



Woden's Medieval Afterlives

Elinor Louise Ward

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Department of Linguistics and Scandinavian Studies

Faculty of Humanities

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Candidate no: 3002

Abstract

Woden, alongside his Norse complement Óðinn, is a figure that has continued to fascinate and persist within England's cultural consciousness. In this thesis, the multifaceted nature of Woden's usage post-Conversion will be examined, paying close attention first to his function as legendary forefather, whose resonances with kingship have enabled those descended from him, as evidenced in Old English genealogical material, a strengthened legitimacy to rule. This association with kingship will also be applied to instances in which English placenames derive their name from the god, such as Wansdyke ('Woden's Dyke') in Somerset and Wiltshire. Woden's more devilish byname of Grim will likewise be considered, both in relation to placename studies, but also in English folklore, specifically the Church Grim, and finally in the character of Grim the fisherman in the thirteenth century romance *Havelok the Dane*. Through his guise of Grim, the adaptability of Woden's remembrance in England can thus be emphasised. Indeed, by considering several fields of study in dialogue, this thesis aims to stress that the survival of Woden in England's cultural memory owes much to his inherent malleability.

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Introduction

Why did Woden continue to occupy the Medieval English imagination, and beyond, despite the advent of Christianity? This enigmatic figure from England pagan past continues to be a subject of much interest and debate for modern scholars, not least because of his enduring legacy in toponyms such as Wansdyke and numerous Grim's Dykes and Ditches. Certainly, if placename studies are any indication, "Woden was the most widely honoured of the heathen gods in England."¹ But what was it about his godly characteristics that allowed him to rise to such a prominent position, and perhaps more importantly, maintain no small amount of cultural relevancy, even after a thorough euhemerising, as evidenced by his treatment in Old English royal genealogies? Scholarship has often examined Woden in close correspondence and conversation with the Norse god Óðinn; the Germanic origins of their respective worship likely rooted in descriptions of Mercurius, found in Roman historian Tacitus' *Germania* (c. 98 CE).² Although undoubtedly related, Woden and Óðinn, it should be noted, are by no means identical, yet this study will pay close attention to this relationship, nonetheless. Indeed, their most marked visual difference is undoubtedly the latter's loss of an eye, which is indicative of Óðinn's more advanced development, as pagan beliefs held on for longer in Scandinavia than in England. In this thesis project, I will not be arguing that pre-Christian belief and worship of Woden lasted longer than typically understood, rather that a removal of his godhood did not equate to the complete removal of Woden's significance, in particular his resonances with authority and power. What is more, this project will stress that Woden is arguably unique in this regard, as no other pre-Christian deity in England possessed, or likewise *possesses*, his malleability of function and cultural permanence.

The four primary gods of the pagan Anglo-Saxons — Tiw, Woden, Thunor, and Frige — can be observed in present time in the Modern English names for the second to fifth days of the week, however, as Christopher R. Fee notes, these deities "represent only a portion of the total pantheon."³ Nevertheless, "although not always chief among the gods worshiped in Germanic Europe, Odin — known as Wode, Wodan, or Wotan to the Anglo-Saxons — is purported in Norse sources, and notably by Snorri Sturluson, to be the father of the gods and the wisest and most powerful of them."⁴ In this study of Woden's medieval afterlife in England, I have taken an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on several fields of study, which include his use as a

¹ Brian Branston, *The Lost Gods of England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974): 93.

² Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 78–79.

³ Christopher R. Fee, *Gods, Heroes, & Kings: The Battle for Mythic Britain* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): 15–16.

⁴ Fee, *Gods, Heroes, & Kings*, 19–20.

prestigious ancestor in many Old English royal genealogies, as a more devilish figure in folkloric material, as an indicator of linear earthworks in English placenames, and finally, as an admittedly disputed reference in the thirteenth century Middle English romance, *Havelok the Dane*. By putting myself in dialogue with these areas of interest, I aim to draw a roadmap from Woden's euhemerization in medieval genealogical material and connection to Wansdyke as a representation of power, contrasting it with more his more malevolent, ambiguous moniker Grim, as depicted in placenames and folklore, to the "inconsistent" characterisation of Grim the foster-father, and founder of Grimsby, in the Middle English romance, *Havelok the Dane*.⁵ The purpose of this approach is therefore to draw attention to how Woden, and by extension Óðinn's, multifaceted character and thus subsequent adaptability, have uniquely cemented his place within England's cultural consciousness.

It must be acknowledged, however, that Woden's survival as a significant cultural figure owes much to his positioning as a unifying ancestor to the England's kings. This phenomenon, and Woden's importance, evidently extended into the twelfth century and will be explored in the first chapter of this study. This association bears close correspondence with representations of Óðinn, who is likewise linked with the elite class, as illustrated in Norse material:

Óðinn á jarla,
þás í val falla

[Odin gets the noblemen, who fall in the fight]⁶

Woden's "peculiar association with the Anglo-Saxon royal houses" would confirm this parallel, notes William A. Chaney.⁷ This understanding of and interest in the Early English god is clear in late twentieth century scholarship, such as Brian Branston's assertion that "the genealogies of the kings bear witness to the former dignity of Woden's name, for even in Christian times the royal houses of Kent, Essex, Wessex, Deira, Bernicia and East Anglia all traced back to Woden."⁸ Similarly, Chaney, who has dedicated substantial discussion on the topic of "Woden-sprung kings," has commented that "a notion of common divine origin" descended from Woden "apparently linked all — or almost all — of the kingly families of the Anglo-Saxons."⁹ However,

⁵ Herbert L. Creek, "The Author of *Havelok the Dane*," *Englische Studien* 48 (1914–15): 201.

⁶ "Hárbarðsljóð," in *De Gamle Eddadigte*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1932): verse 24, [https://heimskringla.no/wiki/H%C3%A1rbar%C3%B0slj%C3%B3%C3%B0_\(FJ\)](https://heimskringla.no/wiki/H%C3%A1rbar%C3%B0slj%C3%B3%C3%B0_(FJ)); "Hárbardsjóð," in *The Elder Edda*, trans. Andy Orchard (London: Penguin, 2011): 71.

⁷ William A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press): 34.

⁸ Branston, *Lost Gods*, 93.

⁹ Chaney, *Cult of Kingship*, 32.

while Chaney asserts that “the origin of Woden as god of kings and warriors is lost in the obscurities of pre-history,” his association with kingship nevertheless lingers.

Nearing the close of the 1990s, Richard North is another notable scholar whose work has informed this thesis.¹⁰ However, whereas North has arguably strived to establish evidence from Old English material suggestive of a continued belief in pagan figures and practices, I have purposely avoided this line of exploration. The belief in Woden I have sought to establish, as previously stated, is the belief in his continued cultural resonances, which extend beyond a belief in his godhood, and are instead centred around his, at times, ambiguous relationship with power. Although undeniably speculative, a valuable area of exploration that will be examined in the second half of this first chapter are the folkloric uses of Grim, a notable byname for both Woden and Óðinn. Special attention will be paid to the “Church Grim,” an ominous, supernatural creature with close ties to legends of the devilish Black Dog in England. This more ominous aspect of Woden character arguably emphasises his manipulability within the Christianised imagination: not entirely just a euhemerised ancestor, but equally, not entirely a shunned heathen devil either. Instead, Woden’s adaptability of purpose allows him to embody numerous guises, a characteristic which also he shares with Óðinn, amongst several other traits that will be investigated throughout this study’s three chapters.

Moving into chapter two, England’s placenames are another area of study that possess prominent connections to Woden’s cultural survival and have thus proven to be a fertile field on which to draw in chapter two. Like his use in Old English genealogies, Woden’s presence in the name Wansdyke (‘Woden’s Dyke’) can also be viewed in relation to his association with legitimacy and kingship, explored more thoroughly in chapter one. Notable explorations into Woden’s presence in England, not limited to placename evidence, have been pursued by A. L. Meaney and J. S. Ryan, during the 1960s, respectively.¹¹ Chief among the placename scholars used in this thesis are more recent studies by Sarah Semple and Margaret Gelling.¹² Semple, notably, makes the astute observation that early medieval communities “perceived remnants of the ancient past, and used them for a variety of purposes,” weaving them into their

¹⁰ See North, *Heathen Gods*.

¹¹ A. L. Meaney, “Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence,” *Folklore* 77, no. 2 (1966): 105–15; J. S. Ryan, “Othin in England: Evidence from the Poetry for the Cult of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Folklore* 74, no. 3 (1963): 460–80.

¹² Sarah Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Sarah Semple, “Sacred Spaces and Places in Pre-Christian and Conversion Period Anglo-Saxon England,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. David A. Hinton, Sally Crawford, and Helena Hamerow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 742–763; Margaret Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-names and the History of England* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co, 2010).

understanding of “past, ancestry, and landscape.”¹³ In response to this, I have endeavoured to highlight how such an assertion made by Semple can also be applied to Woden, who is undoubtedly a significant “remnant” of England’s ancient past, if not *the* most significant, not least because of his connection to the name Grim, which Gelling has explored extensively in association with linear earthworks.¹⁴ However, as will be evident in the chapter, not every Grims- placename can be confidently linked to this likely moniker of Woden’s. Grimsby, in Lincolnshire, has been typically understood as one such place. Yet, in this chapter, I will explore how correct an assumption that truly is.

Which brings us to this thesis’ final chapter, regarding Woden’s potential occurrence in *Havelok the Dane* (c. 1280–90), a favoured text among scholars in concordance with discussions on the depiction nationhood and the burgeoning English identity in Middle English literature.¹⁵ Yet, *Havelok the Dane* is also deeply connected to the landscape of Lincolnshire and its folklore. This chapter owes much to, and likewise builds upon, the work of Edmund Reiss, who in the mid-sixties sought to identify a possible mythical origin for the *Havelok*-legend, chiefly, that the character of Grim, the foster-father to the titular Havelok, is a distant echo of the god Óðinn.¹⁶ Eleanor Parker, on the other hand, has countered that “there is little to suggest that any of the medieval writers who tell of versions of the *Havelok*-legend were aware of this, and in most of these texts Grim is presented as a kindly, hard-working, but essentially very ordinary fisherman.”¹⁷ Yet recent studies have also argued the reverse, such as Kenneth Eckert, who has commented on the inconsistencies of character evident in Grim’s various representations.¹⁸ Nevertheless, *Havelok the Dane* has not been truly scrutinised regarding the possible parallelism between Grim and Óðinn since Reiss, who, it should be noted, does little to relate this reference to the wider themes of the narrative, namely, how an Odinic character might grant those associated with him a legitimacy to rule. In this way, the depiction of Grim as evocative of Óðinn can be viewed in dialogue with other instances in which Woden has been used in England as a marker of power, yet not always straightforwardly so.

¹³ Semple, “Sacred Spaces,” 757–58.

¹⁴ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 150–56.

¹⁵ See for example Michael Faletta, “The Ends of Romance: Dreaming the Nation in the Middle English Havelok,” *Exemplaria* 17, no. 2 (2005): 347–80; Diane Speed, “The Construction of the Nation in Medieval English Romance,” in *Readings in Medieval English Romance*, ed. Carol M. Meale (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1994): 136–56; Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language and National Identity 1290–1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

¹⁶ Edmund Reiss, “Havelok the Dane and Norse Mythology,” *Modern language quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1966): 115–24.

¹⁷ Eleanor Parker, *Dragon Lords: The History and Legends of Viking England* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018): 161.

¹⁸ Kenneth Eckert, “The Redemptive Hero and ‘Inconsistencies’ in Havelok the Dane,” *Philological Quarterly* 94, no. 3 (2015): 225–44.

In summary, as remarked upon by Fee, “Odin is certainly the most volatile and interesting of the Aesir of Norse tradition,” and this can also be extended to his English counterpart, Woden.¹⁹ In this thesis, I thus aim to highlight that despite the advent of Christianity, as well as his demotion from deity to legendary ancestor, Woden’s cultural resonances with kingship, authority, and legitimacy, but also with duplicitousness and brutality, remained remarkably intact. The strength of these associations, as evidenced in extant genealogies, placenames, English folklore, and potentially in the character of *Havelok*’s Grim the fisherman, give credence to his continued cultural survival. Moreover, his enduring relevancy thus underscores Fee’s observation that Óðinn, and by extension Woden, is a rather singular cultural figure.

¹⁹ Fee, *Gods, Heroes, & Kings*, 20.

I. Storied Ancestor and Grim Devil

Within Old English genealogies, Woden holds a unique position as a legendary, euhemerised ancestor to all but one of the nine extant royal lines, though his characterisation as a prestigious progenitor to kings is not the only one that lingers within post-Conversion England's cultural consciousness. It has long been speculated that the otherworldly entity known as 'Grim,' associated with the dykes and ditches throughout England that bear his name, as well as the ominous 'Church Grim' of English folklore, was a byname of Woden, in addition to the Norse Óðinn.¹ This chapter will explore the dual function Woden played in Christian England as both an ancestor and a devil, and how this malleability of character enabled him to survive in cultural memory in way that stands apart from other pagan gods. Woden's integration into England's post-Conversion worldview is most evident in the genealogies that list him as an ancestor to kings, a practice that survives until the twelfth century, complete with illustrations of him crowned. These inclusions suggest a certain exclusivity as Woden alone among the pre-Christian Germanic gods had the ability and cultural capital to imbue his descendants with a sense of kingly legitimacy and prestige. What is more, Woden arguably remains a potent character in England's cultural memory, well into the Middle Ages, even to the present day, due to his other face, his other function: the devilish Grim to the genealogies' kingly antecedent.

So, why was Woden such a desirable ancestor to Christian kings? A detailed description of Woden's characteristics doesn't exist, but his inclusion in genealogical material suggests that he was in some way connected to authority, kingship, and lineage, as evidenced by his prominent place in *Libellus de primo Saxonum uel Normanannorum adventu* (fig. 1), a twelfth century manuscript commonly attributed to Symeon of Durham, which includes an illustration of a

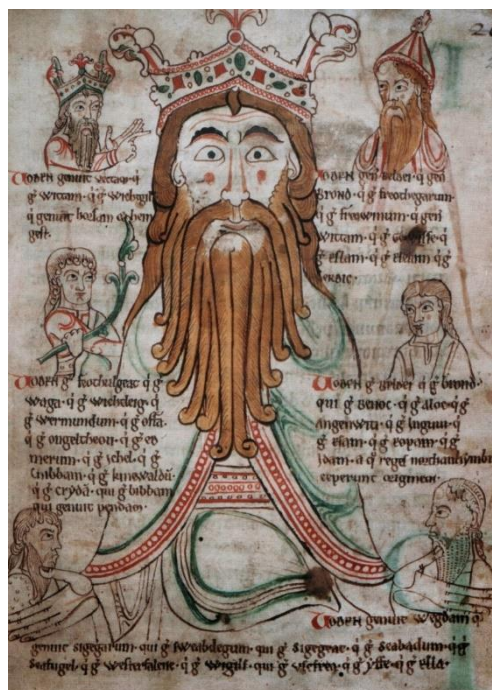


Fig 1: London, British Library Cotton Caligula A. viii

¹ *A Dictionary of English Folklore*, ed. Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 156; Jennifer Westwood and Jaqueline Simpson, *The Lore of the Land: A Guide to England's Legends, from Spring-Heeled Jack to the Witches of Warboys* (London: Penguin, 2006): 43; Katherine Briggs, *An Encyclopedia of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies, and Other Supernatural Creatures*, 1st American Edition (New York: Pantheon Books, 1976): 205.



Fig 2: Cambridge Corpus Christi College MS 66

crowned Woden surrounded by the royal lineages that claim descent from him: Kent, Mercia, Deira, Bernicia and Wessex. Also in the twelfth century, Woden is likewise depicted as crowned and surrounded by his royal descendants in *Historia Anglorum* (fig. 2), composed by Henry, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, which connects him to the contemporary king of England, Henry II. Lastly, although not accompanied by an illustration, in Ernulf Bishop of Rochester's *Textus de Ecclesia Roffensi*, the kings of East Anglia are described as descendants of the legendary Woden.² The primary function of these genealogies was not simply lineage for lineage's sake; they were documents of political intent, with common descent from Woden arguably representing a culturally unifying act. Indeed, as mentioned, there are few extant Old English genealogies which do not include Woden as a

prominent forefather. The royal dynasties of Bernicia, Deira, Lindsey, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, and Wessex can be mainly found within *Historia Brittonum*, a supposed history of the indigenous British, dating from the eighth and early ninth centuries. Individual genealogies are also extant in a variety of other texts, namely Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Asser's *Life of Alfred*, a West Saxon regnal table, several instances in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (in the entries for the years 547, 560, and 855), the *Chronicle of Æthelweard*, and, lastly, in a ninth-century manuscript fragment containing a West Saxon and East Saxon genealogy.³

Of the genealogies that survive, all except one trace the descent of its kings from Woden. The kingdom of Essex instead traces its lineage from Seaxnet, a "former tribal divinity," according to Craig R. Davis, and "an eponymous ethnic progenitor rejected by the West Saxons in favour of Woden."⁴ Seaxnet was "known among the Saxons of the Continent," notes William A. Chaney⁵, was "still venerated by eighth-century Old Saxons," expands Davis, and known there as "Saxnot."⁶ Chaney and Davis disagree, however, with regards to Sussex's absent genealogy, with

² Rochester Cathedral Library, MS A. 3. 5.

