

University of Texas Press

The Illicit Love Visit: An Archaeology of Old Norse Sexuality

Author(s): Jenny Jochens

Source: *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Jan., 1991), pp. 357-392

Published by: [University of Texas Press](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3704308>

Accessed: 07/11/2010 22:47

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=texas>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



University of Texas Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Journal of the History of Sexuality*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

The Illicit Love Visit: An Archaeology of Old Norse Sexuality

JENNY JOCHENS

*Department of History
Towson State University*

SEXUALITY IS perhaps that sphere where Christianity has most profoundly influenced human behavior. In all areas of the world where it held sway, Christian thinking imposed itself on every aspect of sexual life, from regulations of marriage to proper coital positions.¹ Originally without a full program of its own, the new religion slowly formulated its sexual and marital policies by simultaneously adopting and rejecting ideas from its host cultures, Judaic, Greco-Roman, and Germanic.² Viewing sexuality with profound suspicion, churchmen eventually demanded celibacy for their officials and formulated a strategy for the laity that domesticated the human sexual drive within marriage by defining this bond as an indissoluble sacrament instituted for procreation, into which a man and a woman entered voluntarily, promising each other fidelity for life and thus excluding all other sexual contacts.³ Fully developed by the middle of the twelfth cen-

A shorter version of this article was read at the annual meeting of the Society for the Advancement of Scandinavian Study, Madison, WI, May 1990. Support from Towson State University in the form of assigned time and a travel grant is gratefully acknowledged. I want to thank François-Xavier Dillmann, Paris, and the anonymous readers from *Journal of the History of Sexuality* for their valuable criticism and suggestions.

¹James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, 1987), pp. 10–175.

²Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1986), vols. 2, 3; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988); Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York, 1988); Suzanne Fonay Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister, 500–900* (Philadelphia, 1981), pp. 10–15.

³Jean Gaudemet, *Le mariage en Occident* (Paris, 1987), pp. 23–107; Hans Zeimentz, *Ehe nach der Lehre der Frühscholastik* (Düsseldorf, 1973); Georges Duby, *The Knight, the Lady, and the Priest: The Making of Modern Marriage in Medieval France*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York, 1983).

[*Journal of the History of Sexuality* 1991, vol. 1, no. 3]

© 1991 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. 1043-4070/91/0103-0001\$01.00

tury, the implementation of this program obviously encountered local resistance according to its variance with previous sexual mores and the suddenness with which it was introduced into a new region.

In societies without a native literary tradition, such as the Germanic world, pre-Christian sexual behavior will in most cases remain elusive. Since churchmen simultaneously introduced both a new religion and a new medium of writing, the former undoubtedly informed the latter regardless of subject matter, in the present case constructing a picture of pagan sexuality mediated through a Christian optic. The Norse corner of the Germanic world, however, standing at the outermost limit of the geographic and chronological expansion of Christianity, offers a special case worth further investigation. Arriving in the north with its sexual and marital program almost fully developed at least half a millennium later than in the rest of Europe, churchmen encountered sharper confrontations with native culture here than on the European continent where Germanic and Christian traditions had been in contact for centuries. As a consequence, Old Norse sources afford abundant illustrations of the near-impossible task of imposing Christian sexual morality on a recalcitrant population. Is it also possible, therefore, to bring into focus the latent image of pre-Christian or pagan sexuality from this evidence? It seems apparent that those features against which churchmen fought most vigorously or which they accepted with reluctance, traits such as extensive concubinage and easy divorce, can be hardly less than still vital remnants of pagan sexual deportment. Beyond traits such as these, however, it is also feasible to enlarge the picture of pagan sexuality from this evidence or, at least, to ascertain subtle shifts of sexual behavior within the Christian epoch.

SOURCES AND ISSUES

Viewed from the standpoint of marriage and sexuality, the Old Norse sources fall into three distinct groups.⁴ In the middle are the laws, originally formulated during paganism, but written down and modified in Christian times.⁵ As among other Germanic tribes, the laws describe mar-

⁴Einar Ól. Sveinsson, *The Age of the Sturlungs: Icelandic Civilization in the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Jóhann S. Hannesson, Islandica, 36 (Ithaca, NY, 1953); Jenny M. Jochens, "The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland," *Journal of Medieval History* 6 (1980): 377–92, and "The Medieval Iceland Heroine: Fact or Fiction?" *Viator* 17 (1986): 35–50, reprinted in *Sagas of the Icelanders*, ed. John Tucker (New York, 1989), pp. 99–125.

⁵The Icelandic *Grágás* is published by Vilhjálmur Finsen: *Grágás*, vols. 1a and 1b (Copenhagen, 1852), vol. 2 (Copenhagen, 1879), and vol. 3 (Copenhagen, 1883); all three volumes reprinted (Odense, 1974) (henceforth abbreviated *Gg*). Citations for quotations from this and other Old Norse sources are generally given in the text. For edition information on the other Old Norse sources, see nn. 8, 10, 55, 72, 76, and 82. Pages 1–217 of *Gg* 1a have

riage as a commercial contract arranged by two men, most often the groom himself and the *marieur* of the woman, who herself, however, played no role in the negotiations. Through the exchange of a woman (from one family) and property (from both families) pagan society regulated human production and reproduction, transferring property to the next generation, children born in legitimate union between the man and his wife. The Christian notion that the woman must consent to this arrangement appears only in the so-called Christian-law sections, later added to the Norwegian and Icelandic laws, but this novel condition was attenuated by penalties against women who married contrary to the advice of their male kin.⁶ Although pagan society thus had brought sexuality under control through legal marriage that directed a man's sexual energy into one accepted channel, that of his legally acquired wife, the laws also admit that these regulations did not fully control male sexuality. Men's sexual violence against women and its consequences emerge as serious social issues in the legal texts. Whereas the Icelandic *Grágás* does countenance a woman accepting a man's advances, the more frequent reference is that of a man using violence and rape against a woman or gaining access to the woman's quarters by using female disguise.⁷ The law inflicts severe punishments on males who commit such crimes and differentiates penalties for stealing kisses, sleeping with, and impregnating women on whom they have no sexual rights (*Gg* [1b:47; 2:176]). In other words, as in most societies the law is conscious of a discrepancy between the desired norms and actual social behavior. The text does not, however, construe sexual crimes as affecting the women as individuals but, rather, their families who controlled their sexual and reproductive capabilities. Furthermore, by not distinguishing married from unmarried women, the law takes marriage less seriously than later Christian doctrine, which considered it as a sacrament. Thus, the legal model, as well as its infractions, fits well within the confines of paganism.

been translated in Andrew Dennis, Peter Foote, and Richard Perkins, trans., *Laws of Early Iceland: Grágas* (Winnipeg, 1980). The Norwegian laws are found in R. Keyser and P. A. Munch, eds., *Norges gamle love*, 5 vols. (Christiania, 1846–95); the English translation of some of these can be found in Laurence M. Larson, *The Earliest Norwegian Laws Being the Gulathing Law and the Frostathing Law* (New York, 1935). On the problematic value of Germanic laws as sources for paganism, see Elsa Sjöholm, *Gesetze als Quellen mittelalterlicher Geschichte des Nordens* (Stockholm, 1976), pp. 53–85, and *Sveriges medeltidslagar: Europeisk rättstradition i politisk omvandling* (Lund, 1988). To my knowledge nobody has yet suggested applying her ideas from the Swedish laws to the Icelandic and Norwegian texts. See also Clausdieter Schott, "Der Stand der Leges-Forschung," *Frühmittelalterliche Forschungen* 13 (1979): 29–55.

⁶Jenny Jochens, "Consent in Marriage: Old Norse Law, Life, and Literature," *Scandinavian Studies* 58 (1986): 142–76.

⁷The text rules in the case when a man would "fell" or "strike down" (*fellir sér*, *Gg* [1b:47]) a woman in order to have intercourse with her.

This picture of a society troubled by frequent discrepancies between desired and actual sexual behavior is also found in the second group of sources, the so-called contemporary sagas, that portray Christian society in Iceland and Norway during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.⁸ Marriages were still established through private contracts between men who often sealed political reconciliations between formerly feuding parties in this way. It is important to notice that these sources rarely mention violence against women, but they do reveal a society that disregarded the Christian demands of monogamy and marital fidelity. Consisting of open concubinage and multiple sexual partners and involving both laity and clergy, such conduct would be considered unacceptable in Christian society. This deportment did indeed produce violence among men later, but apparently not during the initial sexual encounters to which women seem to have acquiesced. On the whole the narrative accounts simply record the behavior, limiting overt criticism to the ecclesiastical legislation.⁹

These two types of sources offer usable historical evidence for the Christian society of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Because their common features of contractual marriage and multiple sexual partners are at variance with the Christian program of marriage and sexuality, they also permit the interpretation that these traits are remnants of an earlier pagan sexuality in the north.

The interpretative problems become more complicated in the third and final group of sources, the so-called family sagas, the most famous of the Old Norse literary evidence. Written during the thirteenth century, they seek to depict the pagan society of Norway and Iceland from the ninth through the eleventh centuries, including, therefore, the conversion to Christianity.¹⁰ How do these narratives accord with the traits of pagan sexuality suggested by the sources describing Christian society? The family sagas concur in the almost total absence of violence against women found in the contemporary sagas. They also agree with both the sagas and the

⁸They include the massive collection known as *Sturlunga saga*, the episcopal sagas, and the contemporary kings' sagas treating Norwegian royalty. For the purposes of this article, the most important ones are the two first (*Sturlunga saga*, ed. Jón Jóhannesson et al., 2 vols. [Reykjavik, 1946]; *Biskupa sögur*, 2 vols. [Copenhagen, 1858–78]).

⁹See Jochens, "The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland."

¹⁰The standard edition is the series *Íslenzk fornrit* (henceforth ÍF) (Reykjavik, 1933–). A few sagas not found in this collection are cited from the series *Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur* (henceforth SUGNL). Citations are most often given in the text. When there is no indication, the ÍF edition has been used. In order to facilitate the location of passages in translations, references are given to volume, chapter, and page. Most sagas can be found in English translations (see Donald K. Fry, *Norse Sagas Translated into English: A Bibliography* [New York, 1980]). The new religion was accepted peacefully by the Althing in Iceland in 1000 (or 999) and imposed by royal force in Norway during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.

laws in viewing marriage as a commercial contract involving the exchange of a woman and property, but, in addition, they reveal that the woman's guardian occasionally asked for her consent, a notion normally associated with Christianity. Even more surprising is the near total absence of problems posed by uncontrolled male sexuality. In some thirty-five extant family sagas extramarital sexual activity can be demonstrated through only a handful of mistresses and informal marriages, a few casual sexual encounters, and about a dozen illegitimate children among literally hundreds of seemingly faithful and stable couples. Such behavior, furthermore, is limited to periods when travel, death, or other calamities have interrupted normal married life. Thus, in *Eyrbyggja saga*, after Þorsteinn's drowning, his wife Þóra continues to run the farm with a hired man to help with the work; without marrying, they have a son, Már, who plays a prominent role in the next generation (4.11.19).¹¹ The family sagas convey, therefore, the impression that men were content with one sexual partner at a time, living most often in legal marriage.¹² Considering that the men were often absent on extended trips within Iceland and abroad, this sexual restraint is all the more remarkable.¹³

Briefly stated, while the contractual marriage is the norm in all three groups of sources, the family sagas generally keep silent on problems of multiple sexual partners and violence against women; the laws admit the existence of both problems; and the contemporary sagas are particularly voluble on the first issue and silent on the second. By reading the family sagas and the contemporary sagas as a continuous narrative of Nordic sexuality from pagan through Christian times, therefore, the reader might

¹¹The most famous of the few extramarital affairs involves the beautiful slave Melkorka in *Laxdæla saga* whom Hǫskuldr buys on a trip to Norway and who becomes the mother of his favorite son Óláfr pái. The author prepares the reader by saying that Hǫskuldr and his wife get on well together "but were usually rather reserved with one another" (5.9.18). He goes out of his way, however, to explain that when Hǫskuldr returns and has installed Melkorka in his household "he slept with his wife every night and had nothing to do with his concubine" (5.13.26–27). Even the dignified Njáll in the saga of his name had a mistress who had given him an illegitimate son (*laungetinn*, literally, conceived in hiding), named Hǫskuldr after her father (12.25.71); she no longer lives with Njáll, but their son is about the same age as his other children. As a rare exception Þorgrímr in *Vatnsdæla saga* has both a wife and a mistress (8.37.97).

