“She Did Not Want a Husband, and Least of All This One”

Marriage and Gendered Power Relations in Icelandic Folk Legends

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Abstract
The article looks at how marriage appears in Icelandic folk legend collections from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while focusing on the portrayal of femininity and gendered power relations. The focus is on legends of women and nonsupernatural men as well as women and male outlaws, which are common in Icelandic folktale collections. The legends show women being forced into marriage, difficulties within marriage and eventually perhaps women’s hopes for a better life. The article considers the messages about and for women conveyed in the legends, bearing in mind that while legends tend to reflect the societies to which they belong, they can also potentially affect and shape their environments.

Keywords: legends, femininity, marriage, iceland, outlaws, violence, Iceland

Introduction

In nineteenth-century Iceland, one of the main institutions of society was the family, which usually started with marriage. Marriage in Iceland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a contract made by two people, a man and a woman. It was not always based on romantic love but was a mutual agreement which was supposed to be beneficial to both. Nevertheless, the man was the head of the house, and according to ruling ideology, the wife should be obedient to her husband (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011:83–85).

While relatively few Icelandic folk legends tell of wedding ceremonies or festivities, there are many which focus on the themes of love and/or marriage. In this article the focus will be on those legends which tell of the position of women within marriage and the gendered power relations which appear in them. The legends examined here tell of marriages between non-supernatural men and women, as well as between women and male outlaws.[1] They focus on women who are forced into marriage, either by

their fathers or future husbands, difficulties and violence within marriages and finally legends which might reflect women's hopes for a better life. I seek to examine the portrayal of these women and the power relations found within them, as well as what impact those legends might have had on those who heard them.

Looking at legends as sources for the societies in which they were told, as will be done here, is a well-known method in folkloristics. While legends cannot be considered accurate historical sources, they nevertheless convey a certain truth as they offer valuable insights into the societies in which they were told (Alver 1989:149; Röhrich 1991:9; Palmenfelt 1993:157; Tangherlini 1994:15–17). Therefore, it can be said that they contain a reflection of people's ideas about the world around them (Holbek 1998:435; Dégh 1989:181; Siikala 1990:39). Legends can also work as a guide to what was considered appropriate behaviour, what was considered normal and what should be avoided (Gunnell 2008:15). Legends can thereby be said to contain unwritten rules about behaviour and communication, not least with regard to gender and class. Legends are thus both affected by their society and have the ability to shape and impact it, mediating certain ideas to those who hear them. It is important to note that in Iceland, legends are sometimes longer than elsewhere, meaning that the borders between legends and wonder tales can sometimes seem blurred (Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir 1988:15; Jón Hnefill Aðalsteinsson 1989:228). Nevertheless, as in other countries, Icelandic legends purport to take place in the real world of the people who told them; they are often set in a specific time and connected to specific places and people.

When working with legends it is always important to bear in mind where the material originates from and how it might have been influenced by factors such as individual storytellers and collectors. Here, the emphasis is placed on the material contained in the three earliest and most extensive folktale collections,[2] as well as the only collection from this time made by a woman, Torfhildur Þ. Hólm. Her legend collection is important as it is also the only one which includes more legends attributed to female storytellers than male (Júlíana Þóra Magnúsdóttir 2010:134). This gender bias found within the collections is something which must always be kept in mind, especially when examining the portrayal of women and gendered power relations within the material. The *Sagnagrunnur* Icelandic legend database, which contains information on 10,110 published legends, was used to find additional legends which will be considered where relevant (*Sagnagrunnur*; Gunnell 2010; Trausti Dagsson & Holownia 2020). This article draws on both folkloristics and gender studies, the approach being essentially historical folklore studies with an emphasis on gender history and gendered power relations (see, for example, Gill, 2000:172–190; Phillips and Jørgensen

2002:61; Sigríður Matthíasdóttir 2002:32–34; Ingólfur Á. Jóhannesson 2010:252).

Marriage in Iceland in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

Up until the late nineteenth century Icelandic society was primarily a rural farming and fishing community. The farm was both the home and the workplace of most people, and social and legal restrictions as well as religious ideology had a great deal of influence on social standing and human rights. Most women in the nineteenth century became either housewives (if they got married) or housemaids (Guðmundur Hálfdánarson 1993:18).[3] However, not all women had the possibility to get married. Up until the end of the nineteenth century a set of laws called *Vistarbandið*, intended to ensure that everyone had a place to live and that farmers had cheap workers, placed marriage restraints on workers. The laws forbade marriage among the unpropertied classes, stating among other things that people who had received money from the parish during the last ten years were not allowed to get married. This situation was not specific to Iceland but known all around Europe. What was specific to Iceland though was that around 25% of the population remained in the position of unpropertied labourers throughout the nineteenth century (Gísli Gunnarsson 1987:32–38; see also Vilhelm Vilhelmsson 2017). While for male farmworkers the situation was often temporary, many women remained housemaids throughout their lives (Guðmundur Hálfdánarson 1993:18). Among other things, this law also resulted in the average marriage age in Iceland being rather high compared to other countries at the time. In the years 1891–1895, it was age 30.8 for men and 28.2 for women (Símon Jón Jóhannsson & Ragnhildur Viðarsdóttir 1991:73).

