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Traversing the Uncanny Valley:

Monstrosity in the Narrative and Narratological Spaces of *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*

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Abstract

The troubled personality of Grettir Ásmundarson has been approached through numerous inroads, including the historical (Hume 1974), cultural (Hastrup 1990), mythological (Poole 2000), paranormal (Hawes 2008), religious (Bennett 2009), spatial (Barraclough 2010), and monstrous (Merkelbach 2015). Because *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* is an outlaw saga that foregrounds issues of both spatial and social displacement, its spatialization has high potential for unlocking a nexus of intratextual associations. These include the relationship of the outlaw to the wilderness and the relative positioning of man and monster. Therefore, this thesis proposes a study of space in order to develop a new reading of Grettir accounting for narratological space. First, an analysis of narrative space reinforces Grettir's resemblance to the revenant Glámr, rendering Grettir a historically liminal figure. Using cognitive-semiotic theory, a reading of narratological space then demonstrates that Glámr appropriates human characteristics and falls into the "uncanny valley" of the text, producing a horror effect for the reader. Ultimately, this study argues that Grettir and Glámr's bilateral reflectivity echoes a narrative uncertainty regarding Iceland's conversion period.

Fræðimenn hafa nálgast erfitt sálarlíf Grettis Ásmundssonar eftir ýmsum leiðum, meðal annars sögulega, menningarlega, goðsagnalega, yfirnáttúrulega, trúarlega og út frá hugmyndum um rými og skrímsli. Þar sem Grettis saga er útlagasaga sem fæst við bæði líkamlega og félagslega útlegð er rými sögunnar mikilvægt rannsóknarefni sem opnar dyr að alls konar textavenslum. Þar má nefna tengsl útlagans við villta náttúru og hvernig maður og skrímsli venslast. Í þessari rannsókn er því fengist við rýmið til þess að opna fyrir nýjan lestur á sögunni þar sem rými frásagnarinnar skiptir máli. Þannig má skoða náin tengsl Grettis og Gláms með rannsókn á frásagnarrýminu og staðfesta að Grettir er jaðarpersóna í sögunni. Með notkun á hugrænni frásagnarfræði má síðan sýna fram á hvernig Glámur verður mennskur og hrapar ofan í „ankannanlegan dal" textans sem gerir söguna hryllilega fyrir áheyrandann. Að lokum eru hér færð rök fyrir því að speglun Grettis og Gláms hvors á öðrum beri vitni frásagnarlegrar óvissu um kristnitökuskeið Íslandssögunnar.

In the Desert

In the desert
I saw a creature, naked, bestial,
Who, squatting upon the ground,
Held his heart in his hands,
And ate of it.
I said, "Is it good, friend?"
"It is bitter—bitter," he answered;
"But I like it
"Because it is bitter,
"And because it is my heart."

Stephen Crane

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1. Introduction

1.1. The Trouble with Grettir

Grettir Ásmundarson's foul deeds and fouler temper have undergone some of the closest inspection of all heroes in the *Íslendingasǫgur*. Born in 996[1] to an adoring mother and considerably less impressed father, Grettir spends his childhood indulging in both verbal and violent outbursts, antagonizing his elders, torturing farm animals, and, in a fight over a bag of meal, committing his first manslaughter at just fourteen years of age. Sentenced to *sekð*, or lesser outlawry (Turville-Petre 1977, 769), Grettir is exiled from Iceland for three years, whereupon his behavior improves considerably: in redirecting his energies toward killing monsters of the animal, human, and paranormal variety, Grettir discovers that he enjoys being useful – just not in a conventional sense.

Grettir's promising development takes a turn for the worse when he attempts to kill the revenant Glámr, a former farmhand who, like Grettir, preferred fighting monsters to other more mundane tasks. Though Grettir does manage to slay the walking corpse, it first places Grettir under a trifold curse: that he will only achieve half his human strength; that he will suffer full outlawry; and that he will be forever haunted by their fateful encounter. Indeed, Grettir's fortune soon changes when he mistakenly burns all the occupants of a farmhouse alive and is sentenced to full outlawry as a *skógarmaðr*, or forest-man (Turville-Petre 1977, 770). Unlike sekð, which sends him abroad, being a skógarmaðr prevents Grettir from leaving, and he spends the rest of his days alternately killing the monsters that threaten Iceland's peace and stealing from the communities which owe him their thanks. Disgraced, Grettir dies almost twenty years later on the cold northern island of Drang.

[1] This is the date estimated by Guðni Jónsson. See the tímatal of the Íslenzk fornrit standard edition, page lxvii.

Grettis saga has an unusual status as somewhat of a textual hybrid. Surviving in five manuscripts (AM 556a-b 4to, AM152 fol., AM 551 4to, AM571 4to, and DG 10 fol.), the earliest of which dates to the fifteenth century, the saga is relatively young. Moreover, its emphasis on paranormal elements is atypical for an Íslendingasaga. In fact, it has only recently been classified as such; according to the provenance of the original manuscripts, *Grettis saga* should rightly be grouped with *fornaldarsǫgur*, romances, and other outlaw sagas,[2] suggesting an early recognition of the fact that the saga was not to be taken at historical face value. As such, it has the potential for heightened symbolic and allegorical meaning, a significant fact given its strong Christian message and choice of Grettir as a protagonist. Analyzing the troubled figure of Grettir Ásmundarson may thus offer singular insights into the fifteenth-century Icelandic culture which produced[3] him.

1.2. Previous Scholarship

The issue of Grettir's problematic nature has been approached from a variety of angles. Kathryn Hume (1974) characterizes Grettir as a hero born to a society that has outgrown the need for heroism, reflecting the saga-author's dissatisfaction with his own age. In a more positive reading, Kirsten Hastrup (1990) sees Grettir as a joker, inhabiting various roles as culturally necessary[4] but occupying a problematic position between the human and non-human worlds. Taking a psychological and mythological approach to the outlaw, Russell Poole (2000) concludes that Grettir's maternal ties problematize his

[2] For this and more on the saga's manuscript history, see Kathryn Hume (1990), 158-160.

[3] For the purposes of this study, I will limit my discussion of Grettir to the literary figure rather than the historical one (Turville-Petre 1977, 771) which certainly helped inspire him.

[4] It should be noted that Hastrup discusses the Grettir tradition in terms of both literary and oral culture, thereby spanning centuries. However, because the oldest manuscript containing *Grettis saga* dates to the fifteenth century, I will limit my approach to reflect this fact.

relationship with the adult male world and render him a trickster figure. Janice Hawes (2008) describes Grettir as monstrous with regard to his paranormal connections, reflecting post-conversion Iceland's ambivalence about its own past. Approaching Grettir from a more explicitly religious perspective, Lisa Bennett (2009) argues for the Christian condemnation of Grettir due to his mass burning-in.

Following in the footsteps of Helen Damico (1986), who posits that the saga landscape itself serves as a means of characterization, Eleanor Barraclough (2010) holds that Grettir's movement farther into the wild reflects his increasingly troubled social standing. Rebecca Merkelbach (2015) employs Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's (1996) work "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)" to identify Grettir as monstrous, arguing for this characterization's relevance to a social perspective on Icelandic family relations. Notably, much of the scholarship highlights his encounter with the revenant Glámr as critical to understanding Grettir; several scholars have even gone so far as to characterize the two figures as doubles (e.g. Hume 1980, 10; Sayers 1996, 254; Ármann Jakobsson 2009, 307).

1.3. A Spatial Approach to Grettir and Glámr

While each of these studies has made its own contributions to the debate, there are two trends here of particular interest to my investigation. The first is the spatial approach to characterizing Grettir, currently spearheaded by Barraclough. Compared to more direct techniques of assessing Grettir's characterization, such as through personality and behavior, this method is relatively unexplored. There is much more room for discovery here, for as an outlaw saga, *Grettis saga* addresses both social and spatial exile; moreover, as a work rife with paranormal encounters, it also implicitly deals with figural exile – that is, Otherness in a more-than-human sense. Because Grettir is an outlaw and, in many eyes,

a monster, social, figural, and spatial exile form a nexus of characterization within the saga. In this vein, I intend to investigate characterization through narrative space, by which I primarily mean through interactions with place and landscape. Using this as an analogue, I will then expand my study to include characterization through narratological space, by which I primarily mean the distance between the reader and the represented consciousnesses of the saga.[5]

The second scholarly trend of interest to this study is the emphasis on Glámr in characterizing Grettir. Much like the monster Grendel, Glámr defies narrative expectation in that, despite appearing relatively early in the story and preceding opponents that are explicitly described as more difficult to fight, he nevertheless remains Grettir's most memorable antagonist and one of the most famous of all Old Icelandic fiends. Although his resemblance to Glámr is admittedly standout, Grettir comes to resemble a great many monsters over the course of the saga. What, then, gives Glámr his unique impact? I believe that a study of narratological space holds the key.[6]

To these ends, I will first demonstrate the importance of space in characterizing the figure of the outlaw. Next, I will present an analysis of narrative space to argue that Grettir's liminal and chthonic characteristics render him monstrous, coming to resemble

[5] Note that I use "space" here as a term of convenience in that it encompasses both the narrative and narratological aspects of my study. Many scholars of philosophy and anthropology have rejected the concept of "space" as an abstraction which does not reflect a phenomenological understanding of the world; as such, it is not ideal for the first half of my study, which concerns the phenomenological world of the saga. However, because I lack a better term for what I intend to investigate in the second, narratological half of the study, I will continue to use "space" as an umbrella word. For more on the space-place debate, see, for example, Edward S. Casey (2001) or Tim Ingold (2001).

[6] Mine is not the first attempt to access the Old Norse world of the paranormal through a narratological reading. For example, Rory McTurk (1993) argues that narratologically objectivist statements in *Njáls saga* – i.e. statements seem to be objectively true within the saga world rather than focalized through the subjective minds of characters – are "reserved for accounts of supernatural events of specifically Christian significance" (44).

Glámr in particular. In an approach derived from the field of cognitive semiotics, I will then present a comparative analysis of three monstrous encounters to argue that Glámr is rendered humanlike through narratological space, bringing him into an uncomfortable resemblance with Grettir. Finally, I will discuss what a bilateral characterization of Grettir as Glámr-like and vice versa means for the saga as a whole.

2. Outlawry and its Spatial Implications

2.1. Outlawry, Space, and Monstrosity

In a 1997 study, Tim Cresswell investigates how applying metaphors of displacement to "undesirable" individuals can redirect social rhetoric, thereby impacting political as well as public response. Cresswell observes:

> [P]lace is one of the primary factors in the creation and maintenance of ideological values (what is good, just, and appropriate) and thus in the definition of appropriate and inappropriate actions and practices. The notion that everything "has its place" and that things (e.g., people, actions) can be "in-place" or "out-of-place" is deeply engrained in the way we think and act. (334)

This is especially relevant in the context of outlawry. Grettir's outlawry is, of course, very real, but the metaphors his countrymen use to describe the state have cultural connotations that are in themselves enlightening. A relatively neutral metaphor used in the saga to describe an outlaw is "útlegðarmaðr" (e.g. ÍF VII, 178),[7] roughly "outlaw-man." Because the "Norsemen conceived of society as synonymous with the law" and the "Icelanders referred to their society as 'vár lǫg' ('our law')" (Byock 1993, 460), to be outlawed therefore entailed both legal and social exile.

[7] Note that all parenthetical citations of the Íslenzk fornrit standard editions of sagas follow the Icelandic citation style: *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* is (ÍF VII), *Landnámabok* is (ÍF I), and so forth.

Although Grettir is condemned to the Icelandic interior rather than forced from its shores, his outlawry dictates that he cannot cohabitate with ordinary citizens and must instead roam the wilderness; to assist him is a punishable offense (Turville-Petre 1977). Importantly, this demonstrates that society and the rule of law are conceptualized as pockets of space within an otherwise wild terrain – an implicit recognition of the fact that law is only effective insofar as there are people to uphold it. Moreover, the outlaw seems to carry with him his own pocket of outlawry: in the event that he must conduct legal business with others, for example, he should confine himself to a *fjǫrbaugsgarðr*, "an area or enclosure outside the hallowed precincts of the assembly" (Turville-Petre 1977, 770).[8] In this regard, the spatial non-belonging of outlawry reaffirms the social, for the two are inexorably intertwined: in all senses, the outlaw loses his place among his people, even when he is in their midst.

This relegation to the spatial and cultural wild is further reinforced by the terms "markamaðr" (e.g. ÍF VII, 135) and "skógarmaðr" (e.g. ÍF VII, 147), both of which mean "forest-man." Although the post-Industrial-Revolution world has the luxury of being able to romanticize rather than antagonize nature, such was not the case in medieval Europe. For a farming society like Iceland's, the "forest"[9] was what one cleared to carve out a space for civilization, as Yi-Fu Tuan (1979) emphasizes in "Fear in the Medieval World":

[8] The idea that a man's relationship to community forms a metaphorical pocket of space around him can also be seen during Grettir's infiltration of the *Hegranessþing*, when the *þingmenn* unwittingly grant him an oath of protection "til hérvistar ok heimferðar, hvárt er hann þarf at fara á legi eða landi, at fari eða flutningi" (ÍF VII, 232); similarly, the man who breaks the oath will be barred from "heim hvern, nema helvíti" (ÍF VII, 233).

[9] "Forest" should be considered somewhat symbolically here: as Turville-Petre (1977) points out, the term *skógarmaðr* "must have originated in Norway or even further afield for, even in the earliest times, the forests of Iceland cannot have been so dense that a man could hide in them" (769). The continued use of the term thus speaks to its metaphorical value in designating wilderness spaces, relegating the skógarmaðr to the realm of the dangerous and unknown.

> Cultivated fields are the familiar and humanized world. By contrast, the forest surrounding it seems alien, a place of possibly dangerous strangers... Wayfarers can literally lose their way, but lostness also carries the sense of moral disorientation and of disorderly conduct. The forest is infected with outlaws – wild animals, robbers, witches, and demons. (Kindle locations 1523-1527)

To be a forest-man is therefore a self-contradiction, for the forest is rightly the domain of beasts. By way of cultural association, the humanity of the skógarmaðr therefore comes into question. Indeed, this bestial insinuation is taken to its logical extreme in the term *vargr*, which means both outlaw and wolf. In fact, Gabriel Turville-Petre (1977) argues that the former designation likely preceded the latter – a development which would certainly testify to the heinousness of the term. Vargr therefore evidences none of the sympathy, if limited, of skógarmaðr, but rather calls for drastic measures in order to eliminate a deadly and nonhuman threat. Surely it is no coincidence that the owners of Drangey call Grettir by this name (ÍF VII, 229), for by this point in the saga, Grettir is at his absolute lowest, and "wolf" is not an inappropriate name for an outlaw who must resort to stealing sheep. These metaphors of displacement hint at how concepts of medieval Icelandic outlawry are inherently bound up with simultaneously spatial, cultural, and figural forms of Otherness, demonstrating a nexus of connotations that deserve further exploration.

