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Landscape Theology: Exploring the Outfields of the Telemarkian *Dream Song*

Thomas Arentzen (Uppsala University, Sweden)

During Christmas Eve a young man named Olaf fell asleep and did not wake up. For thirteen days he was lost in the obscure corridors between life and lifelessness. He slept through one of the holiest periods of the calendar; across dark and dangerous times he slumbered. According to popular belief, the wild undead hunt of *Oskoreia* would roam the earth and the air during these days. Almost like a bear in hibernation, Olaf was cut off from the outside winter world. While he slept out of time, he slipped into a new space. And while he was absent from the cultural realm of humans, he became a wanderer in the landscapes of dreams.

Dream landscapes feed on the wakeful ones. If you are used to rowing, you may find your otherworld on an island (see, for instance, Siewers). If you spend your time thirsting in a desert, chances are you will fantasize about an oasis. Olaf learned his religious lessons from a dreamed-up landscape, a landscape that resembled his own and emerged from the outskirts of his local terrains. Not necessarily unlike other visionary literature, the Norwegian *Dream Song* or *Dream Verses* (*Draumkvæde*, TSB B 31) suggests that a corporeal encounter with the native rural land – if in the guise of a dream – yields religious insights superior to those of religious texts; an almost shamanic Christian knowledge has been taught to Olaf by the kneading, scraping terrain; the land has carved itself into his disintegrating body. In the following I study the dreamer's journey through these parts and the terrains in which he moves.

Discussing the 'place-corrosive process' of the twentieth century, Arne Næss once emphasized 'the interrelation between the self and the environment' for the

‘development of a sense of place’ (45).¹ The Telemarkian *Draumkvæde* does not describe a scenic panorama, but, I argue, it speaks theologically of place, conveying a theology situated in the local. As Simon Schama puts it, the ‘scenery [of a landscape] is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock’ (Schama, 7), and ‘once a certain idea of landscape, a myth or vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories’ (Schama, 61). Landscape, then, is a hermeneutical process of dwelling in the land. ‘Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world,’ Denis Cosgrove insists (13). Landscapes are not only seen, we might add, but also imagined, and experienced – aspects that come to the fore in *Draumkvæde* specifically, since the song describes landscapes that have not been witnessed by eyes but grasped in a dream. *Draumkvæde* participated in the muddling of categories by speaking theologically with the land; it contributed both to a theological landscape and a landscape theology. Lacking chronological markers, Olaf’s dream abounds with spatial markers, taking its audience from realm to realm, from place to place. In this study, then, I do not interpret ‘landscape’ as an objectified magnitude that can be cartographically transferred onto a map, but rather as terrain as it may be engaged with. At the expense of characterization and character interaction, I explore the religious expression of the landscape. Although vague in its accounts of location, *Draumkvæde* emerges from a sense of place which permits the local terrain to speak mythologically. The landscape is embedded in the lore as the lore in the land.

After the Urtext: An Introduction

Draumkvæde has long retained its place in the canon of Norwegian literature and is generally considered a kind of ‘national ballad’ (Espeland, Prøysen & Ressem, 30 *ballader*; Sørensen). No fictitious dreamer in the country can compare his or her

¹ The bibliography on *place* in ecocriticism, and ecologically oriented humanities more broadly, is vast. Since Næss published his essay in 1992, it has grown considerably. For three quite different perspectives, see Buell, 252–79; Christie, 102–140; Heise. For a more anthropological approach, see Ingold.

fame to that of Olaf. Many nineteenth-century collectors of folklore took an interest in the folksong.² In the form that we know it, *Draumkvæde* is a ballad tradition from the region of Upper Telemark. Almost two centuries ago, Anne Lillegård, Maren Ramskeid, Anne Skålen and other traditionists performed it in their local communities. We know that they had heard it from older generations and transmitted the oral lore handed down to them. A conglomerate of stanzas, *Draumkvæde*'s shape varied a great deal. Nobody, said the locals, is so ignorant that he does not know some stanzas of *Draumkvæde*, but nobody is so wise that he knows it all (Espeland, Prøysen & Ressem, 30 *ballader*). Authors like Moltke Moe (1859–1913) tried to ‘reconstruct’ a lost *Urtext* among the miscellaneous *Dream Songs* (see Strömbäck; Alver, 9–39; Johannesen, 7–44), but, of course, the performed versions recounted quite different dreams, and what the tradition provided was merely a core story around which traditionists could spin their own narratives freely and creatively. This variety, the riff on a standard, stories’ ability to serve as base for endless artistic improvisation, is at the heart of traditional storytelling, and today a search for the lost ‘original’ would seem less attractive to most scholars. Indeed, it was the performed versions – rather than the later ‘reconstructed’ ones – that people in the early nineteenth century heard and cherished.

The housemaid Maren Olavsdotter Ramskeid was born at the Heggteit farm in Åsgrend in 1817; she lived and grew up in the mountainous inland area between Brunkeberg and Seljord (Kviteseid municipality) before she immigrated to America in the 1850s. She had learned *Draumkvæde* from her father, who had learned it from his father (Landstad, 66). This article studies the version that Ramskeid sang to Magnus Brostrup Landstad in Kviteseid.

² Nils Sveinungsson is the first person known to have recorded parts of the song corpus in writing in 1842, on behalf of Olea Crøger (1801–1855), a priest’s daughter from Telemark. Based on his notes from Vinje, she wrote down the *Dream Song* towards the middle of the century. Around the same time, Magnus Brostrup Landstad (1802–1880) and Jørgen Moe (1813–1882) – both priests and poets – collected variants in the area. Several singers in the region of Upper Telemark knew a version of this dream vision, and the ballad collectors gathered the diverse renderings that they came across.