³ Hermann Moisl, "Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies and Germanic Oral Tradition," *Journal of Medieval History* 7, no. 3 (1981): 215.

⁴ Craig R. Davis, "Cultural Assimilation in the Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies," *Anglo-Saxon England* 21 (1992): 26.

⁵ William A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970): 29.

⁶ Davis, "Cultural Assimilation," 26.

the former arguing that there is “little reason to believe that it too was not Woden-sprung.”⁷ Davis, on the other hand, posits that it is likely that Sussex took after Essex, and “also thought of some ethnic avatar, probably a variant of Seaxnet himself, as the father of their people.”⁸ Nevertheless, Woden’s near universal inclusion in Early English genealogical material suggests he was a desirable figurehead to claim descent from. However, as A. L. Meaney observes, “it was probably in the time of Offa (i.e. late eighth century) that names were added above his, showing that by this time he had [...] perhaps been euhemerised to an ancestral king.”⁹ Yet, this euhemerization of Woden did not deter his continued inclusion, and the reinterpretation of myths as historical figures and events is a far from unusual occurrence when considering his Scandinavian counterpart, Óðinn.

There are parallels between Woden’s treatment in English sources and those of Óðinn in Scandinavia and Iceland, but, as noted by Jens Peter Schjødt, although Woden and Óðinn are often considered to bear a strong resemblance, “the identity is never complete.”¹⁰ Indeed, it is difficult to say whether Woden was functionally the ‘same’ as the Norse Óðinn, or if he was a differently regarded figure altogether. Moreover, representations of Óðinn were not homogeneous throughout the Nordic world; “at certain times some functions of the god would be more accentuated than others.”¹¹ For the Early English, however, Woden’s consistent inclusion in genealogical material suggests that the function of the god that was accentuated the most was his role as an ancestor and patron to kings. Nevertheless, “the formal kinship” between the two, as observed by Richard North, “provides a basis for attempting to explain the Anglo-Saxon Woden,” as Óðinn is the better documented of the pair.¹² Indeed, it should be noted that Óðinn’s increasing use as a founder of Scandinavian dynasties was likely influenced by the arrival of West Saxon texts in Iceland during the twelfth century.¹³ North gives the examples of Ælfric’s *De falsis diis*, which was translated into *Um þat hvaðan ótrú hófst*, also a list of West Saxon kings not dissimilar to that of Cotton Tiberius A. iii, fol. 178, that was added into the early thirteenth-century *Breta sogur*, a translation of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia regum Britanniae*, written c. 1135.¹⁴ Outside of England, it has been argued that Woden’s Germanic

⁷ Chaney, *Cult of Kingship*, 29.

⁸ Davis, “Cultural Assimilation,” 26.

⁹ A. L. Meaney, “Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence,” *Folklore* 77, no. 2 (1966): 110. Meaney’s article was written as a response to J. S. Ryan, “Othin in England: Evidence from the Poetry for a Cult of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Folklore* 74, no. 3 (1963): 460–80.

¹⁰ Jens Peter Schjødt, “Óðinn,” in *The Pre-Christian Religious North: History and Structures, Volume III*, ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén, PCRM-HS 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020): 1124.

¹¹ Schjødt, “Óðinn,” 1124.

¹² Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 78.

¹³ North, *Heathen Gods*, 123.

¹⁴ North, *Heathen Gods*, 123; Faulkes, “Descent from the Gods,” 97–9.

counterparts were likely never considered ancestors of kings or chieftains, though “Óðinn’s *Valföðr* and *Heriaföðr* epithets” in the Eddic poem *Grímnismál* “suggest that Óðinn was known in Scandinavia as the adoptive father of kings, princes or warriors slain in battle.”¹⁵

It seems probable, then, that the English use of Woden as a progenitor to royalty influenced depictions of Óðinn in works such as Snorri Sturluson’s *Prose Edda*, the most extensive written work we have on Norse mythology, and *Heimskringla*, a collection of sagas concerning several Swedish and Norwegian kings. Moreover, as mentioned, parallels to the euhemerism of Woden can be observed in the transition and loss of divine power regarding Óðinn, as evidenced in his depiction in *Ynglinga saga*, part of Snorri’s account of the kings on Norway in *Heimskringla*:

Fyrir austan Tanakvísl í Asíá var kallað Ásland eða Ásaheimr, en hofuðborgin, er var í landinu kǫlluðu þeir Ásgarð. En í borginni var hofðingi sá, er Óðinn var kallaðr [...] Óðinn var hermaðr mikill ok mjök víðfǫrull ok eignaðist mǫrg ríki. Hann var svá sigrsæll, at í hverri orrostu fékk hann gagn, ok svá kom, at hans men trúðu því, at hann ætti heimilan sigr í hverri orrostu.

[The land east of the Tana Fork was called the Land or Home of the Æsir, and the capital of that country they called Asgarth. In this capital the chieftain ruled whose name was Óthin (...) Óthin was a great warrior and fared widely, conquering many countries. He was so victorious that he won the upper hand in every battle; as a result, his men believed that it was granted to him to be victorious in every battle.]¹⁶

In this saga, Óðinn is portrayed not as a god, but as a “hermaðr mikill” (“great warrior”), though it is later acknowledged that “en Óðin ok þá hofðingja tólf blótuðu menn ok kǫlluðu goð sín ok trúðu á lengi síðan,” (“people worshipped Óthin and his twelve chieftains, calling them gods and believed in them for a long time thereafter”).¹⁷ This echoes what Snorri says in the *Prologue* of the *Prose Edda*, which is that the old gods of the north were just impressive mortals, originating from Asia, who unenlightened men believed to be deities thanks to their deeds.¹⁸ However, although he neatly explains away their deification, Snorri nevertheless remarks upon Óðinn’s involvement in the founding of various dynasties that claimed descent from him.¹⁹ In *Gylfaginning* — the section of the *Prose Edda* that details the history of the world, most likely modelled on the

¹⁵ North, *Heathen Gods*, 131.

¹⁶ “Ynglinga saga” in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. N. Linder and H. A. Haggson (Uppsala: W. Schultz, 1869–1872): ch. 2, https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Ynglinga_saga; Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, trans. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995): 7.

¹⁷ “Ynglinga saga,” ch. 2; Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 11.

¹⁸ See “Prologus” in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar: með skáldatali*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1935): ch. 3–5 <https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Prologus>; Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans. Jesse L. Byock (London: Penguin, 2005): 5–8.

¹⁹ See “Prologus,” ch. 5; Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, 7–8.

Eddic poem *Völuspá* — Snorri proffers the information that Óðinn is regarded as the king among gods, the father of most of them, the “Alfǫðr” (‘All-father’), as well as of humankind.²⁰

Furthermore, Óðinn is said to reside in “Valhǫll” (‘Hall of the Slain’), which is “clearly modelled on the kingly halls of pagan Scandinavia,” notes Schjødt.²¹ If we are to view representations of Óðinn as analogous to Woden, it is clear that although euhemerism did take place, reducing his status from a god to a legendary hero, Woden’s position as a progenitor of kings was likely enhanced, as reflected in the Norse material. As North states, “it appears that the cult of Woden in Anglo-Saxon England got an extra lease of life from Christian hands.”²² Speaking about the acceptance of Óðinn in areas north of Denmark, and subsequently connecting this acceptance to the preparation for the acceptance of Christianity, Terry Gunnell notes that “when Christianity appeared, the natural and logical next step would be to cut away the lower levels (substituting them with saints), and simply change the name of the man on top.”²³ Change the man at the top they did but dismiss him completely they did not. In England, Woden was “demoted rather than dismissed,” as evidenced by his inclusion in seven of the eight surviving Old English genealogies, where he is presented as “an ancestor of legendary but no longer supernatural proportions,” argues Davis.²⁴ Gunnell, although he remarks upon the cult of Óðinn in Scandinavia being a later development, also notes that Óðinn’s rise to prominence was connected to the interests of “the new class of ‘national’ or area ruler (rather than a local family head or chieftain),” and to “the development of ‘central places’ that governed a large area of territory.”²⁵ Woden’s inclusion also suggests that he was of interest to the ruling class of Medieval England, and that this interest did not wholly diminish after the conversion to Christianity. As North observes, “the Christian position with Woden in later Anglo-Saxon England was politically rather than spiritually ambiguous.”²⁶

Kenneth Sisam’s 1953 examination of the Old English genealogies concluded that they could not be considered reliable historical records, reflective of actual lineages.²⁷ Instead, as suggested by David N. Dumville in 1977, it seemed more reasonable to interpret them as political documents,

²⁰ For instances in which “Alfǫðr” (‘All-father’) is used see “Gylfaginning” in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar: með skáldatali*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1935): chs. 3, 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 20, 34, 35, 39, <https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Gylfaginning>; Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, 11, 18, 19, 14, 24, 28, 31, 39–40, 43, 48.

²¹ “Gylfaginning,” ch. 20; Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, 31; Schjødt, “Óðinn,” 1141.

²² North, *Heathen Gods*, 132.

²³ Terry Gunnell, “From One High-One to Another: The Acceptance of Óðinn as Preparation for the Acceptance of God,” in *Conversations: Looking for Ideological Change in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Leszek Słupecki and Ruldolf Simek (Vienna: Fassbaender, 2013): 171.

²⁴ Davis, “Cultural Assimilation,” 24.

²⁵ Gunnell, “One High-One to Another,” 160.

²⁶ North, *Heathen Gods*, 81.

²⁷ Kenneth Sisam, “Anglo-Saxon Royal Genealogies,” *PBA* 39 (1953): 287–348.

and therefore tools for furthering dynastic ambitions.²⁸ Woden's inclusion could thus be understood as an intentional political choice, designed to imbue his royal descendants with a potent cultural legacy, thereby solidifying their legitimacy to rule. Molly Miller has expressed disbelief at the possibility of Bede attributing any true historicity to Woden as an ancient heroic figure and antecedent of the Kentish and other royal lineages. Instead, she argues that Bede must have been aware of the propaganda at play and that the tradition of tracing royal descent from a former god was simply "a means of defining royalty."²⁹ She maintains that Woden's presence in the Christian context of the Old English genealogies was "understood and used, but not believed in any primary sense, and its use is most properly described as propagandist."³⁰ Dumville concurs with Miller, agreeing that Woden was for Bede a mere "convention," and his inclusion in the genealogies "is not intended to be taken literally."³¹ Conversely, Davis finds this stance "unlikely," contending that "medieval historians so frequently rescued former ethnic and dynastic divinities by euhemerism that, without Bede's explicit comment on the subject, we have no way of knowing whether he sceptically acquiesced in the tradition of descent from Woden as a convenient political figure or thought of Woden as an authentic ancestor later deified by ignorant people."³² Certainly, if Bede did believe the latter, that does not preclude the possibility that Woden's inclusion in the genealogies also served a political purpose.

Little written material exists on Woden to illuminate in what regard he was considered by the Early English, but it may be significant that in the second section of *Maxims I*, located in the Exeter Book (a late tenth century codex of Old English poetry), Woden is contrasted unfavourably with God the Almighty:

Woden worhte weos, wuldor alwalda,
 rume roderas; þæt is rice god,
 sylf soðcýning, sawla nergend (Maxim I, II, 132–34)

[Woden wrought idols, the Almighty wrought glory,
 the broad skies. He is the might God,
 the very King of truth, the Saviour of souls.]³³

Although disparaging towards Woden, his placement alongside, yet in opposition to God, is suggestive of his standing at the top of the pre-Christian English belief system, a position that allowed for considerable influence among the ruling class. Additionally, in the Old English *Nine*

²⁸ David N. Dumville, "Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists," *Early Medieval Kingship*, ed. P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (Leeds: The School of History, University of Leeds, 1977): 72–104.

²⁹ Molly Miller, "Bede's Use of Gildas," *The English Historical Review* 90, no. 355 (1975): 254.

³⁰ Miller, "Bede's Use of Gildas," 254.

³¹ Dumville, "Kingship, Genealogies and Regnal Lists," 79.

³² Davis, "Cultural Assimilation," 25–26.

³³ "Gnomic Verses," in *The Exeter Book: Part II: Poems IX–XXXII*, ed. and trans. W. S. Mackie (London: Oxford University Press, 1958): 40–41

Herbs Charm, connections can once more be made between representations of Christian belief and Woden³⁴. Although the hanging Lord who features in the poem is a Christian motif, “the Lord’s creation of herbs on the gallows is reminiscent of Óðinn’s acquisition of *rúnar* in *Hávamál*,” argues North.³⁵ It would be a misstep, North reasons, to conclude that the hanging Lord in *The Nine Herbs Charm* was understood to be a direct reference to Woden, rather than to Christ, but “the continuing need to practice herbal magic within Christianity led this poet to characterise Christ’s sacrifice as if it were Woden’s, because the extraction of curative herbs from Hell does not appear to be a biblical motif.”³⁶ This contrasting of Woden and Christian figures suggests that, while no longer worshipped, Woden was still useful in advancing the interests of the Christianised English, whether that was by bestowing a sense of legitimacy on their lineage, or by strengthening the righteousness of God and/or Christ.

Gunnell notes that in contrast Óðinn “was not deeply rooted amongst the general populace [...] and was not a god closely associated with the land.”³⁷ The same cannot be said of Woden, as he has been connected to several placenames (particularly earthworks) in England, a topic which will be discussed at greater length in chapter two. But it is not just the name Woden that has made its mark upon England’s cultural consciousness. Although harder to pinpoint in terms of dateable sources, it is worth considering the folk beliefs that surround the name Grim, a likely byname of Woden (and Óðinn), particularly as a supernatural entity. In Old English, *grīma* can mean ‘goblin’, ‘spectre’, or ‘mask’, the first two unquestionably otherworldly beings.³⁸ The latter meaning is noteworthy when we consider Óðinn’s function as a god of death, choosing half of those who die in battle to join him in *Vahǫll*; a role that may have also in some fashion been extended to Woden, although evidence remains elusive. Furthermore, what is striking about the name Grim in folklore is that the supernatural grim occurs in both the folk traditions of England as well as in parts of Scandinavia, notably in the form of the ‘Church Grim’, or *Kyrkogrim* in Sweden, and *Kikegrim* in Denmark. In England, Katherine Briggs notes the widespread tradition of churchyard spirits taking the form of a black dog.³⁹ She has also speculated that, owing to his association with the name Grim, Óðinn “may have descended to be a Church Grim,” though such a claim is, of course, speculative.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, the Black Dog, as it appears in English folklore, could be said to evoke the mythology surrounding Óðinn. Theo Brown has noted several

³⁴ See Joseph S. Hopkins, “*Nigon Wyrta Galdor*, Popularly Known as the *Nine Herbs Charm*: A New Annotated and Illustrated Translation,” *Mimisbrunnr.info*, 2020, <https://www.mimisbrunnr.info/nigon-wyrta-galdor#normalized-and-direct-translations>.

³⁵ North, *Heathen Gods*, 87.

³⁶ North, *Heathen Gods*, 87.

³⁷ Gunnell, “One High-One to Another,” 162–63.

³⁸ *Dictionary of English Folklore*, 156; Westwood and Simpson, *Lore of the Land*, 43.

³⁹ Briggs, *Encyclopedia of Fairies*, 74–75.

