

Sniolvs kvæði

The Growth of a Ballad Cycle

Patricia Conroy

It is generally assumed that the Faroese heroic ballad tradition (comprising the first 113 ballads in *Føroya kvæði*) was past its creative period by the time the first major collector, Jens Christian Svabo, recorded fifty-two ballads in 1781—1782. In the preface to this manuscript he reported that, as far as he knew, no one had ever written ballads down before, except for the twelve sample texts sent in 1639 to Professor Ole Worm, which were no longer extant. Since they had been preserved for generations only in the memories of men, reasoned Svabo, some of them must have been forgotten and the texts of those that survived must be in a state of disrepair.¹ From Svabo's description it is clear that he did not believe Faroese ballad tradition in his day to be vigorous and growing, but rather shrinking and on the road to oblivion.

Most scholars feel that Faroese ballad tradition had its heyday in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and reflects the intermixing of native Nordic and northern German narrative traditions that took place at that time in urban trading centers throughout Scandinavia. However, many who have studied the corpus of native heroic ballads have remarked — but only in passing — that a number of them appear to be of more recent composition.² In the absence of any discussion we are left to assume that these younger ballads were composed some time after the first period of creativity in the fourteenth and fifteenth

centuries but before that period of decay during which they were collected in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not only are we left to our own devices to deduce how old »young« is, but we are told nothing about the criteria used to distinguish younger ballads from older ones. A quick survey of ballads labelled as young by Axel Olrik and Christian Matras reveals that (1) none of them is believed to reflect directly a medieval Nordic or northern German narrative tradition; (2) none of them was collected by the earliest collectors, Svabo, Schrøter, and Hentze; (3) none of them has been collected in more than two variants; and (4) many of them feature heroes that originally belonged to separate epic traditions. Unfortunately, the above features cannot be regarded as criteria for identifying a young ballad because there are other ballads in Faroese heroic tradition which also share these features even though they have not been considered young. The question, then, of which ballads are young and when and where they were composed remains an interesting one because of what the answers can tell us about the history of Faroese ballad tradition as a whole.

The task of adducing the provenance of individual ballads within Faroese tradition is not an easy one. To begin with, except in unusual cases, ballads are handed down in oral tradition without any indication of their original composer or of their date and place of composition. We are completely at the mercy of the collector and what he has chosen to record for what little we do know about them. For instance, when travelling throughout the Faroes in 1781—1782, Svabo seems only to have been interested in ballads as stories: he recorded only the texts — never the melodies — and he gave no indication of who the singers were and in what villages the ballads were sung. We are equally in the dark concerning the collections of Pastor Schrøter from 1818 and P. Hentze from 1819 — they also were only interested in ballad texts and nothing else. However, insofar as Pastor Schrøter lived on Suðuroy and P. Hentze on Sandoy, it can be assumed that their collec-

tions reflect the traditions of their respective islands. It was P. Hentze's copyist, Johannes Clemensen, who actually recorded the ballads in Hentze's collection; and it is not until he himself became interested in collecting on his own account that we get not only ballad texts but additional information about the name of the singer in each case and the place and date of the recording. Later, V. U. Hammershaimb in his collection from 1847 and 1848 and Jakob Jakobsen in 1904 followed suit in recording the names and home villages of the singers in addition to the texts that were sung. Unfortunately, other collectors from the mid and late nineteenth century failed to emulate Clemensen, Hammershaimb, and Jakobsen and have left us ballad books filled with texts gleaned from anonymous singers in unnamed places.

But even the records left by Clemensen, Hammershaimb, and Jakobsen give us a very incomplete picture of the nature of the tradition in the areas in which they were collecting. It seems fairly clear that as a rule even the most meticulous collectors recorded a ballad only once, possibly because they were more interested in the scope of their collections than in keeping an inventory of the ballads sung in any given ballad community. For example, if a collector recorded a ballad from one singer, he then »had« the ballad, so to speak, and did not continue to collect the same ballad from other singers or in other villages, no matter how often he might hear it. Thus, using the collections assembled by a mere fourteen or fifteen collectors in different parts of the Faroes over a span of approximately 120 years, we may tally where and how many times a given ballad has been recorded, and we will still have only an extremely rough idea about the spread of that ballad.

Nevertheless, patterns occasionally seem to emerge from the extant data that suggest a more complete picture of the tradition. The case in point is the long ballad cycle *Sniolvs kvæði* (FK 91), which in its longest form consists of some nine sub-ballads or *tattir* together with some four other ballads that are closely related to it. *Sniolvs kvæði* has had a somewhat

unusual collection history that casts some light upon the composition of new ballads about the Sniolv cycle.