Previous scholarship has attempted to identify and interpret the characters of the ballad: Should Olaf's last name be the matronym 'Åsteson' rather than 'Åkneson'? Could this mean that the protagonist of *Draumkvæde* is none but the famous medieval St. Olav Haraldsson, whose mother's name was Åste? Perhaps these pieces of poetry even preserved fragments of an ancient pre-Christian worldview? Could not the enigmatic Grutte Greybeard hide a reference to the Norse god Odin? (Bø, 40). Was the song itself – not unlike its main character – a sleeper that originated in the Scandinavian Viking past and that only reawakened in modernity when enlightened women and men started to shake it? One might see in the visionary poem a remnant of the European tradition of otherworldly travels in the Middle Ages (Johannesen, 70–75); like the heroes in the *Vision of Tundale* or Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, Olaf was granted a glimpse of a world inaccessible to most living mortals. Both Moe and Landstad thought that *Draumkvæde* was a reworked version of the presumably medieval Icelandic *Sólarljóð* or *Sun Song* (e.g., Landstad, 65). As Christian Carlsen remarks, 'Questions of dating and authorship were long the chief subject of critical engagements with the poem, and suggestions ranged anywhere between the turn of the fifth to the eighteenth centuries' (Carlsen, 58–59). Instead of reviewing the pedigrees sketched by earlier scholarship, however, I shall turn to the song's immediate historical setting.

Any terrain shapes its people and the folklore which they produce, as well as the religion they practice. *Draumkvæde* reflects the land of the particular place that formed it. What is more, the song itself is the story of a landscape dream; Olaf's adventures amount to harsh encounters with a dreamed-up landscape. While the terrain he walks into is not the familiar hummocks of home, it is not an entirely other, either, for it lies just beyond. Emerging on the other side of the fences, one might say, is what Timothy Morton calls a 'strange stranger', a 'strange stranger' of landscapes, the familiar made uncanny (Morton, 275–77).³ Maren Ramskeid

³ Morton explains that 'the strange stranger is not only strange, but strangely so. They could be us. They are us ... Strange strangers are uncanny in the precise Freudian sense that they are familiar and strange simultaneously. Indeed, their familiarity is strange, and their strangeness is familiar.'

presents no exotic terrain in her version, but an uncharted place just beyond the well-known.

As fascinating as the Dante parallel may be, it suppresses vital differences between the *Divine Comedy* and *Draumkvæde*. Literature about the otherworld constitutes a vast body of text, and Dante's work shares relatively few features with the Norwegian song (regarding Dante and Medieval landscapes, see Fitter, 218–32). They emerge from dissimilar historical landscapes, but they also treat humans in contrasting manners: Dante's poetic I travels through a funnel packed with human bodies in all kinds of poses and positions. Wherever he goes, he finds sinners or saints, as he journeys firmly towards his heavenly goal. Beatrice leads him on his way. In the *Vision of Tundale* – a story that was translated into Old Norse under the title *Duggáls leizla* and arguably resembles the Telemarkian ballad more than Dante's work does – the knight is similarly escorted by an angel (cf. Wellendorf, 'Apocalypse', 137–40, for more visionary guides). Olaf, on the other hand, has no human guide, and his encounters are few; neither angels nor demons come his way, and the landscape is barely populated by any people. Only at the very end, just before the dream land loosens its grip, does he meet a group of beings that may be taken to resemble people and demons. And here St Sål Michael appears, a character who seems to be the archangel. Yet Olaf never goes to Hell; nor does he travel through Purgatory or Paradise – at least not in any form similar to how these three places are imagined in Dante. (For a broader view of relevant vision literature in the medieval Latin west, however, see Carlsen; Wellendorf, *Kristelig*.) In this article, therefore, I bracket the literary-genealogical considerations and explore instead how the song, in interacting with the natural environment where we know it was once sung, moulds an imaginary landscape from the land.

Ideologically speaking, *Draumkvæde* aims not to create clear distinctions between the sinners and the just in the otherworldly landscape. While Dante made a projection of his own social world (as he saw it) in an 'otherworld', *Draumkvæde* completely lacks a sociology, for, as already mentioned, the dream hardly features

any people at all. It is the encounter with the land itself that interests the singer.⁴ Even the animals that appear in the song play an instrumental role and seem only, in effect, to be inhabited by (more than they inhabit) the uncanny landscape.

As dreams often do, Olaf's story lacks a clear chronology – and even, one might say, a geography. Veronica della Dora has shown how, in realms uninfluenced by the objectifying principles of linear perspective of the Renaissance, seeing land generated a more place-oriented literature, exemplified in Odysseus' travels, where the experience of the particular places attracts the narrator's attention, while the eventless parts of the journey are eclipsed (della Dora, 1–29; cf. even Casey's notion of 'place-world', 7–9). In this manner, Olaf (helped by the stanzaic form of the song) moves from *topos* to *topos*, from one thematically pregnant place to another. Although the poem itself post-dates the Renaissance, it emerges from an environment where the land amounts to anything but an open field of laid-out spatial possibilities or an aesthetic pleasure for the urban eye. The song tells of a landscape that is hard for a listener to map, but which is felt, painfully, by and through Olaf's body.

One might expect, perhaps, that a religious landscape yields contemplation. Deserts and mountains, for instance, have long been places of contemplative encounters with the divine in Christian and other traditions. Maren Ramskeid's land is different. As opposed to great oceans and endless deserts, it is a place of few extremes, but many hindrances: the wet bogs are as hard to cross as the thorny thickets and plains. Rather than thick dark forests, Olaf walks into an open landscape typical of more mountainous parts of Telemark.

