Biological Science", in which he pronounced "the possibility of discovering in the phenomena of civilization, as in vegetable and animal structure, the presence of distinct becomes apparent" to abounding approaches to the human race's studies. He further elaborated his views and presented detailed arguments and examples in support of his theories.

5 Sidos: P. Perlmund d' Saussure (1857-1943) also took his predecessors to task for their approach to language, and the development of language. He discussed the use of biological metaphors in the study of language, and emphasized the importance of considering the historical and cultural context of language.

6 For a more recent demonstration of biological metaphors of gene, see an interesting discussion of "Literary Genres as Biological Species" in Poetics, 1993: 99-115.

Grýla, Gryður, "Grølks" and Skekses: Medieval Disguise Traditions in the North Atlantic?

TERRY GUNNELL

One of the oldest Icelandic folk traditions is that connected with the figure of Grýla, the hideously ugly, ever-vomiting mother of the Icelandic jökkur motör (Christmas Lads!). In modern day Iceland, Grýla is well known to all the children. Along with the dreaded jökkur motör (Christmas Car!), she annually strikes terror in the hearts of under-six-year-olds every Christmas when she descends from the mountains in search of badly-behaved children to eat. As further Arm Björnsson, 1998: 338ff. Despite the recent efforts of certain parties to ease the fears of the young by prematurely announcing Grýla's death in a popular Christmas song, the ancient Grýla seems to hang on in our folk memory. She has lived over eight hundred years, and, quite understandably, is not so easily persuaded to give up the ghost.

Perhaps the most famous description of Grýla are those given in the first volume of Jon Amason's collection of Icelandic folk songs from the middle of the nineteenth century. Jon introduces this monster as follows:

"Bo nið voguh ogal langa nein munurmið um Grýla að týlanda s að veðar altum hú vòð það að gera hertam því er þann húsir at hama at namsforn Legupalla, því at þry öðrum þarf niður að grinfast því er þimmur hafa væri um þau kynni og stóð um Grýla. Nið að bæði þyggur að vera þráll íall að Grýla tótt í tólkum at namsfornum í Sveri Edda. Máttum er þó og sem innar þrøttun síðu einum eftir hana því enig þráll þau finnufalla núnum. Eft að þarf vóð að hættu að þrállinn í uppranaum móð ymna mán hestar Grýlumum látt mígja frekve at því Grýla var með heldur á að fela hrun mörð henni frá þarinn og æðsins ... (Jon Amason: 1804-1840: 460, 1990, see also 2010: 5, 2.80).

(Even though little oral information exists about Grýla in the oral tradition today, it is nonetheless necessary to mention her, not least because of the information given about her and her husband Legupall [Pach-fool] in early Icelandic works and name lists. In earlier centuries, numerous legends must have been told about them, and especially how ‘a long poem was composed about them, and many about Grýla herself. The couple were both supposed to be trolls, indeed. Grýla is marked amongst oppressed in the list of oppressed notes in Sveri Edda. They are people, as did others of their kind, and were particularly important in children, although they also sculpted grown-ups. But since people stopped frightening children in various ways as part of their upbringing, the belief in Grýla has diminished greatly, since Grýla was mostly used to frighten children, and keep them safe and quiet.)
As the above quotation demonstrates, Ymir Arason, like any good Leif-bearer, was well aware of the age of Gryla. What he seems to have been less aware of, however, was exactly how widespread the Gryla tradition was. (From the Swedish lakes to western Norway, and from Shetland to the north of Iceland, or that all indications point to her having regularly appeared "in person" to the people inhabiting the North Atlantic Islands in the early Middle Ages. In fact, there is good reason to visit the traditional reinterpretation, potentially the "missing link" between pagan ritual drama and later Scandinaug traditions like that of the phallus.)

As has been noted above, the earliest references to Gryla are found in the thirteenth century, where her name appears not only in Snorri Sturluson's Edda, but also in the contemporary historical sagas. Eldingsdags saga and Sverris saga (the first part of which is named after Gryla). Her presence here should remind us of how long that imagination that every contemporary saga gives a trustworthy picture of everyday life in early medieval Scandinavian society. There is a real threat that the sagas do not tell us. Indeed, as other scholars have pointed out, those things that tend to be placed on record are actions or objects that are of the ordinary, we have an important role to play in the narrative. Daily activities and well-known stories, legends and beliefs are commonly taken for granted, as can be seen, for example in the scarcity of accounts of speaking in the sagas (cf. Gíslason 1980:97).

As Jón Hólmfríð Árnasonson (1997:14-161) with regard to Gryla, the number of extant thirteenth-century references stresses that the associations of her name must have been well-known to most people. No "correct," however, was ever made of what the original Gryla that people knew in the thirteenth century, and why, of all signs, should her name have been given to a medieval text written about a male Norwegian king (Sverrir)? Some reading through the lines is necessary, but all the extant jögu pieces are as yet assigned, there seems to be a clear overall pattern.

In general terms, there would seem little reason for the same general association is implied in Eldingsdags saga where Lofti Palsson quotes a verse about Gryla while riding to attack Björn Hverfisson and his associates at Breiðakolshólar, in the south of Iceland, on 1243 (Sturlunga saga 1788:1286). However, in this case, is referring to a particular figure rather than a breed.

In general terms, there would seem little reason for the same general association is implied in Eldingsdags saga where Lofti Palsson quotes a verse about Gryla while riding to attack Björn Hverfisson and his associates at Breiðakolshólar, in the south of Iceland, on 1243 (Sturlunga saga 1788:1286). However, in this case, is referring to a particular figure rather than a breed.