The oldest variant of *Sniolvs kvæði* was collected by Svabo in 1781–1782. This variant consists of only four *tættir*, which are untitled but correspond to what are in later collections called (1) *Golmars táttur*, (2) *Sniolvs táttur*, (3) *Ásmundar táttur*, and (4) *Gríms táttur*. Although it might be assumed that Svabo's text is not complete, that he only succeeded in collecting four out of a possible nine *tættir*, it could be argued that these four *tættir* do in fact comprise a complete text of the cycle. In his *Indberetninger fra en Reise i Færøe 1781 og 1782*, Svabo gives a short characterization of Faroese ballads in which he says that they usually consist of one, two, or three *tættir*, although there are those that have even four, and he names *Sniolvs kvæði* as the lone example.³ To judge from his specific mention of *Sniolvs kvæði* in this context, Svabo seems fairly certain that he has collected the entire ballad.

Furthermore, the text itself with its complex but coherent structure also gives the impression of completeness. The four *tættir* relate sequentially three infamous acts committed by the villain Ásmund: in *Golmars táttur* Ásmund rapes Duke Golmar's wife and then before killing the Duke forces him to assist in finding a sword once sunk deep beneath the sea by the valiant warrior Hildibrand. This motif, the quest for a weapon, is a rather common opening in Faroese ballads and is usually handled in one of two ways. Sometimes the pre-history of the weapon is provided, as for example in the first *táttur* of *Sjúrdar kvæði* (FK 1), in which we are told how the sword breaks when Sjúrd's father dies and how years later Regin forges the two pieces together and gives them to the young Sjúrd. However, it also happens that a ballad can open without giving any background for the weapon, as in *Risin í Holmgørðum* (FK 10) — this ballad begins with Virgar's trip to his father's burial mound to get a sword, but nothing is said about where the sword came from or how it got into the mound. Svabo's text of *Sniolvs kvæði* employs this more simple variation of the motif of the quest for a weapon.

The next two *tættir*, *Sniolvs táttur* and *Ásmundar táttur*, tell about Ásmund's second misdeed: first the young Sniolv is introduced, and we are told how he woos and wins the sought-after Adalín. In the second *táttur* the villain Ásmund slays Sniolv in single combat by using unusual tactics (*kastar svørð-um umkring* »swings his sword around« — in other variants he uses magic), and Adalín dies of sorrow upon seeing her husband's severed head tied to Ásmund's saddle.

The last *táttur*, *Gríms táttur*, relates Ásmund's third and most infamous deed. Having established himself as a slayer of champions, he challenges the famous warrior Grím to do battle, but Grím refuses to fight Ásmund because he is protected by the magic of his wicked mother. He offers instead to fight any champion that Ásmund might send him. Ásmund gets Hildibrand to take up the counter-challenge, and armed with the sword Ásmund has given him (which is, as we know from *Golmars táttur*, Hildibrand's own sword), Hildibrand slays Grím and then dies of sorrow when Ásmund tells him that he has slain his own son.

Not only is Svabo's text of *Sniolvs kvæði* a sequentially narrated account of Ásmund's adventures, the typical structure for heroic ballad cycles in Faroese tradition, but it also has the structure of a frame story. The first and last *tættir*, comprising the frame, tell the age-old story about how a father kills his son. The central part of the ballad, the second and third *tættir*, tells the otherwise unknown story of the hero Sniolv who is killed by the evil Ásmund. The frame structure of the Svabo text suggests that this version of the Sniolv cycle might have originally come about through the combination of two separate stories by means of (1) the association of the figure Ásmund known to the Nordic variant of the father-kills-son story (*Ásmundur saga kappabana*) with the villain Ásmund of at pre-existing *Sniolvs kvæði* in two *tættir* and (2) the subsequent embedding of the older *Sniolvs kvæði* into the father-kills-son story. Certainly the so-called E and F texts of the Sniolv cycle support such a theory — they contain only

the *tættir* about Sniolv, *Sniolvs táttur* and *Ásmundar táttur*, and thus give evidence for the existence of an independent ballad about Sniolv in Faroese tradition. But no matter what prehistory this frame structure might suggest for Svabo's version of *Sniolvs kvæði*, it functions to bind the four *tættir* into a compact unit that gives the impression of a story completely told. Although we do not know where or from whom Svabo collected *Sniolvs kvæði* in 1781—1782, we nonetheless do know that his text is not a fragment.

When Johannes Clemensen recorded *Sniolvs kvæði* for Hentze's collection in 1819 from an anonymous singer on Sandoy, it consisted of no less than seven *tættir*: (1) *Rana táttur*, (2) *Sniolvs táttur*, (3) *Golmars táttur*, (4) *Hildibrands táttur*, (5) *Virgars táttur*, (6) *Ásmundar táttur*, and (7) *Gríms táttur*. Not only does Clemensen's text contain three more *tættir* than Svabo's, but it has also reversed the order of *Golmars táttur* and *Sniolvs táttur*. Furthermore, to complicate matters, Clemensen recorded *Sniolvs kvæði* again in 1821, but this time identifying his singer as Peder Lukassen from Skálavík on Sandoy. Clemensen's 1821 text is not the same as his 1819 text — besides differences in wording and stanza order, it contains two additional *tættir*, *Hildardalsstríð* and *Risin á Blálandi*, which were sung immediately preceding the last *táttur*, *Gríms táttur*.