Marriage granted women some additional rights. From the time of Iceland's settlement until the nineteenth century, arranged marriages were not uncommon, and autobiographies of people from the late eighteenth until the late nineteenth century suggest that romance was not always the biggest factor in choosing a spouse (Inga Huld Hákonardóttir 1995:121). When marriage was considered acceptable, the tradition in Iceland was that the men proposed to women, rather than the other way around, and in upper-class families at least, men were required to seek the father's consent to marry his daughter (Árni Björnsson 1996:191).

As can be seen by mass-produced texts written or translated by Icelandic men for Icelandic women, as well as personal sources and memoirs, in nineteenth-century Iceland, girls were brought up in a way that directed them towards becoming either good housewives and mothers or loyal housemaids.[4] Girls were taught to raise children and do housework and

chores neatly, and to be helpful and obedient to their husbands or masters (Símon Jón Jóhannsson & Ragnhildur Viðarsdóttir 1991:55; Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011:83; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2020:293). One of the best-known Icelandic guides for young men and housewives was written by the priest Björn Halldórsson (1724–1794). He published his guide for young men around 1780 and wrote a guide for housewives around the same time. His guide for women however was not published until 1843, after he had passed away. In the guide for men there is a section on how to choose a spouse. There it is noted that the best qualities to look for in a wife are that they are hardworking and clean, save money, are reliable, obedient, sociable and god-fearing (Björn Halldórsson 1983:58; Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011:84). The later guide for women is aimed at the wives of wealthy farmers, ministers and officers. According to this book, the housewife is responsible for raising children, telling workers what to do and running the home with determination, frugality and resourcefulness. The book also underlines that a woman should be god-fearing and an icon of goodness and tolerance. As a wife, she must be her husband's best friend, adviser and confidant but still be submissive and follow her husband's advice (Björn Halldórsson 1973; Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011:84–85).

The idea that women should be obedient to their husbands is also echoed in ministers' speeches at wedding ceremonies in Iceland in the nineteenth century, where it was stressed with references to the Bible that the man was at the top of the hierarchy and the wife should obey him (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2009:87). Women were given by their fathers to their husbands, and married women did not become financially independent until the 1900s and the man remained in charge of estate until 1920 (Símon Jón Jóhannsson & Ragnhildur Vigfúsdóttir 1991:98). Emphasis is also nevertheless put on the fact that both men and women should have the respect and support of their spouse (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2009:92–93). By the end of the nineteenth century things begin to change and one can see discussion and objection to gender inequality, both in general and in relation to wedding ceremonies and marriage (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2009:100–101).

For a long time, marriage was also a very binding contract, as it was difficult to get divorced. During the sixteenth century in the Nordic countries both men and women had equal rights to divorce on the grounds of adultery, impotence and malicious desertion. These provisions remained formally in force in Iceland until the modern marriage and divorce legislation of the twentieth century was implemented (Ólöf Garðarsdóttir & Brynja Björnsdóttir 2018:95–96).[5] Divorce rates in Iceland were similar to that described in the Nordic countries during the nineteenth century: stable and low. As the historians Ólöf Garðarsdóttir and Brynja Björnsdóttir have noted, it could be risky for people to get divorced as it could affect their position within society. Divorced individuals had to negotiate a financial

settlement and men and women could move from being farmers into the position of workers or paupers (Ólöf Garðarsdóttir & Brynja Björnsdóttir 2018:101).

Women Who Are Forced to Marry

As noted above, while relatively few Icelandic legends focus on or tell of weddings or wedding ceremonies and festivities, many of them deal with themes such as love and/or marriage. While naturally some Icelandic legends include happily married people or portray marriage as the ultimate goal of men or women (as is often the case in wonder tales),[6] there is often little description of their married life or role as husband or wife in those legends and they give us limited insight into the gendered power relations at work. However, as Ulf Palmenfelt and Bengt Holbek have both pointed out, conflict between the sexes is one of the main driving forces in many legends and wonder tales, effectively reflecting the society these narratives belong to (Palmenfelt 1993:151; Holbek 1998:416). The legends dealt with here include such conflict, as they give us further insights into the gendered power relations which exist within married life.