¹²The comment about Björn in *Droplaugarsona saga* that he is married but "was not content with his wife alone" (*hlítti Þó eigi Þeiri einni saman* [11.6.151]) is unique.

¹³Among the family sagas only *Grettis saga* takes seriously the sexual problems of the single, roaming male, by incorporating four episodes in which are described the hero's encounter with women, including the wife of another man, the daughters of a giant, a widow, and a servant girl (7.17.51–53, 61.200, 67.219, 75.238–41). On Grettir's further sexual exploits described in the poem *Grettisfærsla*, erased in the manuscript before the end of the sixteenth century but restored through modern technology, see Ólafur Halldórsson, "Grettisfærsla," *Opuscula* 1, Bibliotheca Arnarnagæana, 20 (1960), pp. 49–77.

conclude that the earlier pagan Icelanders controlled their sexuality with greater discipline than their Christian descendants. Such an observation would contrast sharply with the progression from chaotic to more orderly conditions theorized for the Continental tribes by German scholars who have attempted to demonstrate a development in the normal form of marriage from *Raubehe*, marriage by capture, to *Kaufehe*, marriage by purchase.¹⁴

The chief problem is how to evaluate evidence from the family sagas. Written during the thirteenth century, must they be seen as constructions reflective of their authors' age, or do they convey trustworthy evidence of the pagan era through oral tradition? The applicability of the Old Norse sources to the study of paganism has always been problematic.¹⁵ For German scholars of the nineteenth century these sources provided materials for the construction of a pan-Germanic pagan past throughout north-western Europe. The so-called Icelandic school, which produced the most important saga scholarship of this century, has narrowed the sagas' geographic and chronological scope. These Icelandic scholars interpret the Old Norse sources as literary products exclusive to the Icelandic twelfth and thirteenth centuries, thus denying their applicability to the larger Germanic and pagan world on the Continent, although allowing unspecified validity for the authors' own culture and society.

Outside Iceland, however, scholars have begun to read Old Norse literature in a way that can best be described as rehistoricization, or—in literary terms—labeled as “New Historicism.” Anchoring the family sagas in their period of composition, the thirteenth century, but without confronting their pagan setting, Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, for example, lays importance on the contemporary Christian audience who, as producers and

¹⁴K. Köstler, “Raub-, Kauf-, und Friedelehe bei den Germanen,” *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte; germ. Abt.* 63 (1943): 92–136; Noël Senn, *Le contrat de vente de la femme en droit matrimoniale germanique* (Portentruy, 1946); S. Kalifa, “Singularités matrimoniales chez les anciens germanes: Le rapt et le droit de la femme à disposer d'elle-même,” *Revue historique de droit français et étranger* 48 (1970): 199–225; Peter Buchholz, “Die Ehe in germanischen Literaturdenkmälern,” in his *Il matrimonio nella società altomedievale*, *Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo*, 24 (Spoleto, 1974), pp. 887–900; Sjöholm, *Gesetze als Quellen mittelalterlicher Geschichte des Nordens* (n. 5 above), pp. 53–85.

¹⁵For the most recent discussion of the problem and application of the new theories, see Theodore M. Andersson and William Ian Miller, *Law and Literature in Medieval Iceland* (Stanford, CA, 1989), pp. vii–xiv, 1–118. For a historiography of the family sagas, see Theodore M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey* (New Haven, CT, 1964); and Carol J. Clover, “Icelandic Family Sagas (*Íslendingasögur*),” in *Old Norse–Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*, ed. Carol J. Clover and John Lindow, *Islandica*, 45 (Ithaca, NY, 1985), pp. 239–315.

consumers of the evolving manuscript tradition, found these pagan stories meaningful in written and oral form.¹⁶ In an analogous manner, anthropologists and legal historians under the influence of structuralism have begun to explore similarities between Icelandic society, whether pagan or Christian, and tribal societies elsewhere, regardless of time and space.¹⁷ Singling out at first the unchanging character of the macro and micro narrative structure within the sagas, literary scholars, in turn, later stressed permanent aspects of Icelandic culture and society, for example, feuding and gift giving, thus qualifying such features for the pagan period as well.¹⁸

Although structuralism and continuity may allow backward projection in time in certain cases, a more difficult problem is the interpretation of behavioral descriptions in areas such as sexual mores where Christian leaders sought to effect societal change. In other words, what are we to make of the display of seemingly Christian sexuality among pagan Icelanders in the family sagas? It may be the safest recourse to see these narratives as constructions, direct or indirect, of thirteenth-century society. They indicate what the authors thought or wanted their audience to think about their pagan forefathers. Elsewhere I have argued that the notion of consent in the family sagas can be seen as the clerical propaganda of the authors who wished to depict suitable role models for contemporary audiences.¹⁹ Two other striking "Christian" features in the family sagas are the absence of violence against women and the ubiquity of monogamy. It strains credence to conclude that already in the ninth century pagan Norwegians and Icelanders had developed marital and sexual mores indistinguishable from the contemporary ideals preached by churchmen several centuries later, and

¹⁶Preben Meulengracht Sørensen's work, *Saga og samfund: En indføring i oldislandsk litteratur* (Copenhagen, 1977), may be seen as the starting point of this trend. See also his "Murder in Marital Bed: An Attempt at Understanding a Crucial Scene in *Gísla saga*," in *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature*, ed. John Lindow et al. (Odense, 1986), pp. 235–63. For an anthropological approach, see Kirsten Hastrup, *Culture and History in Medieval Iceland* (Oxford, 1985).

¹⁷Among several articles by William Ian Miller, see in particular his "Choosing the Avenger: Some Aspects of the Bloodfeud in Medieval Iceland and England," *Law and History Review* 1 (1983): 159–204.

¹⁸Theodore M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Cambridge, MA, 1967); Carol J. Clover, "Scene in Saga Composition," *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 89 (1974): 57–83; William Ian Miller, "Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid: Case Studies in the Negotiations and Classification of Exchange in Medieval Iceland," *Speculum* 61 (1986): 18–50; Jesse L. Byock, *Medieval Iceland: Society, Sagas, and Power* (Berkeley, CA, 1988). Byock goes as far as stating that his book will explore "the course of legal and political decision making, especially from the tenth through the twelfth century" (pp. 7–8), thus including the transition to Christianity.

¹⁹Jochens, "The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland" (n. 4 above).

that these ideals had reverted to “pagan” practices during the turmoil of the Sturlung age.²⁰

Is violence—that of men forcing themselves on women in sexual encounters—entirely absent from the family sagas? On closer inspection such sexual violence is indeed present—not linked with marriage, to be sure—but with the theme of the illicit love visit. Undoubtedly aware of problems of uncontrolled sexuality in their own society, the thirteenth-century authors may have found it hard to imagine that their forefathers had not experienced similar problems, but they may also have perceived them, as we shall see, as simpler and under better control than in their own days, when people were burdened with the new rules of churchmen. Although demonstrating the success of the pagan marriage regulations in controlling sexuality, the authors admit the occasional explosion of sexual violence in the theme of the illicit love visit. In the interstices before marriage young men occasionally acted forcibly either against the girl whom they wanted to visit or against her family who attempted to prevent such visits. In the course of events these men often resorted to physical aggression, probably including rape. Although the initial interest in the woman was quickly lost, the brutality escalated into violence among men as the woman’s family enlisted support to resist the aggressor. The consequence was often a drawn-out feud resulting in several deaths.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the topos of the illicit love visit found primarily in the Icelandic family sagas. Distributed throughout fifteen sagas, the topos occurs more than twenty times.²¹ Since these narratives purport to describe the pagan society of Norway and Iceland from the ninth through the eleventh centuries, this approach may aid us to uncover some perceptions of the elusive pagan sexuality in this area.²² From this analysis I shall first argue that thirteenth-century authors viewed male sexual violence as a serious problem for their pagan ancestors. The frequency of the topos and the subsequent unfolding of disorder in the stories suggest that male aggression had been an important component in sexual encounters in the period spanning the transition to Christianity. Although restrained in part by marriage regulations, the laws and the contemporary evidence suggest that this violence continued into the medieval Christian era.

Second, the topos will make possible an inquiry into gender responsibility for sexual encounters. As to which gender takes the initiative, a shift

²⁰Although Einar Ól. Sveinsson admits that the twelfth century was no better than the thirteenth, he seems close to such a conclusion (see his *The Age of the Sturlungs* [n. 4 above], pp. 62–65).

²¹Rolf Heller, *Die literarische Darstellung der Frau in den Isländersagas* (Halle, 1958), pp. 30–47, treats the theme. His list (p. 154) is not complete.

²²The contemporary sagas contain only rare references to such visits (see n. 79 below).

from male to female can be discerned coinciding with the change from the pagan to the Christian era. Third, the theme of the illicit love visit will allow us to speculate on the apparent discrepancy between the monogamous marriage pattern of the family sagas and the multiple sexual partners found in the laws and the contemporary sagas. Revealing disparate layers in the development of actual pagan and Christian sexual behavior, as well as in the authors' perception of these matters, the topos will help lay bare an archaeology of sexuality in the Nordic world.

VIOLENCE

A young girl was an asset to her family not only for her potential as mother of the next generation but, more immediately, for new kinship networks established through her marriage. Normally, however, a father could do nothing to initiate a marriage match for his daughter but, instead, had to wait until an attractive suitor appeared, at which time negotiations took place between two men without the girl necessarily approving or even being present.²³

A disapproved love visit occurred when an unmarried male, after having taken a fancy to a girl, started to visit her regularly but without making a marriage proposal. Her relatives would naturally be displeased because he did not approach the family immediately to arrange a marriage. The father or other guardian would have allowed a legitimate suitor to marry the girl if normal procedures had been followed, but these visits dishonored the family and devalued the girl for future matrimonial negotiations. The unwelcome male, although seeking female company, was usually not yet willing to marry.²⁴

The seriousness with which the illicit love visit was considered can be gauged from the fact that such visits presented the only occasion when the girl's relatives could break the unwritten rule against openly soliciting a suitor. In *Kormáks saga* and *Hallfreðar saga*, for example, fathers felt obliged to arrange the marriage of daughters who had been sullied through previous visits of unwelcome males; however, characteristically, it was

²³Jochens, "Consent in Marriage" (n. 6 above).

²⁴In *Hallfreðar saga* the protagonist is in love with Kolfinna, the girl he visits, but although her father wants to marry her off, Hallfreðr is not yet ready (8.3.144). When Gríma in *Fóstbræðra saga* offers Þormóðr her daughter in marriage if he will desist from his visits, he answers that "I am not in the mood for marriage" (*eigi er skaplyndi mitt til þess at kvángask* [6.9.161]). Þormóðr never marries, but Hallfreðr eventually does. When his Swedish wife dies he returns to Iceland and starts his visits to Kolfinna again. In *Vatnsdæla saga* Ingólfr continues his visits with Valgerðr after his marriage, but this is the only case of a married visitor. In a unique case in *Bjarnar saga hítðelakappa* a visit is preliminary to a marriage proposal; the marriage, however, never takes place (3.1.113–14); see also n. 66 below.

not done by the fathers directly but through intermediaries (8.7.225; 8.3.144–45, respectively).

When the unwelcome man was told to cease his visits, his refusal initiated a series of murderous actions that often dominate the rest of the narrative. Rolf Heller has shown, often convincingly, that many of the figures involved, particularly the women, cannot be identified from other sources. He concludes, therefore, that the episodes are not historical and that the theme is of little interest even for cultural history and is simply a literary device.²⁵ The question remains, however, why this theme became so popular. We remember that authors and their audiences in the thirteenth century were conscious of the ecclesiastical criticism of their sexual behavior and recognized the destructive power of male sexuality in their own society. In recounting the illicit love visits of their pagan ancestors the authors recognize the deep historical roots of extramarital sexual relations and of male sexual violence. On the other hand, the ubiquity of marriage in the world of the family sagas suggests that they perceived these problems largely to have been brought under control.