Draumkvæde represents a period when the mechanistic worldview had not yet penetrated the Norwegian countryside, nor had modern romantic ideas about wild nature as a sublime locus of emotions and insights caught on in the agricultural milieus of Upper Telemark (Mæland). While rationalist priests might be preaching

⁴ Although amusing, Georg Johannesen's post-colonial whirlwind of a reading (*Draumkvæde* 1993) fails to address the fact that Olaf's story is not primarily about other human beings.

an enlightened gospel, most laypeople still negotiated with the various forces and spirits in the world around them; forests, creeks and other parts of the landscape were alive with complex powers and potentially dangerous beings in this traditional worldview of pre-rationalist Christianity (cf. Amundsen, 269–74). As Chris Fitter has noted regarding the landscape perspective of various classes in society in general, ‘the farmer and field worker survey a realm of named boundary landmarks [and] experience the “close-to” perception of worked growth.’ (18). Urban National Romantics once envisioned the inland districts of Telemark as the typical Norwegian scenery, but for them it was far from a lived terrain (for a discussion, see Nordenhaug, 411–13; for the idea that there is a modern crisis of imagination regarding the environment, see Buell). The *Draumkvæde* traditionists from Telemark, on the other hand, knew hilly and rugged places, lakes and bogs, in challenging agropastoral valleys where humans and animals of the farms struggled to make a living. Compared to the rich agricultural soil of the Innlandet region north of Oslo, the land in western Telemark is meagre. There is nothing idyllically pastoral about the world that Maren Ramskeid imagines (for literary pastoral, see Gifford). While Anglophone ecocriticism with a romantic inclination has paid much attention to wildernesses (see, Garrard, 66–92), traditional pre-Romantic cosmologies in Norway did not share that interest. There lay no Arcadia beyond the cultivated land. This does not imply a disregard for what is more than human but emerged from an experience of vulnerability. Around their houses people demarcated a zone of relative safety for humans and animals – not a zone detached from the natural world, but within it. The fence did not, in other words, separate culture from nature. Venturing beyond these fences (which people surely did, and Olaf dreamed he did) meant stepping out into a realm wrought with danger, where predators and trolls roamed, where humans were constantly at risk. It did not, however, mean walking out of one’s own self. Maren Ramskeid is never tempted to idealize her terrain.

The terrain that appears in *Draumkvæde* may be described as *utmark* ('outfields'):

the Scandinavian concept 'utmark' lacks a corresponding denotation in English terminology. The term denotes natural-geographical environments such as forests, moorland, mountains and coastal areas, and economic, social and cultural aspects of these landscapes as parts of agricultural systems, as a complementary component to the infield. [...] 'utmark' may perhaps best be translated with the terms outfield or wasteland [...] In Norway, the areas covered by grazing land, forests, moors, rivers, tarns and lakes are extensive, and less than three per cent of the total land mass has ever been under cultivation (Øye, 9–11).

In this article, I follow Ingvild Øye's relatively broad definition, where 'outfields' does not merely denote the fields on the outside of the fence, but a wider area of grazing land.

As people in the Upper Telemark region tended to rely on animal husbandry, the infields there were generally small with larger outfields and shieling areas (Nordenhaug). Even houses were small, and people were relatively few; whereas the world seen from the Anthropocene may look densely populated and crowded with humans, Ramskeid would probably have sensed that the terrain was overwhelmingly powerful, as her song suggests. Just beyond the fences of the farms, wolves and bears might roam, and unwelcoming plants grew uncontrolled. Nevertheless, *Draumkvæde* says, these landscapes could speak theology. In negotiating the outer borders of the 'close-to' terrain, Olaf's point-of-view travel through the topography makes him vulnerable to the landscape, almost incorporated into it; the song renders the land a set of places that come to life in their encounters with Olaf.

Draumkvæde falls into three main sections: The beginning has an omniscient narrator that introduces Olaf and sets the scene (1–6); this section employs the refrain ‘that was Olaf Aakneson, who had been asleep for so long’.⁵ The second section describes his journey (7–20/22) with the refrain ‘for the moon shines, and the roads disperse so wide’.⁶ The landscape is witnessed from within. From this moment on, Olaf tells the story; the reader/listener is given a first-person viewpoint narration. Such subjective storytelling, which foregrounds the experiential element of the story, is unusual in older vision literature (Carlsen, 90), while it may be said to echo trends in European landscape writing of the early modern era.⁷ The final section, also included in Olaf’s monologue, consists of the Judgment. It starts with stanza 23, but Ramskeid introduced the refrain ‘in Broksvalin – that’s where Judgment shall be passed’ already in stanza 21.⁸

Like a later addition to an old church building, the two final stanzas represent a different voice within the text. The words are ascribed to Olaf, but since they were performed in the official written language (Danish) and almost seem to undermine the content of the song, they appear as an anti-voice in the song, as if echoing an educated theologian who does not speak the local dialect. They may well have been composed by an eighteenth-century priest of a rationalist bent, as has been suggested (Espeland et al, *Legendeballadar*). Instead of censoring, however, Maren Ramskeid integrated this anti-voice and included it in her composition but chose to pronounce it in a markedly foreign accent from which she and the local audience could distance themselves.

The text was first published by Landstad (84–89). I follow the version recently printed in *Norske mellomalderballadar: Legendeballadar* (Espeland et al). All English translations of the song are my own.

⁵ ‘dæ va Olaf Aaknesonen som sovi hæve saa længe’.

⁶ ‘for Maanen skjine aa Vægjene fadde saa vie’; another translation of the last part might be ‘and the roads seem so long’.

