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Male Rapist Narratives of Óðinn and Rindr, and Ewen and
Thaney

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“Am I Not a Woman Like Thyself?” – The Transvestite Male Rapist Narratives of Óðinn and Rindr, and Ewen and Thaney

Andrew Bull¹

Abstract

The tale of Óðinn and Rindr is a complex one, but in its version found in the early thirteenth-century *Gesta Danorum*, we can see how Óðinn’s gender fluidity has become simplified into transvestism. From a being capable of changing gender, Óðinn now simply adopts the disguise of a woman. With this disguise, Óðinn rapes the woman Rindr in order to fulfil a prophecy. Thomas Hill found that this version of events has a parallel in Scotland: the story of Prince Ewen and St Thaney. Ewen similarly uses transvestism to gain access to an otherwise unwilling woman in order to rape her.

This article will compare the two narratives to each other and to the broader figure of the male transvestite as found in the medieval period. What similarities are there? And what brought the writers of these tales to utilise this narrative trope? This article will firstly argue that Óðinn’s gender identity is simplified in the Christianised version of the Óðinn and Rindr narrative found in the *Gesta Danorum*. Secondly, it will take into account issues surrounding Thaney’s believed virginity, which caused the writer of the mid–twelfth century *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta* to adopt the Óðinn and Rindr narrative, male transvestite rapist included. Finally, it will note that these stories show far more about their writer’s perceptions of transvestism, rather than having any basis in reality.

Keywords: Transvestite, Óðinn, Thaney, Kentigern, Hagiography

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Introduction

The figure of the male transvestite was a complex one in medieval times. In chivalric romance, male transvestism was used as a joke, an amusing disguise that was ultimately shed to prove the underlying inherent masculinity of the perpetrator.² Yet to church officials, transvestism was subversive and to be avoided, lest its presence tear apart the binarised difference between male and female.³ It could also distort the heterosexuality of other men, as a man in woman’s dress could tempt other men, and transvestism and sodomy were often grouped together as sins against nature.⁴

This article will discuss two narrative containing male transvestism. Firstly, that of Óðinn and Rindr from Scandinavian mythology, both its early appearances in the sagas, and the later Christianised form found in Saxo Grammaticus’ early-thirteenth-century *Gesta Danorum*. Secondly, that of Ewan and St. Thaney, found in the Scottish *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta* (also known as the ‘Herbertian Fragment’) of the mid–twelfth century, written by an anonymous cleric of Glasgow. Both of these narratives share similarities in their portrayal of male transvestism and have previously been suggested to be related by Thomas Hill.⁵ Hill, however, focused on the overall narrative structures, rather than focusing on their presentations of male transvestism in particular. This article will endeavour to open up further questions around the presentation of male transvestism in both narratives, especially around the fact that in both cases, transvestism is utilised in order to enact the rape of a woman.

Cross-dressing/transvestite female saints are common enough—usually with the theme of wishing to enter a religious community, but being unable to join a female one, so instead takes the guise of a monk (for example St.s Marina, Margaret, Pelagia, and Euphrosyne).⁶ As the women was taking on the role of a

² Ad Putter, ‘Transvestite Knights in Medieval Life and Literature,’ in *Becoming Male in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Jeffery Jerome Cohen and Bonnie Wheeler (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 297.

³ Putter, ‘Transvestite Knights,’ 297.

⁴ Putter, ‘Transvestite Knights,’ 293.

⁵ Thomas D. Hill, ‘Odin, Rinda and Thaney, the Mother of St Kentigern,’ *Medium Aevum* 55 (1986) 230-237.

⁶ Dyan Elliott, ‘Gender and The Christian Traditions,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith Bennett and Ruth Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

man, this was seen as positive, and to be admired.⁷ However, medieval conceptions of gender rarely looked upon men slipping between gender boundaries as positive, as men were perceived as superior to women.⁸ Whilst pre-Christian Scandinavian tales of Óðinn appear to allow for a more fluid understanding of gender, later Christian versions, as shown in the *Gesta Danorum* and *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta*, refuse to allow such fluidity. Óðinn's gender becomes steadfastly male as the centuries progress in our examples.