The reality behind many sexual encounters may have been masculine physical strength that enabled most men to seize women who were under the protection of male relatives less powerful than the aggressors. In the family sagas this phenomenon is occasionally described as existing among Vikings, as in the story of a man from the Hebrides whose “custom it was to take women who were beautiful or well-to-do and keep them for a while, because the men did not dare stand up against him” (*Flóamanna saga* [SUGNL 56.15.21]). That it still was thought to occur among native Icelanders in pagan times is suggested by the description of the *goði*, or chieftain, Þorbjörn who “took men’s daughters or other female relatives and kept them with him for a while, and sent them home later” (*Hávarðar saga Ísfríðings* [6.1.291]).²⁶ In *Ljósvetninga saga* two brothers are described as “very violent men in love affairs and law suits” (*óeiðarmenn miklar um kvennafar ok málferli* [10.1.4]).²⁷

The existence of such references in the family sagas may add credence to the theory of *Raubehe* (marriage by capture), frequently debated by Ger-

²⁵Heller, pp. 42–43.

²⁶A similar behavior is attributed to several of the early Norwegian kings (see Jenny Jochens, “The Politics of Reproduction: Medieval Norwegian Kingship,” *American Historical Review* 92 [1987]: 327–49, especially pp. 333–34); a particularly notorious and well-documented case involved Hákon Hláðajarl (see p. 334, n. 36). The connection between violence and sexuality is often seen in the cases of berserks who either took women unceremoniously or, at best, waited until they had defeated husbands or brothers in duels (see, for example, *Egils saga* [2.64.199–206] and *Grettis saga* [7.19.61–71]). On the issue of duels, see Olav Bø, “*Hólmganga* and *einvígi*,” *Medieval Scandinavia* 2 (1969): 132–48.

²⁷Similar behavior is undoubtedly behind the casual reference to men condemned for *konumál* (see, for example, *Vatnsdæla saga* [8.39.101]).

man scholars, suggesting that it was originally practiced in the north, at least by chieftains.²⁸ In such cases the men's violence would undoubtedly take the form of rape. Memories of such behavior may have been sufficiently strong to justify the segregation of women in the *dyngja*, the special women's house that was part of the complex Icelandic farm structure, and often the immediate goal of the suitor's visit. In *Hallfreðar saga* the protagonist heads straight for the *dyngja* to visit Kolfinna. He even dares to put her on his lap and kiss her in full view, despite the simultaneous negotiations of her marriage to Gríss being transacted between her father and her future husband in the main house (8.4.145).²⁹ The need to protect women during such visits was so strong that Steingerðr's father locks her up when Kormakr arrives (*Kormáks saga* [8.5.218]).³⁰ We also notice that young widows and divorcées did not stay on their farm but moved back with their parents. When the Icelandic hero Refr, known from the late *Króka-Ref's saga*, arrives in Norway with his family, he warns his sons never to leave their mother alone in the rented house. They disregard his admonitions, and she is confronted with rape. Although she defends herself successfully, her husband kills the offender (14.16.151–52). Clearly, a perception persists that a young woman could not live alone but needed to be protected against men's sexual advances. We shall see that these unmarried visitors undoubtedly had other sexual contacts among inferior classes of servants and slaves, but multiple partners taken from the same social group was not normal behavior for this class of free farmers.

The illicit love visit thus involved a man and a girl from a good family. In the family sagas violence is still present, sometimes even palpable, in these encounters, either provoked by the visitor's force against the woman or her family or resulting from her family's subsequent resistance. In *Ljósvetninga saga* Sölmundr comes to take away Ólvir's daughter whom he has been visiting. By this time Ólvir has obtained support from a certain Ófeigr, known for his strength. Seizing his weapons, Ófeigr catches up with the couple as Sölmundr is lifting the girl over the fence. Since he is able to pull her back, this is a rare case where the girl's family prevails (10.1.4–5). In *Vatnsdæla*

²⁸See Köstler (n. 14 above); Senn (n. 14 above); Kalifa (n. 14 above); Buchholz (n. 14 above); and Sjöholm, *Gesetze als Quellen mittelalterlicher Geschichte des Nordens* (n. 5 above).

²⁹Björn's abduction of Þóra in *Egils saga* can perhaps be seen as an extreme case of the illicit love visit. When Björn brings her back to his father wanting to marry her formally, the latter decides to accept her as if she were his daughter and Björn's sister. The *dyngja* where she is placed with Björn's mother, and from which Björn abducts her again, appears to be placed far from the men's quarters (2.37.83–84).

³⁰I retain the *á* in the protagonist's name in the title of the saga because it is used in the Íslenzk fornrit edition but use "Kormakr" when referring to the hero himself (short as opposed to long vowel) because this form is favored by the manuscript tradition (see Einar Ól. Sveinsson, "Kormakr the Poet and His Verses," *Saga-Book* 17 [1966–69]: 16–60, especially p. 19, n. 1).

saga, when Hrolleifr senses that the family of Hróðny is mustering reinforcements to prevent his visits, he brings along his family's slave, because, as he explains, "they are going to cause me trouble" (8.18.53). *Kormáks saga* provides a case of two men visiting the same girl, Steingerðr, both males introducing violence into the household. Her father enlists the help of one against the other, but in the end Kormákr kills both his competitor and this man's brother (8.18.217, 221).³¹ In *Eyrbyggja saga* Björn's prowess overcomes the physical resistance of both Þórdís's husband and her brother as well as their use of magic. Björn continues his visits but eventually leaves the country voluntarily (4.29.77–80, 40.106–12, 47.132–35).³²

So far, the illustrations have suggested that the visitor used brutality against both the girl herself and her family. We shall later examine the attitudes of the women involved in these encounters, but for the moment we notice that the authors' interest in violence is not focused on the injury done to the woman, but on the unfolding conflict between two men—the visitor and the girl's protector, each with reinforcements—which had been prompted by the brutality of the former as he damaged the property of the latter. As in the legal texts, the crime is not against the woman, but against the family that controlled her sexuality.

We shall see that most visitors were killed early in the story, suggesting authorial disapproval of the behavior, especially when the cases were fictitious. In a few cases, however, where the girl's family was of sufficient social stature to enforce its demands on the violator, the father renounced violence in favor of peaceful settlement through legal prosecution. In such cases the visitor remained alive, but violence persisted for years, invariably initiated by the visitor. In *Vatnsdæla saga*, the girl's father, Óttarr, who is a prominent man himself, although less so than the visitor Ingólfr, wants the latter to pay fines or to undergo prosecution by law. Ingólfr has not only visited Óttarr's daughter, but he has also made her the object of his love poetry. Ingólfr, nevertheless, is so infuriated by this peaceful request that he

³¹In *Kjalnesinga saga* the beautiful Ólof has no less than three visitors competing for her attention. After a tense year during which "nobody could say anything to Ólof without the others hearing it" one of the suitors, Búi, kills the second and wounds the third. He takes her away by mild force (*tók hann þá Ólofu upp á handlegg sér ok gekk leið sína*), although she assures him that her father will not like it. After Búi's death the remaining suitor shows up again and takes her away *nauðga* (against her will) and also against her father's will (14.6–9; 16.16–24, 38, especially 19, 23).

³²We shall later have occasion to look at the visitor story in *Þáttr Hrómundar balta*; the father Þórir must have been relieved that Helgi transforms his illegitimate relationship with his daughter Helga to a regular marriage, but Helgi's earlier role as an unwelcome visitor prepares the reader for Helgi's subsequent violence in the community (8.4–5.310–15).

threatens to implant his axe in Óttarr's head. When the case is called, Ingólfr and his uncle attack and clear the court (8.37.99–100), forcing Óttarr to move out of the region.³³

More often the visitor's violence was only potential, inferred from the condition that the girl's relatives were too weak or old to protect her. In other words, the visits occurred only when men were unable to prevent suitors, and when they tried, they suffered defeat. In *Ljósvetninga saga* Sölmundr's regular visits to Ólvir's daughter continue because of the father's "weakness" (*lítilmensku* [10.1.4]). In *Droplaugarsona saga* Björn pursues his visits to Þórdís because her husband is "very feeble" (*brymðr mjök*), and he persists despite Helgi's suggestion that there is no honor "in provoking an old man" (11.6.151).³⁴

That the visitor was aware of his superior strength over that of the girl's family is suggested by the visitor Björn's behavior in *Eyrbyggja saga*. Originally curious about Þuríðr, the new wife of his deceased sister's husband, Björn undoubtedly has stopped at their farm Fróðá before his former brother-in-law's death. Afterward, however, "he made regular visits in order to seduce" Þuríðr, and it appears that their child had already been conceived at this stage. Because of these meetings, Þuríðr's brother Snorri removes her from Fróðá to his own farm for the winter. Without asking her, he accepts a proposal of marriage from a certain Þóroddr on her behalf, and the following spring the couple is installed at her old farm. Björn does not call on her while she is with her brother, because he realizes Snorri's superior strength, but as soon as Þuríðr returns to Fróðá with her new husband, he resumes his visits (4.22.55, 29.76–77, 40.109).³⁵

Faced with unwelcome visits, a father might send his daughter to a more powerful ally, if he doubted his ability to prevent them, as Ísólfr did with Friðgerðr in *Ljósvetninga saga* (10.12.63–64).³⁶ Conversely, if the visits occurred elsewhere, a father might bring his daughter home if he thought he

³³For a slightly different version of the story, see *Hallfreðar saga* (8.3.142–44). This story contains another love visit involving the protagonist. When he returns to Iceland he spends a night with his former, but now married, girlfriend. He even composes insulting poetry about her husband and challenges him to a duel (8.10.186–93).

³⁴In *Kormáks saga* Steingerðr's second husband Þorvaldr, who is described as being "not famous for any great spirit" (*engi skörungr í skaplyndi* [8.17.263]), pretends that there is nothing wrong with Kormákr's continued visits to his wife, but he finally admits to his brother that he is "annoyed" (*óskapfellt* [8.20.277]), at which moment the brother takes charge.

³⁵A similar pattern can be discerned in *Kormáks saga*.

³⁶See also *Sörla þáttur* (10.1.109–12) where Guðmundr at first pays no attention to Sörli's visits to his daughter Þórdís, but ends by sending her to his brother Einarr. Sörli's later request for Þórdís in marriage is at first turned down by her father, ostensibly because of the rumors his visits have caused.

could protect her better, as Porkell did when he heard about Kormákr's visits to Steingerðr at her foster parents' farm (*Kormáks saga* 8.4.216).³⁷

The man thus gained access to the girl because of his evident or perceived strength. His continued visits are conveyed through the standard expression: "He develops the habit of going there" (*hann venr kvámur sínar þangat*).³⁸ Although his purpose was obvious to everyone, the authors use the euphemism that he came "in order to talk to" the girl (*til tals við*).³⁹ If asked to refrain by the girl's or his own relatives, the man might stay away for a while, as does Ingólfr in *Hallfreðar saga* when requested by his own father who was prompted by Óttarr, Valgerðr's father (8.3.143). Likewise, at her mother Gríma's request, Þormóðr abstains from visiting Þórdís for a short time (*Fóstbræðra saga* [6.9.162]). The visitor will invariably return (Þormóðr), however, or start to compose love poetry (*mannsongsvísur*; Ingólfr), a serious provocation, and one sure to exacerbate the anger of the girl's relatives. The explicit prohibition in law shows that this was a social issue.⁴⁰

An element of sexuality is always implied in a *mannsongsvísa*. Although practically all the stories contain a stock phrase that the visitor went home late at night, clearly the purpose of his visit was sexual.⁴¹ This is, of course, obvious in the visits that resulted in pregnancy.⁴² In all Old Norse sources, however, sexual activity is expressed obliquely, but in the pagan period the sexual reality is hidden under a veneer of Christian respectability. The au-

³⁷See also *Eiríks saga rauða* (4.3.203–4) where Þorbjörn removes his daughter Guðríðr from her foster father Ormr because a certain Einarr has remarked on her beauty and asked Ormr to request her hand in marriage on his behalf.

³⁸Among many examples, see *Fóstbræðra saga* (6.11.170).

³⁹Among many examples, see *Droplaugarsona saga* (11.6.151). On the linking of sexual and verbal, particularly poetic, skills in these texts, see Laurence de Looze, "Poet, Poem, and Poetic Process in *Bjarnarsaga Hítðelakappa* and *Gunnlaugssaga Ormstungu*," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 85 (1986): 479–93, especially 484–85.

⁴⁰See *Gg* (1b:184; 2:393).