2.2. Mapping the Old-Norse Other

One cannot address the spatial conceptualization of the Old-Norse Other without touching upon a vast body of scholarship. Beginning with *Snorra-Edda*, there is a longstanding tradition in Old-Norse studies of attempting to map the cosmos and its inhabitants, whether human, divine, monstrous, or some mix thereof. I will not attempt a comprehensive overview of these studies but will instead point out significant recent contributors to the discussion of which cosmological beings belong where. *The Road to Hel*,

in which Hilda Roderick Ellis (1943) situates the realm of the gods in the sky and that of death in the underworld, seems like an appropriate place to begin, for although the binary designation seems basic, Ellis is immediately faced with contradictions regarding how to classify Valhǫll, which is simultaneously thanatic and celestial.[10] The debate does not get simpler from here.

Much of the discussion of Old-Norse cosmography has been dominated by the axial model, famously codified by Eleazar Meletinskij (1973; 1974) in his two-part "Scandinavian Mythology as a System." Meletinskij conceives of the horizontal and vertical axes as two separate, self-contained cosmological models which require "'conversion' from one 'code' to another'" (1973, 46). It is important to note that the axes are not mutually exclusive: on the horizontal axis, Meletinskij situates Miðgarðr, herein the world of both men and gods, at the center, and Útgarðr, the world of giants, foreigners, and other chaotic forces, at the periphery; on the vertical axis, he situates the gods' realms at the top of Yggdrasill and that of death in the underworld. Kirsten Hastrup (1981) combines Meletinskij's two axes into a single system of mutually-exclusive parts. On the horizontal axis, she places men, elves, trolls, and giants spreading outward from the center; on the vertical, she places Ásgarð and the realm of the dead at the top and bottom, respectively. Omitting works written by Snorri from his study as being markedly Christian, Jens Peter Schjødt (revisited in 2004) argues "at ingen af de ældre kilder omtaler om guderne som himmelske" [that none of the older

[10] Ellis writes: "[t]here is on the one hand the conception of an existence after death in the realm of the gods. Connected with this we find the practice of cremation, of suttee and certain kinds of sacrifice; the god Othin seems to be of great importance; and one side of the Valhöll conception is dependent upon it... Contrasted with this on the other hand, we find the conception of a continued existence within the grave-mound itself; there is evidence for a cult of the dead developing out of this, with emphasis on fertility beliefs, rebirth and mantic inspiration; and one side of the Valhöll conception, that of the everlasting battle, appears to be bound up with it too" (198).

sources speak of the gods as celestial] (124, translation mine) and omits the top half of the vertical axis. In this model, men, gods, and giants live on the surface world, with the giants at the periphery, and the dead occupy the underworld.[11]

Other scholars have moved away from the structuralist approach in locating the cosmological Other. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996), for example, notes that "the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond – of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within" (7). Jonas Wellendorf (2004) has taken a stand against the axial model by arguing against the notion that the pre-Christian model – or even the Christian model that supposedly replaced aspects of it[12] – was ever homogenous to begin with. In his analysis of giants, Ármann Jakobsson (2006) finds that they "live on the shore and in the East and in the North and in the forest and in the mountains... indeed, everywhere" (109); in fact, the creatures are not even consistent in name, appearing in the texts alternatively as jǫtnar, trǫllur, hrimþursar, bergrisar, and other seemingly indistinct designations. Jakobsson concludes that "[t]o pin them down is to deny the giants their very chaotic essence" (110). Even relegating the Other to the "wild" as a sort of blanket category of "outsideness" has its problems, for according to Oscar Aldred (2008), archaeological evidence suggests that many natural features of the Icelandic landscape were used to mark the boundaries of early settlements. To a local, a river, ravine, lake, or hill might therefore signify not wilderness, but rather a defined border between two neighbors, the infield and

[11] It should be noted that Margaret Clunies Ross has also famously supported the axial worldview, though her most significant contribution regards the reversibility and irreversibility of time along the axes and does not therefore play as much of a role in this spatial discussion. See Clunies Ross (1994), particularly chapter 7.

[12] "The main model in the Christian cosmology was vertical... [W]hat seems to have happened was that the pre-Christian vertical model was taken over by the new Christian model. Óðinn and Þórr were replaced by God the Almighty and Jesus Christ. The heavenly abode of the pagan gods was replaced by the Christian heaven, and so forth" (Hastrup 1981, 33).

outfield, the outfield and the wild, and so forth. All told, the only clear point of consensus appears to be that the Other is spatially Elsewhere.

I agree with Schjødt and other structuralists that there are "nogle klare tendenser i materialet, som må anses for signifikante" [some clear tendencies in the material that must be considered significant] (Schjødt 2004, 126, translation mine). Indeed, it is futile to deny that these exist within a magical worldview. Consider what George Frazer's (2014) identifies as the two principles of sympathetic magic: the first, called homeopathic magic, states that acting upon an image of a thing can magically affect the thing itself;[13] the second, called contagious magic, states that acting upon a discarded part of a thing can magically affect the thing itself.[14] While Frazer presents these principles primarily insofar as they concern the casting of spells, the underlying idea of power through association is fundamental to magical thinking as a whole. Because *Grettis saga* is steeped in the religious and mythological content of its historical context, it cannot therefore be avoided that certain such associations exist within the text.

That said, I do not believe that the Old-Norse material is consistent enough to render anything resembling a cosmological map; in attempting to do so, in fact, some scholars demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding the nature of myth.[15] Moreover,

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[13] E.g. "when an Ojebway Indian desires to work evil on any one, he makes a little wooden image of his enemy and runs a needle into its head or heart" (Kindle locations 318-319).

[14] E.g. among certain aboriginal tribes in New South Wales, "[an] extracted tooth was placed under the bark of a tree near a river or water-hole; if the bark grew over the tooth, or if the tooth fell into the water, all was well; but if it were exposed and the ants ran over it, the natives believed that the boy would suffer from a disease of the mouth" (Kindle locations 872-874).

[15] In the midst of decrying the axial models, for example, Wellendorf attempts to puzzle out the logic of the gods' domain as depicted in Grímnismál: "It also tells how the gods each day cross a river when they ride to the tree... This indicates that the gods are at least separated from the tree by a river, and therefore they cannot live directly at the trunk of the tree. They do however live at a place where the branches of the tree are within easy reach because *the goat and the deer, which stand at the roof of the house of Óðinn, bite the branches of the world tree*" (2004, 52, emphasis mine). While he does later concede that "it is against the nature of the

structuralists run the risk of arguing for one trend to the exclusion of another;[16] myth is seldom so tidy or consistent. And even if it were possible to produce a faithful cosmological map based on thematic trends and literary description, the exercise would not interest me. That a man exists in Zone A and a monster in Zone B is of little significance; in fact, this arrangement describes a near-perfect world. Only when one figure crosses into the other's territory does their relationship become truly meaningful.

2.3. Identifying Saga Spaces

In this vein, I intend to take a relativistic spatial approach to *Grettis saga*. Rather than treat saga spaces as containers whose contents acquire particular labels (e.g. calling Grettir wild because he moves outdoors or civilized because he moves indoors), I will attempt to identify points at which spatial and personal qualities appear to align in a non-coincidental way. As Grettir spends much of his time confronting monsters of both the human and paranormal variety, I will focus on liminal and chthonic space. Liminality is relevant in that confronting an Other necessitates a traversing of worlds, whereas the chthonic is unavoidable for a character who fights the undead, giants, and other beings of the earth and underworld. Because places often arise without context in the saga, I will prioritize spatial features which are undeniable in their essence – for example, edges or

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poem to rationalize it in this way, so this argument may be of no use" (52), the brief indulgence is characteristic of a tendency within some of the scholarship to approach myth far too literally.

[16] For instance, while I consider Old-Norse giants to be chthonic, a point to which I will return in chapter 3.2, Jens Peter Schjødt writes that "det er forkert, når visse forskere opfatter jætterne som chthoniske. Jætterne befinder sig udelukkende på den horisontale akse, selv om det må medgives, at visse jætte*kvinder* befinder sig i underverdenen" [it is incorrest when certain scholars perceive the giants as chthonic. The giants are found exclusively on the horizontal axis, though it must be conceded that certain giant*esses* are found in the underworld] (Schjødt 2004, 125, translation mine). However, I consider this to be a false limitation imposed by the binary nature of the axial model. Although Schjødt identifies – I believe correctly – a thematic trend involving Þórr, the giants, social models, and so forth, restricting the giants to the horizontal axis denies the very essence of what it means to be chthonic: the Greek root *khthon* means *earth*, not *downwardness*, and Old Norse giants are nothing if not intrinsically linked to earth, stone, caves, and cliffs.

thresholds as liminal, burrows or boulders as chthonic; unlike an overbroad zone such as "the forest," which can be alternatively liminal, peripheral, or alien depending on the needs of the interpretation, such features are easily identifiable regardless of descriptive context.

3. Grettir in Narrative Space

3.1. Grettir's Spatial Liminality

Much of Grettir's spatial liminalization occurs during battle, a fact which plays a significant role in characterizing him as a warrior. In an early test of his mettle, Grettir fights a man-killing bear "í sjávarhǫmrum; var þar hamarklettr einn ok hellisskúti framan í hamrinum." (ÍF VII, 74). Poised between the mouth of a cave and the edge of a cliff, Grettir's liminality is multiplied both spatially and thematically, for his life hangs in the balance as he struggles in the space between two thresholds. Fortunately, Grettir is able to keep the bear at arm's length through sheer brute strength, after which he wrestles it over the cliff and kills it in the fall. Given that Grettir's success in this tête-à-tête is contingent on his matching a wild animal in ferocity and might, it is no wonder that the killing blow is itself liminalized by the movement over the cliff's edge: in being physically equipped to defeat the beast, Grettir shares the very traits that define it as a monster, making his victory – and thus, his exact standing in the world of monsters and men – troublingly unclear.

While it is no secret that those who battle monsters risk becoming monsters themselves – "an acknowledged truth already in mediaeval Iceland" (Ármann Jakobsson 2009, 313) – suffering this fate is not a foregone conclusion. As Lisa Bennett (2009) points out, Grettir's bear-fighting episode contrasts starkly with a bear fight in the early-fourteenth-century work *Finnboga saga ramma* wherein Finnbogi appeals to the bear's reason and honor before finally engaging in combat, a tactic which Bennett argues elevates

them both. Moreover, although much of the saga's spatial liminalization arguably dramatizes action – smashing through a physical barrier here or threatening to tumble a fighter over a precipice there – this does not appear to be its sole function, for the saga seems at times self-aware of its thematic importance. For example, when Grettir defends himself against eighteen assailants by positioning himself "í hamraskarð eitt" (ÍF VII, 183) and Hallmundr secretly defends him from rear attacks, one assailant remarks of Grettir's seemingly supernatural prowess, "nú sé ek, at hér er við troll at eiga, an ekki við menn" (ÍF VII, 184). The image of the trollish exile wedging himself between stone cliffs and defeating an impossible number of foes as if by magic neatly merges Grettir's spatial, social, and figural liminality, feeling like one of many winks to the saga reader.

Not long after overcoming the bear, Grettir fights the villainous Gunnarr and his men. When one of the men "[k]omsk sá til duranna ok drap fótunum í þreskǫldinn ok lá fallinn," Gunnar realizes defeat is imminent and, shield raised, backs out of the doorway. As he crosses the threshold, "Grettir hjó þá niðr í milli Gunnars ok skjaldarins ok af honum báðar hendrnar í úlfliðnum; fell hann á bak aptr út ór durunum. Grettir hjó hann banahǫgg" (ÍF VII, 83). As before, both Grettir's position and his movement become liminalized during this encounter: Grettir backs Gunnar into a doorway, cleaves *í milli* Gunnarr and his shield, and, presumably, must step across the threshold to deliver the death blow, echoing his defeat of the bear. Although heroic, Grettir's ability to defeat so many men singlehandedly poses a latent threat, for only he can determine whether to use this power for good or ill.

Given that encounters with the paranormal Other are themselves a meeting between worlds, it is only fitting that these saga scenes are particularly marked by the

often violent traversing of physical boundaries. When Grettir fights the trollwoman, for example, their boundary-breaking verges on overkill:

> allt þat, sem fyrir þeim varð, brutu þau, jafnvel þverþilit undan stofunni. Hon dró hann fram yfir dyrrnar ok svá í anddyrit... Hon vildi draga hann út ór bœnum, en þat varð eigi, fyrr en þau leystu frá allan útiduraumbúninginn ok báru hann út á herðum sér; þœfði hon þá ofan til árinnar ok allt fram at gljúfrum... [S]vá varð hann lauss, en hon steypðisk í gljúfrin ok svá í forsinn. (ÍF VII, 212-13)

By now, the tropes are familiar: the combatants struggle through a doorway, fight along a perilous border, and seal their fates as one is forced over the edge; in this instance, the fighters even smash through plenty of furniture for good measure. This hyperliminalization is only fitting, for as a folk-hero, Grettir eliminates those that antagonize the world of men, but as an inhabitant of Othered space, Grettir is an antagonist in his own right, leaving his social and figural standing every bit as questionable as his spatial.[17]

Outside of combat, Grettir's multivalent liminality also repeatedly manifests in his traversing bodies of water. It is important to note that the previously discussed thresholds– e.g. the mouth of a cave, the edge of a cliff, a doorway – have existed along the plane where two defined zones come into contrast. Water, on the other hand, is a self-contained zone defined by its own *thingness* and is rendered liminal only in that it divides zones of human livability and presupposes travel. Rather than merely encourage a flirtation with a dividing line, a water crossing therefore prolongs Grettir's movement *through* a geographical border zone, specifically emphasizing the liminality of his physical action. Take for instance Grettir's night-crossing of an icy channel to retrieve fire: "Kuflinn var sýldr allr, þegar hann kom á land, ok var hann furðu mikill tilsýndar, sem troll væri" (ÍF VII, 130). In this crossing,

[17] Hastrup (1990) likewise addresses this ambiguity, though in a thematic rather than spatial sense, remarking: "His fighting of the dark forces of Iceland is an expression of his super-human qualities, yet it is decidedly a *social* act" (164).

Grettir's trollishness upon emerging reflects an uncertainty as to his superhuman physical ability.

This can be seen even more clearly when Grettir helps a woman and her daughter ford an icy river:

> [Hann] greip þær upp báðar ok setti ina yngri í kné móður sinnar ok bar þær svá á vinstra armlegg sér, en hafði lausa ina hœgri hǫnd ok óð svá út á vaðit. Eigi þorðu þær at œpa, svá váru þær hræddar... [Ó]ð hann sterkliga, þar til er hann kom at bakkanum ǫðrum megin, ok fleygir þeim á land... Hon sagðisk eigi vita, hvárt hana hefði yfir flutt maðr eða troll. (ÍF VII, 211)

The passage lingers unsettlingly on Grettir's immense strength, which again leaves him somewhere between man and monster. This uncertainty is further emphasized by the fact that Grettir uses one hand to lift the two women and the other to make his passage: the former ties him firmly to the human community while the latter reaffirms his Otherness in its many forms. As with the battles scenes, Grettir's physicality is presented ambivalently, allowing him to accomplish feats that benefit the social order but could just as easily be turned against it.

