The Significance of Shape-Shifting and Transformation in Medieval Welsh and Icelandic Literature: The Ingenuity of Medieval Writers

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SHAPE-SHIFTING AND TRANSFORMATION IN MEDIEVAL WELSH AND ICELANDIC LITERATURE: THE INGENUITY OF MEDIEVAL WRITERS

by

Samantha J. Cairo

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Submitted to the
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Western Michigan University, 1999

The folk-motifs of shape-shifting and transformation are an important mechanism
in both Medieval Welsh and Icelandic literature. To better understand these motifs it is
important to consider the ideas behind and the belief in these concepts. The role of the
shaman and the separable soul, the Double, and the psychological projection all form a
basis for shape-shifting in Medieval literature.

The Welsh literature will include: Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed, Manawydan Son of
Llyr, Math Son of Mathonwy, Lludd and Llefelys, Culhwch and Olwen, Peredur Son of
Efrawg, The Hanes Taliesin, and the transformational poetry of Taliesin. The Icelandic
literature to be examined includes: The Saga of the Volsungs, King Hrolf and His
Champions, the sagas of Gongu-Hrolf, Hafdan Eysteinsson, Bosi and Herraud, Egil and
Asmond, Sturlaug Starfsama, Eyrbyggja, and Egil.

By examining the Welsh and Icelandic literatures of the Middle Ages, looking at
the motifs of shape-shifting and transformation, it is hoped that we will come to
understand how the motifs were employed in each culture’s literature, what the element
of belief was, and the possible basis for their conception in Medieval literature.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Shape-shifting, metamorphosis, and transformation are important mechanisms in folk-tales and literature throughout the world. Use of these terms, specifically the term shape-shifting generally means a person or creature who is able to change their shape at will or by the aid of another. Shape-shifters may be evil or benign depending on the need created in the story for their particular talents. Shape-shifters may change their shape by some inner magic ability, through a magic object, or by ingesting something which causes the transformation.

In some cultures it is only the gods who have the ability to shift their shape, while in other cultures it is attributed to witches, strange foreigners, and magical creatures of the Other-World. Shape-shifting may be used for strategic deception, escape, punishment, liberation, and immortalization. There is, however, one constant in academic circles regarding this motif, that a human can not, has not, and will not ever change their shape into an animal form. The fact that this folk-motif is so wide spread and popular demonstrates the beauty and the longing of the human imagination.

The general purpose of shape-shifting in folk-lore and literature is to blur the distinctions and portray the collapsing boundaries between the human and the animal world. It is offered as both punishment and reward, mortality and immortality, ugliness
and beauty. Tales of shape-shifting project our human anxieties regarding identity, worth, isolation, and the very notion of what it means to be human. It is also and sometimes most importantly used to depict a mental and spiritual change in a person. Overall shape-shifting is linked to power. Those in control of their shape exercise power over the natural world; those who are unwillingly transformed are subject and enslaved.

Transformation into an animal is usually a tragic fate. It is neither death nor life, but a state of limbo. It degrades the human to a nonhuman status, brought about by a witch, a god, or the sorcerer's apprentice.

This study will examine both Medieval Welsh and Icelandic literature concerning the folk-motif of shape-shifting. Most importantly, this study will examine how shape-shifting is used by the author and why. The connection between the Celtic and Scandinavian cultures has long been felt by scholars. The Celts and the Scandinavians inhabited northern Europe together, sharing in a similar cultural system of beliefs and ideas. Yet as similar as these two cultures might have been they are remarkably different at the same time.

This study is certainly not exhaustive in its use of literature, particularly from Iceland. It must be remembered that there is only a limited amount of material to be studied in Welsh literature of the Middle Ages in comparison to the plethora of Icelandic texts remaining. Perhaps Irish literature should have been substituted in place of the Welsh, but there is always the difficulty in separating the influence of the Viking occupation on Irish literature and vice versa. Although the Irish Celts were very little affected by the Vikings in regard to their literature, the comparisons between the Irish and
the Scandinavians has already been subjected to scholarly thought. Shape-shifting has not been properly examined in Medieval Welsh literature. Therefore shape-shifting in Medieval Welsh literature must be compared to one of the most brilliant uses of shape-shifting in the Middle Ages: the Icelanders.

For a long time it has been assumed that shape-shifting was a nonessential motif of Medieval Welsh literature. All incidents of shape-shifting have been regarded as occurrences of the humanized gods found in a collection called *The Mabinogi*. To some extent these scholars are right. There is no doubt that at some time in the past the characters of these tales were gods and that shape-shifting was one of their attributes. Unfortunately these same scholars fail to take into account that these gods have been humanized and are no longer gods in the literature. It is certainly not my intention to spin a room full of gold into straw, but rather to examine and celebrate the gold found therein.

The Medieval authors had a plan in mind when they wrote what they did. The way they recorded these stories reflects in part the popular mind set of the period. By recreating their gods as men they set new limits on the idea of shape-shifting in Medieval Welsh literature.

Conversely, the Scandinavian scholars have long since been looking at this prominent motif in Icelandic literature. The difference here is that it is impossible to credit all of the incidents of shape-shifting to gods or humanized gods. There are ogres, elves, ghosts, men, shamans, witches, and wizards who all have the ability to shift their shape.
Despite the overabundance of shape-shifters in Medieval Welsh and Icelandic literature it is difficult to know whether or not the people of the Middle Ages actually believed in the possibility of shape-shifting. It seems logical, based on literary evidence, that they did. The idea and belief behind shape-shifting derives from animism, animal totems, and taboo. Ultimately shamanism and the separable soul, the double, and the psychological projection all had a part in the development of the literary form of this idea.

There are five different ways from which a person may transform themselves put forward by J.A. MacCulloch in his *The Childhood of Fiction*. Unfortunately his categories are not quite specific enough for this study. I have added to his five principle types of shape-shifting to encompass every incident about to be discussed. The first type is transformation by another. This includes witches, sorcerers, gods, and or God himself. In this category MacCulloch did not include the fact that these beings may or may not transform others by the aid of a magical object such as wands, gloves, spells, or songs. The second type is transformation by bathing, eating, or drinking. This form plays a very minor role in the works about to be discussed and needs no further clarification. The third type of transformation is the self transformation; this is the most common form of shape-shifting found in both Icelandic and Welsh literature. MacCulloch's list did not include the idea of the projected shamanistic transformation, which is found in this study and falls under the self transformation category. The fourth type of transformation is the transformation combat in which two sorcerers battle as different creatures until one has defeated the other. The fifth type of transformation is not found in this study, but consists of the transformation of the fugitive lovers and the objects they cast away behind them.
There are two important associations with shape-shifting found in these stories that MacCulloch does not take into account. This is the understanding of and being able to speak the language of the animals and birds while still in a human form. The other association is a mental-spiritual-strength transformation in which a character transforms into a wiser, braver, stronger warrior on the inside while still retaining his outward appearance as a man. These last two associations, in particular the latter, usually occur through drinking the blood of a dragon/serpent or some magical and ferocious beast. These additions are important because in themselves they are not physical transformations, yet at the same time these people are gifted with a knowledge, strength, and bravery which only belong to the natural world.

Thus this study will examine the thoughts and developments behind the literary usage of shape-shifting, the possibility of belief and the weight that shape-shifting carried in the Middle Ages, and how this folk-motif was used in both Medieval Welsh and Icelandic literature. For a proper study of shape-shifting all forms of animate shape-shifting: human to animal, animal to animal, and the switching of semblances--human to human will be used. The Medieval Welsh literature to be examined includes: Pwyll Prince of Dyfed, Manawydan Son of Llyr, Math Son of Mathonwy, Lludd and Llefelys, Culhwch and Olwen, Peredur Son of Efrawg, and the Hanes Taliesin. Along with these prose narratives five poems attributed to Taliesin will be examined: The Cad Goddeu, The Fold of the Bards, Taliesin's Song of His Origins, Ceridwen's Chair, and The Angar Kyfyndawt. In comparison the Medieval Icelandic literature will include: The Saga of the Volsungs, King Hrolf and His Champions, Gongu-Hrolf's Saga, Bosi and Herraud, Egil
and Asmond, Sturlaug Saga Starfsama, Eyrbyggja Saga, and Egil's Saga. From these stories this study ought to be able to ascertain how the folk-motif of shape-shifting was used, for what purpose, and the parameters which surrounded the motif in each culture.
CHAPTER II

ORIGINS OF THE IDEA BEHIND SHAPE-SHIFTING

Shape-Shifting

Shape-shifting is a mechanism that is found in the folk-tales and literature of most cultures throughout the world. As popular as the motif appears to be, very little serious work has been done on it. This is in part due to the overabundance of material to work with and the elusive nature of the shape-shifters in literature. There is also the difficulty of determining the origin of the concept of shape-shifting. The ideas most directly related to shape-shifting consist of the shaman and the separable soul, the Double, and the psychological projection. Each of these ideas could have given rise to the belief, concept, and definition of shape-shifting in folk-lore and literature.

Shape-shifters are people or animals who are able to change their shape either at will or under special circumstances. They may be evil or benign. They are also regarded with a mixture of fear and gratitude due to their awesome ability. Yet shape-shifters are elusive characters in literature. They seldom, if ever, explain their actions or purpose in a story. Nor are they frequently the main character, instead they assume a minor role preferring to make brilliant, but brief entrances. Anything the audience does learn of these characters comes through the editorial comments made by the narrator, and even those comments are rare.
There are many different terms for shape-shifting, the most common being: metamorphosis, lycanthropy, skin turning, transformation and shape-shifting. As a rule the term metamorphosis is used only when a person has not volunteered to change their shape (1). Usually it is a god, a witch or someone else with magic abilities that transforms the person into some other creature. Lycanthropy is similar to metamorphosis, but on occasion the victim may cause him or herself to change into a wolf by the aid of some magic charm. Lycanthropy has also been considered a psychological phenomenon, where the person who claims to become a wolf only does so in their mind out of madness. Lycanthropy then, can be considered an illness, but the belief of transformation into wolves is still apparent (2). Skin turning is similar to lycanthropy, although it is not considered an illness. The skin turner may become a wide variety of creatures, but in particular a wolf or a bear. Skin turning is a term normally only associated with northern Europe, in particular the Nordic countries. The practice makes use of the skin of a wolf or bear, or a belt made from the skin of either of these animals (3). Transformation, as stated above, is more of a general term and is used interchangeably with metamorphosis meaning that it is the result of magic applied by another (4). Shape-shifting is a more literal word and is used for those who can change their shape at will (5).

In folk-tales and literature the reasons for shape changes are usually to engage in combat, help a hero or heroine escape death, kill or pursue an enemy, perform a dangerous task, punish someone, reach an inaccessible place, seduce another, steal, or violate a tabu. Any discussion of this subject ought to begin with some thought as to the origin of the belief or idea of shape-shifting. This point is often ignored due to its
problematic nature, but in order to understand this folk-motif in literature it is important to explore the origins and ideas behind or akin to shape-shifting.

It is impossible to pinpoint the exact origin behind the belief and idea of shape-shifting, but there are other thoughts or beliefs that are similar and run parallel to it: the idea of the shaman and the separable soul, the Double, and the psychological projection. Examining these other concepts should make it easier to understand the idea of shape-shifting.

Shamanism and the Separable Soul

There is no doubt that the probable origins of shape-shifting began with animism and totemism, but it very likely evolved with the development of shamanism and the idea of the separable soul. In the northern European context there is very little recorded evidence to support the theory that shamanism existed. Yet it is often assumed that most European cultures at one time practiced shamanism (6). It is only in the outer most regions of Europe where Christianity arrived late that traces of shamanism survived. Only in Siberia and Lapland have cases of shamanism been documented fairly well (7). Since in many of the Norse Sagas the shape-shifters are of Lappish/Samek identity it seems worth while to examine the beliefs of the Lapps in regard to shamanism.

The Lapps, or Samek as they call themselves, have always lived in close contact with nature. The spirits ruled every aspect of nature; all things had a soul (8). Thus we have the basic principle of animism in the pre-Christian Samek religion. The dead survived in another world not much different than this world. They lived in a spiritual
world, called Saivo, the Samek equivalent to paradise (9). There was no concept of
demonic spirits in the pre-Christian Samek religion, but the forces of nature were
considered dangerous nonetheless.

The shaman in Samek culture, as in other cultures around the world, is an
intermediary between this world and the spirit world. In the religion of the Samek the
shaman is called a Noaide, a wiseman/sorcerer/shaman, who communicates between both
worlds to resolve critical situations by entering into a trance or a state of ecstasy (10).
He generally has three roles to play in his society: psychopomp, a hunting magician, and
a medicine man. He also plays a minor role in foretelling the future, recovering distant
objects, and tracking reindeer herds.

The Noaide most often plays the role of medicine man. Illness is believed to be
casted by one of two things, the loss of the soul, in which case the Noaide has to journey
to the Other-World to retrieve and bargain with the dead who hold the soul captive (11).
Or by the intrusion of an object or spirit which the shaman can summon without the need
of a trance or helping spirits. The first case concerning the journey to the Other-World
is more relevant to this study than the second, as will be seen below. In many sagas it is
not only humans who shift their shape, but the dead and creatures of the Other-World.

The Noaide believes he has one or more body souls which are responsible for the
maintenance of life functions, and a free soul which can wander free from the body while
in a state of sleep and maintain contact with various spirits called shaman companions.
In the Samek culture, which is one of the better documented sources for Northern
European shamanism, these shaman companions are called Noaidi Gadze (12). There
are three different types of Noaidi Gadze: the Saiva Olmah, the Noides-Woeigni and the Jamegeh/Jabmek.

The Saiva Olmah or supernatural men live in the holy mountain and are responsible for calling the Noaide to his vocation. They contact him by sending his Saiva Leddie, a supernatural bird, to help bring him to the Other-World. The Saiva Leddie is just one of the Noides-Woeigni or shaman spirits, a theriomorphic spirit helper who also lives within the holy mountain. They act as escorts while the Noaide is in his trance. The Noaide also has in his company another bird called the Vurner Lodde/Vuokko. The Vurner Lodde/Vuokko is a hideous bird that the Noaide sends out against his rival Noaide to fight in combat. There is also the Saiva Guelie, a fish or sometimes interpreted as a snake, who guides the Noaide to the underworld of the dead and watches over the soul of the Noaide while he is on his journey. The last Noides-Woeigni is the Saiva Sarva, a reindeer that the Noaide bids to fight against the reindeer spirit of a hostile or rival Noaide. The fates of the Noides-Woeigni are reflected on the Noaide, if they are injured or harmed so is the Noaide (13). The Jamegeh/Jabmek, the dead, live underground in a realm ruled over by a powerful old woman Jabmieakka--the old crone of the dead. Using his Noides-Woeigni to guide him, the Noaide has to fetch the souls of the sick from this realm.

The Noaide is often conceived as taking on the forms or shapes of animals. The Noaidi Gadze teach the Noaide to assume the shapes of wolves and bears as well as casting the forms of animals onto other people. There seems to be some confusion though on whether the Noaide traveled to the underworld in the shape of his Noides-
Woeigni or just traveled along with them in human form (14). The concept of the spirit
in an animal guise and the concept of the Noaide's soul in corporeal form thus entwine.
The free soul shows itself in animal form and can assume the same spiritual distance
towards its owner as the helping spirit. Thus we see the entanglement of the spirit and
the free-soul ideas. The helping spirit may then be conceived as the Noaide's free soul
transformed into animal shape.

The concept of the soul in Nordic tradition is just as complex as the Noaide and
his spiritual helpers in the Samek culture. The soul was considered to be a spiritual
element which radiated from an individual and was capable of exercising some influence
whether or not it was controlled. The concept of the separable or wandering soul is an
old Scandinavian concept. The soul or hugr as it was called in Old Norse, was considered
to be a highly mobile and separable part of humans, assuming its own shape (15). This
hugr may be so strong that it has a hamr or shape, more or less a materialization which
reflects the owner of the hugr. The hugr may take the shape of the person to whom it
belongs, it may be an animal that has some relationship to the person's character, or it may
be more abstract like fog or fire (16).

The conception of the materialized soul being able to free itself from its owner is
connected to the idea that one could lead a vard or hugr in a certain direction. A vard
is a spirit attached to a person which accompanies a person wherever they may go (17).
The vard may reveal itself as a glimmer of that person, a sort of second self or phantom.
A person can activate their hugr, using it for certain intentions; "here in fact lies the germ
of the idea of changing shape, the ability to go out from yourself and let your hugr take
that is to say take the form of your second self” (Dag Stomback, “The Concept of
the Soul in Nordic Tradition”, 17). The physical state of sleep, exhaustion or a trance is
fundamental to changing one’s shape when concerning the real physical body. In most
gift-tales there is a certain amount of practicality that accompanies shape-shifting. The
idea of shape-shifting is easier to believe if there is a certain amount of ritual that
accompanies it. This ritual may be the above mentioned trance, the wearing of an animal
skin or belt, or sleep in which the soul separates itself from the body. However in
literature, a certain amount of "magic" may be added so that the ritual can quite easily
disappear. What remains in this last case then is a quite powerful shape-shifter with very
few limitations.

Shape-changing is one of the dominant features in the Old Norse sagas. Its
constant use and the variety of terms used for the different types of projections the soul
may take make it fairly obvious that the idea of the soul as being capable of separating
from the body while living gave birth to the idea of shape-shifting in Norse culture (18).

The Psychological Projection as the Double

The idea of the separable soul being able to take on a physical shape is related in
part to the idea of the Double. The Doppelganger or Double as the word suggests is the
duplication of an individual, both physical and psychological. Yet at the same time it is
not an exact duplication of the self; there is always some variation apparent. The
conventional Double in modern literature is usually depicted as the evil twin or the
tempting devil. The Double may also play the role of the twin brother, the pursuer, the
tempter, the vision of horror, the savior or the beloved.

Animism also plays a role in the concept of the Double as it did in the idea of the separable soul and the shaman. The principle of animism relates that if man lives and moves it is because there is a little man or animal inside him who moves him to action (19). It is the animal inside the animal and the man inside the man that represents the idea of the soul. In animism the soul may reside in inanimate objects such as plants as well as animals. Figures resembling primitive soul Doubles are ghosts, vampires, werewolves, dolls of necromancy, the golem and robot, the mannikin, thumbling and homunculus which are all usually malignant and threatening figures. These figures are of a later cultural imagining and thus more complex. The primitive soul doubles are merely a second self and are not antagonists.

The second self is usually an intruder from the background or shadows of a person's life and is more likely to have knowledge of the foreground of his counterpart than the latter of him. The second self represents some aspect of the self that has been repressed or unrealized as well as the unconscious and instinctual drives of the self. In fact, the second self often has no self history, its memory and history begin with its emergence.