Kollabúi was not even to be bothered by Gryla at margr EinolfiRolfe at eðh thorfe. It's not the only way to do things, but it works. A true hero not afraid to die for his beliefs. 1666-68, 2.5.3

As Jón Árnason pointed out, the fact that Gryla must have been a recognized entity in early medieval Icelandic folk belief is clear from the appearance of her name alongside those of other trolls in a banner (an image in verse) attached to the AM 748 version of that part of Snorri Sturluson's Edda, known as the Skaldskaparmál (Gíslason 1980:191). The verse fragment quoted by Lofti Palsson, however, contains the only visual description of this figure in early medieval sources. The striking point about all of the above verses is that they all depict men putting themselves or other men in the role of Gryla or its "true" name. In this way, however, there is that certain point that Lofti Palsson had in mind when he used the verse as his own. Furthermore, as has been mentioned above, Gryla were obviously imagined to exist in the past. Gryla herself, however, was certainly not the same as Lothair Palsson in this case.
was not merely seen to exist. She came from the wild, outside the civilised surroundings of the farm (see also Mastryn 1985:136-154). Furthermore, she was associated with deliberate, planned movement in a particular direction, towards the area of settlement. This is not only indicated by Loftr’s verse, but also by another old Grýla verse (from Flóðinga saga apparently uttered by Glauburn Gálshorn before he and Jon Ærlaðr (the Strong) rode off to visit Bruni Jonsson at Saudark in Hrundjalur. where they mimed Bruni’s follow, V Amanda.

What’s going on? Why talk of making love? Is Strong going home from work? Have you ever heard anything new About the travels of Grýla?

Even more interesting is the fact that one of Loftr’s main targets at Brúðarlabrá (especially in the lost part of the battle which Loftr refers to as “Sægmeglarvá”, or Grýla’s tomb) is a man from Isafljótur in the isolated western fjords of Iceland, by the name of Steingrimr Skjálfason, “son of Skjálf” (Skjálfason saga 1878:3,244). Steingrimr was almost certainly one of the bravest of the Icelanders who had accompanied Loftr on a previous occasion when they “fárda· lapt í fljótrum, ok gíða um hans ámæ margi, ok mars-mársp stótt anna” (had made mocking verses about Loftr, many dance songs and other kinds of jokes!) [ibid.:245]. Things were not unpriyed when, at another important farm (Qxó), on St. Nicholas’ Day, “Írve· sár … og sér-hengilanda· pínt lópti ok börk, ok vínum hæs … var aust fyr h)” by Steingrimr Jafðarsteinn (Loftr, Björn and his friends) had thrown around words.

Steingrimr from Isafljótur was soon involved in the (ibid.:246). One can understand Loftr’s rage, however, the name Skýggur is particularly intriguing because, apart from providing a second example of a man using this female name (cf. Gryla- Bruni above), it points to an association between Gryla and internal men. Furthermore, when attached to Steingrimr’s praises the possibility of links with public entertainment. In general, it can be no coincidence that Loftr Pálsson decides to use the Grýla verse which is usually quiet well-known to use the song of Skýggur. The verse and the name must have been associated in very general terms, considering Steingrimr Skýggursson’s probable associations with the “danza margá” at Brúðarlabrá, it is tempting to consider the possibility of a link between the two verse fragments uttered by Loftr Pálsson and Glauburn Gálshorn and the medieval verse accompanying the so-called “Thorarek versvör” of the renowned dance at Kolbuk as it is described in the Old Swedish Legend from c.1340-50 (ES) fourteenth Legendare 1847- 60:287ff). The Kolbuk tale is based on events that supposedly took place in Germany in the seventh century (cf. Sinning 1961 and 1970), but in the Legendare, the setting is transferred to Orkney, north of Scotland. In brief, the account tells of how a group of young men lured the daughters of the priest at St Magnus’ Church in “Cel-Rebark” to dance with them outside the church at Christmas. They ignored the priest’s orders to stop dancing, and “Sidhur the vísir’s hornøy eya leyla” the ságrabí’s horn báey other with such weather ladies of ieré eyat sti viroa all

not mention ok aurín to fármund skúla” [Since they would not obey him, he said: “May God and St Magnus not allow you so leave this dance this year, and not part from each other”]. The verse thus implicitly took effect, aptly demonstrating Magnus’ power.

In the Legendare, the verse sung by the group to accompany their link-dance runs as follows:

Hliðmof konungs þyrthviðr þróna skúla
Ok gíða um hans ámæ margi
Írve· sár … og sér-hengilanda· pínt lópti ok börk, ok vínum hæs … var aust fyr h) (Loftr, Björn and his friends)

Loosely translated, this means: “The prepared company rode ever (strong) thick forest and bunged-si(?) with their loveliest of maidens. Why so we said? Why do we not move?” (In the Legendare the verse is written as prose.) The original Latin verse contained in the twelfth-century account on which the Legendare was based reads:

Equitatu Deus per utrum fratres,
Duxque uterque fratres frater,
Quod tenet uterque stare minus
(Hom. Aen. 14.179-180)

As Steingrímur points out (1918-20:242), the fast time in the Legendare account probably should have been translated as “Reddan Bori og konungs yver thorila skogla” (cf. Mastryn’s translation of the same line in Handlungsson (1905- 95) in the thirteenth century: “By he leaved rode yver broale”). Mannus 1859:220.

The parallels between this verse and those so far with Grýla are fascinating, but cannot be totally ignored, since both verses of a man with the more evil of a devilish figure (Grýla and Bori), the leader of the dance) travelling throughout the countryside, but also two rhetorical questions, about the lack of movement. Furthermore, the Legendare proves the oral version of the Kolbuk tale must have put down firm roots in Orkney, if not further north, before the end of the thirteenth century. Regarding the figure of Bori, it is also worth considering another possibly related sixteenth-century account given by a Danish Franciscan named petrus in Denmark. According to Petrus, the name Bori was given a ‘process’ scene figure that was carried by certain Danes as part of a ring dance which had been devised to entertain a pregant friend (Olrik & Olrik 1907:175). Petrus account, which has a different verse (“í rauðj Bosi, bláu iersar”), must also exist within the oral tradition, since the same motif later reappears in several folk legends from Denmark and Sweden. In one context, the presented being that the farm girl of the story dances with has become “ávarkaísdr” (cf. Olrik & Ellekjaer 1951:93). “All of us above raise the gæs of whether both the Grýla figure and the Grýla word might have been, in a sixth to seventh century (cf. Tydeman 1944:15 on the possibility that the Kolbuk story was enchanted in stones), or even observed continuous existence in contemporary columns that were being pressed against the growing Scandinavian dance traditions. The “Cel-Rebark” parallel is challenging, but it is far from proven, and does not explain why Grýla should have been more threatening than any other troll. Nor
does it explain their "sarvels," why men should have been associated with her, why she had fijomu tails, or the context for the name "Skimtygylra," which, as Finmar Jonsson pointed out, most refer to a form of "skand-svalur" ("animal skin monster") or "skand-skarlukst" ("animal skin beggar").