⁴¹See, for example, *Eyrbyggja saga* (4.40.109); *Flóamanna saga* (SUGNL 56.19.29); *Fóstbræðra saga* (6.9.163). Sometimes the poetry embedded in the text, in most cases supposed to be older than the prose, is more explicit than the prose (see strophe 25 in *Eyrbyggja saga* [4.29.79] and strophe 2 in *Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa* [3.5.123]).

⁴²*Eyrbyggja saga* (4.29.80, 39.106–9); *Droplaugarsona saga* (11.6.152); *Njáls saga* (12.87.212); *Ljósvetninga saga* (10.12.65). The author of *Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa* suggests that Kolli is the son of Björn and not of Oddný's husband Þórðr (3.21.171–72, 23.174–75). The child was not conceived during Björn's original love visits to Oddný, however, but during a prolonged winter stay which he had accepted at Þórðr's insistence. On the relationship between the theme in this saga and in *Eyrbyggja saga* where it is also found, see Sigurður Nordal's introduction to the ÍF edition of *Bjarnar saga* (3:lxix–lxx). On the relationship between the two verses in which the paternity is described, see Ursula Dronke, "Sem jarlar forðum: The Influence of *Rígsþula* on Two Saga-Episodes," in *Speculum Norroenym: Norse Studies in Memory of Gabriel Turville-Petre*, ed. Ursula Dronke et al. (Odense, 1981), pp. 56–72, especially pp. 65–72.

thor of *Egils saga* goes out of his way to explain that Björn, who has abducted Þóra twice because of her beauty and who wants to marry her, does not sleep with her but arranges a formal marriage in a foreign country more than a year after the first abduction.⁴³ The author even makes the birth of their daughter fit this scheme (2.33.87). Even the most explicit references to what occurred in such love visits are graphically restrained and refer chiefly to the social consequences. In *þáttr Hrómundar halta*, when a ship full of Vikings is stranded in Iceland, the men need to find winter quarters. Fearing violence, however, nobody is willing to take them in. A certain Þórir eventually gives the captain Helgi and his men lodgings, but not food, provided they will keep the law of the land and promise not to bother anyone. After a short time Helgi and Þórir's daughter Helga begin to meet regularly. "Becoming excited by talk, kisses, and embraces in affection and love, an illegitimate relationship resulted" (8.2.307–8). It is characteristic that when Þórir asks Helgi to stop this behavior, he refers simply to their "talk."⁴⁴

In this case Þórir is undoubtedly relieved when Helgi indignantly replies that he and Helga cannot abandon their love because he wants to marry her, but the original encounter belongs to the category of unwelcome visits. It differs entirely from the rare glimpse of a young man's legitimate visit to a young woman, described briefly in *Egils saga*, in which he goes directly to her father to request her in marriage. At a sacrifice in Norway Ólvir meets the beautiful Sólveig, daughter of an earl. Stressing Ólvir's growing love that results in a request for marriage, the author uses the expression that he "courted her" (*gerði sér um títt*). When her father turns him down because of their social difference (*manna munr*), Ólvir remains so afflicted that he renounces his Viking activities (2.2.6).⁴⁵

⁴³The sexless expression that he "celebrated his marriage with Þóra" (*gerði hann brúðlaup til Þóru* [2.32.85–86]) is used.

⁴⁴On this story, see also n. 32 above. In *Droplaugarsona saga* (11.9.157) Tófa Hlíðarsól is mentioned as Helgi Droplaugarson's *hjalskona*, mistress, and they "talked a lot together." In the later (sixteenth-century) elaboration of the story in *Fljótsdæla saga* (11.13.249–50), it is mentioned that Helgi has his eyes on another woman, Helga, whom he "was in the habit of visiting" (*legði krómur sínar*). He even asks her to come and spend the winter with him, to which she agrees. This is told to a man who has wanted to marry her, in the words that Helgi plans to "lay her next to himself in bed" (*leggja hana í seng hjá sér*). In the kings' sagas this is the standard term used when a king takes a mistress, but such a relatively explicit sexual term is unheard of in the classical family sagas and may be due to more recent influences in this narrative.

⁴⁵The author states that Ólvir composes many *mansongskveði* about Sólveig. As a result her brothers attempted to kill him (2.4.10). Enhancing the seriousness of this love, there is no evidence that Ólvir ever married. The difference between a love visit and a marriage proposal is seen clearly in *Eyrbyggja saga* in the Swedish berserk Halli's discourse as he shifts between the two issues in his negotiations with the brothers Vermundr and Styrr (4.25.63, 28.71).

An illicit visitor might enjoy all imaginable pleasures of a woman, even to the point of impregnating her, but only one of these men lived to become acquainted with his child.⁴⁶ While the woman disappeared from the narratives, the theme of violence is heightened by the fact that all impregnators, as well as most unwelcome visitors, suffered death at the hands of the girl's relatives, as Bárðr in *Gísla saga* (6.2.7–8), or, on a lesser scale, from severe wounds, as Þormóðr in *Fóstbræðra saga* (6.9.163–64), or, finally, by capture and exile, as Hallfreðr in the saga of his name (8.4.148–49). Since the visits had occurred because the girl's relatives were unable to prevent them, such consequences may seem astonishing. They may, therefore, reflect more authorial disapproval than historical fact.⁴⁷ It is not surprising, however, that the reactions of the insulted relatives can be sorted into categories according to the family's strength relative to the visitor.

At times the injured male pretends that he does not care about the visits, like Þorvaldr in *Kormáks saga* (8.20.277), or he may admit annoyance but do nothing about it, like Þóroddr in *Eyrbyggja saga* (4.29.77). This lack of action can prove embarrassing to friends or relatives who, therefore, offer help, as happens on two occasions over the protagonist's continued visits to Steingerðr in *Kormáks saga*. Narfi offers help to her father, and later her second husband's brother takes charge, because, as he says, the husband "does not dare" and the visits "are shameful for us all" (8.4.216, 20.277).⁴⁸

A stronger father might resist with force, but his weaker position will compel him to resort to ambush at night. In this way Kolr attacks Sǫrla in *Flóamanna saga* (SUGNL 56.19.29). Since the father or relatives had not been able to prevent the visits in the first place, they must compensate by asking help from others. In *Droplaugarsona saga* Þorsteinn requests assistance from Helgi Droplaugarson, related to his wife, who has been visited and impregnated by Björn. After three warnings to stop, Helgi kills Björn (11.6.151).

Eyrbyggja saga combines these approaches. As we saw, two young men had offered to help Þóroddr bring an end to the visits from Björn. Accepting this and help from two other men, Þóroddr organizes an ambush late one night as Björn is leaving Þóroddr's wife, but Björn kills the two young

⁴⁶Björn and Kjartan in *Eyrbyggja saga*. It is probably no coincidence that this is the only case where the author bothers to carry the pregnancy theme to its natural conclusion in a child, Kjartan, who as a young man plays a minor role in the continuation of the story.

⁴⁷Authorial disapproval is evident in the story of Hrappr in *Njáls saga*, perhaps the most unpleasant character in the entire saga corpus. Among his many misdeeds is an illicit love visit, resulting in the seduction and impregnation of a young Norwegian woman, and the killing of her brother. Skipping the usual circumlocutions, the author lets Hrappr tell the father to his face that he had slept with his daughter (*lá ek hjá dóttur þinni* [12.87.212]).

⁴⁸See also the offer to Þóroddr from the two brothers, Örn and Valr in *Eyrbyggja saga* (4.29.77).

men. Much later Þóroddr asks their mother, a magician, to create a storm that almost kills Björn on his return from another visit. Still unsuccessful, Þóroddr finally appeals to Snorri, his wife's brother. Although Snorri fully intends to slay Björn, he only persuades him to leave the country (4.29.77–79, 40.109–12, 47.132–35). Björn was thus unusual among the unwelcome visitors not only in prolonging his visits—seducing and impregnating his mistress—but also in escaping with his life. In general, however, the fatal outcome was so assured that the topos served as a literary device in *Njáls saga* to engineer the downfall of Gunnarr.⁴⁹

Only two stories do not fit into this underlying pattern of male violence originating with the visitor and spilling over to the girl's family. The first concerns Þormóðr in *Fóstbræðra saga* who, we have seen, had already discovered the danger inherent in illicit love visits when he was badly wounded by Gríma's slave Kolbákr as a result of his visits to her daughter Þórdís. Later, stranded on an expedition, he finds a new widow, Katla, and her daughter Kolbrún, whom he starts to visit. Finding the girl attractive, he returns regularly, and he even composes love poetry to her. In this case, however, Katla encourages Þormóðr to stay on, although he admits that the purpose of his visit is “to amuse myself” (*at skemmta mér*), a frequent euphemism for sexual intercourse.⁵⁰ Furthermore, Katla does not object to the love poetry he composes to her daughter but bestows on him a ring and the name “Kolbrún's skald” (*Kolbrúnarskáld* [6.11.169–72]). The only explanation for this strange behavior is the absence of men in the household.⁵¹ In the earlier encounter between Þormóðr and Gríma the latter has been helped by her slave Kolbákr, who is described as “big and strong, of an attractive appearance, and a good fighter” (6.11.161). Katla and her daughter, on the other hand, live alone. Without male assistance, Katla may have decided to put the best face on her helpless situation. This interpretation also explains that when Þormóðr later attempts to become reacquainted with Þórdís, his former friend, she understandably receives him coldly because of his love poetry to Kolbrún, but her mother Gríma

⁴⁹Þormóðr recommends to Gunnarr's enemies that a certain Þorgeirr visit Gunnarr's relative, Ormhildr, with the purpose of seducing her. The theme of violence on the side of the visitor is highlighted in detail—when it becomes known that Gunnarr will not stand for this, Þorgeirr, the sexual offender, will attack Gunnarr. Since Gunnarr has already killed Þorgeirr's father, and he has been told he cannot kill twice in the same family without jeopardizing his life, the death of Þorgeirr in this encounter, assured by his illicit love visits, will guarantee Gunnarr's eventual downfall (12.71–72.174–77).

⁵⁰In another of the illicit love visits the girl asks permission to go into the nut forest *at skemmta sér*; a short time later she and her lover are found “lying together in a grove” (*í runni einum liggja bæði saman* [*Njáls saga*, 12.87.211]).

⁵¹This seems to be implied in the expression that when Þormóðr comes to their house he finds that “there were no men but some women present” (*þar var ekki inni manna nema konur einar* [170]).

welcomes him “with great pleasure” (*með miklu gleðiþragði* [6.11.172]).⁵² The reader cannot help but conclude that Gríma is forced to act this way because she is now alone with her daughter, having sent her slave off to Norway for safety after he, at her instigation, has wounded Þormóðr.⁵³

This unusual episode from *Fóstbræðra saga*, acknowledging the reality of men who help themselves to women in the absence of other males, presents a negative print of the illicit love visit. The second story not accommodated within the pattern is found in *Hávarðar saga Ísfirðings*. Here the old topos is maintained with disastrous consequences for the visitor, but it has undergone interesting changes. The story concerns the encounter between Óláfr and Sigríðr. In this case violence is not attributed to the visitor Óláfr, a well-liked young man with exceptional skill in finding lost sheep, but to Sigríðr’s employer, the overpowering Þorbjörn. Renowned for his sexual aggression, he apparently considers it his right to determine whom his young housekeeper can see. Returning lost sheep to Þorbjörn’s house, Óláfr starts a conversation with Sigríðr that leads to his regular visits. After Þorbjörn has arranged his own marriage, Sigríðr decides that since her household services are no longer required, she is free to return to her relatives and to remove her considerable property after it has been evaluated by the neighboring farmers. Resuming his visits at her new home, Óláfr is attacked and killed by Þorbjörn (6.1–2; 4.291–99, 303–7).

Remaining in this story is the visit itself and the visitor’s sudden death. The initial violence, however, has been transferred from the visitor to the formerly weak party, the girl’s relative. In this case Þorbjörn was not related to Sigríðr but was merely her employer without rights over her marriage. If he had been her *marieur*, his power would have prevented the visits in the first place. The topos still enabled the author to illustrate the ever present reality of male violence. We recall that Þorbjörn was known for using force in his own sexual encounters. When he decides to act in this case, he is undoubtedly motivated by a poorly hidden jealousy over his pretty and well-to-do housekeeper, aggravated by the young couple’s obvious mutual fondness. When Óláfr and his father participate in evaluating Sigríðr’s property, this offers Þorbjörn an excuse to kill the young man. In the final outcome, therefore, the parallel with the old topos was maintained.