The focus here is first and foremost on legends which tell of marriage between non-supernatural men and women, as well as those legends which tell of marriage between male outlaws and women. In Icelandic legends outlaws are often presented as dangerous almost inhuman or supernatural figures. They live outside of human society and are known to steal both sheep and people (Lindow 1998:109; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2016:38). Outlawry was a form of punishment in medieval Iceland and involved people being banished from society either for three years or even permanently for breaking the law. Legends of outlaws can be said to be on the border of legends and wonder tales. It is nevertheless clear that some Icelanders believed in and feared dangerous or supernatural outlaws until the nineteenth century (Ólafur Briem 1983:7–9). The connection between the legendary outlaws and reality has been discussed by several scholars since. These include Kirsten Hastrup, who argues that the outlaw figure became increasingly supernatural in Iceland over the course of time, and Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, who believed that their relationship to the real world kept them from fully transforming into trolls (see Hastrup, 1985:143; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, 2003:222–225; see also Írena Líf Styrkársdóttir, 2019). Meanwhile, Ragnheiður H. Þórarinsdóttir has argued that legends of outlaws were mostly intended to be educational rather than a form of entertainment, as they teach us how not to behave (Ragnheiður H. Þórarinsdóttir, 1998:313).

When examining the legends it is clear that they confirm the idea that women's fathers were in charge of whom their daughters married.[7] Many

Icelandic legends tell of women who are forbidden to marry the men they love. Such legends usually have a tragic ending as the women often die of sorrow as a result.[8] Other legends tell of women who do not want to marry but are forced into marriage. These legends will be examined further here.

As mentioned earlier, marriage could provide women with more rights, yet according to the legends not all women wanted to marry. That could be complicated, as in Icelandic legends it is usually dangerous for women to refuse men either sex or marriage, as that most often results in them becoming victims of violence as the men who have been refused seek revenge (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2020). Many legends also tell of "stubborn" women who turn down any man that asks for their hand in marriage and are as a result eventually forced into marriage, usually by their fathers. This is for example the case in various legends of outlaws. One legend type found in several variants in the Icelandic legend collections[9] is a great example of this. The legend tells of a young girl who meets a group of outlaws (often when staying home and watching the farm while the others are at church). The girl manages to kill all the outlaws except one, who escapes. Years later, a mysterious man appears and asks to marry the young girl. She does not want to marry him but her father decides she should, as can be seen in the legend "The Bishop's Daughter in Skálholt" told by an unknown storyteller to Jón Árnason:

> The bishop spoke to his daughter about marrying this man, but she flatly refused. He said that she was being short-sighted to refuse all men: "I won't be living with you forever," he says, "and when I die you will be left without any assistance." She was unimpressed and said that she didn't want a husband, and least of all this one. The bishop said he was not going to put up with this any longer, and that he was now going to take charge of all of her affairs, meaning that she would marry this man. The bishop told the man that the marriage would take place soon and that this problem would not prevent it taking place (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, II:231).

They get married. On their wedding night, the man admits to being the outlaw who escaped all these years ago and now wants revenge by killing his new wife by running burning iron through her heart.[10] In all these legends the women manage to escape the horrible violence their new husbands intend to inflict on them.[11]

All these legends tell of women of the upper class, as their fathers are bishops, clerics or farmers. This is understandable since, as noted above, at the time it was nearly impossible for housemaids to marry. Legends of this kind also often note that the women in question have refused every man that has asked for their hand in marriage, the only reason given for this being the women's stubbornness. The fact that the women are so selective is thereby used to explain why, when the outlaw returns, often disguised as a well-educated, wealthy and powerful man, their fathers feel compelled to take action and force them to marry. Thereby, the women

are shown to be at least in part to blame for their situation.[12] Here it is worth considering Mimi Schippers' idea of "emphasized femininity" and "pariah femininity". According to Schippers, emphasized femininity consists of characteristics defined as feminine or womanly and establishes and legitimates a hierarchical and complementary relationship to hegemonic masculinity. Pariah femininity on the other hand pollutes the usual power relations between masculinity and femininity in which femininity is subordinated, it encourages independence and rebellion against hegemonic ideas of gender, and those women who fall into the category of "pariah" femininity are often portrayed in a negative manner or punished in one way or another (Schippers 2007:94–95; Connell 1987:183–188; Gyða Margrét Pétursdóttir 2012:8). It is safe to say that women who kill a group of outlaws and do not want to marry can be seen as rebelling against hegemonic ideas of gender. The women are punished for not wanting to marry by being forced to marry the outlaw. Nevertheless, considering how these marriages turn out, in the case of these particular legends it could be argued that these narratives imply that forcing women into marriage is problematic, at least with mysterious men outside of the society. At the end of the legends, however, the women are regularly noted to have married someone else who proves to be a good husband. The fact that the women who did not want to get married at all in the beginning and nevertheless end up getting married diminishes their feelings towards marriage in the end. The women end up in traditional female roles as the housewives, something that is still shown as desirable, even after their previous husbands try to murder them, and therefore they do not become pariahs as they do not threaten the social order.