One aspect of the second self is the second self as the twin brother (20). This is one of the oldest products of imagination recorded from oral tradition. This twin typically is the opposite of the original self. In most cases the second self appears to be the enemy attempting to destroy the self. On occasion the second self may befriend the self and help to seek promotion, welfare and salvation for the self.
The mirror image of the self is usually produced by narcissism, a literal self love, involving the relationship of self to self in which oneself is regarded as another person. Freud stated that the double springs from man's primary narcissism, the result from the unbounded love he has for himself which originated in infancy (21). It is only when there is some inner conflict in the self that the double takes a physical form. The same may be said for shape-shifting, in particular the human exchanging of semblances. Each time two human characters exchange shapes it is usually caused by a conflict concerning one of the characters. The inner conflict may be as simple as desiring to gain a kingdom, to win a bride, protect a mistress, or to beget a child. In each case this human to human transformation helps the troubled party to gain what peace they need by creating a double of themselves and vice versa.

Every story about the second self is the story about the growth of the self. This is accomplished by the second self coming to the self and confronting the self with its existence. However, the Double may not be produced without some inner psychological conflict that distresses the self or the ego.

The ego is a complex factor to which all conscious contents are related. It is the center of the field of consciousness and is the subject of all personal acts of consciousness. The shadow, the anima and animus have the most disturbing influence on the ego (22). The most accessible is the shadow, whose nature is the personal unconscious acquired in a lifetime. No one may become conscious of their shadow without considerable effort; one must recognize the darker aspects of their personality emotionally. However, the shadow may be assimilated into the conscious. The shadow represents the negative side
of the personality, the sum of all the unpleasant qualities hidden in the personal unconscious (23). In dreams the shadow appears to be the same sex as the dreamer. Resistances to the shadow are usually bound up in projections and are not readily recognized, if they are they are a moral achievement. It is the unconscious that creates the projection to isolate the ego from its environment. The projections change the world of the conscious into a replica of one's unknown unconscious. Thus with a little self criticism one can see through the shadow.

The anima and animus are much further away from the consciousness; they are a contra sexual figure representing the negative side of the personality (24). The anima is the female form found in men, representing loyalty and solace, but may also be a great illusionist, a seductress, fickle, capricious, moody, uncontrolled and emotional. Sometimes she is gifted with demonic intuitions, capable of being ruthless, malicious, untruthful, double faced and as well as mystical; "the empirical reality summed up under the concept of the anima forms an extremely dramatic context of the unconscious" (Carl Jung, *Aion*, 13).

Women contain the male animus figure. Just as the anima is the maternal eros the animus is the paternal logos. It is the mediator between the conscious and the unconscious, representing a function; "the more civilized, the more conscious and complicated a man is, the less he is able to follow his instincts" (Jung, *Aion*, 20-21). The animus tends to be obstinate, harping on principles, laying down the law, dogmatic, world-reforming, theoretic, word-mongering, argumentative and domineering. Both the animus and anima possess a fatality that can produce tragic results and disastrous
entanglements of fate. The anima surrounds itself with inferior people and the animus lets itself be taken in by second rate thinking. The anima/animus is not an invention of the conscious then, but a spontaneous product of the unconscious trying to guide the self to a higher form of consciousness.

One of the most frequent figures to appear in literature relating to the psychological projection is the old man of the psyche, who appears most often in fairy tales (25). This figure may also be an old woman or a dwarf, but generally is an elderly person, someone with wisdom and experience. This figure may be replaced in tales by animals who can better prepare the hero rather than a human. These animals are often helpers with magic powers, preparing the hero for some life changing quest.

Hence we come to one of the most well known folk-tale incidents -- transformation, in particular theriomorphic shape-shifting (26). In folk-lore there are five different types of transformation, not all of which apply to this particular study, but relate nonetheless to the subject at hand (27). The first is the transformation by a sorcerer, witch or god, popular in classical literature, and is usually done to punish the person transformed. Most of these tales make transformation the result of an action which has aroused the displeasure of the enchanter. The second type of transformation is transformation by bathing, eating or drinking. There is a much larger collection of transformation by eating and drinking found in European tales than of transformation by bathing. The third type of transformation is self transformation. This is usually ascribed to gods, spirits, and sorcerers, but may also occur to ordinary humans. The fourth is the transformation combat. This usually occurs when the hero is in power of the sorcerer
whose magic he has learned and takes advantage of such as in the Gwion Bach tale, "though such a story as this is sometimes used to prove the Celtic (Druidic) doctrine of metempsychosis, it really proves nothing more than that a folk-tale of wide occurrence has been grafted onto a Celtic mythological cycle" (J.A. MacCulloch, *The Childhood of Fiction*, 166). The fifth has very little relevance to this study, but should be mentioned nonetheless. This is the transformation of fugitive lovers and the objects they cast away to delay their pursuer.

The idea of transformation goes hand in hand with animism in which animals, men and inanimate objects are equally alive and possess some sort of soul or spirit. There are two beliefs that accompany transformation in tradition. One is that the spirit of a human or animal can leave its enclosed body and wander or take up residence temporarily in another body. The second is that the underlying similarity of all things hinders men from having a definite idea of a personality. Personalities are not necessarily concrete, they may assume hundreds of disguises. The first of these beliefs is related to the shaman and the separable soul. The second is related to the Double and the psychological projection. In any case all three of these concepts: the shaman and the separable soul, the Double, and the psychological projection are all possible bases for the ideas of shape-shifting and transformation.
Endnotes for Chapter II


8. This belief is called Animism and will be discussed further below.


12. For more information on these and the following terms see: Clive Tolley, "The Shamanic Seance in the Historia Norvegiae," in *Shaman* vol.2, no. 2 (Autumn 1994), 135-156.


22. This and the following information is a Jungian interpretation of the psyche. Although this is vastly interesting and bears relevance to the topic at hand I have included this information only to explain the Double as a phenomenon. I do not intend to use a Jungian interpretation anywhere else in this study. See: Carl Jung, *Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self* (1959. Reprint. trans. R.F.C. Hull. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 3-35.


26. Theriomorphic shape-shifting consists of human to animal transformations.

27. These are the same five classifications as mentioned in the previous chapter found in J.A. MacCulloch, *The Childhood of Fiction: A Study of Folktales and Primitive Thought* (New York: Dutton and Company, 1905), 146-187.
CHAPTER III

THE POPULAR BELIEF IN TRANSFORMATION IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Transformation and shape-shifting both play significant roles in folk-tales, fairy
tales, saints lives and literature in the Middle Ages. It is difficult, as seen above, to place
exactly the origin and development of shape-shifting with any one particular idea, but it
is my belief that shamanism and the separable soul, the Double and the psychological
projection played the most important roles in the literary development of shape-shifting.
The next aspect of shape-shifting to be examined then is whether or not the people of the
Middle Ages, particularly in Welsh and Icelandic society, actually believed in a person's
ability to change their shape.

The problem with this particular folk-motif is that it spans the globe, belonging to
a wide variety of cultures, each with its own particular theories and stories on shape­
shifters. Despite the differences of these cultures and their beliefs they all share the same
principle rules of transformation listed in Chapter II. Due to the abundant information
gathered about shape-shifters, it has been rather difficult for folklorists to study them with
any amount of diligence. The only person to attempt this task with any degree of success
was J.A. MacCulloch (1) who stated "the world-wide belief in the power of certain
persons to change their form, usually into that of an animal, was accepted firmly by
Medieval people and investigated by theologians" (Medieval Faith and Fable, 75). How
firmly this belief in shape-shifting was held and how seriously it was investigated by theologians remains an issue to be examined. It seems unlikely that every person in the Middle Ages believed in the actuality of shape-shifting. However there is ample evidence to say that shape-shifting was considered a possibility and a big enough threat to cause the Church to disclaim the physical act of shape-shifting.

Augustine, one of the most influential church fathers of the Middle Ages, insisted that the theory of transformation was unreal, that it was a delusion wrought by demons:

but it is to be most firmly believed that Almighty God can do whatever He pleases, whether in punishing or favoring, and that the demons can accomplish nothing by their natural power...except what He may permit...And indeed the demons, if they really do such things as these on which this discussion turns, do not create real substances, but only change the appearance on things created by the true God so as to make them seem to be what they are not (City of God, 624).

Augustine's opinion was firmly held by the Church in that the Church believed demons caused the illusion of transformation (2).

Not only did the demons cause the transformation illusion in the mind of the person who believed they were being transformed, but they influenced the minds of the observers as well (3). In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it was believed that these demons made aerial bodies of animals which they or their victim assumed. The demons might also go about in the body of a wolf or a cat causing men to believe that they were transformed. Another way in which the demons aided the belief in transformation was that they clothed men with an actual wolf skin, causing them go about acting as wolves. Sometimes the demons would cause a man to fall asleep and then have him dream of becoming a wolf, where upon awakening the man would not know that he had not been
a wolf or any other animal (4).

As long as Medieval scholars concluded that transformation was a delusion, no one who maintained that he had changed his form was punished on that charge. This theory changed with the emergence of the witch trials. If a person, after the witch scare began, held to the belief that they or someone else could change their shape, the Church insisted the accused had been conversing with demons aided by the devil in order to do so (5).

There is of course the difficulty of lycanthropy, usually associated with werewolves. Many people believed they could turn into a wolf or bear by wearing the skin of the animal they wanted to transform into. Later on it was believed that people only needed to wear a girdle made of wolf or human skin in order to transform, but mimetic dancing, incantations, herb balms and alchemical processes were also used. If someone managed to injure the transformed person while in their animal body it was believed that the injury would show up on the human body once they had transformed back into their original shape (6). This belief and practice was condemned by the church many times. However, there are many folk-tales relating the adventures of these skin changers in the literature of the Middle Ages which prove that the belief was not quite extinct. Interestingly enough in northern European tradition these creatures were regarded with a sympathetic eye rather than intense fear or hatred. For instance, Giraldus Cambrensis (c.1145-1223) recorded in his Topography of Ireland a story about an Irish couple who had been turned into wolves by a saint for seven years. The priest in the story sympathized with the wolves and gave the dying she-wolf holy communion. In return for
the favor the male wolf led the priest and his attendant out of the woods where they had been lost (7). This story naturally caused much discussion in the church.

The idea of lycanthropy is mingled with the idea of the Norse berserk who wore the skins of animals and had an ungovernable passion for warfare, often acting much like an animal in battle. In Icelandic literature these berserkrs are often said to be actual shape-shifters in taking on an animal form when their battle frenzy overcame them (8).

In Old Icelandic the word for shape is hamr. Hamr can be used to mean an animal skin, to refer to the wings and feathers of a bird, and for someone with the gift of assuming a non-human shape. A person with the ability to change their shape was termed a hamrammr or shape-strong. Other words relating to this idea are hamask a verb meaning to fall into a state of wild fury or animal rage and thus be hamslauss to be out of one's shape. A similar word hamhleytha refers to a shape-leaper, someone with the ability to leap out of their skin. The term hamfarir meaning shape-journeys was used to denote the sending out of the spirit into an animal form while the body rested (9). The use of these terms in literary sources suggest there was enough of a belief in Icelandic and Norse culture to warrant the use of these words.

A person could turn themselves or be turned into almost any creature. The bear, in particular, was one of the most frequently used animals in Icelandic literature. The bear was the most powerful and dangerous animal of the north. The Samek were so impressed by the bear that they termed a dead bear saivo, the same term they used for the spirits of men who lived in the Other-World. It was also a well established custom of the Samek to drink the blood of a bear in order to gain the animal's strength. The bear was not
considered an evil animal like the wolf; it was felt that the bear had no natural antagonism towards humans. It was believed to be closely linked to man due to the bear's ability to stand on its hind legs like a man, strike a victim with his forepaw or squeeze an enemy to death in a "bear hug." The foot prints of the bear were also thought to look similar to a man's and when the creature was skinned it was thought to resemble a man as well.

The names Bjorn and Ulf, respectively bear and wolf, were common names in the Germanic world. The term berserkr may have been based on the wearing of bearskins. In fact, the word serkr means shirt which suggests the alternate name given to these warriors: Ulfhednar or wolf coats (10). The link between animal behavior and the warrior becomes apparent when considering that the bear is a lone fighter, independent, noble in behavior, but when driven into a rage able to strike down anyone. On the other hand, the wolf fights as one of a pack, linked closely with his companions. The wolf is cunning and ruthless and spares no one. Each of these animals exhibits the two forms of fighting styles used by the berserkrs (11).

To examine the belief in shape-shifting and transformation itself, it is often necessary to examine the pre-Christian beliefs of a culture. Christianity arrived late to Iceland in comparison to the rest of Europe. Thus, due to the late arrival of Christianity, the instances, words, and definitions of shape-shifting were in part preserved in their pre-Christian context by Snorri Sturluson (1178-1241). However our evidence in this Icelandic belief can not be considered completely accurate since it was recorded two hundred years after the Icelanders came to Christianity (12). After considering the linguistic evidence stated above regarding the variety of words for shape-changing, the
idea of the separable hug, and the battle frenzy of the berserkr it seems possible that there was a popular belief in shape-shifting. However, since a lot of this material is linguistic and comes directly from the sagas this evidence is subject to scrutiny.

It is with greater difficulty then that I examine the Welsh. The Welsh came much sooner to the religion of Christianity than the Icelanders did, thus it is more difficult to look into their pagan past to gather just what they thought of transformation and shape-shifting. What we do know of the Celtic religion tells us that, like the Scandinavians, it revered nature. It is through this reverence that the Celts came to respect and worship animals which gave rise to later divinities with animal forms or attributes as has been found universally (13). This cult or sacredness of animals has been connected to totemism, in which a clan believed itself to be related to an animal or plant. The clan therefore held this animal or plant sacred and placed a taboo upon the entire clan from killing or eating it since there is a mystical bond between the chosen totem and the clan. In order to explain how the clan arrived at their present physical appearance or the appearance of their totem, transformation tales arose (14).

The pre-Christian Celts like other pagan/animistic societies were in part devoted to magical practices. Words for magic in Welsh abound; the most common word is hut (15) which is distantly related to the word seid, an Indo-European word related to seidr a Norse word for magic. The word seidr is associated with woman's magic. It is a magic so obscene that for a man to be associated with seidr would taint him with emasculation. However seidr magic is notorious for transgressing the boundaries between male and female, human and animal, and altering nature. Men's magic which is
more honorable is galdr. Galdr is associated with writing and poetry. Seidr is, however, the magic type that Odin and Loki used to change their shapes, the type of magic that one learned from the goddess Freya, thus being a feminine type of magic. Unlike the word seidr, hut does not have the same negative connotations which might lead to a man’s impotence (16).

The Welsh for witchcraft dewiniaeth and diviner dewin are both of a Latin origin, whereas the word for sorcerer swynwyr and a prophet or shape-shifter sywedydd are both Brythonic (17). Which in turn brings about the problem with the Celtic or Welsh deities in the literature about to be discussed. These deities seem more often to appear as magicians rather than gods. Shape-shifting is common to them though, in that they were able to change both their own forms as well as the forms of others. This lowered status of the Welsh deities may have something to do with the influence of Christianity on Welsh culture. With the coming of Christianity it seems probable that the emphasis on god-like abilities was reduced over time to magician qualities.

Another debatable problem with the Celtic religion is the supposed belief of the transmigration of souls. Caesar claims the druids taught that the soul passed from one body into another, a belief related to the Pythagorean theory of Metempsychosis or the Transmigration of souls. However despite what Caesar has to say there is no real evidence for this belief among the Celtic peoples. As Proinsias MacCana states:

Far from implying that the process of serial reincarnation affected all animate beings, these legends restrict it to a relatively small number of instances, all of them concerning either deities or mythical personages. Assuming, however, that similar legends were current among the Gaulish Celts, it can be readily appreciated that they would have lent themselves to misinterpretation by classical
commentators familiar with the Pythagorean theory (*Celtic Mythology*, 122).

There are two possible instances of transmigration in Welsh literature: Lleu, after being struck his death blow became an eagle, and Taliesin. Taliesin despite his claim of multiple births throws no light on this subject, since his births are not the same transmigration of souls that Pythagoras taught. All that the Taliesin story shows is a belief in successive transformations and the occasional re-birth (18).

The difficulty of examining the Welsh stories is that they have a heavy Medieval overtone as products of the Christian Middle Ages. It is debatable whether the supernatural elements in Welsh literature of the Middle Ages are from a "foreign and later influence, or to the conservatism which we have noted elsewhere in Welsh tradition but which has left but sparse remains in the literature" (Chadwick, *The Celts*, 185). These Medieval overtones make it impossible to examine the tales in a pre-Christian context.

In the Medieval Welsh material the majority of characters who have the ability to change their shape are deities from the Other-World. However, outside of the few works on which this study concentrates, there is a whole realm of folklore of witches turning themselves into hares, swan maidens, brothers transformed into white crows, werewolves and so forth which suggests a wider realm of possibilities (19). The stories selected for this study deal mostly, but not entirely, with humanized deities changing their shapes. It is quite possible that the audience was not unaware of the old significance of these characters and half remembered that they were indeed old gods. The fact of the matter is that these deities are so buried in the narrative and embedded in a Christian/Medieval culture that they hardly appear as more than humans with certain magical abilities.
It appears, based on the information above, that both Welsh and Icelandic cultures could have believed in a person's ability to shift their shape to some other form. However, the evidence examined is certainly not strong enough to carry the weight of the argument. The linguistic evidence alone can not support the argument since a majority of the words used here show up in the sagas. As for knowledge of the pre-Christian religion of both the Celts and the Scandinavians, we know very little except from what outside sources and Christians had to say. With the Welsh sources, we are more dependent upon the oral folklore recorded in the last century. Since the Norse and Icelandic material also depends upon oral folklore regarding the same subject, oral folklore could be a valid way to assess this question fairly. However, the previous century was hardly the Middle Ages. As for the historical evidence mentioned in this chapter it spans too vast a time period to consider this question accurately. The fact of the matter is that there will always be someone somewhere who believes in another person's ability to change their shape to another form at any given time. The folk-motif of shape-shifting suggests many things about the human mind and our relation to the world around us. It points in part to our psychological make up and our world view from a time too long past to remember. In fact:

an examination of the enormous mass of evidence for the belief in metamorphosis suggests that man's idea of personality, or perhaps rather of the forms in which personality may lurk, is an exceedingly fluid one. There had everywhere been a stage of human thought when no clear distinction was drawn between man and the rest of the universe, between human and animal, between animate and inanimate (MacCulloch, "Metamorphosis", 593).

Now that we have examined the probable origins and development of shape-shifting and
the evidence related to the belief in shape-shifting it is time we make a literary examination of the Medieval stories found in the Welsh and Icelandic literature.
Endnotes for Chapter III

1. MacCulloch is the only author to have written extensively upon this subject (see bibliography). Eliade, Ford, and Matthews have also written on the subject of shape-shifting, but either repeat what MacCulloch has written or have examined it from a shamanic perspective.


8. H.R. Ellis Davidson, "Shape-Changing in the Old Norse Sagas," in: *Animals*


10. The first part of the term berserkr, berr meaning naked or bare, may have come from the fact that these men fought without mailcoats, throwing off their armour when the berserkr frenzy overtook them. However, the more recent interpretation of this term, since 1860, accepts bear as the meaning of berr instead of bare. See endnote in H.R. Ellis Davidson, "Shape-Changing in the Old Norse Sagas," in: *Animals in Folklore* (eds. J.R. Porter and W.M.S. Russell. Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1978), 126-142. The terms berserkr, serkr, and ulfhednar may be found in *An Icelandic-English Dictionary* (ed. Richard Cleasby. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), berserkr on page 61, serkr on page 523, and for the word ulfhednar see page 245 under the word hedinn the modern Icelandic word for a jacket or a coat.