Óðinn and Rindr

This narrative is found in its fullest form in Book III of the early-thirteenth-century *Gesta Danorum* by Saxo Grammaticus.⁹ Hqðr killed Óðinn's son Baldr; seeking revenge, Óðinn consulted prophets and diviners, and found out that it would be the son of him and Rindr, daughter of the king of the Ruthenians, that would bring about this revenge.¹⁰ Three times Óðinn appears before the king, in various male disguises, and attempts to woo Rindr. She, however, is not interested, and repeatedly rebukes him. It is the fourth disguise, that of a female physician, that allows Óðinn to get close to Rindr. After some time, Rindr falls sick, and Óðinn has her bound to the bed so that he can administer a particularly bitter tasting medicine. Instead of aiding her, however, he rapes her, whilst still dressed as a woman.¹¹

This results in the hero Bo being born, who brings about the revenge that Óðinn sought. Óðinn, for his actions, was banished for ten years by the other gods. Even upon his return, there were those who were unhappy with him,

2013), 25; see also Michael Goodich, *Vita Perfecta: The Ideal of Sainthood in the Thirteenth Century*. (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersmann, 1982), 177-8, 193; John Anson, 'The Female Transvestite in Early Monasticism: The Origin and Development of a Motif,' *Viator* 5 (1974) 1-32; and Stephen J. Davis, 'Crossed Texts, Crossed Sex: Intertextuality and Gender in Early Christian Legends of Holy Women Disguised as Men,' *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10, 1 (2002) 1-36.

⁷ Vern L. Bullough, 'Transvestites in the Middle Ages,' *American Journal of Sociology* 79, 6 (1974) 1383.

⁸ Elliott, 'Gender and The Christian Traditions,' 21, 25.

⁹ Karsten Friis-Jensen (ed.) and Peter Fisher (trans.) *Saxo Grammaticus: Gesta Danorum. The History of the Danes*. Vol I. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2015), xxxiv, gives a likely date for completion 'not long after 1208.'

¹⁰ Oliver Elton (trans.), *The First Nine Books of The Danish History of Saxo Grammaticus* (London: David Nutt, 1894), 94.

¹¹ Friis-Jensen and Fisher, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 167.

though this was due to him utilising a disguise and performing ‘women’s duties.’¹² Rape, it appears, was acceptable—but to adopt disguises and enact women’s work was not, especially at length. Óðinn took some time in the disguise of ‘Vekka’ the female physician, as it was only ‘at length’ that he was enlisted into the queen’s entourage.¹³ Óðinn’s apparent ease in the role of a woman, rather than his rape of a woman, appears to be the main issue.

Earlier versions of the narrative imply a lack of willingness on Rindr’s part as well. They also, however, raise questions over Óðinn’s gender identity. In the mid-tenth-century *Sigurðardrápa*, Kormákr Ögmundarson remarks ‘*seið Yggr til Rindar*’ in the third stanza, which, accounting for Yggr being another name for Óðinn, roughly translates to ‘Óðinn enchanted Rindr’.¹⁴ The rest of the stanza discusses head binding in some form; the remark being suggestive of the binding of Rindr to the bed.¹⁵ Óðinn here performs *seiðr*, a practice that is commonly regarded as magical or shamanistic, and possibly sexual, though also is found connected to weaponry.¹⁶ Another mention of the same story, found in the sixth stanza of *Grógaldr*, does not mention *seiðr*. Magic is clearly involved though:

Then first I will chant thee
— the charm oft-tried,
That Rani taught to Rind.

Þann gel ek þér fyrstan,
— þann kveða fjölnýtan,
þann gól Rindi Rani.¹⁷

¹² Friis-Jensen and Fisher, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 169.

¹³ Friis-Jensen and Fisher, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 167.

¹⁴ Finnur Jónsson, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning*. Vol B-I. (København: og Kristiania, Gyldendal, Nordisk forlag, 1912), 69. If Yggr is not Óðinn, then it is at least clear that Rindr is being enchanted by someone.

¹⁵ Cecil Wood, ‘Kormak’s stanzas called the “Sigurðardrápa,”’ *Neophilologus*, 43, 4 (1959): 309-10.

¹⁶ Amy May Franks, *Óðinn: A Queer týr? A Study of Óðinn’s Function as a Queer Deity in Iron Age Scandinavia*. M.A. Dissertation, University of Iceland, 2018, 52. Henceforth, Franks will be referred to as Jefford Franks, reflecting their use of the name Amy Jefford Franks in other academic writing; John McKinnell, ‘Encounters with Völur,’ in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society* ed. by Margaret Clunies Ross. The Viking Collection: Studies in Northern civilization, vol. 14. (Denmark: University Press of Southern Denmark, 2003) 113.

¹⁷ Translation from Henry Adams Bellows, *The Poetic Edda* (New York: The American-Scandinavian Foundation, 1923), 236. Old Norse from Guð Jónsson, *Grógaldr* (Heimskringla, n.d.). This Edda is likely no older than the twelfth century, Einar Ól Sveinsson, ‘Svipdag’s Long

Rind clearly must be Rindr, again leaving us with the logic that Rani is Óðinn.¹⁸ The overall text is about a son asking his deceased mother for magical charms that will aid him in his romantic quest. Again, it is magic that plays a role in the tale of Óðinn and Rindr, despite it not being specifically named as *seiðr*.

