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Portraying Nature and Constructing Gender in the *Íslendingasögur*

— An Ecocritical Reading of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*

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In memory of my grandfather, Diao Yunfeng (1929-2016),

and my family,

***fontem amoris amarumque meis*.**

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Abstract

This MA dissertation looks at *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* through the lens of eco-criticism, exploring how *nature writing* may be interpreted as interacting with gender construction in the two *Íslendingasögur*. It is argued that the two saga-authors' portrayal of nature — including meteorological phenomenon, landscape, place of residence and animals — can contribute not only to plot progression, but also to certain protagonists' characterisation and the externalisation of their emotional undercurrents. The images of certain natural objects — like the sea, the moon, light and darkness, frigidity, the horse and the cave — may be held as rich in metaphorical and theological connotations; and with them, covert messages would, as it seems, be embedded into the narratological performance of "female heroism" and "Christian masculinity". To some extent, the co-existence of Christian and pagan qualities within the characters under study may also be conceived as resonant with medieval Scandinavia's ongoing transition from heathenism to Christianity throughout the 11th to 14th century. Thus, *nature writing* in the two sagas could be considered as both a realistic depiction of natural surroundings and, in all probabilities, also a projection of the saga-authors' individual opinions and instantaneous sentiments, whereby nature would appear as infiltrated into, rather than separate from, human subjectivity. In the philosophical terms,

Key words: *Bárðar saga*, *Grettis saga*, Eco-Criticism, Gender Construction, Emotion.

1 Introduction

The idea of nature contains an
extraordinary amount of human history.

— Raymond Williams (1980:67)

1.1 Overview

Focussing on two *Íslendingasögur — Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, this MA dissertation looks at the narratorial performance of gender through the lens of eco-criticism, analysing how *nature writing* contributes towards the (re-)presentation of Christian masculinity and female heroism in the two Old Icelandic texts. Admittedly, my dissertation offers but one possible reading of the two sagas from the superimposed critical vantage point of eco-criticism; yet fundamentally, it aims to derive justifiable ecological imports from the two medieval texts, which should be in tune with the postcolonial *zeitgeist* of environmentalism.

Approaching premodern literature through the prism of eco-criticism is a well defensible practice. Italian eco-critic Simona Alias has argued that the "ecological awareness is not a modern [or postmodern] phenomena"; rather, its provenance lies in the ancient civilisations and its textual evidence can be extracted from not only ancient Greek and Latin literatures, but also the classics of other religions and peoples, like the Sumerian epic of *Gilgamesh* and early Buddhistic texts of the *Mahayana*.[1] As regards the medieval European perception of *nature*, Alias defines it as a synthesis of pagan and Christian ideologies — one that witnesses a "complex and composite culture" in which the Greek, Latin, Arabic and

[1] Alias, Simona. *An Ecocritical Approach to Chaucer: Representations of the Natural World in the English Literature of the Middle Ages*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Trento, academic year 2010/2011, pp. 11-16. See, for instance, Plato's *Critias* (111a, 111b, 111c, 111d); Paci, Marco. *L'uomo e la foresta.* Roma: Meltemi, 2002, pp. 17-18; and Williams, Paul. *Mahayana Buddhism.* New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 36-38.

Germanic heathen views of *nature* form an amalgam in the process of confluence and assimilation.[2]

Apropos of the European medieval natural philosophy, this issue would seem so all-encompassing as to defy any elaboration in the present dissertation. Yet there is a basic consensus. Just as J. Zupko and J. M. Thijssen have argued, Plato's and Aristotle's teachings are of particularly far-reaching and long-lasting influence upon the European medieval stance on *nature*.[3] And their principal tenet, concluded by Weisheipl, is that

> [o]nce we have excluded anything that can be explained by art or by chance, we are still left with phenomena that can be explained in no other way than by 'nature', some source which is ultimately *given* in human experience.[4]

In other words, viewed from the perspective of Platonism and Aristotelianism, *nature* would appear to be more than a tangible, physical object, but rather a combination of "matter and form",[5] incorporating both the material and metaphysical (or spiritual/divine) existence, and therefore verging, by and large, on both the subjective and the objective.[6]

Besides, while Plato's and Aristotle's *philosophia naturalis* bears indelible theological implications, Lucretius's *De rerum natura* and Pliny's *Historia Naturalis* also touch upon the cult of Nature and the idea of a personified (and/or deified) Nature,[7] which according to Alias seems alluding to a close human-nature tie in the medieval European worldview and cosmology.[8]

Obviously, scholarly discussion about *nature* in medieval European literature predates the thriving of eco-criticism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. By the 1960s, E. R. Curtius had keenly detected that the "medieval descriptions of nature are not meant to

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[2] Alias (2011), p. 37.
[3] Gracia, Jorge J. E & Noone, Timothy B. *A Companion to Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, p. 1. See also Zupko, J. "What Is the Science of the Soul? A Case Study in the Evolution of Late Medieval Natural Philosophy", in *Synthesis*, vol. 110, no. 2, p. 299; and Thijssen, J. M. M. H. "Late-Medieval Natural Philosophy: Some Recent Trends in Scholarship", in *Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2000, pp. 164-170. Key texts are Plato's *Phaedo*, and Aristotle's *Physics*, *Libri Naturales*, as well as *De Anima*.
[4] Weisheipl, James A., O.P. "Aristotle's Concept of Nature: Avicenna and Aquinas", in Lawrence D. Roberts (ed.), *Approaches to Nature in the Middle Ages: Papers of the Tenth Annual Conference of the Center for Medieval Conference of the Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies*. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, vol. 16. Binghamton, N.Y.: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982, p. 144.
[5] Alias (2011), p. 45.
[6] White, Hugh. *Nature, Sex, and Goodness in A Medieval Literary Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 68.
[7] See, for instance, *Historia Naturalis* II, 1 & 64; XXXVI, 1, 1-2, and *De rerum natura* I, 1-43 & 62-79.
[8] Alias (2011), pp. 36-40 & pp. 82-84.

represent reality".[9] Over the past fifty years, Curtius's insights have directed scholars like D. W. Robertson and Gillian Rudd to delve into the allegorical implications of *nature writing* in medieval European (esp. medieval English) literature, inspiring their research into, for instance, how the portrayal of "an iconographic nature" produces "an effect of considerable verisimilitude",[10] as well as how *nature writing* achieves more than "adding to an effect of verisimilitude".[11]

More recently, in her doctoral dissertation concerning the representation of the natural world in medieval European literature, Simona Alias has well substantiated the significance of applying eco-criticism to medieval texts:

> The environment plays in fact a fundamental role in much medieval literature, and the ways in which it is represented show a variety of underlying ideas and conceptions of nature that would baffle common ideas and images about the Middle Ages and medieval culture, too often and for too long seen as a culturally and intellectually monolithic period, and as an age with no room for reason, logic, objective and "scientific" method in the interpretation and explanation of the world.[12]

As for eco-criticism as a critical approach, my dissertation considers its rise as in response to the current anxiety about global warming and the emergence of anti-speciesism, two thought-provoking phenomena that lead scholars in humanities to review the embodiments of "human-nature relationship" in literature. Medievalists have also participated in this campaign. Over the past two decades, medieval texts ranging from Anglo-Saxon masterpieces like *Elene*, *Andreas*, *Exodus*, and *Beowulf*,[13] to *Sir Orfeo* — the Breton lay preserved on the Auchinleck manuscript (ca. 1300),[14] Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1400),[15] and a posse of Arthurian legends circulating throughout medieval Europe,[16] have been interpreted effectively in the light of Environmental Humanities.

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[9] Curtius, E. R. *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, translated from German by Willard R. Trask, Princeton UP, 1983 (first German edition, 1953), p. 183.
[10] Robertson, D. W. *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspective*. Princeton UP, 2015, p. 242.
[11] Rudd, Gillian. *Greenery: Ecocritical Readings of Late Medieval English Literature*, Manchester UP, Manchester and New York, 2007, p. 11.
[12] Alias (2011), p. 26.
[13] Estes, Heide. *Anglo-Saxon Literary Landscapes: Ecotheory and the Environmental Imagination.* Amsterdam University Press, 2017.
[14] Rudd (2017), pp. 93-109; Alias (2021), pp. 108-111.
[15] Stanbury, Sarah. "Ecochaucer: Green Ethics and Medieval Nature", in *The Chaucer Review*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2004, pp. 1-16.
[16] Rudd, Gillian. "The Wilderness of Wirral in 'Sir Gawain and the Green Knight'", in *Arthuriana*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2013, pp. 52-65.

Previous eco-medievalists' accomplishments have paved the way for me to approach other medieval literary traditions, including the Old Norse branch, eco-critically.[17]

1.2 Organisation of the Dissertation

In Chapter II, the basic philosophical tenets of Environmental Humanities will be clarified, especially the ideological connotations of eco-criticism vis-à-vis Cartesian dualism. In Chapter III, previous scholarships on interpreting Old Norse literature eco-critically will be summarised, with emphasis on the literary interpretations of landscape, weather/climate condition, animal, and place of residence in the sagas. Chapter IV is dedicated to a review on the construction of gender in the *Íslendingasögur*, where contemporary theories on femininity and masculinity will be referred to when necessary. On this basis, Chapters V and VI will further investigate the interplay between *nature writing* and gender performance in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, centring on how the eco-narrative can shape and even comment on femininity and masculinity in the two texts.

1.3 A Summary of the Primary Texts

1.3.1 *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*

Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss is a relatively late *Íslendingasaga*, dating approximately to the fourteenth century.[18] As for its author, there is the hypothesis of "dual authorship",[19] seeing that this saga does not guarantee a perfect sense of unity in narrative style.[20] The overt plot of *Bárðar saga* recounts the good deeds that Bárðar Snæfellsáss and Gestr, his son, practised in medieval Iceland and Norway. Thematically, this saga "follows the decline of a family while showing the increasing power of a communal and political Christian society that seeks to inhibit the freedom of the individual, represented in its most extreme form by the members of

[17] Apart from medieval English literature, some other medieval literary traditions have also been investigated via eco-criticism, including the Germanic, Romance, and Byzantine traditions. See, for instance, Classen, Albrecht. *The Forest in Medieval German Literature: Ecocritical Readings from a Historical Perspective*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015; Goldwyn, Adam J. *Byzantine Ecocriticism: Women, Nature, and Power in the Medieval Greek Romance*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; and McCracken, Peggy. *In the Skin of a Beast: Sovereignty and Animality in Medieval France*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017. A detailed bibliography on medieval eco-criticism is retrievable at https://medievalecocrits.wordpress.com/bibliography/ (13/05/2021).
[18] Vries, Jan de. *Altnordische Literaturgeschichte*, volume 2 (Die Literatur von etwa 1150 bis 1300, die Spätzeit nach 1300), Grundriß der germanischen Philologie 16, 2nd ed. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1967, pp. 338–339. However, *Bárðar saga* has also been argued to be a product of the 900s. See Hermansson, Halldór. *Bibliography of the Icelandic Sagas and Minor Tales*, Islandica 1, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Library, 1908, p. 4.
[19] Alle, John G. "A Study of the Place Names in 'Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss'", in *Germanic Studies in Honor of Edward Henry Sehr*, ed. F. A. Raven et. al. Miami, 1968, pp. 15-36.
[20] Ibid., p. 16.

Bárðr's clan".[21] So viewed, *Bárðar saga* would appear attempting to render a description of the passing of an era — the heroic Viking Age. Accordingly, Gestr's death can be taken as a metaphor for the bygone pagan order that is being replaced, gradually but irrevocably, by the future Christian community.[22] In Owing's opinion, the saga author must have intended, in all probability, to crystallise "the transition between two cultural orders, pagan [heroic] and Christian",[23] in *Bárðar saga*.

The main witnesses of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* are preserved in Reykjavík at the Árni Magnússon Institute (abb. AM), as well as the Landsbókasafn Íslands (abb. Lbs & ÍB). The manuscripts corresponding to this current research are: (1) AM 564 a, 4to; (2) AM 162 h, fol; (3) AM 489, 4to; (4) AM 551 a, 4to; (5) AM 158, for; (6) AM 491, 4to; (7) AM 165 g, fol; (8) AM 486, 4to.[24] The other extant manuscripts are listed as follows:

1.3.1.1 A Synopsis of the Manuscripts of Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss

Shelf Mark	Language	Title	Place of Production	Date	Details
AM 564 a 4to	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1390-1425	1r-2r
AM 162 h fol.	Icelandic	*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*	Iceland	1400-1450	1r-2v
AM551 a 4to	Icelandic	*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*	Iceland	1490-1510	1r
AM 490 4to	Icelandic	*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*	Iceland	1600-1640	1r-32v
AM 486 1-6 4to	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1600-1699	Part IV, 77r-101v
AM 491 4to	Icelandic	*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*	Iceland	1620-1670	1r-24v
AM 158 fol.	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1630-1675	1.11, 29r-37v
AM 165 g fol.	Icelandic	*Harðar saga*	Iceland	1635-1645	1r-22v
AM 164 f fol.	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1650-1699	No. 3, 5v
AM 163 h beta fol.	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1650-1700	No. 1, 1r-11r

[21] Ewing, Lynn O. *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss: A Translation*. MA thesis, University of Saskatchewan (Canada), 1987, p. 4.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid., p. 13.
[24] *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, ed. Þórhallur Vilmundarson & Bjarni Vilhjálmsson, Íslenzk fornrit, 13, Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag 1991, p. 100.

AM 552 d 4to	Icelandic	*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*	Iceland	1675-1699	No. 1, 1v-10r
ÍB 52 fol.	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1675-1725?	No. 2, 101r-150v
AM 738 4to	Icelandic	*Edda, Eddukvæði, ýmis önnur kvæði o.fl.*	Iceland	1680	No. 35, 135v
AM 157 c fol.	Icelandic	*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*	Unknown	1690-1697	1r-22v
AM 928 4to	Icelandic	*Íslendingasögur*	Iceland	1700-1747	No. 8, 210r-220v
Lbs 633 fol.	Icelandic	*Rímnabók*	Iceland	1700-1799	No. 5, 92r-168r
Lbs 896 4to	Icelandic	*Sögu- og rímnabók*	Iceland	1756-1799	No. 9, 139r-146r
AM 946 a-e 4to	Icelandic	*Íslendingasögur*	Copenhagen	1800-1883	Part IV, 1r-49v
Lbs 748 fol.	Icelandic	*Efnisyfirlit*	Iceland	1871-1875	No. 4, 72r-75v
Lbs 2329 4to	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1880?-1881	No. 11, 417v-432r No. 12, 432r-446v
Lbs 4493 4to	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1902-1903	No. 9, 38r-43v
AM 349 I-II 4to	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	Unknown	Part I, 1r-10v
AM 489 I-II 4to	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	Unknown	Part I, 1r-10v

1.3.2 *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*

Composed also by an unknown author, *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* is an *Íslendingasaga* revolving around Grettir Ásmundarson, a bellicose Icelandic outlaw that stirs much sympathy and fellow-feeling from readers.[25] Although the stories related in *Grettis saga* are hypothesised to have taken place between the ninth and eleventh century in Iceland,[26] the text is generally received to be "written around 1300 or shortly after";[27] and indeed, this work

[25] Byock, Jesse. (Trans.), *Grettis Saga*. Oxford UP, 2009, pp. i-ii.
[26] Thorsson, Örnólfur. (Ed.). *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*. Translated by Bernard Scudder. New York: Penguin Books, 2005, p. ix.
[27] *Grettis saga* has been argued to be composed between 1320 and 1330. See Simek, Rudolf & Pálsson, Hermann. *Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur. Die mittelalterliche Literatur Norwegens und Islands*, 2nd edition, Stuttgart, 2007, p. 126.

is "full of heterogeneous material, with a particularly heavy inlay of motifs from folklore and folktale as well as from the polite literature of the continent".[28]

In terms of the narrative plot, *Grettis saga* can be divided into three parts.[29] Chapters 1-13 are primarily concerned with how Onundur Tree-foot (i.e., Grettir's great-grandfather) escaped Norway and settled in Iceland after the Battle of Hafrsfjord, where he combatted against the first king of Norway — Harald Fairhair (c. 850 – c. 932). Chapters 14-85 focus chiefly on Grettir's life trajectory, including his condemnation, exile and death. Chapters 86-93 deal with Grettir's half-brother Thorstein Dromund's journey to the court of Constantinople, where he found courtly love and then decided to spend the rest of his life as an anchorite in a monastic cell in Rome.

Hawes proposes that Grettir as the eponymous protagonist is fashioned as a *bleðingur*, i.e., an admixture of monstrous and human characters, and that while Grettir demonstrates a distinct air of heroism with his physical prowess, he also possesses certain noble qualities, like his generosity, resourcefulness and occasional self-restraint.[30] As Hawes further points out, although Grettir as a historical figure is attested in the *Landnámbók*, in the saga he is appropriated as a "monster fighter",[31] and this "use of the saga as an 'expanded history' of the hero" must have been "consciously intended for the saga-author to explore Iceland's past".[32] Along this line, Kathryn Hume has also suggested that the author of *Grettis saga* is likely to have entertained some "Christian assumptions" when composing the saga, because on the textual level, the author forced "both legendary and romance concepts of the hero to give way to the Christian and everyday [concepts]".[33] At any rate, just as Faulkes' observation indicates, together with Gisli and Hord — another two best-known outlaws in Old Icelandic literature, "only Grettir lived and died a Christian, and *The Saga of Grettir*, particularly the final chapters, has a distinct Christian slant".[34] Hence the conjecture that the saga-author, who was most probably a "good fourteenth-century Christian", intentionally fused both pagan and

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[28] Glendinning, Robert J. "'Grettis Saga' and European Literature in the Late Middle Ages", in *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1970, p. 50.
[29] Thorsson (2005), p. xiv.
[30] Hawes, Janice. "The Monstrosity of Heroism: Grettir Ásmundarson as an Outsider", in *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 80, no. 1, 2008, pp. 30-34. Hawes argues that in Chapter 34 when Grettir gives Audunn an ax in friendship, he is able, at least occasionally, to be self-restrained (33).
[31] Hawes, Janice. *Monsters, Heroes and Social Identity in Medieval Icelandic and English Literature*. Ph. D dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2004, p. 184.
[32] Ibid. As for the conscious design of *Grettis saga*, see Hume, Kathryn. "The Thematic Design of 'Grettis Saga'", in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol, 73, no. 4, 1974, p. 470 & p. 478.
[33] Hume, Kathryn. "From Saga to Romance: The Use of Monsters in Old Norse Literature", in *Studies in Philology*, vol. 77, no. 1, 1980, pp. 6-7.
[34] Faulkes, Anthony. "The Saga of Grettir", in Johnston, G., & Faulkes, A. (eds.), *Three Icelandic Outlaw Sagas*. J. M. Dent, 2001, p. xix.

Christian elements into Grettir's characterisation.[35] And this situation, by analogy, would seem in tune with the fact that the story of *Grettis saga* took place at the turn of the new millennium, bearing testimony to Iceland's conversion to Christianity.[36]

There are four major manuscripts on which the Old Icelandic text of *Grettis saga* survived and which form the basis of the present dissertation's source material. They are (1) AM 551, a, 4to; (2) AM 556, a, 4to; (3) AM 152, fol — all preserved in the Árni Magnússon Manuscript Institute in Reykjavík (Iceland) — and (4) DG (Delagardie) 10, fol, which is kept in Uppsala (Sweden). The other extant manuscripts are listed as follows:

1.3.2.1 A Synopsis of the Manuscripts of Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar

Shelf Mark	Language	Title	Place of Production	Date	Details
AM 152 1-2 fol.	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1300-1525	No. 1, 1r-49v
AM 556 a 4to	Icelandic	*Sigurgarðs saga frækna — Saga af Sigurgarði hinum frækna*	Iceland	1475-1499	No. 2, 5r-52r
AM 551 a 4to	Icelandic	*Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*	Iceland	1490-1510	No. 3, 7v-53r
Lbs 1370 8vo	Icelandic	*Rímur*	Iceland	1600-1800	No. 6, 92r-93v
AM 151 fol.	Icelandic	*Grettis saga*	Iceland	1635-1645	No. 1, 1r-60v
AM 165 k fol.	Icelandic	*Grettis saga*	Iceland	1635-1645	No. 1, 1r-60v
AM 478 4to	Icelandic	*Grettis saga*	Iceland	1635-1699	No. 1, 1r-85v
AM 614 b 4to	Icelandic	*Rímur af Hervöru Angantýsdóttur — Grettis rímur*	Iceland	1656	No. 2, 25v-46v
AM 611 d 4to	Icelandic	*Pílatus rímur — Um völundarhús — Vísur úr Grettis sögu*	Iceland	1658-1700	No. 3, 12r
GKS 1002 fol.	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1667	No. 2, 27v-60v
AM 426 fol.	Icelandic	*Íslendingasögur — Íslendingaþættir — Samtíðarsögur*	Iceland	1670-1682	No. 8, 80r-129v
AM 480 I-II 4to	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1675-1699	Hluti II, 11r-93v

[35] Hume (1974), p. 484.
[36] Byock, Jesse. (Trans.). *Grettir's Saga*, Oxford World's Classics, 2009, p. xii.

AM 552 c 4to	Icelandic	*Þorvarðar þáttur krákunefs*	Iceland	1675-1699	No. 2, 3r-3v
AM 150 fol.	Icelandic	*Grettis saga*	Unknown	1690-1697	No.1 1r-96r
AM 479 4to	Icelandic	*Grettis saga*	Iceland	1690-1710	1r-98v
AM 939 4to	Icelandic	*Grettis saga ásamt tveimur vísum um Kjartan og Bolla*	Iceland	1700-1725	No. 1, 1r-79v, bls. 1-157.
Lbs 2452 4to	Icelandic	*Sögu- og rímnabók*	Iceland	1700-1799	No. 2, 53r-175v
Lbs 633 fol.	Icelandic	*Rímnabók*	Unknown	1700-1799	No. 5, 92r-168r
AM 1020 4to	Icelandic	*Inntak vísnanna í Grettis sögu — Ex notis O. Verelii ad Sögu Hervarar*	Iceland	1700-1800	No. 1, 1r-20r
AM 476 4to	Icelandic	*Grettis saga*	Iceland	1702-1712	1r-254v
AM 153 fol.	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	1711-1712	No. 4, 44r-72v
AM 1003 4to	Icelandic	*Inntak vísnanna í Grettis sögu*	Iceland	1735-1800	1r-40v
Lbs 1483 4to	Icelandic	*Grettis saga*	Iceland	1770-1820?	1r-173r
Lbs 205 fol.	Icelandic	*Samtíningur*	Unknown	1770?-1820	No. 2.4
AM 1002 4to	Latin	*Um ævi Grettis*	Iceland	1772-1800	1r-35v
AM 455 fol.	Icelandic and Latin	*Grettis saga*	Copenhagen	1775-1798	1r-379r
Lbs 438 4to	Icelandic and Danish	*Samtíningur*	Iceland	1800-1850?	No. 13, 37r-54r
AM 946 h 4to	Icelandic	*Grettis saga — Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*	Copenhagen	1800-1883	No. 1, 1r-87v, 1-174
AM 946 i 4to	Icelandic	*Grettis saga — Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*	Copenhagen	1800-1883	No. 1, 1r-247r, bls. 1-493
KG 36 IV a	Icelandic and Danish	*Einkaskjalasafn Konráðs Gíslasonar*	Copenhagen	1800-1899	No. 5
ÍB 442 4to	Icelandic	*Grettis rímur*	Iceland	1830	No. 1
Lbs 205 fol.	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Unknown	Unknown	No. 2
AM 477 I-II 4to	Icelandic	*Sögubók*	Iceland	Unknown	Hluti II, No. 1, 13r-72r

2 An Illustration of Eco-Criticism and Eco-Narratology

Haud igitur penitus pereunt
quaecumque videntur,
quando alit ex alio
reficit natura nec ullam
rem gigni patitur
nisi morte adiuta aliena.

— *De rerum natura* (I, 262-264)

2.1 The Rise and Purport of Eco-Criticism

After tracing the development of Eco-Criticism (also termed as "environmental criticism" and "green cultural studies" in other cases[37]) in USA and the UK over the past three decades, Pippa Marland defines Eco-Criticism as follows:

> Eco-Criticism is an umbrella term for a range of critical approaches that explore the representation in literature (and other cultural forms) of the relationship between the human and the non-human, largely from the anxieties around humanity's destructive impact on the biosphere.[38]

While this definition pinpoints the multidisciplinary essence and environmental connotations of Eco-Criticism,[39] it would seem evocative of what Lawrence Buell terms as

[37] See, for example, Hochman, Jhan. *Green Cultural Studies: Nature in Film, Novel, and Theory*. University of Idaho Press, 1998; LeMenager, Stephanie. & Shewry, Teresa. & Hilsner, Ken. (Eds.). *Environmental Criticism for the Twentieth-First Century*. Routledge, 2012.
[38] Marland, Pippa. "Ecocriticism", in *Literature Compass*, vol. 10, no. 11, 2013, p. 846.
[39] Other definitions of and discourses over Environmental Humanities, as resonant with Pippa's, can be integrated as follows: "The environmental humanities (also ecological humanities) is an interdisciplinary area of research, drawing on the many environmental sub-disciplines that have emerged in the humanities over the past several decades, in particular environmental literature, environmental philosophy, environmental history, feminist/queer/indigenous science and technology studies, and environmental anthropology. Environmental humanities employs humanistic questions about meaning, culture, values, ethics, and responsibilities to address pressing environmental problems. The environmental humanities aim to help bridge traditional divides between the sciences and the humanities, as well as between Western, Eastern, and Indigenous ways of relating to the nature world and the place of humans within it. The field also resists the traditional divide between nature and

"human and non-human webs of interrelation"[40] — webs that are knit constructively to represent nature creatively in art and literature.

In her doctoral dissertation, Cao points out that in the postwar era, English-speaking scholars' reviews of the aesthetic expressions of human-nature relation in art and literature were mostly in response to the global environmental crisis.[41] Indeed, while the Cold War was simmering, many English-speaking intellectuals were preoccupied with the devastating influence that the rampantly developing nuclear weapon would exert upon the Earth's precarious eco-system.[42] With London's Great Smog of 1952 — "a deadly conjugation of got and smoke emissions which led to the death of 12, 000 people",[43] environmental protection gradually evolved to be a central issue in the UK, as culminated in its participation in the first United Nations Conference on Human Environment (5th, June — 16th, June, 1972, Stockholm). Also, in the 1980s, Lady Thatcher delivered a series of speeches themed on British environmentalism, which can be taken as a highlight of the UK's solicitude for the global environmental crisis.[44]

Admittedly, such a variety of socio-political campaigns have enhanced people's awareness about environmental protection; nevertheless, a comprehensive, scholarly understanding of *nature*, according to this present dissertation, is not supposed to be restricted within the purely ecological sense. Rather, as a concept of multiple meaning and plural signification,[45] *nature* may need to be comprehended with close reference to its specific

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culture, showing how many environmental issues have always-already been entangled in human questions of justice, labor, and politics. Environmental humanities is also a way of synthesizing methods from different fields to create new ways of thinking through environmental problems." For details, refer to http://environmental.humanities.ucla.edu, as well as Deborah Bird Rose, Thom van Dooren, Matthew Chrulew, Stuart Cooke, Matthew Kearnes and Emily O'Gorman. "Thinking Through the Environment, Unsettling the Humanities", in *Environmental Humanities*, vol. 1, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1–5.

[40] Buell, Lawrence. *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination.* Maldon, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 138.

[41] Cao, Liqun *Constructing Nature: The Poetry of Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes and Seamus Heany*. Ph.D. dissertation, Beijing Foreign Studies University, 2016, pp. 9-12.

[42] Barca, Stefania. "Laboring the Earth: Transnational Reflections on the Environmental History of Work", in *Environmental History*, vol. 19, no. 1, 2014, pp. 3-27.

[43] https://www.historyextra.com/period/modern/william-wordsworth-extinction-rebellion-history-britains-green-activists-environment-campaigning-activism-environmentalism/. 14/03/2021.

[44] Lady Thatcher's speeches themed on environmental protection are retrievable from https://www.climatecentral.org/news/the-iron-ladys-strong-stance-on-climate-change-15840.

[45] For instance, according to *The Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British sources*, ed. by Ashdowne, Howlett and Latham (2012 —) [online], the item *natura* in medieval Latin is polysemous, referring to "the power that determines [or] shapes the physical world, including God as 'supreme nature'", "[the] natural or normal state or condition [of something]", "[a] created artifact, [or] creation", and "[the] inherent quality, property, […] essence, nature, [or] character [of something]". Likewise, according to Oxford Learner's Dictionary, *nature* is meant for "the phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, and other features and products of the earth, as opposed to humans or human creations", as well as "[the] inborn or hereditary characteristics as an influence on or determinant of personality, often contrasted with *nurture*" and "the physical

"contexts of appearance".[46] For instance, in the realm of literary studies, Marland considers *nature* as not only the material environment where all living creatures dwell, but also a symbol and metaphor, by the agency of which, allusions to the socio-psychological environments of given epochs, dynasties, or any particular "states of affairs" — be they factual or fictional — can be conveyed.[47]

In philosophical terms, Elana Gomel incisively suggests that "nature is simply history under a different name",[48] which seems implying that through a nuanced observation of *nature writing*, certain bits and pieces of history that would otherwise sink into oblivion can be recollected, reintegrated, and reviewed. In this sense, while eco-criticism re-examines the human-nature interaction in times of the ongoing environmental crisis, it can also offer insights into how narratives about nature could be read as a symbolic representation of the authorial attitudes towards social existence. And this could possibly reflect given authors' personal stances on what was conventionally marginalised, stereotyped, demonised, or taken for granted in their times.

2.2 Two Internal Debates of Eco-Criticism

Since its rise, eco-criticism has been suspected of lacking "legitimacy and coherence",[49] principally because it adopts sundry approaches to literary texts. Besides, since *environment* can be conceptualised as "everything and thus nothing",[50] eco-criticism has been accused of being "still distinctly on the academic margins, [for which] the eco-critical movement still does not have a widely-known set of assumptions, doctrines or procedures".[51] Granted, eco-criticism is yet to be well-fledged; nevertheless, the present dissertation detects that its two central arguments are rather salient. One is its potential hesitancy over "linguistic constructivism" — the theory claiming that whatever conveyed via human language is *ipso*

force regarded as causing and regulating the phenomena of the world". At any rate, the meaning of *nature* is synchronically multiple and diachronically evolving.

[46] Sorvig, Kim. "Nature/Culture/Words/Landscapes", in *Landscape Journal*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2002, pp. 1–14.

[47] Marland, Pippa (2013), p. 846.

[48] Gomel, Elana. *Narrative Space and Time: Representing Impossible Topologies in Literature*. London: Routledge, 2014, p. 6.

[49] Marland, Pippa (2013), p. 846.

[50] Clark, Timothy. *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 203.

[51] Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 3rd edition. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, p. 239.

facto a linguistic construction.[52] Another is the eco-critical hypothesis that *subject* and *object* are infiltrated with each other in *nature writing*, which potentially challenges the traditional western dualistic stance upon *subject* and *object*, as well as upon *mind* and *matter*, whose ideological root is, by and large, in Cartesian philosophy.[53]

2.2.1 Casting Doubt to Linguistic Constructivism

In the postmodern context, eco-criticism demonstrates its ideological disposition towards *cosmocentrism*.[54] From an *earth-centred* perspective, it looks askance at the fundamental tenet of linguistic constructivism, i.e., the assertion that "all reality is linguistic, so that there can be no meaningful talk of a 'real' world which exits without question outside language".[55] According to the present dissertation, however, not only is eco-criticism cognizant of the substantiality of human language, but it also defies the centrality and ascendency of race, class, and gender issues in postmodern literary criticism, for it strives patently to establish a new paradigm pivoting on *nature*. This opinion finds its echo in Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm's deliberation over the relationship between eco-criticism and postmodernism:

> If your knowledge of the outside world were limited to what you could infer from the major publications of the literary profession, you would quickly discern that race, class, and gender were the hot topics of the late twentieth century, but you would never suspect that the earth's life support systems were under stress. Indeed, you would never know that there was an earth at all.[56]

Just as Marland clarifies, eco-criticism arose originally as a reaction to the scholarly "frustration with the particular 'linguistic' turn present in the structuralism and post-structuralism of the 1970s and 1980s that viewed language as a closed system".[57] This philosophical take on language, which considers it futile to discuss the 'real' world outside the

[52] Labuda, Pavol. "Common-Sense Realism and its Position in Realism-Antirealism Debate", in *Organon F*, vol. 20, pp. 64-78.
[53] Kim, Chin-Tai. "Cartesian Dualism and The Unity of a Mind", in *Mind*, New Series, vol. 80, no. 319, 1971, pp. 337-53.
[54] Wess, Robert. "Geocentric Ecocriticism", in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 10, no. 2, 2003, pp. 2-4.
[55] Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 3rd edition. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009, p. 68.
[56] Glotfelty, Cheryll. & Fromm, Harold. (Eds.). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996, p. xvi.
[57] Marland, Pippa (2013), p. 848.

linguistically knit text, is a key argument that Eco-Criticism takes issue with. Yet it is worth noticing that eco-criticism does not indiscriminately negate the constructive potential of human language; rather, it focusses on how *nature* is constructed to deliver meaning, drawing on the interaction between the external, natural world and the internal, conceptual world in the processes of literary interpretation and literary production.[58] This, according to Oppermann, is not only the underlying logic of eco-criticism but also resonant with the epistemological shift entailed at the core of this theoretical proposal:

> Ecocriticism today finds itself struggling with hermeneutic closure as well as facing an ambivalent openness in its interpretative approach. This paradox is due to the fact that many prominent ecocritics who aligned themselves with the perspectives of realist epistemology, think it enables ecocriticism to be an open field of inquiry. They ignore the conceptual problems the realist perspectives conjure.[59]

Oppermann's insights raise another related question: to what extent are eco-critics entitled to read literary texts as faithful portrayals of reality? In other words, since the constructiveness of language is but a matter of degree, how could the traditional hermeneutic approach be properly deployed to activate the latent textual information in literature?

To some extent, moreover, Oppermann's revisionist view on linguistic constructivism would seem in harmony with Kate Soper's theory of the constructiveness of nature (rather than that of language). Soper proposes that

> it is not language that has a hole in its ozone layer; [but] the 'real' thing continues to be polluted and degraded even as we refine our constructive insights at the level of the signifier".[60]

According to Soper, what is conceived of as real, or independent *nature* is but "the product of our conceptual projections or material cultural constructions";[61] and accordingly, eco-critics are expected to "beware of constructs, learn to detect the signs of phony projections of authenticity".[62] Grounded on Soper's theoretical proposal, Maryland makes further elaboration on methodological level:

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[58] Cao (2016), pp. 10-12.
[59] Oppermann, Serpil. "Theorizing Ecocriticism: Toward a Postmodern Ecocritical Practice", in *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, vol. 13, 2006, p. 103.
[60] Soper, Kate. *What is Nature? Culture, Politics and the non-Human.* Oxford: Blackwell, 1995, p. 151.
[61] Soper, Kate. "Realism, Humanism and the Politics of Nature", in *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, no. 98, 2001, pp. 56-57.
[62] Ibid.

> The 'nature-endorsing' approach typical of early ecocriticism should be balanced with a more 'nature-skeptical' sensibility, able to reflect on the way in which 'nature' has been constructed and deployed to reinforce the dominant ideologies, but neither perspective should be allowed to dominate.[63]

That being the case, while perceiving *nature* as bordering on both subjectivity and objectivity, rather than opposed to *culture* or *nurture*, eco-critics are diverting attention to how nature is constructively limned in literature. This practice pertains to another essential feature of eco-criticism, i.e., its defiance against the dualistic view on human-nature relation.