⁴⁰ Katherine Briggs, *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature* (London: Routledge, 2002): 56.

characteristics that are suggestive of this. For example, the Barguest iteration of the entity, as it occurs in Cambridge, Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk, “is frequently one-eyed, haunts coasts, fens, roads and churchyards, and is always ominous.”⁴¹ The “one-eyed” trait recalling the myth of Óðinn’s sacrifice of his eye at *Mímisbrunnr* (‘Mímir’s well’) in exchange for a drink from its wisdom-giving waters. Furthermore, Brown remarks that “in Staffordshire, there is a group haunting wells and wayside burials,” and more generally, this “Barguest type” is notable for “chang[ing] its shape,” and for not confining its shape to the form of a dog.⁴²

This shapeshifting also recalls Óðinn, as his ability to change form is well documented in Norse mythological material. In the Eddic poem *Grímnismál*, he is known as “Grímr” (‘Mask’), “Fjølñir” (‘Hider’), “Grímnir” (‘Masked One’), and “Jalk” (‘Gelding’). In *Skáldskaparmál*, Óðinn first takes on the guise of Bolverkr to trick the mead of poetry from Jötunn Suttungr, who gained it from the dwarves Fjalarr and Galarr in recompense for the death of his parents.⁴³ He then changes into a snake: “þá brást Bolverkr í ormslíki,” (‘Then Bolverk changed himself into the shape of a snake’)⁴⁴ and finally makes his escape by changing into an eagle. Likewise, in chapter seven of *Ynglinga saga*, it is noted that:

Óðinn skipti hǫmum; lá þá búkrinn sem sofinn eða dauðr, en hann var þá fugl eða dýr, fiskr eða ormr, ok fór á einni svipstund á fjarlæg lǫnd, at sínum erendum eða annarra manna.

[Óthin could shift his appearance. When he did so his body would lie there as if he were asleep or dead; but he himself, in an instant, in the shape of a bird or animal, a fish or a serpent, went to distant countries on his or other men’s errands.]⁴⁵

Óðinn and the Black Dog of English folklore also parallel one another in their distinct colouring, as evidenced in chapter eleven of *Völsunga saga*, in which Óðinn is described as wearing “heklu blá” (‘a black hooded cloak.’)⁴⁶ However, there is no way of definitively linking the two based solely on conveniently compatible descriptions. Indeed, folkloric testimony is arguably even more difficult to assess in terms of authentic pagan belief than the later sagas are, which were written hundreds of years after Christianity had been fully integrated in Scandinavia and

⁴¹ Theo Brown, “The Black Dog,” *Folklore* 69, no. 3 (1958): 176.

⁴² Brown, “The Black Dog,” 176.

⁴³ For the origin of the creation of the mead of poetry from the blood of Kvasir, in translation, see Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans. Jesse L. Byock (London: Penguin, 2005): 83–85.

⁴⁴ “Skáldskaparmál” in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar: með skáldatali*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1935): ch. 6
<https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Sk%C3%A1ldskaparm%C3%A1l>; Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, 86.

⁴⁵ “Ynglinga saga” ch. 7; Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 10.

⁴⁶ “Völsunga saga” in *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, ed. Guðni Jónsson and Bjarni Vilhjálmsson (Reykjavík: Bókaútgáfan Forni, 1943): ch. 11, https://heimskringla.no/wiki/V%C3%B6lsunga_saga; *The Saga of the Volsungs: The Legend of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer and the Magic Ring of Power*, trans. Jesse L. Byock (London: Penguin, 2013): 53.

Iceland. Nevertheless, the connection between the Black Dog legends, in relation to the Church Grim, and in turn to Woden/Óðinn is not wholly without substance.

Brown has also remarked upon the chthonic nature of the Black Dog legends, noting that some refer to it having come out of, living in, or returning to the ground.⁴⁷ Arguably there is also a chthonic aspect to the description of Óðinn in chapter seven of *Ynglinga saga*: “en stundum vakti hann upp dauða men or jörðu,” (‘at times he would call to life dead men out of the ground’).⁴⁸

Additionally, it says that:

Óðinn vissi um alt jarðfé, hvar fólgt var, ok hann kunni þau ljóð, er upp laukst fyrir honum jörðin, ok björg ok steinar, ok haugarnir, ok batt hann með orðum einum þá er fyrir bjöggu, ok gékk inn ok tók þar slíkt er hann vildi.

[Óthin knew about all hidden treasures, and he knew such magic spells as would open for him the earth and mountains and rocks and burial mounds; and with mere words he bound those who dwelled in them, and went in and took what he wanted.]⁴⁹

This is especially striking when we consider the many Grim’s Ditches and Grim’s Dykes present in England, as well as Woden’s connection to earthworks, most notably the Wansdyke. Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson have referred to Grim as “a legendary creator of large-scale linear ditches,” and although there is an absence of narrative myths explicitly depicting Woden, or Óðinn, as the creator of landscape features, “the occurrence of the name Wansdyke in Wiltshire proves that this was one of the powers popularly ascribed to him, for this name is derived from ‘Woden’s Dyke.’”⁵⁰ The relationship between Woden, Grim and various placenames in England will be further explored in chapter two.

The chthonic aspect of Óðinn and the Black Dog is also exemplified in the Church Grim. William Henderson notes the similarities to the Swedish *Kyrkogrim*, which appears as a lamb, and attributes it to foundation sacrifice and the early days of Christianity in which a lamb was buried under a church’s altar.⁵¹ Benjamin Thorpe has also argued that the folklore surrounding the Swedish *Kyrkogrim* is indicative of pre-Christian practices and ritualistic beliefs being retained and transferred onto the later construction of Christian churches.⁵² Like Henderson, Thorpe notes the use of a lamb, buried “under the altar in the first Christian churches,” although

⁴⁷ Brown, “The Black Dog,” 182. Brown gives the examples of the Dobb Park Lodge dog, who was said to reside in an underground chamber, and the Belle Hole Boggart, which is associated with a hole in the hillside. At Thackergate, Lancashire, there is a legend of a dog coming out of a pit. Also in Lancashire, the Trash-Skriker “sinks into the ground with a strange noise.”

⁴⁸ “Ynglinga saga,” ch. 7; Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 11.

⁴⁹ “Ynglinga saga,” ch. 7; Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, 11.

⁵⁰ Westwood and Simpson, *The Lore of the Land*, 20–21.

⁵¹ William Henderson, *Notes on the Folk-lore of the Northern Counties of England and the Borders*, vol. II (London: W. Satchell, Peyton and Co., 1879): nb.1, 274.

⁵² Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mythology: Compromising the Principal Popular Traditions and Superstitions of Scandinavia, North Germany, and the Netherlands* (London: E. Lumley, 1851–52): 102.

he adds that the choice of a lamb may have been emblematic of Christ, who is titled the Lamb of God (John 1:29 and 1:36).⁵³ By contrast, in Denmark the *Kirekgrim* took the form of a “grave-sow.”⁵⁴ If such is the case, the Swedish Church-lamb could be evidence of pagan practice being repurposed and adapted to a Christian audience. Intriguingly, in 1896, at Birkenhead Priory, a Benedictine monastery founded in 1150, the bones and skull of an adult sheep, complete with horns, was found in a “carefully prepared cavity” at the foot of one of the Priory’s buttresses.⁵⁵ “It seems clear that the sheep was deliberately immured in the recess prepared for it,” observes W. Fergusson and N. F. McMillan, “and whether or not this constitutes a genuine example of foundation sacrifice the facts are here recorded.”⁵⁶ However, unlike the Church-Lamb of Sweden, the Birkenhead sheep was an adult, “but not aged” and of “a small and unimproved type.”⁵⁷

Another notable difference between the Birkenhead sheep and the Swedish Church-Lamb is the mention of horns, which evokes the many horned figurines and images, thought to be of Óðinn (though not definitively), that have been found across Scandinavia, but also in England; most notably on the Sutton Hoo helmet.⁵⁸ Local folklore connecting this site to a Church Grim is absent, however. Yet, the correspondence between foundation sacrifice, whether archaeological or folkloric, in relation to churches in both England and Scandinavia, in addition to its connection to the Church Grim, remains arresting. It should be noted, too, that written evidence of pagan practices continuing past the Conversion do exist and it is possible that these practices, including foundation sacrifice, were later absorbed into folklore and folk practice, their pre-Christian origins muddled and likely distorted.⁵⁹ These comparisons between the folkloric Church Grim and Óðinn are, of course, speculative, extending across a large passage of time in which other influences and traditions may have intermingled. However, the value of such analogies is arguably the emphasis they place on the malleability of Woden/Óðinn within

⁵³ Thorpe, *Northern Mythology*, 102.

⁵⁴ Henderson, *Folk-lore*, 274; in Maximino Guiérrez Barco, “The Boar in *Beowulf* and *Elene*: A Germanic Symbol of Protection,” *SELIM* 9 (1999): 166–169, Barco notes the specifically boar (rather than sow) symbolism in connection to the deities Freyr and Freyja, as well as Woden. Additionally, in Kathryn Starkey, “Imagining an Early Odin: Gold Bracelets as Visual Evidence?” *Scandinavian Studies* 71, no. 4 (1999): 381, Starkey comments that “a boar [...] plays a role at Odin’s hall, Valhalla,” however, “it cannot be assumed that Odin was associated with boars as early as the fifth or sixth century.”

⁵⁵ W. Fergusson Irvine and N. F. McMillan, “A Foundation Sacrifice at Birkenhead Priory,” *Antiquity* 43, no. 169 (1969): 56–57.

⁵⁶ Fergusson Irvine and McMillan, “A Foundation Sacrifice,” 57.

⁵⁷ Fergusson Irvine and McMillan, “A Foundation Sacrifice,” 57.

⁵⁸ See Michaela Helmbrecht, “Figures with Horned Headgear: A Case Study of Context Analysis and Social Significance of Pictures in Vendel and Viking Age Scandinavia,” *Lund Archaeological Review* 13–14 (2007–2008): 31–54; Neil Price and Paul Mortimer, “An Eye for Odin? Divine Role-Playing in the Age of Sutton Hoo,” *European Journal of Archaeology* 17, no. 3 (2014): 524–25.

⁵⁹ See Nicholas J. Higham, “From Tribal Chieftains to Christian Kings,” in *The Anglo-Saxon World*, ed. Nicholas J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015): 161–62.

cultural consciousness — as an ancestor, a guardian, and/or a devil — a trait that his continuing survival was strongly dependent on. Indeed, Westwood and Simpson have observed that whilst Grim may have been used in England as a nickname for Woden, “in the Middle Ages [it] was another name for the Devil.”⁶⁰

The use of Grim as a by-name for the Devil is perhaps reflected in the Church Grim, since the “the Devil as a Black Dog” is well-known in English folklore. But also “in all Scandinavian countries,” notes Theo Brown.⁶¹ This association is of interest, especially when we consider the devilish aspect of Óðinn, as depicted in the Old Icelandic sagas of the thirteenth century. As Annette Lassen observes when looking at the inclusion of the pre-Christian gods in the Old Icelandic *Íslendingasögur*, the treatment of Freyr and Þórr differs substantially from that of Óðinn, who appears less frequently. Unlike Óðinn, Lassen notes, Freyr and Þórr “did not take up the role as the devil in disguise in Old Norse literature.”⁶² Furthermore, in *The Separate Saga of St Olaf*, Óðinn visits the king in disguise, yet when St Óláfr comes to understand who he is facing he calls him “hinn illi Óðinn” (‘the evil Óðinn’).⁶³ This view of Óðinn as a devilish spirit, associated with disguise, can also be found in *fornaldarsögur*, *Hrólfs saga kraka* and the manuscripts of *Orvar-Odds saga*. In the latter, Óðinn appears as the peasant Hrani, who tests Hrólfr’s men, advises him on how to win a forthcoming battle, and offers him a gift of weaponry, which Hrólfr mistakenly refuses, not knowing who Hrani truly is.⁶⁴ Hrólfr eventually dies in battle, and his men come to suspect that Óðinn had a hand in their enemy’s success. Furthermore, Hrólfr, who is a noble heathen, considers Óðinn an “jllur andi” (‘evil spirit’), a denouncement that evokes Óðinn’s depiction in the sagas of the missionary kings, such as the one mentioned above.⁶⁵ Óðinn as the Devil in disguise also appears in *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*. Initially, Óðinn impresses King Óláfr Tryggvason, his host, with his knowledge of countries and past kings, which results in Óláfr attempting to forgo sleep that night, until persuaded otherwise by his bishop. In the morning, when the search for his wise, one-eyed

⁶⁰ Westwood and Simpson, *The Lore of the Land*, 43.

⁶¹ Brown, “The Black Dog,” 186–88.

⁶² Annette Lassen, “Óðinn in Old Norse Texts other than *The Elder Edda*, *Snorra Edda*, and *Ynglinga saga*,” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (2005): 94.

⁶³ Lassen, “Old Norse Texts,” 96; *Flateyjarbók: En samling af norske konge-sagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder I og udenfor Norge samt annaler*, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C. R. Unger, II (Oslo: Mallings, 1860–68): 134.

⁶⁴ Lassen, “Old Norse Texts,” 99. In her footnotes, Lassen comments that “in the interpolation in manuscripts A, B, and E of *Orvar-Odds saga* (*Orvar-Odds saga*, ed. R. C. Boer (Leiden: Brill, 1888): 125–37) a Rauðgrani (that is, Óðinn) appears and has negative characteristics. He is, however, not identified with an evil spirit as is in fact in *Hrólfs saga kraka*, but Rauðgrani is, to some extent, ridiculed.” See also Annette Lassen, “Gud eller djævel? Kristningen af Odin,” in *Scandinavia and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages: Papers of the 12th International Saga Conference Bonn/Germany, 28th July – 2nd August 2003*, ed. Rudolf Simek and Judith Meurer (Bonn: Hausdruckerei der Universität Bonn, 2003): 210–11.

⁶⁵ Lassen, “Old Norse Texts,” 99.

guest proves fruitless, Óláfr realises he was the Devil, in the disguise of Óðinn, and that Óðinn tried to prevent him sleeping so that he would neglect the service of God the next day.⁶⁶ Lassen notes that in the *fornaldarsögu* Óðinn is presented as “the lord of the underworld” in *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, suggesting that this is “probably inspired by the traditional Christian identification of Óðinn with the devil.”⁶⁷ However, this can also be seen to relate back to the chthonic aspect of the Black Dog and Church Grim discussed earlier.

These more malevolent, or at the very least ominous, depictions of Óðinn arguably highlight his multifaceted nature within our cultural consciousness. This is best exemplified in England by Woden’s ability to shift guises, moving from ancestor to devil when needed, straddling the line of something to be integrated versus something resistantly Other. Indeed, Gunnell says of Óðinn that he was “essentially a moving god, who had closer connections to trade, war, death, mystic knowledge and the wild side in general.”⁶⁸ If the same can be said of Woden, the irony is that his very rootlessness is what makes him such an adaptable and resilient figure, ultimately leading to his survival within our recorded culture thanks to his promotion by elite circles, but also through folkloric oral traditions. Woden undoubtedly stands well apart in England’s cultural memory, irrespective of contemporary religious beliefs and practices, and from all other Early English deities. It is why he, and Óðinn, continue to fascinate.

⁶⁶ Lassen, “Old Norse Texts,” 96–97; *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, ed. Ólafur Halldórsson, II, Editiones Arnmagnæanæ A 1–3 (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1958–2000): 86–90.

⁶⁷ Lassen, “Old Norse Texts,” 99; “Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana,” in *Drei lygisögur: Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar bersekjabana, Ála Flekks saga, Flóres saga konungs ok sona hans*, ed. Åke Lagerholm, Althordische Saga-Bibliothek 17 (Halle: Niemeyer, 1927): 63 & 63 nn. 3, 4.

⁶⁸ Gunnell, “One High-One to Another,” 162–63.

II. Grim Places and Wodenic Earthworks

Sites of ancient remains, comments Sarah Semple, can be viewed as “potent symbols of real, mythic, and imagined pasts [...] charged with meaning.”¹ Similarly, the names they bear can be equally charged, especially those which reference England’s connection with the pagan god Woden, a relationship that cannot be solely confined to a pre-Christian past, but extends well beyond it. Theophoric placenames of this kind may well “signal the emerging ambiguity of these important but heathen ancestral characters in the late Anglo-Saxon Christian mentality,” Semple observes.² Moreover, what is particularly striking about Woden’s link to mythmaking in the English landscape is his survival not only in places derived from his primary name, but also the places connected with his other, more shadowy moniker: Grim. Woden, unlike any other heathen deity present in English toponyms, possesses a malleability of use and function that sets him apart. It is this distinctness that enables his persistent association with these places, as well as his continued presence in England’s cultural memory.

Although rare, some monuments, “and sometimes identifiably prehistoric monuments,” bear theophoric placenames, though the accurate identification of these sites depends on whether they can be dated to an era prior to the conversion to Christianity.³ It is possible, Semple notes, in accordance with John Hines, that some such names date from “later literate and Christian traditions.”⁴ This is in itself noteworthy, however, as it suggests that the cultural capital of such gods, and their names, still held significant weight, even post-Conversion, despite genuine belief having been supplanted. Moreover, just as the Old English genealogies, as referenced in chapter one, highlight the ways in which royal dynasties established an often Woden-sprung lineage to enhance their legitimacy to rule, so might this later naming tradition have taken place for much the same reason. Put simply, whether identifiable to the prehistoric period, or the later Christianised era, the survival of Wodenic placenames underlines Woden’s association with the politics of power, as well as his longevity and persistence within England’s cultural memory. “Nobody in tenth-century England believed in Þunor or Woden,” asserts Harte, who also notes that “they were all too well aware that these two gods or fictions or demons were to be found, under slightly different names, in the pantheon of their enemies, the heathen host from

¹ Sarah Semple, “Sacred Spaces and Places in Pre-Christian and Conversion Period Anglo-Saxon England,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. David A. Hinton, Sally Crawford, and Helena Hamerow, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 750.