Seiðr as a concept, however, queers Óðinn's gender. The *Ynglinga saga* (written by Snorri Sturluson as the opening saga of the *Heimskringla* of ca. 1220-30) links *seiðr* to Óðinn's foresight.¹⁹ However 'this magic, when it is practiced, comes with such great queerness that it was shameful for a man to practice it, and the skill was taught to the goddesses./ En þessi fjölkyngi, er framit er, fylgir svá mikil ergi, at eigi þótti karlmönnum skamlaust við at fara, ok var gyðjunum kend sú íþrótt.²⁰ To this we can also add the god's displeasure with Óðinn in the *Gesta Danorum* over not his rape of Rindr, but his practicing 'women's duties.' Loki also accuses Óðinn of *seiðr* in *Lokasenna* 24:

And you practiced *seiðr*
in Samsey,
and struck on a drum like a *vǫlva*;
in a wizard's form you travelled over mankind,
and I thought that was *ergi* in nature.

Eke þik síða kóðu
Sámseyju í,
ok draptu á vétt sem vǫlur;
vitka líki
fórtu verþjóð yfir,
ok hugðu eke þat argi aðal.²¹

Journey: Some Observations on Grógaldr and Fjölsvinnsmál,' *Béaloideas*, Iml. 39-41 (1971-3), 307.

¹⁸ Bellows, *The Poetic Edda*, 236 n. 6. See also 'Rind' for Rindr: Bellows, *The Poetic Edda*, 198. Again, the alternate possibility is that Rindr was a figure repeatedly enchanted and/or raped by multiple men.

¹⁹ On the dating of the *Heimskringla* and its authorship by Sturluson, see Sturluson, Snorri. (2016). *Heimskringla*. Volume I: The Beginnings to Óláfr Tryggvason. Alison Finlay and Anthony Faulkes (trans.). University College London: Viking Society for Northern Research, vii-ix.

²⁰ Sturluson, Snorri. (1962). *Heimskringla I*. Íslenzk Fornrit, Aðalbjarnarson, Bjarni (ed.). Reykjavík: Híð Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 19; translation by Jefford Franks, *Óðinn: A Queer týr?* 53. Finlay and Faulkes, *Heimskringla*, 11, however, translates this to mean this form of magic is 'accompanied by... great perversion'.

²¹ Kristjánsson, Jónas and Ólason, Vésteinn (eds.) *Eddukvæði I: Godakvæði*. Íslenzk Fornrit. (Reykjavík: Híð Íslenzka Fornritafélag, 2014), 413; quoted in Jefford Franks, *Óðinn: A Queer týr?* 52.

The likening to a *vǫlva* also raises questions of Óðinn’s gender. *Vǫlva* or *vǫlur* are prophetesses or seers, who occasionally appear in sagas.²² *Ergi* is a charge of general unmanliness, and possibly male homosexuality. However, Jefford Franks notes that this could also mean *female* sexual excess, again suggesting that Óðinn’s gender identity is more fluid than otherwise expected and that gender binaries were not firmly established at this point.²³ Overall, Óðinn’s links to *seiðr* are suggestive of a certain gender fluidity, with Óðinn’s magic being queer and linked far more to women than to men.

Ultimately, I would argue, Óðinn’s more fluid gender identity in the earlier sagas becomes Christianised, and therefore simplified, in Saxo Grammaticus’ work. An individual that can move between genders at will via the use of queer magic would hardly be acceptable in a Christian context. Grammaticus’ Óðinn therefore becomes a transvestite, providing an easier explanation as to how he snuck his way into the court as a woman and impregnated Rindr.

General transvestite narratives

To an extent, the above story mimics one told often, that of a love-sick hero attempting to gain access to a woman who is inaccessible. Hill points to another story in the *Gesta Danorum*, that of Hagbarth and Signe in Book VII, along with the Old French romance *Floire et Blancheflor*.²⁴ To this, we can add the famed Tristan and Yseult: Tristan is able to bypass the security of Yseult’s tower by cross-dressing.²⁵ Another parallel to this narrative trope can be found in Irish mythology, in the conception of Lugh.²⁶ In all of these, the hero of the tale utilises female disguise in order to gain access to the woman.

²² McKinnell, ‘Encounters with Vǫlur.’

²³ Jefford Franks, *Óðinn: A Queer Týr?* 51.

²⁴ Hill, ‘Odin, Rinda and Thaney,’ 233.

²⁵ Putter, ‘Transvestite Knights,’ 292.