The Sniolv cycle as it was known from Clemensen's Sandoy texts of 1819 and 1821 contained roughly twice as many *tættir* as Svabo's text from 1781—1782. Since it has already been established that Svabo's text represents not a fragmentary but rather a complete and probably stable form of the cycle, then the Sandoy texts by comparison must reflect a vigorously expanding, popular tradition. If this is so, then where did the additional *tættir* comprising *Sniolvs kvæði* as it was known on Sandoy come from? Were they already extant ballads that came to be incorporated into the Sniolv cycle, or were they new compositions?

All five of the additional *tættir* found in the Sandoy texts

from 1819 and 1821 bear the mark of being newly composed elaborations of the Sniolv cycle. These new compositions each reflect the intermixing of champions from originally separate heroic cycles, a feature not found in any of the four *táttir* in Svabo's text. For example, in *Hildibrands táttur* and *Virgars táttur*, both of which first appear in the 1819 text and seem to be a single story told in two episodes, a new champion, Virgar Valintsson, is introduced into the cycle. Ultimately, Virgar's presence in Faroese ballad tradition can be traced back to northern German narrative tradition, some of which is reflected in the late compositum *Piðriks saga af Bern*. He is known to Faroese ballads chiefly as the valiant sidekick of Sjúrd Sigmundarson during the latter's youthful adventures with giants and dwarves. However, Virgar seems to have attained a special stature in local Sandoy tradition, which has named after him a ballad in which he, rather than Sjúrd, plays the chief role. This ballad was also sung in other ballad communities, where it was known as *Risin í Hólmgørðum* (FK 10), the difference in the title indicating a less keen interest in the figure of Virgar. The chief motive for introducing the well-known hero Virgar into the Sniolv cycle appears to have been further to characterize Ásmund's wickedness by providing a popular adversary of established caliber for him to defeat by his villainous use of magic.

Both the 1819 and the 1821 texts of the Sandoy version of the Sniolv cycle begin with *Rana táttur* rather than *Golmars táttur*, which opens the Svabo text. Although *Rana táttur*, unlike the other examples discussed, introduces no heroes from the Sjúrd cycle, it does show itself to be a later elaboration of the Sniolv cycle because it has united in a single episode characters from the two once-separate stories of the cycle — Hildibrand, of the father-kills-son story, fights for the hand of Sniolv's sister. In the Svabo text Hildibrand and Sniolv only interact with Ásmund and never with each other. This combining of Hildibrand and Sniolv in one episode shows how the Sandoy texts of the cycle have gone one step farther than

the Svabo text towards merging the two originally separate component stories.

The Sandoy text of 1821 contains an additional two *tættir*, *Hildardalsstríð* and *Risin á Blálandi*. According to a local legend, Clemensen's informant for this text, Peder Lukassen, actually composed *Hildardalsstríð* while he was temporarily imprisoned.⁴ Stylistically this *táttur* reflects its youth in its combination of heroes from the *Sjúrð* cycle with those of the *Sniolv* cycle: Grím defeats Geyti, the slayer of his fiancée's father, and then has to call on his own father, Hildibrand, for help when Geyti enlists the aid of both *Sjúrð* and Virgar in exacting vengeance for his humiliating defeat. One of the ballad man's purposes in composing this *táttur* seems to have been to measure the heroes of the *Sniolv* cycle against the mightiest heroes of Faroese balladry, *Sjúrð* and Virgar. Grím and Hildibrand gain great honor at the battle of Hildardal — Grím defeats Virgar, and the valiant Hildibrand holds his own against the greatest of all champions, *Sjúrð*. In composing this *táttur* the ballad man seems also to have wanted to put Grím in a very sympathetic light — he portrays Grím as a good son who follows his mother's advice and honors his father's ability, as a responsible and honorable suitor, and as a warrior of great prowess.

The episode narrated in *Risin á Blálandi* is a continuation of the story told in *Hildardalsstríð* and was probably composed at the same time. This *táttur*, too, shows the ballad man's interest in measuring the heroes of the *Sniolv* cycle against heroes of the *Sjúrð* cycle. When Grím returns home from a voyage, he meets a stranger and jousts with him; but when he finds out that the stranger is *Sjúrð*, he defers to *Sjúrð*'s superior prowess. In these two closely related *tættir*, *Hildardalsstríð* and *Risin á Blálandi*, the ballad man ranks Grím as a better fighter than Virgar, but not up to taking on the greatest of them all, *Sjúrð* Sigmundarson!

