities to Áslaug is the abducted Irish princess Melkorka in *Laxdæla saga*, a 13th-century Saga of Icelanders. In the saga, Melkorka is abducted by sea pirates as a child and brought first to Russia and later to Norway, where she is traded as a slave. The Icelandic chieftain Höskuldr Dala-Kollsson acquires Melkorka at a fair on one of his visits to Norway. Despite Höskuldr being warned by the trader that the slave-woman does not speak, he buys her anyway and exchanges her dirty rags with a splendid dress. Höskuldr brings Melkorka to Iceland as his concubine and has a son with her, named Óláfr, who Höskuldr's wife Þórunn

⁵ *Ragnars saga* is closely related to *Völsunga saga*, which forms part of the Nordic branch of the *Nibelungen cycle*. Both sagas are combined in a vellum manuscript from approximately 1400, with *Ragnars saga* conceptualized as a sequel to *Völsunga saga*. The manuscript, known as Y-version, is preserved in *Den Arnarnagnæanske Samling* in Copenhagen, NKS 1824b 4to.

⁶ There exist at least five variants of this tale type amongst Icelandic fairy tales. One variant concerns the giantess Gilitrutt, who assists a lazy housewife with her spinning tasks and demands that she discovers her name after guessing three times (Guðmundsdóttir 2003).

dislikes greatly. She mistreats Melkorka. One morning, when Höskuldr goes outside the house, he overhears a conversation between Melkorka and their son Óláfr, who talk together in a strange language, most likely Irish. When Höskuldr confronts Melkorka, she reveals to him that she is of royal origin and the daughter of the Irish king Mýrkjartan. However, it is not before Melkorka's son is a grown man and travels to Ireland with a golden ring, a knife, and a belt—fairy-tale-style recognition tokens he receives from his mother—that Melkorka's claim is verified. In Ireland, Melkorka's father, King Mýrkjartan, recognizes the golden ring as his own, while Melkorka's old nurse remembers the knife and belt (Hreinsson (ed.) 1997a).

Melkorka in *Laxdæla saga* and Áslaug in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* share certain similarities.⁷ They are both abducted and persecuted princesses, who have to endure a period of hardship and mistreatment while being in a serving position. Despite the fact that Höskuldr and his wife are not acting as Melkorka's foster parents, the motif of a man and a woman of lower origin having supervision over, and mistreating, a well-born young woman is present. Equally important, however, is the fact that both princesses use the same ruse—they keep silent in order to hide their name and royal parentage. In both sagas, muteness is used consciously in order to hide the true identity, which works according to the narrative logic of the sagas. In fairy tales, however, the heroine's muteness is not so much a ruse as it is a necessary condition to be endured, and symbolically hints at the heroine's becoming sexually mature (Cardigos 1991: 55; cf. Vaz da Silva 2002: 204–205). The theme of muteness in *Ragnars saga* and *Laxdæla saga*, however, seems to work according to both narrative criteria.

Another similarity is the circumstance that Áslaug's and Melkorka's sons are finally able to verify their mother's claims by possessing either a special birthmark or a golden ring, which work similarly to the so-called recognition tokens found in fairy tales. The final recognition of the two princesses' highborn origin is, however, not first and foremost intended to

⁷ According to Einar Ól. Sveinsson (1934: xlv–xlvii), the author, *Laxdæla saga* was influenced by heroic epics and poems concerning Sigurðr Fáfnisbani, the Valkyrie Brynhildr, and the family of the Gjúkung. Therefore, it seems possible that the author also knew the story of Áslaug, the daughter of Sigurðr and Brynhildr according to *Ragnars saga* and *Völsunga saga*, and used her as a model for Melkorka in *Laxdæla saga*. The oldest complete manuscript of *Ragnars saga*, which includes the story of Áslaug (c. 1400), is more recent than the earliest manuscript of *Laxdæla saga* (1330–1370), it is, however, evident that the narrative about Ragnarr loðbrók has circulated in Iceland at least since the early 13th century (Ashman Rowe 2012: 207).

secure a wedding with the rightful mate as is common in fairy tales, although this is also the case in *Ragnars saga*, but rather for providing noble and respectable lineal ties for the future generations. It seems here, that the motif of the lineal-identity, important in the Icelandic sagas, coexists with the boy-meets-girl motif crucial to fairy tales, at least with regard to *Ragnars saga*.

A similar fate to that of Áslaug and Melkorka is endured by the boy Tristram in the indigenous Icelandic chivalric saga *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd* [The Saga of Tristram and Isodd], which is derived from the Tristan legend. The French chivalric romance of Tristan by Thomas of Britain was translated into Old Norse as *Tristrams saga ok Ísöndar* [The Saga of Tristram and Isönd] in the 13th century, which inspired the indigenous creation. *Saga af Tristram ok Ísodd*, however, shows drastic modifications and additions from the Norse translation and features Icelandic narrative themes instead (Jorgensen (ed.) 1999: 243). One of these differences concerns the abduction of the royal orphan Tristram, who, like Áslaug in *Ragnars saga*, is raised by a foster-father before he is abducted by King Túrnés. The king then sells Tristram to the worst Viking he manages to find. Tristram is taken captive by the Vikings, who take the boy on their ship. Despite the Vikings' asking repeatedly for Tristram's name and lineage, "fréttu þeir hann at nafni eða hveirrar ættar hann væri" ["they asked him his name and what family he was born from"] (Jorgensen (ed.) 1999: 258), he never speaks to them a single word. In order to humiliate and punish the boy for his silence, the Vikings beat him, cut off his golden hair, and smear the head with tar. After refusing to cooperate with the sea pirates, they finally expose him on a group of skerries and leave him there to die. Tristram, however, manages to swim to the shore and survives his ordeals.

While Rank included the Tristan legend into his work on the mythical hero (by referring to the poem by Gottfried of Strassburg from the 13th century), he interestingly notices that a "clearer version of the Tristan legend, with respect to the characteristic features of the myth of the birth of the hero, is found in the folktale 'The True Bride'" (2004: 42). Here, Rank refers to an Icelandic folktale published in the tale collection of German scholar Adeline Rittershaus (1902). In the Icelandic tale, the boy Tristram is washed ashore in a chest, where he is found by a king and queen, which resonates with Rank's point that the mythical hero is often set adrift in a box or basket. However, in other Icelandic variants of the same tale type (ATU 870 *The Princess Confined in the Mound*), this motif is used interchangeably, where sometimes Tristram and sometimes the girl Ísól is found in a chest on the shore (Rittershaus 1902: 113–118). As mentioned above, the hiding-box is also common in feminine fairy tales, as for example in the *Cinderella* tale type

ATU 510B* *The Princes in the Chest*, where the heroine is set adrift in a chest in order to fly from her incestuous father. One must also ask, if Rank notices a stronger manifestation of his hero pattern in an Icelandic folktale, would it not be more logical to assume that the romance about Tristan derived from a folktale in the first place, rather than a myth?

Tristram's abduction and his being traded to the Vikings resembles, in many respects, the abduction and enslavement of the Irish princess Melkorka in *Laxdæla saga*. It may also be noted that Áslaug as well is taken by the Viking Ragnarr in *Ragnars saga*, although she becomes his wife. Furthermore, Tristram endures the same treatment as Áslaug in *Ragnars saga*, where their hair is shaved off, and their heads tarred. This motif shows great resemblance to the Grimm's fairy tale *Der Eisenhans* [Iron Hans] (KHM 136, ATU 502 *The Wild Man* + ATU 314 *Goldener*),⁸ in which a noble boy is abducted and fostered by the wild man, who is reminiscent of the Vikings in the abovementioned Old Norse sagas. Because of the boy's breaking an interdiction, his hair turns golden. Later, he works as a lowly servant at the king's court, where he hides his highborn identity. Furthermore, he hides his golden hair under a cap by claiming that he has a bad scurf on his head, which can be said to be reminiscent of a tarred head. Therefore, the German fairy tale shows the same enchantment motifs, apparent in the stories of Tristram and Áslaug in the Icelandic sagas. The Grimms state in their annotations to the tale, that the boy resembles a male Cinderella, of the *Allerleirauh*-type (ATU 510B *Peau d'Âne*), which is interesting because Áslaug has also been identified as a Cinderella-figure in Old Norse literature. The tale type of ATU 314 also has a 13th-century French literary variant, known as *Robert le Diable* [Robert the Devil] (Vaz da Silva 2010: 412–413).

All three cases discussed above concern children or young adults of royal origin who lose their royal status due to their being abducted. The abduction is followed by the recurrent motif of the children appearing to be mute or denying answering questions about their name and parentage.⁹ However, only Áslaug receives a new name by her abductress, which refers to both

⁸ The tale was added by the brothers Grimm in the revised edition of *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* from 1850. It replaces the very similar tale of *Der Wilde Mann* [The Wild Man].

⁹ The motif of silent or taciturn children is also characteristic of the *kolbíttr* ["coal-biter" or "ash lad"] in Old Icelandic sagas. The *kolbíttr* is an unpromising youth who sits or lies by the fire site, nibbles charcoal, and refuses to work. Later, however, the *kolbíttr* turns out to be a hero, who is very able to talk and fight. Therefore, he has been described as a male version of Cinderella (Driscoll 1992: lxx–lxxi).

a black bird and an ogress. This means that Áslaug is not only temporarily detached from her own lineage but at the same time incorporated into Gríma's lineal line. The "loss" of speech symbolizes the children's lack of agency, which is further emphasized by their death-like passivity, by being locked up in a box or shipped over water and held captives by their abductors, who mistreat them in various ways, which in the cases of Áslaug and Melkorka includes hard labour. As it later turns out, the children are not only able to speak but also have acquired extraordinary language skills, like the language of birds, the Irish language.