²⁶ Alexander Haggerty Krappe. *Balor with the Evil Eye*. (New York: Institut des études françaises, Columbia University, 1927), 2-3. Various versions of the story exist. Krappe notes a few variants, 2 n. 9; see also the version given by Dáithí Ó hÓgáin, *Myth, legend & Romance: An Encyclopaedia of the Irish Folk Tradition* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991), 276; and John MacQueen, ‘Yvain, Ewan and Owein ap Urien,’ in *Transactions of Dumfriesshire and Galloway*

The primary difference between these and Óðinn/Rindr is that the woman is a willing participant. Indeed, it is sometimes the woman's idea for the man to cross-dress, as with Tristan and Yseult. Óðinn's utilisation of transvestism is far darker though, and more dangerous. Whereas before the noble hero was defeating an evil by gaining access to his love who loved him back, now transvestism is used to enable rape. Considering the original story always seems to have included magic in some way, the willingness of Rindr seems to have always been debatable, and Óðinn's gender identity questionable. Now, however, the figure of the transvestite has been invoked, not as a joke as it often was in chivalric romance, but as a method for Óðinn to gain access to Rindr. The queer gender magic of *seiðr* would not be acceptable in a Christian document, even one dealing with mythology. Instead, the role of transvestite hero sneaking his way into the woman's bedroom is used, only for more sinister purposes.

The Thaney and Ewen narrative

We now turn to another version of this narrative, found in a Scottish context. This is the mid-twelfth-century fragment of the *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta*, written by an anonymous 'cleric of S. Kentigern' (presumed a cleric of Glasgow Cathedral) and now known as the 'Herbertian Fragment.' It contains a brief account of St. Kentigern's mother St. Thaney, before finishing at the moment of Kentigern's birth.²⁷

In this account, Prince Ewen, son of Erwegende (Urien), attempts to woo Thaney, the daughter of King Leudonus of the Lothians. The young woman, however, has already converted to Christianity, and thereby wishes to remain pure. So far, so common for female virgin saints—the tropes of secretly becoming a Christian, wishing to preserve her chastity, and this coming into conflict with societal and familial requirements for her marriage are found in

Natural History & Antiquarian Society ed. R. C. Reid and A. E. Truckell, 3rd series, Vol. 33 (Dumfries: Council of the Society, 1954-5), 128-9.

²⁷ Alexander Penrose Forbes (ed.), *Lives of S. Ninian and S. Kentigern: Compiled in the Twelfth Century* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), 123-33.

many lives of female saints and martyrs.²⁸ Where the tale first differs for Thaney, however, is in precisely how she wishes to prove her new faith—instead of traditionally considering herself ‘married to Christ,’ she vows to imitate the Virgin Mary, including a hope to conceive immaculately.²⁹ Despite repeated advances from Ewen, Thaney remains uninterested. Ewen’s response provides the other main difference from the common form of virgin saints’ lives. Thaney is raped by Ewen, whereas the threat of rape usually dissipates or is removed due to God’s intervention.³⁰

Already, this flies in the face of convention, but what further makes the *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta* differ is that both this and a later *Vita* were created in order to dispel a belief that Thaney *had* in fact conceived immaculately—thereby creating an awkward parallel to Jesus, which later medieval thought would have found uncomfortable and borderline heretical.³¹ So whilst Thaney probably followed her female compatriots even more similarly by retaining her virginity, twelfth-century thought acknowledged that for her to have given birth to Kentigern, she had to have had sexual intercourse in some way. However, Thaney was revered as a virgin saint—she could hardly be portrayed as willingly having sex with a man. Therefore, the obvious solution was to rewrite her story so that she was raped—thereby retaining her moral purity, whilst still explaining her birth of Kentigern.³²

²⁸ Susan Marshall, ‘Illegitimacy and Sanctity in the Twelfth-Century Lives of St. Kentigern,’ in *Jocelin of Furness: Proceedings of the 2011 Conference* ed. Clare Downham (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2013), 74.

²⁹ Forbes, *Lives*, 125. The Glasgow cleric views this rather unkindly, and suggests this was the cause of her later troubles. Victim-blaming appears to not be a recent phenomenon.

³⁰ For a recent feminist reading of Thaney’s rape, see Elspeth King, *The Hidden History of Glasgow’s Women: The Thenev Factor* (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1993), 15-23. The change to actual rape has more in common with the medieval *pastourelle*, though Thaney is of the same social class as Ewen.

³¹ Marshall, ‘Illegitimacy and Sanctity,’ 68. This later *Vita* was written by Jocelin of Furness in the late twelfth century, by the request of Bishop Jocelin of Glasgow, and can be found in translation in Forbes, *Lives*, 28-119. It does not contain the Thaney/Ewen narrative, instead offering alternative suggestions as to how she became pregnant which still protect her moral purity before swiftly moving onto Thaney’s punishment.