Below the surface, however, are other changes reflecting new sensitivities to human emotion that undoubtedly entered the native literary consciousness through translations of French courtly poetry into Old Norse prose romances. There is no indication that Sigríðr’s sole relative

⁵²Þormóðr never marries, but his subsequent career in Greenland suggests that he continues to take his pleasure with women wherever he can find it (see 6.21.224–26).

⁵³On Þormóðr’s two love affairs, see Bjarni Einarsson, “Um Þormóð skáld og unnusturnar tvær,” *Gripla* 5 (1982): 66–76, reprinted in his *Malt mál og forn freði* (Reykjavík, 1987), pp. 139–49.

Póralfr objects to Óláfr's visits, and in his eyes her wealth may have assured her independence. The author takes great pains to demonstrate the young man's extraordinary character, suggesting that he and Sigríðr are a good match. The unusual aspect of the story, however, is the growing love between the young couple, eloquently expressed in their last conversation. The pleasure they find in each other's company is conveyed through mutual greetings. At the end of a long and intimate dialogue Sigríðr warns Óláfr against Þorbjörn whom she sees approaching on the water. She listens to his manly but youthful boasting as to how he will handle the older man, but, with foreboding, sadly replies that she would rather not hear any more. They part with mutual good wishes. When Óláfr has been killed, people look in vain for Sigríðr; she has disappeared, never again to be found (4.304–7).

The topos of the illicit love visit not only demonstrates that the thirteenth-century authors of the family sagas imagined that sexuality expressed outside marriage had provoked violence among their pagan forefathers in certain cases, but it also confirms the information from the legal material clearly formulated within the pagan context, that extramarital sexuality had been and continued to be a social phenomenon productive of violence. How does this topos affect current scholarship concerning the possible existence in the north of the so-called *Raubehe*, marriage by capture, hypothesized by German scholars as a first step in the history of marriage on the Continent? It seems reasonable to postulate that during periods of wandering and endemic warfare men used rape and other violence to obtain women, establishing exogamous unions in this way, some of which may have led to permanent marital relationships. Lacking a word for marriage as a state of life, Germanic languages were restricted to the ceremony that instituted this condition. The origin and meaning of the Old Norse *brúðlaup* or *brúðhlaup* (wedding) (with similar German cognates) remains under debate, but the most likely interpretation conjures up an image of a young woman in flight. The constitutive elements ("bride," and "leap" or "run") suggest the factor of violence in the origin of marriage.⁵⁴

⁵⁴Vilhjálmur Finsen, "Fremstilling af den islandske Familieret efter Grágás," *Annaler for Nordisk Oldkyndighed og Historie* (1849), pp. 150–331, especially p. 236, n. 5; (1850), pp. 121–272; and Konrad Maurer, *Vorlesungen über Altnordische Rechtsgeschichte*, vol. 2: *Über Altnordische Kirchenverfassung und Eherecht* (Leipzig, 1908), pp. 473–678, especially p. 541. Finsen and Maurer agree that the origin of the term must be sought in the expression *bleypa til*, used about bringing male animals to the females. The *hlaup*, or leap, may originally have referred to the running female, but it came in time to mean the procession that brought the bride to her new house. See the article "Bröllop," in *Kulturbistorisk Leksikon för Nordisk Middelalder*, 22 vols. (Copenhagen, 1957–78), 2:306–23 (henceforth *KLM*). This theory has been opposed by Wolfgang Krause, *Die Frau in der Sprache der altsländischen Familiengeschichten* (Göttingen, 1926), pp. 213–19, where he connects the word with *Brauttanz*, a bridal dance (p. 217).

Unsettled conditions, similar to those found on the Continent during the Germanic invasions, still obtained in the north throughout the Viking age. Men, in particular chieftains and kings, regularly acquired women abroad; some returned with the men as wives or mistresses. *Herfang*, or the taking of women in warfare, was prohibited by the church as late as 1176.⁵⁵ Medieval English and Nordic historians concur that Álfhildr, the beautiful mistress of King Óláfr helgi and mother of his only son, was an English woman, abducted by Norwegian Vikings, married to one of them, to whom she bore a child, before she became the king's mistress.⁵⁶ Ordinary people, however, required marriages that assured the passage of property from two families to the next generation. This peaceful purpose could best be obtained through negotiation, suggesting the prevalence of the *Kaufêhe* model (marriage by purchase) over *Raubehe*. That the similar illicit love visits never ended in marriage but always entailed disaster would seem to indicate authorial disapproval of men gaining sexual access to women of their own class through *Raub*.

FROM MALE TO FEMALE INITIATIVE

By returning to the topos of the love visit we shall be able to elicit information about our second problem, gender responsibility for sexual encounters. We recall that young Óláfr in *Hávarðar saga Ísfrðings* was a more sympathetic character than the other visiting lovers, and it is therefore no wonder that the author of this story allowed the woman to express tender feelings toward him. It is worth pursuing the subject of the women's attitudes toward their visitors in the other stories, because these episodes reveal important gender differences over the responsibility for breaking sexual norms, differences that evolved during the introduction of Christianity. If the woman's male relatives disapproved of the visitor but could not prevent him from coming, how was the victim herself expected to behave?

Although the sagas employed euphemisms for all sexual topics, there is little doubt about the perceived power of sexuality in the saga world.⁵⁷ It took its toll on men of all ages. Óláfr in the previous narrative was only eighteen when he was smitten by Sigríðr. At a wedding in *Njáls saga* we

⁵⁵*Diplomatarium Islandicum*, 15 vols. (Copenhagen, 1857–), 1:234; Keyser and Munch, eds. (n. 5 above), 1:409.

⁵⁶Jochens, "The Politics of Reproduction" (n. 26 above), p. 334, n. 34; p. 335, n. 38. For similar behavior among prominent Icelanders, see the case of Helgi Óttarsson in *Landnámabók* (1.123).

⁵⁷On this issue, see Thomas Bredsdorff, *Kaos og kerlighed: En studie i islændingesagaers livsbillede* (Copenhagen, 1971), and the important review by Bjarni Einarsson in *Mediaeval Scandinavia* 3 (1970): 143–53.

meet the mature Práinn who “cannot keep his eyes from” (*var starsýnn á*) the beautiful fourteen-year-old Þorgerðr, daughter of the bride. Divorcing his own wife on the spot, he immediately marries Þorgerðr (12.34.89–90). *Egils saga* contains the arresting story of the old Björgólfr who falls violently in love with the young Hildiríðr whom he meets at a feast. Shortly thereafter, he visits her father, asks for her hand, and declares that he wants to take her with him and hold a “loose marriage” (*lausabrúllaup*) with her.⁵⁸ When her father offers no objection, Björgólfr pays an ounce of gold, and they sleep together immediately. Hildiríðr accompanies him home, and they have two sons. After the old man’s death, his grown son sends Hildiríðr back to her father where her two sons grow up (2.7.16–18).

Nothing is said about Þorgerðr’s and Hildiríðr’s feelings about their elderly husbands, because in most societies women are expected to accept older men without complaint.⁵⁹ Contrary to the Christian Western tradition, in which Mother Eve bears the preponderant blame, Old Norse sources are almost always silent on women’s responsibility in sexual encounters. It is rare to find women who articulate their fathers’—as well as the author’s—disapproval of these visits. In *Egils saga*, however, Helga refuses to cooperate with the man who tries to seduce her after her father has turned down his marriage proposal (2.7.238);⁶⁰ and in the relatively late *Þórðar saga breðu* Sigríðr asks Ormr to stop visiting her because she is engaged to his brother. He returns nevertheless, but when he lays his head in her lap and places her hands on his head, she protests that it is against her will and warns him of her brother’s vengeance (14.5.187–88).⁶¹

Normally, however, in these love visits, as in marital arrangements, women remained passive, siding neither with their family nor with the visitor, at least initially. Little evidence surfaces that it was the women who had tempted or enticed the men; rather, the men came on their own initiative.

⁵⁸Since this is the only time this term is used, we do not know exactly what it covers. Björgólfr pays for her, but the text does not use the word *mundr*, the normal term for a bride price. The illegality of the marriage, which was to become a major problem in the saga later, is not the lack of payment as much as the lack of the normal waiting period between the agreement and the consummation (2.7.17, n. 2). In *Eyrbyggja saga* Björn admits that he would not be able to refrain from visiting Þuríðr as long as they live in the same region (4.47.134).

⁵⁹In *Flóamanna saga* we encounter a young woman who considers a suitor at the age of fifty-five as too old for her (SUGNL 56.31.61–62). They were married nevertheless.

⁶⁰This episode is only an abbreviated version of the love visit, but the fundamental problem is the same; the man wanted to “seduce” (*glepja*) her. The same expression is frequently used in the love visits (see, for example, *Eyrbyggja saga* [4.27.55, 47.134]).

⁶¹Her brother Þórðr was famous for his strong views on correct sexual behavior. The Norwegian king, Sigurðr slefa, known as a “violent man in love affairs” (*óeirðarmaðr mikill um kvennafar*), had abducted the wife of Þórðr’s brother Klyppr and “placed her next to him in bed.” At the age of fifteen Þórðr upbraids his brother for tolerating such a humiliation. At his urging, the four brothers kill Sigurðr in an encounter where Klyppr loses his life. This story, also known from the kings’ sagas, received its fullest treatment in this account (14.1.165–67).

We have already seen that men may have resorted to rape to get their way with women. If we are to take the narratives literally, many cases involved seduction in which men used persuasive powers to “talk” the women into submission.⁶² This expression undoubtedly hides some form of physical force, but regardless of the method, there is no doubt about full male responsibility for the encounter. This is expressed by the term *fífla*, meaning to “trick,” “fool,” or “seduce,” used about men in the active voice almost without exception. In *Fóstbræðra saga* the author comments that Þormóðr’s frequent visits to Þórdís and his “talks” with her made people suspect that he might *fífla* her. Later her mother directly accuses him of doing so (6.9.161). Ottarr tells Ingólfr that he would rather give him his daughter in marriage than suffer that he *fíflði* her (8.37.99).⁶³ In a unique episode in *Flóamanna saga*, however, Helgi tells his widowed mother that he does not approve of her *fíflingar* with Þorgrímr, suggesting that she shares the responsibility for the visits, perhaps a permissible action for a mature woman, especially since Þorgrímr is her own age (SUGNL 56.18.27).⁶⁴ This unique suggestion of dual responsibility may be due to the date of this saga, one of the latest in the genre, after the appearance of new perceptions of women’s sexual role.

It is not surprising, therefore, that expressions of overt female sexuality in any setting are rare in the sagas, both within and without the topos of the illicit love visit. In fact, most direct evidence is to the contrary—that women are sexually passive and take little initiative. In *Droplaugarsona saga* Þorgrímr—whose unpleasant character is enhanced by his nickname *torðyfill*, Dungbeetle—starts the rumor that Droplaug had not been content with her husband alone (he has been dead for some time). Although nobody believes this gossip, Droplaug is so incensed that she incites her young sons to kill Þorgrímr (11.3.144–45). In *Hráfn’s þáttur Guðrúnarsonar* a married man, who has killed another, approaches his victim’s widow with an offer of compensation for her husband in return for sexual favors. She answers that she is not so “eager for a man” (*manngjörn*) that she will accept him, even if he were unmarried (8.1.321).

If the woman did not initially entice her visitor and most likely had been exposed to a forced sexual initiation, once the visits had started, however, a woman often sided with her lover against her family. Originally a victim, and now with her sexual and reproductive future at stake, she probably had

⁶²In the Eddic poem *Hávamál* (98.1–3) the woman whom the chief god Óðinn wants to seduce offers the advice that he should come at night and “talk” if he wants to succeed (*ef þú vilt þér mela man*) (see David A. H. Evans, ed., *Hávamál* [London, 1986], pp. 59, 118).

⁶³For other examples, see *Víga-Glúms saga* (9.22.73); *Ljósvetninga saga* (10.21[31].105); *Gísla saga* (6.2.7); *Njáls saga* (12.71.174); *Reykæla saga* (10.30.241).

