

Mirator

Mirator 2/20 (2021)

eISSN 1457-2362

Glossa ry - Keskiajan tutkimuksen seura / Sällskapet för medeltidsforskning /

Society for Medieval studies in Finland

<https://journal.fi/mirator>

CC BY-NC-ND 4.0



VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

Sharon Choe

‘Hann var blindr’: The Function of Disability in the Aftermath of Ragnarøk

Sharon Choe

University of York

sc1120@york.ac.uk

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9105-4244>

To cite this article:

Sharon Choe, “‘Hann var blindr’: The Function of Disability in the Aftermath of Ragnarøk’,
Mirator 2/20 (2021), 5–20.

‘Hann var blindr’: The Function of Disability in the Aftermath of Ragnarøk

SHARON CHOE

Snorri Sturluson’s *Edda* (c.1220) and the mythological poems from the *Poetic Edda* (*Eddukvæði*) present complementary yet contradictory representations of the *Æsir*, the principal pre-Christian Norse gods. Together, they inform our understanding of early thirteenth-century Icelandic society when they were both recorded in their surviving forms. The representation of the blind god Hqðr shifts between these two sources to alter his role and agency in the death of Baldr, a narrative Snorri thought ‘as leading into the destruction of the cosmos’.¹ This myth, as found in the eddic poems *Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar*, begins with Baldr dreaming of his death. He is then killed by his half-brother Hqðr. In some iterations of the myth, such as the one found in Snorri’s *Edda*, Loki instructs Hqðr, who is said to be blind, and engineers this event by tricking him into throwing a spear of mistletoe and unwittingly killing Baldr. However, the consequences remain the same: Hqðr’s actions lead to Ragnarøk, concluding with the death of the *Æsir* and the emergence of a new world. With a few notable exceptions, such as Lois Bragg and Annette Lassen, scholars examining this myth have tended to focus on either Baldr or Loki and neglect Hqðr’s participation in Baldr’s death. I propose that Hqðr’s specific role in the myth as a blind god needs to be examined in greater detail, as the impact of his disability on events can help elucidate the nuances of Ragnarøk and its aftermath.

While Snorri’s *Edda* was composed well after the Christian conversion of Iceland around 1000 CE, the written poems found in the *Poetic Edda* cannot be dated so precisely and are understood as originating in pre-Christian oral traditions. The different versions of the *Poetic Edda* lead to variations within the poems themselves, for example in the Hauksbók *Völuspá*, dated to c.1300, there are no references to Baldr’s death.² *Völuspá* describes the creation and destruction of Norse cosmology, and so provides important insight into the cultural and religious beliefs of medieval Nordic society. The poem exists in fragments in Snorri’s *Edda*, however it is impossible to know which poems Snorri did or did not know while writing, as the surviving manuscripts of the *Poetic Edda* postdate his work. As a thirteenth-century writer, politician, and lawspeaker, Snorri Sturluson’s privileged education is visible in his representation of Norse mythology.³ While previous scholars have argued that Snorri’s *Edda* is a trustworthy source on pagan myth, contemporary Christian

¹ John Lindow, *Murder and Vengeance among the Gods: Baldr in Scandinavian Mythology* (FF Communications 262), Academia Scientiarum Fennica: Helsinki 1997, 24.

² Carolyne Larrington transl., *The Poetic Edda*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, 274–81. When discussing the Poetic Edda, this article will refer to the Íslenzk fornrit edition, which is primarily based on the Codex Regius or GKS 2365 4to (c.1270) and AM 748 I a 4to (c. 1300–25) manuscripts; Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason eds., *Eddukvæði: Goðakvæði* (Íslenzk fornrit), Hið íslenska fornritafélag: Reykjavík 2014.

³ Anthony Faulkes, ‘Introduction’, in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, Anthony Faulkes ed. & transl., Everyman: London 1995, xi–xxiii, at xii.

liturgical influences are clearly visible throughout the text.⁴ Kevin Wanner suggests that modern scholarship's problematic conceptualising and reconciling of the 'two Snorris', one a politician and the other a man invested in cultural preservation, leaves his real motivations for preserving eddic and skaldic verse unexamined.⁵ Instead, it is more helpful to see Snorri as creating a literary product to 'function as a marker of social prestige and tool of political power', thus reforming how we understand his editorial interventions.⁶ Despite his attempt to structure contemporary myths into a coherent form, Snorri's mediation ironically contributed to the volatile nature of the extant sources available to us, and these varying accounts of Norse myth form the basis of Hǫðr's inconsistent representation in prose and poetry.⁷

Scholarly approaches towards Snorri's *Edda* tend to displace its formation from material and political spheres to view it as a product of intellectual leisure. However, Snorri directly instructs readers how to receive the myths, signposting to the developing cultural and social climate.⁸ As such, it is difficult to read his *Edda* without acknowledging its broader historical situation and Snorri's political background. When considering the mediation of Norse myth, we must also address the conversion to Christianity in Scandinavia. Although the thirteenth century was a time of cultural and political transition with the Church influencing existing power dynamics, the conversion process itself was one that lasted centuries.⁹ Unlike other European rulers, Scandinavian kings and leaders willingly adopted and accepted Christianity first and foremost 'to promote their own short-term political interests'.¹⁰ In contrast to contemporary conversion narratives that envisioned the process as immediate and complete, Anders Winroth suggests that there was a fluidity of religion and a gradual adoption of Christianity, where Northern European countries received and adopted this ideology in piecemeal form.¹¹

In the year 999 or 1000, Iceland's Althing agreed to convert to Christianity. Hoping to retain their cultural independence in the face of growing Latin Christendom, Icelanders recorded their myths during the proceeding centuries in ways that exemplified their ancestors while continuing to promote the Christian faith.¹² Henrik Janson proposes that thirteenth-century Icelandic literature is preoccupied with 'the integration and conversion of the indigenous culture of the North into the Christianity of the Latin Church', and yet we must approach written sources such as Snorri's *Edda* with the understanding that they would not necessarily portray the more complex relationship

⁴ Henrik Janson, 'Edda and "Oral Christianity": Apocryphal Leaves of the Early Medieval Storyworld of the North', in Lars Boje Mortensen & Tuomas M. S. Lehtone eds., *The Performance of Christian and Pagan Storyworlds: Non-Canonical Chapters of the History of Nordic Medieval Literature*, Brepols: Turnhout 2013, 171–97.