After having discussed the cases where the royal children are abducted and held captive by their abductors, the focus shifts to the exposed highborn children who are taken in by caring foster parents.

EXPOSED CHILDREN¹⁰

In *Finnboga saga ramma* [The Saga of Finnbogi the Strong], the hero Finnbogi is not of royal blood, but the son of Ásbjörn, an influential Icelandic chieftain and, therefore, belongs to the highest ranks of Icelandic society. Because of a dispute Ásbjörn had with his wife Þorgerðr, he demands the exposure of their newborn child in the wilderness. The baby boy is exposed by slaves, who put the child between two rocks with a stone slab on top. Additionally, the child receives a piece of bacon (*flesk*) to suckle on. Not long after, the poor man Gestr and his wife Syrpa find the baby and decide to raise the boy as their own child. As Gríma in *Ragnars saga*, Gestr is concerned that the beautiful and strong child would raise suspicions in other people, which is why the couple decides to stage a birth, with Syrpa lying on the floor and acting as if she gave birth to the child. The boy is named Urðarköttr [Scree-cat], derived from the rocky and remote landscape he was found in, and gets dressed in some skin cloak and tattered homespun trousers. He always walks barefoot and carries a club.

Urðarköttr is a precocious child and troublemaker from a young age, like many saga heroes in the Sagas of Icelanders (Jakobsson 2003; Hansen 2003). He is described as behaving wildly and aggressively, and barely talks. Sometimes the boy visits the nearby farm of his parents Ásbjörn and Þorgerðr, who do not know yet that the boy is their child. At the farm,

¹⁰ On the practice of infant abandonment in Old Norse society, see Lawing 2013. Cf. further on the subject of the dead-child tradition in Nordic folklore in Pentikäinen 1968. On the literary motif of the exposed child, see Redford 1967.

Urðarköttr treats the servant girls badly and often beats them with his club, which is why he becomes rather unpopular in the neighbourhood. However, the precocious boy and his enormous strength do not go unnoticed, and one day, when he is eight years old, the boy's wise uncle reveals his identity and parentage. The revelation concludes in an almost Cinderella-like vein, where it is said that "[w]hat he had been wearing before was torn off him, and he was provided with the best of clothes. No one believed that they had seen a man as handsome and as well-proportioned in every respect" (Hreinsson (ed.) 1997b: 226). While Þorgerðr is pleased to have her son back, her husband is more reluctant. At this point in time, Urðaköttr has still not received an honourable name. Like Kráka in *Ragnars saga*, he is often outside and one day, when roaming by the seaside, he observes a sinking ship close to the shore. Because of his strength, Urðarköttr is able to rescue the man called Finnbogi from drowning, and becomes his close companion. Later, before dying in a battle, Finnbogi allows Urðarköttr, who is by then seventeen years old and travels abroad shortly thereafter, to bear his name.

The boy's strange name needs to be further addressed. Urðarköttur is also the name of a fantastical creature, known from later Icelandic folklore. This hybrid animal is said to dwell underground, beneath the churchyard, for three years, where it feeds on corpses until it moves above the ground. Its gaze causes people's sudden death (Árnason 1954–61, I: 610–611). Nothing, however, indicates that the name of the boy in *Finnboga saga* is derived from the folkloric creature, which is only mentioned in fairly late sources. The Icelandic term *urðr* (modern lang. *urður*) means "scree," but refers also to death as well as fate (Ásgeir Blöndal Magnússon 1989: 1090, nr. 2–3). In Norse mythology, *Urðr* is the name of one of the three Norns or Fates (Greek: *Moirai*), who represents the past. This at least suggests that the name Urðarköttr is connected to death and decay, and emphasizes the boy's marginal or liminal position as an outcast, who was left in the wilderness to die. The second part of the boy's name Köttr, which means "cat," is, however, apparent in the same listing of troll names, where also the names Gríma and Kráka from *Ragnars saga* appear (Faulkes 1987: 156). The name of the boy's foster mother, Syrpa, is also connected to female trolls or giantesses and is listed amongst troll names in an Icelandic poem called *Allra flagða þula* [Recital of all Giantesses], which first appeared in the late medieval chivalric saga *Vilhjálms saga sjóðs* [The Saga of William the Purse] from the 14th century (Loth 1964: 67). The poem is connected to an episode of the saga, in which the hero Vilhjálmr is cursed by a giant to recite the names of ninety trolls, who will be in a cave at a given time. Another reference to the name Syrpa is made in the legendary

saga *Bósa saga ok Herrauds* [The Saga of Bosi and Herraud] from the 14th century. The saga refers to a strong magic spell, called *Syrpuvers* [Syrpa's Verse], which demands the recital of six names (Pálsson and Edwards (eds. and trans.) 1985: 207–208). Those examples again refer to the naming riddle in folklore as discussed above, which appears to be strongly connected to trolls and ogres within the Icelandic context of the sagas and later fairy tales. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the traditional Icelandic proverb *Fjórðungi bregður til fósturs en fjórðungi til nafns* [One fourth of a person's character is influenced by their upbringing and one fourth by the one they are named after].¹¹ This means that both the fostering of the child by a foster mother and the name the child receives—which often refers to trolls—seem to be influential on the child's further development and behaviour. Furthermore, the names Kráka [crow] and Köttur [cat] also refer to animals, and it is stated that both characters do not speak or are at least not very talkative. Later it turns out, that both of them seem to understand or speak the language of animals. Kráka understands the language of birds in *Ragnars saga*, whereas Urðarköttur talks to a bear in *Finnboga saga*, which seems to understand him (Hreinsson (ed.) 1997b: 233). The reference to animals, which is reflected in their names as well as in their outer appearance, by wearing dark and furry clothing, strengthens the liminal state they are in. Urðaköttur is also said to behave wildly and aggressively, and often wanders by the beach. Kráka, on the other hand, is mainly engrossed in outside tasks by herding the goats. In both cases, the name clearly reflects on their behaviour and social position.

There are other Icelandic sagas that portray a very similar pattern as in the story of Urðarköttur. One of them is the chivalric saga *Samsons saga fagra* [The Saga of Samson the Fair] from the 14th-century, in particular an episode which concerns the youth of Sigurður Goðmundarson, the son of King Goðmundr á Glæsivöllum [Godmund of the Glittering Plains]. King Goðmundr gives the order to expose the illegitimate newborn in the remote wilderness. The exposure is described in the exact same manner as in *Finnboga saga*. The highborn child is borne out by slaves, who place the boy between two rocks, put a stone slab on top of it, and give the baby something to suckle on. Later, the trollish man Krókr finds the boy and raises him with his wife Krekla as

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¹¹ The belief in receiving the “right” name is deeply rooted in Icelandic society and culture. Still today, people believe in the phenomenon called *nafnvitjun* [name visiting], where the future mother dreams about a deceased relative, who the child should be named after. In a national Icelandic survey into Icelandic folk beliefs and belief attitudes, carried out in 2006–7, 37–38% of the participants believed this phenomenon at least to be possible (Gunnell 2007: 810).

if he were their own child. The boy is dressed poorly—in a similar vein as *Urðarköttr*—in a cassock made of camel hair and shoes of shaggy fox skin, and he carries a club. He receives the name *Sigurðr af sugunni*, which refers to the object the boy suckled on when he was found. *Sigurðr* is later able to prove his royal parentage with a golden ring, similar to Melkorka's son in *Laxdæla saga* (Waggoner 2018).

A golden ring as a recognition token, which is intended to verify the identity of the noble child is also apparent in two other sagas, *Jómsvíkinga saga* [The Saga of the Jomsvikings], a 13th century Saga of Icelanders, and *Dorsteins þáttr uxafóts* [The Tale of Thorsteinn Ox-Foot], a 14th century tale of Icelanders. In *Jómsvíkinga saga* a baby boy of noble origin is exposed in the woods, because he was conceived in incest. He is found by the king's men under a tree root, wrapped in a fine cloth and with a silk knot bound to his forehead, containing a golden ring. Therefore, King Gormr names the boy *Knútr* [knot] and gives him in foster care (Finlay and Jóhannesdóttir (eds.) 2018: 67–68). The ring later proves the noble parentage of the boy, who becomes king. In *Dorsteins þáttr uxafóts*, an illegitimate child is exposed by a slave under a tree root, wrapped in a cloth and with a piece of bacon to suckle on. The boy is found by an old man, who raises him together with his wife as if he were their own child. Later the boy proves his parentage with a golden ring (Hreinsson (ed.) 1997c).

The last example within this group is the story of the boy *Áli flekkr* in *Ála flekks saga* [The Saga of Áli Fleck], an indigenous chivalric saga from approximately 1400. Here, King *Ríkharrðr* of England demands that if the queen gives birth to a boy, the child be killed, because he predicts a difficult life for the child. The queen gives birth to a baby boy, who is exposed by two slaves in the woods, who tell the queen that they have killed the child as requested. The old man *Gunni* finds the boy under a tree and brings him home to his wife *Hildir*. The couple decides to raise the boy, and as in *Finnboga saga*, they stage the birth, by *Hildir* lying on the floor and acting as if she were giving birth to the child. There is a peculiarity as well concerning the boy's name, which he receives every evening from his foster parents, but by the next morning, the name is forgotten. The boy grows up in poor conditions until one morning, his foster father, *Gunni*, calls him *Áli flekkr*, because of a birthmark on his right cheek, and from then on, the name sticks. Shortly after, the king is holding a festivity, where *Áli* and his foster parents are invited. The queen recognizes her son, and consequently, the king acknowledges *Áli* as his son and heir. By this time, *Áli* is eight years old, the same age as *Urðarköttr* when his parentage is revealed (Hui et al. (eds. and trans.) 2018).