⁶⁴When Þorgrímr keeps coming, Helgi kills him. In this story the violence is carried still a step further when in due course Þorgrímr’s son kills Helgi (SUGNL 56.18.28).

little choice. Furthermore, not all visitors were necessarily brutes. Her support might be expressed by her warning the man against ambushes and attacks; at other times she even articulates her pleasure in his company. With foreboding of her mother's plans, Þórdís makes Þormóðr promise one night that he will return home by another route; when he changes his mind, he is attacked by her mother's slave (*Fóstbræðra saga* [6.9.163–64]).⁶⁵ In *Kormáks saga* Steingerðr, who expresses her approval of Kormákr's good looks, prevents her father from attacking her admirer by pulling him away (8.5.211). In *Sqrla þáttr* the father has removed his young daughter to another farm to avoid the protagonist's visits; when Sqrli finds her in the new place, her pleasure in seeing him is expressed in the lyrical phrase: "There is plenty of sun and southerly winds when Sqrli comes riding in" (10.1.110).⁶⁶

If the woman did not take the initiative and, at most, became attached to her friend only as the visits continued, it is possible, however, upon closer inspection to detect covert suggestions of active female sexuality in a few cases. We have noticed that a widow in *Flóamanna saga* might have started a new love herself. A similar conclusion can be gained from *Eyrbyggja saga* about another widow, Þuríðr, the sister of Snorri goði. Rumor had it that she and Björn were *fíflingar*, suggesting perhaps that they shared responsibility.⁶⁷ The suspicion of Þuríðr's active role is strengthened when we notice the reason her brother gave for marrying her quickly to Þóroddr. When Snorri claims that "she was in need of much supervision" (*hon þurfti mjök forvistu* [4.29.77]), he undoubtedly refers to sexual behavior that has been more provocative than society tolerated. This is confirmed when we notice that after Björn's departure she uses her sexual charms to obtain favors from her husband.⁶⁸ Þuríðr's behavior could perhaps be seen as bizarre, however, the result of biological inheritance, since *Gísla saga* hints

⁶⁵When Þormóðr later thinks of Þórdís and wants to return to her, he refers to their previous *vinfengi* or friendship (6.11.172), thus testifying to his own tender feelings for her. In *Flóamanna saga* Áshildr warns her lover against her son (SUGNL 56.18.27).

⁶⁶Heller (n. 21 above), p. 42, suggests that this lyrical outburst is a later influence allowing expression of female emotions. A similar attitude may be seen in Oddný's fainting and severe illness at the news of the killing of her true love Björn, whom she had never married (*Bjarnar saga hítadalakappa* [3.33.205–6]). In *Njáls saga* Guðrún took such pleasure in Hrappr's company that her father has to warn her not to be alone with him (12.87.211).

⁶⁷Earlier the author had stated that Björn visits her "in order to seduce her" (*tíl glapa við hana* [4.22.55]), thus placing the responsibility on the man, although it was already rumored that "the widow at Fróði was taking her loss remarkably well" (4.19.49).

⁶⁸When Þórgunna comes to Iceland with her fineries Þuríðr wants to see them because "she was fond of clothes and loved to dress up." She goes to the ship and asks whether Þórgunna had any woman's clothing (4.50.137–38). After Þórgunna's death Þuríðr puts her arms around her husband in order to persuade him not to burn Þórgunna's bed clothes, as he has promised (4.51.142–43).

of a similar behavior from her mother, Þórdís, thus suggesting that this deportment was unusual.⁶⁹

These episodes involved sexually experienced women. It is also possible to detect, on occasion, sexual initiative in young girls. The love affair between the two beautiful young people, Ingólfr and Valgerðr, begins at a game when Ingólfr by mistake throws a ball that lands near Valgerðr who is among the spectators. She hides it under her coat and encourages him to come and look for it. Telling the others to continue the game, Ingólfr sits down next to her and they “talked” the whole day.⁷⁰ *Ljósvetninga saga* preserves the memory of a young, outgoing girl, Friðgerðr, whose pleasure in male company brings trouble. When a young man visits her at home, her father sends her away to a powerful friend for safety. Overtaken by a snow-storm en route, she changes her destination to a place frequented by three young men. After two of them go abroad, she tells the third, Porkell, that she is pregnant, naming one of the departed as the father. Porkell admits that they have all had a good time, because she is not “reserved” (*fályndr*), but he intimates that any “land lopper” (*hleyþimáðr*) may have been the father (10.12[22].63–67).⁷¹

Sexuality is expressed at least implicitly in the sagas, but despite a few examples of female initiative, the overwhelming impression remains that sexual encounters were the results of the masculine drive. The only sexual, almost pornographic, scenes in the Old Norse corpus are found in *Bósa saga ok Herrauðs*.⁷² This story was written after the family sagas and belongs to a

⁶⁹This observation has also been made by E. O. G. Turville-Petre (see his *Scaldic Poetry* [Oxford, 1976], p. 63). Bredsdorff (n. 57 above), pp. 67–81, suggests that the complicated family relations in *Gísla saga*, in which a sister (Þórdís) betrays her brother (Gísli) because he kills her husband, can be explained by the fact that the sister is taking revenge for the brother's previous interference in Norway with her lovers. This might indicate that she had enjoyed them, or perhaps even encouraged them, again revealing a behavior at variance with the accepted male views on female behavior. The so-called long version of this narrative contains the most detailed description of an illicit love visit replete with an old father who twice shames his sons into action (6.6.20–25; *sub* text). See also Preben Meulengracht Sørensen, *Norrønt nid* (Odense, 1989), pp. 55–62. There is an English translation of this work: Joan Turville-Petre, trans., *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society* (Odense, 1983).

⁷⁰Two slightly different versions of the story are found in *Hallfreðar saga* (8.2.142) and *Vatnsdæla saga* (8.37.98). Although Ingólfr promises several times to break the relationship, it continues also after Ingólfr's marriage. Valgerðr does not marry until after Ingólfr's death (*Vatnsdæla saga* [8.37.100–101, 40.106, 41.109]), enhancing the importance of love. Ingólfr's preoccupation with women is unbounded. Before he dies he requests to be buried—one hopes with a bit of self-mockery—not in the hill normally used by his family, but near the road, so the women from the area will have an easier time remembering him (8.41.109).

⁷¹On this case, see Andersson and Miller (n. 15 above), pp. 32–43.

⁷²Text in *Fornaldar Sögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson, 4 vols. (n.p., 1954), 3:281–322.

different genre, the so-called *formaldarsögur*, or legendary sagas. The setting is the mythical expeditions of the Swedish adventurer Bósi into farm communities of an area known as *Bjarmaland*, or Finland, that part of Scandinavia which remained heathen the longest. This framework encourages us to understand these scenes as evidence not of direct pagan sexuality, of course, but of how it was perceived in the fourteenth century. On three occasions the enterprising Bósi obtains valuable information by sleeping with farmers' daughters. Portraying a rollicking sexuality, these scenes leave little room for the imagination. Although the women clearly enjoy the activity—the second episode even indicates that “the missionary position” was not universal—on all three occasions it was Bósi who took the initiative, as the point of the narrative would require.⁷³

Old Norse pagan women, in other words, are normally not portrayed as the temptress Mother Eve.⁷⁴ Descriptions of physical beauty are more frequent, longer, and more detailed for men than for women. Hair plays an important role for both genders. Female beauty is expressed in objective, almost clinical, terms devoid of erotic connotations.⁷⁵ Pagan society had created marriage to regulate the powerful drive of human sexuality. Since property considerations were uppermost in these negotiations, it is perhaps not surprising that men were responsible for the marital arrangements. When these rules were broken or not observed, however, men, not women, were blamed. We have noticed that the law confirms this perception derived from the family sagas, that pagan society appears not to have credited women with as powerful a sexual drive as men. For this reason

⁷³The three episodes in *Bósa saga* are found in 7.297–99; 11.307–9; 13.313–16. The passage about “the missionary position” is the following: *Pau skemmta sér nú sem þeim líkar, ok var bóndadóttir ýmist ofan á eða undir . . .* (11.309). The saga is translated in Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, *Seven Viking Romances* (Harmondsworth, 1985), pp. 199–227; the three passages can also be found in Hermann Pálsson and Paul Edwards, *Legendary Fiction in Medieval Iceland*, *Studia Islandica*, 30 (Reykjavik, 1971), pp. 79–83. The episodes are so salacious that many manuscripts and the oldest editions have omitted them (see the article “Bósa saga,” in *KLNM* [n. 54 above], 2:172–73). Even Pálsson and Edwards place the girl “now under him and now on top,” although the text states the reverse. The story may be influenced by the French fabliaux tradition.

⁷⁴The obvious exception is the Norwegian Queen Gunnhildr whose nymphomaniac behavior deserves special analysis. The most comprehensive study of her is Sigurður Nordal, “Gunnhildur konungamóðir,” *Samtid og saga* 1 (1941): 135–55. On her role as an inciter of men, see Jenny Jochens, “The Female Inciter in the Kings’ Sagas,” *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi* 102 (1987): 100–119, especially 116–19.

⁷⁵Compare, for example, the descriptions of Kjartan and Guðrún in *Laxdæla saga* (4.28.76–77; 4.32.86). It is probably an anachronistic mistake to see this attitude, as well as the lack of overt expressions of sexuality in the sagas, as signs of modesty. The emphasis on male beauty and the absence of the female body should rather be seen as manifestations of a culture at the stage prior to “the male gaze.” I hope to treat this problem in a future article.

women were not blamed when the sexual drive created havoc with the rules established to control it.

We have observed a slight increase in women's involvement in romantic and sexual affairs in later sagas (*Hávarðar saga Ísfróðings* and *Sorla páttir*), undoubtedly inspired by translations of the romantic literature from Europe.⁷⁶ Descriptions of love and sexuality in these native and foreign settings are largely phrased in positive terms. However, the failure of churchmen to enforce the new Christian rules on sexuality and marriage was recorded in the contemporary sagas, where sexuality often is portrayed in a negative light. More important, women are here assigned responsibility for breaking the marital rules originally established by the pagan society, but now modified and reinforced by churchmen.⁷⁷

Two of the most difficult tasks for the church involved the eradication of concubinage for the laity and the imposition of celibacy on the clergy. On the subject of concubinage, churchmen followed the pagan tradition and made men responsible for initiating such affairs. They fulminated against chieftains who kept concubines, urged them to abandon or marry these women, and punished both sexes implicated in extramarital affairs by withholding the eucharist. In addition, women who bore illegitimate children were denied the lighted candles customarily granted to wives when they entered the church after their confinement. In the fourteenth century, churchmen refused the last sacrament to sick women, unless their lovers married them, or unless the women promised to separate from the men when they recovered.⁷⁸

In these regulations women were already singled out for harsher punishments than the laymen with whom they associated. When clergymen were involved in sexual encounters, however, full responsibility was assigned to the female partner. Since priests and even bishops were regularly married, the clergy were exposed to the same sexual tensions over wives and daughters as the laity. An illicit love visit seems to be behind the encounter, occurring around 1100, between Bishop Ketill and a certain Guðmundr, in which both men lost an eye. The bishop attacks Guðmundr because he has heard that the latter "seduced" (*fíflði*) his wife (who, incidentally, was the daughter of another bishop). Guðmundr responds by taking seriously the

⁷⁶Blensinbil, Tristan's love-struck mother who takes the initiative in the encounter in which Tristan is conceived, was known through the 1226 translation of *Tristans saga* and could have provided such an inspiration. The text is in Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, ed., *Riddarasögur*, 6 vols. (1954; reprint, Reykjavik, 1982), 1:1–247; see especially pp. 1–22.

⁷⁷See Jochens, "The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland" (n. 4 above).