2.2.2 Casting Doubt to Human-Nature Dualism

In the western context, the concept of *nature* normally entails the ontological human-nature distinction, a distinction at the heart of modern western philosophy and arguably also rooted in Christianity.[64] Throughout the Enlightenment to Modernity, western philosophy generally heightens the role of human beings as the subject of feeling, sentiment, and logical deduction, but in the meantime belittles *nature* as deprived of the reasoning capacity, thus reduced to the passive recipient of human comprehension.[65]

According to Lilla, mainstream western philosophers of the modern age — ranging from Descartes, Kant, and Nietzsche to Noam Chomsky and Lévi-Strauss — have almost unanimously objectified *nature*.[66] And they are intrigued chiefly by two major issues: the extent to which human beings can understand and (re-)present the external natural world, and whether mankind as the subject of intellect can be enabled to transcend nature.[67] Likewise, within the western empirical tradition that traces back to John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume, *nature* is taken roughly as equivalent to the material world under human investigation, exploitation, and subjugation.[68] Moreover, in Primavesi's view, objectifying nature on the ground of an antagonistic differentiation between *mind* and *matter* has its ideological provenance not only in the Cartesian philosophy, but also in Christianity:

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[63] Marland, Pippa (2013), p. 851.
[64] White, Lynn, Jr. "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis", in *Science*, vol. 155, 1967, p. 1205.
[65] Cao (2016), pp. 9-12.
[66] Strictly speaking, Levi-Strauss was not a philosopher, and Chomsky is more of a linguist with philosophic ambitions.
[67] Lilla, Mark. "What Is Counter-Enlightenment?" In Mali, Joseph. & Wokler, Robert. (Eds.). *Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment*. *American Philosophical Society*, vol. 93, no. 5, 2003, pp. 13-16.
[68] Robyn Eckersley. *Environmentalism and Political Theory: Towards an Ecocentric Approach*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992, pp. 22-24.

> In western religious and cultural history, matter has been distinguished from mind, nature from culture, women from man, body from spirit, emotion from reason, earth from heaven in order to devalue one compared with the other, the devalued being described as unclean, polluting, inferior and/or profane. The de-valuation or de-grading has meant that, matter, nature, woman and earth could then be treated as of lesser value, lesser importance. The degradation, in the case of women, nature and the earth, was taken to justify their exploitation.[69]

Yet this European modern perception of nature, which largely underpins the Age of Enlightenment on the epistemological level,[70] has turned out to be problematic in the following centuries. Horkheimer and Adorno, for instance, have pointed out that "Enlightenment reaches its limit in the Nazi death camps, [where] the process of the rationalization of means has come to its extreme".[71] In this case, the two philosophers would seem implying that rationalisation and the instrumentalization of human being have bred violence in modern Europe; and this critical reflection upon the fervour for rationalism would appear consonant with Malloy's assertion that "many deaths, brought about in different ways under different rationalizations, all represent enlightenment's failed attempt to actualize itself".[72] Curiously enough, Horkheimer and Adorno's dialectic stance appears fundamentally in tune with Hegel's comment on the Enlightenment, viz., "the guillotine and the showers are both the end results of enlightenment's attempt to transplant heaven to the earth below".[73] Also, while pinpointing the repercussions of western secularisation, they both notice that since the start of Modernity, the awe of nature as a metaphysical being has been substituted by human beings' unbounded ambition to conquer the natural world by means of intellect. And noteworthily, this fetishism of rationalism according to Isaiah Berlin is not restrained in science and technology, but also permeates the studies of liberal arts and social sciences:

> In history we are the actors, in the natural sciences merely spectators. This is the doctrine, above others, on which Vico's claim to immortality must rest. For upon it rests the crucial distinction between *Geisteswissenschaft* and *Naturwissenschaft*. The battle over this distinction has continued unabated until well into our own day.[74]

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[69] Primavesi, Anne. *Sacred Gaia: Holistic Theology and Earth System Science*. London: Routledge, 2000, p. 30.
[70] For a detailed explanation about the importance of human-nature dualism to the eighteenth-century western philosophy, refer to https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/enlightenment/ (01/06/2021), especially Section One, i.e., "The True: Science, Epistemology and Metaphysics in the Enlightenment".
[71] Malloy, Daniel. "Dialectic and Enlightenment: The Concept of Enlightenment in Hegel and Horkheimer-Adorno", in *Auslegung*, vol. 27, no. 2, p. 44.
[72] Ibid., p. 46.
[73] Hegel, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. Miller, A. V. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977, p. 355.
[74] Berlin, I. *Vico and Herder — Two Studies in the History of Ideas*. London: The Hogarth Press, 1976, p. 67.

Regarding the infiltration of rationalism into twentieth-century western theories of literature, the remarks of Chinese scholar Jiaying-Ye would be worth quoting. According to her, the modern western poetic theories about the use of imagery focus almost exclusively on the instrumental role of *nature writing* in expressing given poets' rationally pre-arranged ideas or emotions, whereas these theories are collectively forgetful about the function of *nature writing* in revealing certain poets' instantaneous reactions to the outside world, as well as their spontaneous poetic inspirations.[75] Granted, Jiaying-Ye may not have fully considered the poetics of the seventeenth-century metaphysical poets, whose writings are "wit-driven" and "judgement-free" in T. S. Eliot's eyes and who themselves, according Dr Johnson, have "yoked the most heterogeneous ideas together by violence".[76] At any rate, the present dissertation still holds that Jiaying-Ye well captures a defining feature of modern western poetics, namely its central presumption that *nature* shall be viewed as an agency by which to convey emotions and materialise thoughts, rather than the generator of poetic sentiments or ingenuity. Analogically, this traditional western perception of *nature writing*, as largely dismissive of nature's empathetic potential, may well be ascribed also to the underlying dualistic philosophy.

Fortunately, eco-criticism aspires to rectify this bipartite understanding of human-nature relationship, assuming that the literary fashioning of *nature* is inherently imbued with subjectivity; and accordingly, it puts forward a brand-new definition of *nature*:

> Nature is not a thing, a domain, a realm, an ontological territory. It is (or rather, it was during the short modern parenthesis) a way of organizing the division (what Alfred North Whitehead has called the Bifurcation) between appearances and reality, subjectivity and objectivity, history and immutability. A full transcendent, yet a fully historical construct, a deep religious way (but not in the truly religious sense of the word) of creating the difference of potential between what human souls were attached to and what was out there.[77]

To sum up, the present dissertation finds that eco-criticism is innate with the suspicion of linguistic constructivism, and it is inclined to take heed of the constructiveness of *nature writing* in literary texts, drawing on both the rational fashioning of poetic images and

[75] Jia-ying, Ye. "Exposition, Comparison and Affective Image Both in Western and Chinese Literary Theories", in *Hebei Academic Journal*, no. 3, 2004, pp. 116-122.
[76] Tate, Allen. "Johnson on the Metaphysicals", in *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 11, no. 3, 1949, p. 392.
[77] Latour, Bruno. "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto'", in *New Literary History*, vol. 41, 2010, p. 476. Cf. Abram (2019), p. 20.

spontaneous externalisation of poetic emotion by means of *nature writing*. And this critical approach is of crucial importance also to the ongoing paradigm shift, i.e., "the ecological turn in literary studies" in Kate Rigby's words.[78] It is on this basis that I explore the implied meanings of *nature writing* in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*.

2.3 Eco-Narratology: Aesthetic-Ethical Values and *Nature Writing* as Covert Plot

With the development of Environmental Humanities, eco-critics nowadays are paying more attention to the narratological function of *nature writing*. By "the narratological function", I refer to the functions of *discourse* in narrating *story*. In this regard, obviously, the present dissertation embraces the post-classical dichotomy between *story* and *discourse*,[79] considering *story* as "the narrated events in the actual causal and chronological order, characters and setting", and defining *discourse*, on the other hand, as "the expression, viz., the means by which the content [of *story*] is communicated".[80] In particular, Chatman accentuates three most salient functions of the narrative discourse: the selecting, organising, and commenting functions.[81]

Conventionally, eco-critics would privilege content over form in the narratological analysis of *nature writing*, yet this situation has changed over the past few decades, as

> an increasing number of scholars interested in the intersections of literature and environment are turning their attention to the very structures by which narrative represent and construct environments for their readers and are thus increasingly engaging in the concepts and lexicon of narratology, or narrative theory.[82]

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[78] Rigby, Kate. "Chapter 7: 'Ecocriticism'", in Julian Wolfreys (ed.), *Introducing Criticism at the Twenty-First Century*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, pp. 151-178. The online video lecture is also useful for understanding the ecocritical paradigm shift, retrievable from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4ufeMLo-os (01/06/2021).

[79] Concerning the distinction between *story* and *discourse*, there are dichotomous and trichotomous distinctions — in the latter case the *process of narrative* is involved — proposed by generations of narratologists and literary critics; and the defining feature of postclassical narratology is that it distinguishes *story* from *discourse* (Shen 2005: 566-567). The term "postclassical narratology" was introduced by David Herman (1997), highlighting the necessity of rethinking "the problem of narrative sequences" to enrich narratological theory with tools that can be borrowed from "other areas of inquiry" (1049 & 1057, cf. Ionescu 2019: 9). To quote Herman (1999), "Postclassical narratology (which should not be conflated with poststructuralist theories of narrative) contains classical narratology as one of its 'moments' but is marked by a profusion of new methodologies and research hypotheses: the result is a host of new perspectives on the ***forms and functions of narrative*** itself. Further, in its postclassical phase, research on narrative does not just expose the limits but also exploits the possibility of the older, structuralist models. In much the same way, postclassical physics does not simply discard classical Newtonian models, but rather rethinks their conceptual underpinnings and reassesses their scope of applicability" (2-3, emphasis added).

[80] Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 19.

[81] Ibid., p. 28.

[82] James, E. & Morel, E. "Ecocriticism and Narrative Theory: An Introduction", in *English Studies*, vol. 99, no. 4, 2018, p. 355.

The analytical tools developed by narratologists have impacted upon eco-criticism. According to Lehtimäki, narratology "can be used to explore how cultural practices pertain to the natural ecologies with which they are interwoven".[83] He also stresses two issues at the interface between eco-criticism and narratology, both of which will be attended to in the following analyses of *Bárðar saga* and *Grettis saga*:

> How might an author's concern with a particular kind of ecology motivate the use of specific form? How can techniques for consciousness presentation […] be leveraged to suggest how characters' experiences both shape and are shaped by their engagement with aspects of the natural world? [84]

Under Lehtimäki's influence, Erin James further propounded the term "eco-narratology", defining it as a fusion of "ecocriticism's interest in the relationship between literature and the physical environment with narratology's focus on the literary structures and devices by which writers compose narratives".[85] Obviously, Erin lays emphasis upon the processes, rather than the products, of literary creation and interpretation, and takes interest in what happens to the readerships when they visualise the narrated environments. And he believes that eco-narratology is particularly useful in exploring

> the storyworlds that readers simulate and transport themselves to when reading narratives, the correlations between such textual, imaginative worlds and the physical, extratextual world, and the potential of the reading process to foster awareness and understanding for different environmental imaginations and experiences.[86]

Differentiating *story* from *discourse*, post-classical narratology broadens the scope of classical narratology from the traditional aesthetic appreciation of fictional writing to the polymorphous story-telling in novel, theatre, poetry, as well as film.[87] According to Chatman, "both *mimesis* and *diegesis* are capable of transmitting a story, since a narrator could present a story through a teller or a shower or some combination of both".[88] Chatman's theory directed scholars in narratology to review how the rhetorical and stylistic renderings of a narrative can

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[83] Lehtimäki, Markku. "Natural Environments in Narrative Contexts: Crossing-Pollinating Ecocriticism and Narrative Theory", in *Storyworlds: A Journal of Narrative Studies*, no. 5, 2013, p. 119.
[84] Ibid., p. 137.
[85] James, Erin. *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015, p. xv.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Kafalenos, Emma. "The Story/Discourse Distinction", in *Style*, vol. 52, no. 1-2, 2018, pp. 39-42.
[88] Chatman, Seymour. *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative Fiction and Film*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990, p. 113.

be functional to the conveyance of the "implied meaning". And this has led to Shen's insightful observation that the surface and underlying plots of one narrative can either consolidate or subvert each other. Methodologically, Shen further proposes that in order to detect the artistry and intended themes of some delicately wrought narratives, narratologists should take heed of the discursive construction of covert plots on rhetorical-stylistic level:

> … if a fictional narrative has dual dynamics but we only pay attention to the overt, we will either get a partial picture (if the covert supplements the overt) or a false picture (if the covert subverts the overt) of the ethical import of the text; we will only see a [flatter], or a distorted image of the characters involved; and we can only appreciate the narrative's aesthetic value in a limited and one-sided way. The process of experiencing the covert progression is a process of gaining a relatively fuller, more balanced, or more accurate understanding of the ethical import and artistic quality of the whole work.[89]

Admittedly, Shen's theory attunes primarily to (post-)modern fictional writings. Yet, the *Íslendingasaga* is not a genre deprived of fictionality, but as an artistic account of medieval Icelanders' cultural memory, it partakes of both historicity and fictitiousness.[90] Therefore, *nature writing* in *Íslendingasögur* may well be considered as constitutive of the overt plots, thus foregrounding expressions of human emotions, sentiments and ethical values. It is in this spirit that the present dissertation investigates the interplay between *nature* and *gender* in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*.

Moreover, regarding the legitimacy of interpreting eco-narrative as a type of covert plot that can deliver and even comment on the author's implied aesthetic-ethic values, Cheney propounds that "if value is implicit in our description of the world and our place in it, then the narratives we construct will embody value and orient us".[91] This proposal is further substantiated by Serenella Iovino who elaborates on how eco-narratology can give concrete forms of moral propositions:

> Narrative reinhabitation stirs up awareness about values and responsibilities connected to the life-in-place (the "sense of the story") and allows the envisioning of suitable strategies of change in the form of possible narrative "endings". From an ethical perspective, the epilogue of a story is a task

[89] Dan, Shen. *Style and Rhetoric of Short Narrative Fiction: Covert Progressions behind Overt Plots.* Routledge: London and New York, 2014, p. 26.
[90] Pavan, Matteo. *The problem of the literary genre in post-classical Íslendingasögur: some observations on Gull-Þóris saga and Víglundar saga*. MA thesis, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, 2012, pp. 41-42.
[91] Cheney, Jim. "Postmodern Environmental Ethics: Ethics as Bioregional Narrative", in *Environmental Ethics* II, Summer 1989, p. 132.

> rather than an already accomplished reality. By telling a story, narrations not only confer a *shape* (namely, a sense) to the events that happen in a given context, making them understandable; they also creatively enable a *project* that takes on society and its values. In other words, by inspiring awareness, narrations can be a *creative* form of ethical responsibility, and the object of the story can be turned into a (moral and therefore political) project.[92]

To sum up, the interplay between eco-narrative and the overt plot is worth further researching; and hypothetically, this interplay is discernible not only in (post-)modern literature, but also in medieval literature, albeit the *status quo* that scholarly works reading medieval literature through the lens of eco-narratology — which will be systematically reviewed in the next chapter — are scanty. Via its eco-narratological reading of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, the present dissertation aims to fill in this blank, delving into how *nature writing* can interact with the narratorial construction of masculinity and femininity in the two Old Norse-Icelandic texts.

[92] Iovino, Serenella. "Restoring the Imagination of Place: Narrative Reinhabitation and the Po Valley", in *The Bioregional Imagination: Literature, Ecology, and Place*, ed. Tom Lynch, Cheryll Glotfelty, and Karla Armbruster. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2021, p. 106.

3 Eco-Criticism in Old Norse-Icelandic Studies

Sace rest, aeternus, immensus, totus in toto,
immo vero ipse totum ac finite similis,
omnium rerum certus et similis incerto,
extra intra cuncta conplexus in se,
idemque rerum naturae opus et rerum ipsa natura.

— *Naturalis Historia* (II, 1)

3.1 Legitimacy and Feasibility

Applying eco-criticism to approach Old Norse-Icelandic literature would appear to be an embryonic, yet promising field of scholarly research. Compared with eco-critics in modern and/or postmodern literature, eco-medievalists emerged much later. As far as the present dissertation is concerned, two indelible monographs that take the lead in reading Old Norse-Icelandic literature eco-critically are especially worth mentioning, for they not only successfully combine eco-criticism and medieval studies, but also confirm the legitimacy and feasibility of such a research approach. The two publications are an eco-critical analysis of

Eyrbyggja saga,[93] by Carl Phelpstead,[94] and Christoph Abram's "green reading" of Nordic mythology.[95]

In his pioneering article, Phelpstead explores how the author of *Eyrbyggia saga* alluded, by means of *nature writing*, to the "boundaries between nature and culture, animal and human, and nature and the supernatural" in order to narrate *landnám* (land-taking) as "the construction of a nation out of wildness".[96] He concludes that

> *Eyrbyggja saga* is, among other things, about establishing a stable human community in a previously uninhabited land. This involves the construction of boundaries, both physical and conceptual. Wild nature must be divided from cultivated farmland, Icelandic society from the realm of the outlaw, human from animal, nature from the supernatural.[97]

Moreover, Phelpstead takes the initiative to review human-nature relationship through the lens of literary interpretation, noticing that

> The opposition between nature and nation is continually called into question, blurred, or shown to be inadequate. Dividing lines between human and animal, between natural and humanised landscape, and between the natural and the supernatural are continually crossed.[98]

According to Abram, moreover, it is particularly Old Norse specialists' duty to apply and enrich eco-critical theories through practice, since he keenly detects that eco-criticism casts doubt to the role of *imitatio naturae* as the initial drive of poetic creation in Old Norse-Icelandic literature:

> Norse myth is a distinctly nonmimetic form of literature that has no referential relationship to the physical environments in which it was produced — but it is unquestionably a nexus of ecological concerns. And

[93] *Eyrbyggja saga* revolves around a diversity of families and individuals living on Iceland at Snæfellsnes, and it recounts constant fighting between the contending clans on Snæfellsnes, mostly over resources such as wood, property, and livestock. The Norsemen represented in this saga constantly turn to Snorri and Arnkel for advice and permission to take legal and/or physical action against perpetrators that have wronged them. The story of the *Eyrbyggja Saga* involves actions that stem from greed, fear, ambition or downright meanness, as it describes cold-hearted bargaining between farmers and chieftains. All the events of the Saga take place in one small region of Snæfellsnes, shifting between Álptafjord, which cuts into the northern shore of the peninsula, and Helgafell, the farmstead on Thórsnes, where Snorri Goði resided (Byock 2009: 99-100). The Saga shows a steady shift from paganism in Iceland to Christianity over the course of roughly twenty years.
[94] Phelpstead, Carl. "Ecocriticism and *Eyrbyggja saga*", in *Leeds Studies in English*, New Series XLV, edited by Alaric Hall, School of English, University of Leeds, 2014, pp. 1-18.
[95] Abram, Christopher. *Evergreen Ash: Ecology and Catastrophe in Old Norse Myth and Literature*. University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville and London, 2019.
[96] Phelpstead, Carl (2014), p. 1.
[97] Ibid., p. 17.
[98] Ibid., p. 18.

> even the sagas of Icelanders — those paragons of medieval realism — trouble our complacent notions of literary mimesis by their treatment of the supernatural.[99]

Yet the narratological aspect of Old Icelandic *nature writing* remains largely unexploited. In this regard, the present dissertation proposes a three-fold justifiability of deploying eco-narratological analysis to read Old Icelandic sagas, especially the gendered elements in the *Íslendingasögur*.

Firstly, as Nardizzi claims, "medieval and Renaissance ecocriticisms can help to imagine for our world a range of futures unfolding from banned, censored and forgotten pasts".[100] Considering the widespread misogynistic ideology in medieval Europe (including the British Isle, the Continent, and Scandinavia under the influence of Christianity),[101] exploring the eco-narrative of gender attributes in *Íslendingasögur* is expected to contribute towards the uncovering of the "banned, censored and forgotten pasts" regarding the medieval Icelandic conceptualisation of femininity and masculinity.[102]

Secondly, adopting the eco-critical approach to Old Norse-Icelandic literature accords due respect to Iceland's unique natural and cultural history. As follows, Abram reveals the validity of reading Scandinavian mythology from the angle of Culture History:

> Because Iceland's climate, geology, and landscape are so unusual in a European context, we might assume that they have shaped Iceland, the Icelanders, and the Icelanders' cultural production in particularly influential ways. In considering these suggestions, an ecocritically oriented cultural history merges with a historically aware literary ecocriticism to produce a picture of a nature culture that attempts to account for both the human and nonhuman actants that work together to make up the totality of what we know as 'Iceland'.[103]

Thirdly, Abram propounds that Old Norse-Icelandic literature does not seem characteristic of the ideological dualism that distinguishes *subject* from *object*, Society from Nature, and human from nonhuman on absolute terms, and that the absence of this

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[99] Abram, Christopher. *Evergreen Ash: Ecology and Catastrophe in Old Norse Myth and Literature*. University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville and London, 2019, p. 36.
[100] Nardizzi, Vin. "Medieval Ecocriticism", in *Postmedieval*, vol. 4, 2013, p. 113.
[101] Bernau, Anke. "Medieval antifeminism", in McAvoy, Liz Herbert & Watt, Diane (eds.), *The History of British Women's Writing, 700-1500*, Palgrave, 2011, pp. 72-82; and Clark, David. "Undermining and En-Gendering Vengeance: Distancing and Anti-Feminism in the 'Poetic Edda'", in *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 77, no. 2, 2005, pp. 173-200.
[102] Nardizzi (2013), p. 113.
[103] Abram, Christopher (2019), p. 24.

dichotomous worldview is due mainly to the fact that this literary tradition had thrived anterior to

> Enlightenment's Cartesian revolution that reconfigured the human subject as the sole arbiter of reality; the combined efforts of the scientific revolution and the Industrial Revolution in providing the tools by which our mastery over the nonhuman world could be implemented; and capitalism's legitimization of economic growth, resource exploitation, and individual wealth accumulation as the motors and measures of social progress that has resulted in the commodification of the plant's goods. Old Norse-Icelandic literature originates in a precapitalist, preindustrial, pre-Enlightenment world and thus could in principle be expected, along with other medieval cultures, to reflect a less dualistic worldview than that of Western modernity.[104]

So viewed, deploying the eco-narratological approach to look at Old Norse-Icelandic literature is well legitimate, feasible, and worth further developing.

3.2 Four Major Types of Natural Existence in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature

Now, I will review previous scholarships on four major types of natural existence recurring in Old Norse-Icelandic literature: animals, landscapes, meteorological phenomena, and the places of residence. Over the last century, the four embodiments of *nature writing* have been studied sporadically by folklorists, critics, and literary historians in Old Norse, but they have not been discussed systematically from the perspective of eco-criticism or eco-narratology. By revisiting the preceding research, the current chapter intends to further substantialise the theoretical applicability of the proposed eco-reading of Old Icelandic sagas, as well as to provide solid socio-historical information concerning the natural background against which *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* were composed.

[104] Ibid., p. 26.

3.2.1 Animals[105]

Animal studies is an essential constituent of eco-criticism.[106] Old Norse-Icelandic literature, both sagas and Eddas, is replete with animals. Early in the 1950s, Turville-Petre had pointed out that the animals in the Old Norse *fylgja* corresponds to the "afterbirth of a child" in the material world, and that the *fylgjur* usually take the form of mice, dogs, foxes, cats, birds of prey, or carrion eaters — animals that would typically eat such afterbirths.[107] In recent times, *fylgjur* have been re-conceptualised as animals betokening the characters and/or personalities of the symbolised protagonists, serving as totem animals.[108] For instance, men with a "tame nature" would be typically represented by ox, goat, or boar, whereas characters with an "untame nature" would have *fylgjur* of a fox, wolf, deer, bear, eagle, falcon, leopard, lion, or a serpent.[109] On this account, it would seem well defensible to view the correlation between *fylgjur* and the covert characterisation of certain roles in Old Norse literature as a recurrent feature; and thus, this present dissertation believes that the animals, for their rich metaphorical-allegorical meanings, can potentially influence the plot progressions of certain saga narratives.

Besides, drawing on the symbolic connotation of animal in medieval Europe, Michel Pastoureau systematically analyses the theological-folkloristic implications behind an array of animals in western medieval art and literature. Pastoureau emphasises the cruciality of interpreting animal writing symbolically rather than literally and, grounded on a series of latest archaeological findings, argues that the substitution of bear by lion — two animals that recur in medieval Germanic texts like *Beowulf*, *Hrólfs saga kraka*, and *Skjǫldunga saga* [110] — is concurrent with the dissemination of Christianity in the Germanic world.[111]

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[105] Coupled with animals, plants should also deserve to be mentioned, since living things would include them both. Yet I would refrain from speaking of plants and plant imageries in an independent subsection, in order to avoid redundancy. But when I refer to Yggdrasil in Section 5.4., I have a brief literary review about the implied allegorical meaning of this evergreen, ashy tree in Old Norse mythology.

[106] Combing eco-criticism and animal studies to read medieval literature is an emerging field gaining increasingly scholarly attention. See, for instance, Ralph, I. "An animal studies and ecocritical reading of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*", in *Neohelicon***,** vol. 44, 2017, pp. 431–444, and Wolfe, C. "Moving forward, kicking back: The animal turn", in *Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, no. 2*,* 2011, pp.1–12.

[107] Turville-Petre, G. *Dreams in Icelandic Traditions*. Folklore Enterprises, 1958, pp. 93–111.

[108] Andrén, Anders & Jennbert, Kristina & Raudvere, Catharina. *Old Norse religion in long-term perspectives: The heroized dead*. Nordic Academic Press, 2006, pp. 137–138.

[109] Ibid.

[110] Ramos, Eduardo. *The Dreams of a Bear: Animal Traditions in the Old Norse-Icelandic Context*. MA thesis, University of Iceland, 2014.

[111] Pastoureau, Michel. *Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental*. Éditions du Seuil, Février, Librairie du XXIe siècle, 2004, pp. 74-75 & p. 77. Pastoureau claims that "dans la seconde moitié du XIIe siècle, l'écu au lion devient dans toute œuvre littéraire latine, française ou anglo-normande l'écu stéréotypé du chevalier chrétien. Il s'oppose alors à l'écu au dragon du combattant païen. Seules les régions germaniques résistent

Coupled with Turville-Petre's and Pastoureau's historical-archaeological approaches to medieval animal symbolism, Lena Rohrbach's *Der Tierische Blick: Mensch-Tier-Relationen in der Sagaliteratur* is another seminal study on the human-animal interplay in Old Norse-Icelandic literature. Adopting a literary-anthropological perspective, Rohrbach examines how human-animal relation is epitomised and empowered to convey allegorical meanings in the saga literature. And by exploring the narrative functions of animal writing in a constellation of *sögur*, she tentatively forges a correlation between the narrative structure of certain sagas and the social-economic structure of erstwhile Iceland. In the closing part of her monograph, Rohrbach incisively concludes that

> Die in dieser Studie vorgenommene Annäherung an die Sagaliteratur war interdisziplinär ausgerichtet. Dabei wurde methodologisch und epistemologisch Neuland betreten. Durch die Verbindung von literaturwissenschaftlichen mit anthropologischen und historischen Fragestellungen konnte offengelegt werden, daß die Erwähnung von Tieren einerseits einer Reihe von literarischen Konventionen unterliegt, die die Sagaliteratur als Gattung auszeichnen, andererseits aber gleichzeitig eng mit den in den einzelnen Untergattungen konstruierten Gesellschaftsbildern in Verbindung steht. Eine solche doppelt angelegte Herangehensweise ist meines Erachtens die einzige Möglichkeit, die Bedeutungskonstituierung der mittelalterlichen Sagaliteratur zu entschlüsseln, da sie eben weder als literarische noch als historiographische Textgattung im modernen Sinne angelegt ist, sondern einem eigenen Satz von Regeln folgt. Der tierischen Kompetente dieses Regelsatzes wurde auf den vorliegenden Seiten nachgegangen.[112]

Obviously, by juxtaposing the conventionality and constructiveness of animal narrative in the eco-critical analysis of Old Norse-Icelandic sagas, Rohrbach's work proves that a proper combination of scrupulous philological reading, archaeological evidence, and (post)modern approaches can effectively activate the latent, hidden information in medieval

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pendant quelques décennies à cette prolifération de lions: le sanglier y est encore, au début du XIIIe siècle, l'attribut conventionnel du héros littéraire. Mais cela ne dure pas. Dès les années 1230, par exemple, un héros aussi admiré que Tristan abandonne, en Allemagne et en Scandinavie, son écu traditionnel au sanglier pour prendre un écu au lion, comme il le faisait depuis deux ou trois générations en France et en Angleterre, et comme il le fera un peu plus tard en Autriche et en Italie du Nord. À la fin du XIIIe siècle, partout en Europe occidentale tout héros littéraire se doit d'avoir un lion pour figure héraldique" (74-75). He also notices "that Jusqu'à la christianisation, le lion y est ignoré et ne joue aucun rôle dans la faune emblématique et symbolique. Le trône animal est occupé par l'ours (le roi Arthur lui-même porte un nom qui évoque l'ours, animal royal), mais plusieurs autres animaux lui font une forte concurrence au sein du bestiaire mythologique: le sanglier, le cerf, le corbeau, le saumon. Chez les Germains, les traditions sont plus complexes et plus nuancées. Dans les strates les plus anciennes de la mythologie germano-scandinave, il n'est évidemment nulle part question du lion" (77).

[112] Rohrbach, Lena. *Der tierische Blick: Mensch-Tier-Relationen in der Sagaliteratur*. A. Francke Verlag Tübingen und Basel, Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie, vol. 43, 2009, p. 298.

literature. Rohrbach's forerunning publication, together with Turville-Petre's and Pastoureau's trailblazing works, lays the foundation for the present project to explore the thematic and structural functions of animal narrative in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* through the prism of eco-narrative.

3.2.2 Landscapes

Landscape is another vehemently discussed issue that borders on both eco-criticism and traditional medieval studies. It is found that till now medieval Icelandic landscape has been studied chiefly from two vantage points: the colonisation of Iceland (*landnám*) throughout the 10th and 11th century,[113] and the construction of Iceland's cultural-historical identity and cultural memory, by means of the saga literature.[114]

In *Landscape, Tradition and Power*, Chris Callow reconsiders the historicity of the *Landnámabók* and the *Íslendingasögur*, arguing that by comparing "regions in the west and north-east of Iceland", readers can have a sense of how the regions with differing "physical geographies" would have resulted in the differing "psychological geographies" in medieval Icelanders' conceptual world.[115] In similar fashion, Carol Hoggart reviews the *Íslendingasögur* as what "inscribe[s] in retrospect a process by which the unknown terrain of late ninth-century settlement Iceland is 'mapped' through association with human story".[116] And from an eco-critical viewpoint, Hoggart proposes that "the un-named spaces of *landnám* Iceland are transformed in *Íslendingasögur* into places with human meaning".[117] Such a statement is obviously premised upon the distinction between *space* and *place* propounded by Cuncliff, i.e., "*space* refers to the possibly inaccessible physical and objective reality of a location, whilst *place*, like landscape, is formed through human connection with particular terrain".[118] Along this line, Hoggart further detects that "[t]he *Íslendingasögur* tendency to

[113] For details concerning the settlement of Iceland, refer to Smith, Kevin P. "Landnám: The Settlement of Iceland in Archaeological and Historical Perspective", in *World Archaeology*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1995, pp. 319-347.
[114] For details concerning the construction of Icelandic cultural memory via the Old Icelandic sagas (and eddas), refer to Hermann, Pernille. "Saga Literature, Cultural Memory, and Storage", in *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 85, no. 3, 2013, pp. 332-354; Jørgensen, Michael R. "Constructing History: The Use of the Past as a Model for the Present in the Icelandic Sagas", in *Collegium Medievale,* 2010, pp. 5-32; and Long, Ann-Marie, "Sturlubók and Cultural Memory", in Sigurðsson, Jón Viðar. & Jakobsson, Sverrir. (eds.), *Sturla Þórðarson: Skald, Chieftain and Lawman*, Brill: The Northern World, vol. 78, 2007, pp. 56-69.
[115] Callow, Chris. *Landscape, Tradition and Power in Medieval Iceland*. Brill, 2020, pp. 14-16, plus abstract.
[116] Hoggart, Carol. "A Layered Landscape: How the Family Sagas Mapped Medieval Iceland", in *Milina: A Journal of Historical and Cultural Studies*, vol. 16, 2010, preface.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Cuncliffe, Barry. "Landscapes with People", in Flint, Kate. & Morphy, Howard. (eds.), *Culture, Landscape and the Environment: The Linacre Lectures 1997,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, p.111.

connect current place-names with past characters and action would have subtly encouraged thirteenth-century audiences to understand their environment in terms of human history".[119]

Furthermore, Waage seeks to extract "the deep-rooted meaning of Icelandic landscape concept and its origin" by probing into the etymological provenances and their embedded connotations behind the appellations of Icelandic *land* and *landscape*.[120] Waage notices that the concept of Icelandic landscape is not merely descriptive of concrete natural sceneries, but it also contains metaphorical meanings. She emphasises the gravity of identifying "the aesthetic experiences of the natural environment of landscape as a concept in the Icelandic context",[121] claiming that "the relation between *landskapr* and *landsleg* shall be further examined not only within the Icelandic context, but also "in comparison between Scandinavia and Iceland and within the cultural domain defined by the Germanic languages".[122] Waages's research in a way touches upon the conceptual import of landscape in medieval Iceland, paving the way for future studies on the non-human elements in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

Besides, regarding the Icelandic place names in *Vatnsdæla saga* and *Landnámabók*, Tilley tentatively reads them as a performative speech act, arguing that

> The naming and identification of particular topographical features […] is crucial for the establishment and maintenance of their identity. Through an act of naming and through the development of human and mythological associations such places become invested with meaning and significance. Place names are of such vital significance because they act so as to transform the sheerly physical and geographical into something that is historically and socially experienced.[123]

In tune with Tilley, Wyatt further contends that while the landscapes in *Íslendingasögur* can bear witness to medieval Icelanders' engagement with, and recognition of their *place* in the material world, landscapes are also where medieval Icelanders' struggle for independence is reflected and anticipated — albeit the fact that the independence of Iceland fits in better with the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century context.[124] Moreover, Wyatt probes into the

[119] Hoggart, Carol (2010), preface.
[120] Waage, Edda. "Landscape in the sagas of Icelanders: The concepts of *land* and *landsleg*", in *Norwegian Journal of Geography*, vol. 66, 2012, p. 177.
[121] Ibid., p. 189.
[122] Ibid., p. 177.
[123] Tilley, Christopher. *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments*. Oxford, UK; Providence, R.I.: Berg, 1994, p. 18.
[124] Wyatt, Ian. "The Landscape of the Icelandic Sagas: Text, Place and National Identity", in *Landscapes*, vol. 1, 2004, pp. 55-72.

narrative function of landscape in *Íslendingasögur*,[125] proposing that the landscapes described in the sagas correspond, to varying degrees, to the "physical topography of Iceland", and that the references to saga-landscapes "should be treated with great caution in archaeological or historical discussions".[126] Through their re-interpretations of the landscape accounts in *Íslendingasögur*, both Tilley and Wyatt gesture towards the fusion of historicity and fictionality in Old Icelandic *nature writing*, which happens to be of particular interest for eco-criticism.

Finally, adopting a post-colonial perspective, Clunies Ross draws a parallel between *land-taking* and *text-making* in Old Norse-Icelandic literature. Assuming an essentially eco-feminist stance,[127] she supposes that within the cultural paradigm of "spatial representation", the occupation of Iceland can be conceived of as a metaphor or allegory for the male dominance over female, insisting that this eco-feminist reading of Old Icelandic sagas is not only responsive to the post-colonial trend of literary criticism, but it is also, seen from the socio-historical point of view, in line with the prevailing ideology of medieval Iceland:

> The Icelandic settlers inherited a world-view that at least partly animated the earth as a female being (common enough idea in many cultures) and represented the process of settling and defining individuals' territory upon it in terms of a sexual encounter between a man and a woman through which the male dominates the female and in the process legitimates his possession of her.[128]

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[125] Recent scholarship on the narratological features of landscape writing in Old Icelandic saga principally includes: Schach, Paul. "The anticipatory Literary Setting in the old Icelandic family Sagas", in *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 27, 1955, pp. 1–13; Damico, Helen. "Dystopic Conditions of the Mind: Toward a Study of Landscape in 'Grettis saga'", in *In Geardagum: Essays on Old English Language and Literature*, vol. 7, 1986, pp. 1–15; Barraclough, Eleanor. "Inside outlawry in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* and *Gísla saga Súrssonar*: Landscape in the outlaw Sagas", in *Scandinavian Studies*, vol. 82, 2010, pp. 365–388 and "Naming the Landscape in the *landnám* Narratives of the *Íslendingasögur* and *Landnámabók*", in *Saga-Book of the Viking Society*, vol. 36*,* 2012, pp. 79–101.