12. The conversion of the Icelanders to Christianity took place in 999/1000 A.D.

13. Miranda J. Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth* (New York: Routledge,


16. The goddess Ceridwen was said to be the patroness of the Druids, making hut also a type of magic deriving from the female line, but it does not carry the same connotations as seidr. For the definitins of galdr and seidr see: An Icelandic-English Dictionary (ed. Richard Cleasby. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), galdr on page 187 and seidr on pages 519-520.


CHAPTER IV

SHAPE-SHIFTING IN MEDIEVAL WELSH LITERATURE

Introduction to Medieval Welsh Literature

The folk-motif of shape-shifting plays an important role in the characterization and plot development in certain works of Medieval Welsh literature. So far we have examined the possible ideas behind the literary development of shape-shifting in Medieval literature. The theories presented of shamanism and the separable soul, the double, and the psychological projection are not as obvious in the Medieval Welsh literature as they are in the Icelandic Sagas. The basic principles are there in the Welsh literature, but they have been altered to fit their Medieval audience. It is true a certain majority of the characters are considered by scholars to be gods and goddesses of the old Brythonic pantheon, but for the purpose of this study they will be examined as literary characters and creations of the author.

Apart from the significant amount of shape-shifting found in the tales about to be discussed, it should also be noted that there is a great deal of animal symbolism surrounding certain characters, foreshadowing their personalities and transformations. Animals play an important role in Welsh literature and folk-lore. Animals are respected, herded, hunted and consumed. Certain animals, like the boar or the stag in Medieval Welsh literature, are associated with the Other-World. They are often portrayed as
messengers from, or guides to the Other-World.

There are two basic principles concerning animals in scope of Medieval Celtic literature. The first is the concept of the enchanted creature. This involves an animal possessing supernatural qualities beyond that of an ordinary animal, including human speech, extraordinary wisdom, or the ability to communicate with the Other-World. The second principle is that of shape-shifting, in which an animal has assumed a different shape either from another animal, a human, or a divine being. Shape-shifting may occur in one of three ways; the first is when a god or a human with magical powers changes from a human to an animal form or vice versa by choice. The second is when the shape-changing is imposed on one being by another as punishment, revenge, or a lesson to be learned. The third type of animal shape-shifting is when a creature may be transformed for a particular purpose to serve some need. Most of the time the metamorphosed creature retains its human faculties despite its new appearance. There appears to be an ease of interchange between the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic perceptions of the pre-Christian Celtic culture: "There was no rigid barrier in the Celtic mind between the human and animal form. This must imply that animals were not considered to be significantly lower in status than human kind" (Miranda Green, *Animals in Celtic Life and Myth*, 195). This demonstrates one aspect of the duality in Celtic thought and literature, where everything seems to have a double meaning for some purpose.

Next to the Greek and Romans, the Welsh have one of the oldest extant literatures in the whole of western Europe (1). Welsh literature extends in an unbroken tradition from the sixth century to modern times (2). All of the tales about to be discussed come
from a corpus of works called the *Mabinogion* (3). The earliest collection of the *Mabinogion* can be found in the *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch* which was compiled about 1350 A.D. and in the *Llyfr Coch Hergest* dating to about 1400 A.D. Portions of some of the tales can be found in *Peniarth MS 6* which dates to about one hundred years earlier than the *Llyfr Gwyn Rhydderch*. The consensus on the actual date of these tales agrees that they are all older than the manuscripts in which they are found (4).

Very little is known of the *Cyfarwydd*, who entertained the court with tales like the *Mabinogi*. He was endowed with the knowledge of the traditional lore and learning which was necessary for society to function. There is no direct evidence regarding the relationship between the *Bardd* and the *Cyfarwydd*, who no doubt belonged to the same privileged class of learned men. Unfortunately there are no references to the *Cyfarwydd* in the Welsh laws; the recorded laws only pertain to the *Bardd*. Sioned Davies makes a valid point on the composition of these stories when she states: "these eleven tales are not written versions of oral stories, but rather the result of composition-in-writing. However, it is certain that the authors were drawing on oral material to varying degrees" ("Written Text as Performance: the Implications for Middle Welsh Prose Narratives," 134-135).

The four linked tales found in the collection of the *Mabinogion* are generally called the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, they include: *Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed*, *Branwen Daughter of Llyr*, *Manawydan Son of Llyr*, and *Math Son of Mathonwy*. These four tales are considered the oldest of the Medieval Welsh tales, possibly recording the actions of the humanized gods of a Welsh pantheon (5). The accepted date for which the *Four Branches* appeared in writing for the first time is between 1050 and 1120 A.D. (6), but
the tales themselves are considered to be much older deriving from oral tradition and the
Cyfarwydd (7).

The general consensus of scholars concerning the authorship of the Four
Branches of the Mabinogi, is that they are the work of a single individual "not a reporter's
transcript of a spoken tale, but the product of one mind, a deliberate artistic piece of
literature" (Sioned Davies, The Four Branches of the Mabinogi, 13). However, it is also
believed that the Four Branches have undergone a lengthy evolution and had substantial
changes at the hands of several storytellers (8). It is possible that the author was a cleric,
since monasteries were important centers of learning and there is a strong emphasis on
the good qualities and virtues of the major characters. Members of important Welsh
families entered the monasteries, bringing with them the stories they had heard from the
Cyfarwydd (9).

Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed

The first of the Four Branches of the Mabinogi begins with Pwyll, Prince of
Dyfed in which there is no human to animal or theriomorphic shape-shifting, but there is
an exchange of shapes between Pwyll and Arawn, king of Annwn (10). The story begins
with Pwyll, of whom the text says one day "it came into his head and heart to go a-
hunting" (trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, The Mabinogion, 3). While he was out
hunting, he and his dogs got separated from his men. He found himself alone chasing a
stag. However, another pack of dogs, white with red ears, entered the scene and brought
down the stag. The stag in this story is symbolic of nature and the wild forest, speed,
strength and wisdom; "thus in both Welsh and Irish traditions the stag is bound up with the notion that gods needed living humans to come to their realms and employed stags as intermediaries" (Miranda Green, Animals in Celtic Life and Myth, 167). Pwyll has his dogs chase away the other dogs and thus encounters Arawn, king of Annwn. It is a great disservice to Arawn that Pwyll has committed in driving away his dogs. Most scholars view the exchanging of shapes between Arawn and Pwyll for a year and a day as punishment of Pwyll. For in order to gain Arawn's friendship Pwyll must at the end of the year fight Hafgan, a king of Annwn whose domain is next to Arawn's.

There is more to the shape-shifting in this case than the obvious idea of punishment. At Pwyll's court in Arberth "it came into his head and heart to go a-hunting" (trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, The Mabinogion, 3), it would seem that the desire was not entirely his own. Perhaps by magic, because Arawn needed a human to defeat Hafgan, Arawn influenced Pwyll to act as he did. In return for fighting Hafgan, Arawn governs Pwyll's kingdom better than it has ever been governed before. Pwyll, despite spending each night with Arawn's wife, plays the role of the chaste friend. This unexpected virtue of Pwyll is the basis for a strong friendship and exchange of gifts with Arawn. It also earns Pwyll the title "Head of Annwn."

At the end of the year, Pwyll goes off to fight Hafgan who is the only person to truly suspect that Pwyll is not Arawn. Hafgan after being stuck a mortal blow says to Pwyll: "Ha, chieftain,...what right hadst thou to my death?" (trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, The Mabinogion, 6). This is further proof that Arawn might have had ulterior motives in switching places with Pwyll. Perhaps Hafgan could not be defeated
by a person from Annwn, but only by a human. If Hafgan did see through the guise he
gave no clue of it until he was mortally wounded. Hafgan begged to have Pwyll finish
him off, but Pwyll refused, knowing the second blow would have brought Hafgan back
to full health. Thus Pwyll defeats Hafgan.

Shape-shifting in this case only serves one purpose, which is not punishment.
Arawn clearly had a motive in mind when he came upon Pwyll. The text does suggest
that Pwyll's desire to hunt was not entirely his own idea and could have been influenced
by Arawn. Arawn is almost too ready with the terms of retribution for Pwyll's act of folly.
It would appear that Arawn had been watching Pwyll for some time and knew that with
instruction Pwyll would be able to defeat Hafgan. So under the guise of punishment
Arawn makes Pwyll take his place for a whole year. The fact that Arawn puts no
stipulations on bedding his wife makes it seem as though Arawn did not expect Pwyll to
be chaste. In fact Arawn tells Pwyll: "I will set thee in Annwn in my stead, and the fairest
lady thou didst ever see I will set to sleep with thee each night" (trans. Jones and Jones,
The Mabinogion, 6). Pwyll's ability to restrain himself is the cause of much admiration on
Arawn's behalf. It also strengthens the bond of friendship between the two kings. Shape-
shifting in this case was instigated by a king of the Other-World to serve his own purpose
in destroying an enemy and to explore the character identities, not as punishment for
stealing another man's felled stag. This incident brought on by the stag, begins Pwyll's
dealings with Annwn, thus setting up the rest of the Four Branches.
Manawydan Son of Llyr

In the Third Branch of the Mabinogi, Manawydan Son of Llyr (11), there is a greater amount of shape-shifting to be found than in the previous story. The difficulty with the shape-shifting in this story is that most of it takes place outside the narrative and it is not until the very end that all the strange occurrences are explained to the reader in full. The story once again takes place in Dyfed where Pryderi son of Pwyll ruled. A great mist descended upon Dyfed and all the people and their dwellings disappeared save Pryderi, his wife Cigfa, his step-father Manawydan, and his mother Rhiannon (12).

One day while hunting, Manawydan and Pryderi spotted a shining white boar (13), which appeared from the bushes and ran into a mysterious caer. Pryderi, following his dogs, against the advice of Manawydan and disappeared in the caer. Manawydan did not go inside. Instead he returned home where Rhiannon berated him for leaving Pryderi. She immediately set out for the caer, entered the hall, and became trapped inside along with her son. As night fell a strange mist covered the land and made the caer, Rhiannon and Pryderi both disappear.

With the disappearance of his wife, his son-in-law, and his dogs there was no way that Manawydan and Cigfa could make a living in Dyfed except by farming. Manawydan planted three fields of wheat. Unfortunately each time Manawydan was ready to harvest his wheat the entire field disappeared. The night he was ready for the final harvest he watched the field all night in order to catch the culprit. The mouse he caught, out of the hundreds that came to carry off his wheat, was exceedingly large and could not move as
Manawydan made a noose to hang the mouse. In successive order a clerk, a priest and a bishop appeared before Manawydan to beg for the life of the mouse until Llwyd son of Cil Coed appeared in his own shape and informed Manawydan that the mouse he was about to hang was his pregnant wife whom he sent with his warband and ladies of the court to destroy Manawydan's wheat. He claimed as well that he placed the spell on Dyfed, made Rhiannon to wear the collar of an ass, and made Pryderi wear the gate-hammers collar, both of whom carried hay for Llwyd.

It is obvious Llwyd has the ability to transform his shape as well as the shapes of others from this story. He also has the ability to vacate the land of human inhabitants and their dwellings creating a waste-land. There is no mention of the Other-World in regard to Llwyd, but it seems likely that he was a part of Annwn like Arawn and Rhiannon (14). In any case Llwyd is a very powerful character. His malevolent behavior may seem to be unprovoked, but he was acting: "to avenge Gwawl son of Clud, through friendship for him, did I cast the enchantment, and on Pryderi did I avenge the playing of Badger in the Bag on Gwawl son of Clud, when Pwyll Head of Annwn wrought that... ill-advisedly" (trans. Jones and Jones, *The Mabinogion*, 44-45).

Rhiannon, before she met Pwyll, had been promised in marriage to Gwawl son of Clud. Rhiannon not wanting Gwawl went off to seek Pwyll in the *First Branch*. The union seemed pleasing to Pwyll and a feast date was set. Unfortunately Gwawl arrived at the feast and tricked Pwyll into giving him Rhiannon. A year later when Pwyll disguised as a peasant showed up to the feast for Rhiannon and Gwawl, Pwyll tricked
Gwawl into getting into a magic bag that could never be filled. Pwyll and his men then
beat upon Gwawl while he was helpless in the bag and made him promise to never take
revenge upon Pwyll for this act.

To his word Gwawl did not take revenge upon Pwyll, but his friend Llwyd sought
revenge upon Rhiannon and her son Pryderi whom he turned into horses or asses in
punishment for the wrong that Pwyll committed. It should be mentioned at this point that
Rhiannon is often equated with the goddess Epona, goddess of horses for her association
with the magic white horse she entered the story upon (15). Her son Pryderi is also
associated with horses in the First Branch. Pryderi disappears shortly after his birth on
May eve. Every year on that same night a man named Teymon Twryf Liant had a horse
that would foal. However each year on that night his foal would disappear. On this
particular May eve of Pryderi's birth he stayed awake to watch his horse and when a giant
hand came through the stable to steal the foal he cut off the arm. Outside the stable he
found Pryderi and later reared him as his own son. Rhiannon, for the disappearance of
her son, which everyone thought she had killed, was forced to sit at the horse block for
seven years, relating her story to all who would listen and carry strangers and visitors
upon her back to the court. The transformation of Rhiannon and Pryderi into horses or
asses is in no way surprising to the audience, in fact the audience has been prepared for
it since the First Branch.

Needless to say Manawydan through his own intelligence forces Llwyd to make
everything as it was and made him swear to never take revenge again upon this family.
The act of transformation in this case was indeed done as punishment for a wrong
committed in the past. The revenge, however, is once removed in this case. The person carrying out the punishment is only a friend of the former victim and the person on whom it should be carried out on is deceased. In one respect Rhiannon is more responsible for what happened since it was her decision to marry Pwyll instead of Gwawl. The child of Rhiannon and Pwyll gets punished for the very reason that he is their child and none other. The warband, the wife, and the ladies of the court get turned into mice because the author needed some way to have a confrontation between Manawydan and the creator of the waste-land that was once Dyfed. Llwyd himself in the original story probably did not change his semblance each time into some ecclesiastical figure. It seems more likely that Christianity influenced the author concerning Llwyd's various appearances. Llwyd's changing his shape into progressively important and domineering figures would have been changed to fit Christian ideology, which might have covered a pagan influence on the story at this particular point.

The plot motives for the use of shape-shifting are clear. There were loose ends in the First Branch with Gwawl and Pwyll. There was also the introduction of the children of Llyr as the title Manawydan Son of Llyr indicates (16). Llwyd by changing his shape builds up the tension of confrontation with the enemy as Manawydan defies Llwyd's important, moral, and religious figures of society. The warband and ladies of the court turned to mice are there to aggravate Manawydan further and so that Manawydan can finally begin to make some progress into clearing up the mess of Dyfed and his family. Rhiannon and Pryderi had to serve some sort of penance for the past wrong against Gwawl as stated above and the fact that they were horses or asses is not surprising given
the clues in the First Branch. The *Third Branch of the Mabinogi* acts as a convergence, a place where the characters of the first two stories come together and interact, where wrongs of the past resurface and get cleared up again.

**Math Son of Mathonwy**

The *Fourth Branch of the Mabinogi, Math son of Mathonwy*, is often discussed when examining shape-shifting. It is probably one of the most intriguing *Branches* for this very reason. A brief summary will be necessary in understanding the conditions surrounding the shape-shifting. The story begins: "Math son of Mathonwy was lord over Gwynedd...and at that time Math...might not live save while his two feet were in the fold of a maiden's lap, unless the turmoil of war prevented him" (trans. Jones and Jones, *The Mabinogion*, 47). Gilfaethwy, a nephew of Math by his sister Don, fell in love with Goewin Math's foot-holder. Gwydion, Gilfaethwy's brother, discovered Gilfaethwy's secret and contrived to help him by starting a war with Pryderi of Dyfed. Gwydion as well as Math was a great magician. Gwydion changed the shapes of inanimate objects like mushrooms and concocted horses and dogs of such fine quality that Pryderi gave in return for these gifts his hogs from *Annwn*. When twenty-four hours had passed and Gwydion's gifts had turned back into their original form Pryderi and his people were upset and war was begun. Math set out for war, while Gilfaethwy stayed home and raped Goewin. The outcome of the battle was not beneficial for Dyfed. Gwydion killed Pryderi in single combat in front of both armies.
When Math returned home and Goewin brought suit against Gilfaethwy and Gwydion, Math was enraged. As punishment for the rape of Goewin and the unnecessary slaughter of Pryderi, Math "took his magic wand and struck Gilfaethwy, so that he became a good-sized hind, and he seized [Gwydion] quickly (though he wished to escape he could not), and struck him with the same magic wand, so that he became a stag" (trans. Jones and Jones, *The Mabinogion*, 52). Math then ordered the two to go off for a year and procreate. At the end of a year the brothers returned to court and the fawn they had borne Math turned into a boy and named him Hyddwn (17). He then changed Gwydion into a sow and Gilfaethwy into a boar and ordered them to procreate again. This was a just punishment for Gwydion since Pryderi could not sell or give his pigs away until they had procreated and they had not. Gwydion traded for the pigs, but the gifts were false transformed objects and thus began the war. At the end of a year they returned to Math where he turned the young boar they had conceived into a large auburn haired boy and named him Hychdwn. Math then made Gwydion a wolf and Gilfaethwy a she-wolf for a year. At the end of a year they returned with a wolf-cub whom Math turned into a boy named Bleiddwn and returned Gwydion and Gilfaethwy back into their own shapes.

Since Gilfaethwy had committed the rape it was only fair that he serve being the female twice, and since Gwydion had planned the whole affair it was only just that he serve at least one term as a female sharing the burden of birth. The act of transformation was indeed an act of punishment, but more than anything it was a lesson for the two brothers. Each brother by serving a turn as a female animal learned what it was like for Goewin when they committed their atrocious act. Lessons usually accompany
punishment, but in this case it is clear that Math had both principles in mind when he transformed Gilfaethwy and Gwydion.

However, during the three years that all of this was going on Math was lacking a foot-holder. Gwydion suggested his sister Aranrhod. To test her worth as a maiden Math made her step over his wand. As she did so she gave birth to a rich yellow haired boy and a small something else that rolled away from the scene. The boy is named by Math as Dylan Eil Ton (18). After Dylan's baptism he immediately made for the sea "and there and then, as soon as he came to the sea he received the sea's nature, and swam as well as the best fish in the sea" (trans. Gwyn Jones and Thomas Jones, *The Mabinogion*, 54). This suggests that there is probably shape-shifting involved in this scene. It is believed by many that Dylan became a fish or a seal when he reached the sea (19). In Scotland and Ireland there is a strong belief in the superstition that seals had a supernatural ancestor and that females could remove their skin and be beautiful maidens similar to the swan maiden stories. I believe that this folk-belief applies to this incident concerning Dylan since he immediately took to the sea and "received its nature." Furthermore the act of baptism often changes a person if not physically then spiritually, receiving their "true nature," so in this case Dylan received his true nature which had to do with the sea.