In the legend collections one can also find legends where it is not the father of the bride that forces her into marriage, but rather her future husband. Such legends often tell of women who are abducted from their community, most often by outlaws,[13] who intend to marry them. A good example of this can be seen in the legend "Ólafur at Aðalból", told by an unknown storyteller to Jón Árnason, in which a young woman who is engaged goes out to pick herbs but is abducted by outlaws. Her fiancé goes searching for her but cannot find her. When seventeen years have passed, a couple of sheep do not return from the mountains and the fiancé sets out to search for them but stumbles upon the valley of the outlaws who have stolen the sheep. He meets the leader of the outlaws, who tells him that he stole his fiancée all those years ago to keep as his wife:

> "I caused her disappearance and she is now my wife so you cannot have her. But our daughter is of no less worth. I have also caused the disappearance of the sheep you are searching for, to get you here. Now, I want to give you my daughter so that you will not be disadvantaged in affairs of marriage. Shall I treat you so well that you will be very happy when you part." (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, II:199)

The man takes the outlaw's offer and marries his ex-fiancée's daughter (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, II:197–201). These types of legends are also known in several variants in the Icelandic folk collections.[14] The women in these legends are usually abducted while collecting herbs, doing laundry, or travelling. It is interesting to note that in these legends very little mention is made of the feelings of the women who were abducted and how they felt in captivity all these years. It is also clear in many of the legends that the most discomfort seems to be caused to the fiancé who has lost his wife-to-be and must be compensated for that, eventually by marrying her daughter.[15]

Although there are few mentions of the feelings of the women, it is clear that they were taken against their will, as can be seen in the legend "The Story of Skúli the Farmer", which tells of the abduction of a woman by a supernatural man.[16] When she is reunited with her human fiancé, she tells him:

> A man came and took me, put me on a saddled horse and tied me on top of it. I tried to call for help, but it wasn't enough because he covered my mouth so I couldn't make a sound. Then he took me to this valley and married me. It's the same man you saw walking out of the house. He is the commissioner of this part of the country […] (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:365–367).

No further mentions are made of violence in these legends, although many of the women are also said to have had a child with their captor. Here it is also important to note that the outlaws in these legends all seem to be of the upper class, as they are sheriffs and ministers among the outlaws. The women seem to be at peace with their fate as they also do not return but stay behind with their captors.

In some versions of legends in which women are abducted by outlaws, they are rescued by their former husbands or fiancés. The legend "Ólafur and Helga", told by an old woman in the West of Iceland to Jón Árnason, tells of an outlaw who is not of high status and appears rather troll-like. In this legend it is clear that the girl is very unhappy. As the brother of the outlaw tells her former fiancé:

> She does not want to be with him and feels bad. She is kept in custody and my sisters often sit with her to comfort her and everything is done to make her as happy as possible. But it's all in vain. She neither sleeps nor eats and is overwhelmed with grief and sorrow (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, II:221).

In this version the girl is saved by her fiancé, and they get married (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, II:220–223). It is interesting to note that in the instances in which the women are rescued they have not had children with the outlaws and in some cases emphasis is put on the fact that they have not been violated by the outlaws. It could be argued that this implies that some sort of "purity" has been maintained. This can be seen, for example, in the legend "The Bishop's Foster Son from Skálholt" told by Ingibjörg

Skíðadóttir to Jón Árnason, where it is noted that in the three years that the woman was kept in captivity by the outlaw, he had "sought her affections, but in vain" (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, II:226–230). Some legends however note that although the women have been taken with the intention of marriage, when they object, they are not harmed or "forced" to do anything but rather kept as housemaids.[17]

It is interesting that although the women in these legends do not want to marry at first, all of them eventually end up married, whether it is to the outlaws and their captors or their former fiancés or rescuers. The women therefore seem to see the error of their ways and end up in their intended roles, something that might explain why they do not completely turn into pariahs in the legends, as they do eventually marry and become housewives (Schippers 2007:94–95; see also Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2022a:330–331). Naturally, however, not all marriages were easy.

Difficulties Within the Marriage

Several legends in the Icelandic legend collections also tell of conflict within the marriage of non-supernatural men and women. This is often because the women go against hegemonic ideas of femininity, are too independent or stubborn and become "pariahs" (Schippers 2007:94–95). In legends which tell of women who go against hegemonic ideas about femininity and take on roles more commonly attributed to men, such as running their own farms or being merchants or fishers, the women are often connected to sorcery, as a way to downplay and explain their position (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir, 2021:300).[18] These women often also show great independence, and go against dominant ideology of what was expected of wives, such as being obedient to their husbands. This is often said to cause trouble and power struggles within the marriage.[19] A good example are legends of Þuríður formaður, an independent woman who was the captain of a fishing vessel and got a special permit to wear trousers instead of skirts. Legends surrounding her describe how she tried to get married three times, in each case the relationship ending because of how authoritative she was. The collector notes that the men chose to keep their independence rather than be in a relationship with her (Brynjúlfur Jónsson, 1975:45). A striking struggle can be seen in legends which tell of Stokkseyrar Dísa, a merchant who owns her own fishing boat in addition to taking on other male roles. In the legend told by an unknown storyteller to Jón Árnason, her husband, who is described as "dispassionate", is said to have crushed a tin dish at their wedding and told Dísa that "that is how disobedient women should be treated" (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, III:578). It is clear that he is referring to his wife, who in the legend is said to "have been known for her temperamental behaviour and malevolence" towards those who disagreed with her (Jón Árnason 1954–1961,

