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William Layher

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Starkaðr's Teeth

William Layher, Washington University

Starkaðr inn gamli, “Starkad the Old,” is renowned as one of the most valiant and perplexing heroes in the Norse tradition. The bulk of his tragic story is recounted in books six through eight of the *Gesta Danorum* (early thirteenth century) and in *Gautreks saga*, a *fornaldarsaga* (“saga of ancient times”) that dates from the latter part of the thirteenth century. Additional perspectives about Starkaðr’s origins, his deeds, and his downfall are provided in *Norna-Gests þáttir*, the *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, the U redaction of *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs*, and in a tenth-century skaldic stanza that is recorded only in *Snorra Edda*.¹ Taken as a whole, however, the sources do not provide a unified portrait of the hero. Rather, the composite is much akin to a Cubist painting, for each source refracts different angles and perspectives of what was obviously a contradictory—even fractured—heroic personality. Starkaðr is shown to be a valiant champion but also a coward who flees the battlefield; a loyal retainer to kings like Ingeld, Víkarr, and Olo but also a renegade murderer of two of them; a committed moralist who is himself plagued by self-loathing; a hero granted three lifespans but cursed to commit a shameful crime in each; a gifted poet who is condemned to forget his verses as soon as he utters them; and, not least of all, he is revealed to be a man whose humanity is repeatedly called into question.

On this last point, the sources are in agreement: there was indeed something unnatural and unsettling about Starkaðr’s embodiment. Nowhere else is this more clearly articulated, perhaps, than in the account of Starkaðr’s death in book eight of the *Gesta Danorum*. According to Saxo, the hero, weary of life and anxious to avoid dying an unheroic

1. J. Olrik and H. Ræder, eds., *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, 2 vols. (Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1931). For an English translation of the first nine books see Hilda Ellis Davidson and Peter Fisher, eds., *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes, Books I-IX*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979–80). For *Gautreks saga* see Wilhelm Ranisch, ed., *Die Gautrekssaga in zwei Fassungen*, vol. XI, *Palaestra* (Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1900). The *Sögubrot* is found in “Sögubrot af fornkonungum,” in *Danakonunga Sögur*, ed. Bjarni Guðnason, *Íslensk fornrit* (Reykjavik: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 1982), 46–71. For *Hervarar saga* see Christopher Tolkein, ed., *Saga Heiðreks Konungs ins Vitra* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960). A detailed list of Starkaðr references in the Nordic sources is provided in Marlene Ciklamini, “The Problem of Starkaðr,” *Scandinavian Studies*, 43 (1971), 169–88.

“straw death” in bed, wanders the byways of Denmark in search of a man who will serve as his killer. He soon finds a willing candidate, and after a brief conversation with Hader—the son of a man whom the hero had killed years earlier—Starcatherus offers him his own sword and bows his head to accept the fatal blow. But when Hader strikes off the head of the most illustrious hero in the Norse tradition, Starcatherus’s life force is not immediately extinguished. Rather, Saxo writes that the decapitated head “snapped at the soil with its teeth as it hit the ground, the fury of the dying jaws indicating his savage temper.”²

The phrase “to bite the grass” is an ancient locution in heroic epic, which Saxo likely knew through an attestation in the *Aeneid*. Its use in the *Gesta Danorum* stands as a striking departure from the norm, however. Unlike Homer and Virgil, who use the formula as a florid idiom to mark the death and collapse of a slain hero, Saxo takes the phrase literally. Here he commemorates, for the last and final time, the brute, animalistic ferocity that lurked just underneath Starkaðr’s skin.³ It is certainly possible to see in this enduring image of Starkaðr’s jaws biting at the grass a grotesque rearticulation of the venerable “last words” topos in the Norse sagas, in which the dying hero utters a brief yet telling phrase that serves as his epigraph.⁴ It is significant, however, that Starkaðr’s legacy is set not

2. *Quod corpori avulsum impactumque terrae glaebam morsu carpsisse fertur, ferocitatem animi moribundi oris atrocitate declarans. Percussor tamen, promissis fraudem subesse veritus, saltu non incautus abstinuit.* Olrik and Ræder, eds., *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, I, p. 228. The English translation is from Davidson and Fisher, eds., *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes, Books I–IX*, p. 252.

3. Saxo likely did not know the oldest recorded attribution, from the *Illiad*, but the Homeric and Virgilian examples agree that the phrase is value-neutral: it says nothing about the valor of the slain heroes, instead merely illustrating the degree to which the mighty had fallen—quite literally, down to earth (*Illiad* 2.418; *Aeneid* 11.418). Saxo’s account of Starkaðr’s death shows intriguing parallels with the depiction of the death of Starkaðr found in stanza 27 of the Eddic poem *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II*, according to which the hero’s body is alleged to have fought on after the head had been cut off: *þann sá ec gylfa grimmúðgastan, / er barðiz bohr var á brot hofuð* ‘I saw that hero, most brazen for battle, how the body (lit. ‘torso’) fought on though the head was gone.’ Gustav Neckel and Hans Kuhn, eds., *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern*, 5 ed., *Germanische Bibliothek: Reihe 4, Texte* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1983), p. 155. Although recent scholarship questions whether the *Starcaðr konungr* (27.1) of the Eddic poem is identical to the popular Old Norse hero, such hesitations are unfounded. Klaus von See et al., eds., *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda. Band 4: Heldenlieder* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 2004), pp. 713–16. The grammar and syntax of the attribution in 27, 5–6 (*þann . . . gylfa*) can only take *Starcaðr* as its antecedent, and the etymology of the exceedingly-rare term *gylfi* for ‘leader’ calls forth negative associations to unnaturalness (cf. ON *gylfa* ‘ogre, beast’) that are characteristic for the way in which Starkaðr is represented in Old Norse. In addition, the parallels between the Helgi poem and the *Gesta Danorum*—of death by decapitation and disembodied, post-mortem rage—strongly suggests that the Eddic and prose texts are indeed referring to the same figure. The only significant difference between the accounts in *Helgakviða Hundingsbana II* and in Saxo concerns the part of the body that lives on after death: in the *Gesta Danorum*, it is not the headless torso, but the head.

4. See the discussion, with broad applicability to the Old Norse tradition as well, in Joseph Harris, “Beowulf’s Last Words,” *Speculum*, 67 (1992), 1–32.

by the word, but by the flesh, for the abnormalities and contradictions that characterized Starkaðr's ethos as a hero were incarnate from the very beginning in his unusual and uncanny body.

The teeth that snap at the grass in fury are an apt memorial for this complicated hero, for indeed, as this essay will show, it is through his teeth that Starkaðr lives on in the Norse tradition. At the centerpiece of this study are a number of "sightings" of Starkaðr's teeth that were attested in some medieval Danish and Icelandic annals from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and again in *Norna-Gests þáttir*, a fourteenth-century Icelandic tale with an overtly historical focus. I argue below that these unusual accounts reveal a great deal about the intersection of heroic embodiment and heroic incarnation in the medieval Norse tradition; and further, that Starkaðr's teeth—an uncanny remnant of the vanished body—can offer us remarkable insight into the ways in which Norse audiences of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries engaged with the extravagant and wondrous deeds of their heroic past.⁵

SIGHTINGS

The medieval Icelandic *Lögmanns-annáll* notes that in the year 1404 or 1405, the cleric Arne Olafsson and his wife Sigríð Erlendsdóttir were in Norway. From thence, Arne's travels apparently carried him southward, to the Continent, for the annal states that Arne saw some marvelous relics on display in an unnamed cathedral in northern Europe. Among the relics that Arne saw were the cloak of the Virgin Mary, some items of clothing worn by Jesus and John the Baptist, and two other objects of secular rather than sacred provenance: the hilt of Sigurðr Fáfnisbani's sword, and a large molar tooth:

Arne Olafs son var þar þá með hustru Sigríde Erlendz dottur oc var settur penitenciaríus ollum norænum monnum. þar sa hann serk vorar fru sancte Marie. oc reifa vars herra oc belti. oc duk Johannes baptiste j þeim stad. er Affrica heitir. sa hann hiallted af sverdi Sigurðar Fofnes bana ok mælltist honnum þa .x. fota langt (. . .) þar var oc taunn er sogd var ur Starkadi gamla. Var hun þverar handar a leingd oc breidd. fyrir þat er j holldinu hafði stadit.⁶

5. On wonder as a medieval phenomenon see Lorraine Daston and Katherine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); Caroline Walker Bynum, "Wonder," *The American Historical Review*, 102 (1997), 1–26.

6. Gustav Storm, *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578* (Christiania: Det norske historiske Kildeskrift-fond, 1888), p. 288. In his commentary on this entry in *Lögmanns-annáll*, Herrmann misinterprets *holldinu* as 'hilt,' concluding that Starkaðr's tooth must have served as the hilt or pommel of Sigurðr's sword. A better reading is *holldinu < hold* 'flesh,' here meaning 'mouth.'

Arne Ólafsson was there at the time with his wife Sigrid Erlendsdóttir, and he was named confessor for all the men in the North. There he saw the cloak of our Lady the Virgin Mary, and the swaddling clothes and belt of our Lord, and the cloak from John the Baptist. In the city called *Affrica*. He saw the hilt of Sigurd Fafnisbani's sword, which was said to be 10 feet long (. . .). The tooth that was said to come from Starkad the Old was also there. It was three spans long and wide. At one time it used to be in his mouth.