The small something that rolled away Gwydion picked up and put under his cloak. When he left the presence of Math and Aranrhod he placed this something in a trunk at the foot of his bed until one day he open the trunk and there was a small boy. He took the boy to Aranrhod and informed her the boy was her son. The shame Gwydion pressed
upon her by summoning her to Math and the incidents which followed forced her to deny
knowledge of her son. Gwydion who acts and is called the boy's father in the text by the
author refers to himself as the boy's uncle. Most scholars tend to agree that Gwydion's
interest in the boy is more fatherly and think that he is in fact the boy's actual father, thus
having committed incest with his sister at some point (20). Aranrhod denied her son a
name, arms and a wife. Gwydion by use of his magic changed his and the boy's
appearance and tricked Aranrhod into naming her son Llew Llaw Gyffes and arming him.
In such a way Gwydion forced her son upon her, giving her the father position whereas
Gwydion acted more as his mother. However, Aranrhod after being duped twice by her
brother laid the last destiny upon her son: "that he shall never have a wife of the race that
is now on this earth" (trans. Jones and Jones, The Mabinogion, 57).

For the first time Gwydion was unable to help Llew. Gwydion went to his uncle
Math and together they gave Llew land and created the most beautiful woman ever made
out of flowers--Blodeuedd. Blodeuedd's creation can be viewed as shape-shifting since
it consisted of the manipulation of an object's form. This type of shape-shifting is more
along the lines of creation. Gwydion and Math were not changing the shape of a creature
already living, instead they took the inanimate yet living flowers to create a woman.
However, she had no heart and soon proved faithless. Llew could only be killed in a
particular way and Blodeuedd though deception discovered how. She gave the
information to her new lover Gronw Bebyr who did all that Llew told Blodeuedd, but
when Gronw threw the arrow to kill Llew, Llew became an eagle and flew away. This too
is a form of shape-shifting rather than metempsychosis as will be explained below.
Gwydion discovered Blodeuedd's treachery and set off to find and rescue Lleu. Gwydion followed a sow who led him to Lleu perched in an oak tree dropping his rotting flesh upon the ground. Gwydion bit by bit sang Lleu down from the tree where he struck Lleu with Math's wand and changed Lleu back into himself. Gwydion then turned Blodeuedd into an owl for her crime. Gronw Bebyr was forced to suffer the same death blow that Lleu had been exposed to, except that Gronw died and did not transform his shape. Lleu's transformation into an eagle is not metempsychosis. He either had the same magical abilities that his uncle and father had or he did not inform Blodeuedd of all the particulars surrounding his possible death and thus became an eagle as a result.

Gilfaethwy and Gwydion are duly punished for their crimes against Goewin, Pryderi and Math. They are both forgiven at the end of their sentence. We hear no more about the children born as animals and turned to humans by Math. Each of the transformations Gwydion and Gilfaethwy underwent became more masculine in their natures. The boar and the stag represent fertility, but the boar also represents sensual vices such as lust and lechery (21). The final transformation portrays wolves as marauders, preying on the weak. This last transformation best represents the two brothers and their behavior. Despite Gilfaethwy only giving birth to two of the offspring, they are all considered his rather than Gwydion's children. After all it was Gilfaethwy's violence committed against Goewin that was the true crime.

The transformations of Lleu and Dylan are of a different sort of shape-shifting than the ones mentioned above; they are a transformation of survival. It should be noted here that no transformation in this tale of a person except Lleu and Dylan is done without
the aid of Math's wand. Dylan went to the sea and became a fish or a seal of his own accord, suggesting that is what he was meant to be. As for Lleu, he was incubated in a trunk and when he was struck a mortal blow became an eagle. It is my belief just like his brother that his original form was something other than human, for Lleu his form was that of an eagle. When Lleu was struck his death blow he returned to his original shape in order to escape death. It was only by the aid of Math's wand that Gwydion turned him back into human form. The entire circumstance surrounding Lleu suggests that he was born a bird. A small something escaped from Aranrhod, a something that Gwydion put under his cloak. Gwydion placed this something in a trunk wrapped in silk until sometime later he heard a cry from the trunk and found a small boy therein. Lleu's human body was struck but not his eagle body, thus he could change into himself and fly away. It should also be noted that Lleu's transformation is opposite to Dylan's. Where it is in Lleu's nature to fly and become an eagle, it is in Dylan's nature, his brother, to swim. Thus the two boys are of opposite natures to one another.

Blodeuedd's punishment is more effective than any other that could have been conjured. As flowers she was beautiful, as a human she failed for lack of a heart, as an owl she reigns during the night alone shunned by other birds. She is the opposite of the eagle who is associated with the sun (22). She is forced into shame and to remember what she had done. It is a just lesson. It is here the author balances punishment with a lesson, but it is the lesson which is important and the punishment which is remembered.

Gwydion, the instigator of most of this, is from the family of Don. He does not need a wand to change inanimate objects into other things, or his own appearance for that
of another human, or the appearance of Lleu for a disguise against Aranrhod. However, he never exhibits the capability to change a human into an animal. Only Math possesses that power and that power is only within Math's wand. He does not have the ability of Llwyd son of Cil Coed in the *Third Branch*.

In this story shape-shifting does not serve as a plot motivator, nor do we see it coming as clearly as we did with Pryderi. Shape-shifting serves as a lesson more than a punishment in each case. By becoming an animal Gilfaethwy, Gwydion and Blodeuedd all learn a lesson as well as getting punished, but it is the lesson that stays with them for the rest of their lives. Blodeuedd's case is slightly different since there is no hope of her ever returning to human form, but since she was not human to begin with but something of the earth, the best punishment for her is being turned into something that can not rest long on the ground. This last statement demonstrates the reason why Lleu's marriage failed. If Lleu's true nature is that of an eagle, associated with the sun and sky and Blodeuedd, originally made of flowers, is bound to the earth, this shows that their natures were too different to be compatible and their marriage would fail. Her becoming an owl, puts her in part in Lleu's place as being of the sky or air, but also puts her on her own at night rather than with the day or the sun. She can not alight upon the earth without fearing to be caught, shunned or eaten. She is in fact banished from her former realm, which is the worst punishment imaginable for anyone.

According to W.J. Gruffydd:

The great figures of *Annwfn* appear in the *Mabinogion* in the second stage of their evolution; that is to say, when they have ceased to be gods but have not yet become normally human; whatever their god-like attributes they retain are
indistinct. They trail around them clouds of their old divinity, but they are clouds without much form or substance (Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogi, 22).

What makes these characters distinct is their air of hud enchantment, their possession of mysterious power or malevolent magic. The Four Branches over all is not a mythological document, it makes use of mythological and other materials, but foremost it records the traditions of these god-like characters for their own sake, creating a literary work to entertain, not a mythology to instruct.

Lludd and Llefelys

Thus we conclude our survey of the Four Branches and move onto two of the independent native tales. The first story to be discussed is Lludd and Llefelys. Although this story contains no human to animal shape-shifting it does contain animal to animal shape-shifting. Since animal to animal shape-shifting occurs in a few of the Norse sagas it is appropriate to this study. In this particular story of Lludd and Llefelys we have an expanded, reworked version of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Brut y Brehinoedd. This version of the tale probably appeared in written form sometime during the thirteenth century (23).

The story of Lludd and Llefelys is concerned with the disturbance of the social order of Britain. Lludd was king of Britain and Britain was plagued by three things. The first plague was the Coranieid. The Coranieid were people who could hear every word whispered in Britain, thus no harm could befall them. The second plague was a scream which was raised every May eve causing men to lose their strength, women to lose their children, and the earth to be barren. The third plague was that no matter how much food
was prepared for the king's court none was enjoyed except what could be eaten on the first night.

It is only the second of the plagues which concern this study. The scream was raised each May eve by a dragon of Lludd's realm which fought with a foreign dragon of another folk. Lludd on the advice of his brother Llefelys measured Britain to find the exact center of the island, dug a pit, placed a tub of the best mead in the pit and a silk cloth over the tub and waited the night on May eve. The dragons arose from the pit and fought in the shape of monster animals while on the ground, but once they rose into the air they became dragons again. When the dragons had grown weary they fell into the shapes of two little pigs on top of the silk covering which sunk to the bottom of the tub where the dragons then drank up all the mead and went to sleep. They were then buried in a stone coffer in the earth and so long as they were not removed no plague should visit the island of Britain from elsewhere.

This story although it contains fantastical animals such as dragons, still contains the motif of shape-shifting. The shape-shifting seems to be more of the transformation combat type rather than any other particular form of shape-shifting. We are not told what sort of monstrous animals the dragons became, but apparently each is trying to outmaneuver the other. The shape-shifting here serves its purpose by being an interesting way to perform combat with mythological creatures, who themselves explain why there is a cry raised up on each May eve.

The dragons themselves represent sovereignty and are more than likely the same two dragons who appeared in Nennius' *Historia Brittonum* "de Ambrosio." In Nennius,
the red dragon represented the British, while the white dragon represented the Saxons. Nennius did not include shape-shifting as an attribute of the dragons in the *Historia Brittonum*. However, at the direction of Emrys, Vortigern dug up the dragons and placed them on the silk cloth where they began to fight one another until they flew away. The Nennius story is obviously supposed to take place after the *Lludd and Llefelys* story. Thus Britain was able to fall to the Saxons once the dragons had been released.

It is interesting that the final shape the dragons take in *Lludd and Llefelys* is that of two little pigs. These are, from what we learned in the *Four Branches*, the gifts of *Annwn*. It seems safe to say that the author of this story was looking for some sort of domestic, harmless animal for the two dragons to become to end this part of his tale. However, it should be noted that there is no way to differentiate boars from domestic pigs in literature. Pigs were crucial not only as food, but to the pre-Christian religion as well. Boars could be powerful destructive creatures associated with the Other-World, or the main dish at a celebratory feast. Their destructive nature and their association with feasting cause them to be linked to death and the Other-World (24). So in the end the dragons ended up as "little pigs," which implies that they are young and not of a destructive nature, are still associated with the Other-World as they sink into their death-like slumber.

*Culhwch and Olwen*

The story of *Culhwch and Olwen* shows none of the social and moral concerns that the *Four Branches* or *Lludd and Llefelys* do. As with all heroic and wonder tales the
The author is more concerned with types rather than with personalities and character development, but at the same time the author gives the tale a certain color that is just as wonderful as the dialogue and personal development of the characters of the *Four Branches*.

*Culhwch and Olwen* is the longest of the early surviving native prose tales given a written form in Welsh in the Middle Ages. The final written version of this tale belongs to about 1100 A.D., but as with every other tale discussed so far it belongs to an older tradition (25).

The tale of *Culhwch and Olwen* is as complex with regards to shape-shifting as the three of the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* discussed. Not only do we have a wide variety of shape-shifting caused by God and particular men of Arthur’s warriors, but there is also a great deal of animal symbolism. The story begins with Culhwch's birth in a pig run, from which the author derives his name. His mother died shortly after his birth and his father waited the appropriate time before taking a new wife.

His new wife had a daughter by her first husband. Until the new wife could be trusted Culhwch's existence was kept in secret. When the wife discovered that the king had a son she requested that he be brought forward. The wife told Culhwch he ought to be seeking a wife and that her daughter was quite suitable. Culhwch claimed he was too young to marry. This angered his step-mother and she swore a destiny upon Culhwch that he would never marry until he won Olwen the daughter of Ysbaddaden Chief Giant. Culhwch immediately fell in love with Olwen's name and set out for his cousin Arthur's court for help. Arthur had many warriors of supernatural abilities and they set out on the
tasks that Ysbaddaden requested Culhwch to complete before he could marry Olwen. There is little point here in going over each warrior and his unusual ability or the tasks set by Ysbaddaden. From here on I will only discuss the tasks and people pertinent to my subject.

One of Arthur’s men was a man named Gwrhyr, Interpreter of Tongues. He was probably one of the most useful warriors on this quest in terms of helping Culhwch. Gwrhyr, in the quest to find Mabon son of Modron, who was stolen from his mother when he was three nights old, spoke with each of the oldest animals in Britain to discover Mabon’s whereabouts. He began with the Ouzel of Cilgwri, who sent him to the Stag of Rhedynfre, who did not know where Mabon was either. The Stag sent him to an older creature, the Owl of Cwm Cawlwyd, who sent him to the Eagle of Gwernabwy, who sent him to the oldest animal of all, the Salmon of Llyn Llyw. Since it is only Gwrhyr who spoke with each of these animals it would seem that each animal was speaking their own language and that Gwrhyr Interpreter of Tongues was able to understand animal speech.

On another adventure Gwrhyr helped a colony of ants, whose home was burning. In return the ants helped Culhwch harvest the grain needed for Olwen’s wedding feast. This is another instance of Gwrhyr speaking with the animals.

Apart from being able to speak to the animals Gwrhyr was also able to change his shape by self transformation. In the hunt of the Twrch Trwyth (26) to get the comb, shears and razors that lay between his ears, Gwrhyr changed into a bird in order to approach and speak with the Twrch Trwyth to try to get the items peacefully. His attempts failed and thus Arthur and his warband hunted the Twrch Trwyth for the prized
While fighting Twrch Trwyth and his seven little boars, "His men asked Arthur what was the history of that swine, and he told them: 'He was a king, and for his wickedness God transformed him into a swine" (trans. Jones and Jones, *The Mabinogion*, 109). It is interesting to note that Arthur is quite knowledgeable about this subject, whereas no one else seems to know anything. However, it was because of Arthur that the wolf bitch Rhymhi and her two whelps were changed back by God after Arthur and his men found Rhymhi and her brood. No doubt part of this is to show that Arthur had some sort of private line to God, that he was good and just and thus God would listen to him and bestow wisdom upon him. However we are not told why Rhymhi and her children were transformed into wolves to begin with or why the kings of Erging, Nynnyaw and Peibyaw were changed into oxen. We only know the result and since God transformed the Twrch Trwyth it would seem logical in the sense of this story that God transformed Rhymhi into her animal form as well.

Another of Arthur's warriors with the ability to shape-change was Menw. Menw changed himself into a bird to see if the treasures were indeed between the ears of the Twrch Trwyth, but he did not speak to the Twrch Trwyth. Instead he returned to Arthur, who then sent Gwrhyr to discuss the possibility of retrieving these treasures peacefully.

The story *Culhwch and Olwen* is a mass of half-remembered legends lumped together in Arthur's court and it "is fully charged with survivals of a faith in the credibility of frequent and easy interchange between human and animal form" (D. Simon Evans, *Culhwch ac Olwen*, ix). Gwrhyr and Menw both change their shapes to help Arthur and
Culhwch, rather than for their own purposes. Of the two, Gwrhyr is the more powerful, being able to speak with the animals as well as shape-shift his own form. The Twrch Trwyth and Rhymhi were transformed by God for faults of the past and Rhymhi at the request of Arthur was transformed back into human form. In this story shape-shifting is not unexpected; we have super-human characters setting out on impossible tasks all for the sake of one person--Culhwch. Given the background of this tale, shape-shifting comes as no real surprise, in fact if there were no shape-shifting the story would seem less fantastic and not nearly as endearing. So in a sense shape-shifting is needed to create a more fantastical setting rather than to serve as a plot or character development. All the shape-shifters in the story would have been just as important and no different if they had not changed their shape. So the motif of shape-shifting in this case adds a mythic feeling to the Arthurian world.

Peredur Son of Efrawg

In addition to the *Four Branches* and the independent native tales discussed above there is also a collection of three romances that are based or were the foundation for tales written by Chretien de Troyes. Scholars have dated the Welsh tales to the best of their abilities, but no one is quite certain whether the Welsh or the French tales came first (27). The average date for the composition of the Welsh Romances is 1100-1200 A.D. Thus they are of a later date than the Four Branches. These tales are more "Celtic" than their French counterparts and thus deserve to be looked at in this study.
Of the three romances only *Peredur Son of Efrawg* contains a shape-shifter. Peredur, Arthur's nephew, is usually portrayed as an innocent, kept so by his mother who did not want to lose another son to the battlefield (28). He came across three knights one day in the wood and thus his interest was aroused. He soon set out for Arthur's court, with no manners and no clue as to what he was doing, but his heart was pure and thus he succeeded in most everything he did.

Each time the shape-shifter in this story appeared the audience was given no clue that he was anything other than what the narrator described. Any actual transformation of this character occurred outside the narrative and it is only within the last pages that the narrator had the shape-shifter identify himself:

‘Lord,’ said the youth, ‘I came in the guise of the black maiden to Arthur's court, and when thou didst throw away the board, and when thou slewest the black man from Ysbidinongyl, and when thou slewest the stag, and when thou didst fight against the black man of the slab; and I came with the head all bloody on the salver, and with the spear that had the stream of blood from its tip to the handgrip along the spear’ (trans. Jones and Jones, *The Mabinogion*, 187).

The youth turns out to be Peredur's cousin. The fact that most of the time he appeared as something black shows that either his ability to change his shape colored the mind of the author or that he represented an enemy on the surface to Peredur. In this case the cousin shifted his shape to push Peredur into becoming a good knight since he really did not seem to know much of anything when he departed from his mother. The cousin, by shifting his shape, helped to give Peredur some characterization, move the story along and tie up a number of loose ends in the tale. The fact that there is so very little given about the cousin and his ability, might be due to the lateness of the composition. The fact that
he never changed into animal form is also interesting, perhaps the author was not so much a believer in shape-shifting, but thought the idea of being one person and not another was more intriguing.

The black hag that Peredur's cousin first appeared as, like the stag and the dragons, represented sovereignty. The black maiden fits into the hag transformation theme, in which a hag becomes a beautiful maiden usually to the relief of the young knight that has recently married her, based on some former agreement (29). The black maiden constantly rebuked Peredur. Her sole purpose was to lead Peredur to his destiny. She counter-acted the role his mother took in denying her son true knowledge of being a man and warrior. She is a subconscious figure and a teacher. In a psychological perspective the dark figure of the hag could be viewed as Peredur's anima. She certainly presents herself in such a way. However, it seems unlikely that the Welsh author would have considered this in his writing as this is more of a modern viewpoint. The cousin's role has obviously been expanded from the original, given the very few clues we had of his transformation, but, by being a shape-shifter, the cousin neatly completes the story without leaving any questions unanswered.

Hanes Taliesin and His Poetry

In contrast to *Peredur Son of Efrawg* the *Hanes Taliesin* and Taliesin's poetry abound with the idea of shape-shifting. It is an unusual type of transformation nonetheless and does not correspond with the other Welsh types of transformation examined thus far. Gwydion and Gilfaethwy were changed as a result of outside
enchantment. The Twrch Trwyth had been transformed as a result of his wickedness. Lleu's transformation was more or less to escape death. Arawn and Pwyll exchange shapes which also appears in *Taliesin*, but there is nothing to explain the metempsychosis type of shape-shifting that occurs in the poetry from the *Book of Taliesin*.