In *Risin á Blálandi* the ballad man seems also interested in providing background information for the most tragic episode

in the ballad cycle. Here, Ásmund's motive for engineering Grím's death is accounted for — Ásmund has been sent to fight with Grím by Virgar, who is angry at having been defeated by the young warrior. Just as Grím is about to set off on a voyage (the one from which he is returning when he fights with Sjúrd), Ásmund finds him and challenges him to a jousting match from which Grím emerges victorious, thus provoking Ásmund into threatening him with death »at the hands of one from whom you least expect it.«

In addition to *Sjúrdar kvæði* and its derivatives, another ballad, *Torbjörn Bekil* (FK 98), appears to have played a role in the composition of some of the younger *táttir* in the Sniolv cycle. *Torbjörn Bekil* is about a young Askelad figure named Ásmund who slays some giants to win the hand of the maiden Halga. The Ásmund of *Torbjörn Bekil* bears the epithet »kellingarson« (old lady's son), because it was his mother who helped outfit him for battle against a giant and later healed him of his wounds. The Ásmund »kellingarson« of *Torbjörn Bekil* seems to have become confused with the Ásmund »ungi« (young) or »illi« (evil) of the Sniolv cycle on Sandoy.⁵ The first evidence of this confusion is to be found in the 1819 text of *Gríms táttur* where Ásmund is referred to twice as »kellingarson.« This epithet occurs in two commonplace stanzas (st. 368 and 414), each of which directly follows a scene in which the young Grím refuses to fight with Ásmund because he and his mother practice magic. It seems likely that the two Ásmunds were confused because of their names and because they both had mothers who had helped them get ahead in the world.

This confusion played an interesting role in the composition of *Hildibrands táttur*. Looking for champions to challenge, Ásmund arrives at Virgar's castle when Virgar is not at home. He is addressed by Virgar's *stoltsinsmoyggjar*, valkyrie-like figures, who refer to incidents in Ásmund's past and claim that they were themselves present helping him. Two of these incidents do indeed belong to the biography of Ásmund »ungi«

from *Sniolvs kvæði*, but the other two really concern the Ásmund of *Torbjörn Bekil* — one is the fight with the troll Torbjörn Bekil to win the hand of Halga, and the other is the healing of his wounds by his mother after that same fight.

The tendency to incorporate parts of *Torbjörn Bekil* into the Sniolv cycle on Sandoy may well be a reflex of the same interest in the backgrounds of main characters that led to the expansion of the cycle through the composition of new *tættir* sketching the youthful exploits of Sniolv and Hildibrand (*Rana táttur*), Grím (*Hildardalsstríð* and *Risin á Blálandi*), and even Ásmund the villain (*Hildibrands táttur* and *Virgars táttur*). For those who had confused the two Ásmunds, the ballad *Torbjörn Bekil* would tell the story of the coming of age of the villain of the Sniolv cycle. However, this confusion of the two Ásmunds overlooks the fact that they are of vastly different character. Ásmund »kellingarson« of *Torbjörn Bekil*, who lies around in the kitchen during the day and practices the martial arts at night, saves the maid Halga from the brutish threats of a giant and his thugs. But Ásmund »ungi« of *Sniolvs kvæði* is himself a thug who roams around raping women and winning duels by the wicked use of magic. Certainly, Ásmund »kellingarson« and Ásmund »ungi« could not originally have been conceptualized as one and the same character! The confusion of these two figures evident in the Sandoy texts of *Sniolvs kvæði* must have arisen well after the establishment in tradition of the two separate and very different Ásmunds.

We can sometimes distinguish between older and younger *tættir* of the Sniolv cycle by looking at the way the ballad man has sought to place his particular story in the context of the rest of the cycle. In older ballads future episodes were foreshadowed by means of an extended dramatic scene containing some element of the supernatural — a prophecy, dream, or curse. However, in the younger *tættir* the ballad man tends either to make a simple aside to the audience or else to endow a character with foreknowledge of the future without the element of the supernatural. Compare, for example, the foresha-

dowing of the death Sniolv in the oldest layer of the ballad with the technique used to refer to future episodes in the younger *táttir*. In *Sniolvs táttur* the foreshadowing is contained in a scene composed in six stanzas in which Sniolv's wife awakens in the middle of the night and tells her husband that she has dreamt about a knight who will cut off his head in a fight. But in *Hildardalsstríð* the narrator foreshadows the chief tragedy of the cycle by simply announcing at the end of the *táttur* that this was the last battle that Hildibrand fought before he killed his son:

108 Hetta var tað síðsta stríð,
satt at siga frá,
uttan har á grønum vølli,
hann sín sonin vá.

109 Uttan hann á grønum vølli,
hann sín sonin vá,
eg svørji tann eið við mína trúgv,
tá lá hann sjálvur hjá.⁶

At the close of the young *táttur* *Risin á Blálandi* Grím, looking ahead to the tragedy of *Gríms táttur*, tells Sjúrd Sigmundarson that he does not want to fight with so great a champion and that he has to hurry home because he expects Ásmund to arrive soon:

39 »Ert tú Sjúrdur Sigmundarson,
eg vil ikki við teg stríða,
hann er eingin so reystur á fold,
ið torir tínum brandi bíða.

40 Plaga so allir høviskir sveinar
at fremja dyst og stríða,
tær gevi eg nú sigur í hond,
meg lystir nú heim at ríða.

- 41 Nú lystir meg til hallar at ríða
 bæði snart og skjótt,
 Ásmundur liggur á Brandarvík
 eg vænti hans komur brátt.«⁷

Here it is evident that Grím has foreknowledge of Ásmund's impending arrival without having learned of it by supernatural means.