³² Marshall, ‘Illegitimacy and Sanctity,’ 73; see also Suzanna M. Edwards, *The Afterlives of Rape in Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 24, which discusses Thomas of Aquinas’s thoughts on rape in his *Summa Theologiae*. Incidentally, St Serf, Kentigern’s teacher, was also supposedly born of miraculous conception, Marshall, ‘Illegitimacy and Sanctity,’ 73 n. 26.

Into this narrative requirement for rape, we have a further addition. Ewen realises he will never come close to Thaney dressed as a man, so he instead dresses as a woman in order to get close to her and force himself onto her. Once the rape is over, he utters the phrase ‘Am I not a woman like myself?’ to the sobbing Thaney, who is left confused and unsure of what has transpired.³³ There are a number of similarities to the Óðinn/Rindr narrative that led Thomas Hill to pose it the basis for the Ewen/Thaney narrative. Firstly, the stories both concern the conception of a divinely appointed hero. Secondly, the father progresses through attempted marriage, seduction, and finally rape of the mother. Thirdly, the child is conceived when the father has the appearance of a woman and takes advantage of the trust this entails in the mother.³⁴ With strong similarities between the two narratives, it seems likely that the Óðinn narrative was utilised to provide an explanation for Thaney’s pregnancy, to compensate for the tradition that she was a virgin saint who had conceived Kentigern immaculately.³⁵

Unusually for a transvestite tale, the point at which the maleness of the transvestite should become clear to all (here, the moment of rape) does not have the expected effect on Thaney.³⁶ She remains unsure of what has happened, with the potential for a lesbian interaction hanging in the air until her pregnancy becomes obvious. Whilst we, the reader, are clear as to what has happened, Thaney remains unsure—and we are left with an echo of anxiety over Ewen’s identity. The transvestite has not been outed, not fully, not until Thaney becomes clearly pregnant. This contrasts the chivalric method of utilising transvestism, whereby the ‘joke’ does not fool anyone for long.³⁷ Until Kentigern’s creation is confirmed by Thaney’s pregnancy, Ewen’s actions and

³³ The relevant section is Forbes, *Lives*, 126-8.

³⁴ Hill, ‘Odin, Rinda and Thaney,’ 233.

³⁵ As evidenced by the later *Vita Kentegerni* containing a diatribe against ‘the stupid and foolish people’ in Glasgow who believe Kentigern ‘was conceived and born of a virgin.’ Forbes, *Lives*, 35.

³⁶ In the *Gesta Danorum*, Grammaticus provides an additional comment explaining how the father of Rindr in fact knew what was occurring, but did not intervene - Friis-Jensen and Fisher, *Saxo Grammaticus*, 167-9.

³⁷ Putter, 298. Perhaps ecclesiastical commentators on such things were more concerned to show the longer-term effects of such activities.

comment ‘Am I not a woman like thyself?’ remain in a way subversive towards the gender binary. The homoerotic possibility of Thaney and Ewen’s interaction is, too, only finally extinguished once Thaney’s pregnancy becomes apparent (if it ever truly existed).³⁸

The anonymous writer does not condemn the rape of Thaney. Female saints are often the victims of violence, and often suffer the threat of sexual violence—but as noted earlier, that threat is never realised, usually stopped through God’s intervention.³⁹ Thaney’s rape takes this voyeuristic tendency within hagiography a step further, leaving her ‘Scotland’s first recorded rape victim, battered woman and unmarried mother.’⁴⁰ Overall, this now fragmentary *Vita* deviates noticeably from standard accepted norms, with the issue of a virgin birth being the ultimate root of both Thaney’s rape and Ewen’s transvestism. On the other hand, Thaney’s being held to blame for the rape is not uncommon in light of medieval rape trials.⁴¹

After several attempts from her father to execute Thaney, she is finally set out to sea in a tiny boat. Miraculously she lands on the beach near Culross, where Thaney gives birth to Kentigern on the shore. St. Serf, who lives at Culross, finds her and takes her and her new-born son in. Serf makes several comments at this point in an obvious authorial attempt to justify Thaney’s ordeal. Firstly, Serf clarifies that Ewen’s gender was never really in question, at least not to the writer—he was of ‘the male sex.’⁴²

Secondly, Serf claims that the rape was in fact predestined by God, in answer to her wishes to emulate the Virgin Mary. Therefore the conception was not sinful, and in fact a form of marriage.⁴³ With the twelfth century being a key point where the Church took greater control over marriage and its requirements

³⁸ As always with medieval transvestite interactions. Putter, ‘Transvestite Knights,’ 295-6. Ewen’s straight male desire is, of course, never distorted by his adoption of women’s clothing. Putter, ‘Transvestite Knights,’ 293

³⁹ Simon Gaunt, *Gender and Genre in Medieval French Literature*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 197.