[126] Wyatt, Ian. "Narrative Functions of Landscape in the Old Icelandic Family Sagas', in *Land, Sea and Home: Proceedings of a Conference on Viking-period Settlement at Cardiff, July 2001*, ed., Hines, John. & Lane, Alan. & Redknap, Mark, Leeds: Maney, 2004, p. 273.

[127] Ecofeminist thinkers draw on the concept of gender to analyse the relationship between humans and the natural world. The term "eco-feminism" was coined by the French writer Françoise d' Eaubonne in her book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort* (1974). Basically, the ecofeminist theory asserts a feminist perspective of "Green Politics" that calls for an egalitarian, collaborative society in which there is no one dominant group. Ecofeminist analysis explores the connections between women and nature in culture, economy, religion, politics, literature and iconography, and addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. These parallels include, but are not limited to, seeing women and nature as property, seeing men as the curators of culture and women as the curators of nature, and how men dominate women and humans dominate nature. Ecofeminism emphasises that both women and nature must be respected. For detail, see MacGregor, Sherilyn. *Beyond mothering earth: ecological citizenship and the politics of care*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006, p. 286., and Merchant, Carolyn. "Ecofeminism", in *Radical Ecology*. Routledge, 2005, pp. 193–221.

[128] Ross, Margaret Clunies. "Land-Taking and Text-Making in Medieval Iceland", in Tomasch, Sylvia., & Gilles, Sealy. (eds.), *Text and Territory: Geography Imagination in the European Middle Ages*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998, p. 162.

As synthesised above, previous studies on the medieval Icelandic landscape have dealt with multiple facets and layers of environmental humanities and narratology. It is on this basis that the present dissertation aims to explore the eco-narratological performance of landscape in relation to the fashioning of gender in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*.

3.2.3 Places of Residence (or Habitative Locales)

To some extent, the "habitative locale" is taken as a synonym for "the place of residence" in the current dissertation, thus qualifying as a sub-concept of *landscape*, i.e., "the visible features of an area of land, often considered in terms of their aesthetic appeal".[129] Nonetheless, a central difference between landscape and the habitative locale in the Nordic (or Northern European, broadly speaking) context is still prominent: the places of dwelling, like Grendel's mother's mere and Grettir's hut, are usually more intimate, private and specific locations, whereas such landscapes as mountain, sea and glacier are normally more externalised, backgrounding milieux embedded in the all-encompassing natural world. In this regard, the variance between landscape and the place of residence would seem analogous to the differentiation between *public sphere* and *private sphere* in Jürgen Habermas's sense,[130] where the former lies in a more social, communal realm, whilst the latter is situated in a relatively more domestic, individual field.[131]

In medieval European literature, the layouts of certain public and private sphere(s) have been argued to carry allegorical meanings.[132] Indeed, this theory of allegorising space is yet to

[129] see *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*.
[130] According to Jürgen Habermas, the *public sphere* (German *Öffentlichkeit*) is an area in social life where individual can come together to freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action, namely an area made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state. The private sphere is the complement or opposite to the public sphere, denoting a certain sector of societal life where an individual enjoys a degree of authority unhampered by interventions from governmental or other institutions. Examples of the private sphere are family and home. For detail, see Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy", in Calhoun, Craig (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, Cambridge Mass.: MIT press, 1992, pp. 109–142,
[131] The reference to Habermas here is functionally in anticipation of the textual analyses (in Chapter V and Chapter VI) concerning how the private and public settings in the two target *Íslendingasögur* can interact with the domestic and political roles attached, either conventionally or conversely, to the two genders.
[132] As for previous scholarships looking at the allegorical, especially political meaning of public and private sphere in medieval literature, see, for instance, Blud, Victoria., Heath, Diane., and Klafter, Einat. (eds.), *Gender in Medieval Places, Spaces and Thresholds*, London: University of London Press, 2019., and Kelly, Molly Robinson. *The Hero's Place: Medieval Literary Traditions of Space and Belonging*. Washington, D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009.

be well substantiated in the reading of Old Icelandic saga; yet regarding Old English literature, sporadic analyses have been conducted pertaining to how depicting the interior of a building can convey symbolic undertones. In *Beowulf*, for instance, Grendel's mere has been interpreted as a symbol of Anglo-Saxon nation-building;[133] and likewise, *giefstol* — "the place of highest authority" and the seat from which the lord would promulgate decrees, greet guests and award gifts,[134] has been reconsidered as corresponding to the seat "from which Hrothgar distributes rewards to his followers and [the seat] which the interloper Grendel is mysteriously unable to approach".[135]

Likewise, read through the prism of *the poetics of space*, the Old English enigma, *The Wife's Lament*, has also yielded new interpretations. For instance, in "Het mec hlaford min her heard niman" [my lord commanded me to take home here] (l. 15), the Old English word *heard* [home, living place] has been reconsidered as a metaphor for expiry and descent to the underworld.[136] On this account, the living abode can be correlated both literarily with the place of residence and, by analogy, with demise and caducity. This, according to Waller, is "a reversal of the LIEF IS A POSSESSION metaphor", where, curiously enough, the polysemy of *heard* "fits the spatial conceptions associated with [both] life and death".[137] Owing to these proper applications of postmodern critical approaches, new meanings have been derived from the medieval texts; and this has also shed light on Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

For example, in her monograph on women in Old Norse literature, Fríðriksdóttir investigates women's social position in medieval Iceland through the lens of Habermas's theory of public and private sphere. She finds that medieval Icelandic females are generally excluded from the public sphere, yet when embodied in literature, female power and female rebelliousness are conspicuously intertwined under certain circumstances:

> In the *Íslendingasögur* and *Konungasögur*, complete female independence from men (e.g., that depicted in *Nitida saga*) is impossible, although in exceptional circumstances queens and high-

[133] Siewers, Alfred K. "Landscapes of Conversion: Guthlac's Mound and Grendel's Mere as Expressions of Anglo-Saxon Nation-Building", in *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. 34, 2003, pp. 1–39; reprinted in Eileen A. Joy & Mary K. Ramsey, eds., *The Postmodern Beowulf: A Critical Casebook*, Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006, pp. 199–257.
[134] Pollington, Stephen. *The Mead-Hall: The Feasting Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England*. Norfolk, UK: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2003, p. 81.
[135] VanDonkelaar, Ilse Schweitzer. *Old English Ecologies: Environmental Readings of Anglo-Saxon Texts and Culture*, PhD dissertation, Western Michigan University, 2013, p. 34.
[136] Muir, Bernard. (Ed.). *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*. 2nd ed., 2 vol. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000.
[137] Waller, Benjamin S. *Metaphorical Space and Enclosure in Old English Poetry*. PhD dissertation, University of Oregon, 2013.

> born women could exercise some individual power in the public sphere.[138]

Seen through the lens of *the poetics of space*, the dynamics between gender performance and the protagonists' dwellings surfaces as a central, topical issue in the eco-critical study of the Old Icelandic sagas. Yet the saga-authors' eco-narratives about these dwellings have so far attracted but a paucity of scholarly attention. The present dissertation surmises that the environmental conditions of certain places of residence in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* — like the floes, dens and ponds, and especially the interiors of certain rooms, houses, and halls — can serve as the carrier, magnifier and filter of narratorial opinions and hidden emotions. Hypothetically, the saga descriptions of certain living places can be deciphered as conceptual and cultural metaphors through which characters are shaped, covert plots inserted, and authorial comments implied by narratological means.

3.2.4 Meteorological Phenomena

It is found that the portrayals of wind, rain, light, darkness, frigidity, and the seasonal changes of weather in the Old Icelandic sagas have also been analysed in relation to given protagonists' conceptual and perceptual understandings of nature. And to some degree, the Old Norse specialists' interest in the saga-authors' accounts of the meteorological phenomena would seem in line with that of their Anglo-Saxon counterparts, whose analysis of the weather and climatic conditions depicted in Old English literature could, by and large, illuminate and inspire the homogeneous studies in the Old Icelandic sagas.

For instance, in his monograph on the conceptualisation of darkness in Old English literature, Missuno points out that the wintery weather in Early English literature usually alludes to hellishness, hostility and mortality.[139] He takes the Old English elegy *The Seafarer* as an example, arguing that this poem "closely associates the coming of night with that of the winter weather which is not just cold, but painfully falls and binds".[140] In like manner, through her perusal of *The Seafarer*, *Beowulf*, *Andreas*, *Egils saga Skalla-Grímsson*, *Víga-Glúms saga*, *Ynglinga saga*, and *Eyfirðinga sögur* — a perusal that is mindful of these

[138] Friðriksdóttir, J. K. *Women in Old Norse Literature: Bodies, Words, and Power*. Palgrave macmillan, 2013, p. 131.
[139] Missuno, Filip. *"Shadow" and Paradoxes of Darkness in Old English and Old Norse Poetic Language*, PhD thesis, University of York, 2012, p. 62.
[140] Missuno, Filip (2012), p. 68.

medieval Germanic texts' intertextual nexuses with classical (i.e., ancient Greek and classical Latin) literatures, Italian philologist Carla Cucina asserts that in the broader Anglo-Scandinavian context, the frigid winter and tempestuous sea can considered as redolent of the medieval Christian view on infirmities, dotage, and the transience of earthly life, as well as the dejection incurred by loneliness and the intermediary suffering that a pilgrim is bound to undergo, body and soul, before attaining the Christian promised land:

> Proprio il freddo assume dunque evidenti connotati simbolici che si innestano nel contesto della più ampia allegoria della *navigatio* cristiana, sia sulla base della ricca tradizione dell'esegetica patristica che vuole il gelo chiara evocazione del peccato, sia nel solco di un cospicuo repertorio di immagini poetiche e letterarie convenzionali che trova paralleli nella classicità e nello stesso più remoto nord scandinavo.[141]

Moreover, as Salmon's etymological-semantic study reveals, in Old English and Old Norse poetry, there seem to be "collocations where 'cold' might bear some sinister meaning" and there is "the traditional association of *cald* in the sense of being 'ill-omened' or 'baleful' [and] 'fateful'".[142] Philologically, in Old Norse-Icelandic, the word "kaldr" — a cognate of "cold" in modern English — usually bears evil implications when used figuratively, referring to "malvagità [e] malevolenza", i.e., "wickedness and malevolence".[143]

Lastly, as regards the light-darkness dialectics, it is noticeable that its literary embodiment in Old English literature has been investigated with more scholarly solicitude than in the Old Norse texts, although the Old Icelandic sagas are equally fraught with connotative passages revolving around light and darkness. Remarkably, Jean Ritzke-Rutherford's monograph *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing* dilates upon the conceptual and perceptual dialectics between light and darkness in Old English literature in a rather systematic fashion; and in this work, moreover, the secular and religious implications of light and darkness are both discussed, which according to the present MA project can qualify as a cornerstone on which the limning of meteorological phenomena in Old Norse literature can be explored identically:

> In keeping with the natural psychological and metaphysical associations coupled with light and darkness […], and firmly anchored in Biblical and

[141] Cucina, Carla. "Immagni classiche nel *Seafarer* e nelle culture del Nord", in *Classiconorroena*, vol. 30, 2012, p. 34.
[142] Salmon, Vivian. "Some Connotations of 'Cold' in Old and Middle English", in *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 74, 1959, p. 314.
[143] Ibid., p. 45.

> homiletic writing, light in Old English poetry is equated with good, and in a wider sense with life, while darkness stands for evil and even death. From the very beginning such thought appears in the formulae, systems, and clusters of the poets, who seldom fail to make use of them at least once or twice in every poem. Most often they occur as polar opposites in the descriptions or bald statements.[144]

According to Missuno, this type of "polar opposites", as consists of "shining weapons *versus* darkening night, light of the hall *versus* darkness of exile, [and] light of creation and Paradise *versus* dark earth and dark fire of Hell",[145] have developed to be a staple of literary criticism; and this semantic polarity has been largely conventionalised, pervading a variety of literary traditions throughout the Middle Ages to the present. Against the medieval Scandinavian background, darkness and light have been associated with the solar myths,[146] the representations of religious liminal experiences,[147] as well as the eclipse and volcanic eruption in *Völuspá*,[148] among others. All these preceding studies lay a solid foundation for the present dissertation go continue deciphering the connotations of light and darkness in the two target *Íslendingasögur*.

As illustrated above, previous scholarships are interested chiefly in the metaphorical purports of depicting meteorological phenomena in medieval literature, be they religious or lay; yet research from the eco-narratological perspective is still far from sufficient. In this regard, P. S. Langeslag's monograph *Seasons in the Literatures of the Medieval North* is an eye-catching exception, which captures the alternation of the seasons in medieval north-western Europe as "a material and economic reality that strongly informed the labour, travel and ritual calendars".[149] Langeslag also "comparatively analysed" the "narrative and psychological functions" of the seasons in Old Norse, Old English, and Middle English literatures,[150] thereby "dealing with both the material realities and the figurative functions of the seasonal cycle [and] interpret[ing] seasonal spaces in myth and literature as conventionalised environments. Following Langeslag's train of thought, the present dissertation will also accord particular attention to the textual linkage between portraying the

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[144] Ritzke-Rutherford, Jean. *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing*, Frankfurt a. M.; Bern; Cirencester, 1979, p. 175.
[145] Missuno, Filip (2012), p. 27.
[146] Dronke, Ursula. *The Poetic Edda. II: Mythological Poems*. Oxford, 1997, pp. 375-414.
[147] Schjødt, J. P. *Initiation between Two Worlds: Structure and Symbolism in Pre-Christian Scandinavian Religion*. Translated by Victor Hansen, Odense, 2008.
[148] Schach, Paul. "Some Thoughts on *Völuspá*", in Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason (eds.), *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, Winnipeg, 1983, p. 107.
[149] Langeslag, P. S. *Seasons in the Literatures of the Medieval North*, Boydell & Brewer, D. S. Brewer, 2015.
[150] Barraclough, Eleanor Rosamund. Book Review of Langslag's *Seasons in the Literatures of the Medieval North*, in *Speculum*, vol. 92, no. 2, 2017, p. 547.

atmospheric conditions — both literally and figuratively — and performing gender in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*.

4 Gender Construction in the *Íslendingasögur*: A Brief Review

> *Perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all.*
>
> — Judith Butler (1990: 9)

According to Judith Butler's constructivist stance on gender and sex, "gender attributes are not expressive but performative" and "gender reality is created through sustained social performances".[151] With the infiltration of Butler's theory into contemporary literary criticism, quite a range of characters in Old Norse literature have been investigated through the prism of gender constructivism — with focus on how masculinity and femininity are verbally fashioned in sagas and Eddic poetry.[152]

The present dissertation joins Butler in considering gender to be as a social construct, i.e., "the cultural understandings and representations of what it is to be a man or a woman".[153] In other words, gender in the current project is not taken merely as a biological default endowed by nature; rather, it is regarded as a mutable entity — fluid and malleable, rather than fixed or stereotyped. Along this line, there should be the possibility for one gender role in Old Norse-Icelandic literature to be performed in accordance with the habitually expected

[151] Butler, Judith, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge, 1990, p. 180.
[152] See, among others, Clark, David, *Gender, Violence, and the Past in Edda and Saga*, Oxford, 2012; Clover, Carol, "Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe", in Nancy F. Partner (ed.), *Studying Medieval Women: Sex, Gender, Feminism*, Cambridge, MA, 1993, pp. 61–85; Overing, Gillian R., "A Body in Question: Aging, Community, and Gender in Medieval Iceland", in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1999, pp. 211–225.
[153] Alsop, Rachel, Annette Fitzsimons, and Kathleen Lennon. *Theorizing Gender*. Oxford, 2002, p. 3.

image(s) of the other,[154] which is evocative of the situation where masculinity is embodied by female characters, and *vice versa*.

In recent years, the fashioning of gender in medieval literature has called for an increasing an amount of attention from academia,[155] in which Old Norse specialists are also engaged.[156] According to Stuber, there are "four distinct definitions of masculinity in the Middle Ages — heroic, Christian, courtly, and intellectual", but the four characteristics are, within the scope of medieval literature, incarnated prominently by male characters.[157] Yet in reality, St Jerome in the fourth century had already perceived the likelihood that a woman possesses and demonstrates masculinity on the condition that she serves Christ faithfully. In St Jerome's view,

> as long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from men as body is from the soul. But, if a woman wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will cease to be a woman and will be called man.[158]

To some extent, Jerome's opinion can be read as implying that masculinity is determined not by natural sex, but by one's Christian belief, and that "Christian masculinity" is not exclusively for men, but also open for women to partake of. Correspondingly, Bullough points out that males who failed to live up to the set standards or fulfil the set tasks — "impregnating women, protecting dependents, and providing for one's family"— would be labelled as "feminine and weak" in the Middle Ages and hereafter be deprived of "status within the community".[159] This situation can be taken as an *exemplum* of how "cultural

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[154] Indeed, former scholarships have argued that the biological sex in some Eddic poems is "mutable". See Clark, David and Friðriksdóttir, Jóhanna Katrín. "The Representation of Gender in Eddic Poetry", in *A Handbook to Eddic Poetry: Myths and Legends of Early Scandinavia*, ed. Carolyn Larrington, Judy Quinn, and Brittany Schorn, Cambridge, 2016, pp. 339-340.

[155] See, among others, Bennett, Judith M. "Medievalism and Feminism", in *Speculum*, vol. 68, no. 2, 1993, pp. 309-331; Caviness, Madeline H. "Feminism, Gender Studies, and Medieval Studies", in *Diogenes*, no. 225, pp. 30-45; and Vuille, Juliette. *Holy Harlots in Medieval English Religious Literature: Authority, Exemplarity and Femininity*, D. S. Brewer, 2021. Vuille's monograph provides a case study about "gender reversal" in medieval European vernacular literature.

[156] See, among others, Evans, Gareth Lloyd. *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders*, Oxford UP, 2019; Friðriksdóttir J.K. "Gender, Humor, and Power in Old Norse-Icelandic Literature", in Foka, A. & Liliequist, J. (eds.), *Laughter, Humor, and the (Un)Making of Gender*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2015; and Gareth Lloyd Evans & Jessica Clare Hancock (eds.), *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature*, D. S. Brewer, 2020.

[157] Stuber, Leann. "The Contradiction of Masculinity in the Middle Ages", in *The Delta*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2008, p. 20.

[158] St. Jerome, *Commentary on Ephesians*, Book III, Chapter V. Cf. Hubnik, Sandi J. "(Re)constructing the Medieval Recluse: Performative Acts of Virginity and the Writings of Julian of Norwich", in *The Historian*, vol. 67, no. 1, 2005, p. 43.

[159] Bullough, Vern L. "On Being a Male in the Middle Ages", in *Medieval Masculinities: Regarding Men in the Middle Ages*, ed. Clare A. Lees. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, pp. 32-34.

masculinity [can be] ascribed to a female-sexed character",[160] as well as how a male-sexed character can be despoiled of it, providing that he does not conform to the Christian and/or feudal perceptions of a man of manliness.

It goes without saying that "gender reversal" is not only a social-historical phenomenon, but also a recurring theme in literature in both the medieval and (post-)modern periods.[161] Old Icelandic literature is no exception in this regard. For instance, Evans has noticed that in Old Icelandic literature,

> masculine women — whose female bodies do not fit culturally normalized expectations of a masculine subject — have their masculinity foregrounded, and thus encourage us to examine the construction and, indeed, constructedness, of masculinity.[162]

According to Halberstam, this situation is where the female-sexed women "embody or perform modalities of masculinity";[163] and in Evans's viewpoint, it also justifies "the essential importance of studying female masculinities in order to understand fully the various possible configurations that masculinity might take" in the Middle Ages.[164] Ultimately, this condition would seem resonant also with Butler's fundamental hypothesis on gender reversal:

> gender [is] a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that a *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male as easily as a female one".[165]

Grounded on the previous scholarships about gender performance in Old Norse literature, the present dissertation focusses on the interplay between *nature writing* and the construction of gender, especially gender reversal, in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*. In the following two subsections, I will elucidate the concepts of "female

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[160] Evans, Gareth Lloyd. "Female Masculinity and the Sagas of Icelanders", in *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature*, eds. Gareth Lloyd Evans & Jessica Clare Hancock, D. S. Brewer, 2020, p. 59.
[161] "Gender reversal" is a heated research field in literary studies, especially for scholars in modern and contemporary literature. See, for instance, Breger, Claudia. "Feminine Masculinities: Scientific and Literary Representations of 'Female Inversion' at the Turn of the Twentieth Century", in *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 14, no. 1/2, 2005, pp. 76-106; and Halberstam, Jack. *Female Masculinity*. Duke University Press, 2018. As for "gender reversal" in medieval literature, see Lochrie, Karma. "Before the Tribade: Medieval Anatomies of Female Masculinity and Pleasure", in *Heterosyncrasies: Female Sexuality When Normal Wasn't*, Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2005, pp. 71-102; and Wallace, Lewis. "Bearded Woman, Female Christ: Gendered Transformations in the Legends and Cult of Saint Wilgefortis", in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2014, pp. 43-63.
[162] Evans, Gareth Lloyd (2020), p. 60.
[163] Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*, Durham, NC and London, 1998, pp. 1-2.
[164] Evans (2020), p. 60.
[165] Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Routledge: New York and London, 1990, p. 6.

heroism" and "Christian masculinity" in the medieval context, and briefly summarise how they have been studied in recent years.

4.1 Christian Masculinity

"Christian masculinity" in the current project is not defined in relation to medieval monasticism, thus not meant for the quality that "define[s] the ascetic male as the paragon of manhood".[166] Rather, I concentrate on the worldly Christian masculinity, i.e., "a state of earthly power combined with partial, interiorised asceticism" in Romig's sense,[167] which, to be more exact, is "an ideal of masculinity within which *caritas* allowed men to perform their allegiance to the Kingdom of God symbolically".[168]

Roughly speaking, masculinity in Old Icelandic literature is performed to be either branded with "an aggressive masculine ethic",[169] or characterised by bodily strength and demonstrating a "taste for revenge".[170] According to Evans and Hancock, apart from "physical prowess", masculinity in Old Icelandic literature is also frequently expressed through "violence or sexual conquests".[171] And for this reason, certain saga protagonists' Christian profiles are only "symbolically presented", overshadowed by their blatantly violence-based masculinity.[172]

Indeed, the Old Icelandic sagas usually refrain from responding directly to "individual characters' perceptions of their manliness".[173] Nevertheless, this does not mean that there is no symbolic representation of Christian features in the saga-authors' construction of masculinity. Quite on the contrary, Christianity's impact upon the evolving masculine ideal in post-conversion Iceland is, as Vésteinn Ólason has pointed out, rather evident:

> In some respects, the ideology of the Viking Age worked well as an exemplary paradigm of manly conduct. The sagas, on the other hand, were composed long after the Viking Age by Christian authors. Two different cultural worlds played over the minds of Icelanders after Iceland was

[166] Coon, Lynda L. *Dark Age Bodies: Gender and Monastic Practice in the Early Medieval West*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, Chapter 1, Section 2.
[167] Romig, Andrew J. *Be a Perfect Man: Christian Masculinity and the Carolingian Aristocracy*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017, p. 32.
[168] Ibid., p. 41.
[169] Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht. *The Unmanly Man: Concepts of Sexual Defamation in Early Northern Society*, trans. Joan Turville-Petre, Odense, 1983, p. 21.
[170] Clark, David. *Gender, Violence, and the Past in Edda and Saga*. Oxford UP, 2012, p. 15.
[171] Evans & Hancock (eds., 2020), p. 15.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Evans, Gareth Lloyd. *Men and Masculinities in the Sagas of Icelanders*, Oxford UP, 2019, p. 99.

> Christianized. Saga writers were Christians, and an awareness of the special nature of Icelandic society must always have existed among those who had heard reports of, or even come into contact with, monarchical rule overseas. Yet old ideas about the ties of family, the importance of honour, and obligations of revenge continued to bind their society together.[174]

Given Ólason's opinion, it would seem highly probable that "Christian masculinity" and the pagan-heroic masculinity are intricately twined in the characterisation of certain heroes and heroines in the sagas. And the two "very different models of masculinity were in operation alongside one another during the period in which the sagas were set, and indeed written".[175] This, according to Evans, offers "instances where masculinity is seen to be weakened by the incoming religion", as well as "examples of a muscular Christianity that bolsters a man's masculine standing".[176]

As for Grettir the Strong, whose Christian masculinity will be elaborated in Chapter VI, he is almost received as a "multidimensional, polysemous" character,[177] whose complex nature defies any single labelling.[178] Recently, Grettir has been interpreted as a "hypermasculine character";[179] and his propensity towards violence — including both physical and verbal violence — has been argued to be the most distinct feature of his masculinity.[180] In the meantime, critics have also noticed that Grettir's masculinity is crystallised in his pursuit of independence, especially his strong desire to get rid of hierarchical and patriarchal suppression. In Evans's viewpoint, for instance, Grettir's masculinity can be partially seen as "the need to oppress any other characters that might pose a threat to his masculine identity",[181] even including his father.[182]

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[174] Ólason, Vésteinn. "Family Sagas", in Rory McTurk (ed.), *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, Oxford UP, 2005, p. 111. Cf. Evans (2019), p. 99-100.
[175] Evans, Gareth Lloyd (2019), p. 100.
[176] Ibid.
[177] Poole, Russell. "Myth, Psychology and Society in Grettis saga", in *Alvíssmál*, vol. 11, 2004, p. 6. Cf. Evans, Gareth Lloyd (2019), p. 109.
[178] Hastrup, Kirsten. "Tracing Tradition: An Anthropological Perspective on 'Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar'", in John Lindow, Lars Lönnroth, and Gerd Wolfgang Weber (eds.), *Structure and Meaning in Old Norse Literature: New Approaches to Textual Analysis and Literary Criticism*, Odense, 1986, p. 289.
[179] Evans, Gareth Lloyd (2019), p. 110.
[180] Laurence de Looze. "The Outlaw Poet, The Poetic Outlaw: Self-Consciousness in 'Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar'", in *Arkiv för Nordisk Filologi*, vol. 106, 1991, p. 93.
[181] Evans, Gareth Lloyd (2019), p. 115.
[182] Grettir demonstrates an obvious inclination to patricide. He desires to "do violence to his father and to overcome his father's position of paternal dominance" (Evans 2019: 112). In a verse that Grettir addresses to his mother in Chapter XXXIX, Grettir's wish to kill his father is rather detectable (tran. Evans 2019: 113), where "óskornum nǫglum" [uncut nails] is liable to be associated with the rite of blood-eagle, thus hinting at extreme physical violence:

> lætk á hringa hreyti,
> hǫr-Gerðr, tekit verða

Yet when it comes to the interplay between Grettir's religious masculinity and his "hyperbolic masculinity",[183] scholarly research is far from sufficient.[184] But scholars have built a basic consensus: despite his unparalleled "physical prowess",[185] Grettir's masculinity is a peculiar one that "problematises [his] relation to self, family, society, and the very notion of masculinity itself".[186] Scholars have also come to realise that *Grettis saga* can be viewed as where pagan and Christian elements co-exist, where the scenes of "entire households go[ing] to church on Christmas Eve" appear simultaneously with the exercise of "witchcraft and heathen practices".[187] This situation, for Scott Gwara, indicates that the author of *Grettis saga* "situates Grettir's actions relative to Christianity",[188] and this, in Orchard's eyes, hints properly at Grettir's coincidental, but "unacknowledged Christianity".[189]

At any rate, the assumption that Grettir's masculine character smacks of Christian aura should be tenable. And in the present dissertation, Grettir's Christian masculinity will be further analysed by eco-narratological means.

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gørr, sék gildra sára
gǫgul, óskornum nǫglum.

I will make the scatterer of rings,
Linen-Gerðr, be seized by
— I see blood of great wounds —
uncut nails.

[183] The term "hyperbolic masculinity" is coined by Evans G. L. (2019 : 86) to denote the masculinity characteristic of "physical strength".

[184] For instance, Morrow (2020) offers a detailed survey into Grettir's masculinity, arguing that Grettir "in some senses aligns with the hegemonic masculine ideal" (46) and performs "a violent, non-consensual sexual act in order 'reclaim' his masculinity" (47). Besides, Grettir's small penis is interpreted in Morrow (2020) as a symbol of her "disabled social masculinity" and given the Christian worldview that "only god was physically perfect", Morrow (2020) reads Grettir's physical impairment (together with Týr's loss of a hand and Óðinn's sacrifice of an eye) as a sign of their imperfection in the Christian sense (50). Additionally, Evans (2015) holds that while Grettir "enables extreme masculinity to be seen as socially problematic, and therefore negative [… he] may be considered to be a positive incarnation of masculine ideals" from a modern perspective (211). Likewise, Evans (2019) elaborates on the multiple aspects of Grettir's masculinity, including his hyper-masculinity, the hegemonic form of his masculinity, and his irascibility (107-109, and throughout chapter IV). Yet little scholarly attention has been accorded to the textual representation of Grettir's underlying Christian masculinity.

[185] In Chapter LXXII, Grettir reveals himself at an assembly: "Eptir þat kastaði hann kuflinum ok því næst ǫllum bolklæðum. Þa leit hverr til annars, ok brá mjǫk vá fyrir grǫn, þóttusk þeir kenna, at þetta var Grettir Ásmundarson, því at hann var ólikr ǫðrum mǫnnum fyrir vaxtar sakar ok þreleika". [He threw off his cloak and then his clothes. The men were dumbfounded, and they kept looking at one another, for they realized that this must be Grettir Ásmundarson, since he surpassed other men in size and strength]. *Grettis saga*, p. 233; Fox, Denton. & Pálsson, Hermann. (Trans.). *Grettis saga*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981, p. 150.

[186] Evans, G. L. (2015), Ph.D. dissertation, p. 15.

[187] McCreesh, Bernadine. "How Pagan Are the Icelandic Family Sagas?" In *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 79, no. 1, 1980, p. 62 & p. 65.

[188] Gwara, Scott. *Heroic Identity in the World of "Beowulf".* Brill: Leiden & Boston, 2008, p. 47.

[189] Orchard, Andy. *Pride and Prodigies: Studies in the Monsters of the Beowulf Manuscript*, University of Toronto UP, 2003, pp. 153-155.

4.2 Female Heroism

According to Kathryn Green, in Old English poetry, like *Beowulf* and *The Battle of Maldon*, heroism surfaces as the literary fashioning of "the bond between lord and retainer, as well as the heroic *ethos* key to that relationship".[190] Yet since women were "historically apart from this relationship", the women's literary images in medieval Northern Europe are conventionally interpreted as "identified by their relationships to men, the 'real' heroes in the literature",[191] which in a way implies that women are not entitled to possess heroism.

Nonetheless, in her Ph.D. dissertation that consists of three case studies on the presentations of female heroism in Grendel's mother, Judith and Juliana, Green further argues that female heroism in Old English poetry is manifest principally in fashioning of the female characters' "internal forces",[192] which is different from "male heroism [which] is a product of public performance and [which] relies on the praise of the *comitatus*, the opinions of kings, and, most importantly, the memory of all".[193] From Green's perspective,

> the poets of *Beowulf*, *Judith*, and *Juliana* expanded this tradition [of heroism] by introducing the Anglo-Saxon world to a new kind of female character, a physically powerful heroine. By constructing heroines that connect Germanic tradition with changing Christian sensibilities, poets not only reveal their appreciation for strong women in literature but [also] their willingness to afford women the opportunity to break with tradition and perform autonomously.[194]

The present dissertation holds that Green's observation paves the way for scholars to explore "female heroism" in other Germanic literary traditions, including the Old Norse-Icelandic branch. As a matter of fact, in his *Germania*, Tacitus had already mentioned Germanic women's female heroism, as most detectable in their heroic exploits on the battlefield:

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[190] Green, Kathryn A. "Breaking with tradition(?): female representations of heroism in Old English poetry", Ph.D. dissertation, University of Louisville, 2018, p. vi.
[191] Ibid.
[192] By "internal force", Green (2018) virtually means that although Anglo-Saxon women traditionally did not go onto battlefield with men, yet their combat and struggle with fate took place invariably in their personal realm. For instance, when Grendel's mother fights with Beowulf, it happens in a cave under the mere. Likewise, Judith's confrontation with Holofernes takes place at a banquet and then moves to his private tent; and Juliana undergoes her ordeal in a jail cell. According to Green (2018), "based on provocation and shaped by isolation, women's actions extend to the public forum as a result" (211) and, in the meantime, their internal force is externalised.
[193] Ibid., p. 211.
[194] Ibid.

> Memoriae proditur quasdam acies inclinatas iam et labantes a feminis restitutes constantia precum et obiectu pectorum.[195]
>
> […] some lost or losing battles have been restored by the women, by the incessancy of their prayers and by the baring of their breasts.[196]

Moreover, as related in *Germania*, Germanic youngsters were treated indiscriminately in their childhood, brought up under identical conditions; and women were not only considered as physically equal to men, but they also played a crucial role in the running of society and the nurturing of descendants:

> In omni domo nudi ac sordidi in hos artus, in haec corpora, quae miramur, excrescunt. Sua quemque mater uberibus alit, nec ancillis aut nutricibus delegantur. Dominum ac servum nullis educationis deliciis dignoscas: inter eadem pecora, in eadem humo degunt, donec aetas separet ingenuos, virtus adgnoscat. Sera iuvenum venus, eoque inexhausta pubertas. Nec virgines festinantur; eadem iuventa, similis proceritas: pares validaeque miscentur, ac robora parentum liberi referunt.[197]

In Tacitus's record, women's high power and agency in the Germanic tribal society are not hard to discern; and to some extent, Germanic women may well be taken as a personification of female puissance that is on a par with their male compeers' potency, betokening the "cultural masculinity" ascribed to the female-sexed characters.

Regarding Old Norse-Icelandic literature, recent scholarships have substantiated the embodiment of female masculinity in characters "like the valkyries of the eddic poetry and the maiden-kings of the *fornaldarsögur*".[198] Besides, based on the analyses of Auðr in *Laxdœla saga*'s who is qualified to be *karlkonur* [a masculine woman] by Þórðr,[199] Ólof in

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[195] Tacitus, *Germania*. 275. 8.
[196] Translation from Tacitus, *Dialogus Agricola Germania*, trans. William Peterson and M. Hutton, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1946.
[197] Tacitus, *Germania.* 293. 20. The translation from William Peterson and M. Hutton (1946) is quoted here: There then they are, the children, in every house, filling out amid nakedness and squalor into that girth of limb and frame which is to our people a marvel. Its own mother suckles each at her breast; they are not passed on to nursemaids and wet-nurses. Nor can master be recognised from servant by any flummery in their respective bringing-up: they live in the company of the same cattle and on the same mud floor till years separate the free-born and character claims her own. The virginity of youth is late treasured and puberty therefore inexhaustible; nor for the girls is there any hot-house forcing; they pass their youth in the same way as the boys: their stature is as tall; when they reach the same strength they are mated, and the children reproduce the vigour of the parents.
[198] Clark, David & Friðriksdóttir, Jóhanna Katrín (2016), p. 338-339; Lochrie, Karma. "Medieval Masculinities without Men", in *Rivalrous Masculinities: New Directions in Medieval Gender Studies*, ed. Ann Marie Rasmussen, Notre Dame, 2019, p. 209 & p. 229. Cf. Evans, Gareth Lloyd. "Female Masculinity and the Sagas of Icelanders", in *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature*, edited by Evans Gareth Lloyd and Hancock Jessica Clare, Boydell & Brewer, 2020, p. 62.
[199] *Laxdœla saga*, p. 96.