The entry in *Lögmanns-annáll* appears to be a straightforward account of Arne's travels, but several of the key details in this text remain enigmatic—among them, the significance of *Affrica* and the credibility of the entire passage about Starkaðr's tooth. Determining where Arne actually was in 1404 or 1405 is not an easy task, for the highly compressed and staccato diction in *Lögmanns-annáll*, especially the annalist's repeated use of the adverbial *þar* 'there' for all spatial references, makes it difficult to reconstruct Arne's whereabouts.⁷ Nevertheless, *Affrica* is not what it appears to be; it is, in fact, a garbled reference to Aachen, a major pilgrimage site in the early fifteenth century and the repository, in the St. Mary's Church established by Charlemagne, of exactly the same four holy relics that the *Lögmanns-annáll* attributes to John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary.⁸

The situation is less clear with the next two objects. While the scribe goes on to mention that Arne saw (*sa hann*) the hilt of Sigurðr's sword, its location is not revealed; there is no *þar* in this case to indicate that Arne was still in Aachen, and indeed, the context and punctuation of the preceding phrase *j þeim stad. er Affrica heitir* suggests that this attribution applies only to the holy relics just mentioned, not to the objects that follow. Yet regardless of where the sword hilt and the massive tooth might

Paul Herrmann, *Die Heldensagen des Saxo Grammaticus. Erläuterungen zu den ersten neun Büchern der dänischen Geschichte des Saxo Grammaticus, II. Teil: Kommentar* (Leipzig: Wilhelm Engelmann, 1922), p. 528.

7. The confusion extends also to the identity of the man who allegedly saw these relics in *Affrica*. Herrmann mistakenly identifies him as Vilchin Hinriksson, bishop of Skalhólt (d. 1405), an error that has perpetuated itself in the scholarship; see Herrmann, *Die Heldensagen des Saxo Grammaticus. Erläuterungen zu den ersten neun Büchern der dänischen Geschichte des Saxo Grammaticus, II. Teil: Kommentar*, p. 528; Julia Zernack, "Gests Erzählungen. Germanische Mythologie und der *ordo narrationis* in der isländischen Geschichtsschreibung des Spätmittelalters," in *Präsenz des Mythos. Konfigurationen einer Denkform in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, ed. Udo Friedrich and Bruno Quast, *Trends in Medieval Philology* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 299–328. On the historical value of the medieval Icelandic annals, see Eldbjörg Haug, "The Icelandic Annals as Historical Sources," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 22 (1997), 263–74; Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, "The Flateyjarbók Annals as Historical Source: A Response to Eldbjörg Haug," *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 27 (2002), 233–41.

8. Viola Belghaus, *Der erzählte Körper: die Inszenierung der Reliquien Karls des Grossen und Elisabeth von Thüringen* (Berlin: Reimer, 2005). There is nothing in the historical record to suggest that a massive tooth (or, for that matter, a huge sword hilt) was ever in the medieval collections held by the *Kaiserdom* in Aachen.

have been, it is notable that the scribe of *Lögmanns-annáll* mentions them in tandem. Here, again, the adverb *þar* functions as a ligature, indicating that the sword hilt and the tooth were in the same location: *þar var oc taunn* ‘the tooth was also there’—wherever *there* happened to be. In this account, the equivalencies are carefully balanced. Not only do the sword and tooth form a coherent set of heroic objects—a complement to the religious relics associated with the infancy and ministry of Christ—but the viewing attributed to Arne Ólafsson implies that the saints as well as the heroes of old were equally deserving of *admiratio*.⁹

The next sighting took place in Denmark. According to an entry in the thirteenth-century *Annales Ryenses* from Ryd monastery, around the year 1252 a knight named Henrik Æmælthorp transported a massive tooth he had acquired in Denmark back to Germany. The tooth was said to belong to “Stacathær”

... huius dens per Henricum Æmælthorp militem de Dacia in Teutonium est portatus pro miraculo habens 6 pollices in magnitudine.¹⁰

... whose tooth was carried by Henrik Æmælthorp from Denmark into Germany. A wondrous thing, it was six thumbs in size.

Henrik Æmælthorp, a northern German knight from Emmelndorf near Hannover, was a prominent figure in Danish politics during the turbulent years following the sudden death of king Abel in 1252. The demise of king Abel led to a contested succession for the crown of Denmark. Ultimately, Abel's young son Valdemar III was passed over and his uncle, Christopher I, was elected king. In response to this slight, Henrik Æmælthorp—a supporter of Valdemar III—led a rebellion against Christopher during the

9. There is one critical difference between the sword and the tooth, however—their unequal status in the manuscript record of *Lögmanns-annáll*. The bulk of *Lögmanns-annáll* is transmitted in manuscript AM 420 B (late 14th century), with the first ten leaves attributed to Einar Hafliðsson (d. 1362/1363). Additional entries were added through the end of the 14th century. The *Lögmanns-annáll* was probably continued into the first decades of the fifteenth century as well, but these leaves are missing from AM 420 B and the entries are known only through a later copy, AM 420 C, which dates from the middle of the 16th century. Arne Magnusson's alleged sighting of the teeth in *Affrica* is attested only in the younger, 16th-century copy. And yet, even this copy shows signs of further redaction, because the entire passage concerning Starkaðr's teeth (*þar var oc taunn er sogd var ur Starkadi gamla. Var hun þærar handar a leingd oc breidd. fyrir þat er j holldinu hafdi stadi*) was interpolated into AM 420 C as a marginal entry, in the same hand, directly below the entry about Sigurðr's sword. The significance of this scribal juxtaposition—which concerns Starkaðr alone—is unclear.

10. Erik Kroman, ed., *Danmarks middelalderlige annaler* (Copenhagen: Selskabet for udgivelse af kilder til dansk historie, 1980), p. 157. The oldest manuscript of the *Annales Ryenses* (Hamburg Stadtbibl. 98b in scrinio) was copied around 1300, and its last entry is dated 1288. Kroman, ed., *Danmarks middelalderlige annaler*, p. 149. A brief overview about Henrik Æmælthorp is provided in S. Cedergreen Bech, ed., *Dansk biografisk leksikon*, 16 vols. (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1984), XVI, p. 171.

first years of his reign.¹¹ In 1252 and 1253 Henrik besieged castles and fortified cities across sections of Denmark.¹²

Henrik's possession of this large tooth was clearly important news at the time, for the abrupt reference to him cited here interrupts the ordered chronology of events in the *Annales Ryenses*. At the point at which Henrik Æmælthorp is mentioned, the *Annales* had been tracing the royal line of kingship in Denmark's distant past, and the annalist, closely following the *Gesta Danorum* as his source, had progressed only as far as the reign of Omund, who reigned in the late eighth or early ninth century. Suddenly, however, after noting that Starkaðr had died during this same era, the annalist interpolates the brief notice about a contemporary figure from the thirteenth century—Henrik—who had carried the slain hero's enormous tooth out of Denmark.

While the entry in the *Annales Ryenses* documents the "circulation" of Starkaðr's teeth in the Nordic tradition in the middle of the thirteenth century, the first textual account of how Starkaðr lost his teeth is several decades younger. It is found in *Norna-Gests þáttir*, an Icelandic composition from the early fourteenth century that is typically transmitted as part of *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar in mesta*.¹³ The protagonist of *Norna-Gests þáttir* is Gestr, a mysterious one-eyed wanderer (actually Óðinn in disguise), who entertains the Norwegian king Óláfr Tryggvason with tales of his encounters with figures from Scandinavia's heroic past. Gestr claims to have been with Sigurðr Fáfnisbani in Denmark, and he regales the court

11. For more on the turbulent state of Danish politics in the years around 1250, see Erich Hoffmann, "Der Kampf um die dänische Krone (1241–1340)," in *Königserhebung und Thronfolgeordnung in Dänemark bis zum Ausgang des Mittelalters*, Beiträge zur Geschichte und Quellenkunde des Mittelalters, 5 (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1976), 126–46; Kai Hørby, *Status regni dacie. Studier in Christoffelinjens ægteskabs- og alliancepolitik 1252–1319* (Copenhagen: Den danske historiske Forening, 1977); Erich Hoffmann, "Spätmittelalter und Reformationszeit," in *Geschichte Schleswig-Holsteins*, ed. Olaf Klose (Neumünster: Karl Wachholtz, 1981), 49–57.

12. (1252) *Henricus de Hemmelthorp occupavit Møn. (1253) Rex Christopherus tradidit Valdemaro, filio regis Abel, ducatum vexillo apud Kalding. Fuit bellum Skelfiskøræ inter Christopherum et Henricum Æmellthorp. Møn capitur et Svinaburg. Et hostes regis trucidantur. (1253) Bellum fuit Skyælfiskør inter Christoforum et Henricum Hæmælthorp.* Kroman, ed., *Danmarks middalderlige annaler*, pp. 64, 86, 112, 262.