⁷ For instance, the influential writers John Denham and William Gilpin shared the ‘sense that point of view [narration] enables the viewer to construct landscape from physical terrain ... They insist, that is, that landscape is moral and political’ (Bending, 3).

⁸ ‘i Broksvalin dær sko Domen stande’.

In the Door

When the sun rises on the thirteenth day, it finally wakes Olaf from his dream; on the Thirteenth day of Christmas he rises. Since 1771, Denmark-Norway no longer commemorated Epiphany as a public holiday, and yet nineteenth-century people would still observe Epiphany. At the same time, many celebrated, on this very same day, the old-style Christmas day according to the abandoned Julian (Old Style) calendar. The date itself was, as it were, torn between the present and the past, between official and private. From a certain perspective, young Olaf has slept backwards in time; he fell into his slumber during ‘New Christmas’ and arose in the ‘Old’. His dream transcends temporal categories, in a time gap; from this temporal void, he falls into a new space.

Olaf was in his youth; he is called a bud or branch from a willow tree (1–2), which is the tender material used for making willow flutes. This instrument has been filling rural landscapes with tunes just as Olaf fills it now with song.

The *Draumkvæde* narrative starts with the holiday, as people are making their way to church. Olaf, too, saddles his horse and rides off. He heads for the site where preaching is being done, for he wants to relate his dream and describe what he has experienced. Where might one do that on such a day if not in church? Olaf halts at the entrance. Rhetorically he addresses the priest:

[6] Now you are standing before the altar
and expounding your text
as I am standing in the church door
about to relate my dream.

[6] No stænde du før Altraren
aa læg ut Texten din
saa stænde æg i Kyrkjedynni

fortællje vil æg Draumen min.

The parallel is clear: whereas the priest stands and preaches at the altar, the holiest place in a church, Olaf remains in the door. Thus the poem places the priest indoors, where cold winds cannot reach him; staying there in the front of the human congregation, in the middle of culture, he interprets text. Olaf's position contrasts that of the priest, in the spatial domain of the laity (cf., e.g., Diesen, 11). He lingers in the draft, cast in the outskirts of human community, almost like a shaman communicating between the human and more-than-human realm (cf. Abram, 6). Olaf is preaching to nobody – or at least we are not told that anyone actually draws near to listen. He speaks to trees and stones and the occasional rat, we may imagine. The young man does not, like the priest, read from Scripture; his is a remarkable oral story of a dreamed-up world that he himself has experienced first-hand. His gospel can only be hurled out into the cold winter air; the dead may be listening with half an ear. Who actually listens, however, is really beside the point, for the audience is eventually to be found beyond the text. *We* – who read or listen to *Draumkvæde* – make up his audience. *We* are all there, in the imaginary churchyard where he delivers his address. By implication, the poem positions *us* outside, between the altar and the unsanctified ground beyond the cemetery, between the wilderness and cultured space, learning of his adventures in the outer landscapes.

For Georg Johannesen, the placing of the protagonist by the church door and the pastor by the altar signifies direct antagonism between the two (44). This does not necessarily have to be the case, for some 110 km as the crow flies south of Maren's Kviteseid, the medieval Øyestad Church features a bishop's head in stone precisely over the church door, which is to say that such a position needs not be the locus of anti-theology. *Draumkvæde* does, however, suggest a certain complementarity; perhaps one might say that the priest and the visionary represent different modes of theologizing and different kinds of authority. Differences aside, Olaf and the

priest are both facing west.⁹ They speak their parallel gospels, where the former's delivery presupposes the latter's, according to the poem itself. Olaf chooses the church as his stage, so that his message vibrates – perhaps dissonantly – with the words of the priest. Yet placing Olaf on the threshold between the hallowed room and the outdoors serves to give his gospel a more ambiguous role. He negotiates between the well-dressed and the wild, between the regulated and the forces beyond human control, the safe and the uncanny. He is about to speak landscape theology.

Out into *Uttexiti*

[6] Now you are standing before the Altar

and expounding your text ...

[7] First I was in *Uttexiti*;

I traversed a circle of thorns ...

[6] No stænde du før Altraren

aa læg ut Texten din ...

[7] Fyst va æg i Uttexiti

æg for ivi Dyrering ...

From the seventh stanza, Olaf starts telling about his dream. He draws up a gloomy and slightly mysterious landscape before the inner eyes of his listeners; even though he is celebrating Epiphany/Christmas, he describes a summer scene of adders and wet bogs. Already the first line confronts at least the modern reader with obscurity – and probably also to Ramskeid's contemporaries: 'At first I was in *Uttexiti*'. What does this mean? Where did he go? Few *Draumkvæde* words have provoked more discussion than *Uttexiti*, and I will eschew a review of those debates here. Suffice it to say that while Moltke Moe construed the term as a Norwegian corruption of the

⁹ Or, Olaf could be imagined as facing south, like the door in the old church in Kviteseid for instance.