Víglundar saga who dons male dress to appear masculine,[200] and Freydís in *Grœnlendinga saga* who, heavily pregnant, is left by other men when danger comes and who fends for herself alone like a man,[201] Evans draws the conclusion that

> the sexed body is of significance to the performance of gender the sagas; and female masculinities — by being more effective than some male masculinities — subvert male masculinity, destabilizing the ostensibly inevitable link between men and masculinity.[202]

As this quote suggests, Evans keenly recognises that in certain sagas, women that "are given a greater role" well prove that "masculinity does not belong solely to men", thus "disrupting the link between men and masculinity".[203]

The present MA project considers "female heroism" as an integral, and most distinct feature of "female masculinity". Currently, the opinion that "sex and gender are not coterminous" is both commonplace and widely endorsed in postcolonial studies.[204] And scholars in gender studies generally hold that "masculinity does not necessarily focus on actual men", and that "if we wish to find points at which masculinity transgresses its perceived boundaries, we should locate instances of masculinity that do not directly concern men".[205] On this ground, the present dissertation takes "female heroism" as a synonym for "female masculinity". And it joins Judith Halberstam in defining "female masculinity" as the term denoting "women who feel themselves to be more masculine than feminine".[206] Indeed, Halberstam has also pointed out that "sometimes female masculinity coincides with the excesses of male supremacy, sometimes it codifies a unique form of social rebellion, [and] sometimes [it] marks the place of pathology".[207] Actually, this potential contending relationship between the two biological sexes also exist in *Grettir saga* and *Bárðar saga*,

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[200] *Víglundar saga*, p. 78. The original is as follows, "Í þessu kom maðr í stofuna bláklæddr ok helt á brugðnu sverði. Maðrinn var ekki stórr vexti, en allreiðugligr var hann. Þeir spurðu hann at nafni, en hann nefndist Óttarr. Ekki þekktu þeir þenna mann, en þó stóð þeim nökkurr ótti af þessum manni". [At this moment, a man dressed in black came into the room, and he was holding a drawn sword. The man was not big in stature, but he looked very angry. They asked him his name and he gave his name as Óttarr. They did not recognize this man, and yet they stood somewhat in fear of this man]. Translation from Evans (2020: 67).
[201] *Eiríks saga rauða*, p. 229. Chapter XI recounts the scene where a Norse encampment in North America is attacked by *Skrælingar* and the men of the settlement, led by Karlsefni, all flee in terror, leaving behind the heavily pregnant Freydís to protect herself. See Evans (2020: 70).
[202] Evans, G. L. (2020), p. 74.
[203] Ibid., p. 75.
[204] Ibid., p. 59.
[205] Winnberg, J., Fåhraeus, A. and Jonsson, A. "Introduction: Female Masculinity or Textual Masculinity", in *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2008, p. 4.
[206] Halberstam, Judith. *Female Masculinity*. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1998, p. xi.
[207] Ibid., p. 9.

which will be taken into account in the analysis of female characters like Helga, Thorbjorg and Thorfinn's wife.

5 Eco-Narratological Construction of Helga in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost.
— J. J. R. Tolkein

5.1 Helga's Debut

The present dissertation finds that among the many women related in *Bárðar saga*, Bárðr's daughters can be seen as a typical embodiment of female heroism, and they can be interpreted as an epitome of medieval Icelandic women's complex psychological world. It is further found that "female heroism" in *Bárðar saga* is narrated with partial but obvious resort to the figurative meanings encoded in *nature writing*. The eco-narrative of Helga's *debut* in childhood is a salient example reflecting how the eco-narrative can anticipate the female protagonist's remarkable physical strength and extraordinary fate.

As the storyline reveals, Helga and her kindred little sister Þórdís are "bæði miklar ok ásjáligar" [both tall and pretty].[208] And growing up with Þorkell Rauðfeldsson's two sons,[209] Helga's physical contest with them (Rauðfeld and Sölvi) in her girlhood is incessant. Faced with their aggressive male counterparts, the two sisters remain unyielding throughout infancy to maidenhood, which may, to some extent, allude to Helga's anti-masculinist instinct.

Noteworthily, Helga's *debut* unfurls in a fighting scene, where she attempts to excel her male compeers in *löngum leikmikit* [long game or public sports],[210] and by so doing, to prevent male dominancy. While Helga fights courageously with Þorkell Rauðfeldsson's sons, she keeps in high spirits throughout the contest, appearing to esteem herself as no different to a man. The extract below, for instance, can be read as a vivid display of Helga's innate feminist *ego*, as well as her embryonic female heroism:

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[208] *Bárðar saga*, p. 114; translation from Ewing (1987), p. 49.
[209] "Dætr Bárðar vaxa upp at Laugarbrekku" (*Bárðar saga*, p. 114). Namely, "Bárðr's two daughters grew up at Laugarbrekku" (Ewing: 49).
[210] Translation mine.

> Þorkelssynir ok Bárðardætr lǫgðu saman leika sína á vetrinn á svellum við ár þær, er þar eru ok Barnaár heita. Þau hǫfðu lǫngum leikmikit ok gengu með inu mesta kappi. Vildu Þorkelssynir meir ráða, því at þeir váru sterkari, en Bárðardætr vildu ekki láta sinn hlut lakari verða um þat þær máttu.[211]
>
> Þorkell's sons and Bárðr's daughters played together in the winter on the ice on that river named Barnaár or Children's River. They had lengthy public sports and went at them with the greatest zeal. Þorkell's sons wanted to have more control because they were stronger, but Bárðr's daughters would not permit their part to be lesser if they could help it.[212]

In this quote, Helga's strong intention and willingness to challenge male ascendency would seem rather outstanding; moreover, the parallel between her disobedience to male power and her defiance against Iceland's freezing natural environment is, in my view, equally worthy of attention. Obviously, Bárðr's daughters demonstrate no inkling of fear or dread when confronted with the climatic frigidity of Iceland. And when they vie against Rauðfeldsson's sons whose masculine physique is sturdier and whose masculine aura is more aggressively overwhelming, neither did the sisters exhibit any clue of weakness — physical or mental. To some degree, Helga's indefatigable struggle against the menacing male peremptoriness would appear to be pointing metonymically to her triumph over Iceland's naturalistic harshness — two homogeneous embodiments of Helga's female heroism, both of which could contribute to the shaping of her tough, intrepid character.

In Jankovic's view, meteorological phenomenon within the ambit of medieval Northern Europe generally encompasses "tides, earthquakes, meteors, volcanic eruptions and the unusual agitations of the sea".[213] For medieval Iceland, its atmospheric severity properly includes all these natural phenomena, which would befall, devastatingly and unpredictably, all the year round; and the "uses of weather" in the *Íslendingasögur*, according to Bierstedt, not only renders a number of verisimilar portrayals of medieval Scandinavia's "historical weather", but also contributes towards some protagonists' characterisation, plot progression, and the foregrounding of certain saga narratives' central themes.[214] On this account, it would be safe to consider medieval Iceland's winter, the season that is naturalistically expressive of

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[211] *Bárðar saga*, p. 114.
[212] Ewing (1987), p. 50.
[213] Jankovic, Vladimir. *Reading the skies: A cultural history of English weather 1650-1820*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000, p. 33.
[214] Bierstedt, Adam. *Weather and Ideology in Íslendinga saga: A Case Study of the Volcanic Climate Forcing of the 1257 Samalas Eruption.* MA thesis in Viking and Medieval Norse Studies, University of Iceland, 2019, pp. 21-31.

lifelessness and caducity,[215] as a foil that contrastively illuminates Helga and her sister Þórdís's enterprising spirits in the face of Iceland's appallingly depressive climatic roughness.

The present dissertation notices that the textual references to medieval Iceland's unpleasant weather condition, as well as its vexing impact upon the early Icelanders life, labour, and mindset, are well traceable in the corpus of Old Norse-Icelandic literature. For instance, in the *Landnámbók* and a collection of *Íslendingasögur*, the foreboding weather condition of Iceland is recounted with a considerable degree of historiographical validity.[216] Four intertextual examples — culled respectively from the *Landnámbók*, *Íslendinga saga*, *Þorgils saga skarða*, and *Sturlunga saga* — are quoted below, expected to exemplify the recurrence of "bad weather" in Old Icelandic *nature writing*.[217] To certain extent, these descriptions of medieval Iceland's naturalistic cruelty may well be understood as some textual witnesses to medieval Iceland's environmental grimness, against whose backdrop, Helga's female heroism is performed. And by juxtaposing *Bárðar saga* and the other Old Icelandic texts, I virtually resort to intertextual evidence to substantiate the hypothesis that the backgrounding harsh weather could possibly be read as an underlying narrative plot intended to enhance Bárðr's daughters' female gallantry:

> [1] Vár var heldr kalt. Þá gekk Flóki upp á fjall eitt hátt ok sá norðr yfir fjǫllin fjǫrð fullan af hafisum; því kǫlluðu þeir landit, sem þat hefir síðan heitit.[218]
>
> It was rather cold. Then Flóki went up the mountain one way and saw north over the mountains a fjord full of seas; thus, they called the land *Iceland*, as has been called ever since.[219]

[215] Classen, Albrecht. "Winter as a Phenomenon in Medieval Literature: A Transgression of the Traditional Chronotope?" *Mediaevistik*, vol. 24, 2011, pp. 125-150.
[216] As for the distinction between "weather" and "climate", see Edward Dutton, Paul. "Observations on Medieval Weather in General, Bloody Rain in Particular", in *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies*, ed. Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008. The distinction is clarified as follows: "'Weather' is human, but 'climate' is not necessarily so. Weather, in other words, is the atmosphere in contact with us, and exists when we engage it physically and think about it… If 'climate' is ahistorical and ahuman, 'weather' is properly historical and stubbornly subjective, since it involves humans in time thinking about it and how it affects their lives. By reversing the process, we can, by studying 'their weather', also study them, their preoccupations, economic and social concerns, and cosmological and religious ideas" (168).
[217] For a more systematic discourse on weather in the Icelandic saga, see McCreesh, Bernadine. *The Weather in the Icelandic Sagas: The Enemy Without*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018. The following quotes are extracted from Chapter Two, i.e., "Weather in Historical Writing", pp. 87-100.
[218] *Landnámbók*, Chapter 18.
[219] Translation mine.

> [2] Ok var áin þá í leysingu, svá at engan veg máttu þeir yfir hana komast. Verðr þat þeira ráð, at þeira snúa aftr við svá búit ok ríða heim vestr.[220]
>
> And the river was so freezing then that there was no way of crossing it. It was their decision to turn back and ride westward [back] home.[221]
>
> [3] Tók þá veðr at þykkna, gerði á barviðri ok regn mikit ok it mesta illviðri með ákǫfum stormi. Riðu þeir, þar til er þeir kómu ofan með ǫlfusvatni í Stýfingadal. Kómu þá í moti þeim njósnarmenn þeira ok segja, at Ǫlfusá er ofan hlaupin með ísi ok væri langt um ófæra.[222]
>
> The skies now began to darken, and there was a heavy wind, a lot of rain, and a greatest tempest with intense storm. They rode until they came down by Stýfingadal in Ǫlfusvatn. Then their spies came up to meet them and reported that ice was high in the Ǫlfusá and that it could nowhere be crossed. So, they decided to turn back.[223]
>
> [4] Fórst þeim vel ok fengu færðir góðar. En er þeir riðu ofan eftir Haukadal, var á þeyviðri. Ok er þeir riðu á Haukadalsá, hljóp áin ofan svá ákafliga, at þá rak af baki, er á ánni váru.[224]
>
> They found the roads in good condition. But when they were riding down through Haukadal, there was a storm. And as they rode across Haukadalsá, the river ran down so violently that they were swept off their horses.[225]

Given the four quotes above, it would seem palpable that the climate and weather condition of medieval Iceland are truly formidable. According to McCreesh, medieval Iceland's meteorological feature is characteristic of

> *býsna vetr* [portentous winter], *sóttarvetr* [the winter of sickness], *ófarasumar* [summer that was disastrous for travelling], *felli vetr* [hard winter when cattle died], *grasleysi mikit* [the shortage of grass], and *óáran* [the bad season].[226]

So viewed, the ice-covered landscape, sullen sky, violent torrents, and penetrating rain would appear to be predominantly constitutive of the dismaying scenario of Iceland's atmospheric bleakness, which may render a sense of gloominess and lethargy to both its

[220] *Íslendinga saga*, Chapter 165.
[221] Translation mine.
[222] *Þorgils saga skarða*, Chapter 20.
[223] Translation mine.
[224] *Sturlunga Saga*, Chapter 66.
[225] Translation mine.
[226] McCreesh, Bernadine (2018), p. 14.

habitants and contemporary readers of pertinent literature. Apparently, such a scene of naturalistic obscurity is inconsistent with Helga's inner strength of character; yet mindful of the interplay between "covert progressions and overt plots",[227] I would be prone to arguing that the violent, discomforting naturalistic background could function as an intensifier and magnifier of Helga's valour, resilience, and ambition, contrastively illuming Helga's innate motivation to fight against oppression and hardship.

And indeed, as the narrative proceeds, "Bárðardætr vildu ekki láta sinn hlut lakari verða", namely "Bárðr's daughters did not wish to make their lot worse [than that of Rauðfeldsson's two sons]".[228] According to the present dissertation, such a portrayal of Helga's adolescent psychology could possibly suggest that in her girlhood, Helga is already intuitively disposed to rebel against male dominancy and fight for her own fate, aiming eagerly to excel her male counterparts in any possible field. Helga's mindset, as typical of her awareness about competition and her pursuit of independence, may well serve as a "red thread" throughout her characterisation in *Bárðar saga*. As a rather dignified woman, Helga rarely appears as inferior to her male compeers; and she invariably refuses to rely absolutely upon male protection — from neither her father nor her husband — while going through thick and thin in Greenland and during her vagabond life. Yet as far as the eco-narrative about Helga's *debut* is concerned, I would consider Helga's infantile propensity towards "contest and struggle" as a behavioural externalisation of her spontaneous, unforced dissatisfaction with Icelandic life — one that is fraught with meteorological brutality, potential male persecution, and insidious violence. In other words, Helga's rebelliousness may not appear to be explicitly induced by any external factor — neither her nurture nor her cultural formation; but rather, her pugnacity and bellicosity could be taken as arising out of her nature and instinct, i.e., "without premeditation or stimulus".[229] Therefore, in her *debut* scene, Helga's resistance to the gender oppression and climatic ruthlessness in her native Iceland may well be interpreted as a "natural flow" of her inborn female heroism, which, as illustrated above, is outwardly incarnated by her physical prowess, inwardly crystallised in her will power, and manifested most saliently in the contrast between her active engagement in the antagonistic encounter with Þorkell Rauðfeldsson's two sons and the naturalistic stagnancy of the peril-stricken Iceland.

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[227] Shen (2014), p. 26. See also Chapter 2, Section 3, of the present dissertation.
[228] Translation mine.
[229] See the item of "spontaneous" in *Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*.

At any rate, it may be safe to assert that the covert eco-narrative about Iceland's weather and climate can functionally promote the fashioning of Helga's indomitability and stamina, foregrounding her inherent female heroism and, in the meantime, anticipating Helga's exceptional future incurrence in Greenland, which is to be further expounded in the next section.

5.2 Helga's Mishap

Likewise, the moment of Helga's disappearance is also portrayed with distinct resort to *nature writing*:

> Þat var einn dag, at þau váru at leik sínum, ok gekk þeim þá enn með kappi, Rauðfeld ok Helgu. Hafísar lágu við; þenna dag var þoka mikil. Þau hǫfðu þá leikinn allt við sjóinn niðri. Rauðfeldr hratt þá Helgu út á einn freðjakann á sjóinn, en vindr stoð mikill af landi; rak þá jakann út til hafíssins; fór Helga þá upp á hafísinn. Ina sǫmu nótt rak ísinn undan landi ok út í haf. Hon fylgdi þá ísinum, en hann rak svá ǫrt, at innan sjau daga kom hon með ísinum til Grænlands.[230]

> One day when they were at their games, Rauðfeldr and Helga still competed eagerly. Pack-ice lay offshore, and there was a great fog that day. They were then playing close down by the sea. Rauðfeldr pushed Helga out along to sea on an ice floe while the wind blew strongly from land. The ice floe then drifted out to the pack ice, and Helga stepped up onto the pack-ice. That same night the ice drifted away from the land and out to sea. She stayed with the ice, and it drifted so fast that seven days later she arrived in Greenland on the ice.[231]

In this excerpt, the pack-ice, ice floe, strong wind, and heavy sea fog can be regarded as the "building blocks" constituting the natural environment from which Helga goes missing in an accidental, mysterious manner. It would seem well perceivable that the gelid, polar milieu of Iceland could present the general narrative setting as a "waste land" bereft of vigour and vitality. While ice could by synecdoche signify winter, the image of winter could be read, metonymically and metaphorically, as an allusion to the lack of "joy and happiness of spring",[232] in which case spring could be conceived as a *topos* for the "time of rejuvenation"

[230] *Bárðar saga*, p. 114.
[231] Ewing (1987), p. 50.
[232] Hahn, Ingrid. *Raum und Landschaft in Gottfrieds Tristan: Ein Beitrag zur Werkdeutung*. Medium Ævum: Philologische Studien, 3, München: Eidos Verlag, 1963, pp. 29-31.

in medieval — as well as classical and post-medieval — literatures in Classen's view.[233] Along this line, the present dissertation finds that the ice-brimming, desolate background accompanying Helga's mishap (as in the above quote), could not only exhibit the naturalistic depression, but also externalise Helga's innermost forlornness and helplessness.

For example, the narrative plot reveals that when Helga's accident befalls, Bárðr's daughters and Rauðfeldsson's sons are *at leik* — in physical contention. Rauðfeld and Helga, particularly, are *enn með kappi* [possessed with some warring spirits],[234] i.e., fighting valiantly against each other for the dominating position. Moreover, the concurrent weather condition, as the narrative unfurls, is obviously unpleasant and dismaying: "hafísar lágu við; þenna dag var þoka mikil",[235] namely there is pack-ice lying offshore, coupled with a fit of pervasive, dense sea fog that could possibly attach a strain of spooky opacity to the narrative setting. While the frozen surrounding may allude to Iceland's naturalistic inanimation and lifelessness, according to the present dissertation, the harshness and eeriness of the climatic background would seem gesturing towards the lack of sincere fellowship between Þorkell's sons and Bárðr's daughters. Firstly, Rauðfeldr's jealousy of, and aversion to Helga would seem quite obvious. He hankers to lord it over Helga by physically defeating her, challenging and distaining her ultimately because of her heterogeneous female gender identity. Secondly, Rauðfeldr's shove on Helga may well be interpreted as a metaphor suggesting that she is not well accepted in the androcentric, patriarchal Icelandic community. Indeed, even after Rauðfeldr realises that Helga is almost impossible to vanquish, he still refuses to live in peace with her, but rather deliberately expels her from Iceland with his fatal push.

As the narrative goes, "Rauðfeldr hratt þá Helgu út á einn freðjakann á sjóinn" [Rauðfeldr then quickly pushed Helga out along to the sea],[236] which may be held as a malicious, lethal action. Granted, Rauðfeldr's homicidal thrust on Helga can be taken as ill-intended; nonetheless, practiced by boyish Rauðfeldr, such a violent undertaking may also be interpreted as a metaphor for Rauðfeldr's subconscious misogyny, but not necessarily his self-conscious malevolence. But one thing is almost for sure: Rauðfeldr's push on Helga is indeed of deadly repercussion, triggering both Helga's unexpected disappearance and the two brother's death out of Bárðr's retaliation. Seen through this prism, while foregrounding

[233] Classen (2011), p. 125.
[234] Translation mine.
[235] *Bárðar saga*, p. 114.
[236] Translation mine.

Helga's female heroism, the tempestuous, frigid marine surrounding of Helga's mishap would appear to be evocative of the lurking death and misfortune in the narrative plot.

As a matter of fact, the literary relevance between the frigid Nordic sea and the woeful happenings is intertextually substantiable in medieval Northern European literature. In medieval Anglo-Scandinavian literature,[237] such as *Beowulf* whose homonymous hero's death occurs near the sea, "characters of pagan quality usually relate death with the monster-haunted sea".[238] This point has been argued by Lechmann as follows:

> In medieval belief, the entrance to hell as depicted in art held the gaping jaws of a beast, but the folklore surrounding geography suggests that the Dead Sea, because of its sterility, inhabitability, strangeness, and the horror stories of sin-induced destruction associated with it, contains the entrance to hell. Therefore, the underworld is located under a large body of water which contains the unholy lair of evil beings.[239]

In the meantime, Lechmann notices that "the sea thrashes the living, but peacefully accepts and swallows the heroic dead",[240] whereas geographically, "the sea also physically separates one body of land from another affecting sovereignty and way of life".[241] Moreover, according to B. D. Wilt, the sea in medieval European literature can be generally read as a token for Chaos, as opposed to the ordered Cosmos; and while the sea could potentially disturb the "natural harmony", it may also pose obstacles that block the Christian way to salvation.[242] This is the case particularly in certain Old English elegies, like *The Seafarer* and

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[237] The present dissertation adopts the term "Anglo-Scandinavian", endorsing Townend (2002)'s argument that "Anglo-Norse language contact is that which predicates a situation of adequate mutual intelligibility between speakers of Norse and English, rather than one involving widespread bilingualism or the use of interpreters" (210). According to Townend, Anglo-Saxon England may well be thought of as Anglo-Scandinavian England. More radical opinions can be found in Emonds & Faarlund (2014), where it is asserted that the Early Middle English is linguistically "developed from Anglicized Norse" (46) rather than being a norsified English (a term coined by Thomason and Kaufman 1988, Section 9.8), indicating that the Scandinavian influence upon Anglo-Saxon England has been so profound as to have invisibly, if not insidiously, altered the typology of Old English over the several centuries ahead of the Norman Conquest of England (1066). Noticing that Emonds & Faarlund (2014) does not provide a sufficient explanation of the internal reasons for the purported typological change of Old English, this essay still recognizes the Anglo-Scandinavian linguistic-cultural contact, centering particularly around its embodiment in the literary realm. Contending opinions can be found in, for instance, Neidorf & Pascual (2019) which negates the Anglo-Scandinavian literary contact by casting doubt to Frank's (1979) seminal proposal that "Old Norse influence is discernible in the language of *Beowulf*" and arguing that "*Beowulf* is entirely devoid of Old Norse influence" (298).

[238] Lechmann, Cortney Nicole. *Water, Prestige, and Christianity: An Ecocritical Look at Medieval Literature*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Nevada (Las Vegas), 2016, p. 31.

[239] Ibid.

[240] Ibid., p. 23.

[241] Ibid., p. 27.

[242] Wilt, Brian David. "*Geofon Deaðe Hweop*: Poetic Sea-Imagery as Anglo-Saxon Cultural Archetype". MA thesis, Truman State University (Kirksville, Missouri), 2014, p. 31.

The Wanderer, where the literary fashioning of the sea could in all probability be viewed as a trope for misfortunes, separation from the native land, and heathen beliefs.[243]

In the scene of Helga's disappearance, it would seem rather patent that all the woe-related metonymic connotations of the sea could in a way correspond to her miserable encountering since the mysterious wandering: Helga's post-departure life turns out to be replete with adversities, troubled by social exclusion, infertility, Skeggi's betrayal, and homelessness,[244] her character partakes of both Christianity and paganism,[245] and her incidental driftage from Iceland to Greenland is preceded immediately by Rauðfeldr's envious, spiteful attack. Therefore, regarding the narratological function of the backgrounding sea, it may be considered as hinting, with all its inauspicious symbolic potentialities, at Helga's unfortunate destiny, thus covertly propelling the plot progression.

Lastly, it is worth noticing that when she steps up onto the pack-ice, Helga would appear to be making the decision ultimately on her own. In other words, there would not seem to be any evidence indicating that Helga is deprived of self-will or consciousness at the very foggy moment when she walks on the floating ice. As narrated, "fór Helga þá upp á hafísinn" [Helga then went up to the sea ice].[246] Given this lucid, but powerful sentence in active voice and declarative mood, Helga would not appear to be quite passive or under coercion when moving towards the sea; on the contrary, I would argue that she may well be seen as treading rather willingly, if not intentionally, on the ice floe to get rid of the oppression and violence in Iceland, even though Rauðfeldr's shove shall be taken as the direct motivation for Helga's departure.

Curiously enough, it may surface as well detectable that in the scene of Helga's mishap, both Rauðfeldr and Helga appear to behave in a way influenced by their subconsciousness, i.e., "the part of the mind of which they are not fully aware",[247] and their subconsciousness would seem responsive to the naturalistic setting of the narrative. As argued above,

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[243] Harbus, Antonina. "The Maritime Imagination and the Paradoxical Mind in Old English Poetry", in *Anglo-Saxon England*, vol. 39, 2011, pp. 21-42.
[244] This point will be further illustrated in Section 5.4.
[245] As for how the Icelandic sources present both Christian and pagan versions of the Icelandic Settlement Myths while appearing to applaud them both, see Wellendorf, Jonas. "The Interplay of Pagan and Christian Traditions in Icelandic Settlement Myths", in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 109, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1-21.
[246] Translation mine.
[247] When it comes to "the subconscious", Laplanche and Pontails have noted that "if someone talks of subconsciousness, I cannot tell whether he means the term topographically – to indicate something lying in the mind beneath consciousness – or qualitatively – to indicate another consciousness, a subterranean one, as it were. He is probably not clear about any of it. The only trustworthy antithesis is between conscious and unconscious." For detail, see Laplanche, J. & Pontails, Jean-Bertrand. *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, Karnac Books, 1998, pp. 430-431.

Rauðfeldr's push on Helga, Helga's instantaneous pacing on the floe, and the two children's enthusiasm for fighting may all be ascribed to the children's natural tendency, i.e., their instinctual reaction to the living condition of Iceland, to each other as gender alterity, and to the incident on the foggy day. Accordingly, the specific embodiments of nature — most manifest in the *nature writing* about *sjó* [the sea], *hafísal* [the sea ice], *mikill vindur* [the strong wind], and *þoka mikil* [the dense fog] — may serve as a medium by which Rauðfeldr and Helga's instincts are externalised in a manner of both realistic and allegorical qualities. Therefore, *nature* in this plot could be possibly understood as polysemous, referring, on the one hand, to the concrete natural existence of Iceland and, on the other, to the protagonists' spontaneous echoes — mental and corporeal — to the environmental and communal realities, as I consider to be motivated fundamentally by their natural flow of emotion. In this sense, *nature* in this plot may well be conceived as verging on both the objective and subjective realms, conjoining the physical and cognitive worlds in the saga story.

5.3 Helga's Driftage

When narrating Helga's driftage, likewise, the saga-author would appear to be conveying some implicit messages via the eco-narrative of ice, cold sea, and heavy fog.

Read symbolically, Helga's step on the pack-ice could reflect her volition to procure autonomy and self-rule at the cost of being isolated from Iceland. And the floating ice may be seen as an allusion to Helga's imminent dissociation from her family — a scene that, narratologically speaking, could anticipate Helga's precarious state of existence in times of her solitude wandering. Moreover, while the *vindr af landi* [wind from land] may be taken as the natural engine of Helga's seafaring, the gale at sea would seem liable to divert Helga astray, thus possibly betokening a state of uncertainty, likelihood of disorientation, and prospects of unpredictability.

According to St. Augustine's metaphorical association, the natural sea could represent life as a turbulent sea brimming with pungency, a source of sufferance, and the spiritual contamination that can lead mortals off course on the way to wisdom and Christian salvation. In his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, for instance, Augustine declares that the sea is a perilous place and sea journey is a dangerous undertaking:

> Mare enim in figura dicitur saeculum hoc salsitate amarum, procellis turbulentum, ubi homines cupitatibus perversis et pravis facti sunt velut pisces invicem se devorantes. Adtendite mare malum, mare amarum,

> fluctibus saevum: adtendite qualibus hominibus plenum sit! Quis optat hereditatem nisi morte alterius? Quis optat lucrum nisi damno alterius? Quam multi aliorum defectione cupiunt sublimari! Quam multi ut emant optant alios vendere res suas! Quomodo se invicem opprimunt et qui possunt devorant! Et cum devoraverit unus piscis maior minorem, devoratur et ipse a maiore.[248]

> The sea is a figure of this age, bitter with salt, tossed by gales, where, by their perverse and depraved desires, people have become like fish devouring each other. Look at this evil sea, this bitter sea raging with waves; see the kind of people with which it is filled. Who wants an inheritance without the death of another? Who wants gain without another's loss? How many seek to climb through the fall of others! How many want others to sell their goods so that they may buy them! How they oppress each other and devour those they can! And when a bigger fish has devoured a smaller one, it is devoured by a still larger one.[249]

According to the Augustinian interpretation of Psalm (64: 9),[250] human society is comparable to "a tempestuous bitter sea", i.e., *mare formidulosum* [the vast and terrible sea] fed by *flumen humani* [river of human custom].[251] And as TeSelle has noted, in his *Confession*, Augustine has also spoken of the "waves of temptation" (I, xi, 18) that "beat upon him from childhood", the "torrent of custom" (I. xvi, 25) that "sweeps the children of Eve into the vast sea", as well as "the bitter sea of humanity" (XIII, xvii, 20) that "toss[es] with conflicting desires".[252]

Decoding the Augustinian metaphor of *procellosam societatem* [sea-tossed society] as an emblem of Helga's unforeseeable future life, this dissertation holds that the marine setting may well be taken as a symbolic natural background evoking the hardships that Helga is yet to confront throughout her maturation, socialisation, and self-assertion.

As a matter of fact, in the Anglo-Scandinavian literary tradition, the sea may, under certain circumstances, bear witness to given protagonists' development of character and their confirmation of self-identity. In the Old English elegy, *The Seafarer*, for instance, the tossing waves appear to unfold a figurative backdrop against which the narrator-navigator endures the

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[248] *Enarrationes in Psalmos,* 64, 9.
[249] Translation from TeSelle, Eugene. "Looking for Home: Travel As Metaphor in Augustine", in *Annali D'Italianistica*, vol. 14, 1996, p. 114.
[250] The reconstructed Latin verse is "et timebunt omnes qui inhabitant fines terrae a signis tuis. Exitus mane et vespere delectabis". See Müller, Hildegund (ed.), *Augustinus: Enarrationes in Psalmos 61-70*, De Gruyter, 2020, p. 124.
[251] Starnes, Colin. *Augustine's Confession: A Guide to the Argument of Confessions I-IX*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press, Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 1990, p. 27.
[252] TeSelle (1996), p. 114.

mundane trials and tribulations, meditating upon the essence of human sufferance and eventually abstaining from paganism to strengthen his or her Christian selfhood.[253] In this poem themed on sea-journey, the desolate, frigid sea that accompanies the voyager's trekking is vividly limned in the following lines:

Calde geþrungen
wæron mine fet, forste gebunden
caldum clommun, þær þa ceare seofedun
hat ymb heortan; hungor innan slat
merewerges mod. Þæt se mon ne wat
þe him on foldan fægrost limpeð,
hu ic earmcearig iscealdne sæ
winter wunade wræccan lastum,
winemægum bidroren, bihongen hrimgicelum;
hægl scurum fleag. Þær ic ne gehyrde
butan hlimman sæ, iscaldne wæg. (ll. 8b-19a)[254]

> Oppressed by chills were my feet, | bound up by frost, with cold chains, | where these sorrows sighed | hot about the heart — hunger tearing within | the sea-wearied mind. He does not know this fact | who dwells most merrily on dry land — | how I, wretchedly sorrowful, lived a winter | on the ice-cold sea, upon the tracks of exile, | deprived of friendly kinsmen, | hung with rimy icicles. Hail flies in showers. | There I heard nothing except the thrumming sea, | the ice-cold waves. [255]

Similarly, another pearl of Anglo-Saxon poetry that also survives in the *Exeter Book* — *The Wanderer* — would also appear to set the freezing cold sea as the backdrop of the roamer's driftage, which is most saliently embodied in the initial lines:

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[253] As for the interplay between narrator-navigator's conformation of the Christian selfhood and the poetic representation of the sea in *The Seafarer* and, broadly speaking, in the Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Scandinavian context, see, for instance, Bjork, Robert E. "Sundor æt Rune: The Voluntary Exile of The Wanderer", in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, edited by Liuzza, R. M., New Haven & London: Yale UP, 2002, pp. 315—327; Brink, Bernhard Ten. *Geschichte der englischen Litteratur, Volume 1*, Berlin: Verlag von Robert Oppenheim, 1877; Cucina, Carla. "Immagni classiche nel Seafarer e nelle culture del Nord", in *Classiconorroena*, vol. 30, 2012, pp. 25-77; Parker, Joanne. "Ruling the Waves: Saxons, Viking, and the Sea in the Formation of an Anglo-British Identity in the Nineteenth Century", in Sobecki, Sebastian I (ed.), *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture*, D. S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 195-206; Sobecki, Sebastian I. "The interpretation of The Seafarer — a re-examination of the pilgrimage theory", in *Neophilologus*, vol. 92, 2008, pp. 127-139; and Stanley, E. G. "Christianity Puts an End to Folk-Poetry", in *The Search for Anglo-Saxon Paganism*, Cambridge, 1975, pp. 9-13.

[254] The original from http://www.anglo-saxons.net/hwaet/?do=get&type=text&id=Sfr.

[255] Translation from https://oldenglishpoetry.camden.rutgers.edu/the-seafarer/.

Oft him anhaga are gebideð,
metudes miltse, þeah þe he modcearig
geond lagulade longe sceolde
hreran mid hodum hrimcealde sæ
wadan wræclastas. Wyrd bið ful aræd! (1a-5b)[256]

Often the solitary one | finds grace for himself |
the mercy of the Lord, | Although he, sorry-
hearted, must for a long time | move by hand
along the waterways, | (along) the ice-cold sea,
tread the paths of exile. Events always go as
they must![257]

According to the present dissertation, in addition to physical sufferings and psychological loneliness, the frosty weather and frigid sea may also hint at the absence of God's grace in the erstwhile Germanic pagan community,[258] thus liable to be held as material entities that are "symbolic in evoking both social and natural forces".[259]

It would seem rather evident that at variance with Helga who does not reveal much religiosity in her girlhood, the eponymous protagonists in *The Seafarer* and *The Wanderer* both detest their Germanic heathen identity and, via the allegorical sea-voyage, purge their spiritual world, review the essence of life, and eventually consolidate their Christian selfhood.[260] Yet intertextually, it would be well detectable that the rough sea in Old English and Old Norse literatures could be seen as a trope betokening mundane adversities; and through the eco-narratives about the sea, the narrators and poets may also allude to given protagonists' (re-)consideration of their self-identity, be it religious or lay. So viewed, while the gelid marine setting in *Bárðar saga* may bear innuendoes to Helga's bodily energy and mental perseverance, from the narratological perspective, it could also forecast the severe sufferings that Helga is about to confront after leaving Iceland and, most crucially, Helga's inner transformation into a truly heroic woman.

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[256] Translation from http://www.anglo-saxons.net/hwaet/?do=get&type=text&id=Wdr&textOnly=true.
[257] Translation from http://www.anglo-saxons.net/hwaet/?do=get&type=text&id=wdr.
[258] For details on the "vestiges" of Germanic pagan elements in Anglo-Saxon England in terms of literary production, mentality, and mythological tradition, see, among others, Doyle White, Ethan. "The Goddess Frig: Reassessing an Anglo-Saxon Deity", in *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2014, pp. 284-310; and Matto, Michael. "Vernacular Traditions: Exploring Anglo-Saxon Mentalities", in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 115, no. 1, 2016, pp. 95-113.
[259] Harbus, Antonia. "The Maritime Imagination and the Paradoxical Mind in Old English Poetry", in *Anglo-Saxon England*, vol. 39, 2011, p. 24. See also Harbus, Antonina. "Deceptive Dreams in 'The Wanderer'", in *Studies in Philology*, vol. 93, no. 2, 1996, pp. 164-179.
[260] Smithers, G. V. "The Meaning of 'The Seafarer' and 'The Wanderer'", in *Medium Ævum*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1957, pp. 137-153.