Grettir's trollish water crossings also involve a cosmological understanding of water as a border zone, a no-man's land dividing one world from the next. Eldar Heide (2011) explores this conceptualization of water in Nordic literature and archaeology, citing, among other things, the sailing of ship-pyres to the realm of the dead, the digging of moats around ship burials, the possibility that Hel and Valhǫll lie beyond water, and the existence of a sound or river separating Jǫtunheimr from the realm of gods and men. While Heide's focus is on the otherworldliness of islands, not the water surrounding them, the fact that "the notion of a watery barrier between this world and the Otherworld seems to be more or less universal" (58) suggests that the crossing of water is a rite of passage in itself regardless of

what lies on either side. Indeed, Grettir's monstrosity upon emerging from these bodies of water seems to fit the pattern of a transformative journey, even if – or perhaps even more so *because* – the places into which he emerges are perfectly ordinary.

The liminal convergence of Grettir's battle scenes and water crossings strongly recalls the mythological Þórr,[18] who is likewise known for both his resemblance to the giants and his numerous river crossings. Grettir's spatial, social, and figural liminalization also coincide with trends along what Jens Peter Schjødt (2012) would call the horizontal axis of Norse cosmology, which he believes concerns social models of behavior, an emphasis on physicality, and antagonism between Þórr and the giants. All told, these spatial aspects seem to reinforce what Kirsten Hastrup (1990) has portrayed as a primarily thematic connection between Grettir and Þórr, citing Grettir's "super-human strength," his "quality as a defender of the Earth," and the fact that he "guards the world of humans against other-worldly attacks, while also assuming demoniac properties through his links with other-world beings" (167).

However, while Hastrup acknowledges Grettir's "demoniac properties," it should be noted that her reading as a whole is decidedly positive, especially in classifying Grettir as a "culture-hero" at best and a "joker" at worst; I am far more interested in Grettir's Þórric connection insofar as it increases the ambiguity of his status. On the one hand, the Þórrishness of Grettir's liminality is a counterpoint to the trollishness, highlighting the double-edged nature of his being capable of slaying monsters. On the other, Þórr is both non-Christian and troublingly giant-like. In fact, Lotte Motz (1992) argues that Þórr's

[18] As opposed to the Þórr of saga, a figure far more notable for his human or demonic qualities; in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, for example, Þórr disguises himself as a human but is recognized by the king to be a manifestation of the devil. For more on the Christian depiction of pagan elements in the sagas, see Clunies Ross (2010), pages 78-79.

wading across rivers is *itself* one of many traits that characterize him as Other, implicitly tying him to "the wading giants of Germanic folklore, myth and literature" (479).[19] Yi-Fu Tuan (1986) characterizes this ambiguity as the dangerous yet regenerative power of the strange, for while the stranger is an outsider and potential threat, "he may also be a savior... The truly good cannot come from the local and familiar" (12). Such a reading enriches our understanding of Grettir's self-application of the name "Gestr," under which he does both good and bad deeds:[20] in addition to distinguishing Grettir as an outsider, the term highlights the unspoken social contract of reciprocity between social insiders and outsiders wherein some degree of giving and taking is expected on both sides – ideally, but not assuredly, to everyone's satisfaction.

It is therefore noteworthy that Grettir impresses upon the Icelandic landscape steadfast physical reminders of his ability to bridge worlds. When he stays with Þorsteinn Kuggason, an industrious Christian who has commissioned a church on his land, Grettir helps him – albeit begrudgingly[21] – in building a bridge that peals with bells whenever crossed. After Icelandic conversion, bridge-building was deemed "a good Christian deed equal to making donations to the church" (Lund 2005, 120), meaning that this act presumably edges Grettir into the civilized Christian world. Significantly, however, bridges

[19] See pages 478-81 for a fuller discussion of Þórr as a wader, the giants as waders, and their various shared characteristics.

[20] E.g. carrying the women across the channel and fighting the trollwoman and giant, but also infiltrating the Hegranessþing and obtaining an oath that gives him immunity against their retribution. See chapters 64-65 and 72.

[21] "Grettir var atgangsmikill at drepa járnit, en nennti misjafnt" (ÍF VII, 173).

were also spaces of pagan spiritual power in the Old Norse world, which Julie Lund argues is precisely what made them a point of interest for Christians.[22]

This duality may shed light on another bridge-building scene in *Grettis saga* which comes just five chapters later. After Grettir and Bjǫrn Hítdœlakappi "lǫgðusk í einu eptir allri Hítará ofan frá vatni ok út til sjávar," they "fœrðu stéttir þær í ána, er aldri síðan hefir ór rekit, hvárki með vatnavǫxtum né ísalǫgum eða jǫklagangi" (ÍF VII, 188). Contrasting sharply with the image of a belled bridge alongside a church, this project is decidedly more in line with the Grettir we have come to expect: the men first try their strength by swimming an impossible distance and then fashion a rough passage of stones which, for reasons I will make more explicit in the next section, firmly link Grettir to a wilder pagan past. In this vein, even Grettir's bridges – liminal devices in and of themselves – tie him alternately to civilized and uncivilized worlds. And like these bridges, Grettir's liminality persists throughout the saga, suggesting an enduring narrative uncertainty over how to treat this folk-hero-turned-enemy-of-the-state.

3.2. Grettir's chthonic characteristics

Unlike his persistent liminality, Grettir's chthonic characteristics undergo a critical transformation over the course of the saga. Before his fateful encounter with Glámr, Grettir evidences an aversion to the mundane that only underscores his keenness to explore the

[22] "When a rune-stone was raised at a bridge in the eleventh century, it marked out the bridge as being a Christian place. If ritual depositions had been performed at the same place in the pagan period, the raising of a Christian rune-stone could perhaps imply that the pagan meanings of the places were transferred into Christian cosmology. This way of dealing with the transformation of meanings in the cultural landscape was not unfamiliar. The same kinds of actions took place at graveyards, since pagan graveyards are believed to have been consecrated to Christianity by the raising of rune-stones with crosses, followed by many Christian burials. In order to continue to use a place that had had a pagan meaning, acts had to take place to transform the place into a Christian place with a Christian meaning. The bridge was thus being marked as a Christian place consecrated to Christianity. The bridge should be seen as part of the way meaning embodied in the landscape was changed from paganism to Christianity" (129-30).

world's darker recesses. During his sea voyage to Norway, for example, he "gerði sér grǫf under bátinum ok vildi þaðan hvergi hrœra sik" (ÍF VII, 50) until goaded by his shipmates. Resting unhelpfully beneath the ship's boat, Grettir invites comparison to the hibernating bear he later fights, which only emerges "út ór hellis skúta" (ÍF VII, 77) when disturbed by the activity of nearby humans. Moreover, the fact that Grettir's makeshift lair is described as a *grǫf* has underworldy connotations which not only suit Grettir's un-sunny disposition, but also presage his encounter with the revenant Kárr inn gamli. Before discovering the burial mound, Grettir is unfriendly to his host, Þorfinnr, and "vildi eigi ganga með honum úti á daginn" (ÍF VII, 56); when he sees the death-light of the mound, however, Grettir is intrigued, and when the farmer warns, "[s]á einn mun fyrir þeim eldi ráða, at eigi mun gagn í um at forvitnask," Grettir merely responds, "[þ]ó vil ek vita" (ÍF VII, 57). Digging all day, Grettir enters the inner chamber at nightfall, kills the revenant, and claims the treasure, after which he cheekily reports to Þorfinnr, "[m]art er smátt, þat er til berr á síðkveldum" (59). Grettir does not simply lack a fear of the chthonic; he revels in it.

Grettir's chthonic characteristics also manifest in frequent interactions with stone. On a surface level, this may simply draw on a cultural association between outlaws and stone, as evidenced by the (admittedly rarer) Old Icelandic term "urðarmaðr," which "apparently applied to an outlaw who has to live among rocks and stones" (Turville-Petre 1977, 769). However, I would add that in the case of *Grettis saga*, the connection to stone is at least partially temporal in nature. For example, one of Grettir's early feats of strength is to hoist a boulder: "[þ]á hóf Grettir stein þann, *er þar liggr í grasinu ok nú heitir Grettishaf*. Þá gengu til margir menn at sjá steininn, ok þótti þeim mikil furða, at svá ungr maðr skyldi hefja svá mikit bjarg" (ÍF VII, 48, emphasis mine). As of the narrative present, Grettishaf

remains unmoved from where it fell centuries ago – a testament to not only its enormity, but also Grettir's strength.

The temporality of stone can be more clearly in Grettir's determination to move a second boulder: "[þ]ar stendr steinn mikill, er kallaðr er Grettishaf; hann fekksk við lengi um daginn at hefja steininn ok dvalði svá, þar til er þeir Kormákr kómu" (ÍF VII, 102). Here, the time Grettir spends occupied with the boulder is emphasized, nicely coupling the fact that the stone again remains fixed to the new location as of the time of the saga writing. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (2010) observes, "[h]uman beings have from prehistoric times recognized the potentialities within the lithic to send communication across vast spans of time. Hence our fascination with structures like Stonehenge, designed to persist across a temporal duration no human culture can surmount" (58). In this light, Grettir's stone-throwing, though hundreds of years removed from the narrative present, creates cultural landmarks which continue to shape the Icelandic landscape.

Given this temporal dimension, stone functions an important means of characterizing Grettir, for as Barraclough (2010) points out, "Grettir's exceptionality is directly linked to the amount of time he has survived in the wilderness" (368). It is thus fitting that one of his last desperate acts as an outlaw is to hurl a boulder at the witch whose curse will ultimately kill him: "[Grettir] þreif upp stein stundar mikinn ok kastaði ofan á skipit, ok kom á fatahrúguna. Þat var þó lengra steinkast, en Þorbjǫrn ætlaði, at nǫkkurr maðr myndi kasta" (ÍF VII, 248). The sheer magnitude of the stone's trajectory demonstrates Grettir's will to endure – and endure he has, for the act also recalls his great-grandfather Ǫnundr, whose troops pummel the ships of their enemies with "svá stórt grjót, at ekki helzk við" (ÍF VII, 12). Spanning four generations, the stone-throwing motif in

Grettis saga underscores Grettir's extraordinary ability to survive – a metonymy of his resistance to the law's best efforts to erase him.

Stones also contribute to Grettir's staying power by supporting him in battle. For instance, when an exhausted Grettir allows several berserkers to escape into the night, they "fundusk at áliðnum degi undir einum steini ok váru þá dauðir af kulða ok sárum" (ÍF VII, 70). Broken against the stones, the berserkers' demise suggests a sort of death by proxy, symbolically attributing their defeat to Grettir. When Grettir wrestles the bear over the cliff, it is reported that "bjarg var undir hellinum ok urð við sjóinn. Var þar víss bani, því er ofan hrapaði" (ÍF VII, 74). Fortunately, the bear hits the ground first and is smashed between Grettir and a hard place. Attacked by Gísli and his companions, "Grettir lét hefjask fyrir ok veik at steini þeim, er þar stendr við gǫtuna ok Grettishaf er kallat, ok varðisk þaðan" (ÍF VII, 191-92). With a boulder at his back, Grettir launches a defensive and ultimately prevails, earning yet another lithic placename. As Grettir descends into a cave to fight a giant, a priest helps him secure a rope to a rock pile at the top of a waterfall. However, when the priest becomes frightened, "hjlóp hann þá frá festarhaldinu ok fór heim" (ÍF VII, 216), just as Auðunn flees when Grettir fights Kárr;[23] in the end, Grettir is supported by rocks alone. Once again, Grettir's interactions with stone oppose mortality and the onslaught of time, enabling him to linger despite the world's best efforts.

In addition to characterizing him as an anachronism, Grettir's chthonic tendencies also tie him to creatures such as trolls and giants. These creatures' connection to the earth, which Lotte Motz (1982) explores at length, is well attested in Nordic myth and folklore.

[23] Grettir and Kárr "kippðusk... þar um lengi, ok fóru ýmsir á kné, en svá lauk, at haugbúinn fell á bak aptr, ok varð af því dykr mikill. Þá hljóp Auðunn frá festarhaldinu ok ætlaði, at Grettir myndi dauðr" (ÍF VII, 58).

Motz writes, for instance, that "[f]olklore giants live within a mountain cave. In the *Edda*, the hall of Suttung, a giant, was within a mountain, and so well protected by the rock that to see him Odin had to pierce a tunnel through the stone" (71). As a monster-hunter and outlaw, Grettir frequents caves as a matter of both recreation and lifestyle. In fact, the tale of Suttung is reminiscent of the hole Grettir bores in a stone slab he erects at Skjaldbreið;[24] ironically, however, it is Grettir who longs for a view from his monstrous abode out onto the world and not the other way around.

Motz also observes that "the name *berg-búi*, 'rock dweller,' is a designation of giants" (71). Likewise, the trolls and giants of *Grettis saga* inhabit cliffs and caves, and "Regins skáli," or abode of the dwarves, is even used in a kenning as a substitute for "steinn" (ÍF VII, 86). Motz continues: "that a stone is hurled by a giant is a recurrent motif" (71). Grettir's stone-throwing thus not only evidences his giant strength, but also links him to the oldest being in Nordic myth and literal foundation of the world, whose flesh, blood, and bones form the earth and sky.[25] "Although supposed to be inorganic," Cohen (2010) notes, "stones frequently trouble the divide between that which lives, breathes, and reproduces and that which is supposed to be too insensate to exhibit such liveliness" (60). The fluidity of body and stone becomes explicit in the saga when the people of Bárðardalr insist that one of Grettir's defeated trolls "dagaði uppi... ok standi enn þar í konulíking á bjarginu" (ÍF VII, 213) – though, as I will later argue, it also becomes evident in the body of Grettir himself.

Grettir's connection to the chthonic beings of the old world is especially significant with regard to the saga's Christian composition, for as Motz explains, "Folklore giants are

[24] "Reisti hann upp hellu ok klappaði á rauf" (ÍF VII, 201).

[25] See "Vafþrúðnismál" (1962), stanza 21, "Grímnismál" (1962), stanza 40, and "Gylfaginning" (2012), stanzas 8 and 9, which catalogue the dissembling and scattering of Ymir/Aurgelmir's body to form the cosmos.

hostile to the human community, so that in Christian times the devil, enemy of God and man, replaces in many tales these figures of an earlier faith" (72). While individuals in the story characterize do Grettir as devilish, I believe the narrative stops short of doing so – a fact to which I will return in the conclusion. For now, I will simply argue that Grettir's attraction to the chthonic further explains why he is rendered liminal from a Christian viewpoint: while it allows him to exorcise underworldly monsters, making him an agent of order, it also taints him with underworldliness, problematizing his relationship to post-conversion Iceland.