The same is true in *Hildibrands táttur* when, after having defeated Ásmund, Hildibrand lets him go home because he knows that Ásmund must soon take Sniolv's head to Adalløs:

- 269 Ásmundur stendur á grønum vølli,
 tykist vera í vanda;
 »Gev mær lov at ríða í dag
 aftur til Selgjalanda.«

- 270 »Nú havi eg klovið brynju tína,
 tað mundi teg ikki vara,
 brátt manst tú við Sniolvs høvdi
 til Adalløs at fara.«⁸

Only in *Rana táttur* do we find foreshadowing in its more traditional form. After Hildibrand marries Sniolv's sister, he invites several *nunnur* (nuns) to celebrate Christmas with him, and they prophesy that Hildibrand and his wife will have a son who will die by his father's sword. This prophecy foreshadows the tragedy that takes place in *Gríms táttur* some six (1819 text) or eight (1821 text) *tættir* hence.

The presence of a new style of foreshadowing indicates that the younger ballad men seem to have composed their new *tættir* with a heightened sense of adding to an already complex ballad cycle. Only *Virgars táttur* is without reference to any part of the cycle outside itself. This is probably because it is not a separate tale but an extension of the story (begun in *Hildibrands táttur*) of Ásmund's journey to visit the castles of Hildibrand and Virgar.

The island of Sandoy appears to have been the center for the vigorous growth of the Sniolv cycle. None of the texts collected elsewhere shows the ballad in so expanded a form — they either reflect the cycle in a more primitive stage (Svabo's text and the E and F variants), or they are fragmentary and clearly derived from Sandoy tradition.

If we could assume that Clemensen's 1819 text and Svabo's 1781—1782 text were collected from the same family tradition of the cycle, then we could argue that the three new *tættir* must have been composed in the period between the earlier and later dates of collection. But we cannot — Svabo's text could have been collected anywhere: because he was involved in writing a description of the Faroes at the time, he must have travelled extensively. By the same token, we could pinpoint when the two new *tættir* in Clemensen's 1821 text were composed if we could be certain that Clemensen collected both his 1819 and 1821 texts from the same man. But even that eludes us! We do know Clemensen's 1821 text was sung by a Peder Lukassen of Skálavík, who, according to the common practice of Faroese ballad communities, would have been the only man in that village to perform the ballad. But even though the *tættir* that are found in both of Clemensen's texts are quite similar, there are nonetheless too many differences in numbers of stanzas, wording, and stanza order to make it possible to say with confidence that both texts were sung by Peder Lukassen in Skálavík.

It seems more reasonable to suppose that Clemensen, who had been delegated in 1819 by P. Hentze to collect some ballads, turned first to the nearest singers at hand — his fellow villagers from Sand. It is not likely that Clemensen would have gone further afield until he started his own collection in 1821, and that is indeed when he travelled to Skálavík to collect the cycle from Lukassen. If this is so, then Clemensen's 1819 text is from Sand, and his 1821 text is from Skálavík. But the two texts do bear a marked similarity to each other that suggests that they are both ultimately to be derived from the same

family tradition. Therefore, either Sand or Skálavík was the original center for the tradition on Sandoy from whence it was transplanted to the other village. Once two singing traditions for the cycle had been established in Sand and in Skálavík, then each was subject to new influences and would develop independently from the other. The line-by-line differences between the 1819 and 1821 texts testify to the passage of a period of time between the separation of the singing traditions in Sand and Skálavík and the collection of the texts, but the closeness of the texts suggest that it was a matter of generations rather than centuries. And it was during this period that *Hildardalsstríð* and *Risin á Blálandi* were composed in Skálavík.

In addition to the second layer of composition comprised by the five new *tettir* in Clemensen's 1819 and 1821 texts, there was on Sandoy further ballad-making connected with the Sniolv cycle that seems to represent a still younger layer of composition. This third and youngest layer consists of the following ballads: (1) *Gríms ríma* (FK 52), first collected in 1822 by Clemensen from Hans Johannessen of Sand; (2) *Tíðriks kongs ríma* (FK 97), first collected in 1822 by Clemensen from J. Michael Widerø of Sand; (3) *Frúgvín Olrína* (FK 81), first collected in 1827 by Clemensen from Poul Pedersen of Skálavík; and (4) *Heljars kvæði* (FK 63), first collected in 1847 by Hammershaimb from Ole Joensen of Skálavík. These four ballads appear to form a distinct third layer in the Sniolv cycle because they reflect a knowledge of several of the five new *tettir* found in the expanded texts of 1819 and 1821 and must therefore be younger. Another indication of their youth is the fact that they were collected relatively late and in very few variants. *Gríms ríma* and *Heljars kvæði* were collected in three variants, whereas *Tíðriks kongs ríma* and *Frúgvín Olrína* were collected in only two. It is interesting to note that earliest variants of each of these four ballads were collected in the two villages, Sand and Skálavík, that have been suggested as the two centers for the singing tradition of the Sniolv cycle.