13. On the composition and literary context of *Norna-Gests þáttir* see Jan de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, 2 vols., vol. 15–16, *Grundriss der Germanischen Philologie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1964–67), II, p. 478; Joseph Harris and Thomas D. Hill, "Gestr's 'Prime Sign': Source and Signification in *Norna-Gests þáttir*," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi*, 104 (1989), 103–22; Zernack, "Gests Erzählungen. Germanische Mythologie und der *ordo narrationis* in der isländischen Geschichtsschreibung des Spätmittelalters"; Merrill Kaplan, "The Irruption of the Past in *Norna-Gests þáttir* and Allied Texts" (University of California, 2006). In addition to the normalized edition by Guðni Jónsson below, see also "Norna Gests þáttir," in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzel, 2000), 15–38. For a critical edition of the þáttir itself, see Adele Cipolla, ed., *Il racconto di Nornagestr. Edizione critica, traduzione e commento* (Verona: Edizioni Fiorini, 1996).

with a story about a strange encounter that Sigurðr had with a giant-like warrior named Starkaðr:

Í þeira liði sást einn maðr, mikill ok sterkr. Drap þessi maðr menn ok hesta, svá at ekki stóð við, því at hann var líkari jötnum en mönnum. Gunnarr bað Sigurð sækja í móti mannskemi þessum, því at hann kvað eigi svá mundu duga. Sigurðr réðst nú í móti þeim mikla manni ok nokkurir menn með honum, ok váru þá flestir þess ófúsir. “Finnur vér þá skjótt inn mikla mann,” segir Gestr, “ok frétti Sigurðr hann at nafni ok hvaðan hann væri.” Hann kveðst Starkaðr heita Stórverksson norðan af Fenhring ór Noregi. Sigurðr kveðst hans heyrt hafa getit ok oftast at illu. “Eru slíkir menn eigi sparandi til ófagnaðar.” Starkaðr mælti: “Hverr er þessi maðr, er mik lýtir svá mjök í orðum?” Sigurðr sagði til sín. Starkaðr mælti: “Ertu kallaðr Fáfnisbani?” “Svá er,” segir Sigurðr. Starkaðr vill þá undan leita, en Sigurðr snýr eftir ok færir á lopt sverðit Gram ok lamdi hann með hjöltunum jaxlgarðinn, svá at hrutu ór honum tveir jaxlar. Var þat meiðsla högg. Sigurðr bað þá mannhundinn brott dragast þaðan. Starkaðr snarast þá í brott þaðan. En ek tók annan jaxlinn ok hefi ek með mér. Er sá nú haför í klukkustreng í Danmörk ok vegr sjau aura. Þykkir mönnum forvitni at sjá hann þar.¹⁴

In the opposing army there stood a man, great and strong. He killed both men and horses, so that no one could withstand him for he was more like a giant than a man. Gunnarr told Sigurðr to mount an attack on this devil, because Gunnarr said he himself would not succeed in such an attempt. Sigurðr attacked the big man and some others with him, and most of them were unwilling in this. “Let us then quickly meet the big man,” says Gestr, “and Sigurðr should ask him his name and where he is from.” He said he was named Starkaðr Stórverksson, from the north of Fenhring in Norway. Sigurðr said he had heard news of him before, and most of it bad. “Such men are not lacking in wickedness,” he said. Starkaðr asked, “Who is this man who is talking such big talk?” Sigurðr identified himself. Starkaðr said, “Are you called Fáfnisbani?” “That’s right,” said Sigurðr. Then Starkaðr wanted to escape, but Sigurðr turned after him and raised his sword Gram into the air and dealt him a strong blow on the jaw with the hilt of the sword, so that two molars shot out of his mouth. That was a most grievous blow. Sigurðr told the scoundrel to get lost from there, and Starkaðr then turned away from there. I took one of the two teeth, and I carried it with me. And now it hangs on the bell-rope in Denmark, and weighs seven ounces. People think it a curiosity to see it there.

If assumptions about the composition of *Norna-Gests þáttr* are correct, namely that the text was composed in Iceland around 1300, then the *þáttr* cannot be the source of the entry in the *Annales Ryenses*. Instead, a common ancestor is likely—most probably, a motif drawn from the (largely unrecovered) oral tradition that flourished in the Eastern regions of mainland Scandi-

14. *Norna-Gests þáttr*, in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, I, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan, 1943), pp. 323–24. In manuscript AM 62, fol. the cathedral is identified as Lund cathedral (*Er sa hefðr nu j klocku streng j Lvndi j Danmörk*) and the tooth is said to weigh six ounces (*ok vegr vj aura*). “Norna-Gests þáttr.”

navia, the geographic boundaries of which are revealed by the sightings themselves: the teeth are seen *í Danmörk . . . í Lundi í Danmörk . . . í þeim stad er Affrica heitir*; and (according to a Danish annal) transported *de Dacia* into Germany.¹⁵

Taken as a whole, the details in *Norna-Gests þátr* and in the *Annales Ryenses* and *Lögmanns-annáll* confirm that on several occasions in different parts of the Nordic world, the teeth of this particular hero were exhibited as wondrous objects—in a true sense, as heroic relics—in the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries.¹⁶ The term “relic” is fully justified for these objects, I argue, not only because of the conspicuously devotional milieu in which the teeth were displayed (cf. *Lögmanns-annáll* and *Norna-Gests þátr*), but also because the teeth—like the bones of the saints—take on an explicitly mediating function: they serve as the focal point for a vast array of discourses about bodily construction and dissolution, about the persistence of (heroic) veneration and about contact with the Divine, the inexplicable, and the wondrous. And yet, these teeth are possessed of a strangeness that is quite unlike the sanctity that typically surrounds religious relics. The teeth, in contrast, appear excessive, abnormal, singularly uncanny; they are out of place and off the charts.

Although the teeth appear in the historical and quasi-historical sources as optical proof of the physical existence of an ancient hero, their enormous size calls into question the processes that set a hero of that stature into being. Indeed, as discussed below, the teeth are but one manifestation of a longstanding and energetic debate within the literary sources of the thirteenth century about the makeup of Starkaðr’s body and the consequences of its difference. While other heroic traditions in Anglo-Saxon Britain and in medieval and late-medieval Germany likewise explored the dimensions of the heroic body, the Norse examples concerning Starkaðr’s

15. There may be some justification as to why certain redactions of *Norna-Gests þátr* specifically mention Lund cathedral as the final resting place for Starkaðr’s giant tooth. It is possible that this location was encouraged by analogy with the mysterious and ancient “jätte Finn” (‘giant Finn’) figure that was carved into a stone pillar in the crypt of Lund cathedral in the late 11th century. In this scenario, like has attracted like: the trace of one giant-figure in Lund attracts the relics of another. Similarly, the reference to the “bell rope” (*klukkustreng*) has a mythological context. As giants in Germanic folklore were believed to be afraid of the sound of ringing bells, using the tooth as a weight at the end of the rope seems an appropriate fate for a problematic hero like Starkaðr.

16. Stephen Mitchell touches on the topic of pagan relics in Old Norse, and wonders about the influence of the *fornaldarsögur* on these objects. Stephen A. Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 135–36. Important insight into the “object-oriented” reception of *Heldensage* in a late-medieval German context is offered by Klaus Graf, “Heroisches Herkommen: Überlegungen zum Begriff der ‘historischen Überlieferung’ am Beispiel heroischer Traditionen,” in *Das Bild der Welt in der Volkserzählung*, ed. Leander Petzoldt, et al., *Beiträge zur Europäischen Ethnologie und Folklore. Reihe B: Tagungsberichte und Materialien* (Frankfurt a.M., Berlin, Bern, New York: Peter Lang, 1993), pp. 45–64.

teeth are unique and culturally distinct. Unlike the claims in the eighth-century *Liber Monstrorum* about the giant-sized bones of Hygelac lying on display along the riverbank of the Rhine, or the account in the *Liber de natura rerum* of Thomas of Cantimpré about the discovery of the enormous skeleton of an ancient hero named Theuton along the Danube (and its subsequent exhibition in thirteenth-century Vienna), or the entry in the *Chronica civitatis Wormatiensis* about the attempted excavation of Siegfried's giant-sized bones in 1488 in the city of Worms, the medieval Scandinavian texts about Starkaðr's teeth were not influenced by the pull of the historicist "Riesen und Recken" topos of the Middle Ages, according to which the heroes of yore were believed to have been as large as giants. In the former cases, the somatic augmentation of the hero was inspired by the testimony of Genesis 6,4 about antediluvian giants living *in illo tempore*, in the age of greatness, and the subsequent search for (and exhibition of) the giant-sized bones attributed to prominent heroes has much to do with *memoria*, nostalgia for a vanished heroic age, and the desire to assert proto-nationalist claims about belongingness and ownership of territory.¹⁷ With Starkaðr's teeth, the hermeneutic is of a different stripe. Here, the fragmented body parts do not call attention to the diminution of mankind since the close of the *Heldenzeitalter* as much as they attest to the material Otherness of the hero in his own time.

My approach is indebted to the work of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, who argued that it was possible to apprehend the preoccupations and anxieties that were often sublimated in medieval cultures by measuring the unnatural, the singular, the extravagant. Thus one is able to set the points of reference for what is held as a standard.¹⁸ But herein lies the problem: it is exceedingly difficult, given the contradictory sources, to get an accurate measurement of Starkaðr. Indeed, the scholarship has been wrestling with this issue for over a century. Much of the older research on Starkaðr sought to unravel

17. John Flood, "Theologi et gigantes," *Modern Language Review*, 62 (1967), 654–60. Jan Dirk Müller, *Gedechnus. Literatur und Hofgesellschaft um Maximilian I*, ed. Joachim Bumke, et al., *Forschungen zur Geschichte der älteren deutschen Literatur* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1982), pp. 190–91; Walter Stephens, "'De historia gigantum': Theological Anthropology before Rabelais," *Traditio*, 40 (1984), 43–89; Hannes Kästner, "'Der großmächtige Riese und Recke Theuton,'" *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 110 (1991), 68–97; William Layher, "Siegfried the Giant: Heroic Representation and the Amplified Body in the >Heldenbuch< of 1479," in *Kulturen des Manuskriptzeitalters*, ed. Art Groos and Hans-Jochen Schiewer, *Transatlantische Studien zu Mittelalter und Früher Zeuzeit* (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2004), pp. 181–215.

18. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 3–25; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "The Order of Monsters: Monster Lore and Medieval Narrative Traditions," in *Telling Tales. Medieval Narratives and the Folk Tradition*, ed. Francesca Canadé Sautman, Diana Conchado, and Giuseppe Carlo Di Scipio (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), pp. 37–58; Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, Medieval Cultures, 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

the discrepancies in the hero by reconstructing an archetypal figure, but the results have not withstood the test of time.¹⁹ Recent treatments have, in the main, set aside the synthesizing source studies of the past and focused instead on Starkaðr's connections to the Indo-European and Norse heroic traditions, but none of these have fully embraced the fundamental contradictions within this character.²⁰ I argue here that it is precisely these contradictions that made Starkaðr significant. As a creature whose very existence defines the borders of the possible and whose abnormal and misshapen body engenders fascination and repulsion in equal measure, Starkaðr's embodiment is strikingly similar to that of medieval monsters—those blemmyæ, monopods, cyclopoi, and cynocephalic creatures, among others—whose existence at the margins of the civilized world simultaneously threatened and upheld the stability of the natural order even as they served as a warning about the dangers of category breakdown and the limits of the anthropomorphic frame.²¹ The sum total of Starkaðr's many transgressions (ethical, somatic, and mythical) reveal him to be the epitome of category

19. The most significant contributions to date include Axel Olrik, *Danmarks Heltedigtning, anden del: Starkad den gamle og den yngre Skjoldungsrække* (Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1910); Herrmann, *Die Heldensagen des Saxo Grammaticus. Erläuterungen zu den ersten neun Büchern der dänischen Geschichte des Saxo Grammaticus, II. Teil: Kommentar*, pp. 410–67 and 557–68; Wilhelm Ranisch, “Die Dichtung von Starkað,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, 72 (1935), 113–28; Jan de Vries, “Die Starkadsage,” *Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift*, 36 (1955), 281–97; de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, II, p. 166.

20. Different perspectives on Starkaðr's status as an Óðinn hero or Þórr hero are presented in Georges Dumézil, “The Three Sins of Starcatherus,” in *The Destiny of the Warrior* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 82–95; Jens Kristian Lindhart Boll, “Starkad og Egil Skallagrímsson som Odinshelte,” *Religionsvidenskabeligt Tidsskrift*, 9 (1986), 33–47; Edgar C. Polomé, “Starkað: Óðinn- or Þórr-Hero?,” in *Helden und Heldensage. Otto Gschwanter zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Hermann Reichert and Günter Zimmermann (Vienna: Fassbaender, 1990), pp. 267–86. On his connections to the Indo-European heroic tradition, see Dumézil and D. A. Miller, “Two Warriors and Two Swords: The Legacy of Starkað,” *Journal of Indo-European Studies*, 19 (1991), 309–23. See also Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, “Starkaðr, Loki and Egill Skallagrímsson,” in *Sagas of the Icelanders: A Book of Essays*, ed. John Tucker (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), pp. 146–59; James Milroy, “Starkaðr: An Essay in Interpretation,” *Saga-Book*, 19 (1975–76), 118–38. Inge Skovgaard-Petersen, “Starkad in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum*,” in *History and Heroic Tale: A Symposium*, ed. Tore Nyberg, et al. (Odense: Odense University Press, 1985), pp. 207–22. On Starkaðr as a *bjargvætti*, a mythical “giant helper” figure, see Ciklamini, “The Problem of Starkaðr.”

21. For more on *monstrum* and the understanding of monstrogenesis in the Middle Ages, see David Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), pp. 12–18. On monsters in the Middle Ages more generally, see John Block Friedman, *The Monstrous Races in Medieval Art and Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature 1150–1750*; Timothy S. Jones and David A. Sprunger, eds., *Marvels, Monsters and Miracles. Studies in the Medieval and Early Modern Imaginations*, Studies in Medieval Culture, 42 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2002); Lisa Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages* (New York, London: Routledge, 2005).

breakdown writ large, and as such a teratological reading of Starkaðr—the hero as monster—has much to recommend it. Indeed, as writes Isidore of Seville, discernment lies at the heart of monstrosity itself, for the root of the word *monstrum* is traced back to the verb *monstrare*, ‘to show.’ Isidore concludes that monsters exist in order to make known certain hidden truths about the natural world and the Divine plan:

Monstra vero a monitu dicta, quod aliquid significando demonstrent, sive quod statim monstrent quid appereat.

Monsters, in fact, are so called as warnings, because they explain something of meaning, or because they make known at once what is to become visible.²²

As argued below, however, I maintain that what Starkaðr's teeth “explain” about the limits of the heroic body is fundamentally different from the lessons offered by other epics, such as *Beowulf* or *Grettis saga*, in which the opposition between man and monster is likewise destabilized.

A common feature of many studies on heroic monstrosity in the medieval Germanic tradition is an interest in the assimilation of the hero to his non-human opponent during moments of particularly brutal combat.²³ This somatic breakdown is made visible through the poets' use of ambiguous pronouns during battle scenes,²⁴ ambivalent terminology²⁵ (e.g. Anglo-Saxon *rinc* ‘warrior’ used also to describe Grendel), and other techniques,

22. Isidore of Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi: Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), p. 113.2–3. Translation from Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous in the Middle Ages*, 31.

23. On the concept of monstrous assimilation, see Walter Haug, “Die Grausamkeit der Heldensage: Neue gattungstheoretische Überlegungen zur heroischen Dichtung,” in *Studien zum Altgermanischen: Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, ed. Heiko Uecker (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994), pp. 303–26. Further discussion of the monster/hero dialectic is found in Katherine O’Keeffe, “*Beowulf*, Lines 702b–836: Transformations and the Limits of the Human,” *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 23 (1981), 484–94; Manish Sharma, “Metalepsis and Monstrosity: The Boundaries of Narrative Structure in *Beowulf*,” *Studies in Philology*, 102 (2005), 247–79; Susan M. Kim, “‘As I Once Did with Grendel’: Boasting and Nostalgia in *Beowulf*,” *Modern Philology*, 103 (2005), 4–27; Richard L. Harris, “The Deaths of Grettir and Grendel: A New Parallel,” *Scripta Islandica*, 24 (1973), 25–53; Anatoly Liberman, “*Beowulf*—Grettir,” in *Germanic Dialects, Linguistic and Philological Investigations*, ed. Bela Brogyanyi and Thomas Krömmelbein (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1986), pp. 353–401; Andy Orchard, *Pride and Prodigies. Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf-Manuscript* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1995).

24. For example, *Beowulf*'s battle with the dragon, where the phrase *hē on searwum bād* ‘he [or it], armored, waited’ has two possible antecedents—*Beowulf* as *winia bealdor* ‘lord of retainers’ but also *se wrym* ‘the dragon.’ Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, eds., *Beowulf. An Edition with Relevant Shorter Texts* (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), v. 2567–68. Further references from this edition are cited parenthetically by verse.

25. See Grendel as *rinc* (720); likewise the term *āglæca*, pl. *āglæcean* ‘heroes, warriors’ used of *Beowulf* and Grendel simultaneously: *Næs ðā long to ðon, þæt ðā āglæcean hȳ eft gemetton* ‘It was not long before the *āglæcean* clashed again’ (2591–2); and note also the use of the term *gebolgen* ‘swollen with rage’ to describe the bodies of Grendel (723), *Beowulf* (1539, 2401, 2550), the sea-monsters (1431), and the dragon (2220, 2304).

such as a sudden reversal of perspective.²⁶ In these scenarios, monstrosity results from the failure of the heroic body to preserve its integrity under moments of intense stress. But in each case these monstrous transformations are both temporary as well as situational; after the resolution of combat the hero returns to the “baseline” status of normative humanity. With Starkaðr, in contrast, the somatic irregularities are indwelling in the hero from the very start. There is no condition under which the hero can escape his hybridity, nor do the epics and heroic poems in which Starkaðr appears ever resolve the issue conclusively. Indeed, it is not until the huge teeth are actually sighted in the historical and pseudo-historical writings of medieval Scandinavia that the longstanding doubts, accusations, inferences, and ambiguities about Starkaðr’s identity are finally laid to rest.

STARKAÐR THE MONSTER

Before we consider the meaning of Starkaðr’s teeth, our first task will be to trace the extent of Starkaðr’s monstrous embodiment in the Norse heroic tradition. Shades of a fundamental monstrosity can already be discerned in the oldest source in which Starkaðr appears, a brief tenth-century skaldic stanza by Vetrliði. This poem, often interpreted as a hymn of praise to Þórr, celebrates his prowess in slaying giants.

Leggi brauzt Leiknar,
lamðir Þrívalda
steyppðir Starkeði
stétt of Gjǫlp dauða

You smashed the limbs of Leikn;
you bashed Þrívaldi;
you knocked down Starkaðr;
you trod Gjǫlp dead underfoot.²⁷

The stanza has a strong somatic focus. Lindow has shown that each of the giants mentioned in this stanza—Leikn, Þrívaldi, Starkaðr, and Gjǫlp—can be associated with specific parts of the giant body (legs, heads, the sexual organs, and so on) that were deformed or present in monstrous overabun-

26. Such as Grettir bursting by night into a hall filled with unsuspecting warriors, “and those inside . . . thought he must be a monster” (*ok hugðu, at óvættir myndi vera*). Guðni Jónsson, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, vol. 7, *Íslenzk fornrit* (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1936), p. 130. With respect to Beowulf’s battle with the dragon in the dragon’s lair, “. . . the difference between foe (*feond*) and defender (*stearcheort*, ‘stouthearted one’) is a question of perspective, with each term forming the secret interior of the other.” Cohen, *Of Giants: Sex, Monsters, and the Middle Ages*, p. 27.

