Háskóli Íslands

Hugvísindasvið

Vikings and Medieval Norse Studies

The Oneiromancy of *Laxdæla saga*

A Psychoanalytic interpretation of the dreams of Laxdæla saga

Ritgerð til MA-prófs í Vikings and Medieval Norse Studies

Suzanne Valentine
Kt.: 211290-3669

Leiðbeinandi: Torfi Tulinius
Maí 2016

I’ve dreamt in my life dreams that have stayed with me ever after, and changed my ideas: they’ve gone through and through me, like wine through water, and altered the colour of my mind

Emily Brönte, *Wuthering Heights*

Abstract

Dreams are a substantial part of the Icelandic sagas, playing a role in the development of the plot as well as the characters. Past scholarship has focused primarily on how saga dreams aid in the narrative trajectory, rather than what they say specifically about a character's oneiric cognition. This thesis will look at the dreams that appear in *Laxdæla saga*, specifically seven of them, through the contrasting psychoanalytic lenses of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. I will look at Freud's theory of wish-fulfilment as it pertains to the series of dreams of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttur, attempting to reconstruct the latent thoughts that form her dreams, despite the questionable conscious origin of them. Jung's theories of universal symbolism are also applicable to Guðrún's dreams, exemplifying what those symbols mean in terms of the Unconscious mind. Jung's theory will similarly be applied to the "draumkonur" that appear throughout the saga, emphasizing how their presence can be seen as a personification of the Unconscious. Through this idea of universal dream symbolism I will also attempt to contextualize the Icelandic saga dreams with dream literature in continental medieval Europe. Throughout this thesis I will confront the problems that arise due to the nature of the dreams being literary constructs, and I will attempt to show that these psychoanalytic theories are pertinent to the study of the saga dreams, despite the initial trepidations.

Ágrip

Draumar eru fyrirferðarmiklir í íslenskum fornsögum og gegna hlutverki bæði í sögufléttunni og í persónusköpun. Fyrri fræðimenn hafa einkum fjallað um þátt drauma í framvindu sögunnar en síður um hvað þeir segja um vitsmunalegt gildi drauma fyrir persónurnar. Í ritgerð þessari verða sjö draumar sem lýst er í Laxdæla sögu teknir til skoðunar út frá ólíkum kenningum sálgreinanna Sigmund Freud og Carl Gustav Jung. Litið verður til kenningar Freuds um uppfyllingu bældrar þrár í draumum til að skoða þá sem Guðrúnu Ósvífrsdóttur dreymir. Reynt verður að ráða í hvað hún var ómeðvitað að hugsa með draumunum, þótt erfitt sé að greina það með vissu hversu meðvituð hún var um það. Einnig má nota kenningu Jung um almenna táknmerkingu drauma til að varpa ljósi á drauma Guðrúnar, sem litið verður á sem dæmi um slíka algilda merkingu drauma fyrir dulvitundina. Jafnframt verður kenningu Jung beitt til að skýra draumkonurnar sem koma víða fyrir í sögunni, með áherslu á að það megi líta á þær sem persónugervingu dulvitundarinnar. Með tillit til hugmyndarinnar um almenna táknræna merkingu drauma, mun ég reyna að skoða drauma í íslenskum fornsögum í samhengi við drauma í evrópskum miðaldabókmenntum. Ávallt verður haft til hliðsjónar að draumar í fornsögum eru fyrst og fremst bókmenntaleg smíð. Þrátt fyrir það verður leitast við að sýna að kenningar sálgreiningarinnar geti eigi að síður varpað ljósi á þá.

Acknowledgements

I would like to give my sincere thanks to the people who have helped me, not only in writing this thesis, but also in achieving everything in my life thus far.

To my parents who encourage me every day to live my dreams despite detours that arise. Of course these dreams would not be possible without the additional support of my entire family.

I must also thank my dear friends who I have met here in Iceland, we have been through some amazing and strange times together and I will always remember each and every one of you.

Finally, I would not have been able to produce this thesis without the instrumental advice and aid from my advisor, Torfi Tulinius, who introduced me to the idea of using psychoanalysis to read literature in the first place.

Table of Contents

Introduction 6
Dreams in Medieval Europe 8
Dreams in Saga Scholarship 10
The Theories Presented 14
Freudian Theory 15
Jungian Theory 17
The Dreams of Guðrún 22
The Dream Anima Appears 34
Conclusion 45
Bibliography 50

Introduction

Dreams have always been an important part of literature, from biblical stories to current popular novels, they add to the plot structure and allow a glimpse further into the character's consciousness. In medieval literature dreams were used in abundance, with many different visionary sources and outcomes, and the medieval Icelandic sagas show this same tendency. The family sagas often use oneiric visions as a means of foreshadowing events, but they are not always as straightforward as those seen in the *fornaldarsögur*, such as *Völsunga saga*, in which the dreams are very obvious predictions of what will happen as the saga progresses.[1] Rather the *Íslendingasögur* tend to contain somewhat ambiguous dreams, using symbolism as well as revenant-like figures, that may give some distorted idea of what is about to come. These dreams can also act as a protecting or damning force for the dreamer. In *Laxdæla saga* the dreams take all of these forms. I will focus on seven of them throughout this thesis, four that are dreamt in serial by a single character and three that are connected only through a similar oneiric figure.[2]