3.3. Characterization of Grettir as Monstrous through Narrative Space

In his work on geography, Edward S. Casey (2001) argues that, beyond simple "reciprocal influence," self and place have a relationship of "constitutive coingredience: each is essential to the being of the other." A central tenant to this approach is Casey's reinterpretation of *Zuhandsein*, a concept from Heidegger's *Being and Time* which roughly translates to "ready-to-hand" and suggests that "place and self are intimately interlocked in the world of concrete work." Casey more forcefully proposes that interaction with place through physical work "helps us to grasp the particular place we are in *as the particular person who we are*" (684, emphasis mine). With this in mind, we can move forward with the idea that Grettir's acts in these liminal and chthonic places define him as a person in a way that exceeds mere literary motif.

Thus far, we have seen how Grettir's interactions with space have brought him into thematic alignment with different monsters at different times, particularly trolls and giants. As a whole, however, Grettir shares a remarkable number of across-the-board spatial traits with Glámr, his most insidious foe. Promising not to flee the *meinvættr* (harmful being)

plaguing the farm where he works, a still-living Glámr expresses the same enthusiasm Grettir conveys in finding the barrow-mound: " 'Ekki hræðumk ek flykur þær,' sagði Glámr, 'ok þykki mér at ódaufligra' " (ÍF VII, 110). In the aftermath of his fight with the meinvættr, it seems "því líkt, sem þar hefði glímt verit heldr sterkliga, því at grjótit var víða upp leyst ok svá jǫrðin" (ÍF VII, 112), recalling Grettir's boulder-tossing. When the locals find Glámr's corpse, "[h]ann var dauðr ok blár sem hel, en digr sem naut... en þó leituðu þeir við at fœra hann til kirkju ok gátu ekki komit honum nema á einn gilsþrǫm" (ÍF VII, 112); here, Glámr not only embodies stone, unbudging as Grettir's boulders, but also lies along gully's edge, echoing the liminality of his undeath. This liminality carries into Glámr's attacks, as seen in the cowherd found in the barn with "hǫfuðit í ǫðrum bási, en fœtr í ǫðrum; hann lá á bak aptr. Bóndi gekk at honum ok þreifaði um hann, finnr brátt, at hann er dauðr ok sundr hryggrinn í honum; var hann brotinn um báshelluna" (ÍF VII, 115). The breaking of the cowherd over the stone threshold recalls both Grettir's breaking the bear in their plummet over the cliff's edge and his killing Gunnarr in the doorway of the house.

In contrast to Barraclough's reading, which characterizes Grettir and Glámr as a spatially incongruous pair,[26] I propose that these shared traits become even clearer over the course of their encounter. Glámr announces his arrival to the scene by "riding" the roof, an interesting Old-Icelandic motif that recalls an barrow-breaking: rather than a human tearing at the top of a mound, an activity for which we have no interior (i.e. revenant's) perspective, we instead have a revenant tearing at the roof of a farmhouse as experienced by those inside. In a sense, Glámr's dramatic arrival thus inverts Grettir's breaking into

[26] Barraclough (2010) writes: "[e]ntrenched so tangibly within his physical surroundings, Glámr's incongruity is heightened, while in contrast, Grettir roots himself in the social world by physically embedding himself in the building itself" (372).

Kárr's mound. As Grettir lies in wait, he observes that "[d]uraumbúningrinn allr var frá brotinn útidurunum, en nú var þar fyrir bundinn hurðarflaki ok óvendiliga um búit. Þverþilit var allt brotit frá skálanum" (ÍF VII, 119). Here, the smashed partition between Grettir and Glámr is metonymic for the liminal space both figures occupy. That Grettir and Glámr are perfectly matched is evident in the struggle over Grettir's cloak: "[í] þriðja sinn þreif hann í með báðum hǫndum svá fast, at hann rétti Gretti upp ór setinu; kippðu nú í sundr feldinum í millum sín. Glámr leit á slitrit, er hann helt á, ok undraðisk mjǫk, hverr svá fast myndi togask við hann" (ÍF VII, 120). Suddenly, two unstoppable forces holding fast to that which divides them find themselves face-to-face after a symbolic tearing of the veil.

Glámr attempts to pull Grettir from the relative safety of the house, and when Grettir realizes the futility of opposing him, he "spyrnir báðum fótum í jarðfastan stein, er stóð í durunum" (ÍF VII, 120); drawing once more on the power of stone, Grettir pushes Glámr with all his might, "ok því kiknaði Glámr á bak aptr ok rauk ǫfugr út á dyrrnar, svá at herðarnar námu uppdyrit, ok ræfrit gekk í sundr, bæði viðirnir ok þekjan frørin; fell hann svá opinn ok ǫfugr út ór húsunum, en Grettir á hann ofan"(ÍF VII, 120-21). In an explosion of liminal and chthonic imagery, Grettir's encounter with Glámr does not constitute a monster-slayer defeating his prey, but rather two selves meeting at a breach between worlds, reflected in the sky above as the veil lifts completely: "Nú í því er Glámr fell, rak skýit frá tunglinu, en Glámr hvessti augun upp í móti, ok svá hefir Grettir sagt sjálfr, at þá eina sýn hafi hann sét svá, at honum brygði við" (ÍF VII, 121). In the end, Grettir succeeds in killing Glámr, but whether he truly defeats him is another matter altogether.

Grettir's interactions with the chthonic world change dramatically after this battle. Glámr's curse leaves him "svá myrkfælinn, at hann þorði hvergi at fara einn saman, þegar

myrkva tók; sýndisk honum þá hvers kyns skrípi" (ÍF VII, 123). Where Grettir's subterranean exploits once evidenced his fearlessness, his further forays into chthonic space[27] now highlight his predicament as an outlaw: Grettir simply has nowhere else to go. The hole Grettir drills into the rock at Skjaldbreið is reminiscent of the curse itself, for Grettir says that "ef maðr legði auga sitt við raufina á hellunni, at þá mætti sjá í gil þat, sem fellr ór Þórisdal" (ÍF VII, 201). This view over the valley of Þórir the half-troll echoes Grettir's cursed vision, for in both cases, Grettir finds himself forced to look upon monstrosity – and perhaps sees only himself.

Though Grettir comes to fear the chthonic, after killing Glámr, his body gains the immovability of stone. The examples are numerous: Grettir grabs a boat "ok helt svá, at hvergi sveif" (ÍF VII, 160); Þormóðr Grabs Grettir by the foot "ok ætlaði at draga hann ofan af Þorgeiri ok fekk ekki at gǫrt" (ÍF VII, 162); Grettir jumps into a cove and sinks "sem steinn" (ÍF VII, 182); when Grettir moves, his presence is announced by the fact that "grjótit sarglaði" (ÍF VII, 191), "immediately identify[ing] him with this particular terrain (Barraclough 2010, 375); Þorbjǫrn attempts to wrestle Grettir at Hegranessþing, and when Grettir does not budge, Þorbjǫrn exclaims, "[e]ngi hefir setit jafnfast fyrir mér í dag sem þú" (ÍF VII, 231); another follows Þorbjǫrn's example, but "gekk Grettir hvergi ór sporum" (ÍF VII, 235); Grettir's killers even remark "hversu Grettir hafði haldit fast saxinu, þá er hann var dauðr; þat þótti mǫnnum undarligt" (ÍF VII, 266). Where Grettir once moved stones, he has now *become* one; like the bloated corpse of Glámr, Grettir proves impossible to remove from the literary landscape.

[27] See ÍF VII, pages 176, 184, 198-199, 200, and 215 for further examples of Grettir voyaging into caves and other chthonic spaces.

Grettir's spatial liminality persists throughout his lifetime, suggesting an ongoing categorical uncertainty: a hero and strongman on the one hand, an outlaw and potential threat on the other, Grettir proves elusive from a retrospective viewpoint. However, his chthonic traits split in two after the battle with Glámr: the more Grettir grows to fear the hauntings of the Icelandic wild, the more clearly he resembles one. These are nothing if not ironic twists, for when Þórhallr warns Grettir, "víss er [þú] dauðinn, ef þú bíðr Gláms," Grettir fatefully responds, "Eigi má ek minna hafa fyrir hest minn en at sjá þrælinn" (ÍF VII, 119); indeed, after being cursed, Grettir lives his life like a dead man, haunted by what he sees Glámr's eyes. By lingering uncomfortably in liminal places or sinking deeper into the chthonic world, Grettir occupies the narrative space of the saga in an implicit misalignment, continuously transgressing boundaries between human and sub- or non-human spheres. These textual signals of non-belonging bring Grettir into resemblance with the monsters he battles, especially Glámr, whom the narrative sets up as an equal to Grettir in both character and power.

4. The Paranormal in Narratological Space

4.1. Conceptualizing Narratological Space

Using the concept of characterization through narrative space as an analogue, I will now expand my study into the narratological space of the saga. By narratological space I do not mean the narrative space of the saga as rendered narratologically, but rather the space implicit within the narratological arrangement itself. For example, if a text employs external focalization (i.e. an outside-in, camera-eye perspective) to portray one character and internal focalization (i.e. an inside-out perspective as filtered through the experience of a figure within the text) to portray another (Genette 1980), the distance between the

reader and the internally focalized character is relatively shorter; in other words, access to consciousnesses can narrow the divide between a reader and character. Although this is only one example of how space is generated narratologically,[28] it at this level which I intend to conduct my study: the space between reader and represented consciousness.

In contrast to classical narratology, which primarily concerns itself with developing criteria for a typology of texts, I intend to adapt an approach used in cognitive semiotics which holds that analyzing variation in a text's narratological features can determine meaning effects outside the level of mere narrative content.[29] As such, it is necessary to establish a narratological baseline of Grettis saga. On the whole, the saga is extremely faithful to the human-level experience, particularly that of Grettir: scenes of interest are most commonly moments of human action and interaction (rather than, for instance, Grettir's introverted experiences[30]); deviations from average scope and granularity[31] tend to be occasional and brief; and internal focalization[32] is rather Grettir-centric, unfolding through him as a default or through people in his immediate vicinity for dramatic or practical effect. Where it concerns narratological inroads to consciousness, which include

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[28] One could also consider, for example, the distance between a representing and represented consciousness, as measured in terms of displacement and immediacy. See Chafe (1994), chapter 3.

[29] For applied examples of this approach, see Bundgaard (2008).

[30] Introverted consciousness is turned inward (e.g. imagining, pondering, reminiscing), while extroverted consciousness is turned outward (e.g. perceiving, acting, evaluating) in response to external stimuli (Chafe 1994). In the case of *Grettis saga*, the few thoughts and feelings that do arise tend to be simple and predictable in their extroverted relevancy to the plot scenario (e.g. Grettir becomes afraid or exhausted during a fight).

[31] Scope measures the visual field of the text (e.g. an ant's-eye view of a single object versus a bird's-eye view of a large area), whereas granularity measures the coarseness or fineness with which the contents of the scope are attended (e.g. citing the exact location, color, or texture of a room's contents versus simply announcing that a room exists) (Talmy 2000).

[32] At times, it is difficult to pinpoint whether moments of displaced immediacy are focalized through the storyworld characters or the (very much present) disembodied narrator imagining itself within the scene. Nevertheless, there is a strong tendency for key scenes, such as action sequences, to unfold in phenomenological accord with the storyworld action.

internal focalization, access to thought, and, at times,[33] speech, we can therefore expect Grettir and his human companions to occupy a spatially central role in that they are the represented consciousnesses to which the reader should have the most access; conversely, we can expect the paranormal Other to occupy a spatially peripheral role in terms of access to consciousness. To test this theory, I will address narratological variation both within and across three of the saga's paranormal encounters to ascertain their respective meaning effects.[34]

4.2. Comparative Reading of Three Monstrous Encounters

4.2.1. Grettir and the Berserkers

Grettir's encounter with a dozen berserkers stands out as one of the most dialogue-heavy scenes in the saga, a counterintuitive fact given the warriors' reputation for brutality and theft.[35] Recognizing the danger they pose to the unprotected homestead, Grettir greets the berserkers hospitably and tacitly offers to collude in their savagery, reporting that "bóndi er heiman farinn með alla heimamenn, þá sem frjálsir eru, ok ætlar eigi heim fyrr en á bak jólunum; húsfreyja er heima ok bóndadóttir; ok ef ek þœttumk nǫkkurn mótgang eiga at gjalda, þá vilda ek þann veg at koma" (ÍF VII, 63-64). Delighted by the good news, the men then "play house," conversing with Grettir and the others as though they were

[33] I say "at times" because while speech is a creation of the mind, it can be employed to both honest and deceitful ends, alternatively narrowing or widening the gap between the reader and the represented consciousness.

[34] It is important to note that work done by Friend (2012), Østergaard and Bundgaard (2014), and others indicates that genre imposes top-down constraints on reading, thereby affecting attention and meaning. The Icelandic sagas' genre status has been widely contested throughout their scholarship history (see Andersson 2008 for an overview), so it is necessary to acknowledge that modern audiences may read them differently than medieval ones.

[35] According to the narrator, "[þ]eir váru háleyskir at ætt, meiri ok sterkari en aðrir menn. Þeir gengu berserksgang ok eirðu engu, þegar þeir reiddusk. Þeir tóku á brott konur manna ok dœtr ok hǫfðu við hǫnd sér viku eða hálfan mánuð ok fœrðu síðan aptr þeim, sem áttu; þeir ræntu, hvar sem þeir kómu, eða gerðu aðrar óspekðir" (ÍF VII, 62).

ordinary guests. Only the narrator's aforementioned condemnation of the men provides an ongoing subtext which hints at their vile intentions.

For instance, their leader soothes the woman of the house while subtextually intimating a violent fate. "Ver eigi stygg, húsfreyja," he says, "engi missir skal þér í verða, þó at bóndi sé eigi heima, því at fá skal mann í stað hans, ok svá dóttur þinni ok ǫllum heimakonum" (ÍF VII, 64-65). Grettir is less subtle, commanding: "Gangið til sængr, konur... svá vill Þórir bóndi skipa" (ÍF VII, 66). Grettir and the berserkers share no fewer than sixteen friendly verbal exchanges before combat begins. In gratitude, the berserkers even pledge fellowship to Grettir, stating, "en mikinn mun eigu vér at gera þín eða annarra heimamanna; lízk mér, sem vér munum þik hafa at trúnaðarmanni" (ÍF VII, 65). The bizarre dialogic nature of the scene juxtaposes the berserkers' exteriority and interiority, creating ironic tension between their civil conduct and savage intent. This suits the monstrous figure of the berserker perfectly, for he is the embodiment of a monstrous discrepancy: although visually indistinguishable from any other stronger-than-average human, a primal, vicious animal lurks just below the surface.