Latin words *extasis* and *exitus* (260), Jon Haukaas has suggested that the word means an infertile or unsown place in the outskirts of or beyond the farmed fields, a rugged or less accessible terrain (123–25), and Magne Myhren similarly has: ‘First I was in an outlying place’ (as translated in Barnes, 212, cf. Myhren, ‘I uteksti’).¹⁰

Yet the storyteller seems to be playing with words, highlighting the contrast between the dreamer and the priest: inside the church the *Text* (6) is being preached; closer to the doorway one approaches the *Uttext* (7). Thus read, *U[t]texti* may be taken to denote the ‘un-text’ or the ‘out-text’, the theology which does not issue from the text but arises from the natural landscape. It is true that in Norwegian, as in English, words such as ‘un-text’ or ‘out-text’ do not feature in dictionaries, but it is also true that such prefixes can be added relatively freely, so that for instance a word like ‘unthirsty’ would be easily understood by English speakers even if the *Merriam-Webster* has yet to include it. The noun ‘text/tekst’ is masculine in most Norwegian dialects. If we take ‘i *Uttexti*’ to be a dative phrase, however, that would explain the -i ending, and dative is still active in the nineteenth-century dialects of western Telemark (for inflections, see Barnes, 192, cf. also 238). We shall never know what Ramskeid’s local audiences heard, and what semantics she herself assumed – it may have been an archaic word that was inherited through the tradition or a dialectal term that is currently unidentifiable – but the wider meaning is clearly the opposite of the indoor realm of the ecclesiastical text. Somewhere beyond the text, then, Olaf journeys to a sort of wilderness, a rough terrain outside the cultivated land, the rather unsafe outfields (7–8):

[7] First I was in *Uttexti*;
 I traversed a circle of thorns;
 torn were both my scarlet cloak
 and all of my fingernails,
for the moon shines and the roads disperse so wide.

¹⁰ See also *Norsk ordbok: Ordbok over det norske folkemålet og det nynorske skriftmålet*, s.v. *utekst* I.

[7] Fyst va æg i Uttexti
æg for ivi Dyrering
sonde va mi Skarlakens kaape
aa Neglan a kvor min Fing
– *For Maanen skjine aa Vægjene fadde saa vie* –

Generally speaking, Norwegian folklore tends to reflect a fundamental cosmological divide between the safe – and at times even sacred – cultivated land on one hand and the dangerous and uncultivated world beyond the ploughed fields on the other (Hodne, 19–24). Like other works of traditional storytelling, *Draumkvæde* imagines the phenomenon of human exposure to danger in terms of venturing outside the boundaries of the farmed landscape. While peaceful powers reigned around houses and homes so that humans, plants, animals, and other non-human beings were mostly on friendly terms, unbefriended forces that were dangerous to people and to the livestock ruled on the other side of the fence. *There*, domestic animals and humans appeared merely as foreign guests and had to be utterly careful not to upset the predators and powers who lived among trees and rocks (Steinsland, 143–44; Hodne, 26–30; Asheim, 26). Fairy tale heroes encounter trolls in such terrains.

This is the kind of landscape Olaf's dream has taken him into: Wild animals are circling ('Dyrering') and the young man is crossing their track ('Dyretrea', 8). A possible interpretation of the first part of these words 'dyre-' – which I follow in my translation here – is that it is a corruption of 'tyrner-/tynnir-', meaning 'thorn' (Myhren 'Draumkvædet', 80; Barnes, 205–6 n. 10; cf. Blom, 11). From a literary point of view, such a reading seems plausible. Landstad himself apparently heard 'dyre-', but we cannot know to what degree he recorded every word of the song precisely; Ramskeid spoke a dialect which lacked orthographic rules (Barnes, 189–95). In any case, Olaf's scarlet cloak is shredded, by thorns or by the wildlife – possibly predators. His fingernails and his toenails (8) are ragged. The scene portrays him

intruding in a violent faunal or vegetal landscape. The red scraps of the cloak hang from his body as if imitating blood dripping from a wounded figure. In a Christian context, the scarlet colour conveys rich connotations of power, sin, martyrdom and death. The prophet Isaiah says, for instance, that ‘though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow’ (1.18), and in the Danish ballad *Elverskud*, blood from a blow flows on a scarlet cloak. Does *Draumkvæde*’s scarlet cloak signify Olaf’s own bloody skin? This question is left to the audience’s interpretation, but his groomed self is clearly being ripped and mangled; the outer land and its creatures are clawing Olaf, scratching at his corporeal presence. Apparently, they try to scare him away from the dangerous terrain; ironically, though, they are scratching his body down until it almost dissolves into the landscape itself, transforming him from an infield being with a cloak into a wild outfield being. The whole scene is described in strikingly tangible ways; yet there is no visual ekphrasis of these regions. Olaf does not so much see and observe the landscape as he experiences it, is made to feel it. He later relates how mud fills his mouth (11). The mud is said to be *rapa*, which can mean both ‘slid’ and ‘belched’. Olaf is, as it were, gulping the soil and becoming a part of it, like a living corpse. The landscape does not lie before him passively; it eats itself into his body.

Crossing the Bridge

Yet the young man moves on, under an ominous moon. As the refrain maintains, the roads disperse so utterly far and wide. Although these words do not translate easily, they contribute to the indication of a gloomy and unwelcoming landscape where the dreaming wanderer is given over to a harsh loneliness. Christian Scripture says that ‘*narrow* is the road that leads to life’ (Matthew 7.14). Olaf appears to be heading in a different direction. And while the verb ‘fall’ (*fadde*) here primarily means simply ‘seem’ – the roads ‘appear so wide’ – it does at the same time suggest a vertiginous landscape where the roads are falling away underneath Olaf’s feet.