Additionally, it shall be worth emphasising that the day of Helga's accident is narrated as enveloped in *þoka mikil* [heavy fog], which may well render a misty, enigmatic, and slightly inauspicious atmosphere of the ethereal setting. Nevertheless, the fog seems to have narratological functions as well. For instance, in my view, the dense fog could not only blur Helga's eyesight, but also analogically cloud her judgement, thus ensuring a logical connection between Helga's nebulous vision and her instantaneous bewilderment when she steps intuitively on the floating ice. On the other hand, the fog, which is naturalistically redolent of opacity and vagueness, may be read as a metonymy for the inscrutability of human fate. According to medieval demonology, heavy fog usually cooccurs with the weird sisters; and when the witches hold their gatherings, "the mountain is always wreathed in fog".[261] Hence, the fog that accompanies Helga's misfortune would seem diabolically empowered.

Relevant examples on the fog's unpropitious connotation are extensive. In *Beowulf*, for instance, the description of Grendel's mother's mere is characteristic of the mist and fog, which seems largely in line with the prototypical setting for witchcraft — "a swamp, fog, rain, a cemetery, thunder, lightning, several skeletons, ghosts, sounds of wind".[262] The following quote, extracted from the country people's tales about the monsters and their living environments, is properly at point:

> Hie dygel lond
> warigeað, wulf-hleopu, windige næssas,
> frecne fen-gelad, ðaer fyrgen-stream
> under næssa genipu niþer gewiteð,
> flod under foldan. Nis þæt feor heonon
> mil-gemearces, þæt se mere standeð
>
> (Beowulf, ll. 1357b-1362b)

> They dwelled apart | among wolves on the hills, on windswept crags | and treacherous keshes, where cold streams | pour down the mountain and disappear | under mist and moorland.[263]

Considering that the "filthy air" of fog may foreground the weird sisters' *maleficium* and that in etymological terms, the "weird sisters" are properly meant for "the sisters of

[261] Roper, Lyndal. "Witchcraft and the Western Imagination", in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 16, 2006, p. 138.
[262] Cruz, MaryCarmen, and Ogle Burks Duff. "Witches, Ghosts, and Other Apparitions", in *The English Journal*, vol. 85, no. 6, 1996, p. 102.
[263] Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. W. W. Norton & Company: New York & London, 2000, p. 95.

fate",[264] the fog and fogginess in medieval Northern Europe may be associated with not only the black sorcery and horrifying natural scenes — like the blood-infested sea in *Beowulf* — but also given protagonist's unpromising life fortune, such as the deaths of Grendel and her monstrous mother. In *Bárðar saga*, similarly, the sea fog could be conceived as what foreshadows Helga's unpredictable life adventure in Greenland.

Nevertheless, as far as the present dissertation is concerned, Helga is by no means equivalent to Grendel or his mother, both of whom may qualify as the most wicked of miscreants. Puissant as she is, Helga does not conduct evil undertakings in Greenland, but she is rather disposed to review and renounce her Germanic heathen identity after experiencing life's ups and downs. As the narrative reveals, after being abandoned by Skeggi, Helga languishes in agony, which may indicate that she is a woman of sensibility rather than cruelty. Moreover, Helga composes a skaldic poem to express her profound reflections upon past life, current quandary, future destiny, and self-identity, where her heroic air may not seem hard to detect:

> Engu undi hon sér, siðan er hon skildi við Skeggja; mornaði hon ok þornaði æ siðan. Þat var einn dag, at hon kvað vísu þessa:
>
> Braut vilk bráðla leita.
> Brestr eigi stríð í flestu
> mér fyrir menja rýri.
> Mun ek dáliga kálast,
> þvit auðspenni unnak
> allteitum sefa heitum.
> Sorg mák sízt því byrgjia.
> Sitk ein. Trega greinum.[265]
>
> She [Helga] took comfort in nothing after separating from Skeggi. She peaked and pined away ever afterwards. One day she spoke this verse: [266]

[264] "Wyrd" is a concept in Anglo-Saxon culture roughly corresponding to fate or personal destiny. The word is ancestral to Modern English "weird", which retains its original meaning only dialectically. The cognate term in Old Norse is *urðr*, with a similar meaning, but also personified as one of the Norns, *Urðr* (anglicized as *Urd*) and appearing in the name of the holy well *Urðarbrunnr* in Norse mythology.
[265] *Bárðar saga*, p. 122.
[266] Ewing (1987), p. 57.

Because of the gold-giver
I must go soon from here
Strife eats my soul
In pain I will pine
for my passion, once pure,
glad and strong, that I had.
I gape open with grief.
I speak sorrow to myself.[267]

The same skald has been translated into prose, as follows:

Soon I will seek the road. | Conflict in most things does not cease | in me because of the dispenser-of-necklaces. | I will waste away miserably | because I loved the riches-spender | with a glad and fervent heart. | Thus, I can hardly hide [my] sorrow. | I sit alone. I explain [my] sorrow.[268]

Attributing her miserable life to the "gold-giver" and "dispense-of-necklace", Helga would seem to be aware that her fervent pursuit of mundane achievements could be the root of her inner grief. This awareness even leads her to envisage her pitiful death, which according to her is fundamentally induced by the obsession with worldly wealth and secular power. Moreover, while Helga pines in sorrow, she seems falling victim to loneliness — physical and spiritual.[269] Admittedly, the elegiac tone of these utterances may highlight Helga's sense of isolation and despondency, thus externalising "psychological special effects within a narrative".[270] Yet for Helga who is half human, half trollish,[271] and who would seem to be veering between her pagan identity and her potential Christian personhood during the

[267] Straubhaar, Sandra Ballif. *Old Norse Women's Poetry: The Voices of Female Skalds*. D. S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2011, p. 53.
[268] Ibid.
[269] The skaldic poem above has been translated in diverse versions. Rendered by Barraclough, it goes as: "Soon I shall seek to leave. | My passion abates not at all | for the spender of treasure. | I shall die pitifully. | For I loved the treasure-embracer | with passionate, warm emotion. | I sit alone and recount my misery". See Barraclough, E. R. "Transforming the trolls: the metamorphosis of the Troll-Woman in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*", in *Quaestio Insularis*, vol. 9, 2008, p. 59. Rendered by Ewing (1987: 122), it is "Away is my want — with searching speed | to ease this ache of loss and pass | from eyes that wonder why I waste | with pining mid their treasures and their pride, | each prudent gaze a goad. I would be spent, | diminished, lost. I would the wasteland's frost | were at my flesh; in waning warmth to find | my yearning's end; my healing love released | from custom's clasp. For here, buried in a living, | I can only live against the life; | an endless stranger vaulted in her grief | thus twice apart, | both heartless and alone, | who sits and watches sorrow branch through stone". Ewing's translation is not a literal one, since it adds plenty of rhetorical elaborations on Helga's psychological movements to externalise her sentiments. But thematically, it chimes in with Helga's reclusiveness, dejection, her inclination to abstain from mundanity, and her renunciation of the Germanic past represented metonymically by the gold-giving (or ring/necklace-giving) acts.
[270] O' Donoghue, Heather. *Skaldic Verse and the Poetics of Saga Narrative*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005, p. 9.
[271] Kress, Helga. "What a Woman Speaks", in *The History of Nordic Women's Literature*, 2011. Retrieved from https://nordicwomensliterature.net/2011/02/11/what-a-woman-speaks/, translated by Kynoch, Gaye. 19/04/2021.

attainment of womanhood,[272] life in loneliness may not only magnify Helga's inner dejection, but also provide her with a private sphere where she could achieve spiritual maturation in hermitic seclusion — a place that "can be occupied by supernaturally oriented *blendingar* who operate within a human, increasingly Christianised sphere".[273] Thus, the unexpected driftage may well be viewed as the a fresh start of Helga's new life; and accordingly, the sea fog could be considered as in anticipation of Helga's inner transformation and refinement after her departure from Iceland. Along this line, it seems saliently noticeable that coupled with its occult, malign implications, the fog could also hint simultaneously at the propitious aspects of Helga's future encountering.

Indeed, fog in the Old Icelandic literary tradition is not always a foreboding natural phenomenon. It could also function as the medium whereby the Providence directs human beings to get rid of trouble and make the correct choice intuitively. In the *Biskupasögur*, most tellingly, there is a scene where God drew fog over the road to prevent Þorlákr Thorhallsson (1133-1193) — the beatified patron saint of Iceland — from his enemy's attack. In this plot, the fog would seem to be protective rather than pernicious, and its provenance is at God's behest rather than motivated by the diabolical elements aligned with the witches:

> Heimamenn lǫttu biskup út at ganga, hann, øruggr ok óskelfðr móti ótta vándra manna, svarar: 'Ganga mun ek til kirkju sem eg em vanr. Ekki mun þessi maðr gera mér til meins.' [...] En hann sjálfr var øruggr um sig ok gerði aðra út af sér ørugga, ok hvárki óttaðisk hann mannfjǫlða né vopnabúnað ok reið óskjálfandi til fyrirbúinna fyrirsáta. En allsvaldandi Guð leiddi enn sem fyrr þoku yfir þann veg sem hann fór ok hans menn, svá þó at þeir fǫtuðu vel veg sinn, sjáandi sína umsátarmenn.[274]
>
> The bishop's men discouraged him from going out, but he, confident and fearless, confronting the fear of the inferior men, replies: 'I shall walk to church as I am used to do. This man is not going to harm me.' […] But he was so confident himself and because of that he made others confident, and neither did he fear crowd nor weapons, and rode without shivering towards the ambush that had been prepared for him. But almighty God drew fog over

[272] Barraclough, E. R. "Following the Trollish Baton Sinister: Ludic Design in 'Bárðar saga snæfellsáss'", in *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, vol. 4, 2008, pp. 15-43, at p. 17. See also Harris, Joseph. "Gender and Genre: Short and Long Forms in Saga Literature", in *The Making of the Couple: The Social Function of Short-Form Medieval Narrative. A Symposium*, ed. F. G. Andersen and M. Nøjgaard, Odense: Odense University Press, 1991, p. 52.
[273] Barraclough, E. R. (2008), p. 27.
[274] *Biskupa sögur II* (2002), pp. 176–177.

> the road where he and his men were travelling in such a way that they found their way easily and could see those in ambush.[275]

To some extent, the fog for St Þorlákr may well be compared to the "cloud of unknowing",[276] shrouding the bishop into the absence of intellectual clarity and leading him, who is temporarily bereft of rationality and visual perception, to act by the agency of divine revelation. By analogy, situating Helga's instantaneous decision-making in the dense sea fog, the author of *Bárðar saga* would seem to be gesturing towards the positive facet of Helga's sea journey, namely Helga's augmented wisdom, improved understanding about mundane life, and her enhanced awareness about self-identity. All these aspects concerning Helga's *Bildung* and self-assertion will be illustrated in the next section which centres on Helga in Greenland.

To sum up, by delving into the possible metaphorical-allegorical connotations of the sea, the fog, and frigidity in the narrative about Helga's driftage, the present dissertation finds that the rough sea and ubiquitous iciness in the naturalistic setting could be held as a foil to Helga's female intrepidity. Moreover, these natural items may also function as a projector of Helga's profound loneliness. As for the sea fog, particularly, intertextual evidence has demonstrated that apart from alluding to the impenetrability and inexorability of Helga's remorseful fate, the foggy surrounding could possibly foreshadow Helga's inner maturation in the following plots, thereby presenting a more comprehensive, but less flattened image of Helga and, in the meantime, adding a strain of mysteriousness to her character.

5.4 Helga in Greenland

> Hon fylgdi þá ísinum, en hann rak svá ǫrt, at innan sjau daga kom hon með ísinum til Grænlands.[277]
>
> She, namely Helga, then followed the ice; but she was so fast that within seven days she reached Greenland on that ice floe.[278]

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[275] Translation culled from Egilsdóttir, Ásdís. "Masculinity, Christianity, and (Non)Violence", in *Masculinities in Old Norse Literature*, edited by Evans Gareth Lloyd and Hancock Jessica Clare, Boydell & Brewer, 2020, p. 121.

[276] To quote T. S. Eliot, the Christian, mystical connotation of the "cloud of unknowing" as a metaphor is that "to arrive at what you do not know, you must go by a way which is the way of ignorance. In order to possess what you do not possess, you must go by way of dispossession". See Eliot, T. S. "East Coker", in *Collected Poems, 1909-1962*, London, 1963, pp. 201. Cf. Rissanen, Paavo. "The Prayer of Being in The Cloud of Unknowing", in *Mystics Quarterly*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1987, p. 140.

[277] *Bárðar saga*, p. 114.

[278] Translation mine.

In addition to the meteorological frigidity, vast sea, and fogginess, another two natural elements in the above quote, both of which revolve around Helga's itinerary to Greenland, may also be worthy of eco-narratological analysis.

The first pertains to the narrative of time, a natural phenomenon ontologically independent and distinct from the mankind.[279] Helga's driftage lasts for seven days before landing. In this plot, "seven" as a natural number may well be considered as a biblical metaphor of time corresponding to the Christian mythology of genesis. The second implicit reference to nature lurks behind the appellation of Helga's destination — Greenland, whose name would seem to contain a green hue, thus possibly evoking a sense of glimmering hope.

According to the Old Testament, Jehovah created the universe in seven days.[280] Considering that the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries are the heyday of translating biblical excerpts in to Old Norse and Christianity was rapidly spreading across Iceland also in this period,[281] it may well be hypothesised that the biblical myth of Genesis must have had a certain degree of impact on the composition of *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* — one of the *Íslendingasögur* generally received to be scribed in the early fourteenth century — on textual and/or ideological level(s).[282] Also, considering its theme, Vigfússon claimed in the nineteenth century that *Bárðar saga* deals principally with Iceland's ideological transition from heathenism to Christianity at the turn of the eleventh century;[283] and his opinion is still well endorsed by contemporary Old Norse specialists.[284] Therefore, in my view, it would not

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[279] Concerning the narrative of time in the *Íslendingasögur*, see O'Donoghue, Heather. *Narrative in the Icelandic Family Saga: Meanings of Time in Old Norse Literature*, Bloomsbury, 2021. O'Donoghue's monograph reveals from the modern narratological perspective that "the stance of the narrator and the role of time — from the representation of external time passing to the audience's experience of moving through a narrative — are crucial to these stories" (preface). To quote Eleanor Barraclough, "by turns philosophical and theoretical, O'Donoghue paints a vivid picture of the saga world and the passage, perception, and representation of time: the rhythms of the seasons, the cultural events marking the social calendar, the deeper historical time spanning the generations. A skillful analysis that reveals the considerable narratological talents of the Icelandic saga authors and the richness of the stories themselves" (ibid).

[280] Carr, David M. *Reading the Fractures in Genesis.* Westminster John Knox Press, 1996, pp. 62-64.

[281] With the Christianization of Iceland, so-called *þýðingar helgar* (weekend translations) were written in Old Norse-Icelandic to help explain the new religion and practices to the populace. These included religious interpretations alongside translations of Bible stories. The oldest Icelandic biblical texts date to c. 1200 when the Old Icelandic Homily Book, which compiled sermons, lessons, and prayers. During the following century, more systematic efforts were made to translate sections of the Bible, eventually being collected into the *Stjórn* around 1350. For detail, see Kirby, I. J. *Bible Translation in Old Norse*, Genève: Université de Lausanne, Publications de la Faculté des Lettres XXVII, 1986, p. 37.

[282] McDonald, Sheryl. "Pagan Past and Christian Future in *Norna-Gests þáttr* and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*", in *Bulletin of International Medieval Research*, vol. 15-16, 2011, pp. 164-178.

[283] Vigfússon, Guðbrandur (ed.). *Bárðarsaga Snæfellsáss, Viglundarsaga, Þórðarsaga, Draumavitranir, Völsaþáttr*, Nordiske Oldskrifter 27, det Nordiske Literatur-Samfund, Copenhagen: Berlingske, 1860, "Fortale", p. iv.

[284] See, for instance, Heide, Eldar. "Bárðar Saga as a Source for Reconstruction of Pre-Christian Religion?" In Daniel Sävborg and Karen Bek-Pedersen (eds.), *Folklore in Old Norse — Old Norse in Folklore.* Nordistica

appear as far-fetched or improper to extract religious implications from the rhetorical, stylistic, and narratological designs in *Bárðar saga*.

From the Christian theological perspective, "seven" as a natural number is indeed very special. It distinguishes itself as a sacred number, having been interpreted as an allegory for "completion and perfection" (see Genesis 1; 2:1-2 & Exodus 20:9-11), "exoneration and healing" (see Deuteronomy 15:1-2 & Matthew 18:21-22 & 2 Kings 5:9-10), as well as the "fulfilment of promises" (see Genesis 9:8-15 & Joshua 6:1-20 & Revelation 2-3).[285] Read through this prism, Helga's seven days of roaming before her disembarkation in Greenland would appear to add an aura of rebirth, regeneration, and hopefulness to her mysterious driftage. And in the meantime, there would also seem to emerge a divine linkage between Helga and the Providence which could in a way superimpose and/or supersede her inherent Icelandic extraction. Such an interpretation would be particularly tenable in the context of Helga's accident, since her unexpected departure from Iceland may be conceived as her "uprooting" from the native land and in theological terms, the seven days of wandering could be held as the process whereby she gradually draws closer to the Christian promised land. Therefore, the underlying number "seven" could possibly be read as a covert reference to both Helga's characterisation and the plot progression.

Additionally, the etymological root of "Greenland" — a land of greenness, is also worth savouring. For the present dissertation, it would seem to imply some ardent longing for verdure and vitality. According to *Eiríks saga rauða*, after the Norwegian-born Icelander Erik the Red was banished from Iceland for manslaughter, he explored, in times of exile, an icy island in the northwest which was habitable; and afterwards, he named this island as *Grœnland*, allegedly in the hope that this pleasant name would attract more settlers.[286] Also, as related in *Eiríks saga rauða*, in the summer, Erik left to settle in the country he had found, which he called Greenland, as he said "menn myndu fýsa þangat farar, at landit ætti nafn gótt",[287] [people would be attracted if it had a favourable name].[288]

Tartuensia, vol. 20, pp. 170-180; Jakobsson, Ármann. "HISTORY OF THE TROLLS? BÁRÐAR SAGA AS AN HISTORICAL NARRATIVE", in *Saga-Book*, vol. 25, 1998, pp. 53-71; and Wellendorf, Jonas. "The Interplay of Pagan and Christian Traditions in Icelandic Settlement Myths", in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 109, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1-21.

[285] For detail, refer to Smyth, Dolores. "What Is the Biblical Significance of the Number Seven?", retrievable from https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/what-is-the-biblical-significance-of-the-number-7.html. (18/04/2021)

[286] Grove, Jonathan. "The Place of Greenland in Icelandic Saga Narrative", in *Norse Greenland: Selected Papers from the Hvalsey Conference, Journal of the North Atlantic*, Special Volume, no. 2, 2008, pp. 30-51.

[287] *Íslendingabók*, 13.

[288] Evans, Andrew. "Is Iceland Really Green and Greenland Really Icy?" Archived on 4th, December 2017 at the Wayback Machine, *National Geographic* (June 30, 2016).

Obviously, "green" as an invigorating colour is the essential semantic component of *Grœnland*. According to Zanchi, in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, the linkage "between the colour green and the natural world is clearly represented",[289] and the term "green" is often associated with plants, particularly *Yggdrasil*, the ever-green tree of Norse mythology that stands for cosmic order and eternal life.[290] The present dissertation finds a most telling example in *Völuspá* 19:

> Ask veitk standa, heiter Yggdrasels,
> hǫr baðmr ausenn hvíta aure;
> þaþan koma dǫggvar þærs i dala falla,
> stendr æ of grønn Urðar brunne.
>
> (*Völuspá* 19)

> An ash I know, 'tis called Yggdrasill,
> The high tree, sprinkled with white water;
> Thence come the dews that fall in the valleys,
> Forever green it stands o'er the fountain of Urd.[291]

On the surface, *Yggdrasill* as the classic embodiment of greenness in Old Icelandic literature would seem overflowing with exuberance and naturalistic energy; yet the current MA project notices that under certain circumstances, this evergreen, mythological plant could also be indicative of death, rather than vigour and vivacity, thus liable to evoke a "dual image" where greenness can allude simultaneously to vitality and caducity. This is properly as Eson has pointed out:

> In Old Norse studies, it has always been perfectly clear that Odin "hung on the windy tree / nine full nights," sacrificing himself to himself "on the three of which no one knows / from what roots it rises" — in other words, on a Cosmic Tree, one which is almost certainly to be equated with the well-documented World Tree known as Yggdrasil.[292]

Evidently, the *Yggdrasil* in Scandinavian mythology is where Odin is hanged in a way akin to Christ's crucifixion.[293] And also, it is the tree whose boughs and branches remain

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[289] Zanchi, Anna. "The Colour Green in Medieval Icelandic Literature: Natural, Supernatural, Symbolic?" In *The Fantastic in Old Norse Icelandic Literature*. Preprint Papers, Pt. 2, 2006, pp. 1096-1104, at p. 1096.
[290] Łaszkiewicz, Weronika. "Into the Wild Woods: On the Significance of Trees and Forests in Fantasy Fiction", in *Mythlore*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2017, p. 40.
[291] Translation from Hagen, Sivert N. "The Origin and Meaning of the Name Yggdrasill", in *Modern Philology*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1903, pp. 57-58.
[292] Eson, Lawrence. "Odin and Merlin: Threefold Death and the World Tree", in *Western Folklore*, vol. 69, no. 1, 2010, p. 86.
[293] O'Donoghue, Heather. *English Poetry and Old Norse Myth: A History*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2014, p. 180.

enduringly luxuriant even in freezing coldness.[294] The invigorating image of *Yggdrasil* as an ashy World Tree can trace back to Adam of Bremen's words:

> Prope illud templum est arbor maxima late ramos extendens, semper viridis in hieme et aestate; cuius illa generis sit, nemo scit. Ibi etiam est fons, ubi sacrificia paganorum solent exerceri et homo vivus immergi. Qui dum non invenitur, ratum erit votum populi.[295]

> Near this temple stands a very large tree with wide-spreading branches, always green winter and summer. What kind it is nobody knows. There is also a spring at which pagans are accustomed to make their sacrifices, and into it to plunge a live man. And if he is not found, the people's wish will be granted.[296]

These intrinsic qualities of *Yggdrasil* may well substantiate the supposition that the greenness of this botanical icon may be connoted with polarised significations. Likewise, in *Bárðar saga*, the antagonistic connotations of "green" seem to coexist in the place name of "Greenland".

For one thing, green in this context can be taken to allude to Helga's inner energy and her relatively positive experiences in Greenland — such as her love romance with Skeggi, her proper use of physical prowess to defeat trolls, and her deepened understanding about the vanity of human wishes (as already argued in 5.2). Moreover, enmeshed in severe chilliness, eerie fog, and the rough sea, the green tincture may also be taken to lay some emphasis on Helga's internal vivacity and vitality, thus possibly adverting to adolescent Helga' female heroism in confrontation with the uncanny, looming colour of green.[297]

For another, seeing that the evergreen *Yggdrasil* could be reminiscent of painful sufferings, self-purgation through affliction, as well as the determined "search of hidden power and knowledge" via painstaking endurance,[298] the "greenness" of Greenland may also echo Helga's "pains and gains" in Greenland.[299]

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[294] Eson (2010), p. 97.
[295] Adam of Bremen. *Adami Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum*. Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum. Hannover, 1876, p. 174.
[296] Translation from Eson (2010), p. 97.
[297] As for whether the colour green in medieval Icelandic literature bears inauspicious or eerie connotations, this dissertation joins Brewer (1997) in contending that "green became associated with the fantastic elements no earlier than in the eighteenth century, as an element of English and Scottish literary Romanticism". See Brewer, Derek. "The Colour Green in A Companion to the Gawain-poet", in *Arthurian Studies*, vol. 38, ed. Derek Brewer and Jonathan Gibson, Cambridge, 1997, p. 185.
[298] Eson (2010), p. 97.
[299] For Helga, her misadventure is primarily in that she kept being isolated and demonised as a strange woman, even though her physical puissance and intellectual capacity are not at all dwarfed by her male compeers. This will be further elaborated in Section 5.5 with textual evidence.

As a matter of fact, Helga in Greenland is never overshadowed by any male counterpart in any respect. Rather, the present dissertation detects that she demonstrates distinct female heroism and strength of character in three major aspects: her physical appeal, moral integrity, and mental resilience:

> Helga var kvenna vænst. Hon þótti ok með undarligu móti þar hafa komit, ok fyrir þat var hon trǫll kǫlluð af sumum mǫnnum; svá var hon ok karlgild at afli, til hvers sem hon tók. Hon sagði allt it sanna af ferðum sínum.[300]

> Helga was the fairest of women. She seemed to have come there in a fantastic manner, and because of that some men called her a troll. Also, she was as good as a man in whatever she undertook. She told the complete truth about her trip.[301]

Despite her many merits, Helga is discriminated in the unfamiliar Greenland, treated as a troll — an "evil, bewitching and possibly vengeful sorceress".[302] Helga's public image as a troll, according to Barraclough, properly hints at her "otherness" in the eyes of Greenland's inhabitants.[303] Indeed, due to her unknown source of origin, Helga is seen as an alterity; yet as the above quote suggests, Helga does not conceal her pastness but candidly recounts her adventures to people around, which may well be considered as a manifestation of her heroic frankness. Moreover, Helga does not self-restrain in the domestic realm but throws herself into martial affairs conventionally in the charge of men. After falling in love with Skeggi, Helga even cooperates with her husband in defeating the trolls and monsters haunting Greenland. Her physical strength appears unsurpassed by any male compeers. As the narrative goes, "Skeggi bjóst til at ráða þau af, ok þat fór fram með því, at Helga hjálpaði honum til ok gaf honum náliga líf",[304] [Skeggi might have lost his life had Helga not helped him].[305] At any rate, Helga's role in Greenland may seem quite indispensable.

As illustrated above, Helga's female heroism seems crystallised chiefly in her valiant deeds and outspoken character, both of which unfurl against the allegorical-theological backcloth of medieval Scandinavia's natural milieux. Nevertheless, it is still worth reiterating that the backgrounding natural objects — particularly the polysemous sea, green hue, and the pervasive sea fog, could often bear contrasting connotations that form unities of semantic

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[300] *Bárðar saga*, p. 115.
[301] Ewing (1987), p. 51.
[302] Kelchner, Georgia Dunham. *Dreams in Old Norse Literature and their Affinities in Folklore*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2013, pp. 40-45.
[303] Barraclough, E. R. (2008), p. 22.
[304] *Bárðar saga*, p. 116.
[305] Ewing (1987), p. 52.

opposites. This situation could not only enrich the thematic import of *Bárðar saga*, but also foreshadow Helga's complex emotion. Earlier scholarships have already pointed out that Helga may be viewed as a personification of *liminality* and that her characterisation interacts with the "low visibility in the form of fog, drifting snow and darkness created by supernatural beings for their own needs".[306] Moreover, according to the current MA project, the multiple facets and layers of Helga's character shall require more detailed analysis. Appearing as a trill, Helga also possesses discrete human nature; in addition to a tough woman with masculine heroism, she may also be seen as a deserted pagan wife similar, in one way or another, to a Christian anchoress. This point will be elucidated in the following section, which concentrates on the eco-narratological construction of Helga's emotion and mentality.

5.5 Helga's Emotion Conveyed by Eco-Narrative

It is noticed that juxtaposed with her bravery and intrepidity, *nature writing* may exert influence also on the delivery of Helga's emotional complexities, including her nostalgia, dejection for being forsaken, and her intense sense of isolation. Moreover, via the eco-narrative about her place of residence, Helga would appear to be fashioned as a multi-layered character, whereby the narrator's sympathetic attitude towards the desolate woman may also surface as well discernible.

As the narrative progresses, Helga is plunged into profound despair after Skeggi's departure, and she is further alienated in her community. One day, she laments outside of her abode, intoning the following verse:

Þat var einn dag, Helga stóð úti ok litaðist um ok kvað vísu:

Sæl værak,
ef sjá mættak
Búrfell ok Bala,
báða Lóndranga,
Aðalþegnshóla
ok Ǫndvertnes,
Heiðarkollu
ok Hreggnasa,
Dritvíkrmǫl
fyr dyrum fóstra.[307]

[306] Heide, Eldar. "Bárðar Saga as a Source for Reconstruction of Pre-Christian Religion?" In Daniel Sävborg & Karen Bek-Pedersen (eds.), *Folklore in Old Norse — Old Norse in Folklore*. Nordistica Tartuensia, 20, p. 169.
[307] *Bárðar saga*, pp. 115-116.

One day Helga stood outside and, while looking about, spoke this verse:

> Joyful I'd be, | if I might see | Búrfell and Bala, | Both Lóndranga, | Aðalþegnshóla | And Qndvertnes, | Heiðarkollu | And Hreggnasa, | Drítvík and Mǫl | Before the fosterer's door.[308]

In the skaldic verses, quite a few Icelandic place names appear. For instance, Lóndrangar are the two basalt rock ridges on the south side of Snæfellsnes; Drítvik is the bay where pagan gods were worshipped in ancient times; and Búrfell refers to a wide range of mountains in Iceland.[309] Existing in Helga's mental perception, these natural landscapes of Iceland may well be read as condensed expressions of Helga's memory of Snæfellsnes. They may also project Helga's homesickness, thus possibly implying her awareness that the deprivation of joy in Greenland may be attributed to her separation from Iceland, her native land.[310]

For such a tough woman as Helga, who might not be expected to bemoan her misfortune with a melodramatic tone, the implicit *nature writing* encoded in the list of place names may be seen as the agency by which the recess of Helga's mind is externalised. In Tilley's words, recounting place names could "transform the sheerly physical and geographical into something that is historically and socially experienced".[311] In Helga's case, recalling the natural scenes of Iceland via their appellations may be taken as an intense ventilation of Helga's nostalgia. While references are made to the volcano, cliff, beach, and gravel of Snæfellsnes, the list of place names could render Helga's recollection of Iceland's natural landscapes as a palimpsest foregrounding her instinctual reminiscence of her motherland and past life, which, in the meantime, may also gesture towards Helga's suppressed emotion and psychological uneasiness.

From another perspective, the versified landscapes may also be interpreted as a crystallisation of Helga's profound loneliness. Segregated and demonised in Greenland, Helga has barely anyone to talk with, but can only resort to her vague memory of Iceland's natural

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[308] Ewing (1987), p. 51.
[309] See https://www.geo.de/reisen/reiseziele/541-rtkl-islands-westen-vier-tagen-durch-die-farbenpracht; https://hiticeland.com/places_and_photos_from_iceland/dritv%C3%ADk; and Thordarson, Thor and Hoskuldsson, Armann. *Classic Geology in Europe 3. Iceland.* Harpenden 2002, p. 85.
[310] Straubhaar, Sandra Ballif. *Old Norse Women's Poetry: The Voices of Female Skalds*. D. S. Brewer: Cambridge, 2011, p. 34.
[311] Tilley, Christopher. *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments*. Oxford, UK; Providence, R.I.: Berg, 1994, p. 18.

sceneries as the object of emotional ventilation. To some extent, therefore, the list of void place names may also function as an aggrandiser of Helga's inner forlornness and melancholy, thus prone to arousing the readerships' compassion for this heroic, woe-stricken woman.

According to the present dissertation, Helga in Greenland suffers first and foremost from Skeggi's bigamy. After separating from Bárðr and losing fatherly love, Helga is abandoned by Skeggi, therefore once again bereft of male protection. As the narrative goes, Helga declines her "scandalised father" Bárðr's paternal company and then further sequesters herself from the world. In despondency, she dwells in a crater, unguarded by any male:

> Eigi undi Helga hjá fǫður sínum ok hvarf þaðan í burt ok þýddist hvárki náliga menn né fénað eða herbergi. Var hon þá optast í hreysum eða hólum. Við hana er kenndr Helguhóll í Drangahrauni, ok miklu viðar eru ǫrnefni við hana kennd um Ísland. Hon þá vetrvist at Hjalla í Ölfusi, en ekki Guðrún Gjúkadóttir, þó at þat segi nökkurir menn, hjá þeim feðgum Þóroddi ok Skapta. Var Helga þar með dul ok lá í yztu sæng í skála um vetrinn ok hafði fortjald fyrir. Hon sló hǫrpu nær allar nætr, því at henni varð þá enn sem optar ekki mjǫk svefnsamt. Austmaðr var með þeim feðgum, er Hrafn hét. Opt töluðu menn um þat, at eigi þóttust vita, hver þessi kona var. Hrafn leiddi þar einnhverr mestan grun á, ok eina nótt forvitnaðist hann undir tjaldit konan frið mjök. Vildi hann upp í sængina ok undir klæðin hjá henni, en hon vildi þat gekk í Hrafni Austmanni inn hægri handleggr ok inn vinstri fótleggr.[312]

> Helga was not content to live with her father, and she disappeared, becoming attached neither to man nor beast nor dwelling. Most often she was in caves or hollows then. Helga's Cave in Drangahraun is named after her, and very widely around Iceland places are named after her. At Hjalli and Ölfuss it was she and not Guðrún Gjúkadóttir as certain men claimed, who accepted winter quarters from Þóroddr and Skafti, his son. Helga was there secretly, and that winter she lay in the hall's outermost bed with a curtain in front. She played the harp nearly every night, because she was not often very sleepy then. An Easterner named Hrafn stayed with Þóroddr and Skate then. Though it was often discussed, no one seemed to know who the woman behind the curtain was. One night, Hrafn, one of the most suspicious, was drawn to the spot and he looked behind the curtain. He saw Helga sitting up, wearing a shirt. To him she seemed a very beautiful woman. He tried to get up into bed under the bedclothes near her, but she would have none of that. They grasped hold of each other, and when they parted, Hrafn´s right arm and left leg were broken.[313]

[312] *Bárðar saga*, pp. 122-124.
[313] Ewing (1987), pp. 58–59.

In the above extract, Helga's place of residence, especially the layout of her grotto-chamber, may bear particular referential meanings that contribute to Helga's characterisation and plot progression.

Firstly, cave and hollow could provoke an aura of emptiness — a possible symbol of Helga's unsubstantial life where both male company and her inherent ambitiousness are extinct. And the exterior cave may be seen as an intensifier of Helga's interior loneliness, building her female image as a pitifully abandoned wife who is languishing in alienation and demonstrating a strain of misanthropy.

Secondly, the hollowness and shabbiness of Helga's living residence seems redolent of Helga's barrenness, which may well be taken as the fundamental reason for her separation from Skeggi. Helga's sterility is elucidated in the following paragraph:

> Um summarit eptir fór Skeggi til Nóregs ok Helga með honum, ok var hann þar vetr annan. At sumri eptir fór hann til Íslands ok heim til Reykja til bús sins; Helga fór ok heim með honum. Ekki hafa þau barna átt, svá at getit sé.[314]

> During the following summer Skeggi went to Norway with Helga, and he stayed there another winter. The following summer he travelled to Iceland and returned home to his farm at Reykr. Helga also travelled home with him. They had no children then as far as can be guessed.[315]

Having lived with Skeggi for two years, Helga is unable to conceive any child or heir for her husband, which may well imply that Helga fails to fulfil her wifely duty. Metaphorically, the void of Helga's grotto chamber may bear innuendoes to her lack of fecundity and, by means of contrastive illumination, hint at the disparity between Helga's strong physical build and her infertility.

Thirdly, living in the vacant cavity, Helga's character would seem to defy any clear-cut categorisation. She might not be properly classified as a human nor a beast, but may swing between the anthropoid and the beastly, just as her territory of residence partakes of liminality. Historically speaking, the first description of Icelandic cave traces back to Adam of Bremen's eleventh-century account, in which Icelanders are described as follows:

[314] *Bárðar saga*, pp. 116–117.
[315] Ewing (1987), p. 52.

> In subterraneis habitant speluncis, communi tecto et strato gaudentes cum pecoribus suis.[316]
>
> They would live in underground caves, glad to have roof and bed in common with their cattle.[317]

This situation, in turn, seems echoing Vésteinn Ólasson's opinion that in the post-classical *Bárðar saga*, Iceland's settlement is largely equivalent to "cave inhabitation".[318] Indeed, textual evidence elucidates that "Bárðr was sent to be fostered by the half-giant Dofri, where he was raised in a cave in more monstrous style".[319] Therefore, Helga's residence in the den may not be taken simply as a desolate abode; rather, it could also be held as a sign of Bárðr and his daughter's similar fate.