Complementing this behavioral focus is a near-complete lack of access to berserker consciousness. Our only points of entry are when we are told that the men "váru mjǫk móðir" (ÍF VII, 65) that they, "ætluðu fyrst, at svarfazk myndi aptr hafa hurðin, ok gáfu sér ekki at" (ÍF VII, 66-67), and that "þeim þótti Gretti dveljask aptrkváman; grunar þá nú, hvárt eigi munu vera svik í" (ÍF VII, 67).[36] Importantly, all three examples are practical in

[36] At another point, it is said that the berserkers "urðu mjǫk glaðir við ok vildu þegar binda félag sitt með fastmælum," which appears to be nonverbal indirect thought (Chafe 1994) until the passage continues with, "Grettir kvað" (ÍF VII, 66); their wanting to make a pledge is therefore referred-to speech (Chafe 1994), while their being delighted may therefore be either the nonverbal indirect thought of the berserkers themselves or an observation about the berserkers' attitude internally focalized through Grettir – the likelier option given the second half of the sentence.

their function, informing the reader rather than meaningfully personalizing the berserkers or their experiences. Similarly, only when Grettir locks the berserkers in the outbuildings do they (perhaps)[37] operate as focalizers,[38] informing the reader when the default focalizer, Grettir, is away. By maintaining a mental distance from the reader, this inaccessibility to berserker consciousness not only highlights their dialogic deceit, but also suggests a lack of humanity past the surface level.

Grettir's consciousness opens to the reader at several moments during the encounter, though an overall limitation of access also proves meaningful. In addition to standard sensory focalization, there are also thought reports concerning the berserkers' intent. When they arrive, for example, "[e]kki *þótti* honum þeir friðliga láta" (ÍF VII, 63, emphasis mine). The fact that the narrator writes primarily in the past tense indicates prior knowledge of the story's outcome; the word "þótti" thus indicates that the assessing consciousness lacks the narrator's knowledge, making this the nonverbal indirect thought of Grettir himself.[39] Importantly, despite evidence that Grettir mistrusts the men, there is a conspicuous absence of access to consciousness where it regards his verbally tricking them: until Grettir traps the berserkers in the outhouse and arms himself, there is no textual evidence to suggest that he will offer up any resistance.

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[37] Admittedly, the narrator is also visible here. E.g. "Hlaupa þeir á hurðina ok finna, at hon var læst; treysta nú á timbrveggina, svá at brakar í hverju tré. *Hér kemr um síðir*, at þeir *fá* brotit skjaldþilit" (ÍF VII, 67, emphasis mine). While the description is in phenomenological accord with the berserkers' actions (running at the door, then discovering it is locked, then pushing, then producing noise) and likely focalized through their experience, the narrator also provides counterfactual expectations (Talmy 2000) in "hér kemr um síðir" and "fá."

[38] A small caveat: when Grettir first leads the men outside, it is remarked that "[þ]ar var hjá salerni mikit ok sterkt ok eitt skjaldþili milli húsanna; húsin stóðu hátt, ok var nǫkkut rið upp at ganga" (ÍF VII, 66). While this observation may be focalized through both the berserkers and Grettir as they approach en masse, the fact that Grettir then sneaks away without their noticing makes him the prime focalizer of this scene. If the report of the buildings' appearance *is* focalized in part by the berserkers, it would be incidental, not integral, to the incident, again making Grettir the key focalizer.

[39] For more on the various types of thought report, see Chafe (1994), chapter 16.

As with the berserkers, this omission of thought emphasizes Grettir's deceitful speech. By now, however, the reader may know Grettir well enough to suspect the deception,[40] meaning that an identical behavioralist approach to Grettir and the berserkers produces two opposite meaning effects: Grettir's feigned malice conceals a plan to protect the farmhouse, whereas the berserkers' feigned civility masks their intent to violate it. Despite the dramatic irony of this disparity, the net effect is arguably comic, for unlike the berserkers, the reader is let in on Grettir's joke. Thus, this narratological arrangement provides a safety within which to enjoy the scene's suspense. Moreover, although the women are ignorant of Grettir's plan until late in the game, the reader can sympathize with their fright without experiencing any real fear for their safety.

Significantly, when the berserkers discover Grettir's deception, the scene's dialogue evaporates:

> Nú er at segja frá berserkjunum, at þeim þótti Gretti dveljask aptrkváman; grunar þá nú, hvárt eigi munu vera svik í. Hlaupa þeir á hurðina ok finna, at hon var læst; treysta nú á timbrveggina, svá at brakar í hverju tré. Hér kemr um síðir, at þeir fá brotit skjaldþilit, ok kómusk svá fram í gangrúmit ok þar út á riðit; kemr á þá berserksgangr ok grenja sem hundar. (ÍF VII, 67-68)

From this point forward, all doors to berserker consciousness close, for the scene lacks further direct or indirect speech, thought report, or internal focalization. This switch from amicable chatting to animalistic howling perfectly suits the berserker, for as he enters a battle rage, his most primal mental faculties overtake him. This sudden distancing of consciousness renders the reader unable to identify with the berserkers as humans,

[40] I concede that this suspicion is not a given. Robert Cook (1985), for example, does not believe the reader has seen a consistent enough picture of Grettir up until this point to know whether or not he is sincere in his offers to the berserkers, stating that "the reader is in a position comparable to that of Þorfinnr's wife and daughters" (142). While this may be true for modern audiences unfamiliar with Grettir, it certainly would not have been the case for the original saga audience.

suggesting that what remains is utterly nonhuman. Thus, the berserker-as-monster becomes narratologically exterior to the reader as much as he is spatially exterior within an Old-Norse worldview.

Unfortunately for the reader, this distancing combined with other narratological tools somewhat flattens the action sequences that follow. It should be noted that Grettir's battle against the berserker gang begins in relatively high detail:

> Í því bili kom Grettir at; hann tvíhendi spjótit á Þóri miðjum, er hann ætlaði ofan fyrir riðit, svá at þegar gekk í gegnum hann. Fjǫðrin var bæði lǫng ok breið á spjótinu. Ǫgmundr illi gekk næst Þóri ok hratt honum á lagit, svá at allt gekk upp at krókunum; stóð þá spjótit út um herðarnar á Þóri ok svá framan í brjóstit á Ǫgmundi. Steypðusk þeir báðir dauðir af spjótinu. (ÍF VII, 68)

From here, however, the description becomes increasingly less specific, continuing: "[þ]á hljóp þar hverr út af riðinu sem kominn var. Grettir sótti at sérhverjum, gerði ýmisst, at hann hjó með saxinu eða lagði með spjótinu" (ÍF VII, 68) As the battle continues, its most striking feature is increased granularity, particularly through descriptions of action: the men thrust, run, fight, slash, flee, and so on. Because of the sheer number of weapons and combatants in the fray, the density[41] also increases – so much so, in fact, that it necessitates the lumping of characters into numbered groups: "Sex fellu þar víkingar, ok varð Grettir banamaðr allra. Síðann leituðu aðrir sex undan... Tvá drap Grettir í naustinu, en fjórir kómusk út hjá honum. Fóru þá sinn veg hvárir tveir; hann elti þá, sem nær honum váru" (ÍF VII, 69). All told, the increasing density has an estranging effect[42] in that it fails to promote emotional engagement from the reader: while the first two casualties not only are named,

[41] Density measures the total number of individual elements described (Talmy 2000).

[42] For another example of how increased density can cause estrangement, see Bundgaard (2008).

but also die in a striking manner, those that follow are teeming, faceless fodder. Even Grettir eventually tires of them and goes home.[43]

The scene's most punctuated moment of saliency is likewise disengaging: when the narrator makes an overt metatextual interjection, calling Vindheimr "þeim bœ, sem fyrr var nefndr" (ÍF VII, 69), the reader is asked to recollect an earlier, unrelated incident which breaks from the encounter entirely, thus increasing estrangement. To its credit, the scene's narratological arrangement contracts a large amount of activity into a rather list-like account, mirroring Grettir's efficiency in eliminating the dozen berserkers. Moreover, the action granularity, estranging density, and lack of emotional engagement become as tedious for the reader as the experience does Grettir. Although a successful mirroring in its own right, the resulting effect entails action rather than suspense; perhaps it is for this reason that the narrator includes compensatory remarks regarding the deadliness of Grettir's foes.[44] As a whole, our inaccess to berserker consciousness seems to conform to Old-Norse spatial expectation: though the men play at being human, their monstrosity ultimately holds them at a distance from the reader.

4.2.2. Grettir and the Trollwoman and Giant

Grettir's two-part encounter with a trollwoman and a giant similarly emphasizes action in its first half, though this effect is achieved by very different narratological means. The most striking contrast between this and the previous encounter is a complete lack of

[43] "Veðr gerði kalt mjǫk með fjúki. Nennti [Grettir] þá eigi at leita víkinganna þeira tveggja, er þá váru eptir; gekk hann nú heim til bœjar" (ÍF VII, 69).

[44] E.g. "var þat in mesta mannhætta, at fásk við þá fyrir afls sakar, þó at þeir hefði engi vápn" (ÍF VII, 68) and "[f]ekk Grettir þá stór hǫgg af þeim, svá at við meiðingum var búit" (ÍF VII, 69). Rather than demonstrate the berserkers' strength experientially through a reflective mode, these statements ask the reader to defer to the narrator on this matter.

dialogue, which suits[45] the opponents' alienness: unlike the berserkers and their initial semblance of humanity, there is no mistaking the visibly Other trollwoman and giant for humans, as they are at a behavioral and intellectual distance from the outset. Moreover, there is no deviation to speak of in the scene's granularity and density,[46] demonstrating few key points of interest on the part of the consciousnesses involved.[47]

When the scene begins, the thread of focalization is somewhat difficult to follow but ultimately favors the narrator:

> *Nú er frá Gretti þat at segja*, at þá er dró at miðri nótt, heyrði hann út dynur miklar. Því næst kom inn í stofuna trollkona mikil; hon hafði í hendi trog, en annarri skálm heldr mikla. Hon litask um, er hon kom inn, ok *sá, hvar Gestr lá*, ok hljóp at honum, en hann upp í móti, ok réðusk á *grimmliga* ok sóttusk lengi í stofunni. Hon var sterkari, en hann fór undan *kœnliga*, en allt þat, sem fyrir þeim varð, brutu þau, jafnvel þverþilit undan stofunni. (ÍF VII, 212, emphasis mine)

Redirecting our attention to Grettir, the narrator becomes overt in the opening sentence fragment. Next, Grettir's hearing announces the trollwoman's arrival, meaning his vision likely focalizes her entrance. This bizarre and memorable description, characterized by an increase in both density and fineness of granularity, reflects a shocking visual experience of her Otherness from the point of view of the human protagonist, reaffirming Grettir's relative closeness to the reader. In the third sentence, the trollwoman "litask um" and "sá,

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[45] I say "suits" because these two paranormal figures are perfectly capable of speech in the Old Norse world: e.g. in *Skáldskaparmál*, the poet Bragi has a poetry battle with a trollwoman (2012, 202-03); in *Vafþrúðnismál,* Óðinn challenges the giant Vafþrúðnir to a knowledge contest. The representation of trolls, giants, and other paranormal figures ranges from rather human to utterly alien across the Old Norse literary corpus (and even within single works, as we shall soon see), so the lack of speech in this instance is not merely a practical constraint.

[46] Heightened action granularity is a typical feature in almost all the saga's battle scenes and is not especially revealing in and of itself. I give it a lot of attention in the berserker scene because of the meaningful switch from dialogue to action, but where the level of action is roughly consistent *within* a scene, I will not elaborate at length.

[47] According to Talmy (2000), changes in scope, density, and granularity reflect shifts of attention on the part of the assessing consciousness.

hvar Gestr lá," which would seem like reciprocal focalization through her eyes were it not for the word "Gestr," a pseudonym by which the people of the farmhouse know Grettir; since the trollwoman has no social contact with the farmstead, she would not know this name, let alone associate it with the stranger before her. Likewise, there is no reason for Grettir self-identify by his pseudonym, so the sentence must logically reflect the narrator's perspective. Similarly, the combatants are unlikely to self-apply qualitative assessments like "grimmliga" and "kœnliga" during an extroverted experience, thus reaffirming the narrator's perspective over the course of the battle. Aside from a brief flash of Grettir's sensory experience, the external perspective[48] prevails, doing little to encourage emotional engagement with the scene's combat sequence and again necessitating narrative assertions as to the combatants' fervor.

Access to the characters' consciousness increases, if only temporarily, as the battle continues:

> Hon dró hann fram yfir dyrrnar ok svá í anddyrit; þar tók hann fast í móti. Hon *vildi* draga hann út ór bœnum, en þat varð eigi, fyrr en þau leystu frá allan útiduraumbúninginn ok báru hann út á herðum sér; þœfði hon þá ofan til árinnar ok allt fram at gljúfrum. Þá var Gestr *ákafliga móðr*, en þó *varð annathvárt at gera, at herða sik, ella myndi hon steypa honum í gljúfrin*. Alla nóttina sóttusk þau. *Eigi þóttisk hann hafa fengizk við þvílíkan ófagnað fyrir afls sakar*. (ÍF VII, 212, emphasis mine)

While the narrator (e.g. "Þá var *Gestr* ákafliga móðr") still assesses of the action (e.g. "*allt fram* at gljúfrum"), increased mental access to the characters also heightens immediacy. Significantly, the fact that the trollwoman "vildi" drag Grettir outside provides the briefest of glimpses into her consciousness in the form of verbally uncommitted thought, evidencing the basic mental faculty of desire or intention. Grettir's nonverbal indirect

[48] While external perspective is provided by a narrating instance, internal perspective arises from character consciousness. For more on the distinction, see Stanzel (1984).

thoughts are more prominent still, overtaking the end of the passage: he is "ákafliga móðr," realizes he "varð annathvárt at gera, at herða sik, ella myndi hon steypa honum í gljúfrum," and "[e]igi þóttisk hann hafa fengizk við þvílíkan ófagnað fyrir afls sakar." Reducing mediation on the part of the narrator, these flashes of interiority narrow the distance between reader and represented consciousness – primarily, as one would expect, that of Grettir.

> As the scene progresses, however, our access to interiority once again scales back:
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> Hon hafði haldit honum svá fast at sér, at hann mátti hvárigri hendi taka til nǫkkurs, útan hann helt um hana miðja, kvinnuna; ok er þau kómu á árgljúfrit, bregðr hann flagðkonunni til sveiflu. Í því varð honum laus in hœgri hǫndin; hann þreif þá skjótt til saxins, er hann var gyrðr með, ok bregðr því, høggr þá á ǫxl trollinu, svá at af tók hǫndina hœgri, ok svá varð hann lauss, en hon steypðisk í gljúfrin ok svá í forsinn. (ÍF VII, 212-13)

While the initial line is specific to Grettir's experience and may be internally focalized, there are no clear markers of interiority after this point, emphasizing action over emotion; only after he prevails do we read that Grettir is "móðr" (ÍF VII, 213), a fact which is more cathartic than engaging given Grettir's victory. Although lacking the exhausting narratological effect present in the berserker battle, this scene's mechanical approach to combat most effectively conveys action, and with the exception of a brief flash of intent, the reader has almost no interior access to the visually Othered, narratologically distant trollwoman.