² Sarah Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 75.

³ Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, 75.

⁴ Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, 75; John Hines, “Religion: The Limits of Knowledge,” in *The Anglo-Saxons from the Migration Period to the Eighth Century*, ed. John Hines (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1997): 375–401.

Scandinavia.”⁵ Nevertheless, this awareness of pre-Christian belief remained embedded within cultural memory, as indicated by the possible practice of foundation sacrifice and the prevalence of the ‘Church Grim,’ as discussed in chapter one. The creation of new monuments, and the continued use of old ones, can be conceived as “an active process of physical myth-making,” states Semple, “with the landscape both adopted and used afresh to add emphasis to the legends and beliefs of communities.”⁶

Margaret Gelling has noted a persistent association with Woden in placenames linked with prehistoric ditches, “implied by the widespread Grimsditch, Grim’s Dyke names.”⁷ The only explicit reference to a ditch using the god’s primary name is Wansdyke, but, as Gelling notes, this is not a prehistoric earthwork.⁸ Instead, it seems likely that Wansdyke is an example of the later naming tradition detailed by Semple. Excavations have shown it to be post-Roman, thus making its name “very difficult to explain,” admits Gelling, although one theory she suggests is that “the earthwork was made by pagan West Saxons and dedicated to Woden as the protector of the builders.”⁹ The problem with this explanation is that the northern frontier of the West Saxons’ territory probably never reached Wansdyke.¹⁰ Interestingly, under his nickname Grim, there seems to be more evidence for a connection between Woden and linear earthworks of prehistoric origin.¹¹ Wodonic placenames in England are not restricted to just earthworks, however. The Domesday half-hundred of *Weneslai*, in Biggleswade, Bedfordshire is the “the *hlāw* or barrow of Woden.”¹² Likewise, Woodnesborough in Kent, and *Wodnesbeorh*, “the old name for Adam’s Grave” in Wiltshire, according to A. L. Meaney, refer to barrows, or hills, in connection with Woden.¹³ Then there are “the lost Essex names” *Wedynsfeld* and *Wodnesfeld*, the Staffordshire Wednesfield, and the Derbyshire Wensley, which include the elements *feld* and *leah*, denoting forest or woodland areas, such as groves.¹⁴

Nonetheless, although seemingly one of the most frequently mentioned pagan deities, most references to Woden in England are to the same large linear earthwork: West Wansdyke in

⁵ Jeremy Harte, “Language, Law, and Landscape in the Anglo-Saxon World,” *Time and Mind* 8, no. 1 (2015): 65.

⁶ Semple, “Sacred Spaces,” 743; with reference to Howard Williams, *Death and Burial in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006): 145–78.

⁷ Margaret Gelling, *Signposts to the Past: Place-names and the History of England*, 3rd edition (Chichester: Phillimore & Co, 2010): 150.

⁸ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 150.

⁹ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 150–51.

¹⁰ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 151; Semple, “Perceptions of the Prehistoric,” 172.

¹¹ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 151.

¹² Harte, “Language, Law, and Landscape,” 64–65.

¹³ A. L. Meaney, “Woden in England: A Reconsideration of the Evidence,” *Folklore* 77, no. 2 (1966): 105–6.

¹⁴ Meaney, “Woden in England,” 106.

Somerset, and East Wansdyke in North Wiltshire.¹⁵ Semple observes that “no further examples of *wodnesdic* were found in the place-name corpus, suggesting that this association of Woden with a great linear earthwork may be unique.”¹⁶ Jennifer Westwood has suggested that which earthworks are ascribed to the god, and which are ascribed to the more devilish Grim “is a question of scale.”¹⁷ More impressive earthworks are logically connected to Woden, whereas smaller earthworks are associated with Grim. However, “it is not quite certain that the name ‘Woden’s ditch’ was given to the earthwork in early times,” notes Meaney.¹⁸ Yet, as mentioned previously, this may just be evidence of a later naming tradition dating from the post-Conversion era. Semple acknowledges that “it is tempting to accept the long-term importance of the barrow and its association with Woden as the reason why the long ditch and surrounding landscape acquired further associations with the pagan god.”¹⁹

When compared with Odinic placenames in Scandinavia, the treatment of Woden in England and his apparent long-term significance within cultural memory is striking. As suggested in chapter one, Óðinn was a god more typically associated with the ruling elite than with common people and this is reflected in his scarcer appearance in Scandinavian placenames, when compared to Þórr, for example. Moreover, as Jens Peter Schjødt has observed “the nearly complete absence of the god’s name from personal names,” which he acknowledges as surprising “could perhaps be explained by the fact that the demonic character of Óðinn made a kind of ‘taboo’ in relation to personal names.”²⁰ Óðinn, and by extension, Woden’s connection to the Devil was explored in chapter one in relation to the folklore legends of the ‘Church Grim,’ however it is intriguing to consider how this association may have also impacted placenames. If the Wansdyke was named in reference to the ancestor aspect of Woden, it stands to reason that the multiple Grim’s Ditches and Dykes may have evoked his more devilish aspect. With regards to Óðinn, placenames do exist bearing his name, but they are “not as frequent as the names of some of the other gods,” admits Schjødt.²¹ That being said, Odinic toponyms “are widespread across most of Scandinavia, except for western Norway,” an observation that Schjødt highlights as interesting “not least because most of the immigrants who went out to Iceland came from this region.”²² It’s possible Óðinn’s association with kingship and ruling elites rendered him less

¹⁵ Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, 172.

¹⁶ Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, 172.

¹⁷ Jennifer Westwood, *Albion: Guide to Legendary Britain* (London: Grenada Press, 1985): 69–72.

¹⁸ Meaney, “Woden in England,” 107.

¹⁹ Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, 173.

²⁰ Jens Peter Schjødt, “Óðinn,” in *The Pre-Christian Religious North: History and Structures, Volume III*, ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andrén, PCRN-HS 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020): 1133.

²¹ Schjødt, “Óðinn,” 1133.

²² Schjødt, “Óðinn,” 1133; with reference to Stefan Brink, “How Uniform Was the Old Norse Religion?” in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World: Essays in Honour of Margaret Clunies Ross*, ed. Judy Quinn, Kate Heslop, and Tarrin Wills (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007): 112.

useful to the republic-founding Icelanders. Significantly, Óðinn placenames occur most frequently in the southern part of Scandinavia, which contained more areas of centralised power. This “accords well with the specific connection between Óðinn and war-band leaders” comments Schjødt, as this association with Óðinn “was probably also stronger in these areas.”²³

The naming of the Wansdyke, however, whether pre- or post-Conversion, may have been a means of establishing a place of centralised power. Julie Wileman has suggested that the construction of Wansdyke may have performed “a political function in the same way that the Great Wall declared the puissance and extent of the Han and later dynasties.”²⁴ Tim Malim has considered Andrew Reynold’s suggestion that “both parts of the Wansdyke were a product of a short-lived political boundary agreement between Wessex and Mercia in the eighth or early ninth centuries,” however, he also notes that Reynolds dismissed this theory “on the grounds of [Wandyke’s] pagan name.”²⁵ Yet the naming of Wansdyke, and its resulting connection to Woden, may, as previously mentioned, reflect his use in the Old English genealogies, which “reveal exactly the kinds of process whereby kings established a lineage that enhanced their authenticity by the incorporation of mythical ancestors, including pagan gods.”²⁶ Crucially, sections of the Wansdyke run along the northern borders of Wessex, a kingdom whose lineage was Woden-sprung.²⁷ It is not inconceivable therefore, regardless of when it was named, that the retention of the name was political. The name Wansdyke (‘Woden’s Dyke’) conveys ownership and that ownership, through the lineage denoted in their royal genealogies, arguably would have extended to the kings of Wessex. In this way, the naming of Wansdyke, and Woden’s survival through its name, is just as politically charged as his inclusion in royal genealogies, a phenomenon that, as noted in chapter one, continued until the twelfth century.

Woden arguably serves more than just this ancestral function in the English landscape. The numerous earthworks and ditches in England named Grim’s Ditch and Grim’s Dyke are thought to reference his alternate name, “either because they were believed to be the work of the god,” comments Gelling, “or as a vague expression of superstitious awe concerning their origin.”²⁸ As

²³ Schjødt, “Óðinn,” 1133.

²⁴ Julie Wileman, “The Purpose of the Dykes: Understanding the Linear Earthworks of Early Medieval Britain,” *Landscapes* 4, no. 2 (2003): 64.

²⁵ Tim Malim, “Grim’s Ditch, Wansdyke, and the Ancient Highways of England: Linear Monuments and Political Control,” *Offa’s Dyke Journal* 2 (2020): 187; A. Reynolds and A. Langlands, “Social identities on the macro scale: a maximum view of Wansdyke,” in *People and Space in the Middle Ages, 300–1300*, ed. W. Davies, G. Halsall, and A. Reynolds (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006): 37.

²⁶ Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric*, 75.

²⁷ Wileman, “Purpose of the Dykes,” 62; see also William Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970): 29–31.

²⁸ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 151.

Gelling does not mention the possible origin of the name's meaning or its association with Woden, it's worth noting that it also features in the Old Norse-Icelandic Eddic poem *Grímnismál*, whose primary and titular character is a disguised Óðinn. As mentioned in chapter one, it is difficult to know to what extent Woden and Óðinn shared similar or identical characteristics, as there are no Old English equivalents to Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* or to the Eddic poetry. Furthermore, these sources, in particular Snorri's *Prose Edda*, are not perfect preservers of pagan belief, having been recorded or compiled centuries after Iceland's conversion to Christianity. Nevertheless, the occurrence of Grim in English placenames that bear some link to Woden does suggest that this alternative name was known to the pagan Early English, if not later Christians as well. What is intriguing, however, is that if both Óðinn and Woden went by Grim, or some close variant of it, did the latter also bear other names, as *Grímnismál* establishes for Óðinn? If so, why has the name Grim lasted in England's landscape, and therefore its cultural memory, whereas variants have left seemingly no trace? A conclusive answer to these questions unfortunately remains out of reach.

Returning to the Norse sources, Óðinn is notable for his many instances of disguise, and the name Grímr ('Masked' or 'Mask') and Grímnir ('Masked One') appear to attest to this trait. Other names for Óðinn suggestive of disguise, especially when travelling, include: Svipall 'Changeable,' Fjolnir 'Concealer,' Siðhǫttr 'Long-Hood,' all of which are also featured in *Grímnismál*.²⁹ Ironically, in *Hárbarðsljóð*, another Eddic poem, a disguised Óðinn says to Þórr: "Hárbarðr ec heiti, hylc um nafn sialdan," [Hárbarðr (Grey-Beard) I am called, seldom do I hide my name].³⁰ The prevalence of Grim in English placenames, specifically associated with earthworks, suggests to Gelling that "a major characteristic like this one seems likely to belong to both traditions."³¹ Moreover, the fact that we can see other potential correspondences between Woden and Óðinn in the Old English *Nine Herbs Charm* may indicate that Woden shared several characteristics with his Scandinavian counterpart.³² This cannot be definitively proven, but it is nevertheless noteworthy that the *Nine Herbs Charm*, whose recording dates from ninth to early tenth century,

²⁹ "Grímnismól" in *De Gamle Eddadigte*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1932): verses 46–48, <https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Gr%C3%ADmnism%C7%AB%CC%81>; "Grímnismál" in *The Elder Edda*, trans. Andy Orchard (London: Penguin, 2011): 57–58.

³⁰ "Hárbarðsljóð" in *De Gamle Eddadigte*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1932): verse 10, [https://heimskringla.no/wiki/H%C3%A1rbar%C3%B0slj%C3%B3%C3%B0_\(FJ\)](https://heimskringla.no/wiki/H%C3%A1rbar%C3%B0slj%C3%B3%C3%B0_(FJ)); "Hárbarðsljóð" in *The Elder Edda*, trans. Andy Orchard (London: Penguin, 2011):68; Kevin J. Wanner, "God on the Margins: Dislocation and Transience in the Myths of Óðinn," *History of Religion* 46, no. 4 (2007): 329.

³¹ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 151.

³² See Joseph S. Hopkins, "Nigon Wyrta Galdor, Popularly Known as the *Nine Herbs Charm*: A New Annotated and Illustrated Translation," *Mimisbrunnr.info*, 2020, <https://www.mimisbrunnr.info/nigon-wyrta-galdor#normalized-and-direct-translations>.

seems to allude to information also present in the Eddic poem *Hávamál*, such as the significance of the number nine, and the god's connection to magic, specifically runes (the glory-twigs):³³

Þyrm com snican, toslat he nan.
ða genam Þoden VIII þuldortanas,
sløh ða þa næddran þæt heo on VIII tofleah.

[A *wyrm* came slithering, and yet he killed no one,
for wise Woden took nine glory-twigs
and smote the serpent,
who flew into nine parts.]³⁴

There is also some mention of a Lord's hanging, as discussed in chapter one, which evokes a similar description found in the Eddic poem *Hávamál*:

Nine Herbs Charm

þa þyrte gesceop þitig drihten,
halig on heofonum, þa he hongode;

[The wise lord shaped these plants,
while he, holy, hung in the heavens]³⁵

Hávamál

Vęitk at ek hekk
vindgameiði á
nætr allar níu,
geiri undaðr

[I know that I hung on that windy tree,
spear-wounded, nine full nights]³⁶

Kathleen Herbert observes that “by mentally adding ‘on the cross’ after *he hongonde*, a discreet pretence could be made that this was an act of special creation by Christ at the Crucifixion.”³⁷ However, as Herbert goes on to note, “everyone who knew the Gospels would be aware that this was not so,” and it becomes evident that the gifts of chervil and fennel, like the gifts of the runes in *Hávamál*, were seen as “coming from Woden’s passion, not Christ’s.”³⁸ Yet, as mentioned in chapter one, these correspondences should not, as Richard North comments, be interpreted as a declaration that “the hanging Lord of *The Nine Herbs Charm* was understood to be Woden rather

³³ See Arkadiusz Sołtysiak, “The Number Nine in the Tradition of the Norsemen,” in *Między drzewem życia a drzewem poznania: Księga ku czci profesora Andrzeja Wiercińskiego*, ed. Mariusz Szczęsny Ziółkowski and Arkadiusz Sołtysiak (Warsaw: Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2003): 231–42, esp. 234–36.

³⁴ Hopkins, “*Nigon Wyrta Galdor*,” Mimisbrunnr.info.

³⁵ Hopkins, “*Nigon Wyrta Galdor*,” Mimisbrunnr.info.

³⁶ “*Hávamól*” in *De Gamle Eddadigte*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1932): verse 137; “*Hávamál*” in *The Elder Edda*, trans. Andy Orchard (London: Penguin, 2011): 35.

³⁷ Kathleen Herbert, *Looking for the Lost Gods of England*, (Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2010): 38.

³⁸ Herbert, *Lost Gods*, 38.

than Christ – far from it.”³⁹ Nevertheless, it would not be unreasonable to suggest that an awareness of Woden’s propensity for disguise, which parallels this same trait in Óðinn, is most obviously represented in the many Grimsditches and Grim’s Dykes found in England. At the very least, the parallels between the depictions of Woden and Óðinn in the *Nine Herbs Charm* serve to strengthen the idea that the Early English may have also been aware of other shared characteristics, namely his use of disguise.

The Old English meaning of *grīma* was examined in the previous chapter, so let us turn instead to its use in Old Norse. Interestingly, *grīma* can mean “a kind of covering for the face or head,” such as a “mask or cowl.”⁴⁰ This corresponds well with Óðinn’s guises as Grímr (‘Mask’ or ‘Masked’) and Grímnir (‘Masked One’), as well as his propensity for wearing a hooded cloak, or drooping hat. Additionally, Geir T. Zoëga lists *grīma* as also meaning “armour covering a horse’s head and breast,” the “beak (on a ship)” and a poetic term for “night.”⁴¹ In chapter seven of *Ynglinga saga*, Óðinn’s relationship with hidden things, including burial mounds, is also made evident:

Óðinn vissi um alt jarðfé, hvar fólgit var, ok hann kunni þau ljóð, er upp laukst fyrir honum jörðin, ok björg ok steinar, ok haugarnir, ok batt hann með orðum einum þá er fyrir bjoggu, ok gékk inn ok tók þar slíkt er hann vildi.