⁵ Kevin Wanner, *Snorri Sturluson and the Edda: The Conversion of Cultural Capital in medieval Scandinavia*, University of Toronto Press: Toronto 2008, 5–6.

⁶ Wanner 2008, 8.

⁷ Janson 2013, 171.

⁸ Wanner 2008, 10.

⁹ Faulkes 1995, xii.

¹⁰ Anders Winroth, *The Conversion of Scandinavia: Vikings, Merchants, and Missionaries in the Remaking of Northern Europe*, Yale University Press: New Haven 2012, 8.

¹¹ Winroth 2012, 133.

¹² Diana Whaley, 'A Useful Past: Historical Writing in Medieval Iceland', in Margaret Clunies Ross ed., *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2000, 161–202, at 192.

between conversion and contemporary Scandinavian society.¹³ I suggest that the representation of the impaired god Hǫðr and the presence or lack of his impairment in Snorri's *Edda* and the *Poetic Edda*, respectively, is a product of these nuances, and that a closer examination of his blindness in the myth of Baldr reveals this trope to be a marker of shifting philosophical, theological, and eschatological thought.

Blindness, or vision loss, is a well-known mythological motif, and in Norse culture it is more commonly associated with Óðinn and his one eye. It is also a typical feature in religious discourses that influenced and shaped cultural attitudes during the Middle Ages. For example, Edward Wheatley examines how blindness as a disability and trope in medieval France and England converges with anti-Semitism and the marginalisation of Jewish communities during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.¹⁴ With Christianity becoming the primary spiritual authority in medieval Europe, those with impairments moved from acceptance within a community to more frequent exclusion and marginalisation. Although Irina Metzler argues that 'disordered, defective, or impaired bodies need not always be viewed as symptomatic of spiritual defects during the high Middle Ages', she acknowledges that scholarship still tends to associate illness and impairment with sin during this period of history.¹⁵ The change in attitude towards impairments, then, can be loosely mapped onto the growing power of Latin Christendom.

Before examining representations of Hǫðr's blindness and his role as Baldr's killer, I want to bring attention to the distinction between disability and impairment, the former being a social construction produced by an active gaze and environment, while the latter is an indicator of one's physicality. With this in mind, I will refer to Hǫðr's blindness as an impairment unless there are any apparent social implications. Bragg and Lassen have both briefly examined Hǫðr's blindness as part of Norse eschatology, however, I believe that there is more to contribute to the discourse. I will build on these formative scholarly discussions to demonstrate how the varying depictions of Hǫðr, both featuring and failing to mention his blindness, permits us to trace the development of a society where ecclesiastic power was coinciding with traditional secular authority. There remains no satisfactory critical interpretation as to why Hǫðr returns with Baldr in the aftermath of Ragnarǫk, and so I will focus on how Hǫðr's blindness re-interprets Ragnarǫk as a site where the impaired and disabled figure regains their autonomy.

Framing the Myth: Is Hǫðr's Blindness Important?

Impaired people in the medieval Nordic world occupied a liminal space in society where they were simultaneously accepted and marginalised.¹⁶ This position, comparable to how Snorri 'places paganism within the wider, explicitly Christian notion of universal history', situates differing view-

¹³ Janson 2013, 171.

¹⁴ Edward Wheatley, *Stumbling Blocks Before the Blind: Medieval Constructions of a Disability*, University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor 2010, 63–89.

¹⁵ Irina Metzler, *Disability in Medieval Europe: Thinking about Physical Impairment in the High Middle Ages, C. 1100–C. 1400*, Routledge: London 2006, 13, 52.

¹⁶ Lois Bragg, 'From the Mute God to the Lesser God: Disability in Medieval Celtic and Old Norse Literature', *Disability and Society* 12, 2 (1997), 165–78, at 175.

points and experiences within a wider social and cultural understanding of the world.¹⁷ Hqðr is placed on the peripheries of the mythological Æsir community, but the representation of his activity and blindness differs between the *Poetic Edda* and Snorri's *Edda*. The latter is the only source that explicitly mentions Hqðr's blindness, while *Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar* only describe him as 'Baldr's adversary' (*Baldrs andskota*) and 'Baldr's killer' (*Baldrs bana*).¹⁸ In fact, eddic poetry defines Hqðr primarily by his relationship to the myth rather than his impairment, centralising his role in the death of Baldr. We cannot assume that a contemporary audience were aware of Hqðr's blindness, nor that this detail was already part of a collective knowledge, especially when oral traditions were 'unlikely to survive unchanged in oral form for a long period of time, especially if it undergoes changes in context'.¹⁹ Rather, the divergence in the myth's iteration and Hqðr's blindness must be addressed in relation to his role as 'an adversary' (*andskota*) and 'a killer' (*bana*).

The blind motif may then be a creative addition in Snorri's *Edda*, something that seems more apparent when comparing Hqðr to Høtherus, Hqðr's Danish counterpart in Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*, or *History of the Danes*, (c.1208–18). There are several key differences between Saxo's and Snorri's renditions of the Baldr myth, the most important being that Loki is non-existent in Saxo's account and how Høtherus performs various tasks that seem to necessitate visual awareness without any mention of him being visually impaired or blind.²⁰ John Stanley Martin suggests that Saxo and early eddic sources were working from an older, more genuinely 'pagan', source than Snorri, with Loki being a late development in the tradition with his eschatological role being only to break free at Ragnarøk and nothing more.²¹ If this is the case, then the omission of Hqðr's blindness in the *Poetic Edda* and his relationship to Loki in Snorri's *Edda* as a blind instrument demands further examination. As such, I suggest that the disparity between sources and their treatment of Hqðr as a blind god mirrors the ongoing tensions between traditional cultural views and emergent Christian theologies in medieval Scandinavia.