III:578). Additionally, her husband cuts her favourite piece of underclothing to pieces, kills her favourite horse and bends her down and cuts along her back through her dress so that she bleeds, to punish her when she refuses to help his friend. The legend also notes that this was a known method to deal with disobedient women and that after this treatment she improved her behaviour (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, III:579). It is therefore clear that here the difficulties within the marriage are blamed on Stokkseyrar Dísa.

Several other Icelandic legends tell of gender-based violence within marriage. However, as in the legends of Dísa, it does not appear to be the violence that causes the trouble within the marriage but the misbehaving wives. In several legends the women are shown as deserving of punishment by their husbands for speaking up to, fighting or belittling men, reflecting the idea that women were to respect and obey them.[20] Their stubbornness is also shown as being a cause of violence. The legend "You Have Not Carried the Saddle as I Have", told by Elín Guðmundsdóttir to Torfhildur Hólm, is a good example of this. The legend tells of a farmer who has three daughters, the youngest of whom "had the temperament of being extremely stubborn", which was why no man dared to marry her (Torfhildur Hólm 1962:46). She eventually marries. On the newlyweds' way back from the wedding, she starts falling behind. Her husband asks what is wrong, but she does not answer. She then takes off in the opposite direction and her husband goes after her. When he catches her, he throws her off the horse and beats her up before leaving her there. She finally returns home, and they do not speak for the whole winter. On the last day of winter, they go and visit their families and the man wins a bet on who has the most obedient wife. The legend then notes that after this the couple stay very much in love and the woman is never stubborn again (Torfhildur Hólm 1962:46–47).[21]

In these legends the violence appears to be merely seen as a way for husbands to temper their ill-behaved wives, something that was not seen as being in opposition to the general principles of acceptable behaviour in the past (see further, Dobash & Dobash 1981:564; Lawless 2003:247; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2020).[22] In Icelandic society during the period in question, it was regarded as being the responsibility of the men of the house to uphold discipline and moral values on their farm. In the Directive on Household Discipline (Húsagatilskipun) issued by the Danish king in 1745, it is stated that the farmers were free to do this by any means they saw fit (Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon 1997:145). It is nonetheless difficult to conclude exactly how common violence against women was in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Iceland, partly because very little historical research has been undertaken on the subject.

It is clear in these legends that these women appear as "pariahs". Their unfeminine qualities are underlined, and they pollute the power relations between men and women and therefore deserve to be punished. It is

interesting to note that comparatively many legends which tell of domestic violence are told by women and found in the collection of Torfhildur Hólm. Here it is important to keep in mind the power relations that existed between those who collected legends and those who told them. In Iceland, as elsewhere, the collectors were mostly educated men or clerics (Gunnell, 2012:1–4). As various scholars have noted, people tend to censor themselves when talking to authorities or someone of a higher class (Foucault 1991:193; Gunnell 2012:12–13; Ólína Þorvarðardóttir 1998:259). For women these power relations were often intersectional as they were subordinated on the basis of both their gender and their class (see Crenshaw 1991 on intersectionality). It is understandable that some women might have been hesitant to tell male collectors stories about violence and difficulties within marriages. Here it is also important to note that while many of the legends found in the collection of Torfhildur Hólm and told by women, the portrayal of the women is not in their favour. As Angela Carter has noted, in patriarchal communities women commonly absorb and recapitulate dominating patriarchal values (Carter 1990:xiii). However, even though it is often the case that women are blamed for the violence that is inflicted on them, this is not always the case.

Escaping a Bad Marriage

Very few Icelandic legends from this time tell of divorce, perhaps understandably so, as it was uncommon during the period in question.[23] A particularly interesting legend type, found in several versions, can nevertheless be said to reflect the idea of women escaping bad marriages when they are abducted by outlaws, but are in the process saved from their violent husbands.[24] The legend "Sigríður from Dalur and Her Siblings", told by an unknown storyteller to Jón Árnason, is an excellent example of this. The legend tells of Sigríður, a farmer's daughter, who falls in love with a farm labourer called Gísli and after getting approval from her father, they get married. On the way home from their wedding Sigríður gets lost. She is found by an unknown man who invites to help her find the others, she agrees, and they continue for a while. Eventually, however, it becomes clear that he is an outlaw, and he is not taking her back to her husband but to his own home in a deserted valley. Sigríður is angry and does not speak for the first few days. During her first night she wakes up with a man in her bed whom she chases away with a knife. A few days later the man who took her tells her that he intends to marry her to his brother, who is a sheriff among the outlaws in the valley:

> He said he had fetched her for him since he had lost his wife this spring. There she was and she married the magistrate. They lived together for a few years and had one child. She was never cheerful or showed any joy, but was always idle (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:330).