[Óthin knew about all hidden treasures, and he knew such magic spells as would open for him the earth and mountains and rocks and burial mounds; and with mere words he bound those who dwelled in them, and went in and took what he wanted.]⁴²

According to Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson, legends that account for England’s earthworks and their connection to Grim are rare, excepting a Grim’s Ditch situated in Hertfordshire.⁴³ This ditch “is said to be the handiwork of the magician Sir Guy de Gravade of Tring Station,” which Westwood and Simpson link to Rev. W. J. Burgess’s explanation, given in 1854, that “the aid of a magician or wizard was necessary for the digging of so deep, so long a trench, for Grima is the Saxon for magician [...] and with this clue, we may fairly interpret Grimsdyke as the Ditch of the Wizard.”⁴⁴ This folkloric account is unlikely to be reliable, yet it is

³⁹ Richard North, *Heathen Gods in Old English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 87.

⁴⁰ Geir T. Zoëga, *A Concise Dictionary of Old Icelandic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016): 173.

⁴¹ Zoëga, *Dictionary of Old Icelandic*, 173.

⁴² “Ynglinga saga” in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, ed. N. Linder and H. A. Haggson (Uppsala: W. Schultz, 1869–1872): ch. 7, https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Ynglinga_saga; Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla*, trans. Lee M. Hollander (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995): 11.

⁴³ Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson, *The Lore of the Land: A Guide to England’s Legends, from Spring-Heeled Jack to the Witches of Warboys* (London: Penguin Books, 2006): 43.

⁴⁴ Rev. W. J. Burgess, “Antiquities of the Chiltern Hills,” *Records of Buckinghamshire* 1, no. 1 (1854): 25.

interesting to consider how the origins of this dyke could perhaps be traced back to a god in possession of the supernatural ability to open up the earth.

However, as Gelling notes, “not all English place-names in Grims- are of this [supernatural] origin,” as *Grímr* was also a common Old Norse personal name.⁴⁵ We can see evidence of *Grímr* being used as a Norse personal name in such fourteenth century sagas as *Helga þáttur Þórissonar* and *Gríms saga loðinkinna*. “Norse personal names became popular all over England in the eleventh century,” according to Julian D. Richards, who gives examples from the Domesday Book, yet concedes that this “might be inconclusive: Norse personal names may have worked their way into the fashionable stock of personal names by the time they were recorded.”⁴⁶ Nevertheless, Gelling also notes that, with Grimsby, Grimsthorpe and Grimscoth in particular, we can make a connection to the personal name *Grímr* quite confidently, as these areas “are of no special archaeological significance.”⁴⁷ However, this is perhaps too dismissive. Although Gelling quite rightly says that not all Grims- placenames can be linked to Woden, Grimsby, long thought simply to refer to ‘Grim’s Farmstead,’ is arguably worthy of reconsideration.

Accurate archaeological examination of Grimsby has been thwarted by the land levelling that occurred during the early twentieth century. Several sizable hills, visible from its periphery, were flattened, making it unknowable whether these natural landscape features were artificially modified.⁴⁸ Although now no longer in existence, Cun Hu and Toot Hill, both located in Little Coates, an area of west Grimsby, are known to have been topped by tumulus containing burials.⁴⁹ Both Toot Hill and Cun Hu are visible on a map (fig. 1) by W. Smith, published in 1825 as the frontispiece to George Oliver’s *Monumental*



Fig 3: Frontispiece to George Oliver’s *The Monumental Antiquities of Great Grimsby*, 1825

⁴⁵ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 151.

⁴⁶ Julian D. Richards, “Anglo-Scandinavian Identity,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. David A. Hinton, Sally Crawford, and Helena Hamerow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011): 49.

⁴⁷ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 151.

⁴⁸ Richard Coates, *Grimsby and Cleethorpes Place-Names* (Nottingham: The English Place-Name Society, 2020): 2.

⁴⁹ Coates, *Grimsby and Cleethorpes*, 2.

Antiquities, which highlights their size, with Toot Hill being the larger of the two.⁵⁰ Toot Hill, or Toothill as it was sometimes recorded, was described in 1903 as being “a huge mound with an irregular ground plan [...] an elliptical contour [and] composed chiefly of sand and sandy clays.”⁵¹ The levelling of the hill for sand in 1904 resulted in the discovery of a complete human jaw bone and urn, which suggest a burial involving cremation, as urns alongside cremated remains were also excavated in 1935 in connection to Beacon Hill, in nearby Cleethorpes.⁵² Given that the name Grim is mentioned in several toponyms connected with mounds, as well as holes, mines or pits, and most notably ancient earthwork enclosures, Grimsby’s lost hills may well have a bearing on the meaning behind its name.⁵³

Had the land not been levelled, suggests Richard Coates, “archaeologists might have viewed Grimsby as being in the same league as Avebury in Wiltshire.”⁵⁴ Cun Hu, although “recorded only late,” according to Coates, “may represent a much reduced Old Scandinavian form consisting of *konungr* ‘king’ + *haugr* ‘mound.’”⁵⁵ This, combined with the likely evidence of a burial having occurred, cannot be regarded as inconsequential. Furthermore, the sacral significance of these hills cannot be dismissed, as “hilltops are widely accepted as an indisputable aspect of pre-Christian sacred topography,” notes Semple.⁵⁶ As Per Vikstrand has noted “narratives connecting the god Odin with hills,” exist all over the Germanic area, for example *Odens kulle* (‘the hill of Óðinn’) in Västergötland, Sweden, *Woensberg* in Noord-Holland, the Netherlands and *Wotansbergs*, now *Bad Godesberg*, outside Bonn in German’s Rhine valley.⁵⁷ What is more, as stated by P. J. Wise, we cannot discount the possibility that there may have been “other Bronze Age burial mounds in the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area.”⁵⁸ However, such comparison must remain speculative, and it is important to remember that not all mounds are suggestive of burials, as they can serve other purposes or be purely natural. Nevertheless, Grimsby’s hills, some of which showed evidence of modifications to include burials, call into question the previous assumptions made about the placename Grimsby. It is entirely possible,

⁵⁰ George Oliver, *The Monumental Antiquities of Great Grimsby: an essay towards ascertaining its origin and ancient population*, (Hull: 1825) http://access.bl.uk/item/viewer/ark:/81055/vdc_000000059082.

⁵¹ W. Johnson, *Byways in British Archaeology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912): 72.

⁵² P. J. Wise, “The archaeology of the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area”, in *Humber Perspectives: A Region Through the Ages*, ed. S. Ellis and D. R. Crowther, (Hull: Hull University Press, 1990): 215.

⁵³ Sarah Semple, *Perceptions of the Prehistoric in Anglo-Saxon England: Religion, Ritual, and Rulership in the Landscape* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013): 175.

⁵⁴ Coates, *Grimsby and Cleethorpes Place-Names*, 2; see also Mark Gillings, Joshua Pollard and Kristian Strutt, “The Origins of Avebury,” *Antiquity* 93, no. 368 (2019): 359-77.

⁵⁵ Coates, *Grimsby and Cleethorpes*, 47. See also Barrie Cox, “Yarlboroughs in Lindsey,” *Journal of the English Place-Name Society* 28 (1995–96), 50–60.

⁵⁶ Semple, “Sacred Spaces,” 745.

⁵⁷ Per Vikstrand, “Place Names and Viking Age Religion,” *Names and Their Environment. Proceedings of the 25th International Congress of Onomastic Sciences, Glasgow 2* (2014): 181.

⁵⁸ Wise, *The archaeology of the Grimsby-Cleethorpes area*, 215.

as Gelling argues, that Grimsby's naming origins were not particularly Odinic in nature, but this does not detract from its potential to also bear Odinic associations.

In addition to his connection with mounds, and as mentioned in chapter one, the name Grim (as a byname for Woden) is a supernatural figure especially associated with linear earthworks of prehistoric origin.⁵⁹ It is striking then, that Grimsby's almost absolute connection to the personal name Grímr can be further complicated by evidence of a once substantial Iron Age earthwork in Grimsby, at Weelsby Avenue. Excavations begun by John Sills in 1976 and continued by Gavin Kingsley have revealed that there were two phases of settlement at this site. It was first established during the first century BCE, with the second phase seeing the re-cutting of an enclosure ditch to form a major earthwork.⁶⁰ Furthermore, it has been suggested that Grimsby may have later developed a significant trading settlement at Weelsby Avenue, as evidenced by the discovery of Gualish and southern British coin types, akin to those seen at Sleaford, a mint and major settlement site.⁶¹ Grimsby was therefore by no means an inconsequential site, devoid of archaeological interest, as posited by Gelling, nor was it 'virgin land' prior to Danish settlement during the ninth century CE. Considering this evidence, a reference to Woden cannot be entirely ruled out, if the basis of Gelling's argument remains that an absence of archaeological interest is what is needed to prove that a Grims- placename is predominantly connected to a personal name, rather than a theophoric one.

In conclusion, placenames associated with Woden, whether they be Wansdyke, or the many Grim's Dykes and Ditches, suggest that an awareness of pre-Christian beliefs remained, embedded in the names we use to add meaning to the English landscape. Certainly, in the case of Grims- placenames connected with earthworks, the repeated use of this name seems suggestive of a recurring and potent figure, which arguably calls into question other instances of its use, such as Grimsby. This awareness does not equate to continued worship, yet it is indicative of continued cultural significance. Moreover, landscape features, such as Wansdyke, carry the imprint of power, but also the remembrance of a figure intimately connected with the Early English's sense of identity, legitimacy, and place. Where Woden stands apart from the likes of Tiw or Þunor, however, is in his more marked ability to move between distinct associations: prestigious and ancestral, but also supernatural and malevolent. The placenames connected with him, along with their survival, signal Woden's ambiguity within the post-

⁵⁹ Gelling, *Signposts to the Past*, 151.

⁶⁰ Wise, *The archaeology of Grimsby-Cleethorpes area*, 216–217; John Sills and Gavin Kingsley, "An Iron Age Bronze Foundry at Weelsby Avenue, Grimsby," *Lincolnshire History and Archaeology* 25 (1990): 49–50.

⁶¹ Wise, *The archaeology of Grimsby-Cleethorpes area*, 218.

Conversion English mentality, and it is this ambiguity, this malleability, which arguably enabled his continued occupation within England's cultural memory.

III. Godhood, Kingship, and Grim in *Havelok the Dane*

An unusually pro-Danish narrative compared to other contemporaneous depictions, the Middle English romance *Havelok the Dane* occurs in the last section of the Bodleian Library's MS Laud Misc. 108, preceding another well-documented romance, *King Horn*.¹ Classified as a romance, and considered part of the 'Matter of England,' *Havelok* has perplexed chroniclers of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries as to its historical basis.² Set predominantly in Lincolnshire and shedding an idealised light on an Early English past, *Havelok's* treatment of place sets it apart from earlier Old French and Anglo-Norman iterations of the same tale. However, it is not only its episodes in Grimsby (a placename discussed in chapter two) and Lincoln that make it worthy of attention. In 1966, Edmund Reiss argued that Grim, a humble fisherman, almost assassin, and foster-father of Havelok, might be related to the Norse god Óðinn, "the god who, in disguise" as an unassuming cotter, "fosters a youth" who later becomes a king in the Eddic poem *Grímnismál*.³ In this chapter, I will expand upon the parallels observed by Reiss and examine how Óðinn and the English Woden's associations with kingship and authority, as explored in chapter one, add another layer of kingly legitimacy to the *Havelok*-tale. Alongside his presence in royal genealogies, placenames, and folklore also, the connection to Grim adds credence to the argument that Woden, intermingled with his Norse counterpart, continued to prove culturally significant and uniquely adaptable.

The Middle English version of the *Havelok*-tale is, as Eleanor Parker confirms, "the most extended of all versions of the legend."⁴ It tells the story of the "entwined fates" of Havelok, son to the king of Denmark, and Goldeborw, daughter to the king of England.⁵ Their parallel paths begin early in the poem, while they are still children, with the dual deaths of their kingly fathers, Athelwold and Birkabeyn. As heirs to the thrones of England and Denmark, Havelok and Goldeborw are left to the care of regents, however both guardians prove to be false, mistreating

¹ For a thorough breakdown of the romance's provenance and noteworthiness, see in full G. V. Smithers, "Introduction", *Havelok*, ed. by G. V. Smithers, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987): xi–xciii.

² In 1310, Rauf de Boun incorporated a synopsis of the *Havelok*-legend into his Anglo-Norman *Le Petit Bruit*, written for the Earl of Lincoln, in which he referred to the tale as "l'estoire de Grimesby" (Rauf de Boun, *Le Petit Bruit*, ed. Diana B. Tyson (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1987): 15, l. 13). Similarly, c. 1338, Robert Mannyng, writing in south Lincolnshire, attempted to incorporate the legend into his *Chronicle*, yet encountered difficulties concerning the narrative's veracity, as no previous authorities could verify historical accuracy: "noīþer Gildas, no Bede, no Henry of Huntinton, no William of Malmesbiri, ne Pers od Bridlynton writes not in þer bokes of no Kyng Athelwold, ne Goldeburgh, his douhtere, ne Haulok not of told," (Robert Mannyng, *Robert Mannyng of Brunne: The Chronicle*, vol. II, ed. Idelle Sullens (New York: Binghamton University, 1996): 499–500, ll. 520–24).

³ Edmund Reiss, "Havelok the Dane and Norse Mythology", *Modern Language Quarterly* 27, no. 2(1966): 117.

⁴ Eleanor Parker, *Dragon Lords: The History and Legends of Viking England* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2018): 159.

⁵ Parker, *Dragon Lords*, 159.

the children and usurping their kingdoms. Deprived of her royal status by the treacherous Godrich, Goldeborw is imprisoned at Dover Castle. Across the North Sea in Denmark, Havelok's sisters are murdered by Godard, who then orders the fisherman Grim to drown Havelok in the sea. Grim, however, recognises Havelok as the rightful heir and spares his life, taking him instead to the safety of England. Havelok and Grim, along with Grim's wife and children, settle near the Humber in Lincolnshire, and found what would become Grimsby. It is here that Havelok grows up, happy and good-humoured, but fast eating his foster-father out of house and home, leading him to leave Grimsby to be a kitchen-boy in Lincoln. Havelok's extraordinary strength and success in stone-throwing contests catches the attention of Godrich, who arranges for Havelok to marry Goldeborw, evidently to humiliate her. The couple, initially reluctant to wed, fall in love and the truth of Havelok's princely origins is made known, resulting in Goldeborw's urging her husband to return to Denmark and regain his kingdom. Just as it was revealed to Goldeborw, Havelok's royal status is proven to the Danes by an otherworldly beam of light that issues from his mouth as he sleeps. This "supernatural token of his royal nature" Parker notes "recurs at key moments" throughout the poem.⁶ Once he has won back his kingdom and avenged his sisters, Havelok leads an army back to England, which he reclaims from Godrich on Goldeborw's behalf. The poem concludes with Havelok and Goldeborw happily married, ruling over England and Denmark "together in one harmonious union."⁷

As G. V. Smithers notes, the Laud MS containing *Havelok* is "usually assigned, on palaeographical criteria, to a date about or soon after 1300," with the poem itself having likely been composed before 1310.⁸ As mentioned, this was neither the first time, nor the only instance in which a version of this story had been recorded. As listed by Smithers, there are six versions to consider when analysing the *Havelok*-tale found in the Laud MS. Geoffrey Gaimar's *L'Estoire des Engleis*, composed c. 1135–40, begins with an account of the *Havelok*-tale, though is intriguingly absent in Gaimar's main source, the Old French *Brut*, by the poet *Wace*. This perhaps suggests that Gaimar's account, found in *L'Estoire*, is original. Another version is the Anglo-Norman *Lai d'Haveloc*, likely composed in England between c. 1190 and c. 1220, and highly dependant on Gaimar's. Then there is a compressed Middle English version, which has been interpolated into the MS Lambeth 131 of Robert Mannyng's *Chronicle of England*, composed in c. 1338, and arguably based on a version of the story not dissimilar to the source used by Gaimar and the *Lai*. A summary of *Havelok* is also included in an unpublished Anglo-Norman prose *Brut*, which in its earlier extant form ends with the year 1272. The Middle English *Brute of England*, whose first section up to 1333 is a translation of the Anglo-Norman *Brut*, likewise contains a version of

⁶ Parker, *Dragon Lords*, 160.

⁷ Parker, *Dragon Lords*, 160.

⁸ Smithers, "Introduction," xvi.