After the violent animals or thorns, Olaf sets out to cross a bridge. As early runic inscriptions attest, bridges had had a positive reputation in Scandinavia ever

since the emergence of Christianity, not only in the symbolic landscape, but also in the physical landscape of rivers and roads (Gräslund, 490–92). The Dynna stone (ca. AD 1050), for instance, reads ‘Gunvor Thrydriksdaughter made a bridge in memory of her daughter Astrid.’¹¹ Building bridges counted as a good deed. Olaf’s bridge is not so good. He is not about to cross an ordinary bridge. Ahead lies the Gjallar Bridge (*Gjallarbru*), which in Norse mythology was known to span the river Gjöll, separating the living from the dead. As Michael Barnes has pointed out, *Gjallarbru* – with a rich field of connotations – remained a part of Christian language in Scandinavia throughout the Catholic period and beyond (Barnes, 43; cf. Carlsen, 165–70). *Draumkvæde* mentions no river, yet even for Olaf traversing the bridge means entering deeper into the landscapes of death:

[9] And the Gjallar Bridge is awful
and not good to walk upon,
The hounds they bite, the adders sting
and the bulls there are a-butting,
for the moon shines and the roads disperse so wide.

[9] Aa Gjeddardbroi den æ vond
aa inkje go aa gange
Bekkjune bite aa Ormane sting
aa Stutæne stænd aa stangar.
– *For Maanen skjine aa Vægjene fadde saa vie* –

The three Billy-Goats Gruff of the fairy tale had to face up to a troll in order to make their way across a bridge, from the infield to the outfields. Whereas bridges form parts of the landscape, as already noted, they also constitute points of transition in the landscape. Giving admittance to new areas, they simultaneously appear as

¹¹ kunuur × kirþi × bru × þririðs tutir × iftir osriþi × tutur × sina

obstacles. The passage from one place to the other can only be achieved through pain and struggle; bridges represent the sting of change. Whoever crosses a bridge – especially in literature – enters a new field or a new realm. Transition may imply danger.

To Olaf, the bridge offers harsh resistance as he ventures into unknown territories. All the actors in the landscape are trying to push the wanderer away from the lands to which he is foreign, a place where nature turns on itself, the dogs and the snakes biting and the bulls butting their heads, perhaps goring Olaf. The animals are nervous and overstrung. Nonetheless, the protagonist's experience does not amount to an exotic hell vision of burning flames and dragons – nor a troll-encounter for that matter. His crossing of the bridge includes cattle, hounds, and adders. None of these were unfamiliar in the rural life of Upper Telemark. Olaf still roams in the outskirts of his own local landscape; his mythical terrain stretches out from the fields that Ramskeid's listeners knew. Rather than dualistically divided into good and evil, the land presents dangers and challenges of various sorts. The animals are nervous out here; they are turning on Olaf, and apparently on each other. Olaf has stridden across deep bogs, he reports, he has waded the bottomless wetlands that he calls *Voxmyren* (11).¹² The landscape threatens to swallow him.

Landscape Learning

As the outfield landscape offers Olaf resistance, it simultaneously teaches him wisdom. Once he has made his way across the bridge, the dreamer starts to understand what the land and its elements are instructing him about. First, he observes two adders biting each other (10). This was, he says, cousins who marry in *this realm* (*denni Heimen*) – that is, in the infields where Olaf stands as he is relating his story. Through their confused yet violent behaviour, the animals warn him not to engage in relationships that contradict Christian ethics. In such marriages, nature turns on itself. Animal activities in this land beyond the Gjallarbru (as animal

¹² The name seems to be a corruption of *våsemyran(e)*, meaning bogs that are hard to wade through or which one will easily sink down in (Myhren, 'Draumkvædet', 81; cf. also Barnes, 216).

activities in the more familiar infields of Telemark, we may assume) make up signs or allegories that Olaf needs to interpret and make sense of. If he does, the landscape and those who dwell in it communicate with him and reveal insights.

Next, in a language clearly reminiscent of the New Testament Beatitudes (Matthew 5.3–12; Luke 6.20–22), the dreamer reveals what he has learned about charity. The one who gives shoes to the poor in the more well-known everyday realm (*Føesheimen*) does not have to walk barefoot on the thorny plains of the *Heklemoe* (12). He who has fed the hungry need not feel faint on the chilling Gjallarbru, nor fear the horns of the bulls (13–14). Those who have given bread and clothes to the needy will not themselves be destitute here in the landscape that Olaf is discovering (15–16). As morally righteous behaviour never contradicts nature, a person who has acted in an ethical way does not upset the species in the landscape; being charitable protects people from the dangers of these outfields. This is hardly the kind of literature that gives all sorts of narrative minutiae, and we are not told how Olaf reaches his conclusions, but his engagement with the landscape itself, his corporeal experience of these painful places, seems to have given him a very tangible knowledge. The stanzas suggest, moreover, that Olaf himself does not belong to the group of people blessed for their compassion, for he has suffered much along the way, and the Gjallarbru confronted him with painful resistance (9). The journey grants him, nonetheless, discernment regarding his own deficiencies.

The Trail of Insight

Eventually Olaf's luck turns as he proceeds to the *Vetters Ti* (17–20). It is possible that Landstad misunderstood this phrase, for while it may sound like 'winter time', it makes more sense if the phrase is interpreted as 'Vitersti', meaning a trail of insight or knowledge (Myhren, 'Draumkvædet', 85–86). It may also, according to Knut Liestøl, mean the trail the dead have to walk (Liestøl & Moe, 195). In any case, it is true that this road leads to winter; by choosing it Olaf would come upon a freezing landscape of blue ice. He avoids it (17), however, and instead he beholds Paradise to his right.

Giving no description of Paradise as a place, Olaf relates how this blessed realm shines from its location down below and appears to emit rays over fields and lands, as if it were a sun rising in the lunar landscape (18). According to conventional Christian cosmology, *up* is good while *down* is bad; heaven is above and hell below. *Draumkvæde* turns this cosmology upside down as the protagonist finds himself situated higher up than Paradise, implying that a good place can be somewhere low in the terrain. Mountains and high hills might be places of vulnerability to Ramskeid and her contemporary animals, whereas valleys and hillsides provided heat and shelter and fertility. Paradise shimmers from a low place. The most striking aspect, however, is not that the levels switch places; on the contrary, the levels themselves collapse in the poem, and the significance of up and down are downplayed to the advantage of various places on the same plane.