The story of *Hanes Taliesin* is found only in late manuscripts dating from the sixteenth century, but some of the poems offer linguistic evidence which proves that the story is much older (30). It is believed that the real poet Taliesin of the sixth century underwent the same sort of mystical change in folk-memory as Virgil did between the sixth and ninth century, becoming a legendary figure whose name became attached to well known folk-tales (31). Sir Ifor Williams believed that the earliest portions of the saga took a literary form in the ninth century, but others have given the date of composition as late as the thirteenth century. The only consistent fact stated about this tale is that it did not reach its present form until the sixteenth century (32).

The story of Taliesin begins with Gwion Bach, who was chosen by the sorceress Ceridwen to tend her cauldron for a year. The contents of the cauldron contained three drops of knowledge she was brewing for her son Morfran. On the last day Ceridwen "was asleep at the moment the three marvelous drops sprung from the cauldron, and they fell upon Gwion Bach, who had shoved Morfran out of the way" (trans. Patrick Ford, *The Mabinogi*, 163). The drops scalded his thumb which he stuck into his mouth to cool off, thus attaining the three drops of knowledge intended for Morfran. Gwion, suddenly brilliant, realized Ceridwen would kill him when she awoke from her nap, so he left. Ceridwen upon awaking discovered what had happened and set out in pursuit of Gwion.
Bach. Gwion turned himself into a hare to escape quicker, but Ceridwen pursued him as a black greyhound. Gwion became a fish and Ceridwen transformed into an otter-bitch. Gwion then became a bird, but Ceridwen pursued him as a hawk. Gwion in a last attempt to escape became a grain in a stack of wheat, but Ceridwen became a high crested black hen and swallowed him. Gwion Bach seemingly loses, but instead he uses Ceridwen's femininity. Nine months after swallowing Gwion Bach she gave birth to Taliesin who was Gwion Bach reborn. He was too beautiful to kill so Ceridwen set him adrift on the water to leave his destiny to fate.

This is the most typical type of the transformation combat, rather than that of the two dragons in *Lludd and Llefelys*. One person is the pursued and the other is the hunter. Also typical of this tale type, one person is the master and the other the apprentice who has acquired their knowledge illegitimately from the master. It should also be noted as in Peredur, most of the things Ceridwen becomes are black, denoting evil.

Taliesin was rescued from the water by Elphin, who named him Taliesin for his bright brow. Taliesin told Elphin in verse that he fled from Ceridwen as a frog, a crow, a chain, a roe, a wolf cub, a wolf, a thrush, a fox, a martin, a squirrel, a stag's antler, iron in the fire, a spear-head, a bull, a boar, and a white grain of pure wheat. This gives Elphin more information than the author gives the reader. However, Taliesin was speaking in verse and could be prone to poetic license in this part of the text.

Apart from changing his own shape, Taliesin is able to change the shapes of others. He exchanged the semblances of the serving girl and his mistress, Elphin's wife, in order to preserve his mistress' honor. So it would seem that Taliesin has a magic
similar to that of Gwydion in the *Fourth Branch* in being able to exchange the appearance of one person for another. In that case he has the same gift as Arawn in the *First Branch* as well. One can only assume that by gaining this wisdom that Ceridwen was brewing in her cauldron Taliesin learned not only infinite knowledge, but magic as well. The transformation combat in part serves its purpose in that all knowledge and shape-shifting abilities Taliesin had gained came from the cauldron that Ceridwen brewed. Without the drops of knowledge from the cauldron Gwion Bach would never have become Taliesin.

Since much of Taliesin's knowledge comes out in verse, the cauldron must also be one of inspiration and poetry, very much like the cauldron of inspiration in Norse mythology (33). A *bardd* like Taliesin not only constructed verse, but was also the keeper of knowledge. Thus Taliesin, a creation of the cauldron, is able to defeat the beirdd (34) at Maelgwn's court. The *Hanes Taliesin* also mythologizes Taliesin, who was an historical person of the sixth century, giving him unquestionable prominence and knowledge among the *beirdd*. So being all knowledgeable he has the ability to change his shape as well as the shapes of others.

The *Cad Goddeu*, a fourteenth century poem (35) from the *Book of Taliesin*, deals with Taliesin's creation and transformations, his dealings with trees and the divine family of Don and his omnipotence in all things. Taliesin thus becomes a vehicle for displaying traditional and exotic learning, primarily for an entertainment value. He had been many things: an enchanted sword, rain drops, a star beam, a word in letters, a book, lanterns of light, a bridge, a path, an eagle, a coracle in the seas, a bubble in beer, a drop in a shower, a sword again, a shield, a string in a harp, a spark in fire and wood in a bonfire.
Many of Taliesin's exploits have been attributed to shamanism and poetic identity. The poet assumes the identity of his subject thus becoming all that he says. To some degree the bardd, which Taliesin was, "was regarded as a shaman or magician who was able to exercise great power over things, and it was firmly believed that his verse constituted an important means to that end" (Ceri Lewis, "The Historical Background of Early Welsh Verse," 15). During the time of Giraldus Cambrensis, some beirdd in Wales were still called awenyddion, inspired poets or seers similar to the Irish fili the Irish word for poet, which literally means seer. It was believed in Wales that bards were endowed with profound intuitive faculties. The word awen refers to a poetic muse, but is also related to the word awel meaning breeze, thus having associations with prophetic verse.

Taliesin, as a historical character and poet, was mentioned by Nennius in the Historia Brittonum written about 800 A.D., where he states: "Tunc Outigirn in illo tempore fortiter dimicabat contra gentem Anglorum. Tunc Talhaern Tataguen in poemate claruit; et Neirin, et Taliessin, et Bluchbard, et Cian, qui vocatur Gueinth Guaut, simul uno tempore in poemate Britannico claruerunt" (ed. John Morris, Nennius: British History and the Welsh Annals, 78). Yet in the Hanes Taliesin Taliesin is hardly his historical self.

The Cad Goddeu is interesting regarding the subject of shape-shifting and has created a lot of confusion in the past as well as in the present. This confusion is not only due to the nature of the subject, but to the language of the poems as well. It is extremely difficult to translate Taliesin's poems with any clear understanding. However, it seems obvious that Taliesin's beginning talk of transformation, of being things such as the foam to list a few.
upon water and the spark in a fire, are a form of poetic identification. Taliesin is calling upon these elements, strong and necessary to society, for support in his poetry. By calling upon these elements he introduces what he really has to say. Therefore Taliesin at least in this poem is not actually talking about transformation or shape-shifting, he is using a poetic style to begin and end his poem. Since he was supposed to be so knowledgeable it makes sense that he would use this set up for his poem. It appears then, once the introduction and the conclusion have been withdrawn, that one of his purposes in composing this poem is to give the tree list since that is the next thing he does. His transitional phrase: "I am not one who does not sing; I have sung since I was small. / I sang in the army of the tree's branches before the ruler of Britain" (trans. Patrick Ford, *The Mabinogi*, 184). We are not told who the ruler of Britain is, but many have supposed him to be Arthur since he is mentioned at the end of the poem. With this last phrase he moves from poetic identification to the battle of the trees in which Gwydion with the aid of God and Math's wand transformed the trees into men. The transformation of these trees into men is intriguing; these tree-men would be quite large and indestructible creating a very powerful army. This transformation may have been influenced by the fact that:

the names of many battles recorded in historical sources, or otherwise known in medieval Wales, tend to contain 'coed' 'forest' or a synonym, presumably because wooded areas were often on boundaries between kingdoms or territories, and -like fords and rivers- would have been strategic battle sites (Marged Haycock, "The significance of the *Cad Goddau* Tree List in the Book of Taliesin," 304).

This tree list is most certainly not an alphabet as has been held by people such as Robert Graves (36). It is, according to Haycock, more likely a mock heroic parody on the
ultimate army, possibly one that was to return with Arthur when he came back to free Wales from the English.

Taliesin then concludes his tree battle with his own creation. He states he had neither mother nor father, that he was created from flowers and wood from the soil, as Blodeuedd was created by Math and Gwydion. In fact he tells his audience: "Math enchanted me before I was mobile;/ Gwydion created me, great magic from the staff of enchantment;" (trans. Patrick Ford, The Mabinogi, 186). He even claims descent from Modron the mother of Mabon in Culhwch and Olwen. He also states: "I was in the rampart with Dylan Eil Mor,/ In a cloak in the middle between kings," (ibid). My interpretation of these last lines is that he was born with Dylan eil Ton of the Fourth Branch. Dylan Eil Ton translates as Dylan son of the wave, the word Mor in this poem means sea. So Dylan Eil Ton and Dylan Eil Mor are one and the same. Lleu was hidden in Gwydion's cloak in Math's presence, but the something that was Lleu fell from the folds of Aranrhod's cloak. It seems wrong to suggest that Taliesin is claiming to be Lleu, I believe instead he is claiming to be the magic that created Lleu and Blodeuedd. As a poet he is claiming to possess the greatest legendary magic in the history of his people, that poetic and memorable magic found only in the tales of the Cyfarwydd, which is the essence of his transformational abilities.

The theme of claiming to be magic or poetry runs throughout Taliesin's verses. This idea is apparent in The Fold of the Bards also found in The Book of Taliesin. In this poem Taliesin contemplates the poetry of Britain, claiming he is the harmonious one, the clear singer, the steel, the serpent, and love. This is not so much transformational poetry
as it is a description of himself and his gift of poetry. The terms steel and serpent are
metaphors for strength and flexibility both of which are necessary in creating verse. Later
in the poem he uses similar metaphors by saying: "I am a cell, I am a cleft, I am a
restoration, / I am the depository of song; I am a literary man" (trans. W.F. Skene, The
Four Ancient Books of Wales vol. 1, lines 25-26). He is claiming to be the thread of
poetry, the keeper of song, and part of the inspiration surrounding poetry.

If he is the thread of poetry and a result of Ceridwen's magic brew then these
claims could come up again in his poetry in the style of poetic transformations. An
untitled poem from the Book of Taliesin known in W.F. Skene's The Four Ancient Books
of Wales as XXV contains a list of transformations which seem to be tacked on to the end
of a poem unrelated (37) and so seem out of place with the rest of the poem. These
transformations are unlike Taliesin's Song of his Origins (38) found in the Hanes
Taliesin. This poem reiterates the Hanes Taliesin in which he describes his flight from
Ceridwen: "I have been a prized defense, the sweet muse the cause, / And by law without
speech I have been liberated" (trans. Lady Charlotte Guest, Taliesin, lines 5-6). The laws
imparted to Taliesin would be the same laws that Ceridwen mentions in her poem
Ceridwen's Chair in The Book of Taliesin also attributed to Taliesin. In this poem
Ceridwen's persona states: "When are judged the chairs, / Excelling them (will be) mine,
/ My chair, my cauldron, and my laws" (trans. W.F. Skene, The Four Ancient Books of
Wales, lines 21-23). Since the poem relates the same information as the Hanes Taliesin
there is very little new to relate about this poem concerning shape-shifting. However,
Taliesin's original transformations from the Hanes... keep reoccurring in his poetry. It is
obvious that his initial transformations play a large role in his poetry.

The last poem to be discussed of Taliesin is the *Angar Kyfynadwt* sometimes translated as the hostile confederacy, but its real meaning is uncertain. This poem is also found in *The Book of Taliesin*. It is a discussion of poetry and tradition once again as seen through Taliesin's eyes. He gives reference to the poet Talhaearn (39) and God by saying: "It is God's minstrel, / through the language of Talhaearn" (trans. Sarah Higley, *Between Languages*, lines 68-69). Most all the poems in *The Book of Taliesin* refer to God as a source or a creator. His reference to God here is then not so unusual. He goes on to talk of *Awen* and how it can be discovered in everything from earth to *Annwn*. Then he lists everything that he knows such as why the salt is salty, or why echoes occur, but it all returns to *Awen* which is what he claims to sing. *Awen* for him comes from the depths of the water and the flow of the river. Throughout the poem he refers to poetry as water or a drink. Like water, good poetry should flow. Considering Taliesin gained his knowledge and poetry from the potion that Ceridwen created his association of poetry with liquid is explained. Once again he ends with the transformational theme. He claims to be a blue salmon, a dog, a stag, a buck, a trunk, a drinking horn and so on. At the end of this transformation sequence he states: "a red-clawed hen received me, / combed foe. / I rested nine nights / in her womb as a lad" (ibid, lines 245-248). So once again he is referring back to the incident with Ceridwen without actually naming her. He ends his poem by saying: "I am Taliesin, / I can compose a correct line, / until the end shall last my praise of Elphin" (ibid, lines 259-262). Unfortunately this is more a poem about Taliesin's poetry than it is about his transformations, however the transformations at the
end of the poem relate directly back to the *Hanes Taliesin* again.

After examining the above Medieval Welsh tales, we find that transformation and shape-shifting are used for a variety of literary reasons. Shape-shifting serves to develop a character's personality, to serve as a plot motivator, to punish and teach a lesson to those who have committed an act of wrong, to spruce up a story by adding some magic and mythic qualities, to tie up loose ends, and to create a poetic work. Shape-shifting and transformation also serve to display the true natures of the characters. Characters are often transformed into animals their personalities or behaviors resemble. All things considered, the motif of shape-shifting always serves some purpose in the story. Shape-shifting is never just there because the character desires it. The author has to command the character to desire the ability to shift their shape for a reason.
Endnotes for Chapter IV


2. Welsh literature extends in an unbroken tradition from the sixth century to modern times, however the oldest recorded Welsh verse belongs to Scotland and Northern England. Welsh or Brythonic was the primary Celtic language spoken in Britain until the middle of the seventh century.

3. *The Mabinogi* was first translated into modern Welsh and English by Lady Charlotte Guest in the middle of the last century. It is from her English translation in 1849 that the title of the eleven Medieval Welsh tales became known as *The Mabinogion*. The word *mabinogion* only occurs once in the original text, but it seems most likely that it was a scribal error. Despite this the term has stuck to the four tales known as *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*.

4. All the tales about to be discussed are certainly older than the manuscripts. The tales are more than likely older than the earliest date given for the written version of these tales. They were originally composed as an oral story rather than a written story. See: Sioned Davies, *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi* (Llandysul: Gomer Press, 1993).

5. The composition of *Culhwch and Olwen* is possibly older than the *Four
Branches. The general date for *Culhwch and Olwen* is sometime around 1100 A.D., whereas the *Four Branches* are somewhere between 1060 and 1120.


8. The tales were more than likely composed as oral compositions and evolved as they were handed down. They did not receive their final form until one person wrote them down in a manuscript resulting in our present day version.


10. *Annwn* is the Welsh Other-world; and for an interesting analysis of Doubling

11. Pryderi and Manawydan met in the Second Branch. In the beginning of this story Pwyll is dead and Manawydan homeless. Pryderi gives land and his mother Rhiannon to Manawydan and invites him to live in Dyfed with himselfand his wife Cigfa.

12. I have shortened this story, for the purpose of space, immensely.

13. The color white is symbolic of the Other-World. In this case the boar is used in the same way as the stag was in the First Branch to lure Pryderi into the caer.

14. Llwyd is more than likely from the Other-World. In the First Branch Rhiannon who the reader assumes is from the Other-World was supposed to marry Gwawl. Since the two were to be married it seems likely that Gwawl was from the Other-World as well. If this is the case then Llwyd is also from the Other-World by his association with Gwawl. However Pwyll was not from the Other-World, but had the exalted position of "Head of Annwn." Rhiannon chose Pwyll to be her husband because she apparently admired him and did not like Gwawl.

15. Epona was also the goddess of fertility and plenty.

16. Manawydan is from the family of Llyr, a wise and powerful family who ruled Britain until they were obliterated in Ireland in the Second Branch.

17. Math names and baptizes all three boys. Math says in the text: "The three sons of false Gilfaethwy, / Three champions true, / Bleiddwn, Hyddwn, Hychdwn Hir" (trans. Jones and Jones, The Mabinogi. 53) after the boys are all brought to his court. Respectively Bleidd means wolf, Hydd is stag, Huch means pig, and Hir is long or tall.
They are all names describing their original form before Math transformed them.

18. Dylan Eil Ton translated from the Welsh means Sea Son of Wave.


22. In Medieval Bestiaries and folk-lore the eagle is often associated with the sun.

23. The Brut Y Brehinoedd was written a century later than the latin Historia Regum Britanniae. See: Proinsias MacCana, The Mabinogi (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), 76-78.


26. The Twrch Trwyth was a boar which Arthur and his warband hunted in
order to retrieve the treasures which lay between his ears. The Twrch Trwyth was at one
time a king, but God transformed him into a boar because of his sins.

27. I am neither qualified or experienced enough on this subject to give an
opinion one way or the other.

28. Other Medieval stories in which Peredur is his usual naive self are *The Quest
for the Holy Grail*, *Sir Percyvell of Gales*, and Chretien de Troyes romance *The Story of
the Grail*.

29. A good example of the hag transformation story is *The Wife of Bath's Tale*
in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.

30. The *Hanes Taliesin* is not found in the Jones and Jones translation of the
*Mabinogion*. It was originally included in Lady Charlotte Guest's *Mabinogion*, but I am
using Patrick Ford's more recent translation instead.

31. See: Juliette Wood, "Virgil and Taliesin: The Concept of the Magician in
Medieval Folklore" in *Folklore* vol. 94: i (1983), 91-104.

32. See: Juliette Wood, "Versions of *Hanes Taliesin* by Owen John and Lewis

University of California Press, 1984), 100; for information regarding Kvasir and poetry.

34. *Beirdd* is the plural form of *bardd* in Welsh.

35. The date of the *Cad Goddeu* as well as the other poems from *The Book of
Taliesin* is uncertain and may be earlier than the Fourteenth Century.

36. Robert Graves in his book *The White Goddess* suggested the tree list of the
Cad Goddeu was a druidic alphabet.

37. I am not entirely certain that these transformations found in this poem belong to Taliesin. The transformation section reads:

"The good Henwyn brought
A tale from Hiraddug.
I have been a sow, I have been a buck,
I have been a sage, I have been a wild sow,
I have been a shout in battle.
I have been a torrent on the slope,
I have been a wave on the extended shore.
I have been the light sprinkling of a deluge,
I have been a cat with a speckled head on three trees.
I have been a circumference, I have been a head.
A goat on an elder-tree.
I have been a crane well filled, a sight to behold.
Very ardent the animals of Morial,
They kept a good stock.
Of what is below the air, say the hateful men,
Too many do not live, of those that know me."

It appears the transformations belong to the tale Henwyn was relating to Taliesin rather than to Taliesin himself. Unfortunately Henwyn has been named as a magic pig, a horse as well as couple of men. See: Rachel Bromwich, Trioedd Ynys Prydein (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1978), 406.