Havelok, closely corresponding with the *Brut*. Lastly, a brief account of summarising plot points exists contained within an unpublished Anglo-Norman prose chronicle *Le Petit Brut*, composed in 1310 at the behest of Henry de Lacy, Earl of Lincoln, by Rauf de Boun.⁹

The earlier French versions of *Havelok* are notable for including references to Arthur and for placing the bulk of the action in a Britain ruled by Constantine, the nephew and successor to the legendary Arthur. This bypassing of the Early English setting in the Middle English *Havelok* perhaps parallels other instances in which Anglo-Norman texts overlook Saxon material in favour of indigenous British narratives.¹⁰ In comparison, *Havelok the Dane* places its story within an Early English context, in “are-dawes” (27), or in other words, in days of yore during the reign of the distinctly Saxon sounding Athelwold.¹¹ It is worth mentioning that the first recorded Viking raid occurred in 841 CE, most likely at Romney Marsh. In 865, the Vikings and their Great Army returned to East Anglia, led by Ivar the Boneless and his brother Halfdan.¹² The Vikings “waged a series of campaigns” states Kevin Leahy and Caroline Pateron, “taking up winter-quarters each year and going back into the field in the following spring.”¹³ In 873/4, the Great Army wintered at Repton, and then, in late 874, divided, with part of the force going to Cambridge, and the rest northwards to the Tyne, “eventually settling in Yorkshire.”¹⁴ It is assumed that at some point during this period Lincolnshire came under Viking rule and it may not have been until the fall of Northumbria in 927 that the kings of Wessex were able to regain control of Lindsey.¹⁵ Lincolnshire’s tumultuous dealings with the Danes is striking when we consider how this may have impacted the writing of *Havelok the Dane*. “[A]lthough reconquered by the English,” the people of Lindsey, the kingdom in which Lincoln and Grimsby resided, “continued to be identified as Danish, or at least of suspect sympathies,” according to Leahy and Pateron.¹⁶ Such sympathies are apparent in *Havelok the Dane*, which arguably endeavours to present Anglo-Danish relations in a positive light and preserve “a memory of [Lincolnshire’s] Danish heritage.”¹⁷ As Thorlac Turville-Petre observes, north Lincolnshire, where *Havelok* is set,

⁹ Smithers, “Introduction,” xvi–xxxii.

¹⁰ See Fiona Tolhurst, “The Britons as Hebrews, Romans, and Normans: Geoffrey of Monmouth’s British Epic and Reflections of Empress Matilda,” *Arthuriana* 8, no. 4 (1998): 76–77.

¹¹ *Havelok*, ed. by G. V. Smithers, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1. All subsequent quotations from the Middle English romance are from this edition and follow Smithers’ line numberings.

¹² Kevin Leahy and Caroline Pateron, “New Light on the Viking Presence in Lincolnshire: The Artefactual Evidence” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001): 181.

¹³ Leahy and Pateron, “Viking Presence in Lincolnshire,” 181.

¹⁴ Leahy and Pateron, “Viking Presence in Lincolnshire,” 182.

¹⁵ Leahy and Pateron, “Viking Presence in Lincolnshire,” 182.

¹⁶ Leahy and Pateron, “Viking Presence in Lincolnshire,” 182.

¹⁷ Thorlac Turville-Petre, “Representations of the Danelaw in Middle English Literature,” in *Vikings and the Danelaw*, ed. James Graham-Campbell, Richard Hall, Judith Jesch and David N. Parsons (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2001): 348.

was “very densely settled by the Danes”, and the people “even at the end of the thirteenth century [were] conscious of [a] history different from that of other parts of the country.”¹⁸

This consciousness, as Turville-Petre concedes, “is difficult to document,”¹⁹ but may explain the favourable depiction of the Danes in *Havelok*. This contrasts strongly with their portrayal in other ‘Matter of England’ texts such as *King Horn* and *Guy of Warwick*, which negatively reference Danes, or alludes to them under the guise of ‘Saracens.’²⁰ Moreover, although the Vikings who settled in England were “rapidly converted to Christianity,” any connection to a pre-Christian past in the form of an Odinic figure is arguably far more observable in this Middle English text than in any other *Havelok*-tale, albeit still highly speculative. Although by no means definitive, similarities between Grim’s characterisation in *Havelok the Dane* and that of Óðinn in Norse material, can be observed, and by extension to Woden, though to a lesser degree owing to the sparsity of his sources. Before such comparisons are made, however, it is worth considering the ways in which Grim is a markedly perplexing character.

Grim is first introduced as a hired assassin, tasked with the drowning of Havelok. This killing, had it been enacted, would have cleared the path for the usurper, Godard, who interestingly could not go through with the murder himself:

J shal do casten him in þe she:
Per I wile þat he drenth be,
Abouten his hals an anker god,
Pad he ne flete in þe flod. (519–522)

Emphasis is subsequently placed on Grim’s brutal handling of Havelok: “Grim tok þe child, and bond him faste” (537) causing Havelok to be “in ful strong pine” (540). However, divine intervention in the form of a “stem” (592) of light, akin to a “sunne-bem” (593), issuing forth from “hise mouth” (592) stays Grim’s hand. Havelok’s divine otherness and proximity to kingship is further cemented by the evidence of “a kynmerk” on “hise rith shuldre” (605), a detail absent from the earlier Old French and Anglo-Norman texts. These dual revelations result in their removal to England for the young heir’s safety, as well as a stunned exclamation and confirmation from Grim that:

‘Goddot!’ quath Grim ‘þis ure eir,
Pat shal [ben] louerd of Denemark!
He shal ben king strong and stark—

¹⁸ Turville-Petre, “Representations of the Danelaw,” 348.

¹⁹ Turville-Petre, “Representations of the Danelaw,” 348.

²⁰ See Helen Young, “Remembering, Forgetting, and Rewriting the Vikings in ‘Guy of Warwick,’” in *Vikings and Their Enemies: Proceedings of a Symposium Held in Melbourne, 24 November 2007*, ed. Katrina L. Burge (Melbourne: Viking Research Network, 2008): 48–59; Kathy Cawsey, “Disorientating Orientalism: Finding Saracens in Strange Places in Late Medieval English Manuscripts,” *Exemplaria* 21 (2009): 380–97.

He shal hauen in his hand
A[l] Denmark and Engeland. (607–611)

Even prior to his marriage to the dispossessed English heiress, Havelok's dual kingship is prophesied and thus assured early on. It is Grim who first comes into possession of this foreknowledge, acting as a narrative conduit to relay the key themes of the romance: kingship, nationhood, and a unified cultural identity. However, as noted by Kenneth Eckert, the inconsistent characterisation of Grim in *Havelok the Dane* has generated debate among scholars who recognise his initial readiness to commit child murder as being incongruous with the benevolent behaviour he later displays as Havelok's foster-father.²¹ Read simply, Grim could be viewed as instantiating the folk-trope of "fisher rescues abandoned child," according to Anne Thompson, yet there are also those who would disagree with this categorisation.²² As evidenced in chapter one, when it comes to depictions of Óðinn, as well as his English counterpart Woden, changefulness of nature, and physical form, as well as untrustworthiness, are par for the course.

Eckert has listed Herbert Creek as responsible for "sound[ing] the note for later analyses," due to the observation that the violence Grim inflicts on Havelok in the early part of the poem "is inconsistent with the fidelity and generosity which Grim later displays."²³ Yet this shift in behaviour could be explained as a preservation of accretions from Germanic legends, such as that of Gregorius, where the fisherman is distinctly malicious, counters Maldwyn Mills.²⁴ This does not account for Grim's depiction in the Anglo-Norman *Lai*, however, in which Grim is presented as "consistently benign" notes Eckert, "and has no plan to murder Havelok."²⁵ According to Creek, this could simply be a case of the *Havelok*-poet's failure to successfully emulate their French source, due to their having "not clearly conceived the character."²⁶ Nancy Mason Bradbury repudiates this, stating that it is "unlikely" if only because the *Havelok*-poet "proves himself too capable a storyteller to turn a consistent character into a contradictory one for no apparent reason."²⁷ The shift from brutality to benevolence can therefore be viewed as an intentional choice on the part of the *Havelok*-poet argues Mason Bradbury. Similarly, Grim's inconsistent

²¹ Kenneth Eckert, "The Redemptive Hero and 'Inconsistencies' in *Havelok the Dane*," *Philological Quarterly* 94, no. 3 (2015): 229.

²² Anne B. Thompson, *Everyday Saints and the Art of Narrative in the South English Legendary* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003): 131.

²³ Eckert, "The Redemptive Hero", 229; Herbert L. Creek, "The Author of *Havelok the Dane*," *Englische Studien* 48 (1914–15): 201. See also G.V. Smithers, "Introduction" in *Havelok*, ed. G. V. Smithers (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987): xl.

²⁴ Maldwyn Mills, "Havelok and the Brutal Fisherman," *Medium Aevum* 36, no. 3 (1967): 221–25; also cited in Eckert, "The Redemptive Hero," 229.

²⁵ Eckert, "The Redemptive Hero," 229.

²⁶ Herbert Le Sourd Creek, "The Author of 'Havelok the Dane,'" *Englische Studien* XLVIII (1914–15): 201–2.

²⁷ Nancy Mason Bradbury, "The Traditional Origins of *Havelok the Dane*," *Studies in Philology* 90, no. 2 (1993): 133.

nature can be interpreted as an intrinsic facet of his characterisation rather than a literary misstep. Furthermore, if Grim’s characterisation is meant to be understood as deliberate, it is interesting to note that such inconsistency is also present in depictions of Óðinn (and Woden).

Indeed, in Saxo Grammaticus’ *Gesta Danorum*, King Haraldus Hyldetan is initially a favourite of Óðinn, who gifts him with invulnerability so that steel cannot wound him, and in return Haraldus promises him the souls of those he kills.²⁸ Thanks to Óðinn’s patronage Haraldus becomes a great king. However, when Haraldus grows old, Óðinn takes on the guise of Bruno, a counsellor to the king, “and through intrigues he create[s] enmity between Haraldus and the Swedish king Ringo,” notes Jen Peter Schjødt.²⁹ Now elderly and blind, Haraldus realises that his enemy’s army is organised in the same manner Óðinn had taught him many years ago and that his councillor, and driver of his chariot, is the disguised god. Understanding that his death is nigh, Haraldus begs for his life, but Bruno, seemingly unmoved, pushes him from the chariot and kills him with his own mace. Óðinn had supported Haraldus all his life, but “in the end he makes sure that he will die in battle and thereby, we must assume,” comments Schjødt, “he will become one of Óðinn’s heroes in Valhøll.”³⁰ Not only does this narrative highlight Óðinn’s changefulness and untrustworthiness, it also underlines his association with violence as a god of war, and also his hands-on violence, which is likewise apparent in Grim’s treatment of the young Havelok.

Grim’s proclivity for violence is represented on the Grimsby town seal (fig. 1), in which he is shown wielding a sword and carrying a shield. He is flanked on either side by his foster-son Havelok, and the English princess, Goldeborw. This depiction of an armed Grim, as though ready for battle, “may allude to an element of the story that is now lost,” comments Mason Bradbury.³¹ In the appendixes of his edition of



Fig 4: Seal of the borough of Grimsby, approx. thirteenth century (British Library, Department of Manuscripts, detached seals, xxxv.79)

²⁸ Jen Peter Schjødt, “Óðinn,” in *The Pre-Christian Religious North: History and Structures, Volume III*, ed. Jens Peter Schjødt, John Lindow, and Anders Andréén, PCRN-HS 3 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020): 1162.

²⁹ Schjødt, “Óðinn,” 1162.

³⁰ Schjødt, “Óðinn,” 1162–63.

³¹ Caroline D. Eckhardt, “Havelok the Dane in *Castleford’s Chronicle*”, *Studies in Philology* 98, no. 1 (2001): 8; See also the frontispiece of Smithers’ edition of *Havelok*, as well as the provided appendix “The Grimsby Seal” (160–67), which suggests that the earliest possible date for the seal would be around 1200 (162). Equally, however, there is reason to suggest a date closer to “the later 13th century,” as the seal’s spelling of *Goldebvvrgh* would be compatible with “any date up to c. 1332” (166), according to Smithers.

the Middle English *Havelok*, G. V. Smithers has also remarked upon this depiction of Grim as “curious” and “potentially another discrepancy [...] since he never takes part in deeds of arms” in *Havelok the Dane*, “nor indeed in Gaimar’s version or the *Lai*.”³² Like Mason Bradbury, Smithers has speculated that the Grimsby seal “might be based on a different and lost (and perhaps oral) version” of the *Havelok*-tale.³³ At the very least, the seal attests to the prominence and active circulation of the legend in the Lincolnshire area in the thirteenth-century, and is thus contemporaneous with the writing of the Middle English *Havelok*, if not several decades older. “[I]conography depicting founders does not appear on town seals in England, although the town seal of Grimsby [...] comes close to it” notes John Cherry.³⁴ The relative uniqueness of the Grimsby seal and its depiction of a founding-legend has been compared to the seal of Evesham Abbey, in Worcestershire, which bears a scene from its founding-legend involving a swineherd named Eoves.³⁵ As Cherry notes, the images represented on medieval seals of towns and cities tended to stem from “the desire to seek protection from the Lord either spiritual or earthly, others to invoke the strength of the mural walls or the ship that provided some towns with their sources of livelihood or their defence, and still others simply to express a conception of the *genius loci*.”³⁶

It is possible a lost element to the *Havelok*-tale, involving Grim defending the town, is being alluded to here. Intriguingly, in Walter W. Skeat’s introduction to his edition of *Havelok*, he makes mention of “an absurd local story that the church at Grimsby, which has now but one turret, formerly had four, three of which were kicked down by Grim in his anxiety to destroy some hostile vessels.”³⁷ The warrior-like depiction of Grim is even more intriguing when we consider comparable portrayals of the Norse Óðinn. Writing in the late eleventh century, German monk Adam of Bremen recorded a description (based on an informant’s report) of the pagan temple at Uppsala, Sweden, and the religious practices that took place there.³⁸ “The temple itself,” notes Peter Orton, “contained idols of Þórr, Wodan (that is, Óðinn) and ‘Fricco’, the last of whom is usually identified as either Freyr or a closely related god.”³⁹ Wodan’s depiction is of particular interest as he is shown armed, “supported by warriors and was appealed to when war loomed,” comments Orton.⁴⁰ Schjødt acknowledges that “although we know that Adam is not reliable in

³² Smithers, “Appendix B: The Grimsby Seal,” 167.

³³ Smithers, “Appendix B: The Grimsby Seal,” 167.

³⁴ John Cherry, “Seals of Cities and Towns: Concepts of Choice?” in *Medieval Coins and Seals: Constructing Identity, Signifying Power*, ed. Susan Solway (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015): 286.

³⁵ Smithers, “Appendix B: The Grimsby Seal,” 160–161.

³⁶ Cherry, “Seals of Cities and Towns,” 287.

³⁷ *The Lay of Havelok the Dane*, ed. Walter W. Skeat (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902): liv.

³⁸ Peter Orton, “Pagan Myth and Religion,” in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007): 305.

³⁹ Orton, “Pagan Myth and Religion,” 305.

⁴⁰ Orton, “Pagan Myth and Religion,” 305.

everything he says about the cult in Uppsala, what he says about Óðinn *could* very well be true.”⁴¹ The existence of the Grimsby seal highlights the possibility that the Middle English *Havelok* drew from an alternate source, contrasting with the earlier French versions, perhaps even a local to Lincolnshire, orally told, *Ur-Havelok*. This lost element may even have been more explicitly Odinic in its depiction, evoking a more brutal portrayal of Óðinn, as found in the fourth book of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*.

In Gaimar’s version there is an incident at sea, retold by Grim’s daughter, Kelloc, in which everyone except for Grim, his family and Havelok are attacked by pirates and killed on their way to England:

Mis pere aveit mult bon[e] nef,
 la raïne amenout süef;
 vers cest païs l’[en] amenout
 quant si avint cum [a] Deu plout:
 de utlages fumes encontrez;
 en mer furent trestuz rüez
 nos chevaliers e nostre gent,
 e la raïne ensement;
 unc ne guari hom fors mun pere
 ne nule femme fors ma mere.
 Mis pere estait lur conussant,
 pur ço guarirent li enfant,
 e jo e vus e mu dui frere,
 par la prière de mun pere. (423–436)

[My father had a very good ship, and he took the queen on board discreetly, and made the crossing over to this country. But as he was doing so, it pleased God that something happened: we were set upon by pirates. All of our knights and our retinue, and the queen likewise, were hurled into the sea. The only man to escape with his life was my father, and the only woman my mother. My father’s identity was known to them, and the reason why the children, I, and you and my two brothers, survived was because my father begged them to spare us.]⁴²

This incident is also in the Anglo-Norman *Lai d’Haveloc*:

Le travers eurent de la mier,
 Mes ne sievent queue part aler
 Ou garder pussent lur seignur.
 Malement lur avint le jour,
 Car outlaghes les encontrerent,
 Qui hautement les escrierent.
 Mult durement les assaillirent
 Et cil forment se defendirent.
 Mes il eürent poi d’esforz;
 Li outlaghe les ont touz morz.