Of these four ballads *Frúgvín Olrína* is most reminiscent of

the five *tættir* comprising the somewhat older second layer. Like them, it was composed as a prehistory to a tragic episode in the cycle and reflects a keen interest in depicting the characters of the protagonists of the cycle. In *Frúgvín Olrína* the ballad man pays special attention to Sniolv, whom he portrays as altruistically defending the fatherless Olrína from the thug-gish assaults of Ásmund. The portrayal of Virgar relies on a knowledge of three earlier *tættir*. Whereas in the earlier ballads he is merely a somewhat flawed character, Virgar is in *Frúgvín Olrína* a full-fledged villain, a lecher with a castle full of women. This aspect of his character is doubtless derived from the scene in *Hildibrands táttur* when Virgar's women, his troop of *stoltsinsmoyggjar*, reveal to Ásmund their knowledge of past incidents in his life. Virgar's villainy in *Frúgvín Olrína* is probably inspired by *Hildardalsstríð*, in which his sending of Ásmund to fight Grím ultimately leads to Grím's death. And there is a clear reference to *Virgars táttur* when, after rejecting Virgar, Olrína insults him by saying that he has been afraid to set foot outside his castle ever since he was defeated by Ásmund.

In composing *Frúgvín Olrína* the ballad man seemed to delight in exhibiting his intimate knowledge of *Sniolv kvæði*. He designed his new ballad to be a prehistory of important episodes in the cycle just as the ballad men before him had done when composing new *tættir*. But the composer of *Frúgvín Olrína* outdid the earlier poets of the Sniolv cycle — his ballad is the prehistory of not just one, but two episodes in *Sniolv kvæði*. Sniolv defends Olrína by imprisoning Ásmund. Ásmund's remark when he is released — that someone will have cause to remember these doings — is an articulation of his motive for killing Sniolv in *Ásmunds táttur*. Likewise, when Olrína rejects Virgar's suit, his messenger, Geyti, kills her father and brothers, murders which Grím tries to avenge in *Hildardalsstríð*.

It is interesting that Clemensen did not collect *Frúgvín Olrína* until 1827. *Sniolv kvæði* was among those first recorded when

he started his own collection in 1821. Apparently keenly interested in this longest of all Faroese ballad cycles, he was quick to collect ballads more loosely associated with it, as well — *Gríms ríma* and *Tíðriks kongs ríma* were both recorded in 1822. It may well be that Clemensen did not collect *Frúgvín Olrína* earlier than 1827 simply because it had not yet been composed. Unfortunately, one can do no more than speculate about the year of composition of a given ballad; but it can most certainly be said that *Frúgvín Olrína* was composed after *Hildardalsstríð*, itself a late ballad. The composer of *Frúgvín Olrína* demonstrates such a sovereign knowledge of *Sniolvs kvæði* that it is tempting to think that he was a member of the family in Skálavík that »owned« the cycle.

The remaining three ballads associated with the Sniolv cycle all reflect to a greater or lesser degree the influence of Danish tradition on the composition of native heroic ballads.

The clearest example of this is *Tíðriks kongs ríma*, which has been correctly identified by Helmut de Boor as a variant of *Kong Diderik i Birtingsland* (DgF 8).⁹ To be more precise, it looks as if some Faroese ballad man grafted an Ásmund story onto the beginning of the Danish ballad. There is a real question, however, as to whether this new amalgam was intended to be an extension of the Sniolv cycle or of the quite popular and widespread *Torbjörn Bekil*. In *Tíðriks kongs ríma* Ásmund is a member of King Tíðrik's retinue. His wife Halga learns that he has been unfaithful to her and poisons him when he says goodbye to her before setting off on the military expedition to Ísland which is the story told in *Kong Diderik i Birtingsland*. Although Ásmund's marriage to a woman named Halga suggests that *Tíðriks kongs ríma* was written about the hero of *Torbjörn Bekil*, the unpleasant character of Ásmund in *Tíðriks kongs ríma* and his association with Diderik's court and the champions Virgar and Sjúřð all speak for a much closer relationship to the Sniolv cycle. In composing this new ballad the poet seems to have wanted to provide a fitting death for Ásmund, the villain of *Sniolvs kvæði* — the man who has

raped the wives of men he has killed is in the end poisoned by his own wife. This ballad is best understood as a reflex of the Sniolv cycle as it developed on Sandoy and, as such, contains the same confusion concerning the portrayal of Ásmund that marks that island's tradition of the cycle as a whole.

Gríms ríma and *Heljars kvæði* are different from all the other ballads concerned with the Sniolv cycle in two important ways. First, they are both composed in couplet rather than quatrain stanzas. It seems likely that their ballad men composed them this way in order to be able to use one of the couplet melodies that had been introduced into the Faroes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries via the extremely popular Danish ballads. Native Faroese tradition is completely dominated by the quatrain stanza type — there are only ten native couplet ballads that are not reflexes of Danish ballads. Since most of these appear to be rather late, like *Gríms ríma*, they also seem to illustrate the use of Danish couplet melodies in composing Faroese texts.