The dreams of Guðrún Ósvífrsdóttur at first appear to be prophetic in nature, simply allowing her insight into her future, and the interpretation given by Gestr Oddleifsson follows this same vein. Each of her four dreams is told to represent a husband that she will have and lose as the saga progresses. But there is more to the dreams than these simple interpretations, they also tell us about Guðrún's motivations and how she affects the outcomes of each of her marriages. She is not a character who simply allows things to happen to her, she carries agency, and therefore has motivation, albeit sometimes hidden in the Unconscious, for each of her actions.

The other three dreams I will focus on all centre around a mysterious woman who visits the dreamer and either imparts prophetic words or physically alters them. These dreams suggest connections with many different medieval and classical visions that feature a woman who visits the dreamer to impact their life and consciousness in some way. These women can be good, as in the case of Án svarti, or evil, as in the case

[1] For example, the dreams of Guðrún Gjúkadóttir in prophecy of her marriage to Sigurðr. Finch, R.G., translator and editor. *The Saga of the Volsungs*. (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons LTD, 1965), 44-46.
[2] The earliest version of the saga in its entirety can be found in Möðruvallabók which has been dated to 1330-1370. . Einar Ól Sveinsson, editor. Introduction to *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit, vol 5. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1934). lxxvi-lxxvii.

of Óláfr Hǫskuldsson, but in each circumstance they represent something more than just a prophetic being visiting the character in their sleep.

Rather than simply talking about the dreams and their significance within the saga, I will attempt to use psychoanalytic techniques to do a close reading of them. Psychoanalysis allows for a more profound view of the cognition of the dreaming character and how they react to the visions that they are given. I have chosen two opposing psychoanalysts to base my theory on, Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. These two doctors were working around the same time, and at many points throughout their careers they conversed with each other and often debated their different approaches.[3]

Freud built the foundations for psychoanalytic dream analysis with his seminal work *The Interpretation of Dreams* and he focuses his interpretation on the ability to associate aspects of the dream with real occurrences in the dreamer's life.[4] This makes it somewhat difficult to put into practice in the context of literary dreaming, even so, when it is done successfully it allows a very interesting perspective into the dreamer's consciousness and motivations. When it is possible to make associations with the dreams of characters and their past experiences it helps to prove Freud's theory that all dreams are essentially wish-fulfilments. Contrarily Jung emphasizes the use of alchemical symbolism in dream interpretation, primarily symbols such as the mandala and the dream anima, both of which are seen as depictions of the dreamer's unconscious. The mandala is seen as a representation of the search for the Self, while the dream anima personifies the Unconscious cognitive functions that are attempting to influence the conscious mind. These ideas may be somewhat more applicable to literary dreams, because they are often constructed to be symbolic in the first place. Jung believes that such symbols as the mandala and the dream anima are universal, with representations in various forms that can be found in every culture and every time. Therefore it is plausible that they can be easily seen in Icelandic saga dreams. Throughout my thesis I will elaborate upon these two dream interpretation theories and attempt to apply them to the dreams that arise in *Laxdæla saga*.

---

[3] Many of these contrasting viewpoints have been compiled into a collection of Jung's lectures into the book *Jung contra Freud.* 1968.

[4] Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams.* Translated by James Strachey. (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

Dreams in Medieval Europe

Because the Icelandic sagas did not exist in a literary void it is important to contextualize them in the active dream culture of the Middle Ages. There are numerous literary examples that show the importance of dreaming and how dreams can act as a conduit between divinity (or demons) and humanity. Of course they can also simply portray remnants of the events of the previous days. There were many different opinions on dreams and how reliable they could be or even whether they should be taken into consideration at all in daily life. A substantial part of the controversy and importance of dreams in the Middle Ages came with the ideas of Christianity as the religion spread throughout Europe.

There are numerous examples of dreaming in the Christian canon, from the New Testament and the Old, yet they remained contentious in practice.[5] The conflict lay in the dreams' inspiration, because, "on the one hand, they saw dreams as dangerous, associated with pagan practices and demonic seduction. On the other, they claimed that dreams could be divinely inspired and foretell the future."[6] It also mattered who was having divine dreams, especially as Christianity became the religion of the rulers and could be used as a tool to manipulate the opinions of the general public. If the Church condoned some oneiric interpretation, then a ruler could potentially use that to his advantage, but in the same stroke, if a commoner or a controversial person claimed to have a transcendental vision there could arise a number of problems, the least of which being heresy. This meant much censorship of dreams, especially those recorded in history, because, to add legitimacy to a claim, they had to have some exclusivity, especially if they were meant to be implemented as propaganda.