Noteworthy is the fact that several other variants of the Gryla verse uttered by Lofti Palsson seem to be well known, even today, on the Faroe Islands, and that yet another was recorded at the end of the nineteenth century on Føløa in Shetland Jon Sattsmorn (1911-45). One version of the Fairoese verse runs as follows:

Ottun kemur gryla fyir gribun
vif jorin holmum,
hióga f baki, skelum í handi,
karum í tyki bakin í bru
u grau fjaðri kjoles.
(Hamreimur 1849:53:308; cf. Thren 1908:65)

[Dora comes Gryla from the outer islands.
With furry tails.
A bag over her back, a sword knife in her hand.
Coming to cut the niodubs from the children Who cry for meat during Lent.]

Another variant reads: "Ottun kemur gryla er gribinu vif jorin holmum, hióga f baki, skelum í hendu kemur at jorin bakin í bru
u grau fjaðri kjoles" (Hamreimur 1849:53:308; cf. Thren 1908:65).


An even more recent version quoted on the Fairoese television programme Mannan nálina (7 February 1991) has yet another variation of the violent fourth line, in which Gryla "kemur at skrækikum í brúknamu" (to coming to cut the tongues out of the children).¹⁷

The less common, but no less important Shetland variant from the isolated island of Foula reads as follows:

Skirkla korma í munn svarta bára berna
fjóta í munn fangatalta
at i munn fangatalta bára berna
Hjelmer 1879:19)

Loosely translated, this means "Skirka (an ogre) rides into the homestead on a black horse with a white patch on its brow, with fifteen tails, and fifteen children on each tail. The connection between the above verses would appear to go back to 1500, before since that time both Shetland and the Faroes have been, regular connections with the Fairoese and Iceland broke down, and the differences between the languages; would have made it difficult to follow the considerable divergence of scripture material between north and south (Jon Sattsmorn 1975:427; Smith 1978:237ff; Mæsen 1978:13ff; and Crawford 1985).²¹

The close textual relationship between the Gylfi verses quoted above does not constitute their only link. An even more intriguing question is what kept them alive for so long. Indeed, the Gylfi verses in the Faroes and Shetland are never associated with Lofti Palsson or Iceland; although the evocations of Gryla riding a horse (Fonlás) and carrying a "skalín" (Faroe) might help to explain why Lofti chose to quote the verse while driving to smack Björn and Siv Sørensen. However, prove that the Gylfi verses must have lived within the oral traditions of the North Atlantic Scandinavia, settlements, and altered in accordance with local vocabulary and traditions. It was no learned literary phenomenon, but was firmly rooted in popular culture. Yet a verse of this kind needs some form of context to survive. Since this verse was not linked to any historical context and has no poetic value, it must have had other associations. Was it related perhaps to a weather belief, Gylfi's fifteen for forty traits referring to an equal number of days of similar weather that were believed to follow a particular date? Considering the thirteenth-century evidence mentioned earlier, such a situation seems highly unlikely. The only answer would appear to be a shared myth of some kind relating to an adult-created bipartie that in later stories was used to frighten the children of the North Atlantic Islands. Yet such figures also tend to be related to a specific date, and as will be shown below is as such will be shown below there is no agreement about the precise time of the ogres' arrival in the Faroes and Skirkla beliefs of the Faroes, Shetland and Iceland. Certainly Lofti Palsson does not seem to link his verse to any particular date. It was the figure itself that was important. What other context might have kept these verses alive?

Something that has received very little attention previously from scholars is the fact that both the Shetland and the Fairoese verse, have close associations with popular costumed traditions involving disguised, and originally female "monsters" which clad in tattered animal skins, where or seaweed and more recently plastic masks bought at the local stores, are still known to visit farms and villages at different times during the winter period to do-"nem" all offerings. These offerings originally took the form of meat, wool or clothes (referred to in the Fairoese as gryllad). No more recently come in the shape of sweets, biscuits, money or alcohol, for example. The Fairoese "gryllur" usually appear on gryllatong, the first Tuesday in Lent (Reinsvoll 1985:145), although this Christian association must be regarded as a last development (Thren 1908:66; Joensen 1978:204). Nonetheless, on the evidence of Svan's Íslandsháttur Fairoese, it seems clear that the present tradition was most well known in the late-eighth century, at which time the costumed figure was also simply known as "Langelinaf," "Langafisl" or "Langafæst" i.e. "Long Face." (Svan 1966:99). The same dictionary describes a "grifl"; like Langelinaf, as being a "Busseland Iverinn mun skræramer Bum i Føstn. Manduocas" (a beggar used to frighten children at Lent, a costumed figure); a related word referring to the adjective "gridur," meaning "abominable" (ibid.:290).²² In one early account from 1821, the figure of "Langafæst" is described as having a "stor tagtaukke," a long bag full of money. It was also remembered as having a "bækt". "Garður" (a kind of bread), "haf" of seaweed which dragged behind her like a tail, a rusty black hook in each hand, and "pra Baggen en sko". The" comfortable" being on a "sofa" in the center of a "rader" bag which she rattled" (Thren 1908:65). This description closely parallels that of the costumed figures from two poor-stricken young children from Mývágur
who, in the turn of the last century, used to dress up as Gryla as a means of collecting food.

Tid vann bønghaugar og fer støppurkast, try bestilt, takk til eller at tekkur, og takk til uppu og eitt stort bæðið. Einna har hon dødd en breytst skiklasók, og eitt skikkingstúr vór dugir frákringjar til málfræði. Rekkvis var byggia við vaxa upp á bæðið til hald, Gickjótt við hvít tek skikl, men varu malut við spíttþraðuk, og skrá figna try ek

Gryla, 1857 (40)

[Screamed as it was going on the outside of the sottered clothes they were on, across their shoulders, and some tucked into a bunter belt. Around their necks they had a net of animal skin, and driven upon their arms as "mittens", they had fish dainties. Other forms of smirky floating (sea weeds and algae) were wrapped around their heads or the form of hair. They had no makeup - their faces were blackened with chimney soot and, last of all, they had another piece of seaweed as a tail.]