Henri-Jacques Stiker writes that 'disability defies order', and this is evident in Hqðr's portrayal within the broader corpus of Norse myth.²² Hqðr's impaired agency in Snorri's *Edda* disrupts Æsir society, and his kennings as recorded in *Skáldskaparmál* stress the importance of blindness as part of his identity. Kennings, figures of speech rooted in pre-Christian traditions, are useful tools for modern scholars to better understand the more allusive poetic references and roles of the gods. Most gods are described by family connections, highlighting the significance of ancestry in social convention. For example, Snorri believes that Baldr should be described first and foremost 'By

¹⁷ Christopher Abram, *Myths of the Pagan North: The Gods of the Norsemen*, Continuum: New York 2011, 210.

¹⁸ Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason eds., *Eddukvæði: Goðakvæði* (Íslensk fornrit), Hið íslenska fornritafélag: Reykjavík 2014, 299, 448; Larrington 2014, 8, 236. Unless stated otherwise, translations of the *Poetic Edda* will be cited from Larrington 2014.

¹⁹ Terry Gunnell, 'Eddic Poetry', in Rory McTurk ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford 2007, 82–100, at 93.

²⁰ Peter Fisher, 'Introduction to Book Three', in Hilda Ellis Davidson ed. & Peter Fisher transl., *The History of the Danes: Books I–IX*, Boydell & Brewer: Suffolk 2002, 65–66.

²¹ John Stanley Martin, *Ragnarøk: An Investigation into Old Norse Concepts of the Fate of the Gods*, Royal Van Gorcum: Amsterdam 1972, 85–89.

²² Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability*, William Sayers transl., University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor 2000, 58.

calling him son of Odin and Frigg'.²³ In comparison, gods with a distinguishing difference such as Týr, Víðarr, and Hqðr, are primarily defined by their impairments. Týr is described as 'the one-handed As' (*Einhenda Ás*) and Víðarr as 'the silent As' (*þogla Ás*).²⁴ In a similar manner, Hqðr's blindness is his primary identifier: 'How shall Hod be referred to? By calling him the blind As, Baldrs slayer, shooter of mistletoe, son of Odin, Hel's companion, Vali's enemy'.²⁵ Hqðr's filial relation is displaced, and instead his blindness and role in Baldr's demise are brought to the fore. Not only does this emphasise Hqðr's visual impairment, but it redefines it as integral to his function as 'Baldr's adversary' (*Baldrs andskota*); it is not merely a stylistic and descriptive component.

The emphasis on Hqðr's impairment, not his family connections, is also present in *Gylfaginning*, where 'Hod is the name of one As. He is blind. Only too strong is he'.²⁶ Snorri establishes Hqðr's blindness which Bragg asserts 'is an integral, traditional, and in no way pejorative part of the story of the Death of Baldr' and combines it with his 'great strength' (*ærit styrkr*).²⁷ This consequently establishes him as 'Baldr's adversary' (*Baldrs andskota*). Although *Gylfaginning's* version of Baldr's death focuses more on Loki, Hqðr still frames the narrative, both physically and textually: 'Hod was standing at the edge of the circle of people, for he was blind'.²⁸ While standing outside the group activities, he commits the killing and then does not reappear until after Ragnarok when 'After that Baldr and Hod will arrive from Hel'.²⁹ In these two small examples, Hqðr is structurally placed on the peripheries of the myth, which in turn reflects his liminal position in Æsir society and their activities due to his blindness. Despite emphasising Hqðr's impairment, Snorri's *Edda* invests more in Loki suffering the consequences for his actions, thus furthering Hqðr's outsider identity. By reframing the myth of Baldr through Hqðr's blindness, we can recognise how impairment and the impaired position is simultaneously active and passive; both participating in a narrative while being relegated to the textual edges.

Loki's Forced Partnership: Questioning Hqðr's Agency

Hqðr's active agency in the myth varies between sources, and in Snorri's *Edda* his role is arguably not as important as Loki's. Rather than being an explicit antagonist, Hqðr is consigned to the edges

²³ 'Svá at kalla hann son Óðins ok Friggjar', Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál I*, Anthony Faulkes ed., Viking Society for Northern Research: London 1998, 17; Snorri Sturluson, *Edda*, Anthony Faulkes transl., Everyman: London, 1995, 74. Unless stated otherwise, translations of Snorri's *Edda* will be henceforth cited from Faulkes 1995. Snorri's *Edda* consists of a Prologue and three other sections known as *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál*, and *Háttatal*.

²⁴ Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál I*, 19; Faulkes transl. 1995, 76.

²⁵ 'Svá at kalla hann blind Ás, Baldrs bana, skjótanda mistilteins, son Óðins, Heljar sinna, Vála dólg', Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál I*, 19; Faulkes transl. 1995, 76.

²⁶ 'Hqðr heitir einn Ássinn. Hann er blindr. Ærit er hann styrkr', Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, Anthony Faulkes ed., Viking Society for Northern research: London 2005, 26; Faulkes transl. 1995, 26.

²⁷ Lois Bragg, *Oedipus Borealis: The Aberrant Body in Old Icelandic Myth and Saga*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press: Madison 2004, 123.

²⁸ 'En Hqðr stóð útarliga í mannhringinum þvíat hann var blindr', Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 45; Faulkes transl. 1995, 48.

²⁹ 'Því næst koma þar Baldr ok Hqðr frá Heljar', Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 53; Faulkes transl. 1995, 56.

of events due to his impairment, and in this position, he remains both present and absent, active and passive, as the world transitions from order to chaos, and then to a new order post-Ragnarøk. In some versions of the myth Loki, an ambiguous and volatile figure, utilises Hqðr's blindness and directs the god to commit the killing. Loki's personality in cultural references and prominence in medieval society continuously fluctuated between the ninth and thirteenth centuries.³⁰ While I will not focus on Loki's role in the myth of Baldr, a re-examination of his partnership with Hqðr will further elucidate the importance of the blindness motif in this myth.

Snorri's *Edda* presents Hqðr merely as a blind implement for Loki's plans, and it is clear that Loki is the main perpetrator. As mentioned previously, Loki is non-existent in Saxo's Danish rendition of the myth and similarly, the myth as found in *Baldrs draumar* and *Vqluspá* places the guilt and blame directly on Hqðr. The juxtaposition of agency in these sources demands further examination to understand whether Hqðr is an innocent bystander, and if not, how this complicates his reappearance after Ragnarøk. *Baldrs draumar* reveals no third-party interference from Loki, as seen when a 'seeress' (*vqlva*) is consulted by Óðinn.