Moreover, Helga's cave in *Bárðar saga* may be viewed in relation to monstrosity. This setting may well be understood as where contaminative power and potential danger lurk insidiously. For instance, *Bárðar saga* also involves Svalr and Þúfa — the two normal settlers that transformed into trolls after entering into mountain caves and then were slain by Bárðar.[320] According to Price's symbolic interpretation, cave in such *Íslendingasögur* as *Bárðar saga, Kjalnesinga saga and Gull-Þóris saga* are "sites for maturation and monstrous transformation", which is a "liminal position in an initiation to adulthood".[321] In other words, the cave may betoken the "liminal, transformational power", witness certain protagonists' "initiatory transformations" and,[322] in terms of plot progression, serve as a "devices for narrative development".[323]

As for Helga, when she retreats to the cave, she is precisely in the initial phase of womanhood. Thus, the cave may be properly seen as where her maturation takes place, as well as where her understanding of self-identity develops. Regarding Helga's self-identity, it seems rather controversial. By descent, she is of trollish extraction, whereas by consent and action, she does not behave in a blatantly monstrous manner. She is not bloodthirsty or

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316 Ahronson, Kristján. *Into the Ocean: Vikings, Irish, and Environmental Change in Iceland and the North.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014, p. 101.
317 Translation mine.
318 Ólasson, Vésteinn. "Family Sagas", in *A Companion to Old Norse-Icelandic Literature and Culture*, ed. Rory McTurk, Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2011, pp. 114-115.
319 McLennan, Alistair. *Monstrosity in Old English and Old Icelandic Literature*. Ph. D thesis, University of Glasgow, 2010, p. 152.
320 *Bárðar saga*, p. 113.
321 Price, Basil A. *Doors, Caves, and Mounds: Liminal Spaces and the Fantastic in the Post-Classical Sagas.* MA thesis, University of York, 2018, p. 53.
322 Ibid., p. 43.
323 Ibid., p. 75

ruthless. The most devastating influence that she could have on others might be her harp music, which keep people awake at night. In this respect, even though Helga would appear to be a retaliative, grieving woman, in no way does she seem to be a heinous she-monster like, for instance, Grendel's mother. Behind her harp-playing, the present dissertation discerns her inexpressibly complex human emotion, ranging from the dolour of loneliness to her inclination to renounce the world.[324] All these plots revolving around the setting of the desolate cave would appear to co-construct Helga's image as woman "in limbo".

Moreover, the curtain in Helga's grotto-chamber may be interpreted as what delineates her individual sphere. And in terms of characterisation, it could enhance Helga's mysteriousness and inaccessibility, for while it further sequesters Helga, it could also block her from the disturbance from outside. Since the curtain separates Helga from the external world, the space behind the curtain would seem representative of Helga's interiority and private life, possibly also including her sexual life. As the narrative goes, Helga well defends herself from Hrafn's unsolicited sexual harassment, hurting Hrafn's arm and leg. This may suggest that Helga is not a sexually voracious she-monster, but more like a woman of principle and dignity. To some degree, Helga's abstinence from sexual intercourse with Hrafn may well render the cave-setting comparable to an anchoritic cell.

In his monograph on the sexual relationships between giantesses and Odinic heroes in Old Norse literature, John McKinnell detects that the otherworldly figures — gendered as female and affiliated with the chthonic sphere — often dwell inertly beyond society in passive possession of wisdom or goods from male heroes.[325] Along this line, Helga's cave may be likened to an otherworldly field; and thus, her marriage with Skeggi, who comes to Greenland from Iceland for business and profits, may well be conceived as an agency by which the extent of Helga's Germanic heathenism is augmented. Yet after Skeggi's departure, quite contrarily, Helga has more liberty to reconsider her pagan identity. This could possibly turn her place of residence as a realm of reflection, contemplation, and mortification, which may explain why Helga refrains from sexual gratification in times of loneliness and dejection. For the present MA project, Helga in her cave would appear now as a religious woman in her spiritual realm, dissociated from earthliness, now as an aggrieved, abandoned woman replete

[324] See Helga's skald: "Braut vilk bráðla leita. / Brestr eigi stríð í flestu / mér fyrir menja rýri. / Mun ek dáliga kálast, / þvit auðspenni unnak / allteitum sefa heitum. / Sorg mák sízt því byrgjia. / Sitk ein. Trega greinum", from *Bárðar saga*, p. 122. Translation goes as follows: "Because of the gold-giver / I must go soon from here / Strife eats my soul / In pain I will pine / for my passion, once pure, / glad and strong, that I had. / I gape open with grief. / I speak sorrow to myself", culled from Straubhaar (2011), p. 53.
[325] McKinnell, J. *Meeting the Other in Norse Myth and Legend*. Cambridge UP, 2005, p. 175.

with misanthropist sentiments. This would seem reminiscent of Helga's inclination to desist from mundane undertakings, as accentuated in her skald beginning with the lament, "Away is my want".[326]

Also, considering that "for a time Gestr was raised by Helga",[327] Helga did perform motherly philanthropy to her kindred brother for roughly eight years. And when she brought Grestr back to his mother Þórdís, Helga "did not hesitate, but left at once",[328] which demonstrates her sincere kindness to her brother. Obviously, Helga's experiences in the cave does not turn her into a monstrous, dreadful virago, but breeds her inner development, transforming her, as it seems, into a solitary woman of female heroism, psychological complexity, and a tinge of Christian benevolence.

That being the case, the *nature writing* about Helga's hollow grotto-chamber seems not only gesturing towards her isolated status, barrenness, and liminality, but also touching on her pagan-Christian nature, thus externalising the wealth of her emotional undercurrents.

[326] Ewing (1987), p. 33.
[327] *Bárðar saga*, Chapter 11; Ewing (1987), p. 74-75.
[328] Ewing (1987), p. 76.

6 Eco-Narratological Construction of Gender in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*

Then let the good citizen here find marvels of nature:
The horse-shoe ravine, the issue of steam from a cleft
In the rock, and rocks, and waterfalls brushing the
Rocks, and among the rocks birds.

And the student of prose and conduct places to visit:
The sites of the church where a bishop was put in a bog,
The bath of a great historian, the rock where an
Outlaw dreaded the dark.

— *Journey to Iceland*, by W. H. Auden

In this chapter I argue that the eco-narratives in *Grettis saga* could contribute towards the fashioning of both male and female characters, hinting at their psychological movements while heralding their inner maturation. And certain natural objects that recur in *Grettis saga*, like the moon, the sea, the light, and certain animals, could, as it seems, not only bear metaphorical-theological connotations, but also — in terms of gender construction — shed light on the performance of certain medieval Icelanders' pagan-Christian masculinity and heroic femininity.

6.1 *Nature Writing* and Grettir's Christian Masculinity

It is found that in medieval European literature, the natural objects mentioned above can in certain contexts be rich in allegorical and theological connotations.[329] As far as *Grettis saga*

[329] See, for instance, Parker, Joanne. "Ruling the Waves: Saxons, Viking, and the Sea in the Formation of an Anglo-British Identity in the Nineteenth Century", in Sobecki, Sebastian I (ed.), *The Sea and Englishness in the Middle Ages: Maritime Narratives, Identity and Culture*, D. S. Brewer, Cambridge, 2001, pp. 195-206; Wilt, Brian David. "*Geofon Deaðe Hweop*: Poetic Sea-Imagery as Anglo-Saxon Cultural Archetype". MA thesis, Truman State University (Kirksville, Missouri), 2014; and Wyatt, Ian. "Narrative Functions of Landscape in the

Ásmundarsonar is concerned, they could not only externalise Grettir's psychological undercurrents and foreshadow his Christian transformation,[330] but also shape and comment on his pagan-Christian masculinity.[331] Regarding the eco-narratological fashioning of Grettir's pagan-Christian masculinity and Thorfinn's wife's appreciation of it, *nature writing* functions in three major aspects:

Firstly, the moonlight and darkness could possibly hint at Grettir's awareness of his decreasing physical puissance behind the veneer of his temporary robustness.

Secondly, the marine setting and Nordic frigidity might imply that as an outlaw, Grettir undergoes divine punishment, whereby to atone for his criminal past; and during his solitary wandering, he seems impelled to reconsider the Christian essence of mundane sufferance. Accordingly, Grettir's masculinity would appear evolving to be less heathen but tinged with indelible Christian features.[332]

Thirdly, the candlelight provided by Thorfinn's wife could be read as a token for her acknowledgment of Grettir's altruism, as well as her recognition of Grettir's masculine, heroic air.[333] This seems to suggest that Grettir, stricken by depression, is still corrigible and redeemable from the religious point of view. In the meantime, Grettir's embryonic Christian masculinity seems emerging and echoing Thorfinn's wife's brand-new view of him.

Old Icelandic Family Sagas", in *Land, Sea and Home: Proceedings of a Conference on Viking-period Settlement at Cardiff*, *July 2001*, John Hines, Alan Lane and Mark Redknap (eds.), Leeds: Maney, 2004, pp. 55-73.

[330] Grettir's Christian transformation is not a well-fulfilled one; but until his death, Grettir remained a pagan-Christian hero. The coexistence of pagan and Christian features within Grettir has been noticed by previous scholarships. See, for example, DuBois, Thomas A. "Rituals, witnesses, and sagas", in Anders Andrén, Kristina Jennbert, Catharina Raudvere (eds.), *Old Norse Religion in Long-Term Perspectives: Origins, Changes, and Interactions*, Nordic Academic Press, 2006, pp. 74-78, at p. 77; and Lasota, Kornelia. "The 'Grettis Saga' through Time and Space: An Exploration of Topics in Old Norse Sagas", in *Academic Journal of Modern Philology*, vol. 10, 2020, pp. 157-162.

[331] As for the commenting function of narrative plots and imageries within the scope of modern narratology, see Section 2.3 of the present dissertation or refer to Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978, p. 19.

[332] The frigid marine setting may also bear positive connotations under certain circumstances. See, for instance, Cucina, Carla (2012) which discusses the redemptive potentials of the gelid seawater. This point will be further elaborated in Section 6.1.2 of the present dissertation.

[333] I consider the textual reference to the candlelight as *nature writing* in the sense that light is a non-human object.

6.1.1 Darkness, Moonlight, and Grettir's Declining Puissance

According to Chapter XIX,[334] after slaying the two berserkers, Grettir feels "ákafliga móðr ok stirðr" [completely exhausted and stiff].[335] In the meantime, Grettir is wreathed in Norway's wintery frigidity, for "veðr gerði kalt mjök með fjúki" [the weather was very cold with a gust of storm].[336] Moreover, "en mikit var af nótt" [the night was almost over].[337] In this regard, coldness and darkness would appear to coexist and potentially interact with Grettir's fatigue.[338]

Curiously enough, it would seem patent that Grettir throughout the whole saga may qualify, in most cases, as a personification of indefatigability. He is rarely worn out or dispirited. For instance, even on deathbed, he keeps summoning up the least of sinew to fight against Thorbjorn Hook.[339] Thus, Grettir's exhaustion may not be taken simply as a literal description of his physical condition; rather, it could also reflect his mentality and innermost emotion, which, to be exact, may well be anchored to Grettis's emerging awareness about his declining puissance and, by extension, the finiteness of human life.

To substantiate this point, it may be worthwhile to divert attention temporarily to Chapter XXXV, for only in this chapter does Grettir go through a similar fit of extreme tiredness after having eye-contact with Glámr — the haunting revenant.[340] In this chapter,

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[334] A synopsis of this chapter is as follows: At the end of December, when Norway was in the trip of wintery frigidity, Thorfinn Karsson travelled to the mainland in Slysfjord for the Yule feast, accompanied by thirty freemen. He left his wife to look after their sick daughters who had just turned marriageable. Thorfinn's absence bereaved his wife and daughters of male protection, and to their misfortune, the "emasculated" household was harassed on the Eve of the Yule by Thorir Paunch and Ogmund the Ill-Willed — the most notorious and ferocious berserkers of that time. Consequently, all the women under Thorfinn's roof were threatened by ravishment and deflowering. As the only male within reach, Grettir saved the endangered women from defilement. By trickery, he entrapped the berserkers in a hut; then, he slew and injured them one by one with his extraordinary physical strength, exhibiting awesome masculine power. After Grettir freed the whole household from shame, the mistress was deeply grateful and apologetic for her previous inhospitality. She withdrew her prejudices against Grettir the outlaw but developed an ardent admiration for him.

[335] Byock (2009), p. 60.

[336] Translation mine.

[337] Byock (2009), p. 60.

[338] The original is quoted as follows: "Þar áttusk þeir lengi við, en um síðir drap Grettir báða; var þá ákafliga móðr ok stirðr, en mikit var af nótt. Veðr gerði kalt mjök með fjúki. Nennti hann þá eigi at leita víkinganna þeira tveggja, er þá váru eptir; gekk hann nú heim til bœjar" (*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 69). Jesse Byock's translation is as follows: "In the end Grettir killed them both. By then he was completely exhausted and stiff. The night was almost over, and outside it was cold, with blowing snow. Deciding not to search for the two Vikings who were still alive, he went home to the farmstead" (Byock 2009: 60).

[339] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, Chapter 82.

[340] Sometimes *Glámr* is referred to as a *draugr* by commentators, but Glámr is never referred to as one in the text, though he is called a "troll". Ármann Jakobsson suggests that like the vampire, the undeadness was transmitted to him after an attack by whatever was haunting the farm. See Jakobsson, Ármann. "Vampires and watchmen: Categorizing the mediaeval Icelandic undead", in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, no. 110, vol. 3, 2011, pp. 294-295.

Grettir is paralysed for quite a while as a result of being petrified by Glámr's fearsome face and particularly his eyes that stare piercingly into Grettir's interiority against the spooky background of a wandering moon occasionally veiled by the ubiquitous darkness:

> Fell hann svá opinn ok ǫfugr út ór húsunum, en Grettir á hann ofan. Tunglskin var mikit úti ok gluggaþykkn; hratt stundum fyrir, en stundum dró frá. Nú í því er Glámr fell, rak skýit frá tunglinu, en Glámr hvessti augen upp í móti, ok svá hefir Grettir sagt sjálfr, at þá eina sýn hafi hann sét svá, at honum brygði við. Þá sigaði svá at honum af ǫllu saman, mœði ok því, er hann sá, at Glámr gaut sínum sjónum harðliga, at hann gat eigi brugðit saxinu ok lá náliga í milli heims ok heljar.[341]
>
> Glam, now off balance, came crashing out of the house with Grettir on top of him. Outside it was bright in the moonlight, with gaps here and there in the cloud cover. On and off, the moon shone through. Just as Glam fell the clouds moved, revealing the moon. Glam stared up at the light, and Grettir later said that this sight was the only one that had ever scared him. Exhaustion and the sight of Glam's threatening eyes now took their toll, and Grettir's strength left him. Unable to draw his sax, he lay between life and death.[342]

1) *The Moonlight*

According to the present dissertation, the moon in the above quote may be perceived as a foil to Glámr's dreadful appearance, and the moonlight would seem to enact an auxiliary role in foregrounding Glámr's evil potential. Generally, the foreboding moonlight in Old Icelandic literature could, in given contexts, be interpreted as a mechanism whereby certain protagonists' paranormal potency is enhanced.[343] For instance, Jakobsson has pointed out that the moonlit setting usually bears witness to the metamorphosis (*hamask*) of berserkers and werewolves into incomprehensible, threatening beings.[344] In this regard, I consider that in Chapter XXXV of *Grettis saga*, while the moon rises, shedding light on Glámr's augmenting degree of creepiness, the uncanny natural surrounding may, in turn, also seem to foreshadow

[341] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 121.
[342] Byock, Jesse (2009), pp. 101–102.
[343] See, for example, the werewolf's shape-shifting and the *tvngls tvigari / itrollz hami* [moon-snatcher in troll-wife] in st. 39 of *Vǫluspá* in the Codex Regius (stanza 25 in Hauksbók and also cited in *Snorra Edda*; *Norræn forkvæði*, 16, 21 and 30; *Edda Snorra Sturlusonar*, 19). See Jakobsson, Ármann. *Nine Saga Studies: The Critical Interpretation of the Icelandic Sagas*. University of Iceland Press, Reykjavik, 2013, pp. 146-148.
[344] Ibid., p. 149.

Grettir's enfeeblement and debilitation — temporary but penetrating — in the face of the haunting darkness, unusual moonlight, and his horrifying enemy.[345]

Noteworthily, while such a combination of freaky moonlight and Glam's threatening eyes could despoil Grettir of all his physical strength, it may, as the text indicates, also put him in a liminal position, i.e., "milli heims ok heljar" [between heaven and hell].[346] In this regard, the moon would seem to not only witness Grettir's declining physicality, but also function as a bell tolling for Grettir,[347] delivering death-related messages.

As a *topos*, indeed, the mutual illumination between moonlight and the imminent death is a recurring image in quite a few Old Icelandic sagas. For instance, in *Brennu-Njáls saga*, a narrative that is "fraught with violence, tragedy, and ultimately with death",[348] Skarpheðinn and Hǫgni witness "a very merry Gunnarr smiling within his grave mound as he stares up at the moon",[349] which happens immediately after Gunnarr loses his brother and foresees his own death.[350] Moreover, as Mayburd has point out, "the motif of glaring full-moon-like eyes is frequently encountered in Viking Age Scandinavian woodcarving".[351] And this type of woodcarving is, according to Turville-Petre, most characteristically represented on the sculpted male head from a cart that is part of the Oseberg ship burial — another death-related undertaking.[352] Additionally, Berg has also proposed that in Old Norse myth and poetry,

> the sun has connotations of light and life, whereas moon connotes the opposite, namely death. As *sinni mána*, the moon's 'companion', the sun could then refer to light or life as the companion, or counterpart, of death.[353]

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[345] As will be elaborated later, the moon and moonlight in medieval Icelandic culture is conventionally associated with life and death, arousing people's sense of horror and awe in the face of the unfathomable (super-)natural world. This point is further summarised from the cognitive-psychological perspective in Lovecraft (1973): "Children will always be afraid of the dark, and men with minds sensitive to hereditary impulse will always tremble at the thought of the hidden and fathomless worlds of strange life which may pulsate in the gulfs beyond the stars, or press hideously upon our own globe in unholy dimensions which only the dead and the moon-struck can glimpse". See Lovecraft, Howard Phillips. *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, New York: Dover, 1973, p. 129. Cf. Mayburd, Miriam (2014), p. 129.
[346] Translation mine.
[347] This is with reference to Byock's literary translation where Glam's threatening eyes are described as "taking their toll". See Byock, Jesse (2009), p. 102.
[348] Crocker, Christopher. "To Dream Is to Bury: Dreaming of Death in 'Brennu-Njáls Saga'", in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 114, no. 2, 2015, p. 291.
[349] Ibid., p. 291.
[350] *Brennu-Njáls saga*, ed. Einar Ólafur Sveinsson, pp. 192–193.
[351] Mayburd, Miriam. "The Hills Have Eyes: Post-Mortem Mountain Dwelling and the (Super) Natural Landscape in the *Íslendingasögur*", in *Viking and Medieval Scandinavia*, no. 10, 2014, p. 140.
[352] Turville-Petre, E. O. G. *Myth and Religion in the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*, New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, figure 7.
[353] Berg, Mai Elisabeth. "Myth or Poetry, a Brief Discussion of Some Motives in the Elder Edda", in *Proceeding of 11th International Saga Conference*, eds. Geraldine Barnes & Margaret Clunies Ross, University of Sidney, Australia, 2000, p. 37.

Considering this tripartite correlation between the moon, horrifying eyes, and impending death, it would be safe to interpret Glámr's creepy gaze as an appalling imagery. Moreover, Glámr's gaze, as it is recounted, issues from his dark-blue, wide-open eyes, and it is precisely when "the moon appears from behind a cloud that Grettir's and Glámr's eyes disastrously meet".[354] Consequently, this eye-contact astounds Grettir — "Þórhalli brá nokkuð í brún er hann sá þenna mann",[355] [Þorhallr was somewhat taken aback at the sight of Glámr].[356] So viewed, the moon may be argued to be functional to weaving the covert narrative plot about Grettir's fearfulness, his bodily fatigue, and his growing consciousness about mortality.

Furthermore, I would also take the fatalistic connotation of the moonlit night as crystallised in Glámr's cursing words, which he passes in a prophetic tone to Grettir who is transfixed by the moon's unconceivable supernatural potency. Casting the evil spell to Grettir, Glámr presages that Grettir's physical strength will go irrevocably in decline and that the more murder he commits hereafter, the more he will suffer throughout the rest of his life:

> Þú hefir frægr orðit hér til af verkum þínum, en heðan af munu falla til þín sekðir ok vígaferli, en flest ǫll verk þín snúask þér til ógæfu ok hamingjuleysis […] Þá legg ek þat á við þik, at þessi augu sé þér jafnan fyrir sjónum, sem ek ber eptir, ok mun þér þá erfitt þykkja einum at vera, ok þat mun þér til dauða draga.[357]
>
> You have become famous because of your accomplishments, but from now on you will fall into outlawry and killings. Most of what you do will now turn against you, bringing bad luck and no joy […] And further, I lay this curse upon you: these eyes will always be within your sight, and you will find it difficult to be alone. This will drag you to your death.[358]

As the narrator reveals, Glámr's malediction turns out to be fulfilled soon. Not only does his imprecation smite Grettir with nyctophobia,[359] but it also exacerbates Grettir's ill-

[354] Poole, Russell. "Old Norse/Icelandic Myth in Relation to *Grettis saga*", in *Proceeding of 11th International Saga Conference*, eds. Geraldine Barnes & Margaret Clunies Ross, University of Sidney, Australia, 2000, p. 399.
[355] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 121.
[356] Translation mine.
[357] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 121.
[358] Byock, Jesse (2009), p. 102.
[359] Jungmann, Astrid. *Monstrous Transformations in Old Icelandic Sagas*. MA thesis, University of Iceland, 2011, p. 27.

tempered temperament, especially his irascibility.[360] This, as the narrative progresses, spurs Grettir to conduct more manslaughter, accelerating his doomed decline and fall.[361]

Another essential component of Glámr's curse, more crucially, seems pinpointing the insignificance of Grettir's muscularity and masculinity with respect to his inexorable senescence, infirmity and mortality. It is quoted as follows:

> En þat má ek segja þér, at Þú hefir nu fengit helming afls þess ok þroska, er þér var ætlaðr, ef þú hefðir mik ekki fundit; nú fæ ek þat afl eigi af þér tekit, er þú hefir áðr hreppt, en því má ek ráða, at þú verðr aldri sterkari en nú ertu…[362]

> This much I can tell you: your strength and the stature which you would have reached, had you not sought me out, are now reduced by half. I will not take from you the strength you have already acquired. But it is in my power to decide that you will never become stronger than you are now…[363]

It would, in my view, surface as evident that Glámr's cursing words in the above excerpt point virtually at Grettir's declining puissance and pathetic decease. And Glámr's malediction is not only formidable in content, but also conveyed in a forewarning tone. This fatalistic prophecy, as it seems, can chime in with the moon's pervasive fateful implications in Old Icelandic sagas. As regards the fashioning of Grettir, the moon could not only unfurl a naturalistic background of his fierce battle with Glámr, but also remind Grettir of the impenetrability of human destiny. In Montgomery's monograph on the western imagination of the moon, the moon — which dims and shines, eclipses and rises by nature, is a naturalistic symbol for the growth and decay (as well as ups and downs) of human destiny, thus indicative of the unpredictability and instability of earthliness.[364] In the metaphorical sense, the moon's waxing and waning may well be likened to human beings' maturation and decrepitude. Yet contrary to the moon whose light and shade can alternate and roll on in cycles, there is — at

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[360] After the horrible encounter with Glámr, Grettir's irritability exacerbated and he became scared of the dark. This means that Glámr's curse took effect. As the narrative goes, "Grettir replied that his temperament had not improved. He had much less control now over his anger than previously and reacted even more poorly than before to affronts. One thing he found had greatly changed. He had become a man so scared of the dark that he dared not travel alone after darkness fell, since he saw in his imagination all kinds of apparitions" (Byock 2009: 103). The original is "Grettir kvað ekki batnat hafa um lyndisbragðit ok sagðisk nú miklu verr stilltr en áðr, ok allar mótgørðir verri þykkja. Á því fann hann mikla muni, at hann var orðinn maðr svá myrkfælinn, at hann þorði hvergi at fara einn saman, þegar myrkva tók; sýndisk honum þá hvers kyns skrípi, ok þat er haft síðan fyrir orðœki, at þeim ljái Glámr augna eða gefi glámsýni, er mjǫk sýnisk annan veg en er". See *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, pp. 122-123.
[361] Ibid.
[362] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 121.
[363] Byock, Jesse (2009), p. 102.
[364] Montgomery, Scott L. *The Moon and the Western Imagination*, University of Arizona Press, 1999, pp. 18-22.

least in the biological sense — hardly any chance for a mortal to rejuvenate or revive. Referring implicitly to such the tension between the ephemerality of human life and the everlastingness of nature, the narrator would appear to hint at the fleetingness of Grettir's corporeal existence, possibly also hinting at Grettir innermost presentiment about his declining physical strength.

2) *The Darkness*

It is argued that juxtaposed with the spooky moon, darkness may be interpreted as another connotative image in Chapter XIX and Chapter XXXV of *Grettis saga*. Regarding the hidden meanings of darkness, Ritzke-Rutherford has argued that in Anglo-Saxon England and coeval Scandinavia, the literary embodiment of "darkness stands for evil and even death" in contexts related to the Biblical tradition and homiletic writing.[365] Following Ritzke-Rutherford's ground-breaking remarks, the present dissertation notices that darkness as an atmospheric and allegorical image is frequently troped to serve as a foil to monstrosity in Old English and Old Norse-Icelandic poetry.

In *Beowulf*, most tellingly, Grendel is referred to as a *deorc deaþscua* [dark death-shadow] (l. 160a) hovering *in þystrum* [in darkness] (l. 87b) and *sinnihte* [eternal night] (l. 161b). According to Missuno's doctoral dissertation on Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing, the nocturnal darkness in *Beowulf* may be held as comparable to "windows through which hell is ushered in, up to the text's surface and the hall's floor".[366] On that account, correlatively speaking, the nocturnal darkness may be read as a token for the hellish, diabolical, and death-evoking existence or circumstances also in *Grettis saga*, the fourteenth-century *Íslendingasaga* that has been argued to demonstrate distinct similarity to *Beowulf* in terms of both form and theme.[367]

Likewise, in his insightful analysis of *Vǫluspá*, Missuno suggests that the narrative structure of *Vǫluspá* pivots largely on the concept of darkness. He argues that in *Vǫluspá*, Darkness co-occurs with Chaos at the moment of the world's genesis, prevails with fire at

[365] Ritzke-Rutherford, Jean. *Light and Darkness in Anglo-Saxon Thought and Writing*, Frankfurt a. M.; Bern; Cirencester, 1979, p. 175.
[366] Missuno, Filip. *'Shadow' and Paradoxes of Darkness in Old English and Old Norse Poetic Language*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of York, 2012, p. 319.
[367] For the correspondence between *Beowulf* and *Grettis saga*, see Swinford, D. "Form and Representation in *Beowulf* and *Grettis Saga*", in *Neophilologus*, vol. 86, 2002, pp. 613–620, and Spray, Thomas. "Missing Links: *Beowulf*, *Grettis saga* and the Late Romances of William Morris", in *The Journal of William Morris Studies*, vol, XXIII, no. 2, 2019, pp. 31-51.

Ragnarǫk (the end of time) and, after a new world "arises into beauty and light again", makes "an ominous return" together with Death.[368] In short, darkness and shadow in *Vǫluspá* are, as interpreted by Missuno, redolent of doom and mortality.[369] This triadic relationship between Death, Darkness, and Chaos, as manifests itself in the inner logic of *Vǫluspá*, would seem intimating that in both Old English and Old Icelandic literatures, allegorising darkness to advert to the evil, destructive force and the transience of human life is a traceable literary phenomenon.

In both Chapter XIX and Chapter XXXV of *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, Grettir's two victorious battles both begin in a "pitch dark night";[370] and as soon as he triumphs, there comes light — both the natural moonlight and the candlelight prepared by Thorfinn's wife. This narratological design may reveal that Grettir's victory is usually foregrounded or accompanied by light — the absence of darkness. Seen through the opposite lens, the dark night may well be perceived as the hellish agency generating Grettir's nyctophobia in Chapter XXXV; and in Chapter XIX, when Grettir's fatigue reaches its climax, the naturalistic setting is also the tenebrosity of the Yule Eve. These textual evidences in a way suggest that the underlying narrative about nocturnal darkness can be taken as evocative of Grettir's physical decline, emotional discomfort, as well as his inauspicious fate ahead. Also, the pervading darkness in narrative background could be viewed as a covert plot gesticulating at the interior weakness behind Grettir's exterior prowess, as well as the limitation of his heroic masculinity in respect to the Providence.

3) *Nature Writing and Gretti's Masculinity*

In consideration of the unpromising, death-related connotations of the eerie moonlight and haunting darkness in Old Icelandic literature, the present dissertation holds that these two meteorological phenomena can not only interact with Grettir's declining puissance, but also externalise his awareness about his ill-fated, criminal life and the finiteness of corporeal existence.

In the meantime, the death-evoking implication of the moon and darkness may to a large extent complicate the investigation of how Grettir's masculinity is performed in the eponymous saga. Indeed, as Evans has claimed and normally well received, Grettir's

[368] Missuno, Filip (2012), pp. 247-248.
[369] For a short summary of the structure of the poem see Larrington, Carolyne, tr., *The Poetic Edda*, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996, p. 3.
[370] Byock, Jesse (2009), p. 61.

Germanic heroic masculinity is crystallised first and foremost in his physical-martial prowess and intrepid character.[371] Yet in my view, while the moon and darkness stimulate Grettir's fatalistic sentiments, his masculinity would seem to be undergoing a certain degree of "emasculation". In this sense, an episode that testifies to Grettir's decreasing manliness may be in want of particular scholarly attention. It is a plot in Chapter XXXV, where Grettir "gat eigi brugðit saxinu" after vanquishing Glámr, i.e., he "was unable to brandish his sax" after defeating the horrible foe.[372]

Considering that in medieval Germanic literature, such weapons as knife, swords, and axe could — it is, needless to say, under the influence of postmodern literary theories — be "viewed as masculine symbols because of their apparently phallic shape",[373] Grettir's inability to wield his weapon may well be deciphered as a metonymy for his declining masculinity and muscularity.[374] Hence, while the underlying eco-narratives about the moon and tenebrosity could potentially foreground Grettir's declining puissance, they may also, by and large, be conceived as responsive to Grettir's performance of virility — his quality of having strength, energy, and a strong sex drive — and the dearth of it.[375] In reality, literary references to Grettir's pagan-Christian masculinity are more conspicuous in the *nature writing* about the coldness of medieval Scandinavia, which is to be illustrated immediately in the following section.

6.1.2 Marine Setting, Frigidity, and Grettir's Pagan-Christian Masculinity

In this section I attempt to argue that Grettir's pagan-Christian masculinity can be held as partially shaped by the eco-narratives of the gelid sea and freezing weather of medieval Scandinavia. For Grettir, an outlaw on the run, the frigidity and bleakness of the Christmas

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[371] Evans, Gareth Lloyd. *Modes of Men: The Construction and Problematization of Masculinities in the "Íslendingasögur",* Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford, 2015, p. 35.
[372] Translation mine. Old Norse *saxinu* is a cognate of Old English *seax*, meaning "knife", of Germanic origin, from Indo-European root meaning "cut". See *Oxford Etymological Dictionary*.
[373] Brunning, Susan Elaine. *The 'Living' Sword in Early Medieval Northern Europe: An Interdisciplinary Study*. Ph.D. dissertation, Institute of Archaeology, University College London, 2013, p. 33.
[374] In medieval Germanic literature, like *Beowulf*, there is the basic resemblance between sexual intercourse and battle. The use of fingers, knife, or sword to penetrate clothing or the body bears indelible sexual implications, the latter always "accompanied by the implied figurative kinship between the sword and the phallus and between decapitation and castration". See Nitzsche, Jane C. "The Structural Unity of 'Beowulf': The Problem of Grendel's Mother", in *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 22, no. 3, 1980, pp. 287-303, at pp. 293-295. For a textual analysis of sword and masculinity in *Beowulf*, see Oswald, Dana M. *Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature*, D. S. Brewer, 2010, pp. 92-101.
[375] Grettir's "disabled masculinity" appears quite a few times in *Grettis saga*, typically embodied by Grettir's small penis in Chapter 72. According to Morrow (2020), Grettir "must perform a violent, non-consensual sexual act in order to 'reclaim' his masculinity". See Morrow, Meg Suzannah. *Disabled Masculinity: An Intersectional Analysis of the Icelandic Sagas*. MA thesis, University of Oslo, 2020, p. 47.

Eve in Norway (narrated in Chapter XIX) may not be viewed merely as a realistic exhibition of the natural surrounding or a projector of Grettir's physical affliction. Rather, the marine setting and frigidity could be read as a medium whereby Grettir attains spiritual purification and refines his heroic masculinity with Christian elements.[376] The rich theological overtones of the natural objects — especially the sea, ice, and light in Chapter XIX will be interpreted as allegorical references to Grettir's potential Christian transformation.

With resort to intertextual evidence, this section extracts a "dualistic implication" encoded in the image of the "frigid sea" by whose agency the icy marine setting could reflect the multiple facets and layers of Grettir's character, especially his manliness and inner Christian potentials, on the narratological level.

It is further found that marine narrative setting in *Grettis saga* can to a large extent encompass not only the sea's negative theological connotations pertaining to crime, sufferance, and punishment, but also its positive connotations in relation to the prospect of attaining the Christian promise land via physical affliction and/or spiritual exile.[377] The latter case, as to be substantiated in 6.1.2.2, will involve intertextual analyses of certain classical Latin excerpts that are worthy of being compared with their Old Norse-Icelandic and Old English counterparts. Ultimately, the twofold overtone of the gelid sea will be argued to correspond to Grettir's hybrid pagan-Christian profile, thus contributing, as a meaningful image in the covert plot, towards the construction of Grettir's pagan-Christian masculinity.

1) *Frigidity, Crime, and Punishment*

In Chapter XIX, Grettir is worn out after chasing and slaying the berserkers. Then the weather condition aggravates; freezing coldness and heavy snow ravage, heaping penetrating coldness opon Grettir. This makes him stagnant on the bloody Christmas Eve and possibly also evokes his fatalistic pensiveness, as the following quotes insinuates:

[376] According to Cohen Esther, what is termed "physical pain" nowadays is an oxymoron, for "pain, in the later Middle Ages, belonged far more in the soul than in the body. The expression of the sensation, therefore, was bound by norms of volition and soul. When the soul broke its boundaries of sanity, the body followed". See Cohen, Esther. "The Animated Pain of the Body", in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 105, no. 1, 2000, p. 68.

[377] As a trope, the Christian allegorical journey "from exile to the promised land" has its root in the Bible, where in the beginning chapters of *Genesis* the story is told about the fall of man and his subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden under the curse of death (Genesis 3:22). Meanwhile, as the father of Israel, Abram was given the promise of a land wherein his descendants would be established as a holy nation and through whom the process of redemption would be brought to fruition (Genesis 12: 1-2).