The most interesting description, however, is that given of the traditions on the somewhat isolated island of Shetland by William Hermonen in his short story "Gryla" (1957), which was based on an account Hermonen heard from Einar Hansen, a whosale merchant from Svinoy [The name from Adal Paul Joensen, dated 20 January 1994].

The single Gryla in this case seems to be a predominantly feminine being, but is enormous, "som en turistisk at se, en lang, ræslende hale stær her etter sig, den ringer og skuskrart som at tømme kalde og kaasen". Much like a stack of peas, she shoots along, restless tail behind her, which swells and bumps, like empty kegs and pots [Heinemann 1970:38]. "Hun er værget liden og bærer horn og hale. [She is very slender, and has horns and tail (33) and surprisingly] enough also has a large, wooden palms ("standav") which supposedly has the quality of being able to beow festile on hafn women (ibid: 39). Furthermore, she has the ability of altering her size, occasionally stretching herself: "Under den støppen Gryljan bregger sig adelslær med våpn i jorden". Meanwhile the Gryla stops, and her downs, stretched as full length with her snout to the ground (ibid: 38). There is little doubt that Hermonen's account has been fictionalised to some extent, but a television interview from the early nineties with certain older inhabitants of Svinoy has confirmed that the basic features of the costume described by Hermonen were correct, at least as regards the use of a wooden mask, animal skins, and a bag for offerings. These informants also agreed that on Svinoy, Gryla was usually played by the same man (Mama millam; see above).

Neither the Svinoy Gryla or the costumed children described by Rauneston spoke in their normal voices. Instead, they piled to make animal noises and use "reverse speech" like the disguised Jakubekar in Norway, as a means of covering up their identity [Heinemann 1970:135, 38, 43; Mama millam; Rauneston 1985 (4); Chronn 1995:37]. The same thing happens in many places in the Faroes today in conversation with Lena Reinert, March 2000."

Heinemann's "Gryljan", however, occasionally "fæddt ganga eng fríblottamundad" [chanted old rhymes and dark refrains] (Heinemann 1970:33). These "old rhymes" probably refer to the fact that in earlier times the Gangfolk had to have introduced herself with the Faroese Gryla verse, albeit spoken with a "førðið meiri" [fervous voice] (Hmundssalin 1849-51:308). Other direct associations between the Faroese Gryla verse and the costumed

tradition are seen in the features of the ragged, tallied costume, the "regular use of a staff and bag", and the fact that the costumed figures tend to come in from outside the farm.

Unlike the Faeroese Gryla verse, there is no direct evidence that the variant from Foula in Shetland was ever spoken by a costumed figure. Yet in spite of this, the connections between the Foula verse and seasonal disguised house visits in Shetland were as intimate as those in the Faroes. One of the most intriguing features of the Foula verse is the fact that the name Gryla has been substituted with that of "Skeks"; a name that was used for a bogey, troll-like figure not only on the northern island of Unst, but also in the Faroes and northern Norway. The term "skelk oder jörkkelk" is known to have been applied to the same sort of being (Jakobsson 1957-59; Jakobsson 1928-32, 197.1928-02). So why was the name altered? And how did the verse come to exist in Shetland in the first place?

In Shetland, long before the late nineteenth-century institution of the well-known Up-Helly-Aa festival in Lerwick, with its costumed fiery celebration of Viking origins, there seems to have been a much more widespread "posing" tradition in which groups of costumed figures, wholly disguised in decorative straw suits and "lads", and sometimes also in white shirts or petticoats, used to visit houses (go "hoaamaylla") on "Winter Sunday" (14 October), around All Saints' Day.
Hallowe’en on 1 November, at Martinmas, during the Christmas period, at New Year; and most rarely at Shrove-tide. On the island of Unst in particular, these figures were known as greulk (gryllæc being spelled variously as grel, grelak, grelak, grelak, grelak and gall einfach in other words, gryllæc).[2] On Yell, Fetlar, and in some parts of the northern Mainland, however, the same figures went under the name of skeleton or skelders, a name that seems to have become more common. But is nowadays only encountered in a few limited areas by older people. Both types of gryllæc, usually in groups of six,[3] appear to have been led by a leader known as the shauler (shauler, scludler, scuddler) especially on occasions when they appeared to bless weddings.[4]

It is worth giving two early descriptions of the performances given by these figures. John T. Reid, in his Art Rambles in Shetland from 1869 gives the following account of New Year ‘gusiers’:

In the olden times, on the last night of the old year, few young lads, consisting of a ‘gentlemee’, a ‘carruing horse’, and three others, all from house to house, singing what they called a ‘New Year’s Eve Song’, and collecting provisions for a banquet for New Year’s Night. ‘The gentlemee’ wore a coat made of sheep’s fur turned outside on the front, a cloak of straw around his neck, a sheet of straw round his waist, and a band of straw round his right arm. It was his duty to sing, while he stood outside the door, and when the song was finished, if arrested, he would enter the house, and introduce himself as Venderfiegn come from Brotnie, pronounced Brotniam. (Reid 1869:58)

The effect of meeting these veiled figures in full straw costume was in an isolated dark farmhouse on a winter’s night is no better described than in the following account published in 1884 by R. Menzies Ferguson. Ferguson received it from a fellow tourist to Shetland who had stared with a woman who had recently moved into the area and was ignorant of the local traditions.

