

Men's Laments. Christianization and the Image of Masculinity

John McKinnell's recent research on women's laments in Eddic lays¹ demonstrates the changing ideal of womanhood, from proud and self-assertive revenger (Brynhildr) to passive weeping widow (Guðrún). He relates this change to the influence of Christianity, among other things to the lives of female saints and Latin lamentations of the Virgin at the foot of the Cross.

One can assume comparable changes in the image of the ideal male hero, due both to the influence of Christian culture (which implies general influence from European culture) and a natural tendency to maintain a balance between ideal heroine and ideal hero. This paper will show how changes in attitudes toward the ideal hero in the Icelandic Middle Ages are reflected in men's laments in *fornaldarsögur*. The main subject of the paper is *Hjálmar's Death-Song* (in *Hervarar saga* og *Heiðreks* and *Qrvar-Odds saga*), *Hildibrand's Death-Song* (in *Ásmundar saga kappabana*) and *Æviðrápa Qrvar-Odds* (in *Qrvar-Odds saga*).² Like the women's laments and death-songs in the Elder Edda, these poems are composed in Eddic metres and their roots lie deep in the pre-Christian heroic tradition.

I will concentrate mainly on the poems but also consider their immediate prosaic context in the respective sagas. It should be kept in mind that the age of the poems and of the saga-prose can differ radically. All the three sagas are considered to have been first composed at the end of the 13th cent.; their earliest extant manuscripts date to the beginning of the 14th cent. with a second round of extant manuscripts dating from around 1400.³ The poems are, however, regarded as being older. This is especially clear in the case of *Hildibrand's Death-Song* (ca. 12th cent.) which goes all the way back to the Gothic Hildebrandslied from the 8th cent.,⁴ while *AS* is believed to be hardly older than the end of the 13th cent.⁵

Hjálmar's Death-Song is relatively short, 8 verses in *HS*, 12 verses in *OS*.⁶ The hero, mortally wounded in the battle with twelve berserks on Sámsey island, recalls his joyful life and his love for a Swedish king's daughter Ingibjörg and expresses his sorrow caused by the death and separation from Ingibjörg, his home-land and his battle companions.

¹ See: McKinnell 1991.

² In this poem the narrative element is considerably stronger than in *Hjálmar's* and *Hildibrand's Death-Songs*; still its nature is very similar to their (lament caused by unequivocally approaching death) and Andreas Heusler puts it in the same category, giving it the name *Sterbelieder*. See: *Eddica minora...* 1903:xliv.

³ The first extant manuscript of *Hervarar saga* og *Heiðreks* (hereafter *HS*) is Hauksbók (14th cent., beg.), the second is GKS 2845 4to (15th cent., beg.); this saga is also considered to be composed around 1280 (*Íslensk bókmenntasaga* II:191). The first extant manuscript of *Ásmundar saga kappabana* (hereafter *AS*) and of the older (short) version of *Qrvar-Odds saga* (hereafter *OS*) is Stockh. Perg. 7 4to; the second extant manuscript of *AS* is AM 586 4to (ca. 1400) and of *OS*, AM 344a 4to (14th cent., end); *OS* also has two important manuscripts of the younger (long) version, AM 343 4to and AM 471 4to (15th cent.). See Boer i: *Qrvar-Odds saga*. 1888:i-vi; Bandle 1990:51; also *The Saga of King Heidrek the Wise*. 1960:xxix ff.; Ciklamini 1993.

⁴ Written down around 800. See: Jón Helgason 1948:50.

⁵ Halvorsen 1951:5. The saga also uses the Gothic Hildebrand legend, much changed in Scandinavia, but most of its material and the approach to its writing is relatively modern (ibid.:5, 10, 27ff.). Both *Hildibrand's Death-Song* and *AS* were fixed by Saxo Grammaticus. I will leave Saxo's material out of this work since he was working in the Latin tradition, very different from both Gothic and Scandinavian.

⁶ Cited after, respectively, *FSN* II:8-10 (*HS*) and 257-63 (*OS*). The first verse (Odd's question to Hjálmar) is included; in the *OS*-version the *þula* of Hjálmar's friends, in the middle of the poem, is excluded. It is only preserved in the two youngest manuscripts of *OS* and is very likely to be an interpolation. — Later in this paper both prose and verses are mainly cited after *Fornaldar sögur Norðurlanda* (hereafter *FSN*) in order to unify quotations: the texts are collated with respective critical editions where possible.

