In vampire stories and possibly other witchcraft narratives, a fear of ghosts always seems to be intertwined with a fear of the past, encapsulated in the word “forneskja,” at once referring to magic and suggesting also that the very past itself is inherently magical and demonic. If the past is terrible in its very nature, time itself becomes an enemy and our own ancestors, those of previous generations to whom the present owes everything but who are no longer present and whose demise and absence is hateful to us in that it signifies our own eventual absence, become actors in legion with the terrible past. This may be the reason why Norse myths sometimes present giants such as Óðinn’s mother as the primordial ancestors of the world, an outlawed species of outdated humans.\textsuperscript{290}

In this giant myth of the outlawed ancestor turned enemy, there are echoes of the Greek myth of Kronos, the god who devoured his own children because he feared that one of them would supplant him. In the end he regurgitated them all and thus provided them each with a second birth, becoming in a sense their mother as well as their father, while his youngest son Zeus became his eventual heir. This myth is a metaphor of birth and death, inverted so that Kronos’s devouring of his children results in a second birth. The Kronos myth, like the Oedipal myth, is concerned with generation gaps, the emphasis though placed not on the father’s vulnerability but rather on parental aggression. This may be a more logical perspective in that throughout the course of history parents have been much more likely to kill their children than are children to kill their parents.\textsuperscript{291}
The myth of Kronos was influential during the Middle Ages. It had its counterpart in the Bible, in the tale of Abraham and Isaac and the narrowly avoided sacrifice on Mount Moriah. In Iceland, the Kronos myth is related in a truncated form in the fourteenth-century manuscript Hauksbók, wherein Saturn is said to kill and eat all of his children except for Jupiter, who then expels him. An indigenous version of the myth is found also in Ynglinga saga wherein the saturnine King Aun sacrifices all of his sons to Óðinn so that he can carry on living himself. He continues sacrificing his sons even when bedridden from old age until at last the Swedes stop him and save his youngest son Egill, who eventually becomes his father’s heir and ancestor to the kings of Norway.

In the Middle Ages, the name Kronos had become assimilated with the Greek word for time, chronos. Thus the Kronos story was interpreted as a myth concerning the onward march of time. Originally the god Kronos was an old and little-known divinity, whose character is distinguished by internal contradiction and ambivalence in the surviving Greek sources. On the one hand he was a benevolent god of agriculture, on the other he was a dethroned, exiled, and solitary god dwelling at the uttermost end of the land and sea, ruler of the nether gods. He was father of both gods and men, but also the devourer of children and the castrator of Uranus, and he was himself subsequently castrated by his own son Zeus. Only later was the figure of Kronos merged with Saturn, the Roman god of field and crops, who seems to have originally been a force of good but who during the Middle Ages had acquired most of Kronos’s negative attributes. Saturn was commonly associated with Melancholy during the Middle Ages, his colour supposedly dark and black, his nature cold and dry. He was also supposed to be the god and planet of the old, as well as of cruelty and avarice. Such notions are echoed in Icelandic sources, including Alfræði íslenzk, in which it is stated that those born in the hour of Saturn are dry and
cold, evil and untruthful, secretive, and volatile; furthermore, they tend to become old. The prevailing wisdom of European learned sources was that Saturn’s children were the unhappiest of mortals, and in the systematised ages of man, Saturn was allotted the final and saddest phase, old age, characterised by loneliness, hopelessness, and physical and mental decay. In poems from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Saturn is connected not only with old age but also with sorrow, darkness, dryness, and avarice, and sometimes even impotence.

The Icelandic sagas include several examples of vicious fathers full of envy and malice towards sons whom they, in at least a symbolic sense, try to devour. There are echoes of this myth in the narrative of the vampire Þórólfr twist-foot who is fuelled not least by a strong sense of hatred for his own son Arnkell. The undead always seem to hate the living with a vengeance and wish to bring (un)death unto them, their very appearance an embodiment of forneskja, the lore of the past. As time eventually devours all, so must the parasitic ghoul infect humans with his demonic nature, “trolling” them and turning them into unspecified demonic others.

The Kronos myth may also to an extent be present in the notion of the primordial giantfather in the Old Norse myths related in Snorra-Edda. Snorri Sturluson not only presents Óðinn to us in his Edda as the oldest and the mightiest of the gods, god of poets and warriors, the wisest of the gods, and father to them all, but also as the grandson of the giant Bolþǫrn, whose daughter Bestla married Óðinn’s father Bor, son of the first human. In spite of this genealogical connection with the highest and the best of gods, Snorri also explicitly states that the giants (variously called “hrímþursar” or “jötnar,” while the females of the race are called “trollkonur”) are evil: “hann var illr ok allir hans ættmenn; þa kavllym ver hrimþvrsa” (he was evil and all his kin; we call them frost-thurses).
It later becomes apparent that the element of evil characterising the aversion shared between gods and giants is, in fact, one of the fundamental aspects of the version of heathen mythology which is presented in the *Edda*. After the disclosure of the wickedness of Ymir and all of his kin, it is soon revealed that certain unwanted “bergrisar” (stone giants) might cross Bifröst, the bridge to the sky, if permitted to do so. And soon after, it is revealed that the primary occupation of Þórr, the strongest of gods and men and Óðinn’s most formidable son, is to fight “hrímþursar ok bergrisar” (frost-thurses and stone giants).

Thus, *Snorra-Edda* gradually builds up its narrative of the long-standing antagonism between the gods and the giants, only to be intensified as the narrative of *Gylfaginning*, the first part of the *Edda*, progresses. But at the same time, the audience of *Gylfaginning* is from the outset made aware of the fact that these antagonists are also ancestors of the gods, specifically their grandfathers. Although a somewhat dramatic Us and Them binary is well established in *Snorra-Edda*, there is also found there an uncanny genealogical affinity between the opposed Them and Us.301

From our childish point of view, we are in fact all raised by giants, a perspective that may resonate in these myths about gigantic ancestors. But they do not only represent the life they gave to us but also the death which looms over us, an integral part of life. Their death is in a sense also our death, their mortality a bell that sounds across time and which also tolls for us. Thus past and parent are not only vital to us but are also dangerous, the passage of time that permitted our own production will devour us in the end, each of our very beginnings is the beginning also of each of our ends.