An example of a well-placed, divinely inspired dream is the vision of Emperor Constantine and the cross over the Battle of Milvian Bridge.[7] Constantine was able to use this vision, not only to inspire his army, but also to later begin the conversion of his people, claiming that God was, in some way, responsible for their victory. This sort of evangelistic vision is often associated with high-ranking people, and justifies, or

---

[5] Examples noted are "in the Old Testament stories of Joseph and Daniel (Genesis, chapters 37, 40, 41; Daniel, chapters 2,4,7-8, 10-12) and in the appearances of God's angel to the New Testament Joseph (Matthew 1:20-24, 2:13, 2:19-22)." Kruger, Steven. *Dreaming in the Middle Ages.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 7.
[6] Kruger. *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, 7.
[7] See further, Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

inspires, their desire to convert those over whom they have power. Such dreams were often considered prophetic, or at the very least, would present the dreamer with a choice and illuminate the possible outcomes. After all, Constantine's vision did not convert the Romans by itself. Instead it allowed for a choice to be made, whether to believe in this Christian god and his power to help the army or to disregard the sign and flee from battle.

The dreams of the common people were accompanied by as many problems as those of the elite, especially because they were subject to more suspicion from the church. Philosophers broke down dreams into three causal categories; "dreams can be caused by man (stomach or reflection, body or thought), God (revelation), or the devil (illusion)," yet these classifications did not necessarily help clarify their origins, especially with the reputed trickery of demonic beings.[8] The threat of demonic dreams became so worrisome that at one point the philosopher Cyprian even encouraged people to resist sleep so that they would not dream.[9] Yet sleep, and therefore dreams, naturally remained part of the human experience and a formative part of literature. There are numerous medieval European examples of oneiric visions in various forms, from Augustine to Dante to Chaucer, but out of respect for time and space I will only give a small overview of some of the more wide-spread ideas connected with dreams and their significance in medieval Christianity.

The previously stated three categories of dreams were expanded in the writing of Macrobius to "*oraculum*, *visio*, *somnium*, *visium*, *insomnium*," with the first three only holding possible prophetic themes and the last two being banal in nature.[10] The most dealt with dream, in terms of interpreting, was that which fell in the middle of the spectrum, *somnium*, and is referred to as the "middle" dream, because "it reliably exposes a truth like the two higher kinds of dream, but it presents that truth in fictional form."[11] While this would not necessarily be considered a vision directly from God (instead a convoluted indirect one), it was believed to have meaning and significance to the life of the dreamer. To deal with the ambiguity of these dreams a variety of dream books existed to aid the layman in the interpretation of his "middle" dreams. Many of

---

[8] Le Goff, Jacques. *Medieval Imagination*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 224.
[9] Le Goff. *Medieval Imagination*, 204.
[10] Kruger. *Dreaming in the Middle Ages,* 23.
[11] Ibid., 23

these books "call to their aid the most striking of biblical sanctions for the prognostic use of dreams," even though the church itself usually resisted such affiliation.[12] The philosophers, especially Calcidius, maintain that "dreams provide a kind of knowledge that human beings, left to their own devices, can never discover," with or without the aid of such things as dream books and preferably with the aid of the church.[13]

The categorization of dreams, as seen in the philosophical texts naming them as either mundane or divine in origin, does not seem to apply in the same way with Icelandic dreams. If the above categories are simplified into three, divine, mundane, and demonic, the majority of dreams in Icelandic sagas can be put in the middle commonplace category. Kruger says "that the *middle* dream, in its middleness, is the quintessentially *human* dream."[14] Being neither of divine or demonic origin, these are the dreams that arise from human experience, or in psychoanalytic speak, from human consciousness. The dreams in Icelandic sagas are not often attributed to any divine origin, the closest thing being when they represent a family or character's guardian spirit, or when they are blatantly Christian constructions. Likewise they are not seen as illusions from the devil, or some inherently evil source. While there are instances when the dream is negative, and the figures in the dream are quite evil, for example the dream of Óláfr in *Laxdæla saga*, they are never seen as a dream that is purposely trying to mislead the dreamer for some evil purpose. Essentially these dreams can be read simply as human dreams, not as any sort of conduit from divine or satanic sources.

Dreams in Saga Scholarship

The dreams in Icelandic sagas have been subject to numerous studies that question their impact on the story, their religious inspiration, and the dichotomies that they sometimes represent. Perhaps the most comprehensive study of dreams in the sagas was done in a published thesis by Georgia Kelchner.[15] This book gives a substantial overview of the dreams found in the sagas and their general premises. Kelchner gives particular interest

[12] Kruger. *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* 10-11.
[13] Ibid., 25.
[14] At this point Kruger is discussing the ideas of Alain de Lille found in *Summa de arte praedictoria*. Kruger. *Dreaming in the Middle Ages,* 80.
[15] Kelchner, Georgia Dunham. *Dreams in Old Norse literature and their affinities in folklore.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1935).

to the use of guardian spirits in the dreams, ranging from gods to trolls to fetches. The book has been used by many of the scholars studying saga dreams since its publication, not least because it contains an index of all the dreams found in the sagas and gives the passages and translations for each. Her work is very helpful as a starting point for a study of the dreams in the sagas, although it has become somewhat outdated and does not delve too deeply into any one theme.