The examples of exposed children discussed in this group, share the fact that it is usually the father (or in the case of *Dorsteins þáttur* the uncle) of the newborn who demands the exposure. The sagas explain that the child was conceived illegitimately, in incest, or is of the wrong sex. In *Finnboga saga* a dispute leads to the exposure of the child. In all the discussed cases, the children are boys who are either exposed between two rocks or under a tree or tree root. In some cases, the baby suckles on a piece of bacon or another object. The consistency of such details suggests that the motif of the exposure is rather stable and was well-known at the time of saga writing.

Usually, the circumstances in which the child is found determine their name. Finnbogi receives his first name *Urðarköttr* from the rocky surroundings of his foster parents' dwelling. Sigurðr in *Samsons saga* receives the byname *afsugunni* in reference to the object he suckles on, and the name *Knútr* is derived from the knot that was bound to the baby's forehead. *Áli flekkur* receives his name in reference to the birthmark. Despite the fact that the foster parents are never directly said to be otherworldly, they are often possessing a giant- or troll-like appearance. They are described as old and ugly, sometimes quite strong and tall, and they live in remote places like the mountains, as in the case of *Krókr* and *Krekla* in *Samsons saga*.¹² The appearance of the children is usually described in detail, where the emphasis is laid on poor clothing, shaggy rags, and pelt tunics, which, like the names, denote their low and marginal status. In the majority of cases, the children can later verify their highborn parentage by presenting a golden ring. But also, a birthmark or extraordinary strength can identify the royal offspring.

The last group of metaphorical enchantments in Icelandic sagas differs from the cases discussed above in that the children are not abducted or exposed, but exchanged by their birth mother.

EXCHANGED CHILDREN

A very interesting rendering of the theme of fostered children in the sagas can be found in *Geirmundar þáttur heljarskinns* [The Tale of Geirmund Hel-skinned], a short tale in *Sturlunga saga*. In *Geirmundar þáttur*, the queen gives birth to twin brothers while the king is absent. The two boys are, however, so ugly and dark-skinned that the queen exchanges them with the beautiful son of a nurse and a thrall, who was born around the same time.

¹² It may be noted here that in some Icelandic legendary sagas, the saga hero is sometimes fostered by troll women or ogress (Gallo 2006 (spring)).

When the king returns, the queen shows him the beautiful child, who she claims to be the king's son. One day, it occurs that only the three children, a poet with a hood, and the queen hiding under her bed covers, remain in the hall. The by then three-year-old twin brothers, believing that no one else is inside the hall except the slave's child, take away the golden ring the boy is playing with and push him out of his seat. Because of their strength and daringness, the poet discovers the truth about their royal origin and lets the queen know that he now knows about her secret. When the king returns, the queen presents the two dark-skinned boys as his real children, whom the king happily accepts by giving them the byname *heljarskinn* [dark-skinned, literally *hel*-skinned] (Jóhannesson et al. (eds.) 1946, 1: 5–11).

Rory McTurk has argued that *Geirmundar þáttur* was influenced by the medieval Breton *lai* of *Le Fresne*, composed by Marie de France in the 12th century, in which highborn twin sisters grow up independently. One of the girls is exposed as a newborn and placed under an ash tree together with a fine cloth and a golden ring. The fine cloth, as well as the ring are later identified by the birth mother, who secures the girl a wedding with a noble man, who was going to marry her twin sister instead (McTurk 1997). *Le Fresne* also seems to be connected to the fairy tale tradition and was identified by Graham Anderson as a medieval variant of *Cinderella* (Anderson 2000: 41–42). *Le Fresne* might have influenced other medieval Icelandic sagas as well, for it had been translated into Old Norse as *Eskja ljóð* by the 13th century. According to Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, Áslaug in *Ragnars saga* resembles the girl *Eskja* in the *lai*— they are both of low status when they get engaged or married to wellborn men. In both cases, the husbands are going to leave them for a woman of higher social status, until they find out about their wives' true parentage (Guðmundsdóttir 2014: 125). In this regard, it is interesting that Áslaug herself is a claimed *Cinderella*. However, with the above discussed examples in mind, it seems that *Le Fresne* and *Eskja*, or more likely an underlying migrating oral tradition of the story, had a more significant influence on the Icelandic sagas than previously assumed, especially with regard to the exposed children, who are often placed under trees or tree roots and receive a golden ring, which later proves their highborn origin. Even costly cloths are mentioned in the cases of King Knútr in *Jómsvíkinga saga* and in *Dorsteins þáttur*.

Beside a possible influence of *Le Fresne*, some other motifs appear in *Geirmundar þáttur*, which are common in later fairy tales, but seem rather twisted in the medieval saga. The motif of a queen and a nurse giving birth around the same time to children that look alike so that they could be twin brothers is apparent in the tale of *The Enchanted Doe* in the tale collection

of Giambattista Basile (2007: 83–90). In an Icelandic variant of the tale type ATU 711 *The Beautiful and the Ugly Twin Sisters*, a queen gives birth to twin sisters, one beautiful girl and a black cat, who gets expelled from the castle (Árnason 1954–61, IV: 514–517). Also common is the exchange of a white bride by a dark one, as in the tale type of ATU 403 *The Black and the White Bride*, where the white and goodhearted bride becomes substituted for the black and malevolent bride, often because they look alike.¹³ In this respect, it seems interesting that in *Geirmundar þáttr* it is the royal twins who are the ugly ones, getting exchanged for the more beautiful, yet much weaker child of two slaves. Like *Urðarköttr* in *Finnboga saga*, Geirmundr and Hámundr are precocious children, who behave aggressively and violently, but it is exactly this strength, rather than beauty, which identifies them as the royal offspring. The golden ring, which the two boys take from the slave's child, does not have the function of a recognition token as observed in the examples above, but by seizing an object representing royalty in the sagas, the mentioning of the ring clearly hints at that common motif.

Another similarity between *Geirmundar þáttr* and some of the abovementioned examples is the common reference to darkness, blackness, and death, as in the cases of *Kráka*, *Tristram*, and *Urðarköttr*. The twin brothers Geirmundr and Hámundr are given the byname *heljarskinn*, because of their dark skin tone, which refers to the fact that their mother originated from the Eastern hemisphere (probably Mongolia). However, the name literally refers to *hel*, the Norse mythological concept of the realm of death, with the goddess Hel as protector, and, therefore, the name clearly denotes death (Magnússon 1989: 317). However, the overt references to darkness and death are often the symbolic representations of enchantment in fairy tales. According to Francisco Vaz da Silva, "... blackness connotes enchantment as well as death. In fairy tales, the two notions are intertwined. Enchantment is something like reversible death, and death itself appears in tones of enchantment" (2007: 245). In this regard, the color black also carries a positive connotation, where according to Victor Turner black stands for "potentiality, as opposed to actuality" (1977: 81). Blackness, therefore, signifies the utmost potential of the hero in fairy tales as well as in the Icelandic sagas, foreshadowing the greatness to which the hero will finally ascend, as soon as his/her identity is revealed. This holds true for most of the above-discussed examples; in *Geirmundar þáttr*, however, this concept seems to be inverted,

¹³ The author could show in a previous article that the elements of this particular tale type have influenced *Ragnars saga* (Werth (forthcoming)).

where a byname connected to death and darkness constitutes the proper name. The treatment of this theme in *Geirmundar þáttir* must, therefore, be regarded as a literary adaptation of a common fairy tale theme.

THE PATTERN OF METAPHORICAL ENCHANTMENTS

Based on the examples examined above, the metaphorical enchantments of noble children in Icelandic sagas can be divided into three stages: (1) *fosterage*, (2) *dehumanization*, and (3) *revelation of identity*, which correspond to enchantments in fairy tales, but also seem to work according to van Gennep's scheme of the rites of passage (separation—liminal status—incorporation).

1. *Fosterage* is the initial stage, where the hero becomes detached from his or her origin and lineage and is temporarily living with strangers, which correlates with the hero leaving home in fairy tales, as well as with the stage of separation in rites of passage. Thereby, it does not matter whether the child is abducted, exposed, or exchanged, because the outcome is always the same—the child is raised under the supervision of foster parents or abductors, who are in all of the above discussed cases of lower status than the child. In the cases of the abducted children, usually sea pirates or the Vikings are involved in the abduction. However, Áslaug and Tristram are both in the care of foster fathers before their abduction takes place, and also Melkorka's old nurse has an important part to play, when she later recognizes Melkorka's knife and belt. Tristram is abducted as well as exposed by the Vikings, which further implies the equivalence of the three groups, established above. In the cases of exposed children, commonly the child's own father demands the exposure, while the foster parents are goodhearted and caring, but live under precarious conditions and in poverty. They also seem to be connected to ogres, either through their names, like Gríma and Syrpa and/or by their ugly appearance. The children are usually exposed by slaves on the periphery of society as, for example, in the mountains, woodlands, or on an island, nearby the homestead of the foster parents. They are placed under tree roots or tomb-like stone slabs, which emphasizes their marginalized position and closeness to death, reminiscent of Áslaug's coffin-like hiding box. Despite the hiding places referring to graves or coffins and, therefore, death, they also seem to mimic external wombs which protect the children until they are found by the foster parents. The image of the children being nourished inside a surrogate womb is stressed by the recurrent motif of the single source of food, where commonly a piece of bacon is mentioned on which the baby

suckles.¹⁴ The bacon can be said to be equivalent to the leek, keeping Áslaug from starving inside the harp. As soon as the children are found, they become metaphorically re-born. This notion is especially strengthened in *Finnboga saga* and *Ála flekks saga*, where the birth of the children is re-enacted by the foster mother, whereas in the majority of examples it is emphasized that the hero is raised as if he/she were the foster-parents' own child. Therefore, the child becomes temporarily incorporated into the lineage of the trollish foster parents, especially emphasized in *Ragnars saga*, where Áslaug receives the name Kráka, because Gríma's mother was called the same. During the time the child spends in foster care, it is deprived of its identity and beauty and has to endure a period of hardship, which leads to the second stage.