Taking a new direction, Grettir's encounter with the giant employs focalization to striking effect, especially when it unfolds through the priest. When Grettir embarks, "[hann] var fáklæddr ok gyrði sik með saxinu, en hafði ekki fleiri vápn; síðan hljóp hann af bjarginu ok niðr í forsinn. Sá prestr *í iljar honum* ok vissi síðan aldri, hvat af honum varð" (ÍF VII, 215, emphasis mine). The soles of Grettir's feet, here textually disconnected from

the rest of his body, are clearly focalized through the priest, who loses sight of the rest of Grettir as he dives into the water. Moreover, the ensuing thought report betrays the priest's ignorance of what unfolds next. This switch to a noncombatant's perspective not only is highly salient in its atypicality, but also heightens suspense by briefly placing the reader in the mind of someone far less informed than the narrator or other characters.

From here, Grettir overtakes the lens of internal focalization:

> Grettir kafaði undir forsinn, ok var þat torvelt, því at iða var mikil, ok varð hann allt til grunns at kafa, áðr en hann kœmisk upp undir forsinn. Þar var forberg nǫkkut, ok komsk hann inn þar upp á. Þar var hellir mikill undir forsinum, ok fell áin fram af berginu. Hann gekk þá inn í hellinn, ok var þar eldr mikill á brǫndum. (ÍF VII, 215)

Because these images appear in step with Grettir's physical movement, the scene builds anticipation while he explores a dangerous and unknown space. Relative to the fight with the trollwoman, moreover, the description also slows, emphasizing exploration rather than action. These techniques are especially effective given that, unlike in the previous encounters, Grettir does not yet know what opponent he will face. Focalization through his perspective thus produces an emotional climax when Grettir sees "at þar sat jǫtunn ógurliga mikill; hann var hræðiligr at sjá" (ÍF VII, 215).

This closeness to represented consciousness quickly passes, however, for the representing consciousness of the narrator interrupts the battle:

> En er Grettir kom at honum, hljóp jǫtunninn upp ok greip flein einn ok hjó til þess, er kominn var, því at *bæði mátti hǫggva ok leggja með því; tréskapt var í; þat kǫlluðu menn þá heptisax, er þann veg var gǫrt*. Grettir hjó á móti með saxinu, ok kom á skaptit, svá at í sundr tók. (ÍF VII, 215, emphasis mine)

Because the opening sentence describes Grettir as a neuter object in the phrase "þess, er kominn var," the scene is initially focalized through the limited understanding of the giant, showing the saga world, for the first time, through the eyes of an Other; the narratological

gap between the reader and the Other is at last closed. However, this distance snaps violently back when the narrator interjects with an explanation of the pike. Like that of the farm "sem fyrr var nefndr," this description breaks the spell of immersion by broadcasting the reader's extratextuality, for only someone removed from the storyworld would require such clarification. More damagingly still, the comment emerges precisely in the middle of an exchange of blows, textually separating Grettir and the giant and dispelling any notion of urgency.

The battle action then unfolds much in the usual way, broken only by the sudden reappearance of the priest:

> Jǫtunninn vildi þá seilask á bak sér aptr til sverðs, er þar hekk í hellinum. Í því hjó Grettir framan á brjóstit, svá at náliga tók af alla bringspelina ok kviðinn, svá at iðrin steypðusk ór honum ofan í ána, ok keyrði þau ofan eptir ánni. Ok er prestr sat við festina, sá hann, at slyðrur nǫkkurar rak ofan eptir strengnum, blóðgar allar. Hann varð þá lauss á velli ok þóttisk nú vita, at Grettir myndi dauðr vera; hjlóp hann þá frá festarhaldinu ok fór heim. (ÍF VII, 215-16)

Increased granularity draws attention to the disemboweling, making the abrupt switch to the priest's perspective even more striking. This sudden refocalization dramatizes the battle's hiddenness from the outside world – and would perhaps increase the reader's concern for Grettir's wellbeing had it not occurred just *after* Grettir strikes a mortal blow; the terror the priest experiences at the sight of the entrails cannot be shared by a reader who knows that they spilled from the giant. Highlighting his error in judgment, refocalization through the priest thus underscores Grettir's safety and the assuredness of his victory. Indeed, the narrator then matter-of-factly finishes the scene: "Nú er frá Gretti at segja; hann lét skammt hǫggva í milli, þar til er jǫtunninn dó" (ÍF VII, 216). Although focalization through Grettir generates suspense and focalization through the giant briefly

narrows its distance from the reader, the narrator's mid-battle interruption and the priest's misinformed perspective ultimately neutralize the feeling of threat posed by the giant.

4.2.3. Grettir and Glámr

With the previous encounters in mind, we can now turn to Grettir's scene with Glámr to find a very different narratological arrangement, especially regarding the spatialization of Glámr. Let us begin with Grettir's experience of the monster:

> Ok er af myndi þriðjungr af nótt, heyrði Grettir út dynur miklar; var þá farit upp á húsin ok riðit skálanum ok barit hælunum, svá at brakaði í hverju tré; því gekk lengi. Þá var farit ofan af húsunum ok til dura gengit; ok er upp var lokit hurðunni, sá Grettir, at þrællinn rétti inn hǫfuðit, ok *sýndisk honum afskræmiliga mikit ok undarliga stórskorit*. Glámr fór seint ok réttisk upp, er hann kom inn í dyrrnar; hann *gnæfði ofarliga* við rjáfrinu, snýr at skálanum ok lagði handleggina upp á þvertréit ok *gnapði* inn yfir skálann. (ÍF VII, 119-20, emphasis mine).

That this scene is initially focalized through Grettir's hearing[49] is suggested by the passive, subject-less construction of "var þá farit upp á húsin ok riðit skálanum ok barit hælunum," which almost seems to refer back to the previously heard *dynr* as the acting agent; while the narrator and the reader know Glámr is on the roof, Grettir cannot be certain of the noise-maker's identity until *þrællinn* peers inside. Focalized through Grettir's vision, Glámr is then sized up from the human perspective: he is "afskræmiliga mikit" and "undarliga stórskorit;" he is not simply large but "gnæfði ofarliga" and "gnapði" in order to fit. In Grettir's assessment, Glámr is bestial and unintelligent, banging dully on the roof and moving monstrously through the farmhouse. His entrance is thus consistent with the monster-as-outsider quality of the saga as a whole.

[49] Although the image of sitting astride the roof and kicking one's heels may seem too specific to be focalized through a character who can only *hear* what is happening, this is extremely typical revenant behavior in the Old Icelandic world; Grettir would therefore be perfectly capable of imagining the specific activity producing these sounds.

In a similar reading, Dean Swinford (2002) likewise argues that this encounter opens through Grettir's perspective; however, he then claims that "there is no reciprocal revelation of Glámr's perception. The narrative simply returns to the omniscient viewpoint" (617). On this account, I hold Swinford to be wrong. Observe how the following passage is partially focalized through Glámr and even provides his verbally uncommitted thought:

> Glámr sá, at *hrúga nǫkkur* lá í setinu, ok rézk nú innar eptir skálanum ok þreif í feldinn stundar fast. Grettir spyrndi í stokkinn, ok gekk því hvergi. Glámr hnykkði í annat sinn miklu fastara, ok *bifaðisk hvergi feldrinn*. Í þriðja sinn þreif hann í með báðum hǫndum svá fast, at hann rétti Gretti upp ór setinu; kippðu nú í sundr feldinum í millum sín. Glámr leit slitrit, er hann helt á, ok *undraðisk mjǫk, hverr svá fast myndi togask við hann*. (ÍF VII, 120)

Mimicking their struggle over the cloak, this passage exhibits a narratological tug-of-war between monster and man. Glámr, who doesn't know that the "hrúga" on the bench is Grettir, internally focalizes the first sentence. The second sentence names Grettir and describes his hidden activity, shifting focalization away from the unknowing monster. The third shifts back to Glámr, who observes that "bifaðisk hvergi feldrinn;" disengaged from the fact that Grettir holds the other end, this kinesthetic experience of the cloak is focalized through Glámr's limited perspective. When the cloak tears, Glámr and Grettir finally meet eye-to-eye, after which point Glámr "undraðisk mjǫk" at Grettir's strength. This thought report is not only Glámr's first in the entire saga,[50] but also speaks to an evaluating intelligence behind what Grettir mistakes for brute monstrosity.

[50] As previously discussed, Glámr first appears three chapters earlier as a living man eventually killed by a meinvættr – only to become an even more powerful monster himself. The living Glámr is characterized through direct, indirect, and referred-to speech (Chafe 1994) as well as description, but never thought report. Up until this moment, the undead Glámr is even less accessible, as he is mostly visible by the trail of corpses left in his wake.

Although a rather typical brawl ensues, the narratological features of the encounter change from unusual to extraordinary once the combatants move outdoors:

> [F]ell [Glámr] 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 augun 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. (ÍF VII, 121)

In a distinct departure from the typically human-centric saga, the narrative scope changes from average to macro level[51] as the moon overtakes the scene visually. Because average scope is the bedrock of a work centered on human activity, this expansion of scope wrests narratological focus away from the human individual, perfectly corresponding with Grettir's sudden loss of strength and agency. Moreover, this visual shift from the human to the cosmic sets the scene for Glámr's magical curse, again diminishing the human agent.

Unusually, the moon appears twice in this scene, a fact which produces a discrepancy in the dilation of time. It first emerges when the combatants hit the ground ("fell [Glámr] 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") and then again as Glámr peers up ("Nú í því er Glámr fell, rak skýit frá tunglinu, en Glámr hvessti augun upp í móti"). In the former instance, the clouds veil and unveil the moon in turns, necessitating the passing of time. In the latter, however, the falling of the fighters, parting of the clouds, and peering of Glámr are necessarily concurrent, for they are bound together by "nú í því." Given the saga's tendency to relay sensory information in phenomenological accord with

[51] Average being at the human scale (e.g. a basic description of a room) and macro being at the larger-than-human scale (e.g. a sweeping overview of a landscape) (Talmy 2000).

characters' actions, the fact that the initial description of the moon exceeds the characters' temporal experience thus creates a misalignment of perspective.

At a surface level, the slow first moon interrupts the rapid, action-heavy fight sequence preceding it, setting the scene for the battle's unusually temporally expanded, action-sparse climax. More importantly, the first description of the moon is *temporally impossible* when contrasted with the second, casting a strangeness over the events which unfold below: although human action grinds to a halt, epitomized by Grettir's literal paralysis, moon-time flows indifferently overhead, suggesting a cosmic inevitability to the battle's troubling finale. Moreover, the fact that "glámr" is an archaic term for "moon" (Cleasby 1874b) implicitly aligns the temporal impossibility of the moon with Glámr's sudden surge in magical power – which, like the moon, defies all ordinary laws of causality. This remarkable temporal clash is further enhanced by a spatio-temporally displaced statement from future-Grettir ("svá hefir Grettir sagt sjálfr, at þá eina sýn hafi hann sét svá, at honum brygði við"), which interrupts the scene by breaking from it altogether.[52]

Because he glares up at it with perverse fascination, Glámr most likely focalizes the second description of the moon. Significantly, Grettir, who faces downward and is paralyzed by Glámr's eyes, *cannot see the moon*. Although we have briefly seen focalization through a monster before, this instance stands out in that it expels the hero from an experience shared by the narrator, reader, and adversary: in this moment, Grettir is truly

[52] Unlike the scene-breaking narrative intrusions in the previous two encounters, this one is emotionally effective in that it is directly relevant to outcome of the scene at hand, allowing Grettir himself to reach out and convey the importance of this moment to the reader; the barn and the pike are only relevant in that they identify place-setting and weapon, which have no effect on the outcome of the battle and only expel the reader from the scene emotionally. Moreover, Grettir's displaced statement breaks chronology by informing the reader that Grettir *will survive the battle*. In inviting the reader to wonder how Grettir survives what appears to be complete defeat, the statement redirects the reader's focus from the level of plot to the specifics of the scene itself, encouraging a slower read.

alone. This presages Glámr's ensuing curse, a passage of direct speech which proves to be one of the longest in the entire saga (and completes the trend of shifting narrative focus from Grettir toward an increasingly more realized Glámr). The curse ends: "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" (ÍF VII, 121). The curse thus promises to inflict upon Grettir that which he has already suffered at a narratological level: with his eyes fixed on Glámr's, Grettir is ejected from a community of shared experience and becomes overwhelmed by forces whose power now surpasses his own. Indeed, the sight haunts Grettir to the end of his days, making his lonely life of outlawry all the more unbearable.

Finally, because Glámr's wild stare focalizes the second description of the moon, the reader effectively sees through Glámr's eyes, meaning that while Grettir suffers *glámsyni* magically, the reader suffers it narratologically. In fact, because the narrator reports "at þeim ljái Glámr augna eða gefi glámsýni, er mjǫk sýnisk annan veg en er" (ÍF VII, 123), I propose that Glámr also focalizes the *initial* description of the moon: its veiling and unveiling, though at odds with the scene's chronology, is what Glámr *will see* over the course of cursing Grettir, thereby inflicting a sort of pre-emptive visual hallucination upon the reader. In this regard, the battle beneath the moon can be said to haunt the reader's vision as much as it does Grettir's own.

4.3. Characterization of Glámr as Human-Like through Narratological Space

In a saga that highly privileges human experience, keeping monstrous antagonists at the narratological periphery and thereby reducing them to sparring dummies, Glámr's development is exceptional. While the consciousnesses of the berserkers, trollwoman, and

giant open to the reader only briefly and narrowly, if at all, Glámr's consciousness actually increases in accessibility, and, in the saga context, *humanity*, as the encounter progresses: he develops from a thrashing beast into a perceiving, thinking, articulating character; his narrative agency increases in inverse proportion to Grettir's; he draws the reader into his consciousness, narratologically ejecting Grettir from the scene entirely. In other words, Glámr supplants Grettir in the narrative spotlight, achieving what is typically only possible for the saga's human characters.[53]

However, Glámr does not simply become more human in his characterization over the course of the encounter. More accurately, he assumes an increasingly human narratological position while simultaneously swelling with superhuman power, for as his agency increases, so does his opposition to and displacement of the human protagonist. This duality becomes clearest when Glámr curses Grettir beneath the moon, for Glámr magically surpasses his humanity at the very moment he most strongly embodies it narratologically. Dislodging Grettir from the narratological center of the saga – that is to say, its human space – Glámr thus comes to resemble in humanity the man who resembles him in monstrosity.