Apart from Kelchner's overview of the saga dreams there have been many more focused studies, all taking different themes and sagas into consideration. Undoubtedly one of the most interesting sagas for dream study is *Gísla saga Súrssonar*.[16] The dreams which appear in this saga are numerous and rich with symbolism and poetry, allowing for many different perspectives. Langeslag, for instance, focuses on the women that Gísli dreams of and their dichotomous relationship and its parallel to Christianity and paganism.[17] On the other hand Christopher Crocker studies the dreams of Gísli as conflicts within his consciousness. Crocker begins his article with references to Freud's beliefs about the prophetic nature of dreams, or rather, that non-literary dreams cannot really be seen as premonitory. Throughout his study he focuses on how the dreams show an internal struggle that should not necessarily be attributed to a battle between good and evil for Gísli's soul.[18] Lönnroth presents the basis for both arguments, although he ultimately also compares the two dream women to the contrasting religious beliefs of the time. He also emphasizes the use of dreams in the sagas as premonitory saying that "a dream in a saga, usually reported by the dreamer to a confidant, is always a concealed warning to the dreamer, a warning that the proper confidant will be able to interpret correctly."[19]

Various other sagas are treated in a similar way, usually with a focus on the literary purpose of the dream within the saga. For example the dreams in *Sverris saga* are seen by Lönnroth simply as propaganda, being dreams that were specifically

---

[16] Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, editors. *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. In *Vestfirðinga sogur*. Íslenzk fornrit, vol 6. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag 1943). 1-118.
[17] Langeslag, P.S. "The Dream Women of *Gísla saga*." *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 81, Spring (2009): 47-72.
[18] Crocker, Christopher. "All I Do the Whole Night Through: On the Dreams of Gísli Súrsson." *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 84, (Summer 2012): 143-162.
[19] Lönnroth, Lars. "Dreams in the Sagas." *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 74, (Winter 2002): 455-6.

constructed and included to serve a political purpose.[20] Ármann Jakobsson, in his study of Guðrún and her dreams in *Laxdæla saga* insists that the visions are primarily premonitions of future events within the saga, which again implies that they were written with a very specific, and somewhat limited, purpose. Ármann essentially uses the dreams of Guðrún to argue the agency that she holds over the events that are predicted, and, while it is a very interesting idea, simply uses the dreams as a starting point for her character analysis.[21] Both Ármann and Lönnroth treat the dreams as literary plot devices that are included for the main purpose of furthering the trajectory of the story, while only giving supplementary insight into the dreaming characters.

While the dreams in Icelandic sagas have been discussed in terms of their uses as literary tools, Christian propaganda, and prophecy, they have not been studied as much in their capacity as a conduit into the oneiric cognition of the characters. The dream interpretation theories of Freud and Jung can help with this hole in the scholarship. Freudian theories have been used in many cases to read literary characters in a new light, although not always through their dreams specifically. The most immediately relevant study of literature that used psychoanalytic techniques is the article written by Hans-Jürgen Bachorski.[22] This article deals with three different pieces of medieval literature that contain dreams and Bachorski uses varying theories to study these dreams, including Freudian dream interpretation. While throughout the article Bachorski addresses the issue of a constructed dream narrative, he gives attention to the dreams of Herzeloyde in *Parzival* in a way that has greatly inspired my thesis work. He attempts to interpret the character's dreams in a truly Freudian fashion, drawing the associations out of the events of the story that would normally be found through conversation with a patient. Bachorski then analyses the dreams by "decoding" the events, as Freud does in his numerous examples.[23]

As far as my research has shown, this sort of technique has not been done elsewhere with medieval texts. Often the use of psychoanalysis with literary dreams is

---

[20] Lönnroth, Lars. "Sverrir's Dreams." In *Scripta Islandica*, Isländska Sällskapets Årsbok 57/2006. Upsalla: Swedish Science Press, (2007): 97-110.
[21] Ármann Jakobsson. "*Laxdæla* Dreaming: A Saga Heroine Invents Her Own Life," in *Nine Saga Studies*. (Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2013): 173-189.
[22] Bachorski, Hans-Jürgen. "Dreams that Have Never Been Dreamt at All: Interpreting Dreams in Medieval Literature." Trans. Pamela E. Selwyn. *History Workshop Journal*, No. 49 (Spring 2000): 95-127.
[23] Freud. *Dreams*, 123.

only applied to more modern works, although it is often mentioned when scholars talk of dreams simply because Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* is undeniably one of the main modern sources for studying dreams of any type. David Aers uses one of Freud's case descriptions to interrogate the perceptions of specific women in medieval literature, namely Eve in *Paradise Lost* and the Wife of Bath in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, ultimately finding sexist tendencies in each example that can be reflected in Freud's work.[24] This tends to be the most common application of psychoanalysis in medieval literature, looking at the characters and their development rather than the Unconscious as shown through their dreams.