After his gloomy drifting, Olaf's path is now filled with excitement. He walks downwards, as from a hill and down in the valley. In or by Paradise he distinguishes someone familiar and exclaims with joy:

[19] Then I caught sight of Paradise;
it couldn't have befallen me better;
I recognised my Godmother there
with red gold on her hands.

[19] Saa saag æg mæg te Paradiis
dæ mone mæg inkje bære hænde
der kjænde æg atte Gudmo mi
mæ røde Gul paa Hænde

For the first time, Olaf encounters another human being, his *Gudmo/Gulmo*. We might ask, however, whether she can be regarded as a regular human being. Although the word may simply mean 'godmother' or 'golden mother', in this song it

can hardly connote anyone but the Mother of God. Alone the facts that her hands are covered in gold and that she dwells in Paradise suggest as much.¹³ She is, in other words, no ordinary human, but the Mother of God herself, wretched creatures' most sanctified helper in the divine realm. Here she resides in Paradise, and to Olaf she represents a joyful turn of events, a salvation from the landscapes of death that surround him.

This could have been the end of his travel, but it is not. The Virgin Mary urges him on to a different place. 'Go to *Broksvalin*,' she says, because that is the place of the judgment.

Broksvalin

Scholars have given no good explanation for the word/name *Broksvalin*, and the performers may not have known exactly either. Some suggestions include 'halls of the clouds' or 'halls in the hills', and even 'vestibule of misery' (Barnes, 214; Myhren, 'Draumkvædet', 87–88). Although possible, none of these definitions succeeds in convincing entirely; they all basically amount to scholarly guesses based on what the two parts of the word might mean according to various dictionaries. Yet there is nothing in Ramskeid's version to suggest misery, and the etymological reference to the Icelandic *brok* (Myhren, 'Draumkvædet', 87) seems intrinsically tied to ideas about the Norse provenance of the song, unless one thinks a related word was in use in the Kviteseid dialect. If we assume that people in the beginning of the nineteenth century did not understand this name to signify anything specific, one could also read it as an evocative name. For instance, as adjective *sval* can mean 'cool' (not too hot), while the verb *hugsvale*, which assonates with *Broksvalin*, means to comfort or relieve. *Brok* can be heard as related to words for being broken or perhaps the word for commotion (*bråk*); a *val* is a battleground (cf. even Valhalla). These possible allusions may add some hue to the otherwise quite enigmatic and lofty halls. Olaf

¹³ Furthermore, a well-known folktale tradition (first recorded in Norway by Jørgen Moe west of Oslo in the nineteenth century) tells of the Virgin Mary as godmother to a poor girl (AT 710, known in English as 'The Lassie and Her Godmother'; see Solberg).

avoids describing the place at all. Escaping secure description, the location does, nonetheless, play a major role in the story, for this is where the Judgment is going to take place. It looms at the end of the visionary landscape, the end of the long and thorny road.

Broksvalin comes with a few peculiar figures who are assembling in this mysterious terrain. First Olaf meets a man:

[21] Then met I the man,
and blood was [his] cloak;
under his arm he carried a child,
in the soil he waded knee deep.
In Broksvalin – that's where Judgment shall be passed.

[21] Saa mødte æg Mannen,
aa Kaapa den va Blo
han bar eit Barn onde sin Arm
i Jori han gjek te Knæ
– *I Broksvalin dær sko Domen stande.* –

Olaf here tells of the only ordinary – albeit unfortunate – human beings that he comes across, yet not even this man is necessarily a regular person. His cloak is blood. As we have already seen, Olaf's cloak was scarlet, a colour generally associated with (Christ's) blood. Olaf's cloak was torn asunder, along with his nails, by the landscape's thorns or clawing animals (7–8). Through this process, we must imagine, the distinction between cloak and blood was diminishing even further. It is difficult not to interpret the man in the cloak of blood, then, as Olaf himself. Olaf also waded through deep bogs and sank down in the dangerous Voxmyren (11), resembling this fellow who is sinking down in the soil to his knees. Stanza 22 talks about a man – apparently the same man – whose cloak is heavy as lead, and the baby

that he is carrying under his arm (21) represents his rigid soul in *this realm* (22). On the verge of the Judgment, the landscape shows Olaf himself in a mirror.

Simultaneously, a terrifying parade arrives from the north. This cardinal direction signals chilling cold, not least in Nordic countries where the winter cold can be fatal. A rider on a black horse heads the procession (23). Grutte Greybeard on the black horse has often been identified as the Devil, but in the song, he is simply known as Grutte, a name which may mean ‘gruff’, ‘grouchy’ or ‘furious’. Black and grey come riding through the landscape. Frightening as his pack may seem, they are not allowed much space in the story, for from the temperate south enters a good procession, led by St Sål Michael and Jesus Christ (24–25).¹⁴

St Sål Michael blows his *lur*, calling all the souls to come forward (26).¹⁵ They are shaking like aspen leaves in the wind, aware of their sinfulness. The idiom of leaves ironically reveals the sinners as both fearful and light at the same time, for do not aspen leaves perform a featherlike dance in the wind? Hence their penitent shaking appears to lighten the weight of their sins which are about to be measured. When St Sål Michael finally uses his scale to weigh them, it does not determine whether the evil deeds or the good deeds are heavier; he simply – as if in a light breeze – ‘weighed all of the sinful souls over to Jesus Christ’ (28). Thus the song ends with the joy of redemption when all the sinners are saved by St Sål Michael and Christ. Even as Ramskeid’s song places Christ in the story, he remains in the outskirts of it, in the distance, decentred; he rides behind the angel, and the latter takes charge of the judgment. Merely a receiver of souls that flutter over to him, Jesus appears present but passive.