2. *Dehumanization* resembles the enchanted or liminal state itself. As in fairy tales, where the hero or heroine turns into an animal or ogre, the children in the Icelandic sagas often undergo a change of their physical appearance, however, not by means of magic. In the cases of Áslaug in *Ragnars saga* and Urðarköttr in *Finnboga saga*, the children's disguise is explained by the foster parents' wanting to prevent suspicions, by making them as ugly as they are themselves. The children are usually dressed poorly in dirty and shaggy rags. Áslaug's and Tristram's heads are shaved and tarred. In the cases of abduction, the child usually does not speak to the abductors and is cautious not to reveal his/her name or parentage. Áslaug, therefore, receives a new name—Kráka—referring to a black bird and an ogres. In the cases of exposed children, the foster parents decide on a name, which correlates with the circumstances the child was found in. In all discussed instances, the new name emphasizes the child's marginalized and low status, often referring to death, animals and/or ogres, as well as the colour black. At this point, the child is isolated and confronted with ill-treatment and/or hard work. The loss of identity and speech, the change in outer appearance, the new and "unfit" name, and the period of hardship are the core aspects of metaphorical enchantments of noble children in Icelandic saga literature. These core-aspects all suspend the human state of the child temporarily by overtly referring to death, animals and non-human creatures like ogres. This is further emphasized by the children behaving wildly and aggressively like Urðarköttr and the brothers *heljarskinn*, as well as Kráka's and Urðarköttr's acquisition of animal languages. In this respect, it

¹⁴ The motif of infanticide in some Sagas of Icelanders, especially *Finnboga saga* and *Dorsteins þáttur uxafóts*, has been discussed by Robin Waugh in connection to a maternal space. Waugh (2017: 236) regards the piece of bacon as a surrogate for the female breast.

might be noted that some of the discussed incidents in the sagas are similar to the period of ill-treatment endured by Cinderella in the fairy tale tradition, with Áslaug being probably the most obvious example. The enchantment-like state of the children can only be overcome as soon as their true identity is revealed, which occurs in the third stage.

3. *Revelation of identity equals disenchantment in fairy tales and corresponds to the process of incorporation into a new status in rites of passage.* Here, the child or by then adolescent is finally inclined to reveal his/her true identity and parentage or is identified and acknowledged by the birth parents, for which reason the child is able to gain a new status. Recognition tokens like a golden ring or other recognizable features like birth marks, or even enormous strength, play an important role for revealing and verifying lineal ties in Icelandic sagas. In fairy tales, recognition tokens are used in a similar vein, with the difference that the tokens usually identify the rightful mate, whereas in the sagas, the emphasis is placed on revealing the noble lineage and, therefore, the rightful heir.

CONCLUSION

“What’s in a name?” Juliet asks Romeo in Shakespeare’s famous drama by implying that Romeo would still be the same person, even if he rejected his last name of Montague for them to marry. In the Icelandic sagas, however, the emphasis on the wider concept of the name, including one’s parentage and lineage, seems to correlate with the belief that the name contains the essence of a person’s identity and fate; therefore, it must be kept secret from their enemies, for the revelation of the true name holds risks. By hiding or being deprived of their identity, the saga hero or heroine is cast into an enchantment-like state, by almost losing their humanity. The metaphorical enchantments in the Icelandic sagas differ from fairy-tale enchantments in that they are usually not intended to identify the right romantic match, but rather to provide a noble and respectable lineage. The revelation of the rightful parentage, as well as the true name, seems therefore to be the crucial process from which the protagonist evolves and is finally recognized as the rightful heir. While sagas and fairy tales abide by different narrative rules, fairy-tale patterns in sagas, like the metaphorical enchantments of noble children, seem to apply the logic of fairy tales in accordance with the narrative conventions of the Icelandic sagas. This further suggests and emphasizes the Icelandic saga’s close relation to oral tradition and its genres.

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Article 3

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The Fleece of the Ram: Cinderella in Iceland and the Narrative Tradition of the Chastity Cloak

Abstract: The fairy tale tradition of Cinderella in folklore (ATU 510) and the medieval Breton fabliau of a magic chastity-testing cloak, known as *Le Mantel mautaillié* (The Ill-fitting Cloak), and its various analogues, do not seem to have much in common at first. However, both the tale type and the medieval narrative contain an intriguing episode about an item of clothing—a delicate slipper, or a magic cloak—which perfectly fits only one particular woman. This article will show that Icelandic medieval literature and modern fairy tales sharing the image of a colourful fleeced ram are at the crossroads of Cinderella and the mantle tradition, and will help bring them into mutual illumination.

Keywords: Cinderella, mantle *lai*, Icelandic saga literature, folkloric motifs

Introduction

The fairy tale tradition of Cinderella in folklore (ATU 510) and the medieval Breton fabliau of a magic chastity-testing cloak, known as *Le Mantel mautaillié* (The Ill-fitting Cloak), and its various analogues, do not seem to have much in common at first. However, both tale type and the medieval narrative include an intriguing episode about an item of clothing—usually a delicate slipper in tale variants of Cinderella and a magic cloak in the mantle tradition—which perfectly fits only one particular woman. In this article, I suggest that medieval Icelandic literature and later fairy tales encompass both traditions in a coherent set of narratives hinging on the image of a colourful fleeced ram.

The tale type of Cinderella in folklore is an encompassing cycle of tales from around the world. According to the latest revision of the standard international folktale classification system (Uther 2004), the tale type of Cinderella has been classified as ATU 510, which divides into the subtypes A and B.¹ The subtype of 510A *Cinderella* (tale proper) features the innocent persecuted heroine, who is ill-treated by her stepmother (stepsisters) and connected to the hearth and ashes. Usually, the heroine loses one of her precious slippers while secretly attending a ball (or church) and is later identified by the very same slipper, which secures her a marriage to a noble man. In tale variants of the Cinderella subtype ATU 510B *Peau d'Âne*, the heroine flees from her incestuous father, who demands to marry his own daughter after the sudden death of his wife. The heroine disguises herself by dressing in a furry cloak or animal hide. She becomes the kitchen maid of another king and secretly attends a ball, where she wears three splendid dresses. The king later discovers the real identity of the maiden and marries her.²

According to the Icelandic tale type index, the only Cinderella type existing in Iceland is ATU 510A, commonly known as the tale of Mjaðveig Mánadóttir (Mjadveig Moon's

¹ The Cinderella tale has been classified differently by various scholars (Dundes 1982, xiv). This study uses the latest classification system by Aarne-Thompson-Uther, revised in 2004, but will refer to other classification systems if necessary.

² The subsequent tale types of ATU 510B* *The Princess in the Chest* and ATU 511 *One-Eye, Two-Eyes, and Three-Eyes* also belong to the Cinderella cycle, but will not be discussed further in this article.

Daughter) (Sveinsson 1929, 62–4; 2003, 9, 238).³ Despite the fact that the Icelandic tale variants of Cinderella were collected from oral tradition mainly in the nineteenth century, various scholars have pointed out the influence of the fairy tale of Cinderella on medieval Icelandic literature early on. While some scholars identified common Cinderella motifs in the thirteenth-century Icelandic legendary saga (*fornaldarsaga*) *Ragnars saga loðbrókar*, which concerns the abduction of Princess Áslaug and her marriage with the Viking Ragnarr (Cox 1893, xxxvii–xl; Rooth 1951, 126–34), others identified variants of Cinderella with regard to the lost-and-found slipper (or glove) in the fourteenth-century Icelandic sagas *Vilmundar saga viðutan* and *Hálfðanar saga Eysteinnssonar* (Schröder 1917, 83–4; Sveinsson 1929, xlii; 2003, 248), with especially *Vilmundar saga* showing many similarities to the Icelandic fairy tale of Mjaðveig (Schröder 1917, 85 n. 2; Sveinsson 2003, 238). The topic has recently sparked renewed interest by placing the focus on the origin and transmission of Cinderella (ATU 510A) in Old Norse literature (Hui 2018), as well as examining the folkloric depth and diversity of the Cinderella cycle in *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* (Werth 2022). Furthermore, the appearance of a male Cinderella in an Orcadian folktale was examined as remnants of Scandinavian cultural memory containing echoes of Norse mythology and literature (Künzler 2021).

In his article on Cinderella in Old Norse literature, Jonathan Hui mentions a connection between the medieval Breton *lai* of *Le Fresne* (Ash-tree), ascribed to Marie de France, and its influence on the development of Cinderella in Iceland (Hui 2018, 357–60). In the thirteenth century, *Le Fresne* was translated into Old Norse as *Eskja* (*Eskjuljóð*) at the Norwegian court of King Hákon Hákonarson (1204–1263). According to Aðalheiður Guðmundsdóttir, *Eskja* as well as other Old Norse translations of Old French *lais* and romances seem to have influenced *Ragnars saga* and other medieval Icelandic sagas (Guðmundsdóttir 2014, 125). Another Old Norse translation of interest is *Möttuls saga* (The Saga of the Mantle), a prose translation of the twelfth-century Breton fabliau *Le Mantel mautaillié* or *Lai du cort mantel* (*Lai* of the Short Cloak), composed by an unknown author.⁴ *Mantel mautaillié* is associated with Arthurian literature, with Arthur’s royal court being the setting of the frivolous and satirical fabliau wherein a magical chastity-testing cloak, woven by a fairy, is delivered by a young messenger. When tried on, the cloak has the ability to expose unfaithful women by magically becoming larger or smaller and will only perfectly fit chaste women. The beloved of a man named Caradoc is the only woman at Arthur’s court who fits the cloak, whereas all the other noblewomen, amongst them even Queen Guinevere, fail the test (Burgess/Brook 2016b). According to Guðmundsdóttir, the recycling of material from Arthurian literature seems to have been customary in Iceland fairly early, but also influenced later Icelandic ballads, *rímur* (e. *metrical romances*), and folktales (Guðmundsdóttir 2020, 764). The story of the magical chastity cloak was, for example, further treated in *Skikkjurímur* (Mantle Rhymes) from around the fifteenth century (Driscoll 1991/1997; Guðmundsdóttir 2020, 766; Kalinke 2021). The chastity-testing cloak is also mentioned in the indigenous chivalric saga (*riddarasaga*) *Samsons saga fagra* (The Saga of Samson the Fair) from the fourteenth century, where the mantle is said to be skilfully woven by four fairies in a cave over the course of eighteen years. Similar descriptions of the cloak can be found in other romances as well. A precious mantle, woven by four fairies (*álfkonur*) in an underground dwelling but without being assigned a chastity-testing ability, is mentioned in *Erex saga* (The Saga of Erex), an Icelandic translation

³ The heroine’s name Mjaðveig is a combination of the Icelandic nouns *mjöður* (e. *mead, honey wine*) and *veig* (e. *strong alcoholic drink*), which are both Icelandic terms for alcoholic substances or even magic potions. The surname Mánadóttir identifies the heroine as the daughter of a king named Máni, which is also an Icelandic term for *moon*.