39. Talhaearn was mentioned by Nennius in the quote above as one of the great beirdd of Britain.
CHAPTER V

SHAPE-SHIFTING IN MEDIEVAL ICELANDIC LITERATURE

Introduction to Medieval Icelandic Literature

After examining the Medieval Welsh literature concerning shape-shifting it becomes obvious that this folk-motif serves a purpose in the literature as stated in the previous chapter. The question then becomes whether or not this same motif serves a similar purpose in Medieval Icelandic literature. The reason this study uses Icelandic literature rather than other Germanic continental literature is because: "Iceland has the only Germanic literature suitable for...comparative work. No other Germanic literature of the Middle Ages has the same quantity of pre-Christian material" (Richard North, *Pagan Words and Christian Meanings*, 1). The phrase pre-Christian material incorporates the ideas and things that have their basis in magic, such as shape-shifting. This does not mean that these stories deal solely with pagan practices; it only denotes that the ideas that were once part of the pagan culture of the Germanic people are here incorporated into these Medieval texts without losing much of their original power or meaning.

The thirteenth century is considered the classical age of saga writing, and most of the sagas about to be discussed were written during this time period. A majority of the sagas used in this study are the *Fornaldar sogur* or sagas of ancient times rather than the
Islendinga sogur or the family sagas of Iceland. It seems appropriate to this study to exclude both the Prose Edda and the Poetic Edda, the first because it pertains only to the Norse gods rather than humans and the second for similar reasons.

There are two words for sorcery in Old Icelandic: seidr and galdr both words are from the root meaning a song or a chant (1). The practice of seidr involves spells or incantations intoned at night by sorcerers seated on a platform. Seidr may be performed either to work good, evil, or to foretell the future. It is said that Freyja was the first of the Norse gods to teach seidr magic to the Norse, but both Loki and Odin used this type of magic. The techniques of seidr are intuitive like shamanism, employing a trance state and relying on animal and plant materials. Galdr magic depends more on the will of the sorcerer who is aided by runes, symbols, and a chanted text. The power of a galdr resides in himself; there is no concern over the power conjured up nor does galdr differentiate between good or bad forces (2). The major difference between seidr and galdr magic is that as stated previously, seidr was a type of magic associated with women. Seidr magic transgressed the boundaries between male and female, human and animal, thus altering nature. If a man were to perform seidr magic it would strip him of his masculinity. It was important to keep the gender categories separate. Hence galdr magic, associated with writing and poetry, became honorable magic for men (3).

Many of the Fornaldar sogur present sorcerers as popular heros (4). The other characters do not seem to fear these sorcerers, but instead have an optimistic feeling towards their supernatural abilities. There also appears to be no compact between the sorcerer and the Devil as is found in most continental Medieval literature. It is interesting
to note that seidr magic began to disappear by the thirteenth century, but that galdr magic managed to continue (5). The cultural emphasis of this time switched from the seidr type to one that placed its emphasis on words and learning as well as on the individual:

frequently the sorcerer awoke the dead, in the early days to foretell the future, but in later times more often to acquire a familiar or an emissary to send elsewhere to harm or kill someone else. These familiars often took the form of birds or dogs or other animals...the folktales rest on a belief that the inner nature of animals and humans is the same and unchangeable...Humans can, therefore, as a matter of course change into animals and animals into humans. Indeed, the fetches that followed a person or family were usually in animal form (Terry Lacy, *Ring of Seasons*, 106).

However, the coming of Christianity brought together the former beliefs with the Christian beliefs. Christianity did not alter either folk beliefs or sorcery in Scandinavia as it did elsewhere. It was not until the sixteenth century when the Reformation and Protestantism began that these views began to change (6).

The older magic, seidr, is the type of magic imperative to this thesis. Seidr magic, shared in Norse culture with the Samek, is primarily shamanistic. Shamanism constitutes ecstacy, auxiliary spirits, journeys to the Other-World, and the ideology of transformation which are all meaningful in connection to the belief in souls and spirits. The shaman held an important role in society; he was a magician, a poet, and a warrior. The Samek shamans were renowned in Scandinavia as early as the Viking period, which explains why the sorcery represented in the sagas is similar to the shamanism of the Samek.

The practice of shape-changing enters the sagas a great deal, but there is more than one type of shape-changing involved. The first type involves a person being able to disguise his/her own or another person's outward appearance. The second type involves
a person possessing the power to go into a trance while part of their consciousness leaves their body. Thus the consciousness travels vast distances in the shape of an animal to carry out some errand for their owner. The first type of shape-changing called *sjontiverfing* is similar to a hypnotic suggestion. For the second type of shape-changing there is no specific name in the literature relevant to the soul (7).

In the sagas, where shape-shifting occurs, people are frequently associated with animals and their well being is dependent upon their animal *fylgja* or fetch. There is a distinction between the animal *fylgja* and the animal form assumed by the spirit of the shape-shifter. In the latter case the animal body is only active while the owner is in a state of unconsciousness. The former *fylgja* is the active, invisible companion which could attend on its owner while in a waking state. The *fylgja* could also precede its owner in arriving somewhere as a form of physical foreshadowing (8).

Animals were as important to the Scandinavians as they were to the Celts. The Old Norse word for shape *hamr* was also used to describe animal skins, wings, and feathers of birds. When a man was gifted with supernatural powers he was called *hamrammer* or shape-strong. In Scandinavian mythology shape-shifting:

was not limited to male warriors or deities. Many of the major and minor goddesses and supernatural beings such as Freyja, the Valkyries, *fylgjur* [fetches], or the witches of the family sagas could all metamorphose into or were associated with animals (Katherine Morris, *Sorceress or Witch?* 100).

There is just as wide an acceptance of shape-shifting in the sagas as there was in the Celtic literature, but perhaps more so in Icelandic literature than in Welsh.
Written Icelandic literature builds upon a long tradition of oral folk-lore. By the tenth century the Icelanders were already renowned for their skill at story telling throughout northern Europe. Icelandic poets, called skalds, made themselves available to the royal courts of Scandinavia and Viking-conquered territories such as England and Ireland (9).

All of the Icelandic sagas were written after the thirteenth century, yet these Family sagas concern themselves with the events of Iceland between 874 and 1030 (10). There is a strong tradition of imaginative writing pervading all Icelandic literature which became intensified in the romantic and fantastic tales written in the late thirteenth century. In this later literature the supernatural belongs to a realm of common experience available to everyone.

These supernatural tales that began developing in the late thirteenth to fourteenth century were called Fornaldar sogur or sagas of former times. These Icelandic prose narratives were based on the traditional heroic themes, whose numerous fabulous episodes and motifs created an atmosphere of unreality. Since these Fornaldar sogur deal so much with the supernatural, they will be the focus of this section, but not exclusively. The Fornaldar sogur to be included in this study are: The Saga of the Volsungs, King Hrolf and His Champions, Gongu-Hrolf’s Saga, the sagas of Hafdan Eysteinsson, Bosi and Herraud, and Egil and Asmond, as well as Sturlaug’s Saga Starfsama. The family sagas of the thirteenth century, the Islendinga sogur, will also be examined in the retrospect of the Fornaldar sogur. These sagas include the Eyrbyggja Saga and Egil’s Saga.
The Saga of the Volsungs

The first of the sagas to be examined is *The Saga of the Volsungs* (11). *The Saga of the Volsungs* is a good beginning for this comparison in that this saga and the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi* contain characters both human and god. The only difference between the two is that in the saga there is a clear definition of who is god, who is a demi-god, and who is human. To fully explain the story would take up too much space in the remainder of this thesis. From hence forward only the elements of shape-shifting will be discussed in relation to the narrative.

Odin's grandson Rerir and his wife were unable to have children. Odin, hearing Rerir's prayers for a child, sent a wish-maiden (12) named Hljod, the daughter of the giant Hrimnir. Hljod flew to earth in the shape of a crow to give Rerir a golden apple sent by Odin to fulfil Rerir's wish. Not long afterwards Rerir's wife became pregnant. However she did not give birth to the child for almost six years. It was only on her death bed that the child Volsung was cut from her. When Volsung was of an age to marry, Hrimnir sent his daughter Hljod to him for a bride.

Already it is seen that Volsung's family is semi-god-like, being the grandson of Odin and married to a wish-maiden with whom he had ten sons and one daughter. It would seem that the shape-shifting in this beginning is more or less a way to demonstrate the abilities of the gods and to get the story moving.

Volsung marries his daughter Signey to King Siggeir against her desire. Things did not go well between the two families, resulting in the death of Volsung and the
capture of all of Signey's brothers. All the brothers were put into stocks to await their death. Each night Siggeir's mother, through witchcraft and sorcery, assumed the shape of a wolf eating one brother a night. When it last came to the youngest brother's turn, Signey's twin Sigmund, Signey smeared honey on Sigmund's face and in his mouth. When the she-wolf came she began to lick the honey from his face and mouth, as she did Sigmund bit out her tongue by the roots and so she died.

In this second case shape-shifting occurred through witchcraft; there is no association with any divine beings. However, this instance does serve to help develop the plot. Volsung had ten sons, yet the story can not follow each of the men. The wolf serves as a way to get rid of the other nine men for a specific reason. If say, an ordinary wolf came around and began to eat each of the brothers, it would not carry the same weight as a shape-shifter does. The she-wolf, Siggeir's mother, kills the brothers out of evil intent. An average wolf would kill because it was hungry. Thus it is seen that Siggeir's family is one of evil inclinations.

The third instance of shape-shifting brings together both divine lineage and sorcery. In order to get revenge upon her husband Signey needed a child of the Volsung line. However, all the children Signey had by Siggeir prove as weak as their father. Signey realized the only way to get her revenge is to have a child that is a pure blood Volsung. So Signey and a sorceress exchanged shapes for three nights so that Signey could lie with her brother Sigmund. This results in the birth of Sinfjotli. In this case the exchanging of shapes involved magic from the sorceress, who was quite willing to do as Signey wished. The narrator informed the audience earlier in the story that Signey had
the gift of prescience. Yet despite her gift she does not possess the ability to shift her
own shape.

One of the most retold accounts from this saga is of Sigmund and Sinfjotli
donning the wolf skins. While in the woods together, they found a house with two men
inside:

a spell had been cast upon them: wolf skins hung over them in the house and only
every tenth day could they shed the skins. They were the sons of kings. Sigmund
and Sinfjotli put the skins on and could not get them off. And the weird power
was there as before: they howled like wolves, both understanding the sounds

During the time that they were in the wolf skins they think and act as wolves while
retaining their human logic. While in their transformational state they learn and are aided
by other animals in the forest. Sinfjotli ignored his father's warnings which resulted in the
two fighting and Sigmund getting the better of his son. Sinfjotli was seriously injured.
Sigmund, at a loss as to what to do, watched two weasels, one of which had injured the
other. The other weasel ran off into the woods to retrieve a plant to cure the injured
weasel. Sigmund then went out and saw a raven flying with a leaf. The raven gave the
leaf to Sigmund who then cured his son with it instantly.

In this type of transformation a magical object was needed, such as the wolf skins,
to undergo the transformation. It seems apparent from the text that they had no intention
of becoming wolves. It sounds more like they were curious and put the skins on. Once
on the skins could not be taken off. The two men were certainly transformed in this part
of the story to learn a lesson. They may have thought they were strong, but by their
transformation they learned the importance of working together and the value of
observing the world and learning from lesser creatures. Although it is not mentioned in
the story, the raven was a bird of Odin. It is only fitting that it was a raven that delivered
the two men to health, whether it was sent by Odin their ancestor or not.

The other frequently discussed incident of shape-shifting in this saga is the story
of Otr's ransom. Otr was a great fisherman:

he had the likeness of an otter during the day and was always in the river bringing
up fish in his mouth. He brought his catch to his father and thus greatly helped
him. He was in many ways like an otter. He came home late and ate alone with
his eyes shut, because he could not stand seeing his food diminish (trans. Jesse
Byock, The Saga of the Volsungs, 57).

One day Odin, Loki, and Hoenir were walking along and saw Otr resting on the river
bank with a salmon. Loki picked up a stone and stuck Otr on the head killing him. That
evening, after skinning the Otter, the Aesir (13) arrived at the home of Otr's father. The
Aesir were seized and a ransom was imposed upon them for Otr's death. The Aesir had
to fill the inside and cover the outside of Otr's skin with red gold. Loki was sent off to
collect the ransom. He went to Andvari's Falls. Andvari, a dwarf in the shape of a pike
and the son of Odin, was forced to give all his treasure to Loki. Andvari tried to keep one
ring back from Loki, but Loki took it. Andvari said that the gold and the ring would be
the death of whoever owned it. Loki used the whole treasure in the ransom and
proceeded to curse the father. Not long after this Fafnir, Otr's brother, killed his father
and took the treasure. He then became ill-natured and thus transformed into an evil
serpent upon his treasure. The other brother Regin became a smith, convincing Sigurd
to avenge him by killing his brother Fafnir.
The audience is not told the lineage of Otr, Regin and Fafnir, but it is obvious there is something special about this family since two of the three brothers transform themselves into animals. Otr apparently always had this gift. An Otter is a nonaggressive animal hunted for its pelt. It is more or less considered a friendly animal, almost human-like in its use of its paws. It is also an animal of both land and water, commanding some respect from humans for its ability to cope in both places. Loki, by slaughtering Otr, sets a series of events into motion. As far as Loki was concerned he was not only getting a dinner of salmon, but also an otter pelt. Otr's death must be repaid in gold to his family as custom demands.

The gold for Otr's death comes from a dwarf who also has the ability to be something other than he really is, a pike. There is no explanation to be offered for Andvari's transformation into a pike. His transformation is more or less an interesting point in the saga and something dwarves are capable of doing. Andvari is not pleased to surrender his gold to Loki, he especially mourns the loss of a particular ring which would have let him regain his treasure in full. The gold is cursed, in particular Andvari's ring, it only brings misfortune to all who possess it. It is possible that the gold could be responsible for Fafnir's transformation and not his family background. However, no one else who possessed the gold was transformed into a serpent. The gold is certainly responsible for a mental change in Fafnir, but not the physical transformation.

Sigurd, of the Volsung line, set out with Regin to kill Fafnir. Upon giving Fafnir his death blow, Fafnir imparted some wisdom to Sigurd the most important being that Regin will avenge Fafnir's death. Sigurd while roasting the heart of the serpent tasted the
juices of this organ to see if it was ready. Upon doing so Sigurd could suddenly
understand the speech of the birds. Sigurd took the advice of the birds. He ate the heart
of the serpent and killed Regin before Regin could kill him. By eating the heart of Fafnir
Sigurd gained immeasurable wisdom and supernatural strength.

This example is not a physical transformation. Instead, it is more of a mental
transformation although Sigurd also gains supernatural strength in this case. This
transformation is similar to the transformation that Taliesin underwent in the Hanes
Taliesin. Sigurd tasted the blood from Fafnir's heart and could suddenly understand the
speech of the birds. Taliesin tasted the drops of wisdom from the cauldron of inspiration
with similar, but more poetic results. In both cases we have the thumb of knowledge
(14), where the hero while cooking for another burns his thumb; sticks it in his mouth
whereby gaining knowledge. It should also be mentioned here that Sigurd upon Regin's
death gained the cursed gold and ring. The possession of the gold does not lead to a
physical transformation in this case. However, gaining the ability to understand the
speech of birds is in itself a half transformation in that the possession of such an ability is
immediate and an incredible asset to our hero. The important part of this transformation
is not only the great knowledge and strength Sigurd gains, but his new found ability to be
able to communicate with the animal world.

The story of Otr explains why the serpent Fafnir is guarding the cursed gold. The
story of Sigurd killing the serpent is the central part of this story. Everything up to this
point had been leading to Sigurd and this incident. From this scene on Sigurd becomes
a legend. There had to be a serpent because they were the most feared and terrific
creatures. The story behind Fafnir and his brother is a bit tragic in that gold was valued more than family. Family connections are very strong in this story because, despite Sigurd helping Regin, Regin’s connection to his brother is stronger than that to Sigurd. Just as Signey betrays her husband to avenge her father and brothers, Regin and later Gudrun tried the same.

By killing the serpent, Sigurd through the heart of the serpent, gained wisdom and strength beyond any other human including understanding the speech of birds. Sigurd did not use his ability to speak with the birds again, but as the reader has already seen birds are crucial to the story and possess great wisdom.

The last element of shape-shifting in this story involves Sigurd. Sigurd and his friend Gunnar exchange shapes as Gunnar’s mother Grimhild had taught them, so that Sigurd could ride through the wavering flames to reach Brunhild in the shape of Gunnar. For three days they kept up the charade until Sigurd left Brunhild and returned to Gunnar. Since it appeared as though Gunnar rode through the flames Brunhild married Gunnar. So the exchange of shapes was again done to aid one person and deceive another as when Signey tried this herself.

Most of the shape-shifting in this story is done in secret to gain some prize, whether it is gold or a wife. Otherwise shape-shifting is there to instruct the characters, by having them gain some wisdom from the experience or to explain to the audience the reason behind something. The story is full of animal symbolism especially in the use of fylgja in dreams, but since they do not themselves constitute shape-shifting they shall not be discussed here.
King Hrolf and His Champions

The story of *King Hrolf and His Champions* is another one of the fourteenth century *Fornaldar sogur* in which there is a great deal of animal symbolism and shape-shifting. The first incident of shape-shifting occurs some way into the saga in the story of Helgi.

One dark Yule eve King Helgi opened his door to "some poor tattered creature" (trans. Gwyn Jones, *King Hrolf and His Champions*, 246). This creature sought shelter in the King's bed. Helgi was quite disgusted by this creature, but the creature insisted that its life depended upon sleeping in his bed. Helgi took pity upon the creature and complied with its wishes. Some time later in the evening Helgi looked over at the creature, but saw instead a lovely elf-woman sharing his bed with him. The elf-woman explained that her step-mother placed a curse upon her, and until she could find a king that would share his bed with her she would remain as she was. Unfortunately Helgi could not leave well enough alone and insisted on sleeping with her. She declined at first, but Helgi was persuasive. The lady, as she left, informed Helgi that they had conceived a child together and that he must come to the boat house in one year to pick up the child. If he failed to do so it would result in trouble. This night results in the birth of his daughter Skuld, who becomes important below.

In this case shape-shifting into some unspecified appearance was caused by an outside influence, the step-mother. It took certain conditions to bring the lady back to her true form. This one incident sets up the rest of the story for the audience. The elf-
lady was a test for Helgi. He was compassionate enough to share his bed with the creature she appeared to be because her life depended on it. Helgi managed to pass this test when the elf-lady was transformed, however he failed the second part of the test. The second part of the test was to resist the beauty of the elf-lady, which he failed. She herself did not tempt him, it was all Helgi's doing. Helgi also failed the third part of the test; he failed to keep his agreement to pick up his child at the boat house, thus demonstrating his lack of interest or unwillingness to take responsibility for the result of his actions. The audience is wary the minute Skuld enters the saga, certain that she will bring evil intent to her brother Hrolf and everyone else. This one incident between Helgi and the elf-lady sets up the final battle at the end of the story and the collapse of Hrolf's kingdom.

The next occurrence of shape-shifting happens in the story of Bothvar. White, the daughter of the king of the Lapps, struck Bjorn her handsome step-son with a pair of wolf skin gloves while declaring that he should be a cave bear if he would not comply with her wishes. Therefore Bjorn became a bear by day and a man by night.