⁴⁰ King, Elspeth. *The Hidden History of Glasgow's Women: The Thenew Factor*. (Edinburgh: Mainstream Publishing, 1993), 13.

⁴¹ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 205.

⁴² Forbes, *Lives*, 133.

⁴³ Forbes, *Lives*, 133.

(notably requiring both members to be consenting), this passage seems an attempt to sanction Ewen's actions.⁴⁴ It is a convoluted explanation, claiming that 'lawful love abounded,' and is clearly concerned with legitimising Kentigern's parentage, rather than having any real concern towards Thaney beyond her virginity.

Ewen is never negatively portrayed. The tale is concerned with showing that Kentigern, 'though conceived through rape, is not fathered by a wicked, lustful monster but by a desperate, love-sick swain.'⁴⁵ Ewen's transvestism is presented as a means to an end, but never commented upon, nor portrayed in either a negative or positive light. It simply happens. In this way, it perhaps is not a trans narrative in that such figures are often 'bent towards the gothic, the fantastical, the comedic, and the pornographic.'⁴⁶

However, if we accept that an underlying narrative thrust was that of pre-destination, per St. Serf's commentary, then perhaps the figure of the fantastical trans person can still be seen in both Ewen and Óðinn.⁴⁷ Certainly, they both exist in a boundary space between the normal world and the queer extraordinary world: Ewen is enacting God's will through predestination; Óðinn is following the path laid out by seers in order to enact divine vengeance. Both are certainly dangerous, their recourse to rape to get what they want being an obvious indicator of this.

Ultimately Thaney 'benefits,' having given birth to a prominent saint, and now revered as a saint herself. She now follows the path God has set out before her, having sacrificed her physical virginity, but importantly still retaining her moral purity.⁴⁸ A change found in eleventh- and twelfth-century writers is

⁴⁴ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 74, 120.

⁴⁵ Marshall, 'Illegitimacy and Sanctity,' 72.

⁴⁶ M. W. Bychowski, 'Trans Literature: Transgender as a Trope in Cisgender Stories,' accessed September 18, 2018, <http://www.thingstransform.com/2018/09/trans-literature-transgender-as-trope.html>.

⁴⁷ Following loosely the main themes of the 'Mystical Drag Queen' in Bychowski, 'Trans Literature.'

⁴⁸ St Serf additionally notes that Thaney 'suffered injury in the flesh, whilst she lost not her virginal devotion.' Forbes, *Lives*, 133. This is reminiscent of Augustine, who says much the same in *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, Book I Chapters 16 and 18 – see R. W. Dyson (ed.), *Augustine: The City of God against the Pagans*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 26-8. Thaney's suffering may have been part of an exercise in attempting to convert those local to that region,

their focus on the potentiality of rape as a suffering worse than death, and poses it as the ‘ultimate sacrifice’ of obedience to God.⁴⁹ However, whilst the *threat* of rape was usually enough to prove a female saint’s holiness, the anonymous Glasgow cleric goes further. This is, in truth, likely in response to the impossible situation of the tradition already surrounding Thaney of her giving birth to Kentigern. The tropes surrounding female saints being threatened with rape appear to have been a useful solution to the problem of Thaney’s pregnancy.⁵⁰

All that was then required was a male actor to perpetrate this rape. Ewen’s cross-dressing fits into a common narrative of male transvestism being utilised due to ‘a desire to have easier access to women for sexual purposes.’⁵¹ No male transvestite saint exists (or rather, no male transvestite has ever been canonised by the Roman Catholic Church—saintly activity may have occurred in such individuals, but been left unrecorded).⁵² The activities of the male transvestite in medieval literature are usually sexual, often socially transgressive, and possibly linked to witchcraft.⁵³ They are either a dangerous figure, or one played as a joke in chivalric romance, but the underlying masculinity of the figure in drag is never truly in question. Both the *Gesta’s* Óðinn and the *Vita’s* Ewan are portrayed as men in women’s clothing, only ever utilising a disguise to dupe a woman. The earlier versions of Óðinn, pre-Christianisation, often a glimpse into a more complex world of gender fluidity, one ‘straightened out’ by later writers.

lacing her as a ‘national heroine whose piety converted the tribe or people to Christianity.’ Goodich, *Vita Perfecta*, 179.

⁴⁹ Edwards, *The Afterlives of Rape*, 22.