Hod will dispatch the high glory-tree to this place;
he will be Baldr's killer³¹

John McKinnell proposes that 'when *vqlvur* are consulted in mythological and legendary sources, it is assumed that they are truthfully predicting an inevitable future'.³² With this in mind, the directness of *berr* and *bana verða* here does not allow Hqðr to be anything but the main perpetrator: he alone is Baldr's killer and therefore cannot be reconciled as innocent. Snorri, in contrast, gives Loki an explicit motive. At the assembly, the Æsir throw missiles and yet Baldr is still unharmed, 'But when Loki Laufeyjarson saw this he was not pleased that Baldr was unharmed', and it is from this displeasure that Loki decides on Baldr's demise.³³ Snorri's rationalisation and alignment of the myth with Christian teaching is visible in Loki's portrayal as a more malicious, and perhaps unreasonable, god within Norse mythology.

This representation of Loki can be affiliated with the Christian devil.³⁴ Pagan demonic figures were more ambiguous than the Devil from Christian liturgy, but by introducing an explicit motive and more agency than existing traditions, Snorri superimposes a clearer Christian ideological structure onto existent pagan forms.³⁵ This in turn draws together old and new traditions while favouring Christian liturgical authority. Loki's presence in Snorri's *Edda* conflicts and overshadows Hqðr's

³⁰ Martin 1972, 84–85.

³¹ 'Hqðr berr hávan / hróðrbaðm þinig, / hann man Baldri / at bana verða', Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 447; Larrington 2014, 236.

³² John McKinnell, *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*, Boydell & Brewer: Suffolk 2005, 98.

³³ 'En er þetta sá Loki Laufeyjarson þá líkaði honum illa er Baldr sakaði ekki', Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 45; Faulkes transl. 1995, 48.

³⁴ Kees Samplonius, 'The Background and Scope of *Vqluspá*', in Terry Gunnell & Annette Lassen eds., *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to *Vqluspá* and Nordic Days of Judgement*, Brepols: Turnhout 2013, 113–45, at 129–31.

³⁵ Thomas A. DuBois, *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*, University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia 1999, 50.

arguably original role, demoting the blind god to a passive character that does not reflect the *Poetic Edda's* descriptions of his strength. The prominence of Loki in the myth also draws attention to Hqðr's blindness and loss of agency. Within the *Poetic Edda* there are nuances to Hqðr's active participation in Baldr's death, for example in *Lokasenna*, an eddic poem describing Loki's quarrel with the Æsir, Loki is exposed as being involved in Baldr's death. This core difference in source material opens up questions concerning Hqðr's participation as a facilitator of the unfortunate events concluding in Ragnarok.

Snorri uses eddic poetry as a way of certifying aspects of his narrative, and yet the death of Baldr episode has a distinct lack of such material, suggesting that 'Snorri's account of the death of Baldr is [...] a careful patchwork of narrative elements from different sources'.³⁶ Stefanie Würth stresses that 'everyone taking part in the transmission of a literary work could intervene in the process of literary production', and I argue that this is specifically the case with regards to the treatment of Loki.³⁷ Not only does Snorri transfer Hqðr's agency in *Völuspá* and *Baldrs draumar* to Loki, but he displaces the blind god to the narrative edges. This marginalisation reflects a conscious mediation of traditional stories influenced by contemporary cultural and political changes, but it also renders Hqðr inactive within Æsir society. As such, Hqðr's agency becomes one of passive interpretation rather than active intervention.

Returning briefly to kennings, they were integral to a skald's repertoire and preserved the memory of figures from traditional mythological stories. Loki's kennings reveal his role in Baldr's death to be not as prominent as his other defining features:

How shall Loki be referred to? By calling him son of Farbauti and Laufey [...] father of Vanargand [...] enemy of the gods [...] maker of mischief, the cunning As, accuser and tricker of the gods, contriver of Baldr's death.³⁸

In this list, Loki has only one connection to Baldr, 'contriver of Baldr's death' (*ráðbani Baldrs*), while Hqðr is principally defined by his part in Baldr's demise. *Ráð* as a noun can also mean 'counsel' and 'advice', so an alternative reading could be Loki as an advisor or guide of the events rather than being the active killer.³⁹ Instead, Loki's greatest value as a cultural touchstone lies in the offspring he sires and his role as 'the cunning As' (*hinn slægi Áss*). Although Snorri could be more creative in interpreting the myths in *Gylfaginning*, he would not have had that freedom with *Skáldskaparmál*. His desire to record the foundational oral-formulaic elements needed to preserve skaldic poetry was part of 'his desire to encourage young Icelanders' interest in skaldic diction', and so his investment in the preservation of traditional poetic devices would not have permitted

³⁶ Heather O'Donoghue, 'What has Baldr to do with Lamech? The lethal shot of a blind man in Old Norse myth and Jewish exegetical traditions', *Medium Ævum* 72, 1 (2003), 82–107, at 82.

³⁷ Stefanie Würth, 'Historiography and Pseudo-Historiography', in Rory McTurk ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford 2007, 155–72, at 170.

³⁸ 'Hvernig skal kenna Loka? Svá at kalla son Fárbauta ok Laufeyjar [...] Fqður Vánargands [...] þolva smiðr, hinn slægi Áss, rægjanda ok vélandi goðanna, ráðbani Baldrs', Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál I*, 19–20; Faulkes transl. 1995, 76–77.

³⁹ 'Ráð, n.1', *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic*. <https://norse.ulver.com/dct/zoega/r.html> (accessed January 07, 2020).

him to make substantial alterations to known kennings.⁴⁰ With this in mind, Loki's kennings suggest his lesser role in the myth while Hǫðr remains the main perpetrator of Baldr's death, despite Loki dominating the narrative in Snorri's *Edda*.