Jung's dream theories are used even less in the analysis of literary dreams, in fact my research did not unearth a single example in the study of medieval texts. This is strange because of the applicability of Jung's idea of universal symbolism, which seems to be reflected in the contemporary dream interpretations of medieval texts, especially in the uses of dreambooks and recognized symbolism. The following chapters of analysis with the dreams of *Laxdæla saga* will hopefully act to remedy this hole in scholarship and bring up many uses for Jungian psychoanalysis in medieval literary study.

While it is difficult to attempt to use psychoanalytic theories on constructed characters who can give no insight into their consciousness, it can be done, and adds depth to the characters and the events that are connected with their dreams. In this thesis I will show how it is possible to psychoanalyze the dreams in Icelandic sagas using the text of *Laxdæla saga*, focusing primarily on the dreams of Guðrún as well as the recurring dream figure of the mysterious woman in the dreams of various characters. Using the theories of both Jung and Freud I will show the contrast in their ideas, but also how each technique can be useful when reading the dreams found in the saga. Rather than positing some specific discovery that will come from this study, I hope simply to show that the theories are applicable and raise questions about the characters even if they are not necessarily answerable within this thesis.

---

[24] Aers, David. " Interpreting Dreams: Reflections on Freud, Milton, and Chaucer." In *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, edited by Peter Brown. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 84-98.

The Theories Presented

The main premise of this thesis is to look at the dreams seen in *Laxdæla saga* through the dream interpretation theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. These two psychoanalysts have significantly different techniques for dream analysis, and often disputed each other's ideas, making for an interesting study when comparing the two. Because each theory needs significant time to interpret any one dream, this paper will only have two focuses; firstly, on a single series of dreams dreamt by one character, and secondly on the ambiguous female figure that appears in multiple dreams throughout *Laxdæla saga*. Guðrún's series of four dreams allow for the use of both Freudian and Jungian theories, each giving the dreams quite different significance. The dream women that are seen in the dreams of Óláfr, Án and Herdís bring to mind the Jungian theory of the dream anima, which can symbolize many things within the dreamer's unconscious, and therefore this section will deal only with Jungian theory. Both Freud and Jung have done a large amount of work on dreams, with compilations available by each author. These two books are what I will mostly rely on, with some reference to the further works of each doctor.

The Interpretation of Dreams by Freud is one of the most referenced books in any scholarly attempt at dream interpretation in my findings while researching for this thesis. People either build off of his ideas or explicitly disagree with his theories, and often in the case of literary dream interpretation they find his techniques somewhat unhelpful. On the other hand Jung is almost never referred to, and definitely not used as a typical source for dream interpretation. This may be because his work on dreams is tightly wound with his alchemical theories, and often are synonymous with them. Jung says that "the alchemists concretized or personified practically all their most important ideas, [...]. The idea of man as a microcosm, representing in all his parts the earth or the universe, is a remnant of an original psychic identity which reflected a twilight state of consciousness."[25] Included in this idea is the necessity for personification or the elements of the universe, especially the consciousness of humans, as we will see in the idea of the dream anima. Because of this, symbolism is used explicitly in Jung's

[25] Jung. C.G. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Volume 13: Alchemical Studies.* Edited by Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, William McGuire. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, LTD, 1967), 92.

interpretations, and I believe this is what makes his theories superbly helpful when interpreting literary dreams. Freud and Jung have very obvious differences in their dream interpretation theories, both of which are helpful and difficult in a myriad of ways. This section of my thesis will act as a basis of knowledge to help the analysis that follows make more sense, as well as allow for ease in describing the difficulties which do arise throughout.

Freudian Theory

Sigmund Freud effectually brought began psychoanalysis as we know it today, and emphasized the importance of dreams in his ever-quoted statement; "the interpretation of dreams is the royal road to a knowledge of the unconscious activities of the mind."[26] While theories have changed and evolved, it is undeniable that Freud's work on dreams is the foundation of what has come since. Freud gives many examples in his *Interpretation of Dreams*, some from his patients and some from his own dreams. His theory of dream interpretation relies heavily on contextualizing the dream occurrences within the life of the dreamer. The first step is to have the dream written down, as soon as possible upon waking because of the inevitable forgetfulness which follows dreaming. Freud then takes the dreams, often sentence by sentence, and draws connections between the dream events and those of the dreamer's actual life. He assumes that everything which takes place in a dream is built off of some true events in the dreamer's life, which the mind has deconstructed and reconstructed to create the dream. His main goal when dealing with dream content is achieved by "replacing it by something which fits into the chain of our mental acts as a link having a validity and importance equal to the rest."[27] As an aid to find the relevant links Freud uses the theory of latent versus manifest dream content.