⁵⁰ Additionally, a parallel to the Rape of Lucretia could be made, with both suffering rape in order to aid their country: Lucretia’s aiding the formation of Rome, Thaney’s aiding the Christianisation of Scotland.

⁵¹ Bullough, ‘Transvestites in the Middle Ages,’ 1382.

⁵² Bullough, ‘Transvestites in the Middle Ages,’ 1383; ‘Nov 1st: All (Gay) Saints,’ Queer Saints and Martyrs: Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Trans in Church History, accessed September 27, 2018, <https://queersaints.wordpress.com/2011/11/01/nov-1st-all-gay-saints/>. Compare this to the not-uncommon trope of female transvestite saints, Goodich, *Vita Perfecta*, 177-8. Trans male saints have been identified, see Blake Gutt, ‘Medieval Trans Lives in Anamorphosis: A Pregnant Male Saint and Backward Birth.’ Accessed September 27, 2018. (Medieval, She Wrote, 2017) <http://www.medievalshewrote.com/blog/2017/6/28/guest-post-by-blake-gutt-medieval-trans-lives-in-anamorphosis-a-pregnant-male-saint-and-backward-birth>, providing a translation of elements from *Le Romanz de Saint Fanuel et de Sainte Anne et de Nostre Dame et de Nostre Segnor et de Ses Apostres*.

⁵³ Bullough, ‘Transvestites in the Middle Ages,’ 1383.

The links between Scotland and Scandinavia

Both tales sharing such noticeable similarities is suggestive of contact and borrowing from one to the other. As has been noted, this version of events found in the *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta* gives the impression of an addition to solve the problem of Thaney's virginity. This leads us to the likelihood that the Óðinn and Rindr tale has been borrowed from to aid the *Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta*. We are left, then, with a question as to how this became known in Scotland. There were plenty of general links between Scotland and Scandinavia which may account for the possibility of the adoption of this tale into the *Vita Kentegerni*.⁵⁴ Viking raiders took control of the Shetland and Orkney Islands, along with the Hebrides, and then moved south, coming into conflict with the Picts in 839 and 866.⁵⁵ Settling took place as well, primarily in the north and west of Scotland, which remained under Scandinavian control up to the thirteenth century.⁵⁶ These areas were known well enough to appear in Norse sagas, which noted that Norse, or partly-Norse, individuals lived there.⁵⁷

We can however suggest a more specific method for the Óðinn/Rindr narrative to have arrived at Glasgow Cathedral. Govan, as a site of early medieval Christian worship and a major ecclesiastical centre by the end of the tenth century, had a 'significant Scandinavian presence' in the area during the tenth and eleventh centuries.⁵⁸ Tenth-century carved stones, so-called 'hogback stones,' found within areas of Norse presence and settlement and first appearing in tenth-century York, have the highest Scottish concentration at Govan, and 'are an unambiguous indication of Norse patronage.'⁵⁹ These appear alongside

⁵⁴ For discussions over the presence of Scandinavian influence in Scotland, see James Graham-Campbell and Colleen E. Batey (eds.), *Vikings in Scotland: an archaeological survey* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

⁵⁵ Barbara Crawford, 'Scandinavia 1. To 1312,' in *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History*, ed. Michael Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

⁵⁶ Crawford, 'Scandinavia 1,' 2001.

⁵⁷ Rosemary Power, 'Scotland in the Norse Sagas' in *Scotland and Scandinavia 800-1800*, ed. by Grant G. Simpson (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), 13-24.

⁵⁸ S. T. Driscoll, *Govan from Cradle to Grave* (Glasgow: The Society of Friends of Govan Old, 2004), 8, 12-14, 23.

⁵⁹ Chris Dalglish and Stephen T. Driscoll, with Irene Maver, Norman F. Shead, and Ingrid Shearer, *Historic Govan: Archaeology and Development*. (York: Council for British Archaeology and

cross-slabs, of a period 900-1100, indicating a possibly joint habitation of Viking and Christian in the area.⁶⁰ The nearby Doomster Hill’s stepped form is comparable to other major Viking centres such as Tynwald and Dublin, and possibly had a ceremonial route between it and the early medieval church.⁶¹

This shared living area from an early point in Govan’s history, along with the greater integration of Scandinavians into their surrounding countries during the end of the Viking Age, could have played a role in how such a noticeable parallel between Óðinn and Ewen could have occurred.⁶² Scandinavian settlers and their offspring could well have known the tale of Óðinn and Rindr. From there, perhaps it seeped into a more general social consciousness over the intervening years. Certainly, Óðinn appears to have been one of the more successfully imported Scandinavian gods, and enjoyed popularity in the more northern areas of what is now Scotland.⁶³