⁴ The mantle *lai* did not only appeal to the Norwegian royal house, but was translated throughout Europe. A German translation of *Der Mantel* (The Cloak) is preserved in the *Ambraser Heldenbuch*, a collection of twenty-five texts, which were written by Hans Ried between 1504–1516.

of the French *Eric et Enide*, where the costly robe depicts the four liberal arts, known as *quadrivium* (geometry, arithmetic, music, and astronomy) (Kalinke 1999a, 259). In the Icelandic *Elís saga* (The Saga of Elis), a translation of the French *Élie de Saint-Gille*, the girl Rósamunda wears a precious cloak woven by three fairies (*álfkonur*) over the course of nine winters. This mantle is further said to be embroidered with large birds and gemstones (Kölbing 1881, 86).⁵ However, *Samsons saga* seems especially interesting insofar as it is the only analogue of the mantle narrative that addresses the source material for the chastity-testing cloak—the special fleece of a ram.

The ram and its special fleece

In *Samsons saga fagra*, Sigurðr, the illegitimate son of King Goðmundr, is exposed as a new-born and raised by foster parents. Sigurðr is dressed poorly and grows up under humble circumstances in remote mountains. Sigurðr’s foster parents own a special ram, which is described as follows: “His fleece was so long that it dragged, and it was of all colors: the colors of gold and silk, cloth and dyes. He shed his fleece three times each year” (Waggoner 2018, 273).⁶ Later, Sigurðr is assigned the task of carrying the ram to Skrímnir, the king of trolls, where he learns about his high-born origin; he is able to prove his parentage with a golden ring he was found with as a new-born. Meanwhile, the colourful fleece of the ram is woven into a special cloak by four fairies (*álfkonur*) who are said to be the daughters of a giant (*þurs*) named Krapí, retainer to King Skrímnir, and even to operate a weaving mill. The finished garment is described as having various natures and possesses the ability of exposing unfaithful wives and unchaste maidens: “The mantle had many powers. It revealed the falsity of wives, if they had been untrue to their husbands, or of maidens who had not dutifully stayed at home” (Waggoner 2018, 277).⁷ Sigurðr later receives the cloak, but it is stolen from him and brought to Ireland, where it only perfectly fits the Irish princess Valentína. The narrative about Sigurðr’s childhood and youth was recently identified as belonging to a frequent folkloric pattern in Icelandic saga literature, where noble-born children become detached from their families and have to undergo a period of hardship until the children’s identity is proven and the noble status restored (Werth 2021).

The circumstance that the ram is the provider of the source material for the chastity cloak is only addressed in *Samsons saga* and is neither part of the Breton fabliau nor *Möttuls saga*. The ram with his colourful fleece, however, returns in the eighteenth-century *Ólandssaga*

⁵ On the exceptional craftsmanship of fairies in French and Icelandic chivalric literature see Lummer 2021, 20–7.

⁶ “Lagður hans var svo síður, að hann dró hann. Hann var með öllum litum, gulls og silkis, klæðis og kólors. Hann kastaði reyfinu þrisvar sinnum á hverju ári” (Vilhjálmsson 1949, 3: 383). This article makes use of the normalized text edition by Bjarni Vilhjálmsson in *Riddarasögur 3* (1949), rather than the critical edition of *Samsons saga fagra* by John Wilson, edited for *Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur* (1953). This is because the recent English translation of the saga by Ben Waggoner is based on the former edition, which differs to some degree from Wilson’s reading of the examined text passages. Vilhjálmsson uses the edition by Erik Julius Björner in *Nordiska kampa dater* (1737), but makes use of different readings in some cases.

⁷ “Hún hafði margar náttúur. Hún birti fals kvenna, ef þær fölsuðu bændur sína, eða meyja, sem ódyggilega höfðu heima setið” (Vilhjálmsson 1949, 3: 390). It is important to note here that the English translation as well as scholarship on the matter interpret the Icelandic “meyja, sem ódyggilega höfðu heima setið” as lazy maidens (Kalinke 2011, 161 n. 10). However, it seems more likely that the text refers to the Icelandic term *heimasætur*, describing unmarried maidens still living with their parents. The Icelandic word *ódyggilega* translates as “unfaithfully” rather than “not dutifully”, which is why the text refers most likely to unmarried sexually active maidens, rather than lazy ones. It might, however, be suggested that there is a close etymological relation between the Icelandic words *ódyggilegur* and *ódulegur* (e. *lazy*). At the end of *Samsons saga* it is stated that the cloak exposes thieves as well (Vilhjálmsson 1949, 3: 396; Waggoner 2018, 280).

(Saga of No Such Land), a lengthy Icelandic proto-novel composed by Eiríkur Laxdal. In *Ólandssaga*, the colourful ram is part of the earliest preserved variant of the Mjaðveig story (ATU 510A, Cinderella proper), where princess Mjaðveig is said to possess three special items: a pot made of soil, containing leeks that bloom all year round and grow back as soon as they have been harvested; three special cuckoos, which understand and speak with human voices and inform Mjaðveig about everything that takes place in the world; and finally, a ram, which is further described as follows: “It was a ram, which shed its fleece four times each year and changed its colour each season. It was blue in spring, green in summer, red in fall, and yellow in winter.”⁸ Instead of the three times in *Samsons saga*, the ram in *Ólandssaga* sheds its fleece four times each year, with the fleece’s colour changing according to season. The cyclic nature of the ram’s colour-changing abilities is also reflected in the image of the leeks, which are said to bloom all year round and rejuvenate themselves after having been plucked. The ram as well as the leeks are blind motifs and are not mentioned again in *Ólandssaga*. The cuckoos, however, later inform prince Hrómundur with their human voice that he has taken the false bride, Mjaðveig’s stepsister, who cut off parts of her feet in order to fit Mjaðveig’s golden slipper, now spoiled with blood (Laxdal 2006, 406–8).

The same incident occurs in nineteenth-century fairy tale variants of the Mjaðveig story, collected and published in the Icelandic collection of folktales and legends by Jón Árnason. Despite Mjaðveig’s special items—the cuckoos, the leeks, and the ram—not being described in as much detail as in *Ólandssaga*, they have been preserved in a stanza describing Mjaðveig’s secret bower by the sea, where she hides from her evil stepmother: “There cuckoos sing, and herbs spring, and there the ram sheds his fleece” (Sveinsson 2003, 9).⁹ Similar to *Ólandssaga*, the leeks and the ram are mere blind motifs, whereas Mjaðveig’s speaking cuckoos and the blood in her golden slipper expose the false bride. While the ram doesn’t seem to fulfil a particular function within the Mjaðveig story, the ram in *Samsons saga* on the other hand explains the origin of a chastity-testing cloak which, similar to Cinderella’s slipper, identifies decisive women.

The continental tradition of the chastity-testing mantle

The Icelandic *Samsons saga fagra* is conceptualized as a prequel to *Möttuls saga*, where in the end, the cloak is stolen by the Viking Grímar who brings the garment to Africa. There, a rich and jealous woman named Elída sends the cloak to King Arthur’s court, where it is stated that the story of *Skikkju saga* (Saga of the Cloak), probably a secondary name to *Möttuls saga*, arises (Vilhjálmsson 1949, 3: 401). Here, *Samsons saga* connects itself to an encompassing European mantle tradition, preserved in various vernacular languages.¹⁰

One of those mantle analogues is the poem *Lanzelet*, composed by the Swiss priest Ulrich von Zatzikhoven around 1200. *Lanzelet* is the first treatment of the Lancelot tradition in German. Here, the magic cloak is sent by a sea fairy, Lanzelet’s foster-mother, to King Arthur’s court. The cloak then only fits Lanzelet’s beloved Yblis. The chastity cloak is also mentioned in a fourteenth-century Dutch composition, *Roman van Lancelot*. This has sparked

⁸ Author’s translation of the Icelandic “Það var hrútur einn sem kastaði reifi sínu fjórum sinnum á ári hvörju og skipti litum við hvörm ársfjórðung. Á vorin var hann blár, á sumrin grænn, á haustin rauður, á veturna gulur” (Laxdal 2006, 394).

⁹ “Þar gala gaurar, og þar spretta laukar, og þar fer hrútur úr hreyfi sínu” (Árnason 1954–1961, 2: 305). According to Sveinsson, the stanza about Mjaðveig’s sanctuary is at least of medieval origin. It appears in a similar form in a traditional Norwegian rhyme as well as in a medieval Danish poem, first recorded in the sixteenth century (Sveinsson 2003, 237).