Time passes, and one evening her husband asks her if she would like to know of her ex-husband Gísli. He goes on to tell her that Gísli did go looking for her after her disappearance, but when he could not find her, he married her sister Rósa:

> He then showed her in [a magic] mirror that Gísli was pushing and beating [Rósa]. Sigríður then put her hands around her husband's neck and tearfully begged him to come up with some way to free her sister from his clutches. He cared little about this. This was the first time she showed him some tenderness, but she always kept it that way and was more comfortable with him every day (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:331).

Shortly after, her sister Rósa shows up at the outlaw's home, cold and tired, and tells them that she had forgotten to take in the laundry so Gísli had beaten her. Rósa also moves to the valley and is saved from Gísli (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:331).

While there are not many legends of this kind, they are nevertheless worth considering. In the legend told above the outlaw uses a magic mirror to show the woman what her fate would have been had he not taken her. In many other variants, though, he simply tells her that her sister is being mistreated by her former husband. In the legend above, Sigríður had married her husband out of love but in many other variants the women are often forced into marriage by their fathers or brothers. This is the case in the legend "Páll's Story", told by Sigríður Sigurðarsdóttir to Sigfús Sigfússon, in which the girl's brother asks her if his friend could propose to her. She "rejected it harshly and said she did not want to have him or anyone else at the moment". When he proposed to her, she denied him and the legend states that her father "disliked this and said that he thought that one day she would pay for her stubbornness" (Sigfús Sigfússon 1982–1993, IX:315–327).

It is also interesting that most of the legends note that the women are visited by the outlaw during the night, and they wake up with him lying in the bed next to them. The women commonly have a knife which they use to either threaten or cut him. This can for example be seen in the legend "The Sisters from Möðrufell", told by an unknown storyteller to Ólafur Davíðsson, in which a man named Jóhann has abducted a young woman:

> One night Jóhann came in and laid down on the bed in front of her. She was so weary of his romantic advances that she wanted to stab him with her pocket-knife; he then recoiled (Ólafur Davíðsson 1978–1980:48).[25]

In the legends the women are usually scolded for threatening the men. In some versions the man returns the night after but that time the women do not use the knife and eventually agree to them sleeping in their bed.[26] One wonders whether this implies the threat of sexual violence in the house of

the outlaw, although it is never mentioned.[27] In these legends it is also interesting that, as opposed to the legends examined earlier in which violence against women seems to be accepted, here it is not. Here it is also important to stress, however, that no emphasis is put on the women being disobedient to their violent ex-husbands, although they do not want to marry them right away. It is also important to note that in these legends the outlaws are also of an upper class, which is interesting since the women are then not only moving to a different society (the outlaws), but they also often move up to a higher class in the process. Eventually the fact that the women were abducted is completely dismissed. Although even though the women are upset at first and do not eat, or speak, they quickly accept and forgive their abductor after hearing how their old husbands treats their sister (and would have treated them). Thus, according to the legend it turns out that the abduction is in their best interest and the abductors turn into their saviours.

These legends are also quite unusual due to the fact that normally in Icelandic legends relationships between humans and the supernatural do not end well (Guðrún Bjartmarsdóttir 1988:22–23; Ólína Þórðardóttir 1995:14–15; and McKinnell 2005 on such relationships in earlier Norse myths and legends). However, this is not the case here. Some scholars have wondered whether legends of outlaws perhaps reflect the ideas of people's hopes and dreams for a better life (Gísli Sigurðsson 2002). Here, one wonders if that is the case with these legends examined here, whereas they might reflect the hopes and dreams of women for a better life, where they are rescued from their current situation or an unpleasant marriage by a mysterious man. Unfortunately, we have little information on who told these legends since most of them were collected from unnamed storytellers.

It is important to note here that the women in these legends also end up married, even though it is to the outlaw, keeping to their role of housewife. The women here can therefore be argued to fall under the category of hegemonic femininity, as they confirm the ruling ideology of women's roles and their relationships legitimate the hierarchical relationship to hegemonic masculinity (Schippers 2007:94–95).