I saw the kitchen full of безной, whose appearance, being so unsmiling, shook the gravity of my muscles, and forced the cold sweat to come out of every pore in my body. There they stood like many statues, one of whom was far above the rest, and of gigantic dimensions. Eyes, months, or noses had they none; not the least trace of a countenance. They kept up an incessant groan, grunting noise, or noise partly resembling voice, and turkey-cocks. Their outer garments were as white as snow, and consisted of garments below, and shirts on the outside, with sleeves, shoes and stockings, and their head dresses or caps, were about eighteen inches in height, and made of straw twisted and plaited. Each cap terminated in tires or four combs in appearance like, all pointing backwards and downwards, with bunches or ribbons of every colour varying from the rows of the cases. The stories, for such they appeared to be, had long ears, with which they kept prying up from the floor. Between them, the door stood open as black as Horn, but more resembling human being than any of the others. His head was a snow-white, and he had a tweed, a bag made of straw, on his back. His hands by his sides, the red hair of his beard nearly half covering our eyebrows, and we all ventured into the kitchen.

Immediately upon entering the kitchen they formed themselves into pairs and commenced hobbling and dancing. When asked what they wanted the butler was persuaded, and it was a piece of meat and other substances. Their chains, or bands, were put on as a disguise and partake of tone of voice, that they would take anything we chose to give them. My landlord gave them some mutton and oats, with which they appeared highly elated, and returned thanks with bows and curtseys; but still kept up the necessary grunting. Before leaving the house, however, they inquired of me, in the same guttural tone of voice, if they should go to the Manse’s. ‘Certainly,’ I said, ‘I see you there, and give her a present of your dancing, for the summer is a very literal gentleman, and I had not, not, fill your kettles.’ (Ferguson 1884:161)

Ferguson goes on to note that the leader of this group was called the ‘Scuddler’, and that the figure with the blackened face was called ‘Judas’ (ibid. 161ff).

The behaviour at weddings was similar, but somewhat more formalised, as the following account (also by Reid, referring to the parish of Walls) states:

About nine o’clock, commotion and whispering being observed amongst those nearest the door, the Gibraltar steps, dancing cones, and the ‘honour man’ informed the company that the ‘gusiers’ had arrived. On the best man announcing that there is plenty of both meat and drink for all, the ‘gusiers’ are invited to dance. On the head of the gusier spring[5] to the side of a tall shawl, called the ‘scadkle’, and on the face of the dancer with a white garland[6] on his head, with a cap made of straw, in shirts like a golden leaf, with three loops at the upper extremity, filled with ribbons of every conceivable hue, and hanging down so as to cover the cap. He wears a white shirt, with a band of ribbons around each arm, and a band of ribbons on his shoulder, with a presentment of long willow straw, called ‘glin’, which hangs loosely. The moment he enters he gives a score, and bowing danced for a few minutes, and the others, called the ‘gentlemens’, somewhat similarly attired, he then bowing, danced and called the ‘lord’, appears, and so on until all are in. And it is really a strange sight to see all young men dressed thus fantastically, and dancing with so much earnestness. They are careful to speak not a word lest they reveal their identity, and not a sound is heard but the music of the straw pianocello, the beat of their feet on the earthen floor, the laughter of the ‘lord’, and the whispers of the bride’s attendants, who, I thought, might be (Read 1869:62)

The folk religious role of the shauler at weddings is particularly clear from this following account by Laurence Young of Walls in early last century in the local law:

The priests and the deacon wedded. The skulder borne in a bed a great banner (of) straw over a stick. They fixed a sheet at the door. If it was not removed they were borne but if the company wished to take it down they returned the shauler and took the banner. Their man and married man and invited them in. Each priest kissed the bride and her maids. Next they got their clothes on. They were all veiled, and their heads dress or cap were about eighteen inches in height, and made of straw twisted and plaited. Each cap terminated in tires or four combs in appearance like, all pointing backwards and downwards, with bunches or ribbons of every colour varying from the rows of the cases. The stories, for such they appeared to be, had long ears, with which they kept prying up from the floor. Between them, the door stood open as black as Horn, but more resembling human being than any of the others. His head was a snow-white, and he had a tweed, a bag made of straw, on his back. His hands by his sides, the red hair of his beard nearly half covering our eyebrows, and we all ventured into the kitchen.

Immediately upon entering the kitchen they formed themselves into pairs and commenced hobbling and dancing. When asked what they wanted the butler was persuaded, and it was a piece of meat and other substances. Their chains, or bands, were put on as a disguise and partake of tone of voice, that they would take anything we chose to give them. My landlord gave them some mutton and oats, with which they appeared highly elated, and returned thanks with bows and curtseys; but still kept up the necessary grunting. Before leaving the house, however, they inquired of me, in the same guttural tone of voice, if they should go to the Manse’s. ‘Certainly,’ I said, ‘I see you there, and give her a present of your dancing, for the summer is a very literal gentleman, and I had not, not, fill your kettles.’ (Ferguson 1884:161)

As Ferguson’s account demonstrates especially well, the shaulers, greulkæs and skeleton, like the Norwegian julebukker and Scandinavian Julebukker, and the Faroese frikalk, did not speak in a normal fashion when visiting in the middle ages. In folklore they are depicted as inarticulate and of low status. Instead, they went out of their way to avoid recognition, making animal-like grunting noises, or more recently using ‘mysterious speeches’ (in other words, inarticulate talking) (Marwick 1957:116, 63). In a way not so much as that they are good folk in Sweden the skulder used to demand some form of offering when they made their visits, most particularly most of them (Marwick 1957:116). They gave nothing.
As with the gylla, there are no records of the skeller and grođë traditions before the nineteenth century. The first description of them appears in 1809 in Edmundson’s "A View of the Ancient and Present State of the Zeland Islands (64). It is clear from the later descriptions, however, that these activities represent an intriguing blend of several related traditions found in all of Shetland’s ‘neighbouring’ countries. The ‘carrying horse’ figure mentioned by Reid, for example, was also known in the Orkney Islands (Macleod Banks 1946:27,339), and may have a faint relationship to the Danish Christmas horse, mentioned below, and the “hestan” that had a role in the Icelandic vikulagi dance games of the early nineteenth century (Gunnell 1995:150,157). The idea of the disguised figures originally having had roles (even though they avoided words in many cases) also suggests links with the southern Scottish mumming tradition, known as “Galoshes”, which also involved painted hats, and a character known as Fadda who carried the group’s “pase” (see Hayward 1992:11f, 28, 35f, 670). Other obvious links are seen with the Baltic traditions of the west coast of Ireland where similarly dressed “strawmen” or “straw-boys” used to visit weddings to feign “luck” by dancing with the bride and other women present (see for example Gailey 1969:74f, 91f; Danaher 1972:24). These links, however, were much less closely linked to seasonal festivals than the grođës and skeller, the names of which are also unquestionably Scandinavian. In general, the Shetland customs point to a blend of three main domestic folk traditions, one coming from Ireland or the Hebrides, another from Scotland, and the third from Scandinavia (something also reflected by the references to “Drøtmheim” and the “vændørdøg” in Reid’s account). Indeed, it should be noted that straw-clad figures very similar to the skeller also existed in Sweden as part of the Holm-Stolfin tradition (Olof & Ellekilde 1926:51,2,10798; Cederberg 1928:274,777; Gunnell 1995:1008), and considering the account of Skell given above, it seems clear that such “living straw figures must have also been known in Denmark at one time. It is nonetheless a little difficult to visualise any large straw figure like the fully-clad skeller attempting to “rin tana” (ride onto the horse field), as is suggested in the Gylla verse from Foella. The likelihood must be that the costumes connected with “Skella” were originally simpler, and possibly even made of skin. Indeed, A.W. Johnston proposed that the word skeller might be related to the Old Icelandic word skelill, meaning the “shanks or legs of an animal’s skin when stretched out” (Macleod Banks 1946:76; Cleasby & Guriarasin Vigfusson 1957:543).