¹⁰ For an elaborate overview and summaries of numerous mantle versions and analogues, see Saint Paul 1987.

the assumption that the magic mantle is somehow associated with Lancelot, King Arthur's champion, even though the garment is not mentioned in Chrétien de Troyes's famous poem *Lancelot, le Chevalier de la Charrette* (Lancelot, the Knight of the Cart) from the twelfth century (Besamusca 2003, 95, 105). Danish scholar Povl Skårup has suggested that a now lost Old Norse translation of Lancelot did exist (Skårup 1980). Austrian scholar Rudolf Simek assumes that *Samsons saga fagra* might in fact be an Icelandic analogue of the Lancelot story, with the chastity-testing cloak belonging to the Lancelot tradition rather than being borrowed from *Möttuls saga* (Simek 1985, 212). Interestingly, Tèrese Saint Paul, who wrote her dissertation on different mantle analogues, also suggests that the Icelandic *Samsons saga fagra* as well as *Skikkjurímur* have derived from Zatzikhoven's *Lanzelet* via a now lost Old Icelandic source rather than from the Old Norse translation of *Möttuls saga* (Saint Paul 1987, 150; cf. Warnatsch 1883, 73–4). Whether the chastity-testing cloak in *Samsons saga fagra* has been a borrowing from *Möttuls saga* or the narrative tradition about the knight Lancelot is difficult to prove. The theme of the ill-fitting cloak, however, might have had a wide-reaching impact on medieval Icelandic literature and later folktales in general, at least with regard to the common incident of the mantle tradition in which the cloak grows long in the front but shortens in the back so that some women's buttocks are revealed (Saint Paul 1987, 141A). The “bared buttocks” incident shows great similarity to the peculiar appearance in Icelandic sagas and later folk- and fairy tales of troll women who usually wear a rough skin tunic which is long in the front but short in the back. The strange cut of the skin tunic enables the human hero to take a glance at the troll woman's behind and in some cases her genitals as well, hinting at the promiscuous behaviour attributed to troll women in Icelandic sagas (Guðmundsdóttir 2017, 340–3).

The *lai* about the ill-fitting cloak is, however, not the only Old French source that features a chastity-testing object. The closely related *Lai du cor* (The Horn *Lai*), composed by Robert Biket probably between 1170–1190, features a messenger who carries a magical drinking horn to King Arthur's court (Rector 2017). Here, however, the noblemen at court, instead of the women, have to pass a test by being able to drink from the horn. Only those men whose wives are faithful are able to drink from the vessel, whereas cuckolds will spill the wine. The only man who is able to drink from the horn is Sir Caradoc, the same man whose beloved fit the chastity cloak in *Mantel mautaillié* (Burgess/Brook 2016a). As far as is known, the horn *lai* was not translated into Old Norse, but might have reached Iceland indirectly through other sources.¹¹

In post-medieval analogues of the chastity-testing tradition, the chastity test by cloak and drinking horn are sometimes combined, which emphasizes their close relation and equivalent qualities. The British ballad “The Boy and the Mantle” was first published by Bishop Thomas Percy in his *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and later also in Francis James Child's collection, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (1882–1898). The poem features the chastity cloak and the drinking horn as well as a wild boar's head, which the men at the Arthurian court are supposed to cut with their knife. As in the medieval tradition, the woman and the man who pass the tests are again Sir Caradoc (here: Craddocke) and his beloved.

The German collection of folksongs and poems *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Boy's Magic Horn), by Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano (1806–1808), draws its title from

¹¹ The drinking from a horn as a test of manhood also appears in a Norse myth and Icelandic sagas. In Snorri Sturluson's prose Edda, the Norse god Þórr attempts to empty the drinking horn called *vítishorn* (e. *penalty horn*). Þórr fails the test, since one end of the horn reaches into the sea, ever refilling itself (Magnúsdóttir 1998, 293–4). In *Þorsteins þáttur bæjarmagns* (The Tale of Thorsteinn House-Power), a huge truth-speaking drinking horn called *Grímr hinn góði* (Grimur the Good) can only be emptied by the giant King Geirröðr (Simpson 1963, 500; Magnúsdóttir 1998, 295–300).

the medieval tradition of the horn *lai*. The poem with the corresponding title *Das Wunderhorn*, printed in the first volume of the collection, was adapted greatly from the medieval tradition, but as in Zatzikhoven's *Lanzelet*, a sea fairy sends the horn which is delivered by a young messenger (Arnim/Brentano 1806–1808, 1: 13–14). In a second poem named *Die Ausgleichung* (The Equalisation), the chastity test by mantle and drinking horn (here: a golden cup) are combined, but also greatly adapted (Arnim/Brentano 1806–1808, 1: 379–82).

An even earlier German analogue than the two poems by Arnim and Brentano is a literary fairy tale by Benedikte Naubert, who published a collection of fairy tales between 1789–1792. One of Naubert's lengthy tales, *Der kurze Mantel* (The Short Cloak) tells the story of a poor girl who has to weave a cloak and who later is the only woman who fits the very same mantle at King Arthur's court (Naubert 1789, 1: 110–275). Additionally, the tale features a golden drinking horn and a wild boar's head, similar to the British ballad. Interestingly, Naubert's tale deviates from the traditional pattern in that the horn exposes noblemen who have cheated on their wives, rather than exposing adulterous women. This modification might arguably stem from the fact that Naubert was a female author, trying to appeal to the female readership of her literary fairy tales.¹² Additionally, the cloak in Naubert's tale does not only identify unfaithful women, but also the lazy ones. In this, Naubert combines the threefold chastity test with a variant of the folktale type of ATU 480 *The Kind and the Unkind Girls*, also known as *Frau Holle* (Mother Hulda) (KHM 24) in the German fairy tale collection of the brothers Grimm (Wiesinger 2019, 182–6; Kalinke 2011, n. 10).¹³ Naubert's adaptation of the mantle fabliau, therefore, develops into a moral about diligent and lazy girls—or, simplified, about good and bad girls—which also prevails in the fairy tale of Cinderella, where the heroine, similar to Caradoc's beloved, is able to prove her rightfulness by means of a well-fitting slipper.¹⁴ The perfect fit of mantle and slipper should then be compared and their significance explored further.

Size matters—the chastity test and the perfect fit

The chastity cloak and its manifold analogues in medieval European and Icelandic literature correspond to the folktale of Cinderella in that they describe items of clothing that only fit a particular woman, one who stands out from a group by being morally sublime. From this perspective, the similarities between the perfect-fit sequence of the mantle tradition and Cinderella tales proper are striking. In the following table, the perfect-fit sequence of two canonical variants of ATU 510A, the French tale *Cendrillon ou la petite pantoufle de verre* (1697) by Charles Perrault and the German tale *Aschenputtel* (1812) in the tale collection of the brothers Grimm, are compared to the medieval fabliau of *Le Mantel mautaillié*.

¹² Naubert was an extraordinarily prolific and popular author, with more than fifty historical novels and translations to her credit, but whose identity as a woman was not divulged until just two years before her death. See for example Jarvis (1992).

¹³ This seems interesting with regard to *Samsons saga fagra*, where it has been suggested that the cloak also exposes lazy maidens, but as discussed above (note 7), this interpretation is likely rooted in a misinterpretation of the Icelandic text.

¹⁴ According to Uther, the tale types of ATU 480 and ATU 510 are highly related and sometimes intermingled (Uther 2004, 1: 294). This might have been the reason for Marian R. Cox to include an Icelandic variant of ATU 480 in her early work on Cinderella (Cox 1893, 105–6 no. 273, 146), where, interestingly, the ram and its fleece return. The variant features three daughters, of whom the youngest is neglected and lies in the ashes. The daughters are assigned the task of fetching fire, but only the youngest passes all tests successfully. She shakes the milk, milks the cow, and cuts off the ram's fleece. She returns with the fire and a beautiful dress. Later, a prince encounters her in the dress and marries her. Because of the heroine lying in the ashes and fetching fire, the girl is called *öskustelpa* (Ash Girl) and *öskubuska* in another variant, which became the Icelandic translation for Cinderella.

<i>Cendrillon</i> (Perrault)	<i>Aschenputtel</i> (Grimm)	<i>Le Mantel mautaillié</i>
A pair of glass slippers and a fine dress are magically produced by a fairy godmother.	A pair of golden slippers and a fine dress are magically produced by a bird (dove), embodying the girl's deceased mother.	A magic cloak is woven by a fairy and exposes unfaithful women.
One slipper gets lost by an unknown girl (Cendrillon) and is found by the prince at the ball.	One slipper gets lost by an unknown girl (Aschenputtel) and is found by the prince at the ball.	The cloak is sent by an unknown lady to King Arthur's court, where there is a feast (at Pentecost).
The prince declares that he will only marry the woman who fits the slipper.	The prince declares that he will only marry the woman who fits the slipper.	King Arthur declares he will give the cloak to the woman who fits it.
All the women at court must try on the slipper.	All the girls at Aschenputtel's home must try on the slipper.	All the women at court must try on the cloak.
No woman at court fits the slipper.	---	No woman at court fits the cloak.
Cendrillon's stepsisters don't fit the slipper.	Aschenputtel's stepsisters cut off parts of their feet in order to fit the slipper, but are exposed by the blood in the shoe.	The cloak magically changes its size in order to expose unchaste women.
The messenger allows Cendrillon, who stands nearby, to try on the slipper.	The prince demands to meet Aschenputtel, who sits in the kitchen in another part of the building and makes her try on the slipper.	The fool Girflet finds Caradoc's beloved in another part of the building and makes her try on the cloak.
Only Cendrillon fits the slipper and marries the prince.	Only Aschenputtel fits the slipper and marries the prince.	Only Caradoc's beloved fits the cloak and may own it.