⁴¹ Schjødt, “Óðinn,” 1179.

⁴² Geffrei Gaimar, *Estoire des Engleis / History of the English*, ed. and trans. Ian Short (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009): 24–25.

N'I remist nul petit ne grant
Fors Grim, qui ert lur conoissant,
Sa femme et ses enfanz petiz,
Et Haveloc i est garriz. (107–120)

[They crossed the sea,
But did not know where they could go
So that they would be able to protect their lord.
Misfortune befell them that day,
For pirates came upon them,
Who hailed them loudly.
They attacked them very fiercely
And those on board defended themselves.
But their forces were limited
And the pirates killed them all.
Except for Grim, who was known to the pirates,
And his wife and his small children;
Haveloc was also spared.]⁴³

It is never explicitly stated in either text that Grim is one of the fighters so Smithers' observation that Grim "never takes part in deeds of arms" remains true. Still, this pirate encounter appears to be the closest Grim comes to partaking in armed violence, albeit defensively, thus subtly emulating his depiction on the Grimsby seal.

The Lambeth Interpolation, another Middle English account, though far shorter than *Havelok the Dane*, also contains this skirmish with pirates:

When þey come in myd-se, a gret meschef gan falle:
Þey metten wyþ a gret schip, lade wyþ outlawes all.
Anon þey fullen hem apon, & dide him mikel peyne,
So þat wyþ strengþe of þeir assaut ded was quene Eleyne.
But 3yt ascapede from hem Grym, wyþ Hauelok & oþer fyue,
& atte þe hauene of Grymesby, þer þey gon aryue,
Þer was brought forþ child Hauelok, wyþ Grym & his fere (17–23)⁴⁴

In *Havelok the Dane*, however, the journey to England concludes without incident. In this version, Grim is a humble, domestic figure, seemingly at odds with his depiction on the Grimsby town seal, although Mason Bradbury allows that "the designer of the seal may of course have simply dressed Grim up in what he regarded as appropriate garb for appearance on a seal," she recognises that "the spirit of the seal points to a sterner, more significant legendary hero than the Grim we find in our versions of the *Havelok*-tale."⁴⁵

⁴³ *The Anglo-Norman Lay of Haveloc: Text and Translation*, ed. and trans. Glyn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2015): 54–55.

⁴⁴ Smithers, "Introduction," xxiii; see also MS Lambeth 131 of Robert Mannyng's *Chronicle of England*.

⁴⁵ Mason Bradbury, "Traditional Origins," 125.

The likelihood that Grim had a “sterner,” more martial legendary origin, perhaps connected to a god of warfare, death, and kingship, is best supported by the inconsistency by which he is portrayed as primarily a fisherman, as this occupation is not universal throughout the differing iterations of the narrative. In the Lambeth Interpolation, Grim is called a *wel god marinere*” (14) prior to his arrival in England. Similarly, in the longer Middle English romance, after deciding that he must kill Havelok to assure his own ascension, Godard sends for “a fishere” (525) to do the deed. However, in Gaimar’s telling of the *Havelok*-tale it is only once Grim has arrived in England that he decides to be a fisherman.⁴⁶ This suggests that in Denmark Grim may have had an elevated position, rather than the humble origins presented to us in the Middle English romance. Likewise, in the Anglo-Norman *Lai d’Haveloc* Grim is described as a baron and ward of the queen’s castle; both queens of England and Denmark are absent in the *Havelok the Dane*, though present in the Lambeth Interpolation. By contrast, the Middle English Grim is described as a “ful drit-cherl” (683) [foul dirt-slave], as well as a fisherman, from the outset.⁴⁷ It is only after he takes on the role of Havelok’s foster-father, a narrative detail at odds with the Anglo-Norman *Lai*, that Grim’s fatherly relationship with Havelok is established.

Despite Grim’s consistent presence in all these narratives, his depiction varies from text to text, which has led to a questioning of his true function within the *Havelok*-tale. As stated in this chapter’s introduction, Edmund Reiss has posited that Grim possesses several functions that parallel those of the Norse god Óðinn.⁴⁸ Indeed, there are several similarities between the pair that are highly suggestive, chief among them Óðinn’s association with, and proximity to, kingship, as well as his role as a foster-father. The Eddic material, *Grímnismál*, illustrates this point clearly, as in addition to the similarity between the names Grímnir and Grim (the latter being a common shortening), Grímnir appears frequently in Norse literature, including nine times in *Egils saga* alone.⁴⁹ Grímnir is the second guise Óðinn adopts in *Grímnismál*, the first being a humble cotter and foster-father. The name Grímr is also included among the list of alternate names for Óðinn, which the god reveals as he sheds his disguise to his stunned foster-son, king Geirrǫð.⁵⁰ This list from *Grímnismál* is also included in chapter nineteen of *Gylfaginning*, in Snorri Sturluson’s *Prose Edda*, as well as later in the *Óðins nǫfn* section of the

⁴⁶ Smithers, “Introduction,” xx.

⁴⁷ Smithers, *Havelok*, xx.

⁴⁸ Reiss, “Norse Mythology,” 117.

⁴⁹ Reiss, “Norse Mythology,” 118.

⁵⁰ “Grímnismál” in *De Gamle Eddadigte*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (København: G. E. C. Gads Forlag, 1932): verses 47, 48, and 49, <https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Gr%C3%ADmnism%C7%AB%CC%811>; “Grímnismál” in *The Elder Edda*, trans. Andy Orchard (London: Penguin, 2011): 57–58.

Skáldskaparmál, where Grímnir is again featured as alternate names for Óðinn.⁵¹ Despite being connected to Óðinn, Grímr also appears frequently as a common name, not just in *Egils saga*, but also on runic material.⁵² This could discount any relationship between *Havelok's* Grim and the Odinic Grímnir/Grímr, however, Reiss argues that it is instead Grim and Óðinn's shared narrative functions which are most of note.

In *Grímnismál*, Óðinn's first disguise is as a "kotbónda" ('cottager'). Alongside his wife Frigg, he fosters two shipwrecked youths, sons of King Hraudung, one of whom, Óðinn's fosterling, goes on to succeed his father.⁵³ Unfortunately, he later meets an untimely end for failing to offer Grímnir, another disguise of Óðinn's, due respect and hospitality; an occurrence that "happens to most Odinic protégés" when they lose their patron's favour notes Carlyne Larrington in her introduction to her translation of the poem.⁵⁴ The changeability with which an Odinic protégé may gain and then lose favour is depicted in reverse in *Havelok*, as Grim moves purposely from adversary to advocate upon discovering Havelok's true identity. Óðinn may also be seen in a fathering role in another Eddaic poem, *Rígsþula*, where the titular Ríg raises a boy named Jarl, from whose son, Konr ungr, "the author thus derives the etymology of the word *konungr*," meaning king observes Sverre Bagge.⁵⁵ Although Ríg is identified as the god Heimdallr in the poem, it is more likely that he is in fact Óðinn, who has stronger ties to kingship and lineage, as well as the recurrence of the number nine.⁵⁶ Furthermore, Bagge notes that "the name Rígr is derived from the Irish *ri* = king."⁵⁷ However, through the use of the genitive case, "the poet has thus rendered the word incorrectly," and as a result raises a question as to whether its true meaning was fully understood, "as he fails to connect the god's name with that of Konr ungr at

⁵¹ "Skáldskaparmál" in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar: með skáldatali*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1935): ch. 10, <https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Sk%C3%A1ldskaparm%C3%A1l>;

"Skáldskaparmál," in *Snorra Edda*, Snorri Sturluson, ed. Anthony Faulkes (London: Viking Society for Northern Research, 1998): 14. See also the use of Grímnir as a name for Óðinn in "Skáldskaparmál," 25–26, which features the skaldic poem *Þórsdrápa* by Eilífr Goðrúnarson, and in translation in "Skaldskaparmál," 83.

⁵² See Lena Peterson, *Nordiskt Runnamnslexikon*, (Uppsala: Institutet för språk och folkminnen, 2007): 82.

⁵³ "Grímnismál," introduction; "Grímnismál," 50.

⁵⁴ "Grimnir's Sayings," in *The Poetic Edda*, trans. Carlyne Larrington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999): 50.

⁵⁵ Sverre Bagge, "Old Norse Theories of Society. From *Rígsþula* to *konungs skuggsía*," in *Speculum regale: der altnorwegische Königsspiegel (Konungs skuggsjá) in der europäischen Tradition*, ed. Jens Eike Schnall and Rudolf Simek (Wein: Fassbänder, 2000): 9.

⁵⁶ Despite the god Heimdallr being identified as the titular Ríg, Óðinn is most likely the disguised god in the poem, who raises the boy, Jarl, thus taking on a similar role to Grímnir in *Grímnismál* (Reiss, "Havelok the Dane and Norse Mythology", 117). For further discussion on the topic of Óðinn and Rígr, see Klaus von See, and others, *Kommentar zu den Liedern der Edda, IV: Heldenlieder* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000): 491, 514–16; Jens Peter Schjødt, "Identiteten af Rígr," in *Skandinavische Schriftlandschaften: Vänbok till Jürg Glauser*, ed. Klaus Müller-Wille and others (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attemto Verlag, 2017): 108–12.

⁵⁷ Bagge, "Old Norse Theories of Society," 22.

the end of the poem.”⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the creation of an Óðinn-sprung lineage plays a noteworthy role in the concluding section of *Rígsþula*, which lists the many sons of Jarl, all skilled warriors, except for Konr ungr, who stands out from the rest by learning the runes of his grandsire.

Hans Kuhn has observed that the usage of the word “konr” also had a meaning of scion or descendant and was known to skaldic poets from the tenth to eleventh century.⁵⁹ The role of lineage is also emphasised in *Havelok the Dane*, as once successfully ascended to the dual thrones of England and Denmark, it is noted that like Jarl in *Rígsþula*, Havelok and Goldeborw have many children:

He geten children hem bitwene
Sones and douthres rith fiuetene,
Hwar-of þe sones were kinges alle
So wolde God it sholde bifalle,
And þe douhtres alle quenes.
Him stondes wel þat god child strenes! (2879–2984)

The role of Woden, Óðinn’s English equivalent, as a forefather to kings is made evident several times in the Old English genealogical sources. The depiction of Óðinn as a (foster-)father and/or patron to kings, however, is not solely restricted to Eddic material. Predominantly set in pre-Christian Scandinavia and prior to the settlement of Iceland, the *fornaldarsögur* contains many supernatural elements which make it “not surprising that Óðinn makes his most frequent appearances in the sagas in *fornaldarsögur*,” notes Annette Lassen.⁶⁰ In *Völsunga saga*, which also places some of its action in Germany, depicts Óðinn as the patron of the Völsungar, and thus connected to their role as kings, as well as their prestigious ancestry. This relationship to kingship through patronage and/or fatherhood is evident in references to Woden in the genealogies mentioned in chapter one. Óðinn patronage of heroes and kings seems likely connected to his function as a father-god, or “Alföðr” (‘All-father’).

As noted in *Gyflaginning*, “Óðinn heitir Alföðr, því at hann er faðir allra goða” (‘Odin is called All-father, because he is the father of all gods’), if not physically, then figuratively.⁶¹ Although not a king, Starkaðr Stórvirksson of *Gautreks saga* also benefits from Óðinn’s patronage as his foster-

⁵⁸ Bagge, “Old Norse Theories of Society,” 22.

⁵⁹ Hans Kuhn, “Das Eddastück von Sigurds Jugend,” in *Kleine Schriften: Aufsätze und Rezensionen aus den Gebieten der germanischen und nordischen Sprach-, Literatur- und Kulturgeschichte.*, ed. Dietrich Hofmann, Wolfgang Lange and Klaus von See, (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1971): 95.

⁶⁰ Annette Lassen, “Óðinn in Old Norse Texts other than *The Elder Edda*, *Snorra Edda*, and *Ynglinga sag.*” *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia* 1 (2005): 98.

⁶¹ “Gyflaginning” in Snorri Sturluson, *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar: með skáldatali*, ed. Guðni Jónsson (Reykjavík: Sigurður Kristjánsson, 1935): ch. 20, <https://heimskringla.no/wiki/Gyflaginning>; Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans. Jesse L. Byock (London: Penguin, 2005): 31.

son, though this is complicated by the interference of the Þórr. What makes this saga noteworthy, however, is Óðinn's use of disguise. "[D]isguises [...] are not unusual for Odin," observes Reiss.⁶² This role of the disguised foster-father who is later revealed to be Óðinn — the old cotter and Grímnir in *Grímnismál*, and Grani Horsehair in *Gautreks saga* — is striking when compared with the character of Grim in *Havelok the Dane*. Although not stated to be anything other than what he is presented as, Grim can nevertheless be seen to parallel the functions of the old cotter and Grani Horsehair. This is evident in his role as a foster-father, but also through his association with the sea. In the Eddic poem *Hárbarðsljóð* the titular ferryman is likely another instance in which Óðinn is in disguise, since Hárbarðr is among the alternate names for Óðinn listed in *Grímnismál*.⁶³ In *Grímnismál*, it is the sea that transports the sons of King Hraudung, Agnarr and Geirrǫth, to the disguised Óðinn and Frigg, and it is again the sea, using a ship granted to them the disguised Óðinn, that allows them to return to their father's land.

Similarly, the sea plays an important role in *Gautreks saga*, in which Grani Horsehair, prior to revealing himself as Óðinn, sails his foster-son Skarkaðr to another island where a twelve-person council is to be held, culminating in a bestowal of gifts from Óðinn to Starkaðr, as well as curses from Þórr. In both instances, the role of Óðinn as a disguised foster-father enables his charges to proceed onto a path, via traversing a waterway, of either kingship and/or renown. A similar dynamic occurs in *Havelok the Dane*, with Grim's ship transporting his new fosterling to an island, thus setting in motion his ascension to kingship and repute. The key difference is that Grim is never revealed to be either Woden or Óðinn in disguise. Indeed, whereas Grímnir and Grani Horsehair can shirk off their respective disguises, revealing their godhood and importance, Grim's true impact on Havelok's journey remains debatable. Nevertheless, the functions of fatherhood and kingship in relation to Óðinn often bear a close association with one another, as evidenced strongly in *Grímnismál*, and also elsewhere.

When examining the cultural origins of the story of Siward the dragon-slayer, a thirteenth-century narrative most probably written at Crowland Abbey in Lincolnshire, Eleanor Parker has noted the many "marker parallels" it bears to Old Norse literature.⁶⁴ The text in which it is extant, known as the *Gesta antecessorum comitis Waldevi*, includes Siward, a Danish earl of Northumbria, as an ancestor of Waltheof, earl of Huntingdon and Northampton, who was venerated as a saint at Crowland Abbey.⁶⁵ Parker observes that Siward's "bear ancestry and

⁶² Reiss, "Havelok the Dane and Norse Mythology," 118.

⁶³ "Grímnismál" in *The Elder or Poetic Edda*, ed. and trans. with introd. and notes by Oliver Bray, (London, The Viking Club, 1908), 22.

⁶⁴ Parker, *Dragon Lords*, 102.

⁶⁵ Parker, "Dragon Lords," 102–3.

exotic adventures” were “intended to reflect glory on the abbey’s saintly patrons.”⁶⁶ Similarly, Havelok’s story, as well as his Danish roots, could have been used in Lincoln and Grimsby to the same affect. But their potential overlaps do not end there. In the account of Siward’s life, the Latin text recalls an encounter with an old man on a mound, an episode that takes place when Siward first lands in England. This meeting “places Siward in an established tradition of Norse heroes who receive supernatural help from a figure like this enigmatic old man,” states Parker, since in Old Norse literature Óðinn recurrently manifests himself in a disguised form to guide young heroes to their destiny, oftentimes bestowing them with gifts, as is the case with Siward, but also Starkaðr in *Gautreks saga*.⁶⁷ It could be argued that Grim similarly guides Havelok to his destiny, bearing prophetic knowledge of his future, as it is Grim who first proclaims how he shall be king of “A[l] Denemark and Engeland” (611), and it is also Grim, akin to the old cottager in *Grímnismál*, who provides his fosterling with the ship in which he travels to the land where he becomes king.