⁷⁸For references, see Jochens, "The Medieval Iceland Heroine" (n. 4 above), p. 44, n. 55 or, in Tucker, ed., p. 114. The reference to the denial of the last sacrament is specifically aimed at women and does not include men (see *Diplomatarium Islandicum* [Copenhagen, 1893], 2:549).

biblical injunction of an eye for an eye (*Ljósvetninga saga*, 10.21[31].105). The use of *fífla* suggests that the saga author blames Guðmundr for the affair.⁷⁹ In *Porgils saga ok Hafliða* in *Sturlunga saga* (1:28–29.46–48) the same story is told by the bishop himself. Ketill could have followed the native tradition and blamed the male offender for his humiliation, but he was clearly steeped in the new clerical training. Although the case involved his own wife, he chose to blame the woman: “she was not faithful to me” (*hon gerði mik eigi einhlítan*, literally, “she did not rely on me alone” [1:29.47]). The sources do not reveal specific cases, but one can readily imagine the inclination to blame women in cases of sexual misconduct.⁸⁰

Since the church’s requirement of clerical celibacy was gained only with difficulty, it is here we find clearest indications of the shift from male to female responsibility for sexual transgressions. For clergymen, whose sexual fantasies usually took a female form, it was natural to blame women for their own shortcomings in the constant battle to maintain chastity. This is particularly clear in the bishops’ sagas, a genre that corresponds to the European episcopal vitae and belongs to the period of the contemporary sagas. Guðmundr the Good, bishop of the northern see of Hólar, was a native churchman who took the demands of chastity most seriously for himself as well as for the Icelandic church. His *Life* includes a series of miracles, of which one is an Old Norse adaptation of the well-known vision of Tundalus of Irish origin.⁸¹ Known as “Rannveig’s vision” (*Rannveigar leizla*), it narrows the original focus from general sinfulness to sexual transgression and changes the protagonist from male to female, thus enabling the author to blame the breaches of clerical celibacy on women where he feels it belongs.⁸² Rannveig, the mistress of a priest, “had previously lived

⁷⁹The occasional use of the expressions *fífla* and *venr kvámur sínar* in *Sturlunga saga* (see, for example, 1:102 and 1:203) confirms that, although on the wane, the illicit love visit was and had been a social phenomenon. The topos is not found in the romantic and legendary genres.

⁸⁰The most famous case of sexual misconduct among the laity involved the chieftain Jón Lóftsson. Although married, he had children by other women. The most notorious was his mistress, Rangheiðr, whom he kept in his house and by whom he had two children. Rangheiðr’s brother, Bishop Þorlákr, the first Icelandic clergyman to take the Christian sexual program seriously, upbraided Jón, placing the full blame for the affair on him, and not on his own sister. The story is analyzed in Jochens, “The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland,” pp. 385–86.

⁸¹See the article “Tundalus,” in *KLNM* (Copenhagen, 1975), 19:53–56, and “Vissionsdiktning,” in *KLNM* (Copenhagen, 1976), 20:171–86.

⁸²The most recent edition of the Icelandic text is in Stefán Karlsson, ed., *Guðmundar sögur biskups*, vol. 1, Editiones Arnarnagagnæ, ser. B, vol. 6 (Copenhagen, 1983), pp. 92–99. The text can also be found in *Biskupa sögur* 1:451–55 and 2:9–11. The most recent treatment of the full vision is Thomas Kren and Roger S. Wieck, *The Visions of Tondal from the Library of Margaret of York* (Malibu, CA, 1990). This illustrated manuscript from the 1470s contains an Old French translation of the monk Marcus’s Latin text from the mid-twelfth century.

with another priest. Although she had few scruples about this, she was a pious woman in other ways.” Leaving a bathhouse one day, she falls into a trance and lays as if dead for several hours. After awakening, she reports her vision to Guðmundr. In her vision she has been seized by demons and dragged, bruised and scratched, across a lava field where she saw many people in suffering and torment. The demons did not let go of her until

they came to a place where she saw in front of her a huge cauldron or a deep, wide pit; it was filled with boiling pitch and around it were blazing fires. Inside she saw many men, both those living at that time and those who were deceased, and she recognized some of them. There she saw nearly all the chieftains who had misused their authority. Then the demons addressed her saying: “Down into this pit you shall be cast, for such are your deserts. You have shared in the same sin as those who are down there, namely loathsome lechery, which you committed when you lay with two priests and so defiled their office. To this you have added vanity and avarice. Now here you shall remain, since you would never abandon our services, and in many ways we shall torment you.”

The story relates how she was burned in the boiling pit, and how she was helped by calling on Mary and the saints in her distress.⁸³ She was finally shown the blessed abode where all the Icelandic bishops dwelt in bliss.⁸⁴

The contemporary sagas thus suggest a shift in perceptions, undoubtedly promoted by the church, that transferred responsibility for breaking sexual regulations from male to female, particularly those involving the clergy.

MULTIPLE SEXUAL PARTNERS

The influence of churchmen can also be detected in the articulation of our third problem, that of multiple sexual partners, an important contemporary issue although not considered serious during the pagan period. We recall that the thirteenth-century sources indicate the prevalence of infor-

⁸³The Icelandic preoccupation with sexual problems is remarkable. In the original text the male protagonist's sins do not include sexual offenses, and the only reference to problems of this nature is found in his visit in hell to “The Beast That Eats Unchaste Priests and Nuns”; sharing the same punishment for unchastity, monks and nuns suffer painful reproduction (Kren and Wieck, pp. 48–49).

⁸⁴For another illustration, see Jochens, “The Church and Sexuality in Medieval Iceland” (n. 4 above), p. 391, n. 17. *Kormáks saga* is often said to be without sign of Christian influence. The author seems to reveal his Christian views on sexuality, however, when he has Þórdís spákona advise Kormákr not to marry Bersi's sister because she is a *falskona* (harlot) and a *fiðfl* (idiot, but here probably used with the sexual connotations we have seen in *fiðfla*) (8.9.233).

mal unions in place of marriage and the indulgence of multiple sexual companions in concubinage in addition to marriage by most leading men.⁸⁵ This behavior was especially common among the Nordic royalty. The kings' sagas reveal cases where fathers offered their daughters for sexual pleasure to Danish and Norwegian kings in the often justified hope that they might produce a royal heir who would in due course bring prominence to their own family.⁸⁶ This practice continued deep into the Middle Ages in Norway, causing severe problems for the royal succession, until the kings accepted the ecclesiastical rule of monogamy and legitimacy as necessary conditions for succession. Persisting in Norway and Iceland among the leading classes, this ingrained habit suggests that pagan sexuality had been originally characterized by multiple partners, at least among royalty and aristocracy.

Occasional references to concubines and illegitimate children in the family sagas suggest the existence of multiple sexual partners also among free farmers, a problem that occasionally created tensions, but the paucity of the examples implied their relative lack of importance. Their continued existence, rather than sudden emergence, can further be deduced from their ubiquity in the contemporary sagas. They may have appeared to be more frequent in Christian times, because original pagan outlets for male sexuality had become restricted through changing social, economic, and, especially, religious conditions. The narrative and legal texts indicate that pagan men made regular sexual use of slaves, poor women, and servant girls. We recall the beautiful slave Melkorka whom Hǫskuld brought home from a market.⁸⁷ The Icelandic law stipulated that a man had the right to purchase a slave "for his bodily pleasure" (*til karnaðar*, *Gg* [1a:192]). Although the law severely punished sexual crimes, none was enjoined if a man slept with a beggar woman. The argument ran that since she was without family to take care of her, she needed to beg. Nobody was offended if her sexual services were exploited and compensated, as long as the man in question took responsibility for possible pregnancy (*Gg* [1b:48–49; 2:178]). Returning to the problem of violence, such encounters, therefore, did not cause strife among men. We can only speculate on how men behaved toward these women, and how they reacted. Pretending to be mute since her capture by Vikings in Ireland, Melkorka was discovered speaking to her son in her native tongue. This is a poignant illustration of a slave woman torn between impotent self-defense and responsibility for her child engendered through an enforced relationship with a master (4.12.24, 13.27,

⁸⁵Jenny Jochens, "En Islande médiévale: À la recherche de la famille nucléaire," *Annales ESC* 40 (1985): 95–112.

⁸⁶See Jochens, "The Politics of Reproduction" (n. 26 above).

⁸⁷See n. 11 above.

20.51). Since men had rights to the sexual services of slave women, it is unlikely that the latter protested overtly, and men may not have resorted to rape. In other words, violence appears only in the covert form that permeates all slave societies.

An episode in *Grettis saga* further illustrates the difference in sexual availability between a free farmer's daughter and the servant girl from the house. Celebrated for his physique, Grettir was discovered sleeping uncovered one morning in a farm house by the daughter of the household and the maid. Admiring his chest, the maid remarks on how small he is "farther down." Although admonished by the daughter of the house to stop her prattle, she continues to marvel and giggle. Eventually Grettir—who, of course, has been listening—asserts in verse that his testicles are no smaller than other men's and that his penis is capable of growing.⁸⁸ He grabs the servant, but the daughter escapes. The author assures his readers that when Grettir and the maid separate she is duly impressed (7.75.238–41).⁸⁹

Briefly, by permitting the sexual exploitation of slaves, poor women, and servants, pagan society induced most men to accept the imperative of legal marriage with a woman they had obtained according to society's rules. Since men's relations with marginal women were considered normal, and since most often neither the mistresses nor their offspring were important enough to enter the narrative of the family sagas, this genre exhibits a relatively placid sexual surface, portraying most couples as enjoying calm, monogamous marriages. Sexual tension erupts only in the topos of the illicit love visit, thus revealing the age-old problem of men using and provoking physical violence when they desire women.

As slaves disappeared and as churchmen insisted that sexual contacts be restricted to monogamous marriages, marginal women became less available for masculine sexual pleasures. When employed, they elicited the authors' notice and churchmen's complaints. (Prostitutes, a predominant urban phenomenon, were virtually unknown in the isolated rural conditions of medieval Iceland.) Whereas problems emanating from men having multiple sexual partners had largely been passed over in silence in the family sagas, they now emerged as major issues in the contemporary sagas.

⁸⁸The stanzas are considered to be contemporary with the saga and therefore cannot be used to argue for older, more explicit, sexual articulation.

⁸⁹Robert J. Glendinning, "Grettis Saga and European Literature in the Late Middle Ages," *Mosaic* 4 (1970): 51–62, points to a similarity between this story and a tale from Boccaccio's *Decameron* (Day 3, Tale 1). The change from two nuns to a farmer's daughter and a servant of whom only the latter is available is, however, indicative of native perceptions concerning women available for sexual purposes. See *Ljósvetninga saga* (10.13[23].72) for an additional suggestion of men's search for sexual companions among servant women.

TWO VISITORS

Returning to the illicit love visit, we shall conclude by taking a brief look at two sagas in which the theme is dominant. They demonstrate the ubiquity of male violence but, at the same time, suggest how pagan and Christian society tried to tame it in various ways. Old Norse literary scholars need not take offense at the suggestion that *Kormáks saga*, beloved among the family sagas and appreciated particularly for its abundant and beautiful love poetry, can be read almost entirely under the native topos of an extended illicit love visit, although it also exhibits the influence of Continental literature.⁹⁰ Having already referred to it to illustrate the structure of the visit, we recall that Kormakr discovers Steingerðr while she is staying with her foster parents. Falling in love with her, he continues his visits, even after her father brings her home in an effort to prevent them. When Kormakr persists in coming, her father is offered help from Narfi, a man living with him on the farm, and from Oddr, another competitor for Steingerðr's affection. This attempt to stop Kormakr results only in Oddr's and his brother's deaths at Kormakr's hands. Our hero perseveres in his visits and his violence by taking revenge against the men's mother, Þórveig, forcing her to leave the area and eventually bringing about her death.

Being a sorceress, Þórveig has laid a curse on Kormakr that he shall never obtain Steingerðr. Scholars see this as an explanation of the strange continuation of the story. When a marriage is arranged between Kormakr and Steingerðr, Kormakr fails to show up for the wedding. If the saga is read as a prolonged illicit love visit, however, his failure need no longer be credited exclusively to magic but can be interpreted as fitting our topos, since illicit love visits never result in marriage. Incensed over the insult to the family honor and eager to make an honorable marriage for his daughter, Steingerðr's father—whose effectiveness has been strengthened by the return from abroad of his grown son Porkell—accepts Porkell's offer to arrange a marriage between Steingerðr and Bersi, an older and renowned fighter. While Steingerðr is married to Bersi, Kormakr visits her only once. He challenges the husband to a duel but is unable to overcome him. When Bersi is badly wounded in a second encounter, it has been inflicted more by

⁹⁰On this saga, see Bjarni Einarsson, *Skáldasögur: Um uppruna og eðli ástaskáldasagnanna fornu* (Reykjavík, 1961); abbreviated and translated to Danish by the author, *To skjaldesagaer* (Oslo, 1976). There is also a translation of the saga into English: Lee M. Hollander, trans., *The Sagas of Kormák and the Sworn Brothers* (Princeton, NJ, 1949). Outside the main plot this saga contains a mini-episode depicting violence. The story involves Steinvör, abducted by a certain Þórarinn because her father has spoken disparagingly about him. After a while she is rescued by Bersi, who installs her on his farm to his new wife's great annoyance. In the end Steinvör serves as an excuse for Bersi to kill his brother-in-law (8.15.257, 16.259–63).