> Þar áttusk þeir lengi við, en um síðir drap Grettir báða; var þá ákafliga móðr ok stirðr, en mikit var af nótt. Veðr gerði kalt mjök með fjúki.[378]
>
> In the end Grettir killed them both. By then he was completely exhausted and stiff. The night was almost over, and outside it was cold, with blowing snow.[379]

By contrast, however, it is also in Chapter XIX that the weather condition before Grettir's sanguinary fighting with the berserkers is portrayed to be rather clement. Accordingly, Grettir is also in good mood and high spirits on that clear, calm day:

> Nú kemr atfangadagr jóla; þá var veðr bjart ok kyrrt. Grettir var lengstum úti um daginn ok sá, at skip fóru suðr ok norðr með landi, því at hverr sótti til annars, þangat sem samdrykkjan var sett.[380]
>
> As Yule evening approached the weather was clear and calm on Haramarsey. Grettir was outside for much of the day. He watched as ships went north or south along the coast, with people on their way to feasts according to different arrangements.[381]

I consider that the climatic exacerbation at night may be understood as in response to Grettir's self-awareness about his repetitive commitment of manslaughter. According to the plot, in order to save the troubled women from the brink of defilements, Grettir commits murdering again. Although this time it is out of tender sympathy, the unlawful act would still enhance Grettir's sinfulness and criminality. The meteorological severity could therefore be read as a penalty for Grettir's malevolent deeds — his irritability, bloodthirstiness, and failure in maintaining self-control, serving as an underlying plot that could externalise Grettir's inner pain and remorse.

Obviously, Grettir on the Eve of Yule in Haramarsey is surrounded by the frigid Norwegian sea and afflicted by exceedingly cold weather. According to Thomas Hill, "cold water" in Anglo-Saxon England and medieval North may not only connote the physical ordeals,[382] but also bear allusion to "the water [that] rejects the accursed one", i.e. "reject[ing]

[378] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 69.
[379] Byock, Jesse (2009), p. 60.
[380] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 63.
[381] Byock, Jesse (2009), p. 56.
[382] For discussion of swimming or fleeting witches, which is one common form of the Cold Water Ordeals, see the article 'swimming' in Robbins, Rossell Hope. *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*, New York: Crown Publishers, 1959, pp. 492-494.

the body of a sinister".[383] With examples from *Guðrúnarkvǫt*, Hill has also contended that within the scope of Old Norse-Icelandic literature, the cold sea water could, under certain conditions, be compared to a narratological device touching on given criminals' and/or sinners' consciousness about their wrongdoings.[384]

It is worth mentioning that in a prayer anthologised in what Liebermann identifies as the *Iudicium Dei Rituale: Kaltwasser*, the punitive connotation of cold water with regard to people crystal clear of their criminal deeds is elucidated from a theological perspective, as follows:

> Incipit adiuratio aquae. Deus, qui aquarum substantiam iudica tua exercens diluuii inundatione milia populorum interemisti et Noe iustum cum suis saluandum censuisti, Deus qui in mari Rubro cuneos Egyptiorum inuoluisti et agmina Israhelitica inperterrita abire iussisti, uirtutem tuae benedictionis his aquis infundere et nouum ac mirabile signum in eis ostendere digneris, ut innocentes a crimine furti — uel homicidii uel adulterii aut alterius naeui — cuius examinationem agimus, more aquae in se recipiant et in profundum pertrahant, conscios autem huius criminis a se repellant atque reiciant nec patiantur recipere corpus, quod ab onere bonitatis euacuatum uentus

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[383] Hill, Thomas D. "The Weight of Love and the Anglo-Saxon Cold Water Ordeals", in *Reading Medieval Studies* XL, 2014, pp. 35-36.

[384] A classic example provided by Hill (2014) is the prose conclusion to *Atlamál in groenlenzca*, (or the introduction to *Guðrúnarkvǫt*, where Gudrun goes to the sea and casts herself into it after killing her children. She attempts to commit suicide as her Volsung predecessor Signy did; however, the "waters reject Gudrun who floats over the waves" (34). As the original goes, "Guðrún gecc þá til sævar, er hon hafði drepit Atla, gecc út á sæinn ok vildi fara sér. Hon mátti eigi søcqva. Rac hana fyir fiorðinn á land Iónacrs konungs. Hann fecc hennar. Þeirra synir vóru þeir Sǫrli ok Erpr ok Hamðir". Namely "Gudrun went then to the sea when she had killed Atli. She went out on the sea and wished to kill herself. She could not sink. The [sea] swept her across the fjord to the land of Jónakr, the King. He married her. Their children were Sorli, Erpr and Hamðir".

This moment is reprised in an intriguing stanza in *Guðrúnarkvǫt* (stanza 13):

Gecc ec til strandar,
grǫm varc nornom,
vilda ek hrinda
stríð grið þeira;
hófu mik, né drecþo,
hávar báror,
því ec land of stéc,
at lifa skyldac.

I went to the beach
I was angry with the norns
I wished to thrust [myself]
Into their harsh peace [?].
The high waves lifted me, they did not drown me
So that I climbed on land,
So that I must live.

> iniquitatis et inane constituit; quod caret pondere uirtutis, careat pondere propriae substantiae in aquis. Per dominum…[385]
>
> The adjuration of the water begins. Oh God, who using the nature of water, killed thousands of peoples by the inundation of the flood and judged Noe the just one and his [family] to be saved, God who enveloped the battalions of the Egyptians in the Red Sea and ordered the Israelite bands to go unafraid, deign to pour out the power of your blessing on these waters and to show a new and marvellous sign in them so that those innocent of the crime of theft or homicide or adultery or of another disfigurement — whose examination we perform — [these waters] may receive in themselves in the manner of water and may draw [the innocents] to the depth; [but] [those] conscious of this crime may these waters repel from themselves and may they reject them nor may they suffer to receive the body which emptied of the weight of goodness the wind of iniquity lifts up and makes empty; but what is wanting the weight of virtue may be wanting the weight of proper substance in the waters. Through the Lord…[386]

As the prayer reveals, water in the Middle Ages would be adjured to receive the innocent but reject people guilty of such felonies as homicide and disfigurement. As punishment, the sinners would be tortured in the "iniquitous wind of wickedness". For Grettir, he practises manslaughter for quite a few times. In Chapter XIX, for instance, when he is fatigued on the Eve of Yule in Norway, he has just killed and disabled a couple of berserkers.[387] Moreover, Gerttir also suffered from the blowing storm before returning to Thorfinn's farmstead: "veðr gerði kalt mjök með fjúki",[388] [the weather was very cold with a gust of wind]. [389] According to the present dissertation, in terms of how the sinful people are penalised in the theological level, there seems to be a correspondence between the Latin abjuration and Grettir's experiences. In other words, the frigid marine setting and climatic severity concomitant with Grettir in Haramarsey could, in all probability, convey a felonious, punitory undertone.

Moreover, Carla Cucina has argued that images related to cold water — like ice, snow and frost — bear theological allusions to a sense of "restriction and rigidity" in both Old English and Old Norse literatures, since all these natural phenomena convey a sense of

[385] *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen*, ed. by Felix Liebermann, Aalen: Scientia, 1960, i, p. 404; *Iudicium Dei Rituale: Kaltwasser*, ¶ 20. Cf. Hill, Thomas D (2014), p. 36.
[386] Translation culled from Hill, Thomas D (2014), p. 36.
[387] See *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, Chapter XIX.
[388] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 63.
[389] Translation mine.

"congealment and stubbornness".[390] In this regard, the literary embodiment of medieval Northern Europe's atmospheric frigidity can be perceived as a naturalistic metaphor for the satanic power — evil force that confines mortals within mundane corporeality, blocks them from spirituality, and precludes them from attaining the Christian promised land.

Likewise, Salmon has also proposed that in Old English and Old Norse-Icelandic literatures, there seem to be "collocations where 'cold' might bear some sinister meaning" and there is "the traditional association of *cald* in the sense of being 'ill-omened' or 'baleful' [and] 'fateful'".[391] And in philological terms, Old Icelandic "kaldr" usually bears evil implications when used figuratively, referring to "malvagità [e] malevolenza", i.e., "wickedness and malevolence".[392] By extension, the ice-covered land of medieval North can be conceived as where God's grace fails to reach and where God's redemptive power does not take effect. As phrased by Cucina, the frozen North is equivalent to the cursed, antediluvian land shrouded in the "peccato che affligge il mondo dalla caduta dei progenitori", namely "the sin that keeps afflicting the world since the loss of Eden".[393]

Therefore, the ubiquitous meteorological harshness in the backdrop of Grettir's exile may well be interpreted as a metaphor for the intervention of the anti-Christian, diabolical force. And the cold water in the Nordic marine setting — naturalistically existent but figuratively connotative in the meantime —could be read as an "objective correlative",[394] reflecting Grettir's self-consciousness about his sinfulness, penalty, and mortality. Hence, the metaphorical-theological implications of nature in this plot can be argued as infiltrated into the externalisation of Grettir's complex, multi-layered psychological world.[395]

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[390] This metaphorical correspondence between ice and rigidity in medieval European literature has its root in classical Latin literature, particularly works by Ovid, Virgil, Isidore, etc. This point has been well substantiated in Cucina, Carla (2012), pp. 37-39.
[391] Salmon, Vivian. "Some Connotations of 'Cold' in Old and Middle English", in *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 74, 1959, p. 314.
[392] Cucina, Carla (2012), p. 45.
[393] Ibid., p. 35; translation mine.
[394] To quote T. S. Eliot, "[t]he only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked", in Eliot, T. S. "Hamlet and His Problems", in *The Sacred Wood*, 1921, retrieved from https://www.bartleby.com/200/sw9.html (26/04/2021).
[395] The significance of metaphor is self-evident: it is not only the means by which we express ourselves in language, but also the mechanism by which we formulate ideas, namely "we think in metaphors" (Draaisma 2000: 8). Within the cognitive school of thought, the most influential theory is propounded by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. See Draaisma, D. *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*, trans. Paul Vincent, Cambridge, 2000, p. 18; Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago, 1988; and Lakoff, G. & Turner, M. *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor*, Chicago and London, 1980.

2) ***The Sea's Binding Power and Redemptive Potential***

The present dissertation finds that the frigid sea and atmospheric severity — which, as indicated above, includes the ice, frost, and snow coemerging with Grettir in Haramarsey — are rich in polysemous imports not only in the Old Norse-Icelandic sagas, but also in some classical Latin and Old English texts. And thematically, while the eco-narratives revolving around meteorological gelidity in the three traditions can, in certain cases, bespeak the formidability of earthly hardships and the absence of providential grace, pertinent *nature writing* about wintery frigidity may also be held as demonstrating some "connecting power" and, in the meantime, acting as harbinger of the Christian redemption. In the ongoing section, I will substantiate the sea's possible auspicious purports in the characterisation of Grettir by means of intertextual analysis.

Admittedly, ice, frost and snow are allotropical forms of water. Naturalistically, flowing water and ice can both serve as the medium whereby ships advance and navigators reach the opposite shore. In classical Latin literature, a typical reference to the "bridging power" of natural water can be extracted from Ovid's *Tristia*, in which a piece of *nature writing* about Ovid's exile to the Black Sea during the winter of Tomis may well be considered as where the icy water's conjoining potential is crystallised:

> Ipse, papyrifero qui non angustior amne
> miscetur uasto multa per ora freto,
> caeruleos uentis latices durantibus, Hister
> congelat, et tectis in mare serpit aquis;
> quaque rates ierant, pedibus nunc itur, et undas
> frigore concreta ungula pulsat equi;
> perque nouos pontes, subterlabentibus undis,
> ducunt Sarmatici barbara plaustra boues.[396]
>
> The Danube itself, no narrower than lotus-bearing Nile,
> mingling with deep water through many mouths,
> congeals, the winds hardening its dark flow,
> and winds its way to the sea below the ice:
> Feet cross now, where boats went before,
> and horses' hooves beat on waters hard with cold:
> and across this new bridge over the sliding flood
> barbarous wagons are pulled by Sarmatian oxen. [397]

[396] *Tristia* III, x, ll. 27-34.
[397] Translation from *Ovid: The Poems of Exile — Tristia, Ex Ponto, Ibis*. Translated by A. S. Kline, p. Retrievable from https://www.poetryintranslation.com/klineasovidexile.php. 25/04/2021.

In the Ovidian description, the poet sees ships and animals shuttling back and forth on the ice-covered sea-surface. It would appear to be well conceivable that the sea and the land in this scenario are, owing to the glacial temperature, connected by ice. The frozen water is modified as *pons aquarum* [bridge of water];[398] and the conjunctive power of the congealed water would seem rather salient.

Likewise, in Old English poem *Andreas*, the freezing sea water is also troped, in similar fashion, as an incarnation of wintery water's binding force. Yet different from Ovid's portrayal, the allegorical water and ice in *Andreas* would appear as tinged with some indelible Christian essence, seemingly redolent of, and homogeneous with, the sea modified to be "īsig ond ūtfūs" [icy and outbound] in *Beowulf* (l. 33a):[399]

Snaw eorðan band
wintergeworpum ...
..., swylce hrīm ond forst,
hare hildstapan, hæleða eðel
lucon, leoda gesetu. Land wǣron freorig
cealdum cylegicelum, clang wæteres þrym
ofer eastrēamas, īs brycgade
blæce brimrade. (*Andreas,* ll. 1255b - 1262a)

Snow bound the earth
with winter storms ...
…, and frost was like ice —
white-haired warriors, imprisoned the homeland of men,
the dwellings of the people. The land was frozen
in cold icicles, the outburst of water has stopped,

[398] The collocation *pons aquarum* is attested in *Disputatio Pippini cum Albino scolastico*, by Alcuin of York (c. 735-804). Alcuin's response to "*Quid est gelu?*" — the interrogation as to what ice is meant for — is "*persecutor herbarum, perditor foliorum, vinculum terrae, fons aquarum*". In this case, *fons* may have been miscopied as *pons*. And therefore, the atmospheric frigidity could result in both *vinculum terrae* [the constriction of the land] and *pons aquarum* [the bridge of water]. For detail, see Cucina (2012: 39), as well as Martin, B. K. "Aspects of Winter in Latin and Old English Poetry", in *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 68, 1969, p. 384. And Wilmanns, W. "Disputatio regalis et nobilissimi juvenis Pippini cum Albino scholastico", in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum*, vol. 14, 1869, p. 538.

[399] This present dissertation notices that in *Beowulf*, when Scyld Scefing's ship is narrated the iced sea, on which the funeral ship dwells, is portrayed as "īsig" [icy or ice-covered]. Such a trope may be considered to forge a linkage between the funereal atmosphere and the frigid sea, whereby the frozen sea might be likened to Scyld's deathbed and, to the ice-bound sea is, as it seems, attached some death-evoking potential. However, "īsig" is further modified by "ūtfūs", which may well imply that the water is both frozen and outbound. An antithesis is detectable in this case: naturalistically, frozen water does not flow. Such an epithetic oxymoron is, according to the present dissertation, suggestive of the dualist nature of the frigid seawater in the Anglo-Scandinavian poetic context. When frozen, the seawater smacks of lifelessness, caducity and despair; but whilst melting or conceived as thawed, the seawater is invigorated again and overflowing with Christian *spes*. Such a pair of contending significations would appear to be interwoven in the seawater as an allegorical *nature writing*.

above the paths of the rivers, the ice has formed a bridge
above the glittering ways hewn by water flows.[400]

At the core of this poem, *Andreas* recounts how St Andrew overcame physical and mental hardships — especially the turbulent sea, torture, and captivity — during his missionary trekking, as well as how he, after being blinded, still convinced the pagan helmsman of the biblical good news.[401] Thematically, *Andreas* centres on how the eponymous saint's strong Christian faith led to his successful communication of God's words to the land of the cannibalistic Mermedonians.[402] By analogy, the present dissertation finds that while the conjunctive power of the frozen seawater in *Andreas* is manifest in its naturalistic potentiality to link the sea and the shores, this power may well be interpreted as in tune with St Andrew's accomplished evangelisation to the barbarians and pagans, for St Andrew's success in preaching may well be held as a metaphor for how his words transcended the gulf between the Christian and heathen ideological shores, comparable to the icy water's liability to connects opposite, natural shores in the material world.

To some extent, the spread of Christian wisdom may be viewed as akin to a bridge leading to spiritual blessedness, transforming *mare amarum* [the sea of bitterness] into *mare vitae* [the sea of life].[403] Thus, the naturalistic sea in *Andreas* may well be likened to a sea brimming with the Christian holy water and overflowing with the Christian redemptive potential. In a further step, while *pons aquarum* [the bridge of water] could, within the scope of Christian theology, refer to the dissemination of God's teaching to places yet to be emancipated from diabolical control, according to Roberta Frank, the fluidity and capacity of the seawater in *Andreas* shall be be read as in anticipation of Christ's prophesied victory over Satan.[404]

Moreover, the frigid sea's binding power and Christian redemptive potential, as derivable from *Tristia* and *Andreas*, can also be detected in the following excerpt of *Grettis saga*:

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[400] Translation mine.
[401] Scragg, Donald. "Andreas", in Michael Lapidge (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Ltd, 1999, p. 32.
[402] Bolintineanu, Alexandra. "The Land of Mermedonia in the Old English *Andreas*", in *Neophilologus*, no. 93, 2009, pp. 149-164.
[403] Cucina (2021), p. 32.
[404] For a detailed rhetorical-philological analysis of the sea's religious image in *Andreas*, see Frank, Roberta. "The Unbearable Lightness of Being a Philologist", in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 96, no. 4, 1997, pp. 494-495.

> Nú kemr atfangadagr jóla; þá var veðr bjart ok kyrrt. Grettir var lengstum úti um daginn ok sá, at skip fóru suðr ok norðr með landi, því at hverr sótti til annars, þangat sem samdrykkjan var sett. Bóndadóttur var þá batnat, svá at hon gekk með móður sinni.[405]
>
> As Yule evening approached the weather was clear and calm on Haramarsey. Grettir was outside for much of the day. He watched as ships went north or south along the coast, with people on their way to feasts according to different arrangements. By then the farmer's daughter had recovered and was able to walk about with her mother.[406]

Situated on the Yule evening, the calm sea appears to be replete with vigour and vivacity. As the plot reveals, the atmospheric clemency is juxtaposed with Thorfinn's daughters' regaining of health. Considering that pain and illness in the medieval Christian context would be understood as the intermediary to spiritual purification,[407] Thorfinn's daughters' recuperation may evoke a sense of purgation and regeneration. Also, set in the propitious season of Christmas, the recovered health may be seen as a witness to the sea's theological connotation as *mare vitae*, rather than *mare amarum*. Moreover, it is well noticeable that the sea coming into Grettir's view is also where voyagers journey around to participate in Christmas celebrations, especially *samdrykkjan* [the Christian communion]. In this regard, the sea could function, as it seems, also as a material medium whereby the Christian bond can be further strengthened in the early eleventh-century Scandinavia, precisely when this area was, historically speaking, undergoing "a peaceful conversion into Christianity".[408]

In the meantime, there are also some "unpropitious torrents" on the sea in Chapter XIX, possibly implying the misfortunes and signifying the intervention of evil force. As Grettir observes:

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[405] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 63.
[406] Byock, Jesse (2009), p. 56.
[407] Olson (2006/2007) points out that illness in the Middle Ages has been conceived as "a means whereby the king was purified from all filth of sin, if there was any, and thus revived at God's pleasure as His vessel of grace" (77). Also, Rey (1995) notes that "within medieval Christendom, bodily pain possessed an affirmative meaning as that which was to be endured as a divine gift, as a sacrificial offering that allowed the one suffering to share in Christ's passion, or as a sign of purgation that offered the hope of man's redemption" (49). Within medieval religious consciousness, the ideal of *imitatio Christi* and teachings of penitential purgation provide a focal point for the culture's understanding of bodily pain as an affirmative good. For detail, see Le Goff, Jacques. *The Birth of Purgatory*. Trans. Arthur Goldhammer, University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 14-21; Olson, Trisha. "The Medieval Blood Sanction and the Divine Beneficence of Pain: 1100-1450", in *Journal of Law and Religion*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2006, pp. 63-129; and Rey, Roselyne. *The History of Pain*. Harvard UP, 1995.
[408] Byock, Jesse (2009), p. xii.

> Þá sá Grettir, at skip reri at eyjunni; þat var ekki mikit ok skarat skjǫldum milli stafna; skipit var steint fyrir ofan sjá. Þeir reru knáliga ok stefndu at naustum Þorfinns, ok er skipit kenndi niðr, hljópu þeir fyrir borð, sem á váru. Grettir hafði tǫlu á mǫnnum þessum, at þeir váru tólf saman. Ekki þótti honum þeir friðliga láta. Þeir tóku upp skip sitt ok báru af sjá.[409]
>
> Then Grettir saw a ship being rowed towards the island. It was not large, but its side was crowded with shields from stem to stern. It was painted from the waterline up. The crew was rowing hard as they headed straight for Thorfinn's boathouse. When the ship touched both the men jumped onto land. Grettir counted twelve of them, and their intentions did not seem to him peaceful. They lifted their ship and carried it out of the water…[410]

Obviously, the frigid Norwegian Sea in this scene does not appear to be particularly auspicious. Rather, it may seem to serve as a naturalistic agency whereby the berserkers intrude into Thorfinn's household and pillage it, suggesting that while the sea demonstrates its redemptive potential, it is also flowing with diabolical, woe-incurring undercurrents simultaneously.

3) *Allusion to Grettir's Pagan-Christian Character*

As substantiated above, the frigidity and marine setting in Chapter XIX of *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* can be understood as where both pagan and Christian connotations are crystallised. Accordingly, the gusts of storm and cold Nordic Sea that Grettir experienced during his exile may hint at the amalgam of his pagan intransigence and his latent inclination towards Christian transformation.

Drawing on the correlation between *nature writing* and Grettir's gender construction, the present dissertation notices that a textually tenable fact shall not be neglected: Grettir's pagan-Christian character, as already argued by McCreesh and Pencak, is well detectable,[411] principally in that — as Byock later proposed — Grettir is not only a criminal killer and thief, but also "a protector for the weak".[412] According to Kathryn Hume, although Grettir is blatantly irascible and impatient in temperament, he may, given some of his laudable qualities like physical prowess and underlying sense of justice, still purport to be "insufficiently

[409] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 63.
[410] Byock, Jesse (2009), p. 56.
[411] For detail, see McCreesh, Bernadine. "How Pagan Are the Icelandic Family Sagas?" In *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 79, no. 1, 1980, pp. 58-66; and Pencak, William. *The Conflict of Law and Justice in the Icelandic Sagas*, Amsterdam-Atlanta, GA, 1995, pp. 36-52.
[412] Byock, Jesse (2009), p. vii.

Christian" in nature.[413] Moreover, to explain why she still considers that Grettir is, albeit his almost unpardonable flaws and wrongdoings, fashioned to be more of a pagan hero than a Christian in *Grettis saga*, Hume holds that it is because the saga-author, who was in all likelihood a "good Christian" living in the fourteenth century, "felt dissatisfaction with his own age" and therefore expressed his (or her) reflections upon the social reality of pagan-Christian Iceland implicitly via the characterisation of a pagan-Christian Grettir the Strong, who is paradoxical, hybrid, and equally thought-provoking[414]

According to Foote, moreover, while the saga-author "sought the causes for Grettir's downfall", he must have concluded, personally and implicitly, that "the inadequacy of a man's reliance on physical strength and courage" should be the moral lesson expected from Grettir's story.[415] This reconsideration about Grettir's prowess would seem pointing exactly at Grettir's pagan-Christian masculinity: it may suggest the narratorial opinion that Grettir's tragic ending shall be attributed to the futility of his heathen masculinity. And Grettir's need to neutralise his heroic virility with the Christian worldview would appear to surface as what the narrator would have taken as wanted in fourteenth-century Iceland. Correspondingly, Grettir's unaccomplished Christian transformation may be seen as a literary epitome of fourteenth-century Iceland where heathen ideology still influenced certain aspects of social life.[416]

That being the case, it may be safe to assert the dualistic connotation of the natural surrounding on the Christmas Eve is in tune with the double-sidedness of Grettir's masculinity, one that is overtly heathen and covertly Christian. As a matter of fact, the Christian profile of Grettir's selfhood is further magnified by another natural object in Chapter XIX — the light set up by Thorfinn's wife, which could also illumine Grettir's pagan profile *pro negationem*.

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[413] Hume, Kathryn. "The Thematic Design of 'Grettis Saga'", in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 73, no. 4, 1974 p. 474.
[414] Hume, Katheryn. "Beginnings and Endings in the Icelandic Family Sagas", in *MLR*, no. 68, 1973, pp. 593-606, esp. pp. 601-604.
[415] Foote, Peter. "Introduction", from *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, London: Dent, 1965, pp. x-xi.
[416] For a finer-grained picture of Christianity in fourteenth-century Iceland, see Sigurdson, Erika. "Iceland in the Fourteenth Century", in Sigurdson, Erika, *The Church in Fourteenth-Century Iceland*, from *The Northern World*, vol. 72, Brill, 2016, pp. 10-29.

6.1.3 The Light, Grettir's Christian Masculinity, and the Mistress's Admiration

In Chapter XIX of *Grettis saga*, Thorfinn's wife orders that candlelight be set up by the window so that Grettir would be directed back to her farmstead. In this plot, the candlelight in the violent, dark Christmas Eve may contain figurative meanings that are wroth savouring:

> Húsfryja lét kveikja ljós í inum efstum loptum við gluggana, at hann hefði þat til leiðarvísis; var ok svá, at hann fat af því heim, er hann sá ljósit. En er hann kom í dyrrnar, gekk húsfreyja at honum ok bað hann vera velkominn, — „ ok hefir þú, "segir hon, „ mikla frægð unnit ok leyst mik ok hjú mín frá þeiri skemmð, er vér hefðim aldri bót fengit, nema þú hefðir borgit oss." [417]
>
> The housewife had ordered that lights be placed in the windows of the upper loft, so that Grettir could find his way home. Because of this decision, he made it back by following the lights. When he came through the door the wife approached and greeted him. "You have now", she said, "won great fame. You have freed me and my household from a shame. We would never have recovered from this disgrace had you not saved us."[418]

As expected, Grettir comes back to Thorfinn's household by following the light and then receives the mistress's hospitality. The present dissertation considers that as a highly symbolic object, the light may not only foreground Grettir's Christian profile, but also seems resonant with Thorfinn's wife's changed attitude towards him, i.e., after she is convinced of Grettir's inner benignity underlying his apparent belligerence.

According to Kenyon, "beyond the physical element, light in the Bible stands for spiritual illumination and truth, encompassing all that is pure, good, and holy, as opposed to the darkness of evil".[419] For example, *Verbum Dei* [God's sord] in the Bible is taken as equivalent to "a lamp for my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105), intended to guide the mortals to follow God commands. And as a metaphor, the idea of light chasing away darkness would seem central to understanding Jesus and Christianity. One of the first Jews to recognise infantile Jesus as the promised Messiah, for instance, called him "a light of revelation" (Luke 2:32). Also, when describing Christ's Church and Christ himself, the scripture goes as follows:

[417] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, pp. 69-70.
[418] Byock, Jesse (2009), pp. 60-61.
[419] Kenyon, E. W. *The Bible in Light of Our Redemption*, Kenyons Gospel Publishing, 1989, preface.

> Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life." (John 8:12)

The above excerpt may well indicate that *light* in the Holy Bible can be generally taken as a hopeful imagery, often symbolising the prospect of salvation that is indiscriminately available to people of all races and extractions.[420] Furthermore, as a recurring image in Genesis, the image of light may also be associated with generation and (re-)formation:

> And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day. (Genesis 1:3-5)

Regarding the hermeneutic interpretation of this biblical excerpt, moreover, St Augustine's reading of the *fiat lux* is "a commonplace of medieval exegesis" of far-reaching, long-lasting, and wide-ranging influence.[421] When it comes to the translation and dissemination of Augustine's works into medieval Scandinavia, Grønlie suggests that Augustine's tenets and teachings, especially his "theological interpretation of the past" have tremendously influenced the Christianisation of Iceland.[422] The author of *Grettis saga* may have been familiar with the Augustinian understanding of *lux fiat*:

> Cum enim dixit Deus: Fiat lux, et facta est lux, si recte in hac luce creatio intellegitur angelorum, profecto facti sunt participes lucis aeternae, quod est ipsa incommutabilis sapientia Dei, per quam facta sunt omnia, quern dicimus unigenitum Dei filium; ut ea luce inluminati, qua creati, fierent lux et uocarentur dies participatione incommutabilis lucis et diei, quod est uerbum Dei, per quod et ipsi et omnia facta sunt.[423]
>
> For when God said, "Let there be light," and light was created, then, if we are right in interpreting this as including the creation of the angels, they immediately become partakers of the eternal light, which is the unchanging

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[420] Besides, light also bears scriptural association with the Messianic prophecy:
1) I, the LORD, have called you in righteousness; I will take hold of your hand. I will keep you and will make you to be a covenant for the people and a light for the Gentiles. (Isaiah 42:6)
2) He says: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:6)

[421] Wright, C. "An Old English formulaic system and its contexts in Cynewulf's poetry", in *Anglo-Saxon England,* vol. 40, 2012, p. 155.

[422] Grønlie, Siân. "Conversion Narrative and Christian Identity: 'How Christianity Came to Iceland'", in *Medium Ævum*, vol. 86, no. 1, 2017, p. 126.

[423] *De ciuitate Dei*, 11.9, ed. B. Dombart & A. Kalb, Turnhout, 1955, pp. 329-330. Cf. *De Genesi ad litteram*, 2.8, ed. J. Zycha, Vienna, 1894, p. 43.

> Wisdom of God, the agent of God's whole creation; and this Wisdom we call the only begotten Son of God. Thus the angels, illuminated by that light by which they were created, themselves became light, and are called "day," by participation in the changeless light and day, which is the Word of God, through whom they themselves and all other things were made.[424]

As enunciated above, light in medieval Christian culture is liable to signify wisdom, creation, rebirth, and God's grace. Given such implications, the candlelight that illuminates Grettir's way back "home" may also be considered to illuminate his mind and exert some Christian redemptive power upon the outcast Grettir. And as Grettir follows the light, he is virtually abiding by God's words, for — as the psalmic scripture reads — "your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (119:105).

After going through the atmospheric harshness Norway, Grettir would seem to have gained a certain degree of inner tranquillity, since in the end he returns home peacefully under the candlelight's guidance. Viewed eco-critically, this scene may imply that in his interiority (or subconsciousness),[425] Grettir is disposed towards Christianity. Yet admittedly, this potential emotional undercurrent of Grettir's may seem rather cryptically conveyed, i.e., only hinted at by allegorical means, rather than articulated by the narrator. Accordingly, Grettir's heroic masculinity, which is characterised by his martial prowess, may be conceived as refined by his increasingly externalised Christian instinct. It is on this account that the present dissertation considers the narrative about natural phenomena — implicit or explicit — as enacting a crucial role in alluding to the co-existing pagan and Christian profiles within Grettir's masculinity or, in a broader sense, his human nature.

6.2 Spatial Layout and Thorfinn's Wife

In this section I argue that the interplay between Thorfinn's wife's performance of femininity and the narrative about her place of residence is worth noticing. Two pieces of eco-narratives depicting the mistress's spatial location in her household may be held to bear innuendoes to her female role in the "domestic sphere", her inability to fulfil male tasks, as well as her dependence upon masculine power.

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[424] Translation by J. H. Taylor. *St. Augustine: the Literal Meaning of Genesis* (Ancient Christian Writers), vol. 41, New York, 1982, p. 56.

[425] I wound not elaborate on "consciousness" in this analysis, lest I should sound anachronistic in the absence of a thorough literary review of earlier scholarships on the performance of the (sub-)consciousness in Old Norse-Icelandic literature.

It would seem evident that Thorfinn's wife's altered attitude towards Grettir is, by and large, triggered by her recognition of Grettir's masculinity — his extraordinary physical strength, intellectual resourcefulness, mercy for the imperilled women, and his undimmed valour. This is manifest in their dialogue, as quoted below:

> Grettir segir: „ Ek þykkjumk nú mjök inn sami ok í kveld, er þér töluðuð hrakliga við mik.“ Húsfreyja mælti svá: „Vér vissum eigi, at þú værir slíkr afreksmaðr sem nú höfu vér reynt; skal þér allt sjálfboðit innan bœjar, þat sem hœfir at veita, en þér sœmð í at þiggja; en mik varir, at Þorfinnr launi þér þó betr, er hann kemr heim.“ Grettir svarar: „ Lítils mun nú við þurfa fyrst um launin, en þiggja mun ek boð þiit, þar til er bóndi kemr heim; en þess væntir mik, at þér megið sofa í náðum fyrir berserkjunum.“[426]
>
> Grettir said: "I think I am now the same man whom, earlier in the evening, you cursed." The wife then said: "We had no idea that you had so much courage as you have now shown. Within this house you have only to ask for anything you want. All is yours which is proper for me to give and honorable for you to receive. And I can guess that Thorfinn will repay your even more when he returns home." Grettir replied: "There is little need just now for us to speak of rewards, and I accept your offer until your husband comes home. I believe you can now sleep in peace without worrying about the berserkers." [427]

In this dialogue, Thorfinn's wife promises that Grettir shall have privilege in the house. Symbolically, the household can be conceived as a spatial metaphor for the "domestic sphere" in Habermas' sense, which is also the realm traditionally in the charge of women, rather than men, in medieval Scandinavia.[428] Along this line, by allowing Grettir to behave freely in her place, the mistress may be interpreted as intended to share her prerogative under the household with Grettir. This behaviour, in my opinion, could be read as Thorfinn's wife's most condensed expression of her utmost gratitude, respect, and even worship for Grettir. From another perspective, the fact that the heroic masculinity is what Grettir embodies but

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[426] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, pp. 69-70.
[427] Byock, Jesse (2009), p. 61.
[428] In medieval Scandinavia, "it is clear that women were not only mothers, wives, concubines, or slaves, and that they should not be regarded merely as passive and silent companions of their proactive husbands. The broad repertoire of activities and roles in which they were engaged, both within and outside the domestic sphere, is confirmed by archaeological finds and textual evidence, and these sources clearly suggest that some held very prominent and powerful positions in the social arena". See Gardela, Leszek. "Amazons of the Viking World: Between Myth and Reality", in *Medieval Warfare*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2017, p. 8. However, according to Kress (2011), "the introduction of Christianity deprived women of many important roles in the execution of pagan rituals, and they did not learn to write"; and while Norse literature spans the transition from paganism to Christianity and from an oral to a written culture, there is a concurrent movement from a strongly woman-centric to a virtually one-sided male-dominated culture". See https://nordicwomensliterature.net/2011/02/11/what-a-woman-speaks/.

what the mistress lacks may partially explain why Grettir is highly esteemed by Thorfinn's wife.

Additionally, the gender differentiation between the two characters would appear to be inferable from the following passage of *nature writing* about the housewife's position in her place of residence:

> Þá sá Grettir, at skip reri at eyjunni […] En er þeir kómu heim at bœnum, tók Grettir í hǫndi Þóri ok leiddi hann til stofu; Grettir var þá málreifr mjǫk. Húsfreyja var í stofunni ok lét tjalda hana ok búask um vel. En er hon heyrði til Grettis, nam hon staðar á gólfinu ok spyrr, hverjum Grettir fagnaði svá alvarliga.[429]

> Then Grettir saw a ship being rowed towards the island […] When they [the berserkers] reached the farm, Grettir took Thorir's hand and led him into the main hall. Grettir was chattering away. The mistress of the house was in the hall, hanging tapestries and decorating the room. When she heard Grettir talking, she stood in the middle of the floor and asked whom Grettir was so intent on welcoming.[430]

This excerpt indicates that when Thorir Paunch and Ogmund the Ill-Willed are intruding into her household, Thornfinn's wife is entirely unaware of the imminent disaster. Rather, she is still busy making Christmas decoration for the house, heedless of the outside affairs. By contrast, Grettir fixes his eyes on the sea, and he vigilantly perceives the impending danger.