The importance of Hǫðr's role is further consolidated with the introduction of Váli, a son of Óðinn born to avenge Baldr's death. In Snorri's *Edda*, Loki tells Hǫðr, 'I will direct you to where he is standing. Shoot him with this stick'.⁴¹ The imperatives *Ek mun* and *Skjót at honum* imply Hǫðr's lack of control and Loki's manipulation. This, however, juxtaposes Hǫðr's actions in *Völuspá*:

From that stem which seemed so slender
there came a dangerous grief-dart: Hod started to shoot⁴²

The alliteration of *harmflaug hættling*, / *Hǫðr* explicitly connects the blind god to the crime. Martin argues that in earlier versions of the myth, 'Hǫðr was the slayer and should have borne the consequences. Revenge is implied in *Völuspá*, if not specifically stated, and Loki seems to be a latecomer in the theme'.⁴³ In Snorri's *Edda*, however, the narrative stresses the Æsir's vengeance on Loki, and so to fully comprehend Hǫðr's position as a killer, we must turn to Váli's avenging role in *Völuspá*.

Hǫðr's blindness is used by Loki to disrupt Æsir society, but his impairment also implicates him as 'Baldr's killer' (*Baldrs bana*). When vengeance is introduced into the mythological narrative, the fractures and changes within this mythic society emulate the social changes evident in thirteenth-century Iceland. Guðrun Nordal suggests that:

Vengeance is not only an obligation decreed by the law but reflects a deep-rooted sense of justice. A brother was the closest companion of a brother in both kin and age, and often more suitable to revenge his killing than the father.⁴⁴

This perspective, rooted in pre-Christian societal values, contrasts with Christian teaching which states, for example, 'revenge not yourselves, my dearly beloved; but give place unto wrath, for it is written: Revenge is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord'.⁴⁵ Váli's presence reinforces the more traditional outlook.

Baldr's brother was born quickly;
Odin's son started killing at one night old⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Wanner 2008, 120.

⁴¹ 'Ek mun vísa þér til hvar hann stendr. Skjót at honum vendi þessum', Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 46; Faulkes transl. 1995, 48.

⁴² 'Varð af þeim meiði / er mær sýndisk / harmflaug hættling, / Hǫðr nam skjóta', Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 299; Larrington 2014, 8.

⁴³ Martin 1972, 121.

⁴⁴ Guðrún Nordal, *Ethics and Action in Thirteenth-Century Iceland*, Odense University Press: Odense, 1998 70.

⁴⁵ Rom. 12:19. All biblical references are taken from the *Douay-Rheims Bible*, <http://www.drbo.org>; Guðrún Nordal 1998, 47.

⁴⁶ 'Baldrs bróðir var / of borinn snemma, / sá nam Óðins sonr / einnættir vega', Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 299; Larrington 2014, 8.

Hqðr's kenning 'Vali's enemy' (*Vála dólgr*), and Váli's kennings, 'Baldr's avenging As' (*hefni-Ás Baldr<s>*) and 'enemy of Hod and his slayer' (*dólgr Haðar ok bana hans*), validate Váli's status as avenger and Hqðr as recipient of such form of justice.

The demand for vengeance is also found in *Baldrs draumar* and it reveals a tension between traditional feuding culture and newer Christian power.⁴⁷

Who'll achieve vengeance on Hod for this wickedness,
Who'll bring Baldr's killer to the funeral pyre?⁴⁸

There is an element of necessity captured by the questioning *Hverr mun [...] eða* which emphasises the need to avenge Baldr and punish Hqðr, leaving no room for subservience to the Christian God. Váli's vengeance and appearance within the myth further develops Hqðr's eschatological role, drawing attention to its roots in heathen practice.

Váli's avenging actions are, in essence, fratricide, and are in turn a product of Hqðr's own fratricidal act. While Hqðr's killing of Baldr signals the downfall of the Æsir, it is Váli's vengeance that propagates the cycle of violence that leads to Ragnarøk. David Clark proposes that Váli introduces a never-ending cycle of death and vengeance and that 'human strife, primarily characterized by kin-slaying and revenge, is thus linked to the archetypal cosmic strife'.⁴⁹ *Völuspá* describes the chaos at the start of Ragnarøk:

Brother will fight brother and be his slayer,
sister's sons will violate the kinship-bond;
hard it is in the world, whoredom abounds⁵⁰

Fratricide is the beginning of the end, firstly with Hqðr killing Baldr, and then with Váli who is begotten specifically for vengeance; the fratricidal cycle never resolves.⁵¹ There are also connections to Óðinn, as Gabriel Turville-Petre reminds us that '[Óðinn] delighted especially in fratricidal strife and in conflict between kinsmen'.⁵² Lokasenna, while not mentioning Hqðr as complicit in Baldr's death, also propagates this theme by revealing Loki to be a blood-brother of Óðinn.

Eventually, the vengeance cycle ends with Ragnarøk, and resolution is found in the aftermath when, according to both Snorri's Edda and *Völuspá*, Hqðr and Baldr return in apparent reconciliation. Before addressing this outcome, it is important to understand that the passages cited above show Hqðr to be responsible for the killing in his own right, regardless of Loki's interference and

⁴⁷ Helgi Þorláksson, 'Historical Background: Iceland 870–1400', in Rory McTurk ed., *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford 2007, 136–54, at 148.

⁴⁸ 'Hverr mun heipt Heði / hefnt of vinna / eða Baldrs bana / á bál vega?', Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 448; Larrington 2014, 236.

⁴⁹ David Clark, *Gender, Violence, and the Past in Edda and Saga*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, 67.

⁵⁰ 'Brœðr munu berjask / ok at bþnom verðask, / munu systrungar / sífjum spilla; / hart er í heimi, / hórdómr mikill', Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 302; Larrington 2014, 9.

⁵¹ Clark 2012, 68.

⁵² E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London 1964, 51.

manipulation. Despite Snorri shifting the majority of the blame from Hǫðr to Loki, both Vǫluspá and Baldrs draumar retain Hǫðr's original guilt as 'Baldr's killer' (Baldrs bana), thus accounting for the vengeance that follows.

Biblical Blindness and Hǫðr's Function

The shift in Hǫðr's agency gestures towards complicated medieval attitudes regarding impaired people. Hǫðr is both a condemned killer and an impaired scapegoat, and yet in these two capacities he maintains an important role in the myth, thus justifying his reappearance in the aftermath of Ragnarøk. During the course of the eleventh to thirteenth century, the curbing of pagan beliefs was accelerated by the institutionalisation of the Church, and consequently, Christian practices became further entrenched within contemporary medieval Nordic society.⁵³ While Snorri actively repositions Hǫðr's guilt and reframes the narrative around Loki, this does not discount Hǫðr's symbolic presence in the myth as a blind figure. Instead, I propose that Hǫðr's displacement from a more visibly central role within the myth to the margins emulates the displacing of heathen practice from the public to the private domain.