27. Old Norse translation by Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North. The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1964), p. 85.

dance in each case.²⁸ Skaldic kennings in *Skáldskaparmál* and elsewhere confirm that Þrivaldi was a giant with nine heads, and Lindow associates the giantess Leikn with legs because Þórr is said to break Leikn's limbs (ON *leggr* 'leg, hollow bone'). Gjálp, who attempted to drown Þórr with her urine stream or menstrual blood during Þórr's visit to Geirrðör, is clearly linked to the feminine reproductive organs.²⁹ What about Starkaðr's body, then? While Vetrliði's stanza praises Þórr for killing giants, on a deeper level Þórr's rage seems to be directed at specific giants whose monstrous deformities made them even more threatening. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that Vetrliði was already aware in the tenth century of an accusation concerning Starkaðr's body that was fleshed out in younger sources, such as the thirteenth-century U redaction of *Hervarar saga*, amongst others, but is not mentioned in the skaldic stanza itself—namely, that the Starkaðr whom Þórr cast down to his death was a giant who was born with eight arms instead of two. In light of the overriding theme of Vetrliði's verse—on the overexuberent, irrational bodies of the giants and on the ways they can be smashed, bashed, and crushed—Starkaðr's inclusion in this stanza suggests that his monstrous embodiment was already firmly established by the tenth century.

Accusations of physical deformity continue to overshadow the hero in the younger sources as well. In *Gautreks saga*, *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*, the *Gesta Danorum*, and the U redaction of *Hervarar saga*, the issue of Starkaðr's latent gigantism remains unresolved—it is never clearly addressed, but neither is it completely absent. Instead, the prose sources respond to the ambiguity in Starkaðr's embodiment by identifying the cause of the abnormalities. Thus a new genealogy for Starkaðr is created, according to which the eight-armed giant named Starkaðr who was cast down by Þórr (cf. the accounts in Vetrliði and *Hervarar saga*) is identified as the paternal grandfather of the renowned hero whose adventures are recorded in *Gautreks saga* and in Saxo. By positioning the hero as the grandson of a giant, the irregularities that are still present in Starkaðr can

28. John Lindow, "Addressing Thor," *Scandinavian Studies*, 60 (1988), 119–36.

29. On this encounter and its connections to the *Pórsdrápa*, see also Margaret Clunies Ross, "An interpretation of the myth of Þórr's encounter with Geirrðör and his daughters," in *Speculum Norroenum*, ed. Ursula Dronke, Guðrún Helgadóttir, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (Odense: Odense University Press, 1981), pp. 370–91. Vetrliði was almost certainly aware of these echoes of Gjálp's monstrous femininity, for her ambiguous fate in his poem—*stétt of Gjólþ dauða*, which some equate with her being crushed underfoot—could be alluding to a much more graphic assault if the verb *stéttu* (< *stíga*) is understood to mean 'mounted.' This reading gains support from the preposition *of* ('over, above'), which explicitly denotes the superior position that Þórr has over his victim. The last line, then, could celebrate the fact that Þórr crushed the giantess to death through violent non-consensual sexual intercourse: he fucked her to death.

be attributed, in typical saga style, to his unusual bloodline, and thus, at least in part, excused.³⁰

Excused, but not erased. Although the prose text of *Gautreks saga* makes no mention of the eight arms, they are nonetheless not entirely absent. The superfluous arms are mentioned in the stanzas of the *Víkarsbálkr*, a quasi-elegiac, retrospective lay that is attributed to the hero himself.³¹ The *Víkarsbálkr* marks Starkaðr's final appearance in the saga. Having fled to Uppsala after treacherously slaying king Olo in his royal bathtub, Starkaðr hopes to recover from the shame of that deed. He is mocked by the king's retainers in Uppsala, however, and they taunt him as a reborn giant (*endrborinn jotunn*) and a disgraced man (*níðingr*). Stung by their words, Starkaðr reviews the events of his sad life, focusing on the murder of king Víkarr in Hordaland that earned him such enmity:

Pess eyrindis, at Þórr um skóp mér níðings nafn nauð margs konar; hlaut ek óhróðigr illt at vinna.	Thor shaped my shame, ordained me traitor, tied me to misery. I was not keen for killing: I was not apt for such evil.
Skyllða ek Víkar í viði háfum Geirþjófsbana	Against my will I gave to the gods my true lord Víkar

30. Note for the sake of comparison the way in which the physical prowess and ferocity of Egill Skallagrímsson is implicitly attributed in the saga to his grandfather Kveld-Úlfr, whose latent beserkr and theriomorphic tendencies play a prominent role in *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*. On bloodlines as determinative of heroic prowess, see Kaaren Grimstad, "The Giant as a Heroic Model: The Case of Egill and Starkaðr," *Scandinavian Studies*, 48 (1976), 284–98. A quick overview of the relevant issues concerning Starkaðr's human/giant ancestry is provided in Davidson and Fisher, eds., *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes, Books I–IX*, pp. 99f.

31. The testimony of *Gautreks saga* must be carefully evaluated, because the saga survives in two versions that differ in their characterization of Starkaðr. The longer redaction of the saga (which is assumed to be younger) survives in paper manuscripts dating from the early 16th to the middle of the 17th century. The shorter redaction, attested by a vellum fragment from around 1400, is generally regarded as the older version of the saga. It is noteworthy that only the younger, longer redaction contains the episode known as *Víkars þáttur*, a quasi-independent strand of the narrative that recounts in considerable detail the deeds of Starkaðr and his slaying of king Víkarr, and it is chiefly in this portion of the saga that Starkaðr's transgressivity is emphasized. But even though the *Víkars þáttur* is a late interpolation, the prose text is supported upon an older narrative framework—the stanzas of the *Víkarsbálkr*, a heroic lay that dates from the end of the 11th or beginning of the 12th century. On the dating of the *Víkarsbálkr*, see Ranisch, ed., *Die Gautrekssaga in zwei Fassungen*, pp. lxxxiii–cix. On the relationship between lay and saga see Andreas Heusler and Wilhelm Ranisch, eds., *Eddica Minora* (Dortmund: Fr. Wilhelm Ruhfus, 1903), p. xxxiii; de Vries, *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, II, pp. 167–68; Robert Nedoma, ed., *Gautreks saga konungs. Die Saga von König Gautrek* (Göppingen: Kümmerle, 1990), pp. 9–24.

goðum um signa;
lagða ek geiri
gram til hjarta,
þat er mér harmazt
handaverka.

Þaðan vappaða ek
villtar brautir,
Hörðum leiðr,
með huga illan,
hringa vanr
ok hróðrkvæða,
dróttinlauss,
dapr allz hugar.

Hér settu mik
sveina milli,
heldr hæðinn
ok hvítbráan,
skellkja skatnar
ok skop draga,
ofs óframir,
at jofurs greppi.³²

high on the tree:
never such pangs
of pain for me
as when my spear
slipped into his side.

I rambled alone,
wretched, restless,
hated by all
in Hordaland,
a sorrowing man,
songless, without gold
or glorious lord,
lost without my king.

They set me among
serving soldiers,
me an old man,
white-browed, a mockery.
Jesters and jokers
these jackanapes,
cruel and unkind
the cuts they gave me.³³

In the last line above the phrase *jofurs greppi*, a reference to the speaker, is not translated literally. We shall return to Starkaðr's self-identification as a *jofurs greppi*; but first let us examine two stanzas near the end of the lay that are of particular interest for a discussion about Starkaðr's body.

Sjá þikjast þeir
á sjálfum mér
jötunkuml
átta handa,
er Hlórriði
fyr hamar norðan
Hergrímsbana
høndum rænti.

Hlæja menn,
er mik séa,
ljótan skolt,
langa trjónu,
hár úlfgrátt,
hangar tjálgur,
hrjúfan háls,
húð jóttraða.³⁴

These monstrous scars
that are seen on me,
on the killer of Hergrim—
so they claim—
are what's left of the arms,
all eight of them, Thor
ripped from my trunk
on the northern rock-face.

Mankind mocks
my snout of a mouth,
the grim jaws, the grey
wolf's gross
bristle, the barked
arms, the bruised
skin knotted
and gnarled at the neck.³⁵

32. Ranisch, ed., *Die Gautrekssaga in zwei Fassungen*, p. 31.

33. "King Gautrek," in *Seven Viking Romances*, tr. Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 157–59.

34. Ranisch, ed., *Die Gautrekssaga in zwei Fassungen*, p. 33.

35. "King Gautrek," p. 159.

Starkaðr's final words in the saga are, notably, about his problematic body and the reaction it provokes amongst onlookers. Old age was certainly a contributing factor in the diminishment of Starkaðr's status at court and there are obvious parallels here to the predicament that the once-vigorous Egill Skallagrímsson faced late in life, when, as Carol Clover observed, the heroic body inevitably becomes *blauðr*, emasculated, with the passage of time.³⁶ And yet, Starkaðr's abjection is much more acute than this; old age alone is insufficient grounds for his banishment to the borders of the civilized world, his inability to win gold or songs of praise, his estrangement (*dróttinlauss*) from the heroic norm. Even Starkaðr's status as a *níðingr* cannot account fully for every indignity that the hero is forced to endure. Instead, we must look—as Starkaðr and the men at Uppsala do—beyond the natural disfigurements to the body that come as a consequence of heroic adventuring and consider, instead, the deeply unsettling unnaturalness that manifests itself on Starkaðr's body through the *jotunkuml átta handa*.