After the Viking Age, Govan’s fortunes shifted, and it ceased to be the main ecclesiastical centre of the area. Govan was granted to Glasgow Cathedral by King David I, between 1128 and 1136, and made a prebend of the cathedral by Bishop Herbert, possibly an intentional snubbing of its previous importance.⁶⁴ Being an area of high Scandinavian cultural contact, which then became part of the Glasgow diocese, Govan then seems a likely route for which the Óðinn/Rindr narrative became known to a Glasgow cleric. Whilst this is still speculative, it seems a better fit than the ‘pagan myths’ explanation provided by Hill for the parallels between the two stories.⁶⁵ It may be yet another element of how Scandinavian culture and identity was imprinted onto the British Isles.⁶⁶

Edinburgh: Historic Scotland, 2011), 31, 49; Olwyn A. Owen and Stephen T. Driscoll, ‘Norse Influence at Govan on the Firth of Clyde, Scotland,’ in *Viking Settlements and Viking Society: Papers from the Proceedings of the Sixteenth Viking Congress, Reykjavik and Reykholt, 16-23 August 2009*, ed. by Svavar Sigmundsson et al. (Reykjavik: Hið íslenska fornleifafélag and University of Iceland, 2011), 336-7, 343.

⁶⁰ Dalglish and Driscoll, *Historic Govan*, 32.

⁶¹ Dalglish and Driscoll, *Historic Govan*, 9; Owen and Driscoll, ‘Norse Influence at Govan,’ 341-3.

⁶² Barbara E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland. Scotland in the Early Middle Ages. 2.* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1987), 219.

⁶³ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, 195-8.

⁶⁴ Driscoll, *Govan*, 24; Dalglish and Driscoll, *Historic Govan*, 50.

⁶⁵ Hill, ‘Odin, Rinda and Thaney,’ 235-6.

⁶⁶ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, 220.

Certainly, Scandinavian myths and Christian belief were not seen as mutually incompatible. Across the British Isles, depictions of Scandinavian myths can be found on crosses and grave monuments with Christian contexts—perhaps the adoption of Óðinn into the *Vita Kentegerni* can be seen as part of this.⁶⁷

Conclusion

I am aware that the two tales above, containing as they do men that only cross-dress in order to sexually assault a woman, may give fuel to the cause of those that see transgender women as simply men invading women's spaces (such as Janice Raymond's *The Transsexual Empire*). It would be simple to read the above tales as just that. Simple, and simplistic. These are not tales told by the actors—these are literary and hagiographic creations. Following Simon Gaunt's line of enquiry as to why writers have chosen to represent the world in this way, and the symbolic value of this to contemporaries, we find ourselves with the conclusion that these tales show more about the writer's own concerns and fears than they do about actual transvestite individuals in the medieval period.⁶⁸ They show us a glimpse into how Christian writers viewed both transvestism and gender fluidity. Óðinn's queer gender is hammered out into a man in drag by Grammaticus; Kentigern's immaculate conception explained away by his mother's rape by a male transvestite, thereby keeping her moral purity.

Óðinn's gender crossing is suggested by the Old Norse sagas as having been achieved by magic; this is a gender queering that occurred pre-Christianisation. So Óðinn's transvestism in the *Gesta Danorum* is only partly Christian, a Christian response to magic that needed a more mundane explanation. Similarly, Ewen's character is portrayed in a remarkably neutral way. The writer is more concerned with showing how this was morally acceptable, in order to defend Kentigern's sanctity. A child born of rape is hard to defend as a sacred birth—one that was born of a love-sick swain, though, is more defensible. In light of Serf's comments that it is as God willed it, one could even argue that

⁶⁷ Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland*, 174.

⁶⁸ Gaunt, *Gender and Genre*, 7-8.

transvestism, here, for this particular purpose, was seen as acceptable. Whilst the male transvestite is utilised as a sexual deviant, it paradoxically is also an agent of God’s will—an unintentional empowerment, and a complex one. Ultimately, both Grammaticus and the anonymous Glasgow cleric were forced to write transvestites into their narratives, in order to fix greater problems. These were stopgap solutions, evidenced by the later *Vita Kentgermi* by Jocelin of Furness that removes this narrative entirely, but still one that someone found acceptable. The transvestite appears, then, as a dark figure in Christian writings around gods and saints. But we should always bear in mind that this shows more about others’ views of transvestites, rather than anything they themselves did. An easily maligned figure such as the transvestite can be turned to any number of questionable activities by writers—but for the anonymous cleric and Grammaticus, it seems the transvestite was the lesser of two evils.

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“Am I Not a Woman Like Thyself?”

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Andrew Bull

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