The second way in which *Gríms ríma* and *Heljars kvæði* are different from the other ballads dealing with the Sniolv cycle is that neither of them tells a new story, but instead retells a story that is already part of the cycle. *Gríms ríma* is a quite close retelling of the story told in *Risin á Blálandi* — (1) About to sail off on an adventure, Grím meets Ásmund and defeats him in a jousting match; (2) he sails to Bláland, slays a giant, and wins a treasure; (3) he meets Sjúrd and yields to him in a jousting match. *Heljars kvæði* is much more loosely modelled on the last half of *Hildardalsstríð* when two adversaries gather their forces and enter into battle. *Heljars kvæði* dwells more on the summoning and arrival of the champions than does *Hildardalsstríð*, but the battle scenes in both are largely the same. In *Hildardalsstríð* Grím fights Virgar and then Geyti; and Hildibrand fights Sjúrd, aims a blow at Gest, and then fights with a dwarf. In *Heljars kvæði* there is no Geyti, and Ásmund has taken over the role played by Hildibrand. And so the battle goes as follows: Grím fights Virgar; and Ásmund

fights Sjúrd, aims a blow at Nornagest, and then everyone fights with a dwarf. The chief difference between the two stories is that *Hildardalsstríð* is about Grím's successful activities, whereas *Heljars kvæði* is about Ásmund's unsuccessful courtship.

Both *Gríms ríma* and *Heljars kvæði* reflect the confusion concerning the figure of Ásmund that is so typical for Sandoy tradition. In the Skálavík text of *Heljars kvæði* the only epithet used of Ásmund is »kellingarson«, even though he is otherwise characterized as the evil Ásmund of *Sniolvs kvæði*. In *Gríms ríma* both variants refer to Ásmund once as »illi«, but it is only the Suðuroy text that contains any use of the epithet »kellingarson«. Since the Suðuroy texts of *Sniolvs kvæði* seem to contain a somewhat random, incoherent selection of *tettir* from the first two layers of the cycle as it is known on Sandoy (L. *Rana táttur*, *Hildibrands táttur* og *Virgars táttur*, *Hildar táttur*, *Golmars táttur*; M. *Rana táttur*; and N. *Annar Sniolvs táttur* [= *Sniolvs táttur* and *Ásmunds táttur*]), it does not appear that this cycle is native to Suðuroy, but rather derivative from Sandoy tradition. It is therefore curious that the Suðuroy text contains the reference kellingarson«, whereas the Sand text does not. A possible explanation is that *Gríms ríma* is not native to Sand, but, just like the Suðuroy text, it was introduced there by a village singer who had learned it more or less well in the village on Sandoy where it did belong. With regard to the stanza containing the reference to »kellingarson«, the Suðuroy variant is closer to the source text than the from Sand.

Trying to determine »birthdays« within Faroese ballad tradition is tricky business, indeed.¹⁰ It is altogether possible for a young ballad to be recorded soon after it is composed, and it is just as possible for an ancient one to go unnoticed by generations of collectors. It is equally hazardous to try to develop a set of criteria that will distinguish the young from the old because, surely, a ballad man well versed in tradition is just as capable of composing a new ballad in the old style as he

is of responding to the fashions of the time to produce a ballad in a new style.

The most fertile areas of investigation for studies of the chronology of Faroese ballad tradition are most certainly the cycles or groups of related ballads, for here there is hope of at least establishing a relative chronology for the members of the group. This study of the Sniolv cycle yielded more than that — texts of this cycle indicate that it was still growing between 1781—1782 when Svabo first recorded it, calling it even then the longest of the Faroese ballads, and the 1820s when Clemensen combed Sandoy to find new ballads for his collection.

In the light of this it seems strange that Svabo thought that Faroese ballad tradition was decaying. Perhaps he, like all folklorists who have been educated in book culture, was dismayed at the apparent frailty of oral tradition, was afraid that the old songs would die with the old men that sang them. He did not see as clearly that there were still young men and new songs that were winning their way into tradition with more authority each time they came into the ballad dance.

NOTES

¹ J. Christian Svabo, *Svabos færøske visehaandskrifter*, ed. Christian Matras, Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 59 (Copenhagen, 1939), p. 3.

² See, for example, Axel Olrik, »Om Grundtvigs og Jörgen Blochs Føroyakvæði og færøske ordbog«, *Arkiv for nordiske filologi*, NS 2 (1890), 250—255; H. Grüner-Nielsen, *De færøske kvadmelodiers tonalitet i midaldralderen*, Færoensia, 1 (Copenhagen, 1945), pp. 16—17; Christian Matras, *Føroya kvæði*, 2:3 (Copenhagen, 1944), endpaper; and Svale Solheim, »Færøysk-norsk i folkevisediktinga«, *Fróðskaparrit*, 18 (1970), 297—306.

³ J. Christian Svabo, *Indberetninger til en Reise i Færøe 1781 og 1782* (Copenhagen, 1959), p. 121.