Kormakr's maternal uncle than by himself. As we have seen from other cases, an aggressive visitor can be restrained by a strong male presence.

Bersi's wounds induce Steingerðr to divorce him. During her second marriage to the weak Þorvaldr, Kormakr often visits Steingerðr and even has the audacity to ask her to make him a shirt, a traditional love token. On one of these visits they find themselves alone for the night, but Kormakr is unable or unwilling to make love.⁹¹ The saga's tragedy, therefore, is not only Kormakr's failure to appear at his wedding but also, especially at this later moment, his inability to consummate the relationship, the normal goal of an illicit love visit. Yet, despite his failure, he continues his visits. Because Steingerðr's husband does nothing to prevent them, his brother, Þorvarðr, finally takes charge. Not trusting his physical strength against Kormakr, he and the ever helpful Narfi bribe a vagabond to recite an obscene verse about the two ill-starred lovers. In a furious rage Kormakr kills Narfi and pursues his violence against Steingerðr's husband and brother-in-law, but he continues his visits, now on trips to Norway and on board ships. Even though he is unable to consummate his love for Steingerðr, his intentions remain openly sexual, as seen from repeated scenes of kissing in Norway.

The love visit's salient features of physical strength on the part of the visitor and corresponding weakness of the woman's protector is highlighted by Kormakr's comment to Steingerðr's husband on his last visit, albeit under unusual circumstances. Steingerðr and Þorvaldr have been captured by Danish Vikings at sea, Steingerðr abducted, and Þorvaldr left alone on the ship, robbed of all his belongings. When Kormakr arrives, he suggests that Þorvaldr try to recover her as well as his belongings, but Þorvaldr answers that he has insufficient forces. This concession and Kormakr's insistent reply: "Are you willing to admit your lack of strength?"

⁹¹There is a vast literature on this subject; in addition to Einarsson, *Skáldasögur*, see, for example, Hans E. Kinck, "Kjærligheten i Kormaks saga," in his *Mange slags kunst* (Kristiania, 1921), pp. 59–77; Frédéric Durand's introduction to his *La saga de Kormak* (Caen, 1975). Some authors have explained Kormakr's problem in his relationship with Steingerðr as impotence (see, for example, Dag Strömbäck, *Sejd: Textstudier i nordisk Religionshistorie*, Nordiska Texter och Undersökningar, 5 [Stockholm, 1935], p. 77). This interpretation is reinforced by the absence of the word *tala*—as we have seen, a code word for sexuality in these meetings—during the long afternoon Kormakr and Steingerðr spend together on this occasion (8.19.272). That Steingerðr thought Kormakr had a problem is suggested by her choice of words in their last encounter. Embarrassed that Kormakr has rescued Steingerðr from a group of Vikings, her husband Þorvaldr suggests that she should now join Kormakr permanently. Her reply is that she does not want to *kaupa um knífa* (literally, "exchange knives," or "penises," here used as a term for divorce [8.26.298]). In spite of Kormakr's constant attention, she has shown some appreciation of her husband, and, given the choice, she now prefers his performance to that of her lover. Kormakr's impotence may only have been intermittent, as suggested by the use of *tala* in the kissing episode in Norway (8.24.293).

(*segir þú ómatt þinn á?* [8.26.296]) can serve as a motto for all men failing to protect women in the illicit love visit. Rescuing Steingerðr from the Vikings, Kormakr returns her to Porvaldr who now offers her to Kormakr. The latter declines, saying that from the start “evil spirits” have prevented them from living together, thus confirming that Þórveig’s magic curse is still in force. He never forgets Steingerðr, but the saga does not report further love visits. Kormakr finishes his violent life as a Viking.

The problem of curbing male violence in sexual encounters may have been so severe that pagan society felt obliged to resort to magic, as suggested in *Kormáks saga*. Demonstrating similarities between pagan and Christian views on male violence, the author of *Hallfreðar saga*, however, sees Christian influence behind the changes in the protagonist’s behavior. We have met Hallfreðr as a young, impetuous visitor to Kolfinna, whose father was willing to let him have the girl in proper marriage. When he declines, she is married to Gríss, and Hallfreðr goes to Sweden where he also marries in due course. When this wife dies, he returns to Iceland and resumes the relationship with Kolfinna, even to the point of spending a night with her. Although he further insults Gríss by composing songs about him, this long-suffering husband is willing to settle peacefully, but in the end Hallfreðr challenges him to a duel. The night before the fight, however, Hallfreðr’s hero, King Óláfr Tryggvason, who has sponsored his baptism, appears to him in a dream and advises him to settle rather than fight. The impression of the dream on Hallfreðr is reinforced the next morning by the news of the king’s death. Accepting the advice, Hallfreðr never bothers Kolfinna and her husband again (8.10.186–93). Dying on board ship, he expresses in poetic form regret over his previous behavior and even admits that he has caused Kolfinna grief (strophe 33; 8.11.198). In this saga only a Christian vision restrains violent behavior.

CONCLUSION

The topos of the illicit love visit in the family sagas has been fruitful, not necessarily for supplying historical facts about specific individuals but for the articulation of a mentality. Although thirteenth-century authors imagined that sexual tensions had existed in the society of their forefathers, they perceived such problems to have been less endemic than among themselves.⁹² By prohibiting all sexual contacts outside marriage, by demanding clerical celibacy—a phenomenon unknown in the former pagan religion—by eventually prohibiting divorce, and by expanding the pagan restrictions against incest, churchmen vastly heightened the potential for sexual con-

⁹²The story of Bishop Ketill and Guðmundr not only suggests that it was a real issue but also reveals its continuity from pagan to Christian setting.

flict in the north. Male violence is endemic to sexual encounters, but, on the whole, this problem had been reduced by the pagan society at an early stage as it developed rules for establishing marriage.

We have argued that male sexual aggression was equally a problem for pagans as for Christians in early and medieval Iceland. By its frequency and the consequent unfolding of disorder, the topos of the illicit love visit in the Icelandic family sagas suggests that male violence had always been an important component of sexual encounters, reaching back to the early Nordic people. Although restrained by marriage regulations, this violence continued throughout the pagan age, as affirmed by both our topos in the family sagas and by the legal texts. To pagan curbs on male violence were added those of churchmen with the advent of Christianity, and the decline of male violence in sexual encounters in the contemporary sagas suggests that the problem was coming under control by the thirteenth century.

If women were less threatened by sexual violence, however, our second problem suggests that, in turn, they became victims of new hostile attitudes toward sexuality emanating from Christianity. As churchmen increased the restrictions on male sexuality, so also did they increasingly put the responsibility on women for infractions.

Violent sexuality, therefore, seems to be under better control in the Christian world of the contemporary sagas than our third problem, that of multiple sexual partners, to which the family sagas make only occasional reference. The ubiquity of concubines in the contemporary sagas casts suspicion on the absence of extramarital relations in the family sagas. This doubt, combined with the legal provisions to regulate the exploitation of women on whom men had no sexual rights, suggests that multiple sexual partners were far more common in pagan times than the family sagas will have us believe. The lack of evidence, however, may result from the low social status of the women with whom the pagan men cohabited. So unimportant were these marginal women that neither they nor their offspring entered the oral traditions used by the thirteenth-century authors. We can assume that these Christian authors, most of whom were trained as clerics, were opposed in principle to the sexual behavior of their contemporaries. Although, when depicting their own times, they could not dissimulate the objectionable behavior of their contemporaries, they could eliminate most references to the sexual peccadillos of their ancient forefathers, and thereby coat the past with an ideal patina that concealed the pagan social world and accommodated it to their dreams for the future. Male violence and multiple sexual partners not only dominated the discourse on pagan sexual behavior in the thirteenth century, but these traits were also, in fact, constitutive of the very subject of pagan sexuality in the north.

Our argument may afford little comfort for scholars looking for affirmation of the strong independent Nordic woman depicted in the Icelandic

family sagas. Since the eighteenth century, Old Norse sources have supplied materials for the construct of a strong pagan female, the ancestress of both Germanic and Celtic women.⁹³ The current interest in women's studies has encouraged scholars to return to this image, often with hopes of arriving at confirmation.⁹⁴ Undoubtedly women had played important roles in prehistoric religion which they continued in the practice of magic.⁹⁵ It is also evident that women in the north, as elsewhere in Europe before the development of feudalism, had made indispensable contributions to production and management of resources—even to the point of owning property on a large scale.⁹⁶ It is therefore possible to argue for a certain equality between the sexes in these areas. Our present subject, heterosexual sexuality, might also be seen to permit comparable equality, but on this most fundamental relationship women were not men's equals. Originally at the mercy of masculine physical strength, women were considered as prey whose capture was not deemed a personal humiliation but an insult to their families. Snatched away unceremoniously, their abduction initiated chain reactions of feuds in which the prize was quickly forgotten. Women were still exchanged as commodities in marriage negotiations,

⁹³Jenny Jochens, "Old Norse Sources on Women," in *Medieval Women and the Sources of Medieval History*, ed. Joel T. Rosenthal (Athens, GA, 1990), pp. 155–88, and "L'indépendante femme nordique: Une construction française?" *Etudes Germaniques* (1991), in press.

⁹⁴Among a growing literature, see Anne Heinrichs, "Annat er vart eðli: The Type of the Prepatriarchal Woman in Old Norse Literature," in Lindow et al., eds. (n. 16 above), pp. 110–40; Carol J. Clover, "Hildigunnr's Lament," in Lindow et al., eds., pp. 141–83; Else Mundal, "Kvinnebiletet i nokre mellomaldergenrar: Eitt opposisjonelt kvinnesyn," *Edda* 6 (1982): 241–371. For a more balanced view, see William Ian Miller, "Beating Up on Women and Old Men and Other Enormities: A Social Historical Inquiry into Literary Sources," *Mercer Law Review* 39 (1988): 753–66. For a brilliant interpretation, see Carol J. Clover, "The Politics of Scarcity: Notes on the Sex Ratio in Early Scandinavia," *Scandinavian Studies* 60 (1988): 147–88. The image of the strong Germanic woman is also found outside the north; see Helen Damico, *Beowulf's Wealhtheow and the Valkyrie Tradition* (Madison, WI, 1984); Michael J. Enright, "Lady with a Mead Cup: Ritual, Group Cohesion and Hierarchy in Germanic Warband," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1988): 170–203; Christine Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England and the Impact of 1066* (Bloomington, IN, 1984).

⁹⁵Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (New York, 1989); Else Mundal, *Fylgjemotiva i norrøn litteratur* (Oslo, 1974); Jenny Jochens, "Völuspá: Matrix of Norse Womanhood," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 88 (1989): 344–62, reprinted in *Poetry in the Scandinavian Middle Ages*, ed. Teresa Päröli (Spoleto, 1990), pp. 257–77, "La magie et les différences des sexes dans les mythes et la société germanico-nordique," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* (1993), in press, and "Old Norse Magic and Gender: *Pátrr Porvalds ens Víðforla*," *Scandinavian Studies* (1991), in press.

⁹⁶Nanna Damsholt, "The Role of Icelandic Women in the Sagas and in the Production of Homespun Cloth," *Scandinavian Journal of History* 9 (1984): 75–90; Helgi Þorláksson, "Arbeidskvinnens, særlig veverkens, økonomiske stilling på Island i middelalderen," in *Kvinnans økonomiska ställning under nordisk medeltid*, ed. Hedda Gunneng and Birgit Strand (Lindome, 1981), pp. 50–65; Anna Sigurðardóttir, *Vinna kvenna á Íslandi í 1100 ár* (Reykjavík, 1985).

subject to male violence as wives, and obliged to acquiesce to their husbands' numerous sexual partners. Christianity eventually provided possibilities of marital and sexual equality as churchmen worked for monogamy, fidelity, consent, and indissolubility, but inveterate masculine habits prevented full implementation of the program. And, to add insult to injury, the misogyny of churchmen further degraded women with primary guilt for offenses against sexuality.