Of course, there is a six hundred year gap between the accounts in Islendinga saga and Edmundson’s early description of the skeller in Shetland. Yet it is probable that the annual reappearance of the skeller, grođë and gylla provided a living context for the Gylla in both Shetland and the Faroes and kept them alive. And since these variants of the Gylla verse were so closely associated with seasonal disguise traditions, all logic suggests that the same must have also applied in Iceland where the earliest example of the verse is found being uttered by a man who is obviously placing himself in the role of Gylla. Certainly, a tradition involving a horned, skin-clad being like that described by Hensen would help explain the name “Skimmrylla”, and why Gylla should have been visualised from the start as having so many tails (linked to a tattered costume). Furthermore, the fact that men tended to act the gylla elsewhere as part of a “custom” or “game” that even later times often involves some degree of cross-dressing would help answer why it was not considered offensive for a man to be compaired with such a figure.

It should be stated immediately that there is no direct evidence for a costume of Gylla tradition ever having existed in Iceland. Yet it is interesting to note that when Porsteinsson wrote his Mundanir orðar skiljilega the vikulagi games in the mid-eighteenth century, he made use of the expressions Gylla anðriða (Gylla face), Gylla mohur (Gylla man) and Gylluamsler (Gylla images) when referring to the disguises used in these games and to other animal games known. These disguises have been adopted in mainland Europe (MS JS 113 8to, 43(2):471f-b, and 48(471): the numbering of the pages is questionable: see also Jon Samsonsson 1964:1 xii, and Olafur Davidsen 1984:23). The words Gylla-mohur are applied to a man in Europe acting a satyr (skogsmenn), while the expression gylluamsler is used in a general sense for all such games. Also Porsteinsson clearly notes Gyll anðriða, the visual terms, associated with animal disguises, and expected his readers to do the same. Furthermore, he associated this directly with the costumed figures of the vikulagi dance games like the þorsóðan monstir, the hóturnaðr (hart), the hópurðör (boar), the kelling (old woman) and Húna-Póta (Tall Thora) (cf. Jon Samsonsson 1964:1). Considering svin-Porsteinsson’s application of the expression Gylla-mohur to animal-like games, it is worth noting the earliest detailed descriptions of Gylla written by poets in the seventeenth century. In Stefan Olafsson’s poem, “Gyllukvöð”, which is contemporary with earlier accounts of the vikulagi games, Gylla is described as being three-headed, and having a húnaðr (a ram’s stout), a beard, a “kúfjan” ens
Gryla, Grylur, "Gorleks" and Seekers

Our lady (a month like a bitch) and eyes like burning embers (Stefán Ólafsson 1484-1810). In Gudmundur Erlendsson’s "Grylukvæn" (1656) she has "born þróm kín like knotted wood on a loom," and "særður ðær súmm kínnet" [bushy, shrubby, scrubby], burning "þrú ræðhósta staung." [her iron staff] quoted in Ólafur Davíðsson 1898-1953:114.

In the eyes of these particular poets, Grylla seems to have borne a very close resemblance to the Swedish "Grylen," and the supernatural Faroese Gryll which is described as having "a sheep’s body, but walking upright like a man." Williamson 1948:248. In very general scents, however, she looks less like a woman, and more like the figures of the earlier mentioned ðælendla and ðjólegli which were once well-known at all-over Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Like the Faroese and Shetland grylar and grylur, the júarlakur used to visit houses seasonally, terrify children and demand offerings. The archetypal júarlakur costume involved a pole topped with a goat’s head (made of various materials) which had clacking jaws. The performer holding this would then be covered with a sheet or skins (Lid 1932-1956:58; Eike 1980; Gunnell 1995:106-128). Once again, records of such traditions do not go back much further than the mid-sixteenth century (Gunnell 1995:114). Nonetheless, it seems that the same being and same costume were probably already known at this time in Iceland, albeit under a different name. This is suggested by Jóhahn Jónsson’s brief account of the "Fingafool" monster that he saw in his youth in the late-sixteenth century. Jón Samuelsen described as appearing at viðum gatherings during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Jón Samuelsen quoted in Jón 1965:138). The fact that the júarlakur had its own name, and is the same share the same roots, both traditions must have existed separately, and unknown to each other for some time. The same apt to yet another figure with clacking jaws, known as the jól toskir, which seems to have appeared at Faroese Christmas dances at one time (Jóhannsdóttir 1987:77; Poulsen 1992-1993:167). The roots of all of these traditions have to be old. Indeed, it might also be noted that just as the enacted júarlakur was known for being used for the entertainment of children, so too did the júarlakur get the "Fingafool" which according to folk belief lived for the rest of the year a "ðælendla og ðjólegli" [on the heaths and in the woods] (Jón Samuelsen 1964:138, Þó 1970:146).