The content of a dream, what is actually remembered or experienced while dreaming, is, according to Freud, an act of condensation. The first step of dreaming comes with the "*latent* content" which can be described as the dream thoughts, what is thought of to create the dream. The "*manifest* content" is then what is condensed from

[26] Freud. *Dreams*, 604
[27] Ibid., 121.

the latent dream thoughts, to create the sensational experience of the dream itself.[28] Freud believes that "dreams are brief, meagre and laconic in comparison with the range and wealth of the dream-thoughts," implying that what happens in a dream is barely a fraction of the latent content that has built it.[29]

Dream interpretation, for Freud, is an attempt to reconstruct the latent dream content from the presented manifest content. He often replaces dream characters with people from reality, realizing that the physical description of the dream character is not always the telling sign of who it represents. He gives the example of a dream he had where, upon waking, he recorded the events as "my friend R. was my uncle," "R" and his uncle had no real similarities in their physicality or their personalities.[30] Freud then goes through figuring out what exactly this composite character represented and who it was, and finally comes up with an explanation that includes not only the two people referenced in the dream, but a third person as well as himself, totalling at four people represented by one dream character.[31] Freud's explanation of this dream, as with others, is very in-depth and lengthy, making it hard to summarize in a few words. Suffice it to say that taking the manifest content and reconstructing the latent content is a difficult process, assuming that one can even bring back unconscious associations, resulting in a "dream-analysis by a dream-synthesis."[32]

The most conclusive assumption that Freud makes about the motivation found in latent dream content is that every dream is essentially a wish-fulfilment. He makes this claim without exception, saying that every dream represents a fulfilled wish, no matter how convoluted that wish may appear within the dream content. Freud allows that "it does in fact look as though anxiety-dreams make it impossible to assert as a general proposition [...] that dreams are wish-fulfilments; indeed they seem to stamp any such proposition as an absurdity."[33] Yet he goes on to say that in fact these dreams are only subject to distortion, and, with some effort, can be shown to fit into the wish-fulfilment category despite their original appearance. What this means is that the true desire of the dream is hidden beneath unpleasant images and events. Often the motivation is

[28] Freud. *Dreams*, 295. (author's italics)
[29] Ibid., 296.
[30] Ibid., 162.
[31] Ibid., 162-165.
[32] Ibid., 326.
[33] Ibid., 160.

misdirected and makes the dream appear negatively. For example if one were to be traveling for a long period of time and dream of his mother dying, it is unlikely that he actually wishes his mother to die, but rather wishes for a reason to return home.[34] This type of distortion often caused trouble in the dreams that Freud presents, but he works through the events to uncover the real wish and how it is in fact being fulfilled in the dream.

Freud explains why distortion occurs by talking about two different forces which create our dreams. First is the force which actually creates the dream based on a wish, and the second force acts to censor the original. This second force "forcibly brings about a distortion in the expression of the wish."[35] Additionally this second power is the one which decides what enters the consciousness, Freud posits that it is what allows the manifest content to be created. While the latent content would be satisfied to stay in the Unconscious, and likely act purely as wish-fulfilment, the manifest content is allowed into the consciousness as dream events, but only by way of this second, censoring force. Essentially it is because of this second force that there are dreams to be remembered and analysed at all, because otherwise they would simply reside in the Unconscious mind.

Jungian Theory

Jung began working as a psychoanalyst after Freud and was heavily influenced by Freud's ideas and teachings. The two men had an active correspondence as Jung's career progressed, especially as he deviated from Freud's ideas and began to construct a psychoanalytic theory that was quite controversial to Freudians. Carl Jung begins his work on dream interpretation by stating that he does not actually come to conclusions about his patients' dreams himself, rather he insists on working through the analysis with the patient and allowing them to make the final interpretation.[36] This allows for interesting examples throughout his work, when he encourages the patient to configure the analysis with only some direction and further inquiry from the doctor. Because Jung emphasizes that this self-interpretation occur, it makes his theories about universal symbolism more believable. Concerning this Jung says quite adequately: "It is far wiser

[34] A dream told to me by a friend, which shows this distortion perfectly.
[35] Freud. *Dreams*, 168.
[36] Jung, Carl G. *Dreams: Collected Works from Volumes 4, 8, 12, and 16*. (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 94-95.

in practice not to regard dream-symbols semiotically, i.e., as signs or symptoms of a fixed character, but as true symbols, i.e., as expressions of a content not yet consciously recognized or conceptually formulated."[37] With this statement he very simply lays out what he believes dream interpretation to be, namely the search for recognition of these "true symbols."