During the Middle Ages, blindness was often thought to symbolise a lack of moral vision, of which there are several examples in Scriptural writing.⁵⁴ Although the earliest known full translation of the Bible in Iceland dates from 1584, the its authority and intervention in Old Norse-Icelandic writing was still significant prior to this date.⁵⁵ The conversion in 999 or 1000, when the Church introduced Latin literacy and schooling in Iceland, established an almost standardised, but Bible-focused, literate education. While there are indeed biblical allusions throughout Snorri's *Edda* and the *Poetic Edda*, as Vésteinn Ólason rightly reminds us, 'the Christian parallel is easily established by Christians, but these lines might not have had any such connotations in the minds of the original audience, or that of the poet'.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the presence of Christian thought in Snorri's work is not surprising and is apparent in his treatment of blindness as a motif.

After the conversion of Iceland, many believers were still only nominal, and Abram argues that 'Christian preachers still felt it necessary to instruct their congregations that paganism was a delusion and the old gods false idols'.⁵⁷ This tension between the old and new societal values is visible when Snorri's asks readers to acknowledge his Christian intentions and his specific readings of these myths.

⁵³ Orri Vésteinsson, *The Christianization of Iceland: Priests, Power, and Social Change, 1000–1300*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2000, 194.

⁵⁴ Kolfinna Jónatansdóttir, "'Blindur er betri en brenndur sé": Um norræna guði og skerðingar', in Hanna Björg Sigurjónsdóttir, Ármann Jakobsson & Kristín Björnsdóttir eds., *Fötlun og menning: Íslandssagan í öðru ljósi, Félagsvísindastofnun Háskóla Íslands, Rannsóknasetur í fötlunarfræðum*: Reykjavík 2013, 27–49, at 41.

⁵⁵ Ian Kirby, 'The Bible and Biblical Interpretation in Medieval Iceland', in Margaret Clunies Ross ed., *Old Icelandic Literature and Society*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2000, 287–301, at 287.

⁵⁶ Vésteinn Ólason, 'Vǫluspá and Time', in Terry Gunnell & Anette Lassen eds., *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Vǫluspá and Nordic Days of Judgement*, Brepols: Turnhout 2013, 25–44, at 34–35; see also Pernille Hermann, 'Literacy', in Ármann Jakobsson & Sverrir Jakobsson ed., *The Routledge Research Companion to the Medieval Icelandic Sagas*, Routledge: London 2017, 34–47, at 35.

⁵⁷ Abram 2011, 193.

But these stories are not to be consigned to oblivion or demonstrated to be false, so as to deprive poetry of ancient kennings which major poets have been happy to use. Yet Christian people must not believe in heathen gods.⁵⁸

Here, although removed from the context of ecclesiastical teaching, we find an example of Snorri warning his audience that those who read his *Edda* should not ‘believe in heathen gods’ (*trúa á heiðin goð*). This need to justify and mediate the reader’s experience of these myths demonstrates an intervention that places the mythic narratives within an explicitly Christian framework. With this in mind, the motif of blindness elucidates an altogether different understanding of Hǫðr and his function within Snorri’s version of the myth.

Despite its impact on medieval society as a social and religious guidebook, the Bible remains unreliable in its depiction of blindness. New Testament teachings can be seen to work against and sometimes completely contradict the more traditional Mosaic books which are also inconsistent. The blind man is a recurring motif found in both the Old and New Testaments but one that drastically differs between these two parts of the Bible. The Old Testament shows varying examples of blindness and people with limited mobility being excluded from society, especially from the temple. In these books, actions towards impaired people are defined by a perceived need for correction and punishment.⁵⁹ However, this social expectation is subverted in the Gospels where, for example, ‘there came to [Jesus] the blind and the lame in the temple; and he healed them’.⁶⁰ The New Testament emphasises miraculous healing and the power of God through Christ, and those with impairments become sites of intervention. It is important to note, however, that while those impaired, specifically blind people, move from marginalization to acceptance in the New Testament, their re-integration into Jewish society is not as impaired, but as healed and now seen to be ‘perfected’ bodies. Their acceptance is predicated on an able body, albeit one that works to unsettle orthodox Old Testament teachings.

Hǫðr’s blindness redefines Æsir society by disrupting the traditional social and religious order. His impairment, however, does not become a way of furthering his agency, but echoes more patristic models of the blind man motif. While the New Testament does not necessarily correlate sin with illness, as Metzler points out, ‘illness is not always *necessarily* the result of sin, as was the Old Testament view, but now it just *maybe* the result of sin’.⁶¹ Further to this point, there are examples where blindness specifically becomes not a sin yet to be redeemed, but a site for the manifestations of God’s miraculous intervention; the blind man is transformed into an indicator of change in social and religious attitudes.

⁵⁸ ‘En ekki er at gleyma eða ósanna svá þessar sögur at taka ór skáldskapinum for[nar ke]nningar þær er hǫfuðskáld hafa sér líka látit. En eigi skulu kristnir menn trúa á heiðin goð’, Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál I*, 5; Faulkes transl. 1995, 64.

⁵⁹ Metzler 2006, 38.

⁶⁰ For example, see Lev. 21:17–22; 2 Sam. 5:8; Matt. 21:14.

⁶¹ Metzler 2006, 42.

And his disciples asked [Jesus]: Rabbi, who hath sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind? Jesus answered: Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.⁶²

The main patristic idea of blindness in the New Testament is founded on the Pauline texts, where it is seen as ‘divinely sanctioned’ and becomes associated with a Jewish spiritual ignorance.⁶³ This is made explicit, for example, when Jesus, after ‘giving’ sight to a man who was blind from birth, says ‘For judgement I am come into this world; that they who see not, may see; and they who see, may become blind’, and his condemnation of the Pharisees, ‘Woe to you blind guides [...] Ye foolish and blind’.⁶⁴

The conversion of Saul of Tarsus to Apostle St. Paul on the road to Damascus is one of the most well-known instances that relates the loss and restoration of vision to miraculous spiritual renewal, a version of which appears in the thirteenth-century Old Icelandic *Páls saga postola*.⁶⁵ Saul, before becoming Paul, was a Pharisee and so embodied previous ideas of spiritual blindness. His conversion is a consequence of being healed from blindness, and this physical change in turn signals a transformation from religious corruption to Christian enlightenment. In France and England, the association between a spiritual blindness and the Jews was similarly coloured by a religious model of disability whereby the impaired Jew must ‘submit to religious discipline in order to qualify for divine cure’.⁶⁶ The complex use of physical blindness as a marker of a spiritual difference led to marginalisation of both groups, and this, I propose, is also evident in the different representations of Hqðr as a blind god.