[53] In describing what makes Old Norse monsters effective, Kathryn Hume (1980) also points to this humanizing trend, though admittedly not at the narratological level: "One simple way of improving the supernatural element in most sagas is to develop the hero and his adversary... Even if the hero is relatively faceless, as is Sigurðr, the monster can be endowed with a thinking mind and a speaking voice. It takes very little of such detail to create good supernatural episodes" (11).

5. Conclusions

5.1. Interpreting Narrative Space

5.1.1. Grettir as a Revenant

To make sense of the saga's nexus of spatial associations, let us first review Grettir's positioning in narrative space. Grettir fights monsters in liminal places, demonstrating that his inhuman physicality makes him just as easily capable of becoming one himself. He frequently crosses rivers and bays, evoking imagery of the watery borders between Old Norse otherworlds and recalling the mythological Þórr, a non-Christian and giantlike figure. Grettir even builds bridges: one for the church, reluctantly, the other from stones, and with great relish. Grettir's liminality walks hand-in-hand with his defiance of social category, for he is simultaneously a folk-hero and dangerous outlaw. Before he meets Glámr, Grettir revels in chthonic space, showing no fear in the face of darkness, undeath, or the underworld. He tosses boulders with great deliberation, permanently altering the Icelandic landscape and leaving ineradicable evidence of his resistance to a legal ruling which would have him disappear. Stone protects him as an outlaw, whether in the form of sheltering caves or cover during battle. Grettir even fights using boulders, most notably in a last-ditch effort to save his life on Drangey. Grettir's stones thematically align him with the lithic, the pre-Christian, the ancient world of trolls and giants.

Through this spatial characterization, Grettir takes on a multitude of Glámr's traits, which include his stone-tossing death battle, stone-like corpse, figural liminality, threshold attacks, and underworldliness. As Ármann Jakobsson (2009) points out, Glámr initially becomes a revenant when the meinvættr he is tasked with eliminating infects him with its evil, and while Grettir does not, in turn, succumb to this now-transmitted evil, he certainly

faces the same risk. To this I would add that although Glámr does not transform Grettir into a revenant literally, he does infect him with revenancy thematically, for from their battle onward, Grettir grows as heavy and immoveable as the corpse of Glámr himself. This moment of thematic infection is arguably reflected in Glámr's intrusion into the center of the narratological structure.

I would therefore posit that Grettir resembles Glámr because he too is a revenant, a relic of an older time trying to find his place into a world that has moved forward. This reading gives additional weight to the moments when Auðunn and the priest abandon Grettir in battle, for although Grettir has the inhuman qualities necessary for prevailing over monsters, the human community fails him by mistaking him for dead. Together, Grettir's liminality and chthonic tendencies frame him in a sort of suspended animation, emphasizing in particular thematic associations with the pre-Christian Icelandic past. To borrow a phrase from the saga itself, Grettir is trapped "í milli heims ok heljar."

5.1.2. Grettir in Historically Liminal Space

In this regard, the reading seems to reaffirm Kathryn Hume's (1974) characterization of Grettir as a hero of the old world born to a time that, quite literally, does not know where to put him. The relevance of this fact becomes clearer if one employs, as Hume does, a whole-text approach to the saga. *Grettis saga* begins with a genealogy largely devoted to Grettir's Norwegian great-grandfather, Ǫnundr, a "víkingr mikill" (ÍF VII, 4) who leads many successful raids before fleeing King Haraldr Finehair and his men. The king seizes Ǫnundr's lands and wealth in Norway, and because Ǫnundr has no desire to become "konungsþræll" (ÍF VII, 7) by attempting to make peace, he eventually resettles in Iceland. With this conflict between the first Norwegian king and the last Norwegian vikings at the

forefront of the saga, Iceland becomes a final refuge for northerners who follow the old way – a sort of Wild West of medieval Europe. As Janice Hawes (2008) argues, "[t]he expansion of the story of Ǫnund suggests that the audience of the saga should keep Ǫnund carefully in mind as Grettir's story progresses" (23). Indeed, though Ǫnundr and his progeny gradually shift from raiding to farming to trading, Grettir breaks this trend, having far more in common with his warrior great-grandfather[54] than his merchant father.[55]

Although Grettir was reportedly born on the crux of Iceland's official conversion to Christianity, the earliest extant manuscript in which the saga survives dates to the 15th century, meaning that the retrospective Christian viewpoint must be kept in mind; thus, Grettir's viking tendencies no doubt contribute to his portrayal in spatially uncertain and temporally anachronistic terms. Straddling the pre- and post-conversion Icelandic worlds, the safety of Grettir's soul comes into question at several points in the saga, for though he is Christian, Grettir's fellows do not always approach him this way. For instance, when Grettir undertakes a religious trial to atone for accidentally burning a household alive, a child appears, remarking, "[u]ndarligr háttr er nú hér í landi þessu, þar sem menn skulu kristnir heita, at illvirkjar ok ránsmenn ok þjófar skulu fara í friði" (ÍF VII, 133). After Grettir defeats him in battle, Gísli forbids his men from traveling along the side of a mountain Grettir inhabits, insisting "þar sjálfan fjándann fyrir vera" (ÍF VII, 194). When Grettir offers to carry the woman and her daughter on one arm, the woman "signdi sik" (ÍF VII, 211) at the mere thought of such an act – and calls him a troll when he succeeds.

[54] See Poole (2000) for more on the similarities between Grettir and the prototypical Viking.

[55] Although Ásmundr, like Grettir, is obstinate and lazy at a young age, he outgrows this after going abroad. See chapter 13.

As previously mentioned, Lisa Bennett (2009) is a strong proponent of the idea that Grettir is a largely negative figure from the Christian perspective, particularly where it concerns his burning-in. Arguing that crimes committed in secret carry greater social stigma, Bennett says that Grettir approaches the farmhouse "behaving as a thief or secret killer" and then "does not confess about the burning-in," placing him "on the same semantic level as thieves, murderers and pagan mass-burners" (121). First, I would contest the stealth of Grettir's approach, for he "ræðr nú inn í húsit ok vissi eigi, hverir fyrir váru. Kuflinn var sýldr allr, þegar hann kom á land, ok var hann furðu mikill tilsýndar, sem troll væri" (ÍF VII, 130). Furthermore, I suspect that an ambiguity of language has falsely generated the impression of a planned theft. When his merchant companions ask Grettir to get fire, he replies, "[e]igi lízk mér mikit þrekvirki at ná eldinum" (ÍF VII, 129). While *ná* can mean to obtain, it also means to reach (Cleasby 1984c), a distinction which is significant given that "eldr kom upp mikill ǫðrum megin þess sunds, er þeir váru þá við komnir" (ÍF VII, 129). The bold deed asked of Grettir is thus not the *taking* of the fire, implying a robbery, but rather the *reaching* of the fire, which entails swimming across the icy sound by night. His hesitancy to accept, moreover, owes not to any moral misgivings, but to a premonition that he will not "hafa gott at sǫk hér fyrir" (ÍF VII, 130).

When Grettir bursts into the house, the inhabitants believe him to be an "óvættr" and immediately attack; "[s]umir bǫrðu hann með eldibrǫndum; hraut þá eldrinn um allt húsit" (ÍF VII, 130). At this point, Grettir does take the fire without asking and flees, but by now the act seems understandably reactionary. Grettir and the merchants return the following day to find a burned ruin, at which point the merchants "spurðu, hvárt Grettir hefði ollat þessu óhappi, ok sǫgðu þetta it mesta illvirki" (ÍF VII, 131). Accused before given

a chance to speak, Grettir angrily retorts that "illt ódrengjum lið at veita" (ÍF VII, 131). Simply put, Grettir "fails" to confess because he does not consider himself guilty of a burning-in; the fire is clearly both accidental and self-inflected. Indeed, the saga seems squarely in Grettir's camp on this matter, for not only does Óláfr konungr believe it "líkara væri, at þú hefðir eigi viljandi mennina inni brennt" (ÍF VII, 132), but when the child sabotages Grettir's trial, the narrative also reports, "þat ætla menn helzt, at þat hafi verit óhreinn andi, sendr til óheilla Gretti" (ÍF VII, 133). However, though the saga itself does not go so far as to declare Grettir unchristian, this does not stop those around him from labeling him as such, especially where it concerns his unluckiness, prowess in killing, and inhuman physicality. In short, Grettir's suspicious peers would place him in a world for which Glámr longs: before being killed, Glámr grumbles, "þótti mér þá betri siðr, er menn váru heiðnir kallaðir" (ÍF VII, 111), a fact which seems to contribute to his potency as a revenant.

To see how Grettir's thematic revenancy most directly ties him to the heathen past, one should turn, fittingly, to the scene of his death. Driven farther and farther from society, Grettir eventually takes refuge on Drangey off Iceland's northern coast, paralleling his great-grandfather's political flight from Norway to Iceland. In a desperate attempt to eradicate the outlaw, Þorbjǫrn ǫngull brings his witch stepmother to Drangey on a boat but is forced to leave when Grettir hurls a boulder at her, breaking her leg. In retaliation, the witch finds an uprooted tree floating along the sea, curses it with runes, blood, and spells, "ok mælti svá fyrir, at þat skyldi reka út til Drangeyjar, ok verði Gretti allt mein at" (ÍF VII, 250). The tree travels unerringly to Grettir, who twice attempts to send it back to the sea before hacking at it with his axe in frustration. "Ok jafnksjótt sem øxin kom við tréit, snerisk

hon flǫt ok stǫkk af trénu ok á fót Grettis inn hœgra fyrir ofan kné, ok svá at stóð í beini, ok var þat sár mikit" (ÍF VII, 251). Although the leg appears to heal nicely at first, after three days it proves to be infected with dark magic: "sýndisk fótrinn blásinn ok kolblár" (ÍF VII, 252), hearkening the black and bloated corpse of Glámr infected by the meinvættr. Incapacitated, Grettir is killed – and, like Glámr, decapitated – by Þorbjǫrn and his men, who then struggle to draw Grettir's sword from his stony grasp.

The symbolic loss of Grettir's leg is an unmistakable inversion of the legacy of his great-grandfather Ǫnundr, who loses his own leg in a campaign against the king's men. The similarities are particularly visible in one of Ǫnundr's later skirmishes. After raining boulders down onto another group of vikings, Ǫnundr's men "skutu tréstubba nǫkkurum undir kné Ǫnundi, ok stóð hann heldr fast" (ÍF VII, 12). The stump becomes a decisive factor in the battle when Vigbjóðr attacks Ǫnundr with a sword: "síðan hljóp sverðit í stubban, þann er Ǫnundr hafði undir knénu, ok varð fast sverðit. Vígbjóðr laut, er hann kippði at sér sverðinu; í því hjó Ǫnundr á ǫxlina, svá at af tók hǫndina" (ÍF VII, 12). This moment ultimately turns the tide of battle in Ǫnundr's favor. The hardy viking has several more successful campaigns but eventually settles in Iceland and acquires a wooden leg, forever becoming known as "Ǫnundr tréfótr." With the loss of his leg, Ǫnundr's viking ways prove to be on their last leg both literally and figuratively – a metaphor that holds true in the Old Icelandic as well, for "standa á tré-fótum" means "to be in a tottering state" (Cleasby 1874a). Nevertheless, the wooden leg – earlier anticipated by his resting on a tree stump – nicely fits the image of a banished raider who nevertheless remains supported enough to live out his days in honor in Iceland.

I would argue that there is an implicit characterization here of wood as reinforcing and socially-binding, two characteristics which are antithetical to Grettir's experience as an outlaw.[56] This connection is perhaps clearer if one considers the recurring motif in Icelandic settlement stories of founders throwing their timber high-seat pillars into the sea and settling wherever the waves take the wood. In *Landnámabok*, for example, Ingólfur Arnarson is said to found Reykjavík in this manner: "hann tók sér bústað þar sem ǫndvegissúlur hans hǫfðu á land komit; hann bjó í Reykjarvík; þar eru enn ǫndugissúlur þær í eldhúsi" (ÍF I, 45). The act appears to have a magical power, such as in *Erbyggja saga*, when Þórólfr mostrarskegg locates his settlement using timbers from a temple dedicated to Þórr: "[e]n þegar þær hóf frá skipinu, sveif þeim til ins vestra fjarðarins, ok þótti þeim fara eigi vánum seinna" (ÍF IV, 7). In this light, the witch's imbuing the tree with magic and sending it across the waves to Drangey functions as an exaggeratedly pagan inversion of the high-seat-pillar motif, for rather than establish a settlement, it performs a sort of exorcism. Coupled with the inverted symbolism of Grettir's cursed leg, this suggests that behaviors which were once honorable for a viking settling in Iceland are now liminalized by a post-conversion society uncertain of how best to manage them. The weight of this inglorious history pulls Grettir increasingly downward and eventually to his demise.

[56] Aside from the witch and her curse, there are several other points in the saga where Grettir's enemies use branches and firebrands as makeshift weapons against him. E.g. when the berserkers discover the trick of Grettir's feigned hospitality, they "vorðusk með trjám, er lágu á vellinum" (ÍF VII, 68); fearing Grettir's trollish appearance, members of the household from which his steals fire "bǫrðu hann með eldibrǫndum" (ÍF VII, 130). Moreover, when Grettir breaks into Kárr's barrow, a point is made of his dramatically ripping the timber props from the earth: "Grettir braut nú hauginn ok var at mikilvirkr, léttir eigi fyrr en hann kemr at viðum; var þá mjǫk áliðinn dagrinn. Síðan reif hann upp viðuna" (ÍF VII, 57). Grettir's antagonistic relationship to logs, timbers, and branches is ongoing, establishing a crucial contrast with his great-grandfather.

At the same time, Grettir ultimately does more good than harm[57] in helping rid Iceland of the monsters he resembles; scribal remarks on the saga contained in AM152 fol. even praise Grettir and decry his killers (Hastrup 1990, 158-59). Moreover, Grettir's slaying by witchcraft is so dishonorable that it merits vengeance,[58] a fact which is problematic from a Christian viewpoint. It is therefore fitting that the saga finishes as a medieval romance: Grettir's half-brother, a member of the Varangian guard, slays Grettir's murderer at a "heilǫgu þingi" (ÍF VII, 273) in Constantinople, after which he enters into a chivalric love triangle, marries, repents in Rome, and ends his days in a divine union physically and sexually separated from his wife. And just as his Roman pilgrimage absolves Grettir's brother of all wrongdoing, so too does this ending – which takes place in two centers of medieval Christendom – redress Grettir's social liminality and personal anachronicity. Bookended with Ǫnundr the viking on one side and Þorsteinn the Christian warrior on the other, *Grettis saga* shows a clear temporal and moral progression, suggesting that the resolution of the narrative is bound to a Christian rectification of Grettir's outdated Icelandic anti-heroism.