In both sagas *Hjálmar's Death-Song* is a part of so called **Hjálmars þátr*. The poem, together with the þátr, is in both manuscripts of *HS* and in all manuscripts of *OS* except for the oldest one. It is though very likely that **Hjálmars þátr* was originally there as well,⁷ and so was *Hjálmar's Death-Song*, which can be called an essential part of the þátr. It is at least sure that the poem existed by the writing time of the manuscript, since it is in the earliest manuscript of *HS* from approximately the same time. We will never know what that, now non-extant, version of *Hjálmar's Death-Song* was like; therefore I will use the Death-Song in AM 344a 4to (end of the 14th cent.) which is, in Bandle's view, very close to the older (short) version of *OS*.⁸ The difference between *Hjálmar's Death-Song* in AM 344a 4to (short version of *OS*) and in the long version of *OS* is very little, but the difference between both the poem and its context in *OS* and *HS* is considerable.

HS:
Drekka í höllu
húskarlar mjöð
menjum göfgir
at mins föður [...]

OS:
Drekkr með jöfri
jarla mengi
öl glaðliga
at Uppsölum.⁹

One can immediately see that the *OS* version is much more staged. *Hjálmar* recalls jarla mengi (which evokes a picture of court knights at a feast) instead of the more plain and prosaic húskarlar. The love motif is also more dramatized in the *OS* version, as two last lines of another verse from the same poem show. In *HS*: "[...] er ek eigi kem // til Uppsala"; in *OS*: "[...] er vit síðan // séumst aldri" ("vit" = vit Ingibjörg – YY). Thus, in his Death-Song in *OS* *Hjálmar* is rather presented as a romantic hero who misses his beloved lady most of all, while in *HS* his main torment is death itself, which implies first of all that he will not come home again. We can see this difference, for instance, in the order of verses in *HS* and *OS*. In *HS* *Hjálmar* starts telling his sorrows by naming his five farms and people drinking joyfully in his father's castle, and only then does he mention Ingibjörg. In *OS*, Ingibjörg is the first and main subject of the poem; only at its end does *Hjálmar* concentrate on his friends and joyful feasts in the castles. One of the reasons for this difference could be that *HS* is, according to the common opinion, closer to the typically older heroic sagas while *OS* is more under influence of the younger layer of European material,¹⁰ likely riddarasögur among other things. We get the same impression of different images of *Hjálmar* in his Death-Song in the two sagas when we look at those four verses which only are in *OS*:¹¹

3. Fregna eigi þat
á fold konur,
at fyr höggum
hlífast létak.
Hlar eigi at því,
at ek hliða gerðak,
snót svinnhuguð
Sigtúnium í.

6. Hvarf ek frá ungrí
Ingibjörgu,
skjört réðum þat,
á skapæðagri.
Sá mun fljóði
fastnæmr tregi.
er vit síðan
séumst aldri.

7. Ber þú til sýnis,
sá er minn vili,
hjálml ok brynju
í höil konungs.
Hugr mun gangast
hilmis dóttur,
er hún höggna sér
hlíf fyr brjósti.

10. Sé ek, hvar sitja
Sigtúnium í
fljóð þau, er löttu
farar mik þaðan.
Gleðr eigi Hjálmlar
í höil konungs
öl né rekkar
of aldr síðan.

⁷ The title "Hauggerð eptir *Hjálmar*" and the beginning of the þátr are still in the manuscript. It appears that one page of the manuscript, containing **Hjálmars þátr*, is missing now, cf. *Qrvar-Odds saga* 1888:i. The story of *Hjálmar* and Odd and their battle with the berserks on Sámsey was circulating before 1200 (Saxo Grammaticus mentions it), cf. *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* II:191, Bandle 1990:65.

⁸ Bandle 1990:60; on the other hand, cf. Boer in *Qrvar-Odds saga* 1888:vii-xii.

⁹ *FSN* II:9, 262.

¹⁰ Cf. *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* II:188ff., 232f. Several motifs in *OS* are surely of Eastern origin, for instance the hero's death caused by a bite of a snake from the skull of his horse, see: Melnikova 2000.

¹¹ Verse numbers here follow *Hjálmar's Death-Song* in *OS*, *FSN* II:257ff.