⁴ Jóannes Patursson, *Kvæðabók*, 5 (Tórshavn, 1945), p. 61.

⁵ Helmut de Boor claims that the epithet »kellingarson« was original with *Sniolvs kvæði*. But insofar as the oldest texts of both *Sniolvs kvæði* and *Torbjörn Bekil* show no association of this epithet with the Ásmund of the Sniolv cycle, but rather with the Ásmund of *Torbjörn Bekil*, I prefer

to think that the occasional appearance of »kellingarson« in *Sniolvs kvæði* is the result of a later confusion. See both his »Die færøischen Dvörgamoylieder«, *Arkiv for nordisk filologi*, NS 32 (1920), 214, and his »Die nordische und deutsche Hildebrandsage«, *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie*, 49 (1923), 174—175.

⁶ Trans.: 108. This was the last battle, true to tell, except where on a green field he slew his son. 109. Except where on a green field he slew his son; I swear that oath by my troth, then he lay himself alongside.

⁷ Trans.: 39. »If you are Sjúrd Sigmundarson, I don't want to fight; there is no one so brave in the world who dares to suffer your sword. 40. All courtly men are accustomed thus to practice jousting and to fight; I will grant you victory; my wish now is to ride home. 41. Now my wish is to ride to my hall both right away and fast; Ásmund is anchored in Brandarvík; I expect his arrival soon.«

⁸ Trans.: 269. Ásmund is standing on a green field, thinks himself in danger; »Give me leave to ride today back to Selgjaland.« 270. »Now I have cleaved your armor, you won't take heed; soon you will go with Sniolv's head to Adalløs.«

⁹ de Boor, »Die færøischen Dvörgamoylieder«, p. 226.

¹⁰ My thanks to Mortan Nolsøe of the Faroese Academy, who called my attention to the fact that Pastor J. H. Schrøter drew up a list of ballads considered in the Faroe Islands to be older than one hundred years and sent it to P. E. Müller, who included it in his introduction to H. C. Lyngbye's *Færøiske Qvæder om Sigurd Fofnersbane og hans Æt* (Randers, 1822), pp. 16—20. Both *Sniolvs kvæði* in seven *tættir* and *Gríms ríma* are listed here. However, I would like to suggest that Schrøter knew nothing definite about the age of the ballads on his list, but merely included the titles of all the non-satirical, anonymous ballads that he knew — precisely those ballads about which too little was known to be able to ascertain the date they were composed.

ÚRTAK

Kvæðabólkurin, ið er kendur undir navninum *Sniolvs kvæði*, var enn í vøkstri seinna helming av átjandu øld og nakað inn í ta nítjandu. Líkt er til, at kvæðið í upphavssniði sínum hevði tveir tættir, *Sniolvs tátt* og *Ásmundar tátt*; hetta kemur til sjóndar í E- og F-uppskriftunum av kvæðinum í *Føroya kvæðum* (Corpus carminum færøensium). Hóast tekstur Svabos er elsta uppskriftin, sýnir hann kvæðið á einum seinni stigi í vøkstri sínum: teir báðir upprunaligu tættirnir eru innfeldir í aðra søgu (ið søgd er í *Golmars tátti* og *Gríms tátti*) um mann, ið óavvitandi verður syni sínum at bana í bardaga. Næsta stig í vøkstri kvæðisins tykja kvæða-

yrkjarar í Sandoy hava framt. Tekstur Jóannesar í Króki frá 1819 eftir ónevndum heimildarmanni hevur triggjar tættir afturat: *Rana tátt*, *Hildibrands tátt* og *Virgars tátt*, sjei tættir til samans; og tekstur hansara frá 1821 eftir Pætri Lukassyni í Skálavík er vaksin við uppáftur tveimum táttum, ið eru *Hildardalsstríð* og *Risin á Blálandi*. Upp í hesar nýggju tættir hava Sandoyingar tikið hetjurnar í Sjúrdarkvæðum, Sjúrd Sigmundarson og Virgar Valintsson. Í hesum nýggju táttum sæst eisini lyndið, sum varðveitslan í Sandoy hevur til at blanda saman hin illa Ásmund í *Sniolvs kvæði* og hin góðsliga Ásmund kellingarson í kvæðinum um *Torbjørn Bekil*. Tað tykist hava verið meiri kvæðayrking í Sandoy í sambandi við Sniolvs kvæði: *Gríms ríma* (CCF 52), *Tíðriks kongs ríma* (CCF 97), *Frúgvín Olrína* (CCF 81) og *Heljars kvæði* (CCF 63). Einkí av hesum kvæðum er at skilja sum táttur í *Sniolvs kvæði*, men tey eru um persónar í kvæðinum, geva annaðhvørt forsøguna at einihvørji sorgarhending í kvæðinum ella eru leyslig endursøgn av hendingum í tí, í tvíreglaðum orindum (heldur enn í fýrreglaðum).

Department of Scandinavian
University of Washington
Seattle, Washington 98195