Baldr is sometimes considered a pagan representation of Christ, and so when in Snorri’s account Hqðr tells Loki, ‘I cannot see where Baldr is’, a parallel can be made between the stock figure of the Pharisee unable to comprehend or see the Gospel truth and Hqðr.⁶⁷ The comparison between Hqðr and spiritual blindness is further developed by his need to rely on Loki, ‘Hod took the mistletoe and shot at Baldr at Loki’s direction’.⁶⁸ This reliance on ‘Loki’s direction’ (*tilvísun Loka*) stresses Hqðr’s need for physical guidance and assistance. The blind man needing assistance is a trope that was developed in medieval Jewish commentary with the figure Lamech who accidentally kills Cain and brings upon himself greater divine punishment. In relation to Hqðr, there are traces of a similar situation: a blind man is in need of assistance, and through the unfortunate circumstances of visual impairment and misguidance, there is a consequential killing. Building on my earlier discussions, Snorri revises Loki into a character that is more reflective of the Christian devil in his narrative, and so Hqðr’s dependence on him, due to his blindness, reflects an inward blindness that reiterates an

⁶² John. 9:2–3.

⁶³ Wheatley 2010, 66.

⁶⁴ John 9:39; Matt.23:16–17.

⁶⁵ Acts. 9:1–19; C. R. Unger ed., *Postola sögur*, B. M. Bentzen: Christiania 1874, 216–17.

⁶⁶ Wheatley 2010, 87.

⁶⁷ Turville-Petre 1964, 119. ‘Þvíat ek sé eigi hvar Baldr er’, Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 46; Faulkes transl. 1995, 48.

⁶⁸ ‘Hqðr tók mistiltein ok skaut at Baldri at tilvísun Loka’, Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 46; Faulkes transl. 1995, 49.

ignorance towards Christian ideals.

The blind motif, then, is not just a symbol of contemporary attitudes of exclusion but is one that also indicates a potential for change. Its role in the Bible, despite the diverging representations, remains the same: it serves to disrupt and intervene a narrative, allowing an opportunity for Christian redemption. In Snorri's *Edda*, Hǫðr upsets the Æsir: 'The work of his hands will long be kept in mind among gods and men'.⁶⁹ By affecting both 'gods and men' (*goðum ok mǫnnum*), the consequence of his actions become one that moves beyond the realm of the supernatural to be a universal issue. His blindness, while being an issue for both the physical and spiritual worlds, also breaks down social order and permits a change in the structure of this community. It takes on a function of disability in society which Stiker suggests 'is indicative, disruptive, subversive, prestigious, theurgical'.⁷⁰ Blindness in the myth of Baldr transcends both social and spiritual divides, and its capacity as an impairment or perceived disability due to its exclusion from certain social spheres, allows the motif to encompass multiple contradictory perspectives and domains.

Hǫðr is excluded from the games of the Æsir when he is unable to participate in the ritualistic throwing of objects at Baldr; to reiterate, 'Hod was standing at the edge of the circle of people, for he was blind'.⁷¹ Bragg argues that in medieval society, those who were blind were excluded, 'not because it was pitiable to be blind, but rather because of the danger that one individual's blindness posed to the community'.⁷² By being on the peripheries of social activity, Hǫðr reflects this attitude and the roots of this treatment is found in the Old Testament. The Book of Leviticus lists various laws for the Israelites, and among the list of rules, rituals, and sacrifices, it is revealed that disabled people are unable to participate. Leviticus 22 writes, 'the man that offereth a victim of peace offerings to the Lord [...] If it be blind, or broken, or have a scar or blisters, or a scab, or a dry scurf: you shall not offer them to the Lord'.⁷³ This biblical exclusion, translated by the medieval Church as an equation between disability and sin, divided social status by physical able-bodiedness, where one's inner spiritual purity was thought to manifest through their physical appearance and condition. This view generated attitudes of social rejection which denied disabled people a place in religious social practice and community. As worldviews shifted from pagan to Christian, the relationship between the aberrant body and its community also moved towards an association with spiritual stagnation or condemnation.⁷⁴ Hǫðr's position and inability to interact with his community in their ritual seems to echo this movement.

Blindness in both the Bible and in Snorri's *Edda* initiates transformation, be it spiritual or physical. Returning briefly to the *Poetic Edda*, although *Vǫluspá* does not mention Hǫðr's impairment in the first place, the seeress says that after Ragnarǫk:

⁶⁹ 'Þvíat hans handaverk munu lengi vera hǫfð at minnum með goðum ok mǫnnum', Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 26; Faulkes transl. 1995, 26.

⁷⁰ Stiker 2000, 60.

⁷¹ 'En Hǫðr stóð útarliga í mannhringinum þvíat hann var blindr', Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 45; Faulkes transl. 1995, 48.

⁷² Bragg 1997, 174.

⁷³ Lev. 22:21–22.

⁷⁴ Wheatley 2010, 15–16.

All evil will be healed, Baldr will come;
 Hod and Baldr will settle down in Hropt's victory-homesteads,
 the slaughter-gods are well⁷⁵

The reunited brothers show future promise of union and peace, of reconciliation and redemption, and there is a suggestion of a healed world, where even the cycle of vengeance is put to an end. We can perhaps speculate whether 'evil' (*bǫls*) here refers to the damages in the world or damages caused by Hǫðr, or whether it might include all kinds of injuries, illnesses and impairments. Beatrice La Farge and John Tucker define the word as 'Bale, misfortune, harm, affliction' and also, 'bodily injury or malady'.⁷⁶ If impairments can be included within the evils of the world that have now been cleansed, then Hǫðr might also be removed from his past deeds and impaired body, justifying his return to the new world; that is to say, his guilt is now forgiven with the cleansing of his physical impairment.