According to Sigurd Bergmann, Nordic churches ‘avoid locating God – the suffering as well as the resurrected – directly in the Nordic landscape’ (237). Even if

¹⁴ ‘Sål(e)’ may mean ‘soul’, but Ramskeid actually uses another word (‘Sjæl’) for soul in the same stanzas, and thus ‘St Sål Michael’ appears to be a set phrase for her. This is supported by the fact that other versions of *Draumkvæde* also call him ‘St Sål Michael’.

¹⁵ A *lur* is a traditional Scandinavian wooden trumpet instrument; it works here as a local variant of the Biblical idea about a trumpet announcing God’s final reign: ‘Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”’ (Rev 11.15).

this may be correct for church imagery, it does not hold true for *Draumkvæde*, where Christ rides – presumably a horse from the warmer south – through the terrain. Admittedly, the landscape of judgment bears no explicit Telemarkian markers (while aspen is native to Telemark, it is also found elsewhere in Europe and Asia), but there is no reason to imagine that Olaf ever abandons the locally informed land, even as he steers clear of the icy trail (17); thus the judgement scene allows the reader or listener to visualize Christ in a ‘Nordic landscape’. In *Broksvalin*, the divine and the local intersect.

The dangerous wilderness beyond the Gjallarbru has eventually shown itself to be fields of salvation, where Christ visits, out in its extremities. Maren Ramskeid does not provide an infernal territory of punishment, but a landscape where those who have upset nature suffer according to nature before the salvific judgment (cf. Hellemo, 86; Johannesen, 57–59).

Eventually, the song, in a dream-like manner, has returned to where it started, to the horse(s) carrying the character(s) onto the scene. As Olaf’s entrance discreetly foreshadowed the judgment, the judgment now takes us back to his place in the church door, where aspen leaves – more or less figurative – may listen to his words, and his proclamation resounds with the *lur*.

After Judgment

In an era when topographic poetry grew in popularity in Europe – as did landscape painting – the *Dream Song* of Telemark spoke religiously with the landscape and told of dangerous, painful places. It is a song about a man who relates his dream, and the dream concerns a journey through a landscape which teaches him theological insights. Ramskeid’s Olaf neither ventures into a different dimension nor is he taken up to a heaven above or a hell below. In fact, above and below hardly apply here. Olaf simply wanders out into the outskirts of familiar terrains. If it is likely, as David Abram assumes, that ‘the supernatural heaven of Christian belief, originates in the loss of our ancestral reciprocity with the animate earth’ (Abram, 10), then Maren Ramskeid exemplifies a more intimate relation with the animate

earth when she participates in the modelling of a dreamscape devoid of celestial supernaturality, a dreamscape formed from the dust of the local ground. Reading Christian ideas about judgment and morality in the regional terrain, Ramskeid conveyed an imaginary topography, a mythological landscape that stretched out as a rustic alternative to the indoor gospel. With the other traditionists, she consulted her own geography and fauna when she spoke theology; they found in their local environment a mythological potential as they were conversing theologically with roads and fields and marshland. The various formations, places, and creatures that Olaf encounters instruct him about life and death, about the consequences of immoral behaviour, about Judgment and Salvation. Other versions of *Draumkvæde* render different topographical encounters (for a list of place names in all the various *Draumkvæde*, see Barnes, 214–17), but they all share the idea that the otherworld stretches out as a terrain extending beyond the fences of this world.

There is nothing picturesque about the landscape of *Draumkvæde*, however, for the terrain commands; it wrestles with and tackles the one who traverses it. Instead of lying there as a passive resource for farmers or others to develop, it teaches and instructs, it grasps and tears, and it interacts with Olaf throughout the whole song. Animals and plants undress the protagonist, shred his skin and grind him down to mud; the landscape scares him and hurts him with its animals and exhausts him with its plants. The agency of the land itself creates the dynamics of the narrative; the dreamer and the terrain have struggled with each other in a battle of life and death. Although Ramskeid's landscape comes with a happy end, she is never tempted to create delightful pastoral scenes, as opposed to her contemporary Romantics, who strolled out into nature's immaculacy for inspiration. For them the wild and natural space formed an open realm where sublime creativity and insight might be bestowed upon the enthused genius, the landscape itself merely representing a spiritless and material world (see Dvergsdal for a study of Norwegian examples). In its dreamy dimness, Ramskeid's landscape has nothing ethereally spiritual to it; on the contrary, it appears almost frightfully tangible.

Those who were lucky enough to hear Maren Ramskeid perform, would have been led to imagine that the terrain – somewhere out there – communicated insights about ethics and ultimately also about the immanent presence of the holy and divine in the outskirts of the local. To us, as twenty-first-century readers of *Draumkvæde*, who are (to return to Næss' terminology) victims of place-corrosion, it speaks in another register. The song confronts us with a less anthropocentric view of agency in the world than we are used to. This historical source imagines me, as human, differently in relation to the more-than-human world, which is here, around me. Without eclipsing the church building, or the Christian text, or the infield – or Jesus Christ for that matter – the *Dream Song* decentres them, demonstrating that the landscape outside can teach us other religious lessons, about the embodied self as a part of the local place. Olaf returns as a transformed person, who now belongs in the doorway, and who has seen past the delocalizing text. For out yonder, beyond the text, lies *Utteti*.

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