In the text White is referred to as a troll or a monster, which might indicate that her true appearance is something other than she appears. However, being the daughter of the Lappish king carries some weight. The Laplanders in the sagas frequently are sorcerers, able to control the elements and change their shapes. It should be mentioned that this magical association was also given to the Finns as well as to some of the Celtic people in the sagas. In the case of the Finns it might have just been a confusion with the Lapps (15). It is not specified in the text whether or not it was the words of White or the act of slapping Bjorn with the wolf skin gloves that caused the actual transformation. If
it did have something to do with the gloves it seems logical Bjorn would have become a wolf rather than a bear. It seems more likely that it was a combination of words and actions rather than just one or the other.

Bjorn, whose name means bear, had prescience of his death. He slept with his lover Bera, whose name also means bear, while in the shape of a man. Bjorn instructed Bera not to eat his bear flesh once he had been killed. Unfortunately White already suspected that Bera was Bjorn's lover and was carrying his children. Bera was forced to consume one mouthful and a very little morsel of the bear flesh so that when she gave birth to her three sons Elgfrothi was an elk from the navel down, Thorir had the feet of a hound, and Bothvar was fully human in his appearance. Bears usually give birth to two cubs, the fact that Bera has three children has no relevance to this except that Thorir and Bothvar look so much alike that people mistook Bothvar for Thorir. Their personalities were more alike than that of Elgfrothi who seems prone to violence and greed. Elgfrothi was not entirely cold hearted. When Bothvar came to see him, it was discovered that Bothvar was the weakest of the brothers. Discovering this Elgfrothi gave his brother the blood from his calf to drink and become stronger in a transformation situation similar to Sigurd consuming Fafnir's blood and heart.

This elaborate explanation of Bothvar's birth helps to explain the incidents in the last battle with Skuld. The significance of Bjorn and Bera's names have not gone unnoticed. It is only strange that none of their children bear the outward markings of a bear. It becomes apparent later on that Bothvar Bjarki, whose name means little bear does carry some bear attributes. Elgfrothi is the most puzzling of the three brothers. He
is violent and cruel, he not only got the mouthful of the taboo meat, but he also bore the
evil brunt of White's enchantment on Bjorn.

In the next example we do not have a physical shape-shifting incident, it is more
spiritual, but should be examined nonetheless. In the story of Bothvar, Bothvar meets a
young man named Hott who hides like a dog behind the bone shield wall and is overall
a complete coward. Bothvar in a sense baptizes him, by washing the filthy Hott from
head to toe in a fountain and forces him to be brave. The change in Hott though comes
after Bothvar kills the winged beast or troll as it is referred to and makes Hott drink the
animal's blood and consume its heart. At this point Hott is so brave, strong, and filled
with courage that his personality changes completely and he takes on the new name Hjalti
the Magnanimous. The so-called baptism cleared away his past as a coward, but the
change was not complete until he had consumed the blood and heart of the winged beast.
Thus Hott completes his transformation to become Hjalti. So Hott, like Bothvar, Sigurd
and Taliesin all transform, not their physical appearance, but their mentality by consuming
something magic whether it be a magic potion, blood or the heart of a magical animal.

In the part of the saga containing the Uppsala ride there is only one incident of
shape-shifting. We are told in the text that Athils was the greatest idolater and that he
worshiped a boar. It is then not surprising to discover that Athils sent a boar to kill Hrolf:
"the next moment in came the troll in the likeness of a boar, rampaging horribly like the
monster he was" (trans. Gwyn Jones, *King Hrolf and His Champions*, 299). The boar
is obviously a troll that through the bidding of Athils has become a boar. Trolls like
dragons belong both to the Other-World and to the human world. The troll, as the
dragons in the story of *Lludd and Llefelys*, neither speaks nor does anything but fight. Trolls seem to belong to the same odd realm of things that dragons do. They can be dumb, lacking speech, and animal-like or they can speak and think as lucidly as any human depending on what sort of character the author needs for that point in the story.

In the battle with Skuld, shape-shifting takes on a slightly different twist. Skuld's army consisted of elves, norns and other evil creatures like herself as well as humans. During the battle Bothvar Bjarki while sitting in his room went into a shamanistic trance, projecting a huge bear into the battle to fight for Hrolf. As long as this bear was fighting in the battle things went well for Hrolf. It was not until Hjalti came to Bothvar and disturbed his trance that the bear disappeared and a monstrous boar, the size of a three year old ox appeared. The moment Bothvar came out of his trance, Skuld found her magic no longer blocked, so she projected the boar, which was wolf grey in color with arrows flying from each bristle. Skuld, at this point, was also able to make her dead warriors rise again and fight.

The shamanistic trance demonstrates who has the real power in the story. Bothvar obviously inherited his ability from his parents and the magic which surrounded them. He also demonstrates that he is the only one of his brothers to carry the bear attributes of his family. Skuld's ability in this case derives from her mother who was an elf. Thus Skuld inherited her magic from her mother's line. It appears, at least in this story, that bears are good creatures and boars are most certainly not. In this survey however, this is the only instance where particular animals are given good and evil connotations.
This type of shamanistic shape-shifting is important to the last scene. If Bothvar had not been interrupted it seems likely Hrolf might have won the battle. Unfortunately he was disturbed, releasing the block on Skuld's magic. Had Bothvar been out in battle as a bear and not as a bear *fylgja*, he would not have been quite so powerful and the magic he used to block Skuld would not have been. In this way the author gives the reader some hope of things before he crushes Hrolf's army with Skuld's magic.

The transformations in this saga fall into the usual categories of plot development, punishment, and to help others. It is unusual that the good vs. evil connotations surrounding each incident seem to be magnified. In no other story examined thus far has there been any serious good or evil overtones. Granted the shape-shifting is accepted by the characters as though it were an everyday occurrence, but these are also characters that have to deal with the mistakes their parents made. Where one character such as Hrolf seems intrinsically good, his father Helgi was a more ambiguous character. Helgi was not evil, he was more thoughtless in his actions than bad. Skuld, herself, does not appear to be evil until given a reason to lash out against her brother and take over the kingdom. It is the good vs. evil association with the animals which is the most perplexing. The only "bad" animal witnessed thus far has been Fafnir as a serpent. Serpents are never good, but in this story neither are boars. Elks seem to be a bit ambiguous, but bears are definitely good. There is no comparison for the malevolence or benevolence of a shape-shifted animal on this scale in either Icelandic or Welsh literature. *King Hrolf and His Champions* is singular in this respect.
The saga of Gongu-Hrolf is also the work of the fourteenth century Fornaldar sogur type. The most notorious shape-shifter in this saga is Grim Aegir. Grim Aegir was found as a child by the sorceress Groa, who reared him and taught him witchcraft so that none could rival him. Not much was known of his past, but some people thought that:

Grim's mother must have been a sea ogress, for he could travel at will in both sea and fresh water... He used to eat raw meat and drink the blood of men and beasts. He would often change himself into the forms of various creatures and could do it so quickly that the eye hardly saw it. His breath was so hot that even men in armor could feel it burning them. He could spew venom and fire at people, killing both them and their horses, and they were helpless against him (trans. Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, Gongu-Hrolf's Saga, 31).

This passage suggests many things about Grim for the reader. For instance, he may be of a supernatural race, his mother being a sea ogress. However this is only hearsay, based on the beliefs of the other characters in the saga. His ability to travel as he does, his fiery breath reminiscent of a dragon or serpent, and his ability to change his shape all make him something other than human.

Grim does actually shift his shape in the story a few times. The first time he was the walrus that sank Hrolf's ships. The second time was during the big battle scene between Hrolf and king Eirik. Hrolf and Grim were fighting against one another when Grim turned into a winged dragon spewing venom over Hrolf. A man named Mondul caught the venom aimed at Hrolf in his bag and threw it at Snori Long-Nose, killing him. Grim only returned to his human form after he had killed nine men with his venom. This is the only detailed incident of shape shifting in the story. Grim changes his shape at other
times in the battle becoming a winged dragon, a serpent, a wild boar, a bull or any other
dangerous beast harmful to man, but these incidents are not explained or detailed in the
saga.

The only other character to change his shape in the story is that of the dead King
Hreggvid. It was ordained that Hreggvid could leave his burial mound only three times,
so on one occasion he became a swallow. As a swallow he delivered the hair of Ingigerd
to Earl Thorgny and set him upon his quest. The difficulty with this character is that he
is dead and thus has a different composition. He is not a sorcerer, nor any Other-world
creature such as an ogre or a troll. He is most certainly human, but he is dead. Being
dead gives him certain magical abilities. Anyone who after death is still able to sit upon
their burial mound and have a conversation has magical attributes. As far as this study
is concerned Hreggvid is the only deceased character to resume some fairly normal life
as a dead person rather than becoming a troll or monster.

In neither case do we have an example of a fully human being shifting their shape
into another. In the first case Grim Aegir had a supernatural mother and the education
of a witch. The second case involved a dead king. Grim Aegir was helping others against
the hero of the story, whereas Hreggvid transformed to help the hero. In either case
transformation came about to help someone else in the saga. This was done either to set
the saga in motion or to create a battle or fight scene to provide a more difficult adversary
to overcome.
In the story of *Halfdan Eysteinsson*, a fourteenth century saga, the shape-shifting incidents do not occur until almost the end of the saga. In the first scene entitled "Victory" Halfdan went into battle against King Harek of Permia (16) and King Finn of Lappland. Both Harek and Finn changed their shapes during the battle. King Finn: "turned himself into a whale...[hurling] himself on top of the men who were fighting him and crushed fifteen of them to death beneath him" (trans. Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, *Halfdan Eysteinsson*, 191). However, Finn was in the end defeated by Halfdan's two dogs who attacked him while he was still in the shape of a whale. King Harek, in the mean time, turned himself into a winged dragon, killing men with the swoop of his tail. Not only did Harek get his leg chopped off, but Halfdan defeated him with a blow to the neck.

In the scene entitled "fighting in Permia" Val, the grandson of king Harek of Permia, and his two sons Kott and Kisi were changed into winged dragons when they laid down upon the gold hoard Val dragged with him under the waterfall: "with helmets upon their heads and swords carried beneath their fins, there they rested until the time Gold-Thorir conquered the waterfall" (trans. Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, *Halfdan Eysteinsson*, 197-198).

Val's father king Agnar, married to king Harek of Permia's sister, after the battle escaped to Halogaland and became a notorious troublemaker. He built himself a burial mound and placed a huge amount of riches in it, "which he entered alive just as his father
had done along with his crew, and turned into a monster money and all" (trans. Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, *Halfdan Eysteinsson*, 198). From the text it does not sound as if Val transformed into a monster after he died. Given the previous instance of shape-shifting above, Val, like his son and grandsons, became a monster by lying upon the gold hoard, just as his father had done. It appears that this is a family trait concerning gold hoards. Considering that this family originated in Permia, Arctic Russia, and that there was a great deal of superstition concerning those people from the far north it is only natural that the shape-shifters in the story do come from Permia or Lappland rather than Norway. The shape-shifting in this story seems almost tacked on. Admittedly transformation is a good way to get rid of a character, especially if they are from Permia. Since this scene comes so close to the end of the saga it does seem as though the author was looking for some fanciful explanation to get rid of some of the not so good characters rather than use the transformations to further the plot.

Bosi and Herraud

The story of *Bosi and Herraud*, a story written around 1300, deals once again with shape-shifting and the illustrious Permia. King Harek of Permia could not be harmed by ordinary weapons, so Smid hit Harek in the face with a special short sword that his father's concubine Busla had given him (17). The blow upset Harek and he turned into a flying dragon, spewing venom and swallowing Smid. Harek also transformed into a boar after crashing on Siggeir's ship to fight Herraud. Harek almost killed Herraud in this scene, but got his snout cut off instead. However, a monstrous bitch appeared on the ship
and tore at the boar's groin, unraveling his guts before jumping overboard. Harek reverted back to his human shape and jumped overboard into the water to follow the bitch: "both sank to the bottom of the sea and never came up again. It's commonly believed that this bitch would have been Busla, since after that she was never seen again" (trans. Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards, Bosi and Herraud, 226).

After Harek had turned himself into a dragon he fought with an enormous bird called skergipr. This bird had an enormous head and was often equated with the devil. The bird and the dragon fought, until the bird crashed into the water and Harek crashed onto the ship. It is unclear if this bird is a previous manifestation of Busla or it is Bosi's father, whom he later pulls out of the sea after the battle (18).

Harek, being the king of Permia, is no exception to the shape-shifting rule of the far north. In the previous tale we were told about Harek's son-in-law and his grandchildren who were transformed when they laid upon a mound of gold. Harek appears to have more flexibility and control over his own shape than his relatives. It should also be noted that in each of these last few incidents the transformations occur while fighting or escaping from a fight.

Once again shape-shifting is used in the climax of a battle scene. The intent in using this folk-motif is clearly to make the battle more interesting and the villain more villainous. This saga follows the same pattern as the one above regarding shape-shifting. It is interesting to note that some of the characters are related. This does not explain the similar pattern in the use of shape-shifting, except in the fact Harek and his grandsons all come from Permia. However, the battle field is an opportune place for the author to use
shape-shifting, being a place of unleashed emotions and extreme bravery. It is also the perfect place for shape-shifters to demonstrate their ability in a useful and accepted way before other non-shape-shifters.

Egil and Asmond

The story of *Egil and Asmond* also belongs to the beginning of the fourteenth century. In this story Egil and Asmond meet Queen Eagle-Beak the giant who tells the two of some of her past exploits including the time she turned herself into a fly and crept under Ingibjorg's dress in order to rip her belly open at the groin. However Ingibjorg recognized her and banged her with a knife breaking three of Eagle-Beak's ribs. More importantly Queen Eagle-Beak was in possession of a magic glass that could either give shape to whomever she chose if they looked in it or blind the person in the same manner. Queen Eagle-Beak changed Egil and Asmond into giants while looking in the glass in order to help them. Egil and Asmond manage to save Brynhild and Bekkhild while disguised as the giants Fjalar and Frosti from the giant King Gaut and Hildir.

In this last case, Queen Eagle-Beak is a giant associated with powers which belong to the Other-World. Not only that, but she provides the magic mirror, an object of illusion itself in order to transform the two men, both to help them and to get her revenge upon Gaut and Hildir. Using transformation to disguise someone's appearance to achieve some motive has been examined already in the *Hanes Taliesin, Pwyll Prince of Dyfed*, and in *The Saga of the Volsungs*. In each case the motive was a different one: Taliesin was attempting to preserve his mistress, Arawn needed Pwyll to defeat Hafgan,
and Gunnar needed Sigurd to win Brunhild for him. In this case the cause is just as noble, but the person or giant, Queen Eagle-Beak, uses the transformation in order to exact her revenge. The characters in this saga are also a bit humorous and there is more description of what happens to Egil and Asmond after their transformation than in the previously mentioned stories. In this last respect *Egil and Asmond* is unique among the above mentioned stories.

**Sturlaug's Saga Starfsama**

The last *Fornaldar sogur* to be discussed is *Sturlaug's Saga Starfsama*, composed during the *Fornaldar sogur* age between 1300 and 1400. There is only one instance of shape-shifting in this saga and it is of the transformation combat type:

A Lapp who was in Franmar's force was designated to fight with Svipudr. Then they charged each other and fought vigorously and quickly, so that one could not catch a glimpse of it. Neither managed to wound the other. When the spectators looked again, they had suddenly disappeared, but two dogs had come, who were biting each other furiously. When it was least expected, the dogs disappeared, but up in the air men heard a great noise and, looking up, saw two eagles flying at one another in the air. With their beaks they were tearing off each other's skin so that the blood fell to the ground. The result was that one flew away, but the other fell to the earth dead. They never knew which one of the two that was (trans. Otto Zitzelsberger, *Sturlaug's Saga Starfsama*, 343-4).

Svipudr was the foster son of Vefreyja, who was "learned and wise in most things" (ibid. 336) as was Svipudr. This scene is important because it is the only true transformation combat in this study of Icelandic material. Once again one of the characters with the ability to shape-shift is a Lapp, the other has learned magical abilities with an unidentified ethnic background. The transformation combat comes at a point in the story
when both Sturlaug and Franmar's men are engaged in single combat. However nothing more is mentioned of this incident again. It serves its purpose by falling into the combat scene and fades as quickly as it came in the Fornaldar sogur style.

Compared to the Hanes Taliesin this transformation combat lacks substance and background. It is not as elaborately drawn out as the story of Taliesin. It is not, however, just thrown into the saga. Compared to the other battle scenes, where most Icelandic transformations occur, the author only implies that there is shape-shifting occurring. The author also fails to inform the audience which character actually won the battle. In any case, the winner of the transformation combat never reappears.

This instance is odd, in that there is no sorcerer and his/her apprentice, that the audience is not informed that it is actually shape-shifting, nor is the audience told the winner of the battle. Looking at this from a pure transformation combat perspective, this scene completely fails. However, this scene does fulfill the basic requirement which is two shape-shifters doing battle with one trying to defeat the other. In this last sense the battle scene succeeds.

Eyrbyggja Saga

The Eyrbyggja Saga was composed not long after the middle of the thirteenth century. This saga is not so much a romance as the other sagas previously mentioned. It is one of the family sagas or Islendinga sogur, belonging to a different genre of sagas than those above. This also means that the instances of shape-shifting are suddenly more practical. For instance, the first character in this saga to exhibit any sort of shape-shifting
ability is Katla, a woman who was well versed in witchcraft (19). Katla turned her son Odd into a distaff, a goat, and a pet hog beside a rubbish dump when Arnkel came to search her house for her son. Each thing Katla changed Odd into is practical in relation to their surroundings. She did not change him into an animal which might be superior in strength to Arnkel and thus kill him or maim him. Her purpose was to protect her son, not kill Arnkel.

Another character to change her shape in this saga is Thorgunna, who was from the Hebrides, a place which had the same connotations as Lapland and the far north. After she died her ghost appeared as a seal and haunted the farmstead she had lived at while in Iceland. Her final wishes had not been observed and it was only with the burning of her bed clothes and canopy that the haunting ceased. Since she is dead her ability to shape-shift is slightly odd. Once a person is dead they already have supernatural connotations, however she had been human, but still came from the Hebrides. She seemed to have some sort of prescience about her death and the consequences that would follow if things were not done exactly as she said.

Thorgunna is an interesting character to examine in this study. Not only was she an outsider, but she was a Christian (20). The seal, her fylgja, is an animal which has a tendency to aid humans in folk-lore, but is also dangerous when harmed or irritated. Seals were commonly believed to have human figures and natures concealed beneath their coats (21). Thorgunna being a Christian is slightly perplexing. She is the first and only character in this study who is a Christian and yet comes back from the grave as an animal. Perhaps the answer to this puzzle lies in the animal in which she chose to return. The only
other character in this study to become a seal was Dylan in the story of *Math Son of Mathonwy* (22). However, Dylan was not deceased, only baptized with no mention of Christianity (23). Thorgunna’s transformation can only be explained through the nature of the seal. Upon her death bed Thorgunna instructed Thorodd to burn her bed and her furnishings: “I’m not saying this because I grudge these things to anyone who could use them...I wouldn't like to be responsible for all the trouble people will bring on themselves if they don't respect my wishes” (trans. Palsson and Edwards, *Eyrbyggja Saga*, 160-161). As her wishes were not carried out, for Thorodd’s wife would not let the items be burnt, Thorgunna became dangerous as the irritated seal in her death. Thorgunna’s religion has very little to do with her ability to shift her shape. Naturally, being deceased she enters a new realm of power, but as a human she was a wise woman who had the gift of prescience which is not usually related to Christianity. Apparently to our author and presumably the audience shape-shifting does not discriminate against religion. Saga writers usually display very little interest in religion or religious experiences. When they do try to make paganism relevant they tend to treat it as a form of nature religion, imperfectly foreshadowing Christianity. However, this does not seem to be the case here. Thorgunna and the Icelanders did not clash in their religious views. The views of the other Icelanders regarding religion were never expressed, and if for some reason these characters failed to get along it had more to do with their personalities than their religion.