Returning to the naming of the first part of Sverrs saga, it should now be a little clearer why somebody should have chosen to name the first part of King Sverrs life to that of a fearful figure like the ragged supernatural "Fingafool" or júarlakur which lived in the mountain wilderness for most of the year, and periodically descended, inspiring terror and demanding offerings. Until the time that Sverrs and his men took to the sea and fjords after the taking of Trondheims in the late twelfth century, he may have been forced to survive like outsiders "on the heaths and in the woods," living off "bórir of vín or sól" and "þrú lýsir." [the bark of trees, and juice, and those berries which had lain under the snow] (Sverrs saga 1928: ch.12:13). Things got so bad that it became hard to know "þrú put váru móst eddyr" [whether they were human or animals] (ibid., ch. 12:17). Instead, they were probably clad in skins as often as breast bork. One also notes the account of how Sverre swooped down from the mountains to demand food from people’s tables one Christmas in Österlandi (ibid., ch. 22:8), and Archbishop Eystræðr Erlendsson’s warning to farmers against providing Sverre and his men with food and clothes (ibid., ch. 28:33). Also worth noting is the uncertainty surrounding the way Eystræðr’s description of Nidaros:

Eystreth ... krav bæri mats til Birkeheima. ... Þær váru ofan ofan ruin nátrun ... og ... segru hera inn til þeir vítu haggar haggar. En þær voru ofaðar út þar hliðin af ðrei súm og þær líktum orðið ... (28:30. M. Ísleifsson.)

"[Eystræðr said, that he had heard that the Birkeheima had gone down into Nidaros and said:] that they will visit the fjaðh here ... but I know that they are few in number, and have small boats, are weak and with diminished power ..."

For the common people of the settlements of Norway, and almost certainly for their children, Sverrir must have commonly been seen as an ever-threatening spirit that could appear in human form anywhere, at any time, to make demands of food and bork. One can see how Sverrir’s name and that of the travelling, skinn clad "Gryla" who demanded offerings in winter time might even become synonymous.

Certainly the appearance of Grylla’s name in common on the surface suggests that the beliefs and the traditions related to Grylla must also have existed in Norway at one time if they did not start from there, although the dispute about the name in the two versions of the prelude to the saga might raise doubts about how widespread this was. Nonetheless, as other scholars have shown, vague similarities do exist between the modern image of Grylla as a female devil and the Norwegian folk figures of Guri Ryssen, Stolle, and the ogres Lussi who occasionally appeared in persons as kari in the area around Vest Agder, Haordals, Rogaland and Telemark to check on the preparations for Christmas (Christiansen 1969:312; Lid 1992-1993:48; Weiser-Asl 1994-2002:22). Considering the Shetland form of the word, it might also be noted that the term grylla used to be applied to a júarlakur or ðjólegli in Kviteseid, Telemark (Weiser-Asl 1994:80, note 100). The word sleykter also has parallels in the Swedish words kvelskat och kvelska used for names for house-visiting júarlakur figures in Nissedal and Vest Agder (see Lid 1982-88; Eike 1980-288), and skulur meaning a (probably disguised) party gang-crasher (see Eike 1980-286).

Turning to Lauf Falson, Steingrímur Skjálfrinsson, and the other references to Grylla in the contemporary sagas in the mountain wilderness for a moment, that a disguise tradition of the kind described here, whatever its original context, would help explain the various references to Gryla’s strympur threatening nature, her “travels,” her arrival from the outside “wilderness,” and her “well-people”. Indeed, both Steingrímur and the later Faroese Þórarinn find interesting parallels in a document from Bergen dated 1307 which refers to a man known as Amadis Jolawez (Christian horse) [Diplomaticorum Norwegiæ 1871:8, 29].
As I have shown elsewhere, figures dressed in horns and/or animal skins appear to have played a central role in Scandinavian pagan ritual as late as the time of the Oseberg burial (830), and two full-sized, seventh-century animal masks have recently been found in the harbour at Hejdeby which once belonged to Denmark (Gunnell 1995:36-39; and Hügg 1984:69ff referring to fragments 14 D and 25 from the 7900 Viking excavation). Furthermore, it seems likely that some of the dialogic poems of the Edda were still being presented as an elementary dramatic fashion somewhere in Scandinavia as late as the early thirteenth century (Gunnell 1993, 1995:182-329). Even though the sagas give no solid evidence on the subject of such activities (see nonetheless Gunnell 1995:80-92), it is highly unlikely that the thirteenth-century Scandinavians were so unique that they lacked all forms of dramatic tradition. Considering the information given above, the existence of a context involving mid-winter house-visits by a masked "Gryla" figure (or a group of grylir on horseback like the later Staffan-riders in Norway; see Eike 1980) would make much sense and help fill in the gap between the earlier pagan costumed ritual and the later dispute traditions that were so widespread all over Scandinavia. If this was so, the likelihood is that while the farm-visiting traditions further south continued (in mainland Scandinavia, Sweden and the Faeroes), the Icelandic Gryla moved indoors as the weather worsened, and eventually became part of the ritualistic dance games. Such an argument can never be anything more than hypothesis, but the evidence that is available seems to suggest that Ælindraga saga and Sverris saga provide us with some of the earliest valuable references to popular disguised traditions known in northern Europe.

Terry Gunnell, PhD., Lecturer
Department of Folklore and Antiquity
University of Iceland
IS-101 Reykjavik, Iceland

Abbreviations
AM Manuscript belonging in the Amámgutur Collection in Reykjavik and Copenhagen
JS Manuscript belonging in the Jón Sigurðsson Collection in the National Library of Iceland
MS Manuscript

References
Aarsleff, Ivar 1963. Norsk ordbog. Oslo
Arnó Bjornsson 1996: Íslenz skaurna. Reykjavik
Ásgeir Blondal Magnússon 1989. Íslensk orðabók. Reykjavik

Bo, Olav. 1970. Vår nordlyt. Oslo
Edinburgen, Thomas 1886: An Ethnological Sketch of the Shetlands and Orkney. Dublin: Edinburgh
Hägg, Inga 1984. Die Textlinien aus dem Hafen von Hofn. Reünntók. (Bloche über die Ausgrabungen in Hofn.)
Gwirn Matthildur of Mentaskolku vax Hamfrith. Dr Margaret Mackay and Dr Emily Lyle of the School of Scottish Studies, Edinburgh University, Benton of Kinsgton, Spinney Farm, BBC Radio Shetland; and all my informants from Unst, Yell and Mainland for their help and advice with regard to this subject.