Throughout his work Jung acknowledges that there are symbols that appear in dreams in some form or another that can be referred to as archetypal. Of course the symbols can appear in different variations and manners, but it is their essential meaning that Jung considers. One of the symbols that he focuses most on, and which will be relevant later on in this thesis, is that of the mandala. This does not refer to the painted or created images that are popularly called mandalas, but rather with what they traditionally represent. Jung relates a conversation he had when the following explanation was given; "the true mandala is always an inner image, which is gradually built up through (active) imagination, at such times when psychic equilibrium is disturbed or when a thought cannot be found and must be sought for."[38] In its relation to dreams and dream images, Jung believes it represents a sort of searching by the subconscious towards the theme of the dream, which will illuminate something about the dreamer's self. The mandala, although connected with many ancient belief systems, is not meant to connect specifically to any tradition when used in dream interpretation. Rather it is meant to illuminate ideas that are apparently inherent in humanity, and inescapable in the symbolism created by our subconscious.

Jung argues that the existence of such a symbol in many ancient religions throughout the world, points towards the universality of the symbolism and its presence within the consciousness of each human. He gives numerous examples of mandala images from around the world and from many different religions, from Aztec symbols to Buddhist images even to Christian murals. Jung points out that "the early Middle Ages are especially rich in Christian mandalas; most of them show Christ in the centre, with the four evangelists, or their symbols, at the cardinal points."[39] These examples substantiate the claim that this universally expressed symbol is a representation of the Unconscious.

---

[37] Jung. *Dreams*, 104.
[38] Ibid., 170.
[39] Jung. *Alchemical Studies*, 22.

With this explanation of the mandala, Jung gives many examples of its appearance and use in dreams. While there are many variations among the appearance of a mandala within a dream, its circular nature is a constant. The centre of the idea is that "this symbolism refers to a quasi-alchemical process of refining and ennobling."[40] Basically meaning that the circularity of the mental function is working towards a more whole conception of the Self. Because dreams are understood as elements of the Unconscious attempting to work their way into the conscious mind, this idea of a drive towards self-identity and wholeness is often shown through representative images and events in the dream, effectually edging the Unconscious towards the reality that the conscious lives in.

Jung describes this vision of the dream anima as a personification of the Unconscious. He cites the Chinese belief of the *p'o* which is "written with the characters for 'white' and 'demon,' that is 'white ghost,' [and] belongs to the lower, earthbound, bodily soul."[41] This ideology combined with the vision of the dream anima that Jung presents in many of his examples leads to a presence that can be explained as a bridge from the Unconscious to the conscious mind. The dream woman represents, to Jung, the inferior cognitive function that is so often repressed in consciousness, as it attempts to make itself known to the conscious functions.

Jung's theory is that there are four cognitive functions, thinking, sensation, feeling and intuition. Of these four every person has a specific ranking for their use of the functions.[42] They can each be in either the dominant, auxiliary, tertiary, or inferior position. The position of the functions dictates which is most used in a person's perception of life and reality and the events taking place around them. The inferior function is what pertains to us now, and its place within the cognition of a person is quite self-explanatory. The inferior function is the least developed and least used of all four functions within a person's mind. Often it is even repressed and only seen at work in the Unconscious. Because of this it presents itself most readily through dreams.[43] The

---

[40] Jung. *Alchemical Studies*, 24.
[41] Ibid., 39.
[42] Later psychologists have developed these ideas to create the Myers-Briggs 16 personality types, differentiating the functions further by whether they are introverted or extraverted as well as adding the concept of a Judging function. Further information and printed resources can be found at www.myersbriggs.org.
[43] Jung. *Dreams,* 180. These ideas can be found in part in most of C.G. Jung's works, but is explained most clearly in volume 6 of his collected works, subtitled *Psychological Types.*

personification of this inferior function is shown in dreams as the anima. This concept will be explored further in my chapter on the dream anima, showing how it relates not only to the dream images but the significance of such a figure in Icelandic folklore.

Applying Jung's dream analysis techniques to the dreams found in *Laxdæla saga* proves to be somewhat straightforward. Because he uses a foundational source of dream symbolism it is simply a matter of finding instances where these images appear and applying the meanings of each symbol to the dream within its individual context.[44] It becomes more intricate with the consideration that most saga dreams are prophetic in some sense. This is, of course, a common problem when dealing with constructed dreams that are often included specifically to foretell the future. In the case of *Laxdæla saga*, the constructed dreams also give perspective into the character, and are not always straightforward when prophesying the future. Jung says that "although the prospective function is, in my view, an essential characteristic of dreams, one would do well not to overestimate this function."[45] I think this must be taken into account when looking at literary dreams. While it is easy to write off the dreams as plot devices, simply added to give the audience some sense of foreknowledge and add tension to the plot, they often do more to show the motivations and character of the dreamer. In the case of Guðrún this is especially true, as her dreams give insight into why each of her marriages fails, and how that affects her sense of self, even before the events have taken place.

These two different approaches to dream interpretation, the Jungian and the Freudian, will be used in my analysis of the dreams that appear in *Laxdæla saga*, giving quite different meanings in each circumstance. Of course the techniques that Freud and Jung describe in their respective works are meant to be applied to living subjects, who are able to elaborate their dreams and whose dreams come naturally and are not constructed with a purpose in mind. The dreams I will work with are decidedly the opposite of this. They have been constructed by the author(s) of the saga, and often foreshadow some coming events within the saga. Yet they can also be shown to fit into these theories, and in doing so the characters are portrayed as more developed and whole than they are when only thought of as people who are given prophetic visions.