The phrase itself (and the somatic features to which it refers) is ambiguous. Starkaðr may be referring to the scars left behind after Þórr's amputation of his superfluous arms, as attested in Saxo (ON *jotunn* 'giant,' *kuml* 'badge, mark, monument'), or perhaps to some unusual birthmarks that the younger (human) Starkaðr Storverksson figure in *Gautreks saga* "inherited" in a mythical sense from his grandfather, the older eight-armed Starkaðr Áludrengr figure who was cast down by Þórr. While the exact meaning of *jotunkuml átta handa* is elusive, the semiotic function is indisputable and, indeed, of greater importance. To the men in Uppsala, Starkaðr is unquestionably a monstrous figure because his body bears the *jotunkuml*, the giant's mark, reminiscent of a violent encounter with the giant-killer Þórr. And since only the giants can battle Þórr and live, the bearer of these scars is functionally a giant as well, an Other figure who had been "reborn" (*endrborinn*) in the guise of a human warrior and whose transgressions break not only legal taboos against murder but ethical and somatic ones as well. Starkaðr is neither man nor giant exclusively, but some perversion of both.

Likewise, the phrase *jofurs greppi* resonates on different levels of Starkaðr's liminal status. The word *greppi* can mean either 'man' or 'poet,' but which of these is the primary meaning is uncertain.³⁷ In the end, the two connotations of *greppi* are in play in the final line of the *Vikarsbálkr*: there is *greppi*,

36. Carol Clover, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women and Power in Early Northern Europe," *Representations*, 44 (1993), 1–28.

37. See Finnur Jónsson, *Lexicon poeticum antiquae linguae septentrionalis. Ordbog over det norsk-islandske Skjaldesprog*, 2nd ed. (Copenhagen, 1966), p. 203.

which is related to *garpr* 'valiant man',³⁸ and the somatic ambiguities become even richer when *greppr* is paired with *jöfur*; the literal sense of which is 'wild boar,' but which also occurs in a kenning for 'giant'.³⁹ In poetic diction, the word denotes 'prince,' 'king,' a meaning probably inspired by an archaic custom of wearing boars' heads as helmets.⁴⁰ Starkaðr, then, names himself at the end of the *Víkarsbálkr* as a hero who is either a valiant warrior kept by a king or, if the metaphors are reversed, a bestial warrior (lit. 'warrior of a boar') who deserves no less than to be excluded from the bounds of heroic society.

Starkaðr's mixed embodiment is also a concern in the *Gesta Danorum*, but Saxo Grammaticus presents a radically different portrait of the hero. In book six Saxo launches into a strongly worded defense of Starkaðr's explicitly human origins. The hero, he asserts, is free from any hint of abnormality or monstrosity:

Fabulosa autem et vulgaris opinio quaedam super ipsius ortu rationi inconsistentanea atque a veri fide penitus aliena confinxit. Tradunt enim quidam, quod a *gigantibus editus monstruosi generis* habitum inusitata manuum numerositate prodiderit, asseruntque Thor deum quattuor ex his affluentis naturae vitio procreatas, elisis nervorum compagibus, avulsisse atque ab integritate corporis prodigiales digitorum eruisse complexus, ita ut, duabus tantum relictis, corpus, quod ante in giganteae granditatis statum effluerat eiusque formam informi membrorum multitudine repraesentabat, postmodum meliore castigatum simulacro brevitatis humanae modulo caperetur.⁴¹

But a common tale has been invented about his origin, which is fictitious, unreasonable and downright incredible. For some folks tell how *he was born of giants and revealed his monster kind* by an extraordinary number of hands. They assert that the god Þórr broke the sinews which joined four of these superfluous extensions of freakish Nature and tore them off, plucking away the unnatural bunches of fingers from the body proper; with only two arms left, his frame, which before had run to a gigantic enormity and had been shaped with a grotesque crowd of limbs, was afterwards corrected according to a better model and contained within the more limited dimensions of men.⁴²

38. See Jan de Vries, *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2nd rev. ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1977), p. 157; *Lexicon poeticum*, p. 173.

39. *Lexicon poeticum*, pp. 330–31.

40. *Altnordisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, p. 294.

41. Olrik and Ræder, eds., *Saxonis Gesta Danorum*, pp. 151–2, my emphasis.

42. Davidson and Fisher, eds., *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes, Books I–IX*, I, p. 170, my emphasis. In this passage from Saxo, Starcatherus has only six arms—four of which were said to be removed by Þórr. The discrepancy between eight and six is minor, as the underlying concept of an overabundance of arms remains. Some degree of legendary tripling could be assumed to have shaped the oral transmission of this mythologem, whereby Starkaðr's three lifespans (granted him by Óðinn) and three shameful, criminal acts he is fated to commit (a curse bestowed by Þórr) were matched up with three (not four) original sets of arms.

This passage marks another important milestone in the ongoing debate in the Norse tradition about allegations of abnormality in the body of this hero. Saxo's précis of this encounter presents it as an aggressive act of discipline: the superior being re-fashions the transgressive body back into a more human form. Þórr's decision to remove Starcatherus's extra arms instead of killing him outright is quite incongruous, however, for Þórr often appears in Norse myth as a giant-killer and conqueror of all that is unnatural; why should Starcatherus be spared here? Dumézil and Polomé, reading Þórr's deed as an act of mercy, explore the ramifications of this encounter for Starkaðr's status as an Óðinn-hero or Þórr-hero in the Norse tradition.⁴³ I do not mean to revisit those arguments here, for my overriding interest is not in Þórr, but in Saxo and his engagement with the fundamental question of Starkaðr's deformity.

Saxo's rejection of the myth may have been influenced by the euhemerist tendencies that are evident in the *Gesta Danorum* as a whole. By repudiating any whiff of monstrous deformity in the hero's body, Saxo is able to simultaneously undermine Þórr's status as a Norse deity, for in this scenario the two figures, victim and victimizer, are inextricably linked; and if Starcatherus had not eight arms but only two, then the tales about Þórr's superhuman prowess—that is, his ability to “fix” Starcatherus's abnormality—must likewise be considered bogus. A second possibility is that a concern with historiography and reliable sources led Saxo to dismiss the *fabulosa autem et vulgaris opinio* about Starcatherus's superfluous arms. Perhaps this rogue tale (*vulgaris opinio*) that reached Saxo's ears was considered incredible, or even factually incorrect. We should note, in fact, that the plurality of arms is always attributed in the vernacular texts to the grandfather, the giant who was hurled over a waterfall to his death by Þórr, and not to the grandson. Saxo knows this too, as his hero Starcatherus is clearly identified as the “son of Storverk,” that is, the grandson of the eight-armed Starkaðr.

While the debate about Saxo's euhemerism and his sources will surely continue, I would like to offer a third interpretation of this passage, one that highlights the threat that a monstrous embodiment would represent for Starcatherus's reputation in the *Gesta Danorum* as the national hero of the Danish people. By denying the allegations about Starcatherus's unnatural birth and monstrous deformity, Saxo is able to present this popular legendary figure not as a rogue and brutish giant/human hybrid but as a valiant swordsman created in the natural order of things, a hero whose “wonderful pre-eminence of mind and body” and “superhuman physique” gained him “brilliant repute even through all the provinces

43. Georges Dumézil, *Aspects de la fonction guerrière chez les Indo-Européens* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1956); Polomé, “Starkað: Óðinn- or Þórr-Hero?”

of Sweden and Saxony.”⁴⁴ Even though Saxo admits that Starcatherus was “remarkable for his unusual size,”⁴⁵ the same could be said for other luminaries in the Old Norse hero tradition such as Hrólfr kraki or Egill Skallagrímsson, whose excessive physicality is attributed to the giants, half-trolls, or shape-shifters that were counted among their ancestors.

Thus the *Gesta Danorum* acknowledges certain unavoidable truths about Starcatherus—that his body was huge and hulking, impervious to cold and impossible to kill, and that his birthplace lay in the eastern borderlands of the Baltic region that were typically associated with giants—while at the same time it refuses to accept the implications of his embodiment. The *Gesta Danorum* can tolerate—even embrace—a large champion, but it cannot abide the idea of a monstrous one, for the body of Denmark’s greatest champion, the very embodiment of Danish superiority, cannot be understood to be defective or monstrously misshapen. Any grotesque deformities of the body would inevitably undermine the moral or ethical superiority of the hero.⁴⁶ While Saxo’s rebuttal targets both the unnatural birth and the rumored “gigantic enormity” of the hero, I would argue that the enduring, popular myth of the superfluous arms represented a far more serious challenge to Saxo’s historical project, for if Starcatherus had indeed been born with a surplus of limbs, Þórr’s correction of this deformity becomes little more than a cosmetic adjustment, a treatment of the symptoms of somatic deviance but not a cure for its fundamental cause.

It is on precisely this issue—on how Starkaðr’s body came to be as it was—that *Gesta Danorum* and *Gautreks saga* differ considerably.⁴⁷ While the

44. Davidson and Fisher, eds., *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes, Books I-IX*, I, p. 170.

45. Davidson and Fisher, eds., *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes, Books I-IX*, I, p. 171.

46. Note, for example, the way in which Starcatherus is used as a vehicle for expressing proto-nationalist viewpoints about the superiority of Danish heritage. See, for example, Saxo’s critique of the fussy and sumptuous German tastes that were corrupting traditional Danish cuisine and undermining its virile customs: “When he [Starcatherus] saw the ancient habits of temperance and all the good customs being perverted by this new luxuriousness and unrestraint, he looked for a serving of coarse food, disdaining the costliness of a more lavish meal . . . He had no desire to weaken the sinews of true manliness by contamination with the synthetic sweetness of foreign rarities.” A comparison with Ingel’s behavior shows a dramatic contrast between the two men. After Ingel had “dabbled in Teuton fashions, he felt no shame in submitting to their unmasculine frivolities. Many epicurian nourishments poured from that drain down the throats of our countrymen.” Davidson and Fisher, eds., *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes, Books I-IX*, I, p. 185.