Table 1 Comparison of *Cinderella* and *Le Mantel mautaillié*.

The table demonstrates that the precious slipper in tale variants of *Cinderella* performs very much like the chastity cloak in the mantle *lai*. In the two *Cinderella* tales, the slipper is produced and presented by a motherly figure (fairy godmother) or by a bird representing the deceased mother, whereas in *Mantel mautaillié*, the woman who sends the cloak to Arthur's court is usually not identified further. However, the sea fairy mentioned in *Lanzelet*, who sends the magic cloak, is Lancelot's foster mother. In *Samsons saga*, Sigurðr receives the ram, from which the cloak is made of, from his foster mother and in other mantle analogues, the woman later turns out to be Arthur's half-sister Morgan le Fay (Saint Paul 1987, 141A, 151–3).

In *Mantel mautaillié*, the occasion at which the cloak is presented and tried on is a feast at Pentecost. In the two *Cinderella* variants, the heroine meets with the prince at a ball or, in other variants, in church, where she usually loses one of her slippers. The revelation of the rightful bride also occurs at a social gathering, an assembly at court or at the heroine's home

as in the German variant. The French tale of *Cendrillon* especially seems here to match with the events described in *Mantel mautaillié*. For this reason, some might suggest that the resemblances of both narratives can be explained with a transfer of motifs from the Old French fabliau to the early modern French tale by Perrault. However, the similarities with regard to the actual perfect-fit sequence appear to be much closer to the German tale of *Aschenputtel*, where the heroine's evil stepsisters cut off parts of their feet in order to fit the tiny shoe. In other words, the stepsisters alter the size of their feet according to the size of the slipper. In the mantle tradition, however, the cloak itself adjusts in size and becomes smaller or larger, longer or shorter, in order to visualize and communicate the particular sexual failures of the noblewomen to the courtly audience. Scholars have pointed out that Cinderella's fitting slipper is a sexual connoted symbol which reveals the best possible sexual "fit" to the prince. At the same time, the slipper exposes unsuitable women, marked by the blood in the shoe, which symbolizes their violated virginity (Bettelheim 1975, 265–72; Dundes 1987, 60–1). Hence, the slipper in variants of Cinderella might be regarded a chastity-testing object as well and would, therefore, be equivalent to the chastity-testing cloak in the mantle narrative, with the perfect-fit sequence as identifying mechanism. While the Freudian interpretations of Cinderella's slipper by Bettelheim are more or less plausible guesses, the American folklorist Alan Dundes introduced a more applicable method for analysing oral narratives through the comparison of different tale variants. Dundes combined Freudian psychoanalysis and Proppian formal analysis in order to demonstrate the equivalence of empirically different motifs—such as nose and phallus, decapitating and castration—in jokes and oral narratives (Dundes 2003). He then developed the concept of *allomotifs*, describing mutable motifs that are functionally as well as symbolically equivalent (Dundes 2007, 319–24). Dundes mainly reasons along Freudian lines by proposing a one-way relation between the established and consciously used motif (nose, decapitating) and an unconscious and "tabooed" motif (phallus, castration). However, Portuguese anthropologist Francisco Vaz da Silva has argued that Dundes' concept of *allomotifs* is by no means restricted to Freudian psychoanalyses and discourse. Instead, the focus should be placed on exploring the common denominator of such motifs, which may be bidirectional as well as used consciously by the tale teller. Therefore, Vaz da Silva proposes that *allomotifs* should be regarded as folk metaphors, which are deeply rooted within a society's traditions (Vaz da Silva 2017).

By juxtaposing the folktale tradition of Cinderella and the narrative of the chastity-testing cloak, which later became adapted within the European ballad tradition, it becomes clear that the medieval mantle fabliau very plainly divulges female sexual transgressions with no symbolic analysis needed to fully understand the meaning of the cloak that does not fit. It is here, where the mantle tradition helps to illuminate the purpose of the perfect-fit sequence in variants of Cinderella, which in the fairy tale is communicated through symbols. Henceforth, the mantle narrative confirms that the ill fit of a garment refers to an unfit bride/wife, which in the fairy tale is communicated through the image of the blood in the shoe. However, the manifold variants of the fairy tale of Cinderella in folklore suggest that the mutual semantic core of both traditions—the identification of the rightful ("fitting") bride/beloved by means of the perfect fit of a marvellous item of clothing—has long been circulating in oral tradition and leads to the assumption that the mantle narrative is a literary manifestation of this distinct folkloric theme. Nonetheless, it can be stated that the understanding of this theme is enshrined within those narratives themselves and not predefined by Freudian analysis.

Another interesting similarity between *Mantel mautaillié* and the German tale of *Aschenputtel* is the absence of the female heroine (the rightful maiden) from the fitting spectacle. *Aschenputtel* was left behind in the kitchen, but the prince insists to see the maiden and sends for her. In the mantle *lai*, the absence of Caradoc's beloved is explained with an indisposition: "She had not been hiding, rather she was somewhat indisposed and was sitting

on a bed” (Burgess/Brook 2016b, 118). A very similar explanation is given in the Old Norse *Möttuls saga* (Kalinke 1999b, 27). While Aschenputtel in the fairy tale washes her hands and face before meeting with the prince, Caradoc’s beloved dresses herself properly before attending the festivity. Despite the varying explanations given for the maidens’ absence, they are both encountered in different parts of the house/castle, not taking part in the frivolous event at the courtly assembly or witnessing the treachery of her stepsisters, which makes them appear even more unspoiled and morally sublime.

The Icelandic Mjaðveig story shows many resemblances to the German fairy tale, as Mjaðveig’s stepsister cuts off her heels and toes in order to fit Mjaðveig’s golden slipper. Later, the cuckoos point out the deceit to the prince, as do the doves in *Aschenputtel*. Meanwhile, Mjaðveig waits in her secret bower by the sea for the prince to arrive. As mentioned above, the ram is a blind motif in Icelandic Cinderella variants, whereas the cuckoos expose the false bride. This seems to be an apt choice with regard to the fact that the cuckoo in nature deposits its eggs in the nests of other birds, which then raise the cuckoo’s offspring instead of their own. The cuckoo, therefore, symbolizes the adulterous and deceitful wife, whereas the deceived husband becomes the “cuckold”.¹⁵ In the Mjaðveig story, the cuckoos then seem to embody the deceitful qualities of Mjaðveig’s stepsister, who embodies the princess and claims to be the rightful bride. Besides the cuckoo, also the horn is a well-known metaphor which implies the wronged husband. While the horn, especially that of a ram, is usually a common symbol representing masculinity and virility, the English expressions “to wear the horns” or “to place the horns on someone” in Portuguese and German refers to the cuckolded husband. In Italian, a husband who is cheated on is called a *cornuto*, a horned one. In some folk customs, the cuckoo and the horns are combined, when at the time of Carnival, young men in Romania disguise as horned cuckoos, who come out of the woods and soil everyone they met (Vaz da Silva 2008, 21). According to Vaz da Silva, horns in folk belief are regarded as a solid form of male seed and are, therefore, a common symbol of masculinity. However, as soon as they are placed on someone’s head they become the stigma of the wronged husband. Vaz da Silva explains this contradiction by stating that in those cases the horns represent the rival’s seed being transmitted onto the deceived husband via the wife’s womb (Vaz da Silva 2008, 18–9). Similar ideas about the horn seem to be preserved in the narrative tradition of the horn *lai*, where cuckolds are unable to drink from the horn and spill the wine at the drinking contest. This might be the reason why the horn in the *lai* identifies adulterous women, rather than cheating men (with the exception of Naubert’s adaptation). The Icelandic *Samsons saga fagra*, interestingly, provides us with the link of the chastity-testing cloak being made from the fleece of a horned animal—a ram, which reminds us that the cloak in the wider mantle tradition not only identifies unfaithful women, but also their cuckolded husbands or boyfriends they are cheating on.

Despite the tale variants of Cinderella (ATU 510A) usually featuring a small slipper instead of a cloak to prove the heroine’s rightfulness, the possibility might be addressed that the chastity-testing cloak became incorporated in another Cinderella subtype, namely ATU 510B *Peau d’Âne*, where the prominent item is a cloak made of various animal skins.

A colourful spectacle—the chastity cloak, the animal hide, and the cosmic dresses

A mantle made of costly materials and from different colours is a recurring motif within the mantle tradition. In Naubert’s tale, the cloak is described as huge and wide like the coronation robe of the emperor with all the colours of the rainbow (Naubert 1789, 1: 250). In the British

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion on the symbolic significance of the cuckoo see Vaz da Silva 2008, 111–33.

ballad, the cloak changes its colour when Queen Guinevere tries in vain to fit the mantle. It first turns golden, then green, blue, and finally black (Child [1884, 1.2], 1.2: 272 st. 11–12). The colourful performance of the cloak in the British ballad is arguably meant to express and project the shameful emotions Queen Guinevere experiences when exposed as unfaithful to her husband in front of the courtly audience. She then runs off with flushed cheeks (Child [1882–1884, 1.2], 1.2: 272 st. 13). In the Icelandic *Samsons saga*, the ram and its fleece, the source material of the chastity cloak, is said to be of different colours and textures, whereas in *Ólandssaga*, the ram changes its colour according to season. While some sources describe the cloak as being colourful, others mention the ability of the cloak (or ram) to change its colour.

Colour-changing items that prove the chastity of a woman also exist in later Icelandic fairy tales, but are rather rare. Two tales mention red stones that change their colour and turn pink as soon as the virginity of a girl is spoiled. In another tale, apples are mentioned, which lose their blooming colour (*blómalit*) and turn pale when they are owned by unchaste maidens.¹⁶ What all three tales have in common is that the intensity of the item's colour lessens in cases where the women are unchaste.