As a figure who participates in the events leading up to the downfall of the Æsir, Hǫðr can reconcile the present with the past; his impaired body creates the space and opportunity for Christian redemption. In the *Edda*, Snorri describes how 'they will all sit down together and talk and discuss their mysteries and speak of the things that had happened in former times', showing Hǫðr participating in this new society to reflect on the past events.⁷⁷ The trope of a body perfected at resurrection, a part of patristic tradition since Augustine of Hippo, was further developed in later medieval theological discourse.⁷⁸ Caroline Walker Bynum gestures towards Early Church eschatology where the body was thought to be reassembled at resurrection, remarking that, 'this theory of a resurrection body reconstructed from the same physical bits and accordingly to the same plan it had in life [...] implied that redemption had something to do with stasis'.⁷⁹ At death the body physical pauses, only to transcend at resurrection without any earthly ailments. The materiality of the body, as part of broader theological discourses during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, becomes a marker of renewal, especially if a perceived 'imperfect' body is to be made whole at resurrection. Returning to Hǫðr then, his literal resurrection can be seen as engaging with these contemporary conversations concerning the body's place in medieval Christian eschatological theory, and as such he is transformed into a site of Christian restoration. His mythological function becomes a symbol of rebirth, one that gestures towards a new movement from the old religion to the new.

There is a danger in claiming explicit Christian parallels in the Norse material. Nevertheless, it is commonly acknowledged that the post-Ragnarǫk vision found in *Vǫluspá* suggests the emergence of a new religion to replace the old one. This interpretation respects past traditions while

⁷⁵ 'Bǫls mun alls batna, / Baldr mun koma; / búa þeir Hǫðr ok Baldr / Hropts sigtǫptir', Jónas Kristjánsson & Vésteinn Ólason 2014, 306; Larrington 2014, 11.

⁷⁶ Beatrice La Farge & John Tucker, *Glossary to the Poetic Edda*, Carl Winter: Heidelberg 1992, 33.

⁷⁷ 'Setjask þá allir samt ok talask við ok minnask á rúnar sínar ok ræða of tíðindi þau er fyrrum hǫfðu verit', Snorri Sturluson, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning*, 53–54; Faulkes transl. 1995, 56.

⁷⁸ Metzler 2006, 56.

⁷⁹ Caroline Bynum, 'Why all the Fuss about the Body? A Medievalist's Perspective', *Critical Inquiry* 22, 1 (1995), 1–33, at 25.

allowing for the integration of an emergent Christian worldview with existing Nordic culture.⁸⁰ The gods who return after Ragnarøk differ depending on tradition. Baldr and Høðr are mentioned in *Völuspá*, while it is Váli and gods associated with vengeance that return in *Vafþrúðnismál*. These two groups, supposedly present after Ragnarøk, change the meaning and tone of the myth as one elevates the innocent, the other the avengers.⁸¹ With regards to the pairing found in *Völuspá*, McKinnell asserts that ‘there is a moral reason why these [gods] are the survivors: they are the innocent’, and yet the overall textual evidence available to us indicates that Høðr cannot be reconciled as entirely innocent.⁸² In the poem, as well as in his kennings, Høðr is the definite killer who initiates a vengeance cycle that gestures towards his guilt, and it is only in Snorri’s iteration of the myth that he is portrayed as a more innocent party in relation to Loki. Nevertheless, if we understand his eschatological function to be one that introduces an idea of regeneration, his presence post-Ragnarøk is understandable.

Høðr: ‘For He was Blind’

Although viewed as a minor god in the extensive Nordic pantheon, Høðr is indeed an important figure in the myth of Baldr. His blindness cannot be simply read as a weakness that diminishes him and his role in Baldr’s demise, but rather, his aberrant body must be understood in relation to the various sources available in order to fully appreciate how his visual impairment, both present and absent, confirms his position as integral to the events leading up to Ragnarøk and its aftermath. The idea that ‘Scandinavian eschatology is a transmission of Christian themes’ is evident in the volatile treatment of Høðr’s impairment within the myth of Baldr.⁸³ Although impaired bodies during the Middle Ages frequently functioned as sites where Christian communities could project their social conceptions of shame and sin, they were also simultaneously places where one could observe the Christian God’s miracles and acts of redemption. By developing Høðr into an innocent and impaired god, Snorri superimposes his Christian ideals onto a pre-existing tradition as seen in *Völuspá*.

In Snorri’s *Edda*, Loki takes over Høðr’s old eschatological role, and Høðr himself occupies a new liminal space where he embodies the active yet passive, culpable yet innocent, role as envisaged by the biblical blind man motif. His exclusion is due to his impairment, something that is not apparent in either *Völuspá* or *Baldrs draumar*. The multi-faceted nature of Høðr’s position in Norse eschatology synthesises the religious and political tensions found within thirteenth-century Icelandic society. Differing representations of Høðr’s blindness encompasses the shifts in social and cultural attitudes, and as a god that returns after Ragnarøk he partakes in the new world as one of the innocents. His eschatological function is no longer one of vengeance and death, but of redemption and of new life. Høðr’s peripheral position reconciles the past with the present,

⁸⁰ Jonas Wellendorf, ‘The Interplay of Pagan and Christian Traditions in Icelandic Settlement Myths’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 109, 1 (2010), 1–21, at 20–21.

⁸¹ Andrew McGillivray, *Influences of Pre-Christian Mythology and Christianity on Old Norse Poetry*, Medieval Institute Publications: Kalamazoo 2018, 157.

⁸² John McKinnell, *Both One and Many: Essays on Change and Variety in Late Norse Heathenism*, Il calamo: Rome 1994, 121.

⁸³ Martin 1972, 41.

preserving traditional heritage and religion during a time when tensions were rising between the growing influence of Christianity and the simultaneous displacement of local beliefs. The explicit mention of Hǫðr's blindness in Snorri's *Edda* reworks a well-known myth to demonstrate the transformative effects of conversion through both the redemption of the world and the physical healing of a body. Through his impairment, Hǫðr embodies the conflation, contradiction, and combination of Christianity and traditional beliefs at the turn of the thirteenth century.