The only other character to shape-shift in this story is also dead. His name was Thorolf and after he died his ghost haunted the farms near his burial mound in such a violent manner that Thorodd had the grave opened and discovered Thorolf’s body was
black and as swollen as an ox. Thorodd had the body burnt. However Thorolf came back as a dapple grey bull and mated with Thorodd's cow. This cow later gave birth to a heifer and a dapple grey bull named Glaesir. Five years later Glaesir killed Thorodd. Thorodd's foster mother was proved correct in saying the bull was a monster since it disappeared in a swamp never to be seen again.

Considering two of the three instances of shape-shifting were conducted by dead people, it should be considered that there has always been a fear of the dead rising and taking their revenge in most cultures. Once dead a person has a whole realm of possibilities he or she can take on. These characters also have unfinished business, usually in the form of revenge, to complete before they can completely disappear. The other character to be transformed was aided by his mother who was well versed in witchcraft. Considering the saga type, the role that shape-shifting plays must be of a more practical nature, thus this role is given over to the dead and witches who possess the supernatural abilities.

Egil’s Saga

Egil’s Saga is another of the family sagas rather than a romance of the Fornaldar sogur type. It was written in the thirteenth century, but is based upon tenth century material. The story begins with Kveld-Ulf, of whom the text claims had the gift of prescience and states: "it was rumored that he must be a great shape-changer" (trans. Christine Fell, Egil’s Saga, 1). The text is surprisingly lax in the treatment of this subject. The other place in which shape-changers are mentioned so casually is when Kveld-Ulf's
son Thorolf died and he petitioned for men to avenge his son. His other son Skalla-Grim choose the men: "all together there were twelve for the journey, all of them the strongest of men, many of them shape-changers" (trans. Christine Fell, *Egil's Saga*, 34). The text does not state which of the men were shape-changers, nor do any of the men actually shift their shape in the saga, there is only the assurance of the author that this is true. It is mentioned casually again in reference to Onund Sjoni, the son of Ani from Anabrekka—one of the men Skalla-Grim had chosen on the journey to avenge his brother. The text claims Onund was big and the strongest of men in the district and "it was not everyone who agreed that he was not a shape-changer" (trans. Christine Fell, *Egil's Saga*, 124).

The shape-shifters in this story, at least the men, tend to be dark, difficult of temperament similar to a berserkr, ugly, and strong. They tend to take jobs as warriors, smiths, and poets. They are certainly not handsome, tower above other men in stature, and more than once kill people by accident while playing a game. There are two types of people in Kveld-Ulf's family; there are the dark shape-shifters of the bad temperament like Kveld-Ulf, his son Skalla-Grim, and his grandson Egil. Then there are the two Thorolfs, Skalla-Grim's brother and Thorolf, Egil's brother. The first Thorolf took after his mother's family the second took after his uncle the first Thorolf. They were attractive, even of temperament, and killed off fairly quickly in the saga (24).

Later in the saga Gunnhild, the wife of King Eirik, turned herself into a swallow. She sang outside of Egil's window to keep him from composing a twenty stanza formal poem in praise of Eirik which would save Egil's life. Gunnhild was an antagonist of Egil, obviously trying to deter him from completing his task in this scene. She was also the
only woman in this saga who had the ability to shape-shift. Gunnhild was obtained by Eirik while he was in Bjarmaland, the area around the white sea near Dvina. This is the area just east of Lapland. The farther north one lived the more exotic one became. There was a bit of xenophobia in Scandinavian culture concerning these northern peoples in particular the Celtic, Finnic, and Slavic peoples.

Egil's character is interesting. Nowhere in the text is it stated that Egil himself is a shape-shifter, nor was he rumored to be one. However, he does inherit the shape-shifter family appearance, his temper, and his gift of poetry from his father and grandfather. The Icelanders as the other Scandinavians valued men who were both warriors and poets. The Scandinavian kings often had many poets among their retainers, demonstrating that the role of the skald in Scandinavian society was as important as the bard in Celtic society.

The folk-motif of shape-shifting in Icelandic literature is used to aid the development of the plot, to develop certain characters, and to instruct other characters about themselves as well as others. Further more, shape-shifting is used as a means of revenge, to deceive others in obtaining some prize, and in combat. The first grouping of uses is no different than the uses in Medieval Welsh literature. The second grouping is considerably different. The use of shape-shifting in combat is particularly different from the Welsh material. Although there is only one true instance of the transformation combat, transformation while fighting a hostile host makes up the majority of the shape-shifting incidents. Given the nature and substance of the Viking age that the Icelandic writers dealt with it is no wonder that in the Fornaldar sogur a majority of the incidents take place while in combat.
Both the *Fornaldar sogur* and the *Islendinga sogur* use the supernatural. The difference between the two is that when the motif of shape-shifting is used in the *Fornaldar sogur* the shape-shifters are more often than not from the far north, of a semi-divine lineage, and sorcerers. In the *Islendinga sogur* the shape-shifters are dead, from a line of shape-shifters, or witches. The more historical the text the more practical and everyday the supernatural abilities become. Even the way the author treats the motif in the two genres is different. In the *Fornaldar sogur* the ability to shape-shift can be done by almost any human with the right knowledge. The author accepts this as a fact and then moves on. In the *Islendinga sogur* the author glazes over the shape-shifting all together. For instance, in *Egil’s Saga* the author states that certain characters were rumored to be shape-shifters and leaves it at that. He takes no time to explain or demonstrate the supposed shape-shifter’s ability. He lets the audience decide whether or not the character in question actually could be a shape-shifter.

Thus there are certain general attributes that all shape-shifters share, but how they are used in relation to a story depends entirely upon that story. Just as the use of a shape-shifter varies from tale to tale, their use varies from culture to culture.
Endnotes for Chapter V


4. The *Fornaldar sogur* contain sorcerer-heroes such as Sigurd and Signy from *Saga of the Volsungs* and Bothvar from *King Hrolf and His Champions*, both of which will be discussed bellow.


12. The Icelandic for wish-maiden is *oskmaer*.

13. The Aesir are the ruling class of the Norse gods to which Odin and Loki belong.


16. Permia is in Arctic Russia.

17. Busla raised both Smid and Bosi, but thought Smid the more amiable of the
two. Her helpful nature in the battle scene more than likely derives from her protective nature since she raised the two men from boyhood.

18. There is no mention of shape-shifting regarding Bosi's father, but he is pulled from the water after the battle. As to how he fell into the water seems questionable since no explanation is given in the text.


20. Knut Odner makes a good argument for Thorgunna's age setting her apart from other Icelandic saga characters as well. He assesses she is about fifty and perhaps at menopause. This is no doubt important for his study of her character, but has very little influence here. For more information see: Knut Odner, "Thorgunna's Testament: A Myth for Moral Contemplation And Social Apathy," in *From Sagas to Society, Comparative Approaches to Early Iceland* (ed. Gisli Palsson, Enfield: Hisarluk Press, 1992), 126-146.


22. In the previous chapter it was mentioned that Dylan, after his baptism, went to the sea and took on its nature. To many this either means he became a fish or a seal. My argument in the last chapter favored the seal.

23. The practice of baptism belongs to many religions, including paganism, and
does not solely belong to Christianity.

24. For a detailed and interesting genealogy of Egil See: Sigurdur Nordal, *Icelandic Culture* (trans. Vilhjalmur Bjarnar. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 119-120. In brief Nordal states Egil's great grandmother was from northern Norway. Her brother was called Hallbjorn Half-Troll; his by-name suggests that he and his sister were Lapps. The great variance of physical appearance in Egil's family has to do with the combination of Lapp and Germanic/Scandinavian backgrounds. The Lapps characteristically lacked self restraint, possessed superhuman strength, and had excellent observation skills. The Germanic peoples were blond, adventurous, given to poetry, and autochthonous. Whereas the Norwegians were suspicious, narrow minded, and conservative. Egil manages to balance all three of these ethnic background within him throughout the saga.
CHAPTER VI

THE CONCLUSION

Transformation, metamorphosis, and shape-shifting are all used to project human anxieties regarding identity, worth, isolation, and the very notion of what it means to be human. They portray the collapsing boundaries between the human and the animal, providing the proof that it takes very little to slip from a human into an animal state. It is also a useful way to depict a mental change in a character. By adding the attributes of some respected animal, the character learns to become a better hero. Most importantly shape-shifting is linked to the reality of human powerlessness over the natural world. When the shape-shifting is voluntary then it is a measure of power, of being in control, or about being divine.

The transformation of a human into an animal is usually a tragic fate. It degrades the victim to a nonhuman status, brought about by an evil witch or a curse for breaking a taboo. European folk-tales generally contain very few willful transformations as demonstrated in this thesis (1). However, when a character willfully transforms in the European tales it is usually by the aid of the same wizard, witch, or the sorcerer’s apprentice as mentioned above.

The origins of shape-shifting are clouded in a mystery that can never really have a definite answer. It does appear that the ideas of shamanism and the separable soul, the
double, and the psychological projection are all related to the belief in shape-shifting. This is not to say that these are the only influences upon shape-shifting. Obviously totems, animism, and taboos had some affect upon this folk-motif. The fact that shape-shifting can be found in the folk-lore of almost every culture suggests that there was at one time some shared thought process that each of these cultures had in common. However, moving from an oral folk-lore society to one of literary capabilities changes the way certain things are viewed. Oral folk-tales when written down seem to lack the beauty and importance that they held as an oral work. When a story of an oral nature is transferred to writing it must undergo a certain amount of change and explanation. For instance, not only is the audience slightly different in a literary culture, but so is the author. The author, supposedly well versed in other writings, is going to have knowledge of additional stories and instances. Therefore, when the author goes to write out the oral story he will add certain things based on the works he has already read, while still attempting to keep to the basic plot. Therefore, in a literary context ideas get shared from culture to culture and incorporated into the different literary works.

There seems to be very little cultural borrowing between the Celts and the Scandinavians. The Welsh material appears not to have been affected by the Viking invasion of England, although for a time the Vikings and the Welsh were allied against the Anglo-Saxons (2). The absence of material surviving from the Viking period obscures the influence of the Vikings upon the Welsh in literature. However, the raids did produce a Welsh unity and nationalism. The Vikings never had a stake in Wales as they had in Ireland where they in part became assimilated with the Irish (3).
Conversely, it is believed that there might have been some effect on Icelandic literature caused by the Celts (4). Although there is very little Celtic contribution to the Icelandic language, Icelandic being the most pure of the Germanic languages, some Celtic words are used in Icelandic poetry and literature of the Middle Ages. In the late ninth century, Norsemen living in the Celtic lands would sometimes move to Iceland as their prospects began to decline; "some of the intellectual and imaginative qualities which distinguish the Icelanders from other Scandinavians may be traced to their earlier contacts with the Celts" (E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Origins of Icelandic Literature*. 5). This of course, has more to do with the narrative of a story rather than the motif of shape-shifting in literature.

In the Welsh material examined in this study shape-shifting was used for a variety of reasons. Other-Worldly men used shape-shifting to their own advantage in order to help themselves, to punish someone for a wrong committed in the past, and as treatment for a serious crime. Some men had the ability to change their own shapes to help their king or cousin, to take on their true nature, or to escape their pursuer. Even God had a hand in the transformations a time or two, in which he transformed someone for an unspecified sin. Shape-shifting acts to develop the plot, to develop a character, to teach a lesson, and to demonstrate power in each of these tales.

The overall majority of the characters that underwent some form of transformation were men. Men wielded the power in the Welsh literature, not the women. In cases where women did transform, it was the men who got the better of them in the end. Rhiannon, from the story *Manawydan Son of Llyr*, was transformed by Llwyd into an ass
and was then later rescued by her husband Manawydan. Rhiannon did not have the capability to transform herself. Neither for that matter did the bitch Rhymhi, from the story of *Culhwch and Olwen*, who was transformed back into a human by God. Blodeuwedd, from *Math Son of Mathonwy*, was created from the flowers of the earth and later transformed into an owl for her crime against Lleu. None of these women had the ability to change their shape themselves. The only exception to this group was Ceridwen, from the *Hanes Taliesin*. Ceridwen transformed herself and actually defeated Gwion Bach. However, when she gave birth to Taliesin she could not destroy the child herself and left it to fate. Thus Ceridwen did not really win the transformation battle, it only appeared as though she did. Since Ceridwen is the only female to actually have the capability to transform herself and she fails to destroy Gwion Bach it is obvious that women do not control this magic successfully.

Ceridwen's emotions appear to get the better of her in the end. This suggests that women, whom male dominated cultures have always portrayed as emotional creatures, are not successfully able to control this magic because of their emotions. A prime example of this explanation is Rhiannon's behavior after Manawydan told her of the disappearance of her son. Rhiannon verbally lashed out at Manawydan and being headstrong entered the enchanted *caer*, thus disregarding her husband's advice. This led to the transformation of herself and her son, Pryderi, against their will by Llwyd. This is certainly not a magic associated with women and men do not fear emasculation by practicing it. Thus the feminine associations with this type of *seidr* magic found in Norse culture are not present in the Welsh literature.
In the Icelandic material, roughly recorded at about the same time, shape-shifting was used in a slightly different manner. It was still used to develop a plot, to develop a character, to teach a lesson, and to demonstrate power. It was also used to explain past events, to obtain some prize or reward, and to fight in combat. People are transformed most of the time for unspecified reasons, out of carelessness, or because they have the ability to do so. A majority of the characters who do transform or transform others are of a semi-divine nature, witches, sorcerers, or come from remote territories that are associated with transformation and magic. There does not seem to be the same slanted gender scale as seen in the Welsh material. There are just as many women who shape-shift or have the ability to do so as there are men.

What is unique about shape-shifting in the Icelandic material is that a large minority of the characters are dead. Yet these characters continue on in this alternate existence as a ghostly animal. Sometimes the dead shift their shape to help the hero of the story, to cause harm, or to gain revenge for something not done to their specifications. These characters belong to the Other-World, the world of the dead, similar to the Other-World found in the Samek shaman religion. Overall the Icelandic shape-shifters are more harmful and more brutal in their actions as transformed beasts than the Welsh; this is particularly true of the dead who have transformed themselves. Whether the Other-World men of the Welsh stories were the overlords of the dead or dwelt in the realm of the dead the text does not state. At least in the Welsh literature the Other-World or Annwn is not very different than the living world. The Icelandic Other-World does not emerge in literature, all that is seen of the Other-World are these dead and gruesome shape-shifters.
However, it seems apparent that the Welsh *Annwn* and the Iceland Other-World certainly enjoyed very different inhabitants.

Another unique feature of shape-shifting in Icelandic literature is that it frequently occurs during a battle scene. This does not necessarily mean that it is a transformation combat, but shape-shifting does frequently occur whenever there is a battle. A great deal of the Icelandic literature concentrates on warriors and their deeds in battle. Thus the battle-field becomes the opportune place for shape-shifting to occur. It is also a place for shape-shifters to show off and fight with other shape-shifters. The battle-field is the one place where shape-shifting would not seem out of place alongside the *berserkr* and other warriors worked up into a battle frenzy. Shape-shifters, in fact, make any battle more dangerous and thus celebrated for the degree of difficulty an ordinary human had to overcome.

Another feature of Icelandic shape-shifting is the shamanistic trance. This form of shape-shifting found in the Icelandic material was more than likely borrowed from the Samek. Just like the inhabitants of the far north:

Icelandic magicians are sometimes portrayed as having special psychic powers while asleep or in a trance. Like Siberian magicians they can transform people into unexpected shapes to prevent their detection. Like Lapp wizards they can attack their enemies in the form of animals such as the walrus, and in Icelandic as in other northern stories the magicians in animal form are sometimes confused with the animal spirits that protect them (Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*. 52).

The only clear example of this type of shape-shifting was seen with Bothvar and Skuld in the saga of *King Hrolf and His Champions*. Each went into a trance and projected either a bear or a boar onto the battle-field to fight for them. Medieval writers apparently
did not find this type of shape-shifting very exciting or they would have used it more often. However, to the modern eye this type of shape-shifting is more practical and believable than any of the other more fantastic forms of transformation examined thus far.

Even though there is a difference between the shape-shifters in the *Islendinga sogur* and the *Fornaldar sogur*, the treatment of the folk-motif of shape-shifting varies even more considerably between the Icelandic and the Welsh literature. Shape-shifting in the Welsh literature is more subdued and muted in comparison to the Icelandic literature. The Welsh literature acknowledges that shape-shifting is there, but it does not really dwell on the wonder of it all. In comparison the Icelandic shape-shifting is like a blazing star, it is there, it is fabulous, and it is gone. Neither culture tends to dwell on the thought of shape-shifting for long, but only the Icelandic literature makes any great show of it.

The wide variety of characters that undergo shape-shifting, the variety of people who have knowledge of the power, and the range of instances in which it is used demonstrate the power the idea of shape-shifting has over the imagination. It is not an idea that has ceased since the Middle Ages; it has continued on into popular culture of these so-called modern times. The difference is that no one but the very young, those involved in shamanistic religions, and hard-core science fiction fans actually believe in the possibility of shape-shifting. Needless to say the very same could be said of the Middle Ages, that no one besides the very young, those involved in a shamanistic or nature religion, and those who desperately wanted to believed in a person's ability to change their shape. However, given the evidence of Chapter III, it is safe to say that the belief in the
Middle Ages was more considerable than the present.

The fear of the werewolf, the wildman, and others despite Augustine's claim that shape-shifting was not possible were acted out with good resolutions in the literature of the Middle Ages. Literature has always been a place of endless possibilities and resolved issues unlike real life. In literature those with magic powers could just as well be benevolent as well as malevolent. Just as those who had been transformed could be changed back to their original state if they were so deserving.

In conclusion then, the belief in shape-shifting in the Middle Ages was strong enough in some circles to encourage the enjoyment and circulation of these tales of transformed characters. Even though there are a number of shared characteristics between the Welsh and the Icelandic stories, the shape-shifting motif is used quite differently as illustrated above. It is used with more imagination and flexibility in the Icelandic literature, being the realm of the semi-divine, sorcerers of the far north, and witches. In contrast shape-shifting is more quiet, dark, and wild in the Welsh literature, used by Other-Worldly humanized gods, beirdd, and superhuman heroes.
Endnotes for Chapter VI


4. The Icelanders were no doubt influenced by the Irish rather than the Welsh.
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