In the Siward narrative, the old man on the mound gifts Siward with a banner named Ravenlandeye, suggesting “a link to the raven banner which appears in legends about Cnut, the sons of Ragnar Lothbrok, and other Scandinavian warriors,” comments Parker, but also perhaps to Óðinn’s own association with ravens: his messenger birds, Huginn and Muninn.⁶⁸ In the Middle English *Havelok*, Reiss notes that Grim has three sons, one of which is named “Huwe Rauen” (‘Hugh Raven’) (1399), who he argues bears a “more than coincidental” resemblance to Huginn, perhaps suggesting that at one point in the *Havelok*-tale, possibly in the lost element connected to the Grimsby seal, “Grim may have been explicitly associated with Odin.”⁶⁹ Grim’s connection to the names Grímr (‘Mask’ or ‘Masked’) and Grímnir (‘Masked One’), as well as earthworks and ditches linked to both Woden and the devil, make it highly suggestive that his function within *Havelok the Dane* may have once reflected these complexities, possibly including this element of disguise so strongly associated with Óðinn and his interactions with kings and heroes. Óðinn also appears in disguise in *Harðar saga*, part of the *Íslendingasögur*, which typically does not feature the god since the sagas “were written by Christian Icelanders and dealt with their Icelandic ancestors,” notes Lassen, so frequent mention, or glorification of their heathen past may have presented a conflict of interest.⁷⁰

In *Harðar saga*, Óðinn, in the guise of a stranger named Björn, assists the hero Hǫrðr to break open a grave mound. The cursed treasure found in the mound ultimately causes trouble for

⁶⁶ Parker, “Dragon Lords,” 103.

⁶⁷ Parker, “Dragon Lords,” 120.

⁶⁸ Parker, “Dragon Lords,” 121.

⁶⁹ Reiss, “Norse Mythology,” 121.

⁷⁰ Lassen, “Óðinn in Old Norse Texts,” 92.

Hörðr, “which makes Óðinn a troublesome character in the saga,” observes Lassen.⁷¹ This inconsistent characterisation highlights Óðinn’s ambiguity as neither a wholly benevolent figure nor a trickster akin to the god Loki. Nevertheless, as explored in chapter two, it is worth noting Óðinn’s function as the devil in disguise in Old Norse literature, which also extends to Woden as evidenced by the English placenames that feature the name Grim, such as the many Grim’s Dykes and Ditches that are equally synonymous with Devil’s Dyke/Ditch. This begs the question as to whether some lost element of the *Havelok*-tale may have included not only a more martial depiction of Grim, as represented on the Grimsby town seal, but also the persona of Grim as a disguise for the pre-Christian deity? Óðinn as the devil in disguise also appears in the *konungasögur*, in the *þættir* in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta*, and in *The Separate Saga of St. Olaf*, where he appears in disguise and tempts the missionary kings.⁷² These narratives connect Óðinn not only to disguise, but also to kingship.

In *The Separate Saga of St. Olaf*, Óðinn visits the king, in the guise of Gestr (‘Guest’), and proceeds to converse with him throughout the night about past kings, asking Óláfr which of these heathen kings, if he could, he would choose to be. After some prompting, Óláfr chooses Hrólfr kraki, to which Gestr responds by asking why he would not prefer to be like another king, whose description perfectly aligns with the Óðinn we meet in *Ynglinga saga*.⁷³ From this response, Óláfr comes to understand that he is speaking to “hinn illi Óðinn” (‘the evil Óðinn’), “an unclean spirit,” notes Lassen.⁷⁴ Óðinn also shows up in disguise in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar en mesta* in *Flateyjarbók*, with his true identity being revealed by the king. As well as the previously mentioned *Gautreks saga*, Óðinn features in several other sagas of the *fornaldarsögur*: *Hrólfs saga kraka*, *Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks*, *Orvar-Odds saga*, *Egils saga einhenda ok Ásmundar berserkjabana*, *Gautreks saga*, *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, *Völsunga saga*, and *Sögubrot af fornkonungum*. In *Orvar-Odds saga*, Óðinn appears as a peasant named Hrani, a lower social status akin to the cotter in *Grímnismál*, and possibly *Havelok*’s depiction of Grim as a “ful dritcherl” (683) (‘foul dirt-slave’), though, as we know, this depiction of Grim is not wholly consistent throughout the extant versions. In all these Norse narratives just mentioned, however, Lassen notes that “Óðinn’s participation usually sees him sharing or revealing his divine knowledge to earthy heroes,” which sees some parallelism in the figure of the old man in the Siward story, as well as Grim’s foreknowledge of *Havelok*’s kingship in *Havelok*.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Lassen, “Óðinn in Old Norse Texts,” 94.

⁷² Lassen, “Óðinn in Old Norse Texts,” 95.

⁷³ Lassen, “Óðinn in Old Norse Texts,” 96.

⁷⁴ Lassen, “Óðinn in Old Norse Texts,” 96; *Flateyjarbók: En samling af norske konge-sagaer med indskudte mindre fortællinger om begivenheder i og udenfor Norge samt annaler*, vol. II, ed. Guðbrandur Vigfússon and C. R. Unger (Oslo: Malling, 1860–68): 134.

⁷⁵ Lassen, “Óðinn in Old Norse Texts,” 98.

As in the *konungasögur*, the role of kingship plays a significant role in the *Havelok*-tales, which is why a connection to Óðinn through Grim has the potential to enrich this aspect of the narrative further. Indeed, as noted by Gary Lim, the Middle English *Havelok* was produced at a time when its author may have been influenced by the factionalism and “threat of disrupted succession,” created by the future Edward I’s involvement with the baronial reform movement of 1258–1267.⁷⁶ An observation made by Helen Cooper that “[r]omance is the myth of the ideology of primogeniture” can certainly be applied to *Havelok the Dane* but, as Lim observes, *Havelok* can also be read as “represent[ing] grave anxieties about how smooth transfers of authority and property can be secured along these inheritance principles.”⁷⁷ These anxieties are alleviated through the death of Havelok’s father at the beginning of the romance, as well as the death of the English king, Athelwold. By eliminating the living presence of a biological father figure, the author presents “a version of masculinity,” according to Lim, where Havelok, the son, must surpass the legacy of the father, Birkbeyn.⁷⁸ This surpassing of the father figure also arguably extends to King Athelwold, whose idealised rule the earthly part of the romance focuses on most. This idealisation of Athelwold at the beginning of *Havelok* creates “an English paternal connection” to the titular hero, granting him the right to the inheritance of the English throne through his narrative association to its late king.⁷⁹

Certainly, for the kings of the Early English, the significance of descent was important, as it helped “establish both claim to rank and a standard of conduct worthy of the nobly born,” explains William Chaney; “descent called its bearer to heroism.”⁸⁰ This connection to the English king “allows Havelok to accrue legitimacy” in an otherwise foreign land, argues Lim.⁸¹ The “threat of disrupted succession” that Lim mentioned is thus avoided and the pathway to Havelok’s dual ascension is smoothed. To take this idea further, if a close narrative proximity to a kingly figure bestows legitimacy and a right to rule upon Havelok through Athelwold, could the same be said of his relationship with his foster-father Grim? If Grim is meant to be read as an allusion or parallel to Óðinn, and to a lesser extent Woden, his inclusion in the narrative arguably adds another layer of legitimacy to Havelok’s subsequent ruling of both Denmark and England. Óðinn’s role as a patron and (foster-)father to kings makes his possible inclusion in

⁷⁶ Gary Lim, “In the Name of the (Dead) Father: Reading Fathers and Sons in *Havelok the Dane*, *King Horn*, and *Bevis of Hampton*”, *JEGP* 110, no. 1 (2011): 24–25. See also R. F. Treharne, “The Significance of the Baronial Reform Movement, 1258–1267”, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 25 (1943): 35–72.

⁷⁷ Lim, “In the Name of the (Dead) Father”, 25.

⁷⁸ Lim, “In the Name of the (Dead) Father”, 25.

⁷⁹ Lim, “In the Name of the (Dead) Father”, 27.

⁸⁰ William A. Chaney, “The Woden-sprung kings: Germanic sacral kingship and divine descent,” in *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1970), 18.

⁸¹ Lim, “In the Name of the (Dead) Father”, 27.

Havelok even more striking in its treatment of Anglo-Danish relations. As Lim observes, Grim differs from foster-fathers found in other Matter of England romances, for example Aylmar and Ermin in *King Horn* and *Bevis of Hampton*.⁸² Grim by contrast never betrays his charge and safeguards the future king by providing him with shelter, food and a livelihood. Despite this, Lim asserts that Grim “ultimately fails to directly influence Havelok’s return to power,” and thus his connection to Havelok’s resulting kingship is less apparent than either King Birkabeyn or King Athelwold’s.⁸³

But to return to Reiss’s argument that Grim bears a strong parallelism to Óðinn, if Grim was meant to be read as more than just a foster-father, his inclusion as an Odinic figure, akin to the old man in the Siward story, serves as an early indication of the hero’s right to kingship. Grim does not perhaps exert obvious influence, but instead imbues upon Havelok a sense of legitimacy through his subtle association with Óðinn, as well as a link to a Germanic, pre-Christian English past that goes beyond even the faux-historical setting of the romance itself. Just as *Havelok* can be read as “a multi-layered account of fatherhood and paternal authority” according to Lim, it can also be seen to create a multi-layered account of one’s legitimacy to kingship within an idealised, mythologised English past.⁸⁴ The fact that Óðinn himself is a complex figure highlights the nuance of this storied past. By considering the ways in which Grim echoes the mythological role of Óðinn in Norse sources, Grim’s position as an ineffectual father figure and narrative influence becomes less clear cut. Instead, the effect of Grim’s presence and function in *Havelok the Dane* can perhaps be better understood to be more in line with how both Birkabeyn and Athelwold grant Havelok a sense of legitimacy through royal association. Susan Crane has argued that *Havelok the Dane*, as well as *King Horn* and *Bevis of Hampton*, combine the royal and baronial interests of the thirteenth century, present at the time of the writing, to promote a stable society by merging the right of blood to rule with a more institutionalised system of laws and property rights.⁸⁵

In summary, the inclusion of Grim as an intentionally Odinic figure can only strengthen Havelok’s right to rule, easing his pathway to the thrones of Denmark and England through

⁸² The Matter of England is a term, originated by 20th century scholars, to refer to Middle English romances which are primarily concerned with English heroes or set in a reimagined English past. Alongside *Havelok the Dane*, other Matter of England texts include *King Horn*, *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick*, (“matter of england, the”, in *Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.uio.no/encyclopedias-reference-works/matter-england/docview/2137970925/se-2?accountid=14699>).

⁸³ Lim, “In the Name of the (Dead) Father”, 41.

⁸⁴ Lim, “In the Name of the (Dead) Father”, 42.

⁸⁵ Susan Crane, *Insular Romance: Politics, Faith, and Culture in Anglo-Norman and Middle English Literature*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 13–52; as cited in Lim, “In the Name of the (Dead) Father”, 42.

Óðinn's association with the fosterage of great kings. By comparison, Woden's inclusion in many Old English royal genealogies, as commented on in chapter one, suggests a similarly close association with the establishment of royal dynasties, as well as kingship more generally, further justifying why reference to this deity, and his equivalents, would be valuable to a narrative concerned with the themes of paternal authority, legitimacy, and ascension to rule. Whether Grim was meant to be clearly understood by a Lincolnshire audience to be an evocation of their pre-Christian past, remains inconclusive since unlike the many instances in which a disguised Óðinn's identity is discovered, we never get the satisfaction of that kind of reveal in any of the extant *Havelok*-tales. Nevertheless, the existence of the Grimsby seal, as well as the noted inconsistencies in Grim's characterisation, and the overall similarities to Óðinn first examined by Reiss, should give us substantial pause. Undoubtedly, the character of Grim extends well beyond the surviving pages, and what survives on those pages doesn't tell the whole story.

Conclusion

The goal of this study has been to outline the ways in which the pre-Christian Germanic god Woden has continued to hold cultural resonances in England past the point of his demotion from a deified position. I have not attempted to suggest that some degree of sustained worship of Woden also took place, but rather that England's conversion to Christianity did not prevent his associations with power, authority, and kingship from being of use to the Early English. Woden's usefulness is perhaps best exemplified through his function as a notable and unifying legendary ancestor, as evidenced in several Old English genealogies. This usage highlights his unique ability to also bestow those descended from him with a common cultural origin, as well as a sense of legitimacy to rule. However, as examined in this paper, Woden's associations are not limited to an elite sphere of influence and can also be connected to a more devilish aspect, sometimes called Grim, a name that appears frequently in English placenames as well as in English folklore. This duality, and at times inconsistency, in his depiction likewise places an emphasis on the complexity and adaptability of his character. It is this multifaceted portrayal, also present in Old Norse texts, which I have endeavoured to stress throughout this project.

The interdisciplinary approach to this thesis has complimented this goal, drawing together different fields of study to emphasise the singularity of Woden's place within England's cultural consciousness. The first chapter of this study sought to establish our understanding of Woden as a forefather to kings, a characteristic he also shares with his Norse counterpart. Indeed, our understanding of Woden is likewise distinctly rooted in his parallelism with the Norse Óðinn. However, as has been stressed within this project, a true equivalence cannot be granted between the two; Óðinn and Woden are closely related figures, though not identical. Nevertheless, throughout this study, comparisons between Woden and Óðinn have been frequent and valuable, although it can be anticipated that the unavoidable difficulty with studying the former is the scarcity of mythological sources when compared with his Norse complement. A dependence on representations of Óðinn to offer insight on how Woden might also have been regarded can therefore be expected, but is not without its problems, as abovementioned. Similarly, the use of folkloric material, especially in this first chapter, must be acknowledged as strongly speculative and by no means definitive in its conclusions. Yet, Woden's potential relationship with the Church Grim nonetheless bears some parallel with other uses of this more devilish byname, such as the many instances of Grim's Dykes and Ditches found in England and subsequently discussed in chapter two of this thesis.

Another, smaller aim of this project has been to shed new light on specific cases in which a Wodenic, or Odinic, connection has previously been dismissed. One such case is the placename Grimsby, in Lincolnshire, which has resolutely been claimed to draw its origin from a personal

name, rather than a theographic one. As with the folkloric material explored in chapter one, the purpose of re-examining Grimsby, in response to the consideration of several overlooked archaeological features, has not been to conclusively argue for its Germanic pagan origins. Instead, it has been to simply question previously and strongly held assumptions on the subject. Ultimately, however, whether Grimsby can be linked to a pre-Christian deity or not, the focus of this second chapter has been to stress that evidently an awareness of pagan beliefs, and more specifically the mythological associations of Woden and Óðinn, remained in England regardless of their continued acceptance and practice. An area of study that might further illuminate the split between placenames and folklore associated with Grim and those with Woden, and that has not been of focus in this project, could be the different ways in which ecclesiastical theories of paganism have affected Woden's representation in England.

Finally, the last chapter of this thesis is admittedly the most substantial and ambitious of the three. Like Grimsby, the character of Grim the fisherman has been highlighted in this project as an area of study that is worthy of reconsideration. Where formerly textual parallels to Óðinn and his various depictions may have on their own been of note, I have additionally striven to ask *why* such an association might have been made in *Havelok the Dane* in the first place. In other words, in what way could an Odinic Grim benefit the narrative and compliment its interests in the ascension to rulership and the legitimacy of kings? The shadowiness of the *Havelok*-legend's origins, as well as its differing depictions of Grim, mean that we cannot know for a certainty if an *Ur-Havelok* may have represented Grim as unequivocally Odinic. The treatment of *Havelok the Dane* and the character of Grim in this chapter is thus reliant on interpretation, which is undoubtedly rewarding, yet nonetheless uncertain in its conclusions. What can be stated with some confidence, however, is that were Grim to be understood to be an evocation of Óðinn, and to a lesser degree Woden, his inclusion in the romance arguably mimics Woden's function in the Old English genealogies and in placenames such as Wansdyke. That is to say, the rise to kingship of Havelok — his foster-son and pseudo-descendent — over the thrones of both England and Denmark is made more legitimate through his implicit association with a patron god of kings.

Above all, my investigation has shown that it is well founded that Woden, and Óðinn, have continued to fascinate and provoke discussions, more so than any other pre-Christian deity. This interest, both within the Early English cultural consciousness and beyond, can be connected to his multifaceted portrayals and straddling of multiple functions. A notable characteristic of Óðinn is his propensity to don guises, and if the prevalence of the name Grim in England's placenames and folklore is any indication, the same can be likely said of Woden. In this way, Woden's medieval afterlife can ultimately be viewed as a clear and compelling consequence of his unique adaptability of character.

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