---

[44] Coincidentally that is not a hard prospect, which perhaps helps prove Jung's idea of these symbols being universal in some form or other.
[45] Jung. *Dreams*, 42.

It is, of course, impossible to apply free association to the dreams of saga characters, because they cannot have any input, but with the knowledge we are given when reading the saga there are some assumptions which are plausible to make. One of these is Freud's idea of wish-fulfilment, which, we will see, applies itself quite well to the dreams of Guðrún. Similarly Jung's idea of a dream anima is very apparent in the dreams of Án, and shows an interesting comparison with the dísir that appear in Icelandic literature. The dreams in *Laxdæla saga* are structurally ambiguous enough to allow for interpretation using the same techniques as would be used upon living patients. In some cases it seems as if the interpretations are irrelevant to the rest of the saga, but they bring a light to the characters and their motivations that would otherwise be explained simply by happenstance. Because of this I believe that, even with the difficulties, it is worth the time put into analysing these constructed dreams using Freudian and Jungian theories, if only to further explore the characters of the sagas.

The Dreams of Guðrún

The dreams told to Gestr Oddleifsson by Guðrún are vivid and rich with symbolism. They are in a sequence of four, all with the same general trajectory. What makes them different are the specifics, pertaining to the symbols themselves and how she feels about them, as well as their eventual ends. Guðrún says that she chooses to tell these dreams to Gestr because "no one has yet been able to interpret them to my satisfaction, although I don't insist that they be favourably interpreted."[46] It is apparent that she has been thinking over the dreams for some time, and perhaps has come to her own interpretation, but insists on having the opinion of the respected visitor. The dreams themselves seem somewhat simple in form and meaning, especially once Gestr has given the presented symbols their respective meanings, however they are significantly more illuminating then they seem at first glance. Not only do they foretell of Guðrún's husbands, referring to their wealth and societal standing, but they also illuminate her feelings towards them and give strange insight into their deaths.

The first dream sets the scene for those that follow, placing Guðrún near a body of water and focusing her attention on some adornment that appears important to her. It is said earlier in the saga that Guðrún "took great care with her appearance, so much so that the adornments of other women were considered to be mere child's play in comparison."[47] This statement is especially significant because each of Guðrún's dreams centres around some piece of physical adornment. The description of her implies that she would have been very particular and aware of how these accessories flattered her as well as how they reflected her character and standing in society. Guðrún would not have been satisfied with the best looking piece of jewellery if it did not also flatter her better than all others. This is seen very clearly in her second and third dream. Yet her first dream explicitly says that she is unsatisfied with the crown upon her head, although it appears to be very valuable and estimable in the eyes of others. She says to

---

[46] Kunz. Keneva trans. *The Saga of the People of Laxardal and Bolli Bollason's Tale*. (London: Penguin Books, 2008), 65. "engi maðr hefir þá svá ráðit, at mér líki, ok bið ek þó eigi þess, at þeir sé í vil ráðnir." Einar Ól Sveinsson, editor. *Laxdæla saga.* in *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit, vol 5. (Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1934), 88.

[47] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal,* 63. "Guðrún var kurteis kona, svá at í þann tíma þóttu allt barnavípur, þat er aðrar konur hǫfðu í skarti hjá henni." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 86.

Gestr "I felt it did not suit me well at all," and even goes as far as to say that she consciously wishes she could get rid of it, but is counselled against it.[48]

Immediately Guðrún makes it clear that her dream is connected with an emotional response, which is obviously negative. She admits to having willed the crown to be gone from her head despite the wishes of those around her. Later, Gestr interprets that this means she will divorce her first husband, which is indeed what happens as the saga progresses. Guðrún finally tosses off the crown into the nearby water, something which will be mimicked in the following dreams, and which becomes significant throughout the dream interpretation.

The second dream begins with a substantially different tone. Guðrún tells of a new adornment, a silver ring, which she feels quite differently towards. She tells Gestr that "[it] suited me especially well. I treasured it greatly and intended to keep it long and with great care."[49] Immediately it is obvious that Guðrún feels greater attachment to this adornment than she ever had to the elaborate crown that she had previously worn and discarded. While the jewellery itself may not have been extremely valuable or showy, the fact that Guðrún felt it fit perfectly, keeping in mind that she is reputed as a very particular woman when it comes to such things, says how invaluable it is to her. And yet, as if because of the level of attachment she had to the ring, its demise is soon and swift. Just as with the crown that Guðrún cast into the water, the silver ring ends up lost in the river by which she stands. In this case the ring is lost to the chagrin of Guðrún, and she despairs greatly upon it speaking of her irrational attachment to the object. Even within her dream Guðrún seems to be aware that her attachment to this object gave it more consequence than it would have otherwise as an inanimate piece of jewellery.

Similarly