47. The witness of the *Vikarsbálkr*, a 12th-century poem, shows that the narrative contours of Starkaðr’s betrayal and murder of Víkarr were already part of the heroic tradition during the time that Saxo was engaged with the *Gesta Danorum*. Thus while it is certainly correct to categorize the *Vikars þáttr* as a late interpolation into the saga, the events described in the *Vikarsbálkr*—among them, a reference to Þórr’s malevolence and his “cursing” of Starkaðr—

Latin text eloquently defends the integrity and unity of Denmark's national hero and absolves the Norse gods from any role in creating or adjusting it, in *Gautreks saga* the ambiguities and contradictions that characterize the Starkaðr figure are blamed on the Æsir themselves: it is they who (mis)shape Starkaðr into the wondrous and terrible figure he was known to be. The saga records that Starkaðr, a loyal champion of king Víkarr, was awakened by night by his foster-father Hrosshárs-Grani (again, this is Óðinn in disguise) and taken onto a nearby island. There, Starkaðr's fate was adjudicated by the twelve men—ten plus Óðinn and Þórr—who sat in chairs around a clearing. As the scene unfolds, the two gods take turns blessing and cursing Starkaðr in equal measure. Each of Óðinn's blessings is matched by a corresponding curse from Þórr: although Starkaðr is granted a lifespan of three lifetimes, vast riches, the victory in every battle and the ability to declaim poetry as quickly as speaking, he is also cursed to commit an evil deed in each lifespan, to suffer grievous wounds in every battle, and to forget his poetry as quickly as it is spoken.⁴⁸ It becomes clear during this episode that Starkaðr is not merely a pawn in a clash of wills between Óðinn and Þórr; rather, his embodiment—his physical body together with his reputation, prowess and heroic legacy—becomes the battlefield itself.

In the end, the oppositions do not cancel each other out. Instead, they work to transform Starkaðr into a new, hybrid creature that is riven by irresolvable—even arbitrary—contradictions. Thus the saga author responds to longstanding inconsistencies in the Starkaðr tradition by offering up a tidy explanation for that which had previously resisted easy explication. This episode in *Gautreks saga* asserts that Starkaðr's many transgressions of ethical, heroic, and somatic boundaries were not the fault of his bloodline or his lineage, that is, not caused by natural means, but were rather the result of an ill-fated and contentious "second birth" at the hands of the gods.

In creating Starkaðr anew through curses and blessings, Óðinn and Þórr do not only use the language of parentage and genetic inheritance—both utter phrases like *ek gef honum þat* ('I give him this . . .') or *þat skapa ek honum* ('I ordain that he . . .')—but they also take on oppositional roles that recall, in a structural sense, the procreation myths of the gods, especially those that concern a mixed union between one of the Æsir and a giantess. Clunies Ross has shown that miscegenation, taboo-breaking, and various degrees of bloodline "contamination" are widely attested in the social structures of the Æsir and Vanir, where interbreeding between

indicate that the account in the younger, longer version of *Gautreks saga* was not the invention of a later redactor. The encounter between Starkaðr, Óðinn and Þórr (see below) must also date to the 12th century, if not earlier.

48. Ranisch, ed., *Die Gautrekssaga in zwei Fassungen*, pp. 28ff.

gods and giantesses was more the rule than the exception. At the same time, however, the myths and their reflections in the skaldic tradition (especially in kennings) reveal the fundamental imbalances and anxieties that undergirded the Norse procreative system: that while giantesses were suitable and even desirable mates for the gods, the goddesses of the Æsir were not to be wed to giants, and indeed, were to be kept secluded, apart, off-limits. So, too, in this scene from *Gautreks saga*, for the bloodline of the offspring is blessed by the seed of the Norse god (here it is Óðinn), while from the Other (i.e., Þórr) comes strength and cunning, but also treachery, unpredictability, a predilection for excess.⁴⁹ The blessings and curses bestowed by Óðinn and Þórr are thus shown to have a generative effect, in that Starkaðr is essentially recreated on the spot into an uncanny and ill-fated “son” that is defined by (indeed, held captive to) the contradictions bestowed on him by his “parents” on either side.

Such divisions against self are not uncommon in the Norse tradition, and numerous examples can be found in the bloodlines of prominent heroes (Egil's grandmother was a half-troll), in the lives of the gods (Ymir or Loki, for example), or in Óðinn's transgressive engagement with the feminized magic of *seiðr*.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the divisions made evident in Starkaðr are unique and distinctive, because the episode in *Gautreks saga* and the echoes of a similar encounter in Saxo and some younger texts reveal the extent to which Starkaðr was regarded as an artificial hero, one whose embodiment was shaped not by the natural standard of the heroic bloodline, but by a capricious and arbitrary interruption of it.⁵¹

49. My reading of the mythical undercurrents present in the re-birth of the monstrous Starkaðr in this scene from *Gautreks saga* does not assert that Þórr is the feminized partner in this union. Rather, I call attention to Clunies Ross' arguments about the gender-balance of Norse procreative myth, namely that creation is in many respects a “male pseudo-procreation” in which paternity is dominant. Thus I see Þórr taking the role of Other that was typically assigned to giantesses. Margaret Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*, 2 vols., The Viking collection: Studies in Northern civilization (Odense: Odense University Press, 1994–98), I, p. 146.

50. Some recent studies on the concept of transgressive “twoness” in Norse myth include Brit Solli, “Odin—the queer? Om det skeive i norrøn mytologi,” *Árbok—Universitets Oldsaksamling* (1997–98), 7–42; Yvonne S. Bonnetain, “En er þetta sá Loki Laufeyjarson, þá líkaði honum illa, er Baldr sakaði ekki,” in *International Scandinavian and Medieval Studies in Memory of Gerd Wolfgang Weber*, ed. Michael Dallapiazza, et al., Hesperides: Letterature e Culture Occidentali (Trieste: Parnaso, 2000), 73–87; Adolfo Zavaroni, “Le Double Principe dans la théogonie germanique: D'Ymir á Loki, á Hoenir et á Heimdallr,” *Leuvense Bijdragen: Leuven Contributions in Linguistics and Philology*, 94 (2005), 1–21.

51. The Hrosshárs-Grani episode in *Gautreks saga* is unattested in the other sources, but antecedents of it can be seen in Saxo's *Gesta Danorum* and in the *Rerum Danicarum Fragmenta* of the Icelandic scholar Arngrímur Jónsson (1568–1648). The *Fragmenta* give details related nowhere else about the battle between Þórr and the eight-armed giant Starkaðr. In this version of the encounter, Þórr is said to rip off Starkaðr's offending arms before killing him. In all likelihood, this is another iteration of the same *communis opinio* myth that Saxo

By presenting the hero as the radical offspring of two gods who were engaged in an adversarial and contradictory act of creation, the author brings the Norse understanding of Starkaðr's unique origins closer into line with medieval European beliefs about monstrogenesis. According to Isidore's *Etymologies*, monsters were considered part of creation rather than freaks of nature. No matter how fantastical a monster's somatic deformation might be, Isidore asserts that its origins were neither accidental nor unprecedented:

non sunt contra naturam, quia divina voluntate fiunt, cum voluntas Creatoris cuiusque conditæ rei natura sit.⁵²

they are not contrary to nature, because they come about through Divine will, since the will of the Creator is the nature of every thing that is created.

The bodies of the monstrous races of the medieval Imaginary were therefore not regarded as existing *contra naturam*, but rather *extra naturam*—that is, as unusual beings whose uniqueness did not break the rules of creation as much as illustrate the mystery, ineffability and arbitrariness of these rules. Because the bodies of the wondrous and exotic monsters that populated the limits of the known world demonstrate in their somatic mixtures and corporeal amplifications the extent of God's mastery over physical form, they also confirm, as Mary Campbell points out, the basic soundness of Christian doctrine: these bizarre bodies "... exist to prove God's power over *our* bodies at the Resurrection."⁵³

Precisely this issue of revelation—what Starkaðr's monstrous body *means*—rests at the core of the disagreement about his embodiment. Since mythography, like nature, abhors a vacuum, the prose sources attempted, each in their own way, to provide some clarity on the issue of cause; for if the cause can be identified, the significances of the object it engenders can also be adduced. Thus Saxo and the prose sources provide a diagnosis of the somatic abnormalities that manifest themselves in Starkaðr's body. In *Gautreks saga*, Starkaðr's transformational rebirth harks back to an established theme in Norse myth—namely, the notion that the Æsir (and especially Óðinn) bring naught but harm when they

condemned in the *Gesta Danorum*. According to Turville-Petre the *Fragmenta* follow a lost 12th-century source that antedates the written accounts in *Gautreks saga* and Saxo. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North. The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, p. 209. In all three accounts, Þórr is said to be actively engaged in the "shaping" of Starkaðr, either for good or for ill. The fact that the sources assign different motives and contexts to this mythologem does not obscure its fundamental importance, nor its singularity: that Starkaðr underwent a secondary creation at the hands of the Æsir.

52. Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi: Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, pp. 11.3.1–2.

53. Mary Campbell, *The Witness and the Other World: Exotic European Travel Writing 400–1600* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 79.

involve themselves in the lives of men. Starkaðr therefore appears as an uncanny reminder of the arbitrariness and omnipotence of the Æsir; the hero is the victim of external circumstances. The *Gesta Danorum*, in contrast, sees internal forces at work. Saxo presents Starcatherus as a man whose embodiment was enhanced by the dominant traits of an (admittedly unusual) heroic bloodline, and for this reason Starcatherus's body cannot bear any particular significance or meaning outside of the natural order. He is a hero shaped, essentially, by nature.