The Jólakötur, closely linked to the Norwegian julekoker, see, for example of Christmas 1933-44ff, and Eik 1980 12328. 264-273 come down into the settlements from the mountains once by one by one in the days leading up to Christmas, and daily leave small gifts in the shoes that have been left out by children for those who have missed them. The behaviour of these figures has mellowed somewhat over the years, and their gait has come under strong influence from Coca-Cola ads. Over the last few years, however, the Icelandic National Museum has been fighting to rekindle this state of affairs by inviting children to meet these figures as they arrive in 'their' (i.e. nineteenth-century Iceland) clothing. See further Jon Atli 1954-69 280ff, and 3280ff, and Amsri Björnsson 1996: 341-353.

The Álafólk exists today who are not wearing any new items of clothes at Christmas. See Amsri Björnsson 1996: 368ff.

1 Unless otherwise mentioned, all translations from Icelandic or Scandinavian are by the present author.

2 I should stress that when I use the word 'drama' here, I use it in any modern work to describe first and foremost the act of performance, where 'the performers engage in the momentary living creation of an alternative world for a section of it within this one, to the extent that what is being enacted is not himself but smaller or something else that belongs to a different time and place. This 'collapse' of double reality creates a new costume and setting in the minds of both performer and beholder. It is this feature, the imposition of "make belief", the creation of the liing double reality, and in the act itself, that makes a scene of drama to be found' (Gustafsson 1995:17). In short, stages, scenery, and texts with a beginning, middle and end are quite unnecessary for the drama's continuation, if not its total 186ff. 22.

3 The name Gryla, like many of the other giant names found in Old Norse mythology (such as Jomme and Ymir) seems to have its root in a root for a growing sound, cf. the Danish and old Norwegian dialect word "gryl" meaning to warmer, matter or grain (Gundestrup 1938: 567 214, and Assen 1983: 349). This is especially interesting in the light of the words made by the disguised figures from Shetland and the Fowes described above.

4 In Old Norse, any suggestion of anogamis was regarded as the subject being entitled to carry out the direct form of submission. See, for example, Snor 1973.

5 See below, on the other versions of the same verse found in Iceland and Shetland.

6 For references to further examples of this unclassified migration legend, and further information about this phenomenon from Iceland, see Gudmund 1991: 158, n. 32.

7 Yet another sláta variation of the fourth line is found in a recent newsletter from the Fowes. There the verse, which mainly follows the second variant given here, reads 'kærur á skendi birkun upp v erk' ("kaurt on theioni up on the children") and begins with the words, "trun inn, trum li". The words of the verse are said to be 'unnobly' (improperly) mentioned by the Gurus (see above). Blais 2000.

8 Informal connections between Shetland and the Fowes remain, but there is no known explanation for how this verse should have come to be found and adapted so well to the Shetland circumstances in later times. So trace it of retreat in modern Shetland of these "grofs" as having been supernatural troll-like figures.

9 As with the word skolaklokkur, these words are subsumed under the Gurus (see above). Blais 2000.

10 The number needed to dance a Shetland Reel, which the groups often performed, hence the name "dancing groks" used at that time in northern Unst. See Shetland Archive TA 05A.
Forging Traditions: Oral and Literary Multiforms of Kämpen Grimborg (ST 7)

Introduction

Few topics have fomented as much debate in ballad scholarship as how questions concerned with the character of composition and performance in traditional balladry. These are points of view which have old roots but which often crystallize around the perceived pole opposite “memorization” and “composition-in-performance.” To a great extent, the debate is one concerning the degree to which Milman Parry’s and Albert Lord’s findings on the character of Serbo-Croatian epics (classically formulated in Lord 1960) may be broadly true of other genres and other language traditions. Forty years since the findings in The Singer of Tales were applied to the ballad, the central difficulty of this comparison remains how we do arrive at provable and convincing conclusions concerning these divergent traditions and their supposed sociocultural foundations (large and largely irretrievable) data. If we in the humanities had the same opportunities for experimentation as our colleagues in the laboratory sciences, we might design a procedure capable of testing various hypotheses concerning what happens when a ballad is passed from singer to singer, or how the ballad text is performed in oral tradition. In our case, we would prepare our test instruments; we would drop our sample text into a living ballad community; and in the end, we would measure the results over time and compare our findings against a control group. This procedure is, of course, just the sort of thing Parry and Lord undertook in the living tradition of the Serbo-Croatian epic, by re-recording from the same singers after an interval of days and years, by comparing mechanical difficulties—which occasionally singers starting over again. We have no opportunity to reconstruct the perfect field or laboratory experiment to resolve the issue of performance-through-composition versus composition-in-performance in the by-gone world of the 18th and 19th-century North Sea ballad community, but some important opportunities are found in our historical data, and to this end, I follow the following example from a group of Swedish (and Framo-Swedish, and Norwegian) ballad texts from the 18th and 19th centuries. My purpose here is to revisit the cherished notion of ballad composition in the context of a single, traditional ballad (but with important connections to the Nordic ballad tradition). Most importantly, this essay looks to discover where we arrive in our understanding of the character of oral-written interplay in Scandinavian balladry by exploring the relationships between the texts transcribed from oral tradition and those constantly reworked in the chapbook and elite traditions, as well as to assess
Nordic Yearbook of Folklore
2001
Vol. 57

Editor
ULRIKA WOLF-KNUTS
ÅBO (TURKU)

Editorial Board
Anders Gustavsson, Oslo; Gustav Henningsson, Copenhagen
Bengt af Klundberg, Umeå; Ann Helene Bolstad Skjellbreid, Oslo

Published by
THE ROYAL GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS ACADEMY
UPPSALA, SWEDEN

Distributed by
BTJ TRYCK AB
LUND, SWEDEN