5.2. Interpreting Narratological Space

5.2.1. The Glámr Battle Scene as Horror

Unlike Grettir's interactions with narrative space, Glámr's positioning in narratological space pulls him firmly into the human world, if only briefly. The efficacy of the scene is without question, given how many scholars have zeroed in on its significance

[57] For a purely plot-oriented assessment of Grettir's deeds, which tip more heavily in the direction of good than bad, see Cook (1985).

[58] As previously mentioned, the man who breaks the oath declared at the Hegranessþing which protects Grettir from harm will be barred from "heim hvern, nema helvíti" (ÍF VII, 233).

to the saga as a whole; however, its unusual narratological arrangement and the meaning therein deserve further probing. I am inclined to identify the scene's effect as one of horror, and while this may not seem like a particularly bold statement given that Grettir is fighting a walking corpse, it does not suffice to allow the scene's narrative content to inform our narratological interpretation; after all, the two other monstrous encounters have, in my readings, meaning effects that primarily relate to comedy, action, and suspense, not horror. Moreover, Dean Swinford maintains that "dimensions of psychological horror... are clearly lacking from the saga's description of Glámr" (Swinford 2002, 616) – though, as I have already argued, he misreads the scene. Given that Glámr's horror cannot be taken for granted, I will therefore propose a different means of explaining the horror mechanism at work.

Noël Carroll's seminal work *The Philosophy of Horror: Or, Paradoxes of the Heart* (2004) outlines several features necessary for the production[59] of what Carroll calls art-horror.[60] They are as follows: the presence of a monster of paranormal or science-fiction origin; a horror reaction from positive human characters within the text; a description of the monster as both threatening and disgusting; a categorical interstitiality on the part of the monster indicating that it is unnatural within its cultural scheme[61] (and therefore

[59] Note that Carroll discusses horror in terms of the normative relation between audience and work, not the actual one; I shall do the same. For more on Carroll's understanding of reader affect, see Chapter 2, "Metaphysics and Horror, or Relating to Fictions."

[60] See chapter 1, "The Nature of Horror," for a complete overview of these features. It should be noted that Carroll addresses horror as a genre – one which he argues does not crystallize until around the time of the writing of *Frankenstein*. While I would by no means label *Grettis saga* a work of horror, Carroll's work is nevertheless relevant to the horrific potential of the Glámr scene.

[61] Carroll does not view the monsters of myth or fairytale as horrific because although they may be frightening, they are a natural, expected feature of their worlds. Although he claims that true horror does not arise until after the Enlightenment, at which point paranormal figures cease to become a part of accepted cosmology, I would contest this for the saga, especially in light of the fact that *Grettis saga* is an unusual *Íslendingasaga* in its inclusion of paranormal elements (Hastrup 1990, 158).

capable of inflicting cognitive damage, such as insanity or derangement); and the spatial alienness of the monster to the human world. Indeed, all of these features are present in Glámr's haunting at the level of narrative: Glámr is a paranormal, interstitial being, neither living nor dead, who is described in terms of fear and grotesqueness[62] and disappears into the wild between attacks on the farm. However, with the exception of interstitiality, a point to which I will later return, these horror features are difficult (if not impossible) to observe at the narratological level and therefore do little to help our understanding of the scene mechanically.

Moreover, Carroll's horror features can also be found in Grettir's battle with the mound-revenant Kárr,[63] a scene which has elicited nowhere near the same reaction from scholars as the Glámr encounter.[64] At a basic level, I would suggest that this is because the scene lacks the salient narratological deviations necessary to make a profound meaning effect. Observe the flatness of the narrative in contrast to the scenes analyzed in the previous chapter:

> Gekk Grettir þá í hauginn; var þar myrkt ok þeygi þefgott... [E]r hann gekk útar eptir hauginum, var gripit til hans fast. Lét hann þá laust féit, en rézk í mót þeim, ok tókusk þeir þá til heldr óþyrmiliga. Gekk nú upp allt þat, er fyrir varð; sótti haugbúinn með kappi. Grettir fór undan lengi, ok þar kemr, at hann sér, at eigi mun duga at hlífask við. Sparir nú hvárrgi annan; fœrask þeir þangat, er hestbeinin váru; kippðusk þeir þar um lengi, ok fóru ýmsir á kné, en svá lauk, at haugbúinn fell á bak

[62] In addition to his being described as physically deformed – e.g. black and bloated with an enlarged head – Glámr is said to be "gustillr," or foul-smelling, even before his death (Torfi H. Tulinius 1999, 295-96). After Grettir kills Glámr, the farmer also refers to the revenant as "óhreina anda" (ÍF VII, 122), or an unclean spirit. Glámr's physical grotesqueness therefore reflects impurity at all levels, striking at the very core of disgust.

[63] It should be noted that while Grettir is unafraid of Kárr, other characters are not. Auðunn warns Grettir against visiting the mound, stating that "síðan Kárr dó, hefir hann svá aptr gengit, at hann hefir eytt á brott ǫllum bóndum þeim, er hér áttu jarðir" (ÍF VII, 57).

[64] Carroll specifically states that monsters, not events, engender horror. The fact that Glámr, unlike Kárr, curses Grettir and turns the tide of the entire narrative is not therefore grounds for an argument as to Glámr's more horrific potency.

> aptr, ok varð af því dykr mikill. Þá hljóp Auðunn frá festarhaldinu ok ætlaði, at Grettir myndi dauðr. Grettir brá nú sverðinu Jǫkulsnaut ok hjó á hálsinn haugbúanum, svá at af tók hǫfuðit; setti hann þat við þjó honum. (ÍF VII, 57-58)

Apart from Auðunn's flight, which occurs after the revenant's fate is sealed,[65] very little of note happens in this battle: there is no internal focalization, speech, thought, or other significant deviation on the part of the combatants, and aside from any mental images an imaginative reader may bring to the table, the scene passes rather uneventfully. And yet, we have a paranormal, interstitial monster which drives humans away in fear, stinks of death, and is relegated to the non-human world of the mound. This suggests that the narrative features Carroll identifies do not necessarily engender horror on their own. More specifically, the scene is utterly devoid any of the humanizing narratological features that characterize Glámr. With this contrast in mind, I would argue that Glámr's bizarre alignment of humanity and monstrosity at the narratological level is precisely what gives the scene a pronounced horror effect.

5.2.2. A Theoretical Overview of the Uncanny Valley

To explain the horrific potency of this uneasy alliance, I would turn to the so-called uncanny valley, a phenomenon originally described by Masahiro Mori in the field of robotics in 1970[66] which suggests that as a robot becomes more humanlike, a human's level of comfort with the robot increases – to a point; however, once the appearance becomes significantly close to, but not identical with, a human likeness, "a person's

[65] Like the flight of the priest upon seeing the giant's innards, this perspective switch does not encourage the reader to fear for Grettir's safety, as it occurs when Grettir's victory seems all but certain.

[66] The uncanny valley phenomenon has roots in the theory of the uncanny, "that species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and has long been familiar" (Freud 2008, 124). It should be noted that Jasia Reichardt (1978) first coined the term "uncanny valley" in describing Masahiro Mori's work on the phenomenon.

response... would abruptly shift from empathy to revulsion" (revisited in Mori 2012). Mori also theorizes that this effect would intensify if an uncanny robot were to move, and act which presumably increases the human expectation of biological identicality. Outside the field of robotics, this phenomenon has been observed in the human reaction to computer-generated video game faces (Tinwell et al. 2001; MacDorman et al. 2006) as well as monkeys' responses to computer-generated monkey faces (Steckenfinger and Ghazanfar 2009), the latter of which suggests that the response is evolutionary, not cultural, in origin. Research has even been conducted to determine how best to intentionally employ uncanny imagery to elicit a response in horror games (Tinwell and Grimshaw 2010).

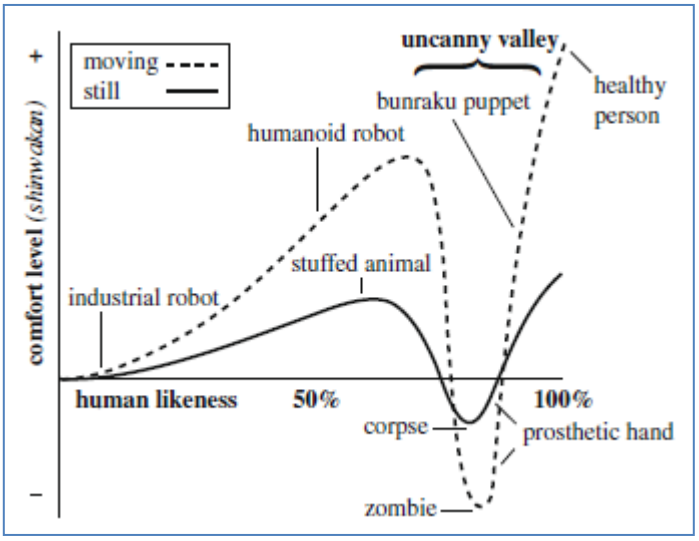

Fig. 1. Charting the uncanny valley. Reproduced from MacDorman et al. (2009), 696.

At its most basic level, the uncanny valley suggests that frustrated expectation can provoke horror: whereas a distinct contrast between dissimilar things neither invites nor disappoints the anticipation of similarity, a near match simultaneously suggests and denies a sense of familiarity. This mismatch provokes the audience to determine precisely what does not belong, prolonging engagement with an irreconcilable inconsistency. Attempting to process the discrepancy causes cognitive tension and ultimately arouses aversion. Indeed, a study using fMRI machines to measure brain responses to humanlike robots seems to confirm that exactly such a perceptual conflict occurs in the neurological

processing of uncannily human visual information (Saygin et al. 2011). While study of this phenomenon is currently limited to how people experience artificially generated humanity in a technological sense, I believe the uncanny valley can also be found in the artificially generated humanity of narrative,[67] specifically in the narratological features of Grettir's battle with Glámr.

5.2.3. The Uncanny Valley of the Saga

In order to make a case for the existence of the uncanny valley in this scene, it is necessary to distinguish between *how* and *why* the phenomenon occurs. As discussed previously, the how seems to be a simple matter of cognitive dissonance – something that applies to interstitiality in general and could be grounds for an aversion response in a wide number of scenarios. The why, however, is less certain. In the case of robotics and computer-generated images, revulsion may arise due to evolutionary drives regarding mate selection, pathogen avoidance, and human empathy, for example, all of which would discourage a positive reaction to a human who strays too far from certain visual ideals.[68] It goes without saying that these reasons do not apply to my narratological analysis of the Glámr encounter.

Instead, I would argue that the why of the uncanny valley in *Grettis saga* originates in the narratological baseline of the text, which functions as a sort of coding regarding the relative positioning of key players: Grettir is largely at the center of this space, and other people tend to move into it insofar as they help characterize Grettir or his actions. In other words, the narratological center of the saga functions as a means of generating *Grettir*. In

[67] At least, I have not yet found the uncanny valley applied to narrative in this way.

[68] For a more comprehensive overview of these and other theories, see MacDorman et al. (2009).

the case of the Glámr episode, however, we have a walking corpse – "blár sem hel, en digr sem naut" (ÍF VII, 112) – who gradually usurps the protagonist's function as the prime narratological mover, thereby occupying a role with which the audience should ordinarily be able to identify. In sum, this narratological arrangement slots Glámr the ghoul into the position of Grettir the hero, a fact which would help explain why so many scholars have characterized the two as doubles at this moment.

Kathryn Hume (1980) asserts that one reason indigenous monsters like Glámr are more effective in Old Norse literature than foreign ones is their familiarity, for "[l]ittle or no inner tension can develop in an audience that has no expectations" (15). According to Hermann Pálsson (1980), however, "[y]firleitt virðist sú skoðun vera ríkjandi, að Glámur sé eingetið afkvæmi íslenzkrar hjátrúar, en þó mun uppruna hans að rekja til útlendra lærdómsrita" [it seems to be the prevailing opinion that Glámr is the unique brainchild of Icelandic superstition, yet his origin can be traced to the knowledge of foreign writing] (98, translation mine). If Hermann is correct and Glámr is a foreign loan, then perhaps we can argue that Glámr's resemblance to Grettir, generated by the saga's skillful deviation from a narratological baseline, is in fact what provides the familiarity which Hume deems so necessary. The tension between the comfortably human and the threateningly nonhuman is greater than the sum of its parts, for it produces not the shocking horror of the alien Other, but rather the creeping horror of an Other who nearly, but imperfectly, resembles oneself. To frame it in a Carrollean sense, the Glámr scene is interstitial at the narratological level, *itself* capable of generating fear and revulsion. And if this reaction is indeed evolutionary in origin, Glámr's uncanny displacement of Grettir would have horrified the medieval reader as much as the modern – just as it horrifies Grettir himself.

5.3. The Self as Other, the Other as Self

In "The Self as Other: Iceland and Christian Europe in the Middle Ages," Torfi H. Tulinius (2009) explores the inclusion of pagan material and themes in post-conversion Icelandic literature. Characterizing this process as "integrating the Other" (213), Tulinius argues that the Icelandic Christian attitude toward its pagan past constituted not mere antagonism, but rather a means of constructing a uniquely Icelandic identity. Thematically speaking, this certainly seems applicable to Grettir. If we accept that the narratological center of the saga is a human space, then it is, in a very real sense, the space of the Self. It therefore stands that Grettir's occupation of the narratological center holds a mirror to the Icelandic Self of the conversion period in an implicit recognition of the fits and starts of transitioning to a post-pagan world: despite his Christianity, his heroic acts, and his status as one of the great Icelanders, Grettir can deny neither his ancestral nor his personal connection to a dangerously recent pagan past. Indeed, Grettir's nineteen-year defiance of the law is an explicit admission that, whether we speak of Icelandic law, religion, or their inexorable intersection, the prescriptive level of society tends to outpace social reality.

Grettir and Glámr's uncanny dance thus has a twofold significance. On one level, their similar characterization through narrative space suggests that Glámr is a hyperbolic expression of Grettir. Glámr's appropriation of the narratological spotlight therefore concentrates Grettir's latently threatening aspects into a startling reminder: we have seen the saga world through the eyes of an Othered Grettir all along. At the same time, however, Glámr differs from Grettir in that he is *intrinsically* rather than *situationally* monstrous. Were this not the case, his infection of the narratological center would not have it horrific impact. Grettir may be the Self as Other, but Glámr is unmistakably the Other as Self – and

key to characterizing Grettir in ambiguous rather than malevolent terms. A spatial reading of the saga thus demonstrates that Grettir's ties to the pagan world, though monstrous, do not make him a monster outright. There are true monsters in Grettir's world, and he exists to dispatch them. That said, the narrative unease surrounding him is a struggle to reconcile a savage Icelandic past: only when his (un)death is rectified in an overtly Christian context can the saga lay Grettir to rest.

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