The theme of a colourful or colour-changing chastity cloak or other chastity-testing objects is, however, not an addition of the later mantle analogues and folktales, but existed already in Zatzikhoven's *Lanzelet*. Here, the cloak is described as being of all colours known to men. Furthermore, the cloak is said to be made from all kinds of beasts, fowl, and sea creatures on earth and under and betwixt earth and heaven (Zatzikhoven 1997 l. 5815–27). Zatzikhoven's description of some sort of cosmic cloak is intriguingly reminiscent of the animal hide that the heroine in the Grimm's fairy tale *Allerleirauh* (All Kinds of Fur) (KHM 65, ATU 510B) uses to disguise herself in order to flee from her incestuous father. Similar to the mantle in *Lanzelet*, the heroine in *Allerleirauh* requests a cloak made of patches from various skins, fur, and feathers of all the animals in her father's kingdom. The motif of a furry animal-hide cloak in which the heroine disguises herself is essential in variants of ATU 510B (Goldberg 1997, 31). Unlike the chastity cloak, the furry disguise in the folktale is not meant to test the chastity of the heroine. However, the heroine's shaggy cloak is a wedding gift from her father, since she is the only woman in the entire kingdom who fits the requirements made by the queen on her deathbed. Therefore, the shaggy cloak in which the heroine escapes her father and an incestuous marriage prevents the sinful violation of her virginity.

The different colours of the chastity cloak as described in *Lanzelet* and later mantle analogues are not particularly mentioned in connection with the animal hide in Cinderella variants of ATU 510B. However, in addition to the cloak, the heroine in *Allerleirauh* requests three cosmic dresses—one that is as golden as the sun, another as white as the moon, and the third as bright as the stars—which have been woven by the three most gifted virgins (rather than fairies) in the kingdom. The heroine then puts the dresses into three nutshells. In Mediterranean variants of ATU 510B, the dresses often refer to the sea and/or plants. In an Italian variant from Tuscany, the heroine wears a dress of all the flowers in the world, a second dress like the waves of the sea, and a third one with all the stars of heaven (Cox 1893, 130–1 no. 134). In a tale variant from Sicily, the heroine demands from her father a dress like heaven, with sun, moon, and stars upon it; a second dress like the sea, with all marine flora and fishes;

¹⁶ Colour-changing stones are mentioned in the fairy tales *Hlín kóngsdóttir* (Princess Hlin) and *Kóngsdæturnar* (The Princesses). Both tales belong to the tale type of ATU 883B *The Punished Seducer*, where a king gives each of his three daughters a red stone before he leaves and indicates that the stones should still be red upon his return. The two older daughters disregard the interdiction and their stones turn pink (Guðmundsson 1932, 4: 137–41; Jónsson Hoffell 1945, 244–6). The colour-changing apples are described in the tale of *Sagan af Litlu-Klöru* (The Tale of Little-Klara), which belongs to the same tale type as the aforementioned two tales. Here the King of England leaves his kingdom and gives his daughters three apples, which turn pale as soon as the two oldest daughters lose their virginity to the King of Scotland (Sigfússon 1957, 13: 119–29).

and a third dress with all the animals and plants of the earth (Cox 1893, 217–9 no. 160). In a Slavonic variant, the father gives his daughter a dress with sun, moon, stars, and all the heavens upon it, and a second dress like the sea, with fishes swimming in it. The dresses are drawn from nutshells, which the devil helps to obtain (Cox 1893, 130 no. 133).

That the three wonderful dresses emerge from nutshells, or are put into them, is a recurrent motif in tale variants of ATU 510B. This incident is reminiscent of the messenger in the British ballad, who takes the chastity cloak from two nutshells (Child [1882–1898], 271 st. 6).¹⁷ The motif of a nut containing the chastity cloak is not apparent in the medieval mantle tradition; however, the cloak is in most instances drawn from a small purse attached to the messenger's belt or girdle. The chastity cloak and Cinderella's shining dresses can then be considered equivalent in the way that those garments emerge or are drawn from illogically small containers and would, therefore, possess the ability of magically decreasing and increasing in size.¹⁸

With reference to the medieval tradition of the chastity cloak, it can be suggested that Cinderella's furry cloak or animal hide and her three cosmic dresses constitute a semantic unit, which divides into various garments in order to establish a fairy-tale-style contrast between the ugly skin disguise and the beautiful dresses. While the ugly animal hide prevents the untimely violation of the heroine's virginity at the hands of her lecherous father, the irresistible beauty of the dresses on the other hand secures the heroine the rightful mate. However, Cinderella's furry cloak as well as her dresses, which Rooth believed to be of medieval origin (Rooth 1951, 117–9), hint at the cosmic qualities of the cloak within the mantle tradition. Recall that in the French romance *Élie de Saint-Gille*, a cloak woven by fairies depicts large birds and gemstones, while a similar cloak in *Eric et Enide* is embroidered with the *quadrivium*, perhaps a cosmic cloak with reference to mankind's cultural and intellectual achievements. The descriptions of Cinderella's cloak and dresses are, however, intriguingly reminiscent of the magic mantle as described in *Lanzelet*. While the animal hide deliberately resembles the wild assortment of life on earth, the dresses on the other hand refer to the infinite beauty of celestial bodies, metals, gemstones, and the sea, as well as nature in general.

In some tale variants of ATU 510B, the heroine fits a golden ring, which in some cases is offered to her by the prince and which she puts later into his bread or soup; in other variants, the heroine inherits the ring from her mother, as in the tale of *Allerleirauh*. The sexual symbolism of the marriage ring, which fits the rightful bride who refuses incest and, instead, looks for a suitable husband, seems to be self-evident. Hence, the ring as a perfect-fit token belongs to the same group of *allomotifs* as the chastity-testing mantle and Cinderella's slipper, which then illuminate one another by communicating that a well-fitting item of clothing or

¹⁷ According to Saint Paul, the two nutshells in the British ballad are a misinterpretation of the Anglo-Norman word *nushel* (e. *brooch*), being very similar to *nutshell*. The mantle tradition often mentions the gimmick of the brooch, which falls off in cases where the mantle shrinks and bursts open, revealing the bodies of the adulterous noblewomen (Saint Paul 1987, 141A). The incident appears for example in *Lanzelet* (Zatzikhoven 1997, l. 6035–49); *Möttuls saga* (Kalinke 1999b, 22), and *Skikkjurímur* (Driscoll 1999, 306 st. 51). According to Saint Paul, the nutshells then have replaced the small container, purse, or bag from which the magic cloak is usually drawn (Saint Paul 1987, 103).

¹⁸ In the Icelandic *Samsons saga fagra*, the motif of an object adapting its size might be echoed in the small golden ship Sigurðr receives from his foster parents and which can be folded and put into a small purse. Rudolf Simek compares Sigurðr's ship with the mythological ship *Skíðblaðnir* as described in *Snorra-Edda*, which can also be folded and put into a purse (Simek 1982, 25–6). In a later Icelandic fairy tale, a mother gives a nutshell to her six sons as a parting gift. As soon as the nutshell is put in water, it magically transforms into a ship (Rittershaus 1902, 178).

jewellery signifies the faithful bride/wife/girlfriend, whereas an ill fit of those same items identifies the cheating or promiscuous woman.¹⁹

Conclusions

The medieval Breton fabliau of *Le Mantel mautailié*, as well as the wider narrative tradition of the chastity cloak, cannot be considered variants of the folktale of Cinderella or *vice versa*. However, the fitting spectacle of the chastity cloak matches the perfect-fit sequence in Cinderella variants of ATU 510A, where the perfect fit is commonly provided by the slipper test. Furthermore, the description of the magic cloak in the mantle tradition shows significant similarities to the animal hide and the three cosmic dresses in variants of the Cinderella tale type ATU 510B. In this respect, the Icelandic saga and fairy tale tradition can be regarded as a crossroads in the narrative landscape, where the two different traditions meet and mingle. One set of motifs concerns the chastity cloak, a European narrative tradition preserved in written sources from the twelfth century onwards, whereas the other set of motifs belongs to the Cinderella cycle in modern folklore. The Icelandic narrative tradition, both saga and folktale, provides the missing link between the chastity cloak and Cinderella, which intersect and illuminate one another by virtue of their mutual motifs, like the ram with colourful fleece.

That the tradition of the chastity cloak might be connected to at least two Cinderella subtypes (ATU 510A and 510B) should not lead to confusion, as we cannot assume that tale types, neatly presented in the tale-type indices, had already developed a stable form by the Middle Ages. Rooth's emphasis on the folktale of Cinderella as a cycle of tales highlights the fact that there are multiple links and interconnections between the different subtypes and even between different related tale types. This is true for folk- and fairy tales collected in the nineteenth century and should, therefore, also apply to potential folktale variants and narrative traditions from earlier periods that have only preserved as literary manifestations. However, the obvious interconnections between the Old Norse translation of *Möttuls saga*, the Icelandic original *riddarasaga* of *Samsons saga fargra*, and the Icelandic Cinderella variants of Mjaðveig Mánadóttir, strengthens the assumption of a probable relation between the fairy tale of Cinderella and the narrative tradition of the chastity cloak.

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¹⁹ Considering these findings, it might be suggested that the slipper in variants of the Cinderella tale type ATU 510A is symbolically equivalent to the animal disguise/the cosmic dresses in variants of the B-type. This might lead to a re-evaluation of the famous *vair/verre* debate in folklore, on whether Charles Perrault changed the slipper of fur (O.F. *vair*) into a slipper of glass (F. *verre*) in the French tale of Cendrillon. If Cinderella's slipper and her furry disguise would be considered symbolic equivalents, a slipper of fur would also refer to the heroine's chaste qualities, similar to a slipper of glass, which like virginity can only be broken once (Dundes 1987, 61).

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