A very interesting variant of the legends examined here is found in the collection of Torfhildur Hólm. The legend "The Disappearance of the Minister's Daughter" told by Guðný Einarsdóttir, tells of the daughter of a minister who disappears. The minister is upset by this and promises that whoever finds her can marry her. The years pass until one autumn, when many of the minister's sheep do not return from the mountains. One of his workers, who had been in love with his daughter, volunteers to look for the sheep. He eventually finds a house which belongs to the outlaws, and when he knocks, he is greeted by the minister's daughter, who lives there with a husband and a child. He gets to stay there for the night but kills both the husband and child. She is terrified by this, but he gives her two options:

> Either she would follow him home to her father, or he would kill her and her children. Most people prefer life, and she decided to go with him back to the settlement (Torfhildur Hólm 1962:163).

He then returns her to her father, telling him that he wants to marry her:

> But the minister's daughter was very sad and aloof and did not want to have him. Her father said that they would decide for her this time, she herself had decided the first time. "Although I have him," she said, "you should know that I will never be faithful to him and he will beware of me." (Torfhildur Hólm 1962:163)

Thus, they get married, have children and the years pass. One time when her husband got home from a day of fishing, he is very tired and goes to bed early. The next morning her husband is found with a pair of scissors through his heart, and the wife and children have disappeared. The storyteller adds that many suspected they had returned to the mountains (Torfhildur Hólm 1962:162–164). This legend is interesting, since the woman here is abducted from the outlaws and brought back to her home. However, she does not want to be rescued and eventually kills her husband. The message that she should have been allowed to be in charge of her own affairs seems rather clear. The fact that this legend is found in the collection of Torfhildur Hólm is also especially interesting since here we can see the woman getting revenge and taking her fate into her own hands.[28] It is also the only legend of this type in which the woman does not end up in marriage.

Conclusion

It is clear that many Icelandic legends tell of gendered power relations within marriage. It is interesting to note that in this regard comparatively many can be found in the collection of Torfhildur Hólm and relatively many are told by women or unknown storytellers.

The legends commonly show women's operating space within society and marriage as limited. The role of the women's fathers in choosing their spouse is made very clear in the legends, although they do not necessarily show it in a positive light. The legends rather show that while women should not be too stubborn or selective when it comes to marriage, they should nevertheless be listened to, at least in the case of arranged marriages. However, that does not seem to be an issue in those legends where women are abducted. Then it is either shown to be an inconvenience for men, in the women's best interest, or they are rescued.

In the case of violence within marriage, the women who go against the ruling ideology of what was considered feminine, or are too independent or stubborn, are often punished and in some cases can be argued to turn into pariahs. The contradictions found within the legends show that the views of society are always nuanced and complicated. While violence seems to be

condoned in many of the legends, showing it as an effective way of controlling one's wife, the legends which tell of women abducted by outlaws and thereby rescued from their husbands who would later violate them are an interesting opposition to this. One wonders if it is possible there to see a reflection of women's hope for a better life, outside of their own community. Here, the question of class is also interesting, as although the women in these legends are of higher class (such as the daughters of farmers or ministers), they often also move up to an even higher class when getting married to the outlaws, who are ministers or sheriffs in the outlaws' societies.

It is clear in the legends examined here that the women in the legends are expected to marry, and although they do not want to at first, in almost all the legends the women end up married. Thereby, the legends commonly show the women as trapped within the tradition of marriage, showing it as the best (and perhaps only) option for women at the time.

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[1] Outlaws are liminal beings, as they were men that had been banished from society for crimes and lived in the highlands of Iceland (Hastrup 1985:143; Einar Ólafur Sveinsson 2003:222–225).

[2] These collections are: *Icelandic Folk- and Wonder Tales (Íslenzkar þjóðsögur og ævintýri*; extended 6 volume edition published in 1954–1961; original edition in 1862–1864) collected by Jón Árnason (1819–1888) with Magnús Grímsson (1825–1860); *Icelandic Folktales (Íslenzkar þjóðsögur*; extended four-volume edition published in 1978–1980; original edition published in 1895) collected by Ólafur Davíðsson (1862–1903); and *Icelandic Folktales and Legends (Íslenskar þjóðsögur og sagnir*, revised eleven-volume edition published 1982–1993; original edition in 1922–1959) collected by Sigfús Sigfússon (1855–1935).

[3] Women naturally also fell into other categories such as being paupers or vagabonds (Jón Jónsson 2018:11–21).

[4] As has been pointed out by various scholars, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries a shift took place with regard to the way people thought about gender roles and the gap between the genders widened in the Western world. Those ideas did not appear out of thin air but had deep roots, for example, in philosophy and religion (Beauvoir 1949; Laqueur 1990:5–6; Sigríður Matthíasdóttir 2002:38). This resulted in the idea that women were meant to stay at home and oversee the private space, while men went outside to work and were in charge of the public space. In the rural society of Iceland, however, things were a little more complicated as the sharp separation between public and private space did not apply and the sexes worked together although their fields of work tended to be different (Erla Hulda Halldórsdóttir 2011:83; see also Stark 2011 on gender and power in Finland where the same applied).