To some extent, the housewife's preoccupation with the interior adornments may be held as a metaphor for her engrossment in the domestic affairs — like "rearing children and attending to livestock", as well as her unfamiliarity in public affairs, such as "combat, politics and sea-voyaging".[431] And according to Friðriksdóttir, her behaviour and reaction to the crisis can well match the social expectations from medieval Scandinavian women in times of this area's Christianisation.[432] Likewise, Grettir's focus on the sea and his outbound vision would,

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[429] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 64.
[430] Byock, Jesse (2009), p. 57.
[431] Jochens, Jenny. *Women in Old Norse Society.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995, pp. 113–114.
[432] Ibid. According to, "historically, high-ranking women in medieval Iceland seem to have had a clearly defined role and realm of power *innan stokks* "within the domestic sphere" as heads of households, symbolized by the bunch of keys hanging at their belt, and this position is often reflected in literary sources. The public sphere was the realm of (high-status) males: men took part in local and national assemblies, legislation, blood feud, travel, trade, and other business, where women had no official role. This, too, is visible in sagas, where women are shown as having restricted opportunities to participate in the sociopolitical and legal structures that affect their lives, and, especially in the *Íslendingasögur*, they occasionally express dissatisfaction and frustration with their lot or subversively circumvent these structures in order to take control over events". See Friðriksdóttir, J. K., *Women in Old Norse Literature Bodies, Words, and Power*, Palgrave, 2013, pp. 9-10.

as it seems, bespeak his engagement in the public sphere.[433] Thus, performing Thorfinn's wife to be occupied with the Christmas decoration, the saga-author may have been intended emphasise her Christian identity and, in the meantime, stress her social attribute as a conversed medieval Icelandic woman.

Besides, it may be worthwhile to highlight that while Thorfinn is away, his wife was "í stofunni" [in the hall/living room], holding the position that stands for male power and authority.[434] And symbolically, the mistress would appear entitled to preside the whole farmstead as the deputy of her husband. Yet as a woman, she is not used to — neither is she capable of — handling the non-domestic affairs, since she is fashioned by the saga-author to be entirely ignorant of what is happening. In this case, the contrast between the mistress's "passively centralised" status in the "castrated" household and her lack of "ruling capacity" would seem to be foregrounded and intensified by the spatial location where she is placed. In other words, although it is her place to enact Thorfinn's male role by leading the household to fight against the marauders, she is nevertheless in want of the masculinity and experience in public affairs. And for this reason, she eventually proves inept in this male undertaking.

As far as the present dissertation is concerned, the household, the hall, the interior, and the sea as constitutive of the eco-narratives in Chapter XIX of *Grettis saga* are not merely realistic portrayals of the naturalistic milieux, but they may also be seen as corresponding to the differentiation between the domestic and public realms in early eleventh-century Scandinavia's social life. And they may be interpreted as interacting with Grettir's masculinity and Thorfinn's wife's femininity, both of which happen to conform to the conventional understanding of gender distinction in medieval Iceland. However, the saga-author's fashioning of gender is not invariably consistent with the erstwhile social norm. under certain circumstances, gender reversal is also detectable. This issue will be elaborated on in the next section.

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[433] Indeed, in the medieval Icelandic family sagas, "women as well men gained and bestowed honor by performing verbally [;] while men's performances tool place in the official, public realm, women promoted and defended the honor of the household in the domestic, private realm. The boundary between public and private was strictly enforced. See Borovsky, Zoe. "Never in Public: Women and Performance in Old Norse Literature", in *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 112, no. 443, 1999, pp. 6-39, especially pp. 10-12.

[434] From Late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages, halls were the central focus of elite residences in Northern Europe. As for the connotations of "the hall" in Old English and Old Norse literature, see, for instance, Carstens, Lydia. "Powerful Space. The Iron-Age Hall and its Development During the Viking Age", in *Viking Worlds: Things. Spaces and Movement.* Ed. by Marianne Hem Eriksen, Unn Pedersen, Bernt Rundberget, and Irmelin Axelsen. Oxbow Books 2014, pp. 12 – 27; Pollington, Stephen. *The Mead-Hall: The Feasting Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England*. Norfolk, UK: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2003, p. 81.

6.3 Horse, Thunder, and Thorbjorg's Female Heroism

In this section I argue that quite contrary to Thorfinn's wife, the wife of Vermund — Thorbjorg the Stout — displays extraordinary leadership and authority in both domestic and public spheres. Vermund is a *goði* [chieftain], a role that is exclusively to men in medieval Iceland. Yet Thorbjorg well wields her husband's authority in his absence, demonstrating a clear strain of female heroism and masculine air. Moreover, out of her sympathy and admiration for Grettir, she timely unfetters the outcast hero from the farmers' lynching, before eloquently persuading her husband to set Grettir free. In *Grettis saga*, therefore, Thorbjorg the Stout may well be taken as a personification of foresight and insight, sensibility, breath of mind, and intellectual excellence.

It is further found that in Chapter LII of *Grettis saga*, two natural objects participate, as it seems, in the fashioning of Thorbjorg's image: horse and thunder. The two metaphorical objects could potentially encode covert messages into Thorbjorg's characterisation, which will be substantiated in the following two subsections.

6.3.1 Thorbjorg on Horseback

The eco-narrative revolving around Thorbjorg's *debut*, above all, would seem to distinguish itself as particularly worthy of attention, for it offers a close-up of Thorbjorg on horseback:

> Þá sá þeir ríða þyjá menn neðan eptir dalnum; var einn í litklæðum. Þeir gátu, at þar myndi fara Þorbjǫrg húsfreyja ór Vatnsfirði, ok svá var; æltaði hon til sels. Hon var skǫrungr mikill ok stórvitr; hon hafði heraðsstjórn ok skipaði ǫllum málum, þegar Vermundr var eigi heima. Hon veik þangat at, sem mannfundrinn var, ok var hon af baki tekin. Bœndr fǫgnuðu henni vel.[435]

> Then they saw three people across the valley. They were riding up towards them. One of the riders wore coloured clothing. They guessed that this would be Mistress Thorbjorg from Vatnsfjord, and so it was. She was on her way to the mountain shieling. A commanding and clever woman, she took charge when Vermund was out of the district and made all decisions when he was not at home. She changed direction and rode over to the group of men. She was helped down from her horse, and the farmers greeted her well.[436]

[435] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 169.
[436] Byock (2009), p. 141.

Firstly, I would consider Thorbjorg's appearance on horseback as a symbolic narrative design, since riding horses (or palfreys) astride was one of the few actions commonly practiced by both men and women across Medieval Europe — including the Continent, the British Isle, and Scandinavia.[437] And in medieval European literature — particularly Arthurian literature — the horse, as an animal bespeaking the chivalric merits and spirits could, under certain circumstances, be taken as a synecdoche for "the masculine attribute of courage".[438] As for the Old Norse tradition, unexceptionally, the horse as a figurative animal in such *Riddarasögur* as *Erex Saga*, *Ívens Saga*, and *Parcevals saga* has been interpreted by Bandlien and Lacy, among others, as a potential trope related to, in addition to the chivalric warriors' physical agility and strength of character, their "male power, authority and even kingship".[439]

Moreover, as Rohrbach has pointed out, in *Egils saga*, *Grettis saga*, and *Heimskringla*, the horse's recurring image could in a way betoken the rider's masculine puissance and imposing social status. And these the proposed metaphorical meanings about horse have turned out to be substantiated by both textual and archaeological evidence:

> Der aus archäologischen Untersuchungen gut dokumentierte Brauch der Grabbeigabe von Pferden im vorchristlichen Island wird in der Isländersagas nur in der Egils saga und in der Grettis saga erwähnt. Im Prolog der Heimskringla wird in Zusammenhang mit der Bestattung des Dänenkönigs Danr erwähnt, daß der König mit seinen königlichen Gewändern, seiner Rüstung, aber auch mit seinem Pferd und dem gesamten Zaumzeug begraben wurde. In diesen vereinzelten Erwähnungen manifestiert sich weniger eine besondere Mittlerfunktion zum Numinosen als vielmehr der hohe Status, der Pferden in den altnordischen Gesellschaften zugeordnet und auf deren Besitzer übertragen wird und in diesem Fall die Macht des Mannes zu Lebzeiten repräsentiert. Die Episoden unterstreichen somit erneut, daß der Nähe eines Mannes zu Pferden — auch über seinen Tod hinaus — statusfördernde Wirkung zugeschrieben wird.[440]

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[437] Gies, Frances & Gies, Joseph. *Daily Life in Medieval Times*. UK: Grange Books, 2005 (originally published by Harper Collins in three volumes, 1969, 1974, 1990), p. 273.
[438] Davies, Emma Herbert. *The Cultural Representation of the Horse in Late Medieval England*, MA thesis, School of History, University of Leeds, 2009 p. 34.
[439] Bandlien, Bjørn. *Man or Monster: Negotiation of Masculinity in Old Norse Society*, Acta humaniora 236, Oslo: Unipub, 2005, ch.1. Cf., Bandlien, Bjørn. "Arthurian Knights in Fourteenth-Century Iceland: 'Erex Saga' and 'Ívens Saga' in the World of Ormur Snorrason", in *Arthuriana*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2013, p. 35. See also Lacy, Norris J. "Writing in the Margins: Norse Arthurian Sagas as Palimpsests", in *Arthuriana*, vol.22, no. 1, 2012, p. 13.
[440] Rohrbach, Lena. "Der tierische Blick: Mensch-Tier-Relationen in der Sagaliteratur", in *Beiträge zur nordischen Philologie*, no. 43, 2009, pp. 241-242. My translation is as follows: The custom of "the burial of horses" in pre-Christian Iceland, well documented from archaeological research, is mentioned only in two Icelandic sagas: *Egils saga* and *Grettis saga*. In the prologue to *Heimskringla* — this is in connection with the

Along this line, the image of Thorbjorg bestriding on her saddle may well be held as entailing the implication that that she may be figuratively "in the saddle",[441] as a man taking over both domestic and non-demotic affairs in her husband's absence.

Another plot expected to call for attention is that Thorbjorg assumes a prominent position and solemn demeanour on horseback. She is "einn í litklæðum" [alone and clad with coloured garments],[442] and she is recognised immediately by the famers in the distance. Also, it is Thorbjorg herself that decides the direction of the marching, and when dismounting from the horse, she is assisted attentively by people around, seemingly enjoying a good reputation and sincere support from the farmers:

> Hon veik þangat at, sem mannfundrinn var, ok var hon af baki tekin. Bœndr fǫgnuðu henni vel.[443]
>
> She changed direction and rode over to the group of men. She was helped down from her horse, and the farmers greeted her well.[444]

In view of the masculine undertones embedded in the equestrian image, the present dissertation detects that when describing Thorbjorg's *debut* with a certain degree of realism, the saga-narrator would seem to be alluding to the heroic woman's distinguished status and received leadership, as well as her public authority by knitting the horse's potential metonymic connotations implicitly into the narrative.

Secondly, it is found that Thorbjorg's success in harnessing the horse — the animal that according to Rohrbach can represent "die Macht des Mannes" [the power of males],[445] may be interpreted as a metaphor for her ability and legitimacy to exercise male power in the public sphere. In other words, the horse's image may not only bespeak Thorbjorg's authority, but also witness and justify the empowerment of Thorbjorg, i.e., the granting of male power and

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burial of the Danish king Danr — the king is recounted to be buried not only with his royal robes and armour, but also with his horse and all his bridle. In these sporadic accounts, the intermediary function of horse is salient; [however,] it is related less with the numinous, but more with the high status assigned to horses in Old Norse societies — high status which is transferred to their owners and which, in this case, represents the power of the man in his lifetime. Once again, these episodes emphasize that a man's closeness to horses — even after his death — has a status-promoting effect.

[441] An English idiom, being "in the saddle" is a pun meant both literally for "being on horseback", and figuratively for "being in a position of control or responsibility". This is a vivid reflection of Thorbjorg's situation. See *Collins English Dictionary*.

[442] Translation mine.

[443] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 169.

[444] Byock (2009), p. 141.

[445] Rohrbach, Lena. (2009), p. 241.

rights upon her. This situation is, according to Friðriksdóttir, well in line with Max Weber's understanding of *Herrschaft*, as illustrated below.[446]

According to Max Weber, *die Macht* [power] in its broadest sense means "every imposition of a person's or group's will, in every conceivable range of situations with a 'social relationship', regardless of what premises lie beneath this, or whether this imposition meets any opposition or not".[447] Domination or rule is the probability that a specific person or group of people obey another party's explicit commands.[448] This kind of power does not have to be in any way socially sanctioned, but is based rather on the question of whether the agent (or group) has the *ability* to rule, that is, to realize their own will, and to implement their agendas and will.[449] By convention, evidently, it is not quite Thorbjorg's place to exercise Vermund's power; and it would even seem disputable as to whether Thorbjorg's acts would have been well approved in her community.[450] Yet there is little doubt that Thorbjorg has the ruling capacity and that in terms of *ability*, she is equal and even superior to her male counterparts.[451] Correlatively, it may well be argued that the horse's image could not only bear allusion to Thorbjorg's powerfulness, but it may also imply the saga-author's positive, even potentially recommending attitudes towards Thorbjorg's female heroic air.

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[446] Friðriksdóttir (2013), pp. 8-9.

[447] Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology (Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie)*, ed. Roth, Guenther., & Wittich, Claus, 2 vols., Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978, vol. 1, p. 53.

[448] Weber, Max. *Selections in Translation*, ed. W. G. Runciman, trans. E. Matthews. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, p. 38.

[449] Weber, Max. *Economy and Society*, vol. 1, p. 53.

[450] Moreover, in Thorbjorg's case, her exercise of Vermund's power and authority is a breach against medieval Iceland's social norm, just as Friðriksdóttir elucidates, "historically, high-ranking women in medieval Iceland seem to have had a clearly defined role and realm of power *innan stokks* "within the domestic sphere" as heads of households, symbolized by the bunch of keys hanging at their belt, and this position is often reflected in literary sources. The public sphere was the realm of (high-status) males: men took part in local and national assemblies, legislation, blood feud, travel, trade, and other business, where women had no official role. This, too, is visible in sagas, where women are shown as having restricted opportunities to participate in the sociopolitical and legal structures that affect their lives, and, especially in the *Íslendingasögur*, they occasionally express dissatisfaction and frustration with their lot or subversively circumvent these structures in order to take control over events". See Friðriksdóttir (2013), pp. 8-10. Cf. Jochens, Jenny. *Women in Old Norse Society.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995, pp. 113–114.

[451] Thorbjorg's excellence over her husband is manifest chiefly in her resourcefulness, magnanimity, and popularity among the people. This is traceable most prominently from the three reasons she provides to her husband to explain why Grettir should be set free. This point will be further elaborated in the following subsection.

6.3.2 *Þórr*'s Power in Thorbjorg's Name

Another natural item involved in the performance of Thorbjorg's gender attribute is concerned with *Þórr* — the Germanic deity that personifies thunder and tempest.[452] According to Battista, considering Thór as the god of thunder and the dominator of atmospheric change can date back to Adam of Bremen's *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (IV: 26), namely

> Thor, inquiunt, presidet in aere, qui tonitrus et fulmina, ventos ymbresque, serena et fruges gubernat […] Thor autem cum sceptro Iovem simulare videtur.[453]
>
> Thor, they say, presides in the air, controls thunders and lighting bolts, winds and rain showers, nice weathers and harvests […] Moreover, Thor seems to imitate Jupiter with his scepter.[454]

It would surface as obvious that *Þórr* in Adam of Bremen's view is an incarnation the dominator of meteorological phenomena and it represents the supreme potency. In Chapter LII of *Grettis saga,* via Grettir's skaldic poem, the saga-narrator would seem to be intentionally pointing out that Thorbjorg's innate power and strength can be deduced from, and ascribed to, her *Þórr*-related appellation:

> Vermund mælti: „Hvárt bauð hon þér til sín?" Grettir svarar:
>
> Mik bað hjǫlp
> handa tveggja
> Sifjar vers
> með sér fara;
> sú gaf þveng

[452] Modern English Thor is the cognate form of Þórr (Old Norse), Donar (Old High German), Þunor (Old English), Thuner (Old Frisian) and Thunar (Old Saxon), which are linguistic siblings of the same origin. They descend from the Proto-Germanic theonym *Þunraz ('Thunder'), which is corresponds to the Celtic god Taranis (by metathesis of *Tonaros; cf. OBrit. Tanaro, Gaul. Tanarus), and further related to the Latin epithet Tonans (attached to Jupiter), via the common Proto-Indo-European root for 'thunder' *(s)tenh₂-. According to scholar Peter Jackson, those theonyms may have originally emerged as the result of the fossilization of an original epithet (or epiclesis) of the Proto-Indo-European thunder-God *Perk^{w}unos since the Vedic weather-God Parjanya is also called stanayitnú- ('Thunderer'). For the etymology of Þórr, see Delamarre, Xavier. Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise : Une approche linguistique du vieux-celtique continental. Errance, 2003; Jackson, Peter. "Light from Distant Asterisks. Towards a Description of the Indo-European Religious Heritage", in Numen, vol. 49, no. 1, 2002, pp. 61–102; and Orel, Vladimir. A Handbook of Germanic Etymology, Brill: Leiden & Boston, 2003.

[453] Battista, Simonetta. "Interpretations of the Roman Pantheon in the Old Norse Hagiographic Sagas", in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference*, edited by Geraldine Barnes and Margaret Clunies Ross, 2000, pp. 24-34.

[454] Translation mine.

Þundar beðju
góðan hest,
es mik gœddi friði.[455]

Vermund said: "Do you think they would have hanged you, if the decision had been left to them alone?"
Grettir said:

> Too rash, as ever, | I'd have stuck my head | in
> their dangled noose | but Thorbjorg, whose name |
> means 'protection of Thor', | came to the rescue |
> of my poetic neck: | she's wise in all matters.[456]

As the plot goes, when he draws on the etymological relevance between *Þórr* and Thorbjorg's name (i.e., Thorbjorg), Grettir wittily delivers his acclaim to Thorbjorg by referring to the positive connotations of *Þórr*. Grettir would appear to be implying that Thorbjorg is as powerful, intelligent and authoritative as the Nordic deities. And when he compares Thorbjorg's identity as "Þundar beðju" [Þundr's bedfellow or protection of Thor],[457] Grettir may be held to allude to Thorbjorg's protective nature.

Yet according to the traditional Christian view, women are normally understood as "passive agents of the patriarchs", dumb and weak by nature, and "psychologically, as well as institutionally enslaved by men".[458] So, the saga-author's rhetorical allusion to Thorbjorg's protective nature may also be seen as adverting to her "gender reversal", i.e., her performance of male traits, thus indicating Thorbjorg's female heroism.

In addition, as Sørensen has argued, the implication of *Þórr* and *Þórr*'s hammer are polysemous in medieval Scandinavia: they can be not only indicative of the natural power of thunder, but also evocative of the ability to triumph over the strongest of giants/giantesses in the world.[459] The *Prose Edda*, for instance, offers a most telling presentation about the defining characteristics of *Þórr*'s hammer, stressing the hammer's potentiality to vanquish evil creatures:

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[455] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, p. 172.
[456] Byock (2009), pp. 143-144.
[457] For a detailed explanation of the kenning "Þundar beðju", see Haley-Halinski, Kathryn Ania. *Kennings in Mind and Memory: Cognitive Poetics and Skaldic Verse*. Master thesis, Universities of Oslo and Iceland, 2017, pp. 56-59.
[458] Mirkin, Harris. "The Passive Female the Theory of Patriarchy", in *American Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2, 1984, pp. 54-55.
[459] Sørensen, Preben Meulengracht. "Thor's Fishing Expedition", in *Words and Objects: Towards a Dialogue between Archaeology and History of Religion*, ed. Gro Steinsland, Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, Oslo, Skrifter B:71, Oslo etc.: Norwegian Univ. Press, 1986, pp. 257–278.

> Þá gaf hann Þór hamarinn ok sagði, at hann myndi mega ljósta svá stórt sem hann vildi, hvast sem fyrir væri, et eigi myndi hamarrinn bila, ok ef hann yrpi honum til, þá myndi hann aldri missa ok aldri fljúga svá langt, et eigi myndi hann sœkja heim hǫnd, ok ef þat vildi, þá var hann svá lítill, at hafa mátti í serk sér; en þat var lyti á, at forskeptit var heldr skamt. Þat var dómr þeira, at hammarrinn var beztr af ǫllum grípunum ok mest vǫrn í fyrir hrímþursum.[460]
>
> Then he gave the hammer to Thor and said that he could hit as hard as he wanted with it, whatever might be before him, and the hammer would not fail; and of he threw it at something, then he would never lose it, or throw it so far that it would not come back to his hand; and if he desired it, then it would become so small that he might have it in his shirt; but there was this flaw in it: the handle was rather short. It was the judgment of the gods that the hammer was the best of all precious objects and the greatest defense was in it against the frost giants.[461]

In this extract, both *Þórr* and *Þórr*'s hammer are fashioned to possess invincible power in Nordic mythology. They may also be seen as the banes for desperadoes, trollish creatures, and the intervention of evil force.

As for Thorbjorg, since she is endowed with *Þórr*'s prowess for her name, she might accordingly be supposed to be immune to the threats from trolls, ogresses, outlaws and irascible giants.[462] And in the narrative, Thorbjorg does demonstrate this immunity, for not only is she invulnerable to Grettir's irascible temper, but her words also well appease Grettir's belligerent wrath, recover his self-control (at least temporarily), and spur him to remain self-disciplined despite the inborn irritability:

> Hon svarar: „Eða hvat villtu nú vinna til lífs þér, Grettir, ef ek gef þér líf?" Hann svarar: „ Hvat mælir þú til?" „ Þú skalt vinna eið," sagði hon, „ at gera engar óspekðir hér um Ísafjǫrð; engum skaltu hefna, þeim sem í atfǫr hafa verit at taka þik." Grettir kvað hana ráða skyldu. Síðan var hana leystr; ok þá kvazk hann mest bundizk hafa at sínu skaplyndi, at hann sló þá eigi, er þeir hœldusk við hann.[463]
>
> Thorbjorg replied: "… What will you do to save your life, Grettir, if I choose to spare it?"

[460] *Snorri Sturluson: Edda*, ed. Finnur Jónsson (abbreviated in the text as *SnE*), Copenhagen: G. E. C. Gad, 1926, p. 99.
[461] Translation culled from Lindow, John. "Thor's 'hamarr'", in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 93, no. 4, 1994, p. 486.
[462] According to Richard North, David Crystal and Joe Allard (2012), *Þórr* "packs a big iron hammer which he uses to smash the skulls of giants" (36).
[463] *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, pp. 169–170.

> Grettir answered: "What would you suggest?"
>
> "You will take an oath," she said, "to cause no more trouble here in Isafjord. And you will take no vengeance on those who attack you."
>
> Grettir said that she should decide in this, and then he was untied. Later he said that it had been the greatest test of his self-control not to strike those men who had been so boastful about capturing him.[464]

Indeed, as a synecdoche for *Þórr*, *Þórr*'s hammer is normally viewed as emblematic of *Þórr*'s potency. Yet as Clunies Ross has argued, *Þórr*'s hammer may also symbolise masculinity, and correspondingly, its loss may be meant for the lack of virility.[465] A most typical example can be found in *Þrymskviða*, namely *Lay of Thrym*, also from the *Poetic Edda*.[466] As narrated in *Þrymskviða*, "*jötunn þrymr* (Thrym) steals Thor's hammer Mjölnir and demands Freyja as ransom for it, desiring the goddess as his own wife".[467] Considering that mjölnir is a well-received "phallic symbol for fertility" in Old Norse myth,[468] the connotations of *Þórr* and *Þórr*'s hammer may well be deciphered as an embodiment of the "phallic role" and "phallic power".[469] Therefore, the *Þórr*-related hidden meanings of Thorbjorg's name would seem capable of transferring an aura of masculinity and prowess into her character. From the eco-narratological perspective, the image of thunder at the core of *Þórr* could, as it seems, contribute towards the fashioning of Thorbjorg's female manliness.

Finally, it should be necessary to point out that in the context of medieval Scandinavia's conversion to Christianity, Thor's hammer may also be regarded — just as Ström and Lindow have proposed — to be a "reaction to the Christian cross",[470] carrying a sense of "protection from evil through ultimately creative powers".[471] Along this line, Michael Bintley notices that the changing shape of Thor's hammer may be expressive of concurrent Scandinavia's social transformation:

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[464] Byock Jesse (2009), p. 142.
[465] Clunies Ross, Margaret. "Þórr's honour", in *Studien zum Altgermanischen*, Festschrift für Heinrich Beck, Herausgegeben von Heike Uecker, De Gruyter, Berlin-New York, 1994, pp. 48-76.
[466] A reliable translation can be found in Barmby, Beatrice Helen. "The Lay of Thyrm", in *Saga-Book*, vol. 3, 1901, pp. 454-458.
[467] Kane, Njord. *History of the Vikings and Norse Culture*. Spangenhelm Publishing, 2019, Chapter 19.
[468] Ibid.
[469] Gunnell, Terry. "Viking religion: Old Norse mythology", in Richard North, David Crystal and Joe Allard (2012), p. 388
[470] Ström, Krister. "Torshamrar", in *Kulturhistoriskt lexikon för nordisk medeltid*, no. 18, 1974, pp. 503-506; and Ström, Krister. "Thorshammerringe und andere Gegenstände des heidnischen Kults", in *Systematische Analysen der Gräberfunde*, ed. Greta Arwidsson, Birka: Untersuchungen und Studien, vol. 2, no. 1, Stockholm: Kungliga vitterhets historie och antikvitets akademien / Almqvist & Wiksell, 1984, pp. 127-140. Cf. Lindow (1994), p. 489.
[471] Lindow (1994), p. 503.

> Originally symbolising the hammer of the agricultural god with which he stirred up thunder and fought with trolls, this 'T' shaped emblem came to develop an additional stalk above its crossbar which came to mark it out as the cross of Christ.[472]

Concerning how *Þórr* as a mythological figure may have been enabled to deliver Christian messages in medieval Scandinavian literature, Swedish historian Olof von Dalin (1708-1763) has claimed that Thor is not only the "Norse Thunderer", but also

> a son or designated hero of the Allmighty, the one mentioned by all ancient poets as the one who should come to the world in order to reconcile Good and Evil, strike down everything that is harmful and raise the downtrodden.[473]

Olaf von Dalin's opinion, as Lönnroth further clarifies, is that

> Thor is thus, in spite of his tough exterior and brutal treatment of the giants, an example of Ramsay's Christ-like *Dieu mitoyen.* It is his task to bring back the innocent and happy Golden Age (i.e., Old Norse *Gylldende Ålder*) which preceded the Fall. He reigns in "Bil-Skermer" (i.e., Old Norse *Bilskirnir*), which Dalin interprets as meaning "Protector of Innocence" and "Shield of the Unhappy".[474]

So viewed, as a miniature of power and masculinity, the Christian implication of the Nordic *Þórr* would seem indelible; and thus, Thorbjorg's rescue to Grettir may be likened to the "Christian salvation". Noteworthily, it is in the recess of the forest that Grettir is captured by a mob of farmers. Considering that the forest in medieval literature (especially the legends about outlaws) recurs as a trope for spiritual obscurity, potential danger and hopelessness,[475] Thorbjorg's rescue may well be taken as what emancipates Grettir from the sway of the haunting, diabolical Darkness.[476] Likewise, since Thorbjorg's bright, shining outfit makes her

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[472] Bintley, Michael. "Material Culture: Archaeology and Text", in Richard North, David Crystal and Joe Allard (2012), p. 270.
[473] The original is "Son eller utskickad Hiälte af den Alrahögste, som alle gamle Poëter omtala, hwilken skulle komma i werlden att förlika det Goda och det Onda, nederslå alt skadeligt och uprätta alt förfallit", from Dalin, Olof. *Svea Rikes Historia ifrån des begynnelse til wåra tider, Efter Hans Kongl. Maj:ts nådiga behag på Riksens Högloffliga Ständers Åstundan författad af Olof Dalin. Förste Delen, Som innehåller Hela Hedniska Tiden*, Stockholm, 1747, pp. 124-125. Cf. Lönnroth, Lars. "Andrew Ramsay's and Olof Dalin's Influence on the Romantic Interpretation of Old Norse Mythology", in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference*, p. 235.
[474] Lönnroth, Lars. "Andrew Ramsay's and Olof Dalin's Influence on the Romantic Interpretation of Old Norse Mythology", in *Old Norse Myths, Literature and Society: Proceedings of the 11th International Saga Conference*, p. 235.
[475] Keen, Maurice. *The Outlaw of Medieval Legend.* Routledge: London and New, 2000, pp. 96–109.
[476] For the diabolical connotations of the Darkness, see Section 6.3.1 of this dissertation.

image rather illuminating, her appearance would seem comparable to a bunch of light representing "Reason and Benevolence", sweeping away the violence and cruelty in the forest while helping Grettir out.[477]

To sum up, Thorbjorg's could be understood to bear testimony to her intrinsic masculine air — her heroic comportment, Christian sympathy, resourcefulness, and valour, all of which are unrivalled by any of her male counterparts. And in Chapter LII of *Grettis saga*, Thorbjorg's female heroism, which is tinged with Christian merits, would appear to be performed and commented at least partially by the underlying eco-narratives about her horse (or palfrey) and the meteorological phenomenon of thunder, as personified by *Þórr* and his hammer.

[477] This present dissertation considers that Thorbjorg can be read as an embodiment of female reason and benevolence, because when he persuades Vermund to help Grettir, she demonstrates both clear logical thinking and fellow-feeling, along with her heroic magnanimity.

7 Conclusion

In the present MA project, I have tentatively demonstrated that the passages of *nature writing* in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* can be interpreted, through the prism of eco-narratology, as covert plots contributing towards certain protagonists' gender performance.

Regarding the eco-narratological fashioning of Helga's female heroism in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, it has been argued that Iceland's frigid marine setting can foreground her indefatigability, the ethereal sea fog can hint at her inscrutable, legendary fate, the green hue embedded in the appellation of *Grœnland* may allude to her vigour and vivacity in hard times, and the natural number "seven", which according to medieval biblical exegesis can be reminiscent of rebirth, purgation, and perfection, could make Helga's seven-day driftage appear as a hopeful voyage, possibly reflecting her inner willingness to get rid of male domination in Iceland, as well as her potential Christian profile. At any rate, the underlying eco-narrative in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* can, in many ways and to varying degrees, serve as a foil to Helga's inherent enterprising spirits, strength of character, and her female intrepidity.

In *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, it is found that the eco-narratives revolving around the polysemous sea, dreadful darkness, eerie moonlight, as well as the candlelight lit up by Thornfinn's wife may be understood as adverting to Grettir's hybrid, pagan-Christian character. To a large extent, *nature writing* would seem conducive to the externalisation of Grettir's emotional undercurrents: his potential reflection upon fate and mortality, awe for the unknown, uncertainty about his self-pursuit of individuality, and his veering between a sinful manslaughter with extraordinary physical prowess and a redeemable Everyman vulnerable to dotage, infirmity, and caducity.

Besides, the present MA project has offered a contrastive study on the construction of femininity in Thorfinn's wife and Vermund's wife. It is noticed that the limning of spatial layout can be held to echo Thorfinn's wife's inability to fulfil male tasks. Contrarily, as for Thorbjorg, she may be taken as a vivid *exemplum* of female masculinity, for as the narrative goes, she far excels Vermund, her husband, in diplomatic tactic, resourcefulness, and her personal charisma.

Admittedly, in both the two *Íslendingasögur* under study, there are some other male and female characters whose gender performances, be they reversed or not, are equally worthy of

eco-narratological analysis, like Hetta, the powerful witch and evil foe of man and beast, as well as Ásdís, Grettir's tough mother whose speech made in the presence of Grettir's decapitated head is fraught with animal metaphors and awe-inspiring *pathos*. Yet as a tentative, unfledged project, the present dissertation is merely intended to set the ball rolling, hoping to shed some light on the eco-narratological interpretation of Old Norse-Icelandic and related medieval literatures.

It goes without saying that there is no presumption that by incorporating the natural objects into storytelling, the two saga-authors had attempted to gesture towards the gender issue *ad letteram* by eco-narrative. Nonetheless, conducting such an eco-critical reading in relation to gender construction in the two texts may pave the way for contemporary readers to better understand medieval Icelanders' perceptions of nature, gender, and human-nature relationship, as extractable from pertinent sagas. Ultimately, adopting this approach to Old Norse-Icelandic literature is aimed to derive from the old texts new, but tenable imports attuning to the zeitgeist of environmentalism, so that more eco-critics will take sufficient heed of the corpus of Old Norse literature.

In closing, I would love to reiterate the three-fold innovativeness of this MA project. Firstly, it combines eco-criticism with modern narratology and, by so doing, considers the passages of *nature writing* as eco-narratives that can — as postclassical narratological theories have substantiated — contribute towards characterisation, foreground central themes, comment on storytelling, and propel the development of covert narrative plots. Practically, this methodological novelty has guaranteed proper adherence to textual evidence in the eco-critical interpretations of the selected extracts. Secondly, in addition to *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, I have referred extensively to other related texts, ranging from some other Old Icelandic sagas and skaldic verses to excerpts written in Old English, classical Latin, as well as medieval Latin. This is intended to accord due attention to the intertextual relationships between Old Norse and other relevant medieval European literary traditions, mindful of the cultural system in which Old Norse-Icelandic literature survived and thrived. Thirdly, it might be worth accentuating that both the beginning and landing points of the present dissertation pivot on the embodiment of human-nature relationship in the two *Íslendingasögur*. Obviously, the natural items depicted in the two sagas are predominantly realistic phenomena that can be attested in the material environment of medieval Iceland, rather than fantasies out of imagination. Yet the passages about nature are also laden with allegorical-theological connotations that can, as argued in Chapter V and

Chapter VI, convey multiple meanings and plural significations to enrich the import and artistic virtuosity of the texts, even though originally the extended metaphorical interpretations might not have been intended by the authors. In this regard, the *nature writing* in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* may well be taken as an example demonstrating how the portrayal of nature can reflect not only the objective, material world, but also the subjective, covert emotional world concurrently. As for this situation, while it casts doubt to the stereotypical notion of human-nature dualism, it is also expected to invite more scholarly attention to the seemingly coexistent expressions of subjectivity and objectivity in medieval European *nature writing*. And this may, as it appears, contribute to both eco-criticism as a developing critical theory and the rediscovery of medieval European (especially Old Norse-Icelandic) literature against the background of environmentalism in foreseeable future.

Hovering between the poles of "presentism" and historicism in the accounts of *Nature* in the two *Íslendingasögur*, I further detect that the seventeenth-century vitalist philosophy, especially the Early Modern European *ethos* of vitalist materialism, according to which *nature* should not be separable from human civilisation and its effects on the world around it,[478] could be brought into closer conversation with the eco-critical interpretation of late medieval European literature. This is just as Marcus has correctly observed:

> We are now at a pivotal moment in which vitalism has reentered our conversations about the relationship between humans and the natural world. Ecocritics who wish to challenge twenty-first-century scientific discourse as a viable avenue for environmental recovery are beginning to engage with vitalism, at least as a way of thinking about the complex interactions in what we now call a "climax ecosystem" — a very diverse, complex grouping of natural things living in a relatively stable balance with each other and with their non-living environment.[479]

[478] This point has been substantiated in recent eco-critical interpretations of Early Modern English literature, especially Shakespeare. See, for instance, Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham, NC and London: Duke UP, 2010; Egan, Gabriel. "Gaia and the Great Chain of Being", in *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, ed., Lynne Bruckner & Dan Brayton. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011, pp. 57-70; Fraser, Mariam. & Sarah Kember & Celia Jury, eds., *Inventive Life: Approaches to the New Vitalism*. London: Sage, 2006; and Watson, Robert N. "The Ecology of Self in *Midsummer Night's Dream*", in *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, ed., Lynne Bruckner and Dan Brayton. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011, pp. 33-56.

[479] Marcus, Leah S. "Ecocriticism and Vitalism in *Paradise Lost*", in *Milton Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2015, p. 108.

As a limitation of the eco-criticism, however, this approach does not seem to always accord sufficient attention to the distinction between the metaphorical use of nature imagery and (essentialist) constructions of nature, i.e., a cultural construct of an alleged essentialist truth about nature defining subject-object relationships, which claims not to *mean* something but to *represent* a relationship that is not based on subject-object relationships, but rather more sustainable or based on a concept of environment. To fathom out this distinction, this dissertation holds that when contemporary eco-critics reinterpret premodern texts, the specific socio-historical contexts should still be taken heed of, so that a proper balance between presentism and historicism in the rereading of medieval texts will be guaranteed.

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