The disembodied teeth, in contrast, reveal nothing of the hero's origins—and yet, they offer surety of a different kind. While the accounts in *Norna-Gests þáttr* and in the *Annales Ryenses* and *Lögmanns-annáll* still engage with the perennial concern in the Norse tradition about Starkaðr's body, these episodes are very much focused on the *what* rather than the *how* of Starkaðr's embodiment; the texts pay close attention to the physical appearance, size and weight of the enormous teeth, the context of their historical sightings and the persons who viewed them. Thus the teeth, to borrow a phrase from Isidore of Seville, reveal or “make(s) known at once” (*statim*) that which the Norse heroic tradition had long alluded to, argued about, or struggled to incorporate. In the retrospective view propagated in the annals and in *Norna-Gests þáttr*, all ambiguity is suddenly cleared away: the witness of the enormous teeth proves that Starkaðr had indeed been monstrously large—and at the same time, however, something less than completely human.

This duality may offer partial justification for the curious hold that Starkaðr's teeth have in the Norse tradition. Taken in sum, the sources indicate that Starkaðr—unlike most heroes in the medieval Germanic tradition—was famous more for what he was than for what he did; or more precisely, it is the nature of his unique embodiment (and no small measure of wonder about its cause and composition) that serves as his lasting legacy in Old Norse. Thus it is fitting that the relic associated with Starkaðr is a corporeal remnant of the monstrous body itself, instead of an ancillary object such as a huge sword, helmet, suit of armor, and the like—items that attest to the size of the heroic body by means of a secondary rather than a primary witness. The teeth offer proof about the physicality of the body, not simply about its size. What is more, the teeth historicize that body in a way that other objects cannot. Because the teeth were knocked out during Starkaðr's ignominious defeat, their very existence as relics is inescapably tied to the precise moment in which the hero's physical superiority was undermined from within, and quickly overcome. They are a lasting monument to the hero's mixed embodiment: somatically exuberant, yet humming with shame.

HEROIC PRESENT, HEROIC PAST

In the end, what do Starkaðr's teeth reveal about the diffusion and transmission of mythologems across the entire Nordic realm, from Iceland to Norway to Denmark, during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries? Is this tooth a uniquely tangible, incarnate example of the predominantly textual "echoes" of Norse myth that Margaret Clunies Ross has made us aware of in a different context?⁵⁴ The verbal and auditory metaphors that inform Clunies Ross's approach—her focus on source, reverberation and echo—provide a useful model for conceptualizing the embellishments and amplifications that the Starkaðr-figure underwent in the Nordic tradition, and her work calls attention to the distances (both temporal and geographical) that a particular mythologem can travel in the medieval Scandinavian tradition. Nevertheless, it is significant in the particular case of Starkaðr's teeth that the primary organ of mythical transmission and reception is not the ear, but the eye. While the embellishment of the Starkaðr figure was certainly traduced and encouraged within the East Norse oral tradition that Saxo acknowledges in book six of the *Gesta Danorum*, the ocular focus of the accounts in *Lögmanns-annáll*, in the *Annales Ryensis*, and in *Norna-Gests þátt* suggests that the interpretive context within which these massive teeth appeared and were venerated was not an exclusively Norse, rigidly mythical one. Rather, the sightings of these teeth in exclusively historical and quasi-historical accounts show remarkable parallels with the way in which the medieval literature of wonders, and especially medieval travel writing, frames the exotic.

In each case, Starkaðr's tooth is linked to a specific person, a specific time, and a definitive place—just as is the case in much medieval travel writing like that found in the Anglo-Saxon *Wonders of the East*, the accounts by John Mandeville, or the apocryphal letters of Alexander to Aristotle. In these texts as in the Norse accounts featuring Starkaðr's teeth, there is an indisputable correlation between eyewitness accounts and wonder. Only that which has been seen first-hand by a reputable spectator—whom we might call the primary viewer—is considered authentic. By the same token, only credible reports are capable of invoking wonder, for that which is implausible, fanciful, or ridiculous is not wondrous, but simply (and literally) incredible. Accordingly, the accounts in *Norna-Gests þátt* and the Danish and Icelandic annals do all they can to corroborate the tooth's physical reality. Each text gives the exact size of the tooth (accounts vary from three spans or six thumbs, the weight as six or seven ounces), and places it in a specific location, be it in *Danmörk*, on the bell-rope in the cathedral at Lund, in *Affrica*, or in transit *de Dacia in Teutonia*. But the Norse texts go

54. Clunies Ross, *Prolonged Echoes. Old Norse Myths in Medieval Northern Society*.

further still, by identifying—in exactly the same manner as is done in the medieval literature of wonders—the primary viewer of the object itself: be it Henrik Æmælthorp, Arne Olafsson or, in *Norna-Gests þátt*, Gestr himself. It is through their eyes that the accounts of Starkaðr's teeth take on reality, their authenticating spectatorship that makes it possible for contemporary audiences in thirteenth-fifteenth century Scandinavia to regard the sightings of these immense teeth not as idle fabulations, but rather as credible reports that satisfy the etiological demands of the literature of wonders. The teeth are real because they have been seen; and once seen—even by proxy, through the eyes of the prime viewer—they are wondrous.

And lastly, because the teeth are wondrous, they are valuable. In the *Annales Ryensis*, for example, the tooth was a powerful political symbol—not solely for Henrik, but above all for the Danish prince Valdemar, the young nephew of king Christopher I, whose cause Henrik supported. The campaigns that Henrik waged against Christopher in the years 1252–54 were part of a broader offensive by Valdemar and his allies, chief among them the northern German lords of Brandenburg, Holstein, and Mecklenburg, to press Valdemar's rightful claim to the Danish throne. Starkaðr's tooth must have played a role in that quest. Henrik's possession of Starkaðr's tooth in the year 1252, and the manner in which he transported it, is strongly reminiscent of the process of *translatio* of other Nordic saints' relics from one sanctuary to another.⁵⁵ By removing this famous tooth from wherever it was kept (perhaps indeed at Lund cathedral?) and taking it to Germany, Henrik was able to strike at the legitimacy and security of Christopher's reign itself. In the end, it matters little how Henrik acquired the tooth—through theft or purchase—for the end justified the means: the physical remains of Denmark's most valiant hero had fallen into the hands of the rebel leader.⁵⁶

In *Norna-Gests þátt*, too, the tooth has a sacral as well as a heroic function. In claiming that one of the teeth hangs on a bell rope in a Denmark cathedral “now” and that some men believe it can still be seen there, Gestr describes a context for exhibition that closely mimics the ways in which religious relics were placed into appropriate settings, mounted, and displayed.⁵⁷ Gestr was not merely a witness to the only significant defeat that

55. Thomas A. DuBois, *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 64.

56. According to Saxo, Starcatherus's fame was already well-established by the early thirteenth century: “So widespread was his conspicuous renown that even today his deeds and name remain distinguished in popular esteem. The roll of his achievements . . . scintillated in our country.” Davidson and Fisher, eds., *Saxo Grammaticus: The History of the Danes, Books I–IX*, I, p. 170.

57. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paula Gerson, “Body-Part Reliquaries and Body Parts in the Middle Ages,” *Gesta*, 36 (1997), 3–7; Barbara Drake Boehm, “Body-Part Reliquaries: The State of Research,” *Gesta*, 36 (1997), 8–19.

the foremost champion of the Danes ever suffered; he was, as he claims, “with” Sigurðr during that campaign, and it is due to his direct involvement that the physical remains of Starkaðr’s humiliation were brought before the public eye. In a real sense, Gestr uses the tooth to establish his authority as a heroic adventurer of the highest caliber.

The tooth’s purpose in *Lögmanns-annáll* is harder to adduce. In 1413, some eight to nine years after Arne Olafsson’s voyage to *Affrica*, Arne was made the archbishop of Skálhólt. At the time of his appointment Arne was the first native-born Icelandic archbishop in that post for over sixty years. It is tempting to regard the entry in the *Lögmanns-annáll* as an attempt to draw an association between Arne Olafsson and Bishop Vilchin Hinriksson of Skálholt, a beloved and highly-accomplished administrator who died in 1405—the same year in which Arne was named *penitentiarius*. The link is obvious on the textual level, in that the laudatory necrology for Vilchin Hinriksson segues immediately into the report about Arne and the relics he saw in *Affrica*, but it likely resonated also, most especially for Icelandic audiences in the areas around Skálholt, on the devotional level. Vilchin is remembered for his sponsorship of the gilding of the skull of St. Þorlak in silver, and its enshrinement in a reliquary in a local church. Perhaps the annalist of *Lögmanns-annáll* sees this as the connection—that the viewing of the relics in *Affrica* is a testament to the broad experience of Arne Olafsson, whose travels brought him in contact with some of the most sacred objects of the Christian faith and of the heroic past. A plausible hypothesis, perhaps, but let us return to the enigmatic state of the manuscript evidence for this entry in *Lögmanns-annáll*, which forces us to consider another likely possibility—that Arne did not see the tooth at all. The reference to Starkaðr’s tooth exists only as an interlineal interpolation in AM 420 C, which subordinates it to the passage in the main text about the hilt of Sigurðr’s sword. The Starkaðr passage appears as a scribal afterthought, the tooth as a complement to the sword hilt that Arne definitively “saw” (*sa hann*) on display, and indeed, the structural dependencies in the underlying myth that was captured and recorded in *Norna-Gests þáttr* may well have proved impossible for the fifteenth-century annalist to resist. Thus the clash between hero and anti-hero in the heroic tale, which culminated in the cause and effect of Sigurðr’s famous strike to Starkaðr’s face, is reified in the historical account through reference to the unbreakable dyad of sword and tooth. Here, for a final time, the iconic power of Starkaðr’s monstrous teeth leaves its mark: so wondrous and strange as to cause a “sighting” in the historical record where perhaps none had actually taken place.