These verses underline the three main themes of *Hjálmar's Death-Song*: Hjálmar's almost courtly love for Ingibjörg, his reluctance to part with the joyful life (the conflict of the glorious past and the sad present, characteristic of elegies, is very visible in this poem) and his courage. It is remarkable that while Hjálmar is presented as a loving knight reluctant to die both in *HS* and *OS* (though both motifs are much more dramatized in *OS*),¹² the question of his courage arises only in *OS*. It is not unlikely that this is related to the way the hero receives his death. Unlike the typologically older male hero of *Íslendinga sögur*, *konungasögur* and a number of *fornaldarsögur*, who meets his death without visible regret or even with laughter, Hjálmar grieves his death. His poem is a lament, which had mainly been viewed as a womanly genre. At the same time, he is a real hero of his þátt: a brave knight/viking who has had many excellent battles, kills (together with Odd) all the berserks in his last battle and dies stoically after all, having composed a long poem for Odd, Ingibjörg and his friends. Verses like # 3 above are very suitable for underlining the heroic nature of Hjálmar.¹³ Still the need to justify Hjálmar's grief and lament appears only in *OS* which is younger and deeper involved into the discussion on what a real male hero should be like.¹⁴

Thus, Hjálmar's warrior's qualities counterweigh his knightly side to make the poem presentable both in context of the typologically old heroic literature, where the roots of the poem lie, and the typologically new, Christian tradition of the "milder hero", a knightly and at the same time womanly tradition of the romance¹⁵ which has apparently influenced the final shape of the poem, especially in its version in *OS*.

We can also see this tendency to balance between the "older" and "younger" traditions in the relation between *Hjálmar's Death-Song* and its immediate context, **Hjálmars þátt*. This þátt is very independent both in *HS* and *OS*, partly due to the highly fragmentary composition of these sagas. In *HS* it opens the saga and is loosely connected to its other parts. Hjálmar is only needed to kill 12 berserks and "bury" the powerful sword Tyrfringr (Odd is a secondary person, a friend who is never mentioned in the saga again). Therefore, he only appears in the saga when he has to solve the problem which arises when the bersekr Angantýr, owner of Tyrfringr, asks for Ingibjörg as wife. Hjálmar's appearance is very unlike a hero's presentation in the "older" saga tradition:

Í því bili stígr fram yfir konungs borðit sá maðr, er hét Hjálmar inn hugumstóri, ok mælti til konungs: „Herra konungr, minnizt þér nú, hvé mikinn sóma ek hefi yör veitt, síðan er ek kom í þetta land, ok hversu margar orrostur ek átta at vinna ríki undir yör, ok hefi ek yör látit heimila mína þjónustu. Nú bið ek yör, at þér veitið mér til sæmdar ok gefið mér dóttur yðra, er minn hugr hefir jafnan á leikit...“¹⁶

Here is no traditional description of the hero (leave alone his genealogy). It could be that

¹² Verse 7 above can serve as example. In *HS*, Hjálmar only asks Odd to bring Ingibjörg his ring; in *OS* he also asks to take to her his cut armour and helmet – though the ring proves enough to make Ingibjörg die.

¹³ Cf. last stanzas by Harald harðráði, a real hero who only wears his shirt in the battle (# 155 and 156 in: Snorri Sturluson. *Heimskringla III*. 1979:187-188), especially: "Framm gÁngum vér // í fylkingu // brynjulausir // und blár eggjar. // Hjálmar skína. // Hefkat mína. // Nú liggr sknúð várt // at skipum niðri".

¹⁴ This discussion starts in *OS* with the battle between Odd and Hjálmar (before they become companions) which is mainly hold in order to "vita [...] hvár okkar meiri maðr skal vera" (Odd's words, *FSN* II:232; italics mine – *YT*). Hjálmar and Odd prove equal in that battle. The discussion is resumed in the account of the battle on Sámsey. Criteria as courage (*hugrekki*, *hreysti*) together with its opposites – cowardness (*bleydí*) and fear (*æðra*), – wisdom (*víska*), calm and moderation (*stillí*) are used define a real male hero. Here there is no room for detailed examination of this extensive prosaic text, but my conclusion is that the saga-writer keeps carefully the balance between the two heroes: the reader never learns which of them is "meiri maðr".

¹⁵ Cf. Burns 1997.

¹⁶ *FSN* II:2-3.

Hjálmar, together with Odd, was already a well known saga-person and it was enough to mention his name. But this absence of descriptions and genealogies is also characteristic for the typologically “younger” tradition where a hero matters as such. A knight would not necessarily mention his ancestors – he would rather name his deeds.

Another detail in this introduction of Hjálmar is remarkable: the word þjónusta (service). This word is very characteristic for riddarasögur; and the whole **Hjálmars þáttur* in *HS* can be viewed as a short riddarasaga. A knight (one of the king’s servants) appears at the critical moment and offers to solve the problem if he marries his fair lady, the king’s daughter; he performs a heroic deed and kills all the king’s enemies, also those who have supernatural power, but perishes himself; his beloved dies of grief.

Hjálmar plays a bigger role in *OS*, as Odd’s companion in many battles; still he is a secondary person in this saga. Here he is a viking, though he has some characteristics of a knight.¹⁷ His description is also short, and it is a description of a viking, as *OS* is mainly a viking and adventure saga. Grím, Odd’s father, says:

„[...] nú mun ek vísa yðr til þeira tveggja víkinga, at ek veit mesta ok bezt at sér um alla hluti. Annar heitir Hjálmar inn hugumstóri, en annarr Þórðr ok kallaðr stafngláma.“¹⁸

Ingibjörg does not have as visible a role in **Hjálmars þáttur* in *OS* as in *HS*. Her father, king Hlöðvér, does not want her to marry Hjálmar, who “eigi berr konungs nafn”.¹⁹ Hjálmar and Odd leave Hlöðvér and go on one of their viking-trips; their meeting with Angantýr and 11 other berserks is a typical battle between two groups of vikings and is not related to Ingibjörg, who still dies as soon as she sees Hjálmar’s ring and hears from Odd that Hjálmar is dead. Odd’s reaction is very remarkable:

Þá skellir Oddr upp ok hlær ok mælti þetta við: „Eigi er þat fleira um hrið, at vel hefir at farit, þá skal því fagna. Nú skulu þau njótast dauð, er þau máttu eigi lífs.“²⁰

Laughter has different roles in Old Icelandic literature, but in this case it is almost certain that the saga-writer parodies the tradition of riddarasögur (alluding, among other things, to the story of Tristan and Isolde) and thus takes a new step in the development of the new image of the male hero, now parting from the knightly tradition.

Hjálmar’s Death-Song comes from the old heroic tradition, but in the course of its development it obviously falls under the influence of Christian culture and the typologically younger tradition of court romances. The same is true for **Hjálmars þáttur*, but its development is not quite parallel to the one for *Hjálmar’s Death-Song*. A romance story in *HS* is a frame for the rather reserved poem, while Odd’s parodic laughter in the prose of *OS* is an answer to the highly, even exaggeratedly dramatized knight love-and-sorrow poem. Hjálmar’s riddari’zation seems to have reached its peak in his Death-Song in *OS*; a rough reaction of Odd is needed to slow down this process and prevent a change of the ideal hero into a hyper-sentimental knight, a “ladies’ man or lady/man”.²¹

¹⁷ His rules for viking journeys are, e.g., unusual: “Þat er fyrst at segja, at ek vil aldri eta hrátt né lið mitt [...] Ek vil aldri kaupmenn ræna né búkarla meir en svá sem ek þarf at hafa strandhögg á skipi mínu í nauðsyn. Ek vil ok aldri konur ræna, þó at vér finnum þær á landi uppi með miklum fjárhlutum, ok eigi skal konur til skips leiða nauðugar, og ef hún kann þat at segja, at hún fari nauðig, þá skal sá engu fyrir týna nema lífi sínu, hvárt sem hann er ríkr eða óríkr.” (*FNSV* II:234). Hjálmar is almost a representative of (courtly) civilization.

¹⁸ *FNSV* II:230.

¹⁹ *FNSV* II:236; *Orvar-Odds saga* 1888:68 (AM 344a 4to); in Stockh. Perg. 7 4to: “en konungr vill eigi gipta hana útignum manni” (ibid.:69).

²⁰ *FNSV* II:263-264.

²¹ This allusion is to Burns 1997.

Hildibrand's Death-Song is also a typical man's lament, though of another kind. Here the hero looks back over the story of his family and grieves the bad fortune which has led to his death at the hand of his half-brother. The hero of this poem is undoubtedly closer to the typologically old tragic hero than of the "younger" knight-hero, since the roots of the poem lie deeper in the past than those of *Hjálmar's Death-Song*. We can see this clearly in the third verse of the poem, which shows most resemblance to the German *Hildebrandslied*. *Hildibrand's Death-Song* has more features in common with the laments of the Elder Edda. It also goes back to the struggle of the Goths and the Huns; yet another common feature of this poem and the heroic lays of Edda is that the main subject of the poems is the (mis)fortune of the individuals rather than the peoples' history.²² The individual's (Hildibrand's) mode of expression is very similar to the women's laments in the heroic lays of Edda, especially the numerous contrasts (typical for elegies in general) and the characteristic weeping, emotional intonation:

Hildibrand's Death-Song:

Bið ek þik, bróðir,
bænar einnar,
einna bænar,
 eigi þú synjal
 Mik skaltu verja
 váðum þínum,
 sem fjörs bani
 fær annars mun...

Guðrúnarkviða in fyrsta:

Sakna ek í sessi
 ok í sængu
 míns málvinar,
valda megir Gjúka;
valda megir Gjúka
 mínu bölvi
 ok systur sinnar
 sárum gráti.

Guðrúnarkviða in forna:

Hvert vildi mér
hnossir velja,
hnossir velja
 ok hugat mæla.
 ef þeir mætti mér
 margra súta
 tryggðir vinna, –
 né ek trúa gerða.²³

An "old" tragic male hero emotionally lamenting his misfortune (especially in the fourth, last verse) is not a usual picture for the 12th cent.; it requires a closer look at *AS*.

It is obvious that *Hildibrand's Death-Song* is the only considerably old source for the saga, and also that the saga-writer did not know well the legend behind the poem and filled in the gaps.²⁴ At some point in the development of the Hildibrand legend the focus seems to have shifted from the battle between the father and the son into the battle between two (half-) brothers. Hildibrand's son still having been killed by his father unwillingly. The saga-writer tries to explain this saying that Hildibrand had a berserk's nature and killed his son in a fit (berserksgangr).²⁵

The berserk's nature is a feature of a typologically older hero, not of the tragic heroes of Eddic lays but rather of, for instance, an *Íslendinga saga* hero.²⁶ On the other hand, Hildibrand's life in the saga is comparable to the life of a *konungasaga* hero: when driven out of his kingdom, he becomes a viking, then gathers forces, fights for his kingdom and wins it back. Hildibrand in *AS* is thus a specific mixture of "old" heroes from various literary genres. There is however little of the romantic around him. The saga says, for instance, that he has a son, but does not even mention name of his wife, only that she is from the family of some king *Lazinus* who was one of the wealthiest of kings.²⁷ It is therefore particularly remarkable that *Hildibrand's Death-Song* is of the expressive, emotional kind which was hardly expected from an "old" hero before.

The roots of *Hjálmar's and Hildibrand's Death-Songs* lie deep in the old pre-Christian

²² Cf. Jón Helgason 1948:65.

²³ *FSN* I:406; *Eddukvæði* II:331, 372. Italics mine – YY.

²⁴ Cf. Jón Helgason 1948:60ff., Halvorsen 1951:21ff.

²⁵ *FSN* I:392, 404-5.

²⁶ A prototype of Hildibrand's killing his son *i berserksgangi* could be Skallagrímur Kveldúlfsson who almost killed his son Egill in a *berserksgangr*-attack.

²⁷ *FSN* I:390.

heroic tradition, but their final composition is dated in the 12th–13th cent., and we can clearly see in these texts the influence of the new era: Hjalmar and Hildibrand are portrayed primarily as emotional heroes. This is a major break-through in Icelandic literature. Now not only women, but also men, who had hitherto been required to be stoical, could be depicted as sensitive and emotional characters. On the other hand, one can clearly discern in these texts a silhouette of the typologically older, “purely heroic” character. Thus the texts allow a double reading, in the context of both the “old” and “new” traditions, a reading carefully supported by the apparent intention of the saga-writer to maintain a balance between the emotional and the traditionally heroic (for instance between the highly emotional presentation of Hjalmar in his Death-Song in *OS saga* and the prose text of *Hjálmars þátr in the same saga; compare the more reserved *Hjálmar’s Death-Song* in *HS*, framed by the more romance-like prose).

In these poems the traditional image of masculinity is brought to a crisis. Not only do the main characters change; we can also find womanly kings like Buðli, who adores treasures (*gersemar*), and manly princesses like Æsa in *AS*. The border between the two sexes started to drift. A reaction, firming up the border again, follows immediately.

An example of this reaction is *Ásmund’s Lay*, which concludes *AS*. Its roots are not likely to be as old as those of *Hildibrand’s Death-Song*, but the fact that Saxo Grammaticus also knew it shows that it is not younger than from the 12th cent. Thus, this lay was shaped at approximately the same time that the *Hildibrand’s Death-Song* we find in *AS*. The fact that these two poems are put together in *AS* is significant, especially when we consider that *Ásmund’s Lay* is as different from *Hildibrand’s Death-Song* in its approach, tone etc. as it could be. *Ásmund’s Lay* is an enumeration of the battles and deeds of the hero, characteristic of the typologically older tradition; a poem like this is easily found in an *Íslendinga saga* or a *konungasaga*.²⁸ At the same time, exaggerations in *AS* are characteristic of *fornaldarsögur*²⁹ and present a new image of masculinity: a *super male hero* who fights alone with one, two and then up to eleven warriors.

The style of the poem is rough; the hero shows almost no emotions, in any case not in connection with Hildibrand’s death which is the tragic climax of the saga.³⁰ This is a strange behaviour on the part of the hero who has just killed his brother without having known with whom he was fighting. I have already mentioned that the story and its sources are corrupt and confusing. I would also suggest that the four verses which Ásmund recites at the end of the saga, and in which he refers to Hildibrand just as one of many warriors, probably a super

²⁸ Compare, as example, a stanza by Egill Skallagrímsson: “Borðumz ek einn við .viij. // en við ellifu túsaur // sua fíngum val vargi // varð ek einn bani þeira...” (*Stj.* A1:58, verse 40.)

²⁹ Compare in this context *Krákumál* (12th cent.), ascribed to Ragnar loðbrók. This poem is another example of the “super-male” reaction, where the hero is again stoical and severe, in fact an exaggerated viking king of the “old” tradition. At the same time his image is also complex, especially if we consider *Ragnars saga loðbrókar* and the stanzas that the hero recites there.

³⁰ The only emotional moment in *Ásmund’s Lay* is the beginning of the third verse: “Þá hvarflaði // hugr í brjósti, // er menn ellifu // ofkapp buðu...” (*FSN* I:408). This could be, however, viewed as a common place. Compare the first lines of Odd’s stanza in **Hjálmars þátr*: “Þá var mér ótti // einu sinni, // er þeir [= 12 berserks – YY] grenjandi // gengu af öskum...” (*ibid.*, II:5, 253). It is usually recognized that the author of *AS* was familiar with *OS*, and the interplay between the Hildibrand tradition and the Hjalmar tradition is visible, for instance, in the following verses:

<u>Hildibrand’s Death Song:</u>	<u>Hjálmar’s Death Song. HS:</u>	<u>Hjálmar’s Death Song. OS:</u>
Nú verð ek liggja	nú verð ek liggja	Nú verð ek liggja
lífs andvana,	lífs andvani,	lít megandi,
mæki undaðr. [svo – YY]	sverði undaðr,	sverði undaðr,
þeims magnar sár.	í Sámseyju.	Sámseyju í.

The word *mækir* is of older usage than *sverðr*, therefore borrowing from Hildibrand’s Death-Song is more likely; the word change is likely due to the necessity of forming alliteration with *Sámsey*.

warrior whom he killed (nothing in the poem indicates that Ásmund is talking about his brother), *do not belong to the legend of a hero killing his brother*, whether this would be Hildibrand legend (its substantially modified Scandinavian version) or another story. A confusion of some sort could have caused these two poems to become parts of the same story.³¹

It is however possible that the saga *chose* to present Ásmund as he appears in his poem: a super warrior male hero, who has just killed his brother by bad luck but is supremely reserved and does not show his feelings. This is exactly the impression the reader gets from the saga, irrespective of whether these two poems, the expressive *Hildibrand's Death-Song* and the extremely reserved *Ásmund's Lay*, came to the saga as the result of a confusion of sources and stories or were deliberately put together to contrast with each other. The conclusion is as follows: the super male hero of the new kind kills, both in the saga and in the literary tendencies in *formaldarsögur* of the 12th-13th centuries, the hero who has developed from a close, typologically old heroic tradition into a knightly, more lady-like hero, similar to the European type (or even model).

Another example of a super-male (and super-manly) character is Odd, the main hero of *OS*, who is depicted as a viking and adventurous wanderer rather than a knight with a trace of "old" tragic hero (like Hjálmar) both in the saga and in his *Ævidrápa*. *Ævidrápa* appears only in the younger, long version of *OS*, though the oldest manuscript already contains its last and second last verse.³² It contains 71 verses (much more than the two laments considered above), an enumeration of the main hero's deeds in chronological order, beginning with his childhood. It has thus strong shade of *erfíkvæði*.

The development of *OS* is long and specific. It is not unlikely that the saga had some historical background but then came, through a viking-saga and adventure-saga, close to being a *riðdarasaga*³³ (though the viking-element is still one of the strongest in the younger version). Its hero's image changed in accordance with the saga's development. So did the hero's image in *Ævidrápa*, where the development was also complicated.

It is likely that the *mannjafnaðarvísur*, recited by Odd in the drinking contest with Sigurð and Sjólf, were (one of) the oldest layer(s) of verses related to Odd.³⁴ It should still be noted that in both versions of *OS* there are two kinds of *mannjafnaðarvísur* in the same poetic contest episode. The first group consists of the verses that Odd recites in the contest dialog; the second group are the verses (actually, a short poem) which Odd recites when his rivals are already drunk. When R.C.Boer attempts to restore **Die ursprüngliche ævidrápa* (correlating, in his view, with the older, short version of *OS*), he relies greatly on the *mannjafnaðarvísur*. He uses mainly those verses which do not have the *mannjafnaðar*-formula and are at the same time more narrative, since the emphasis is no longer on *níð*. Thus, the basis of his reconstruction is the second group of verses from the drinking contest.³⁵ We don't have any proof that either of these two groups is younger than the other one, and the border between the "contest verses" and "narrative verses" in this scene is very unclear. Still we could suggest that early in the development of the poetic corpus around Odd two kinds of tradition formed. They could use the same (or slightly changed) verses as the basis, but while some performers

³¹ This confusion must have occurred before Saxo, who already uses the poems as they are presented in *ÁS*.

³² Neither is in AM 344a 4to, but there we find Odd's words "...[...] En þó skal ek áðr yrkja kvæði um ævi mína". Síðan tekr hann til kvæðis." (*Qrvar-Odds saga* 1888:194.)

³³ Saxo mentions for instance some "Jathraie regulus Oddo"; more in: Bandle 1990:64ff.

³⁴ For *mannjafnaðarvísur* see: *FSN* II:311-320. While Oscar Bandle (1990:65) states that prosaic stories about Odd from the 11th-12th cent. served as the basis for the poems and verses which the saga contains, Lars Lönnroth (1979:104-5) argues that *mannjafnaðarvísur* Odd's in his poetic contest with Sigurð and Sjólf served as the basis for the prose saga. I will not intervene in this discussion and suggest considering the development of the prose and verse in the saga as a parallel development.

³⁵ *Qrvar-Odds saga* 1892:97-100. The verses taken from *mannjafnaðarvísur* are numbered 1, 6-8, 14-16¹⁻⁴.

put the emphasis on *mannjafnaðr*, others persented the verses as an autobiographical poem. This latter could have developed into **Die ursprüngliche ævidrápa* (and later, in *Ævidrápa*), while the *mannjafnaðarvísur* were taken into the saga as such.

The image of the male hero in *mannjafnaðarvísur* is typical for this genre. The verses enumerate what is *not* acceptable for a hero (and is therefore *níðsök*): to stay at home while others are in battle, to be flirtatious, false and slavish.³⁶ The real male hero is a strong, fearless warrior, a viking to whom fighting is his life's joy. The border between the two sexes is very definite at this stage. They don't shift much in **Die ursprüngliche ævidrápa* as it is restored by Boer. Its 15 verses are terse about the events it mentions, and it is rather reserved, though the characteristic contrast between the glorious past and the present which brings the hero nothing but death, is in the two last verses:

16. Nú hefk órar
 iþner talþar,
 þærs forþom vér
 framþar höfðom;
fjólþ's at segja
frá sþrom mínom
snotrom seggjom
 – sjá mon en efsta.

17. Þér skoloþ skunda
 til skips ofan
 heiler aller;
 – hér monk dveljask;
 bereþ Silkesif
 ok sonom okkrom
 kveþjo góþa;
 – komk eige þar.³⁷

The main difference between **Die ursprüngliche ævidrápa* and *Ævidrápa* is that the latter presents a spiritual and emotional hero. While the main aim of *mannjafnaðarvísur* and **Die ursprüngliche ævidrápa* is to praise the hero himself and his friends, *Ævidrápa* also aims to demonstrate the inner life of its hero Odd, as the second half of the first verse shows: “Hljóði seggir, // en ek segja mun // vígsvalendum // frá vinum mínum; // seint er at dylja, // sék, at mátti-t // skógs skæstafr // við sköpum gera.”³⁸ It is mainly this latter thread (trials and losses which Odd had to pass through in his hopeless struggle with the fortune, half-personified by Ögmund Eyþjófsbani) and especially the open-hearted way Odd talks about the death of his son, his many friends and finally his own, that gives the poem the shape of a lament. Odd is though never as emotional as Hjálmar or Hildibrand; he is not verbose about his feelings, and the poem lacks completely the weeping intonation characteristic of laments. This must be due to the fact that viking and adventure superheric features dominate in Odd over the features both of a knight and an “old” hero grieving his fortune. Odd's struggle with fortune is of another, typologically new spiritual kind.

As *Ævidrápa Odds* evolves from the extremally reserved *mannjafnaðarvísur*, we can see there development towards emotional expression, but it never matches the emotional strength of Hjálmar's and Hildibrand's *Death-Songs*. The new hero that evolves as the result

³⁶ See examples from *FSN* II:311-20, the first verse by Sjólf, the others by Odd (italics mine – YY):

Þú hefir, Oddr. *farit*
 með ólmustum
 ok bítlinga
 af borði þegñ,
 en ek einn
 af Útfsfjalli
 höggvinn skjóð
 í hendi þar.

Slótt við meyjar
málþing, Sjólf,
 meðan loga létum
 leika um kynni;
 unnum harðan
 Hadding drepinn,
 ok Ólvi var
 aldrs of synjat.

Sjólf, vart eigi,
þar er sverð ruðum
 hvöss á jarli
 fyr Hléseyju;
 en þú hallaðist
 heima á milli,
 kynmálasamr,
 kálfs ok þýjar.

Sigurór, vart eigi,
er á Sælundi felldak
bræðr böðharða,
 [...];
 en þú heima látt
 í höll konungs,
 skrókmálasamr,
 skauð hernunin.

³⁷ *Orvar-Odds saga* 1892:100. Italics mine – YY. It should be noted that the second half of verse # 16 and the whole verse # 17 are the same in the final redaction of *Ævidrápa* (in the younger version of *OS*).

³⁸ *FSN* II:340. This is parallel to the saga, which shows Odd's long spiritual development, from a teen-ager who beats the *völva* to a man who has comprehended the limits of being a human. See Bandle 1990.

of the “Icelandic *Herrenfrage*”³⁹ is not a “womanly man” but a strong male who restores the balance and the border between the sexes. Women (and love, especially courtly love) play an amazingly little role both in *Ævidrápa* and in the whole *OS*, always secondary and weak – even the troll’s daughter, the mother of Odd’s son.

As in **Hjálmar’s þáttur* and *ÁS*, the saga-writer balances carefully the saga prose and *Ævidrápa* in everything that relates to the image of the male hero. The most remarkable thing is that *Ævidrápa* emphasizes that Odd not only became Christian but also “[...] kunnak þá // Kristi at þjóna”.⁴⁰ Odd’s more profound Christianization in *Ævidrápa* can explain his milder style and sensitive expression in the poem (in the saga prose, Odd expresses his feelings with a fury fit comparable to *berserksgangr*, when his foster brother is killed – or a rough laughter). On the other hand, only the saga prose mentions Odd’s magic abilities (e.g. setting sail in the calm).⁴¹ Again, the saga allows double reading: having accepted Christianity, Odd still remains a viking and adventure hero.

In *fornaldarsögur* – which are typologically on the borderline between “old” heroic and “new” romance traditions – we find different images of manhood side by side, and also competition between these different images. The *fornaldarsögur* show that the image of the male hero is under intense reconsideration, with regard first of all to the questions of courage and other traditional virtues of the hero, but also of the hero’s attitude towards Christianity, sorcery, chivalry. It is important that while the image of womanhood developed steadily in the direction of a passive beloved lady or weeping widow, the image of manhood took a step in a similar direction (a courtly, “lady-like” knight), but the reaction that followed led, on the other hand, to the formation of a new super hero of war and adventure.

At around the same time the male image in Continental Europe was passing through a crisis which was caused, among other things, by the appearance of a new type of man, a “lady-like” knight of courtly romance.⁴² One can assume that the comparable crisis in Iceland, which was described in this paper, was greatly due not only to the influence of Christian culture but to some extent also of the European courtly romance, which seems to have reached Iceland, together with other manifestations of the so called renaissance of the 12th century,⁴³ much earlier than the first known translation of these romances (beg. of the 13th cent.).

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³⁹ Cf. McNamara 1994.

⁴⁰ *FSN* II:357, verse 56; compare the rather brief and dry prose description (*ibid.*:268-9).

⁴¹ *FSN* II:210, 276.

⁴² See: McNamara 1994; Burns 1997.

⁴³ Cf. Guðrún Nordal 2001:19, 361; *Íslensk bókmenntasaga* II:184ff.

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