[5] Nevertheless, research has also shown that as early as the 1790s Icelandic couples were granted divorce through royal dispensation on the grounds of incompatibility and based on mutual agreement (Ólöf Garðarsdóttir and Brynja Björnsdóttir 2018:95–96).

[6] For further information on this in Icelandic wonder tales see, Áslaug Heiður Cassata 2014:46–47; see also Tatar 1993:94–98; Röhrich 2008:58, 114.

[7] Naturally there are exceptions to this, for example in legends which tell of young women who go looking for lost sheep and are found by an outlaw who returns the sheep and rescues her. They intend to get married, but her father disapproves and takes him to Parliament to have him executed for his previous crimes. However, the women rescue the men and marry them, against their fathers' will (see, for example, Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:271; Sigfús Sigfússon

1982–1993, IX:237–244; and Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2021:295).

[8] See, for example, Torfhildur Hólm 1962:85–86; 88–89.

[9] See, for example, Einar Guðmundsson 1932–1947, II:85–96; Jón Árnason 1954–1961, II:230–234; IV:393–395; Ólafur Davíðsson 1978–1980, III:257–259.

[10] These legends fall under the ATU tale type number 956B *The Clever Maiden Alone at Home Kills the Robbers* (see Uther et al. 2004:596).

[11] With one exception, found in a legend told by Guðríður Eyjólfsdóttir to Jón Árnason, in which a housemaid is stabbed to death by the outlaw when he returns (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:394–395).

[12] Something that would today be referred to as victim blaming, in which violence against women is blamed on the women themselves and normalized (Maestre 2013:311; Finnborg Steinþórsdóttir & Gyða Pétursdóttur 2019:4).

[13] Here, it is interesting to note that fewer Icelandic legends tell of women being abducted by trolls, something well known in other Nordic countries. In Iceland it is more common that female trolls take men to keep as husbands or lovers (Conrad 2021; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir, 2022b). Women are more often abducted by either outlaws or hidden men (elves).

[14] See, for example, Jón Árnason 1954–1961, II:194–197, 197–201; IV:332–334, 342–344, 365–367; Ólafur Davíðsson 1978–1980, III:259–260.

[15] In one version it is the foster brother of the woman who find her and is compensated by marrying the daughter of the outlaw and in another version the compensation is money and various gifts (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:342–344, 365–367). In one of these legends the abductor is a hidden man (elf), but the collector Jón Árnason categorizes the legends with legends of outlaws due to their similarities to those legends (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:365–367). This idea of men being compensated for women can also be seen in ghost legends where ghosts rape women who will later marry (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2020:29).

[16] In this legend the storyteller talks about a hidden man (elf), but the collector chooses to categorize the legend with the legends of outlaws due to its similarities to legends which usually focus on outlaws (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:365–367).

[17] See, for example, Jón Árnason 1954–1961, II:232–233.

[18] See, for example Jón Árnason 1954–1961, I:576–578; Ólafur Davíðsson 1978–1980, III:175; Sigfús Sigfússon 1982–1993, V:407; Brynjúlfur Jónsson 1975:45.

[19] See, for example, Jón Árnason 1954–1961, III:577–578: Ólafur Davíðsson 1978–1980, III:175; Sigfús Sigfússon 1982–1993, V:407; Brynjúlfur Jónsson 1975:45.

[20] See, for example Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:231; Sigfús Sigfússon 1982–1993, X:235–236; XI:260–269, 278–290; Torfhildur Hólm 1962:45–48, 55.

[21] This legend evidently falls under the famous tale type ATU 901 (The Taming of the Shrew), also known from William Shakespeare's comedy (Brunvand 1966:346; Tatar 1993:106–108; Uther et al. 2004:524).

[22] Naturally there are exceptions to this. A quite interesting one is that if the women are pregnant in the legends, the violence is always frowned upon (see, for example Torfhildur Hólm 1962:28–29; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2020:32).

[23] Nevertheless, some examples can be seen in legends such as Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:175–178; V:433–434; Ólafur Davíðsson 1978–1980, I:46–47; Guðni Jónsson 1940–1957, I:15–16.

[24] See, for example, Jón Árnason 1945–1961, II:201–203; 203–209; IV:344–347;329–332; Ólafur Davíðsson 1978–1980, I:47–49; Sigfús Sigfússon 1982–1993, IX:315–327.

[25] It is important to note that in this variant the woman is abducted by a hidden man. However, it is very similar to those legends that tell of outlaws.

[26] Some of the legends also talk about the women being attacked by monsters during the night (Jón Árnason 1954–1961, IV:329–332, 344–347).

[27] Several Icelandic legends tell of women being assaulted by ghosts while sleeping (Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2020:28–30).

[28] Here it is also interesting to note the fact that in the legend collection of Torfhildur Hólm, one can often find unique variants of well-known legend types, often showing women in a more leading role (see, for example, Torfhildur Hólm 1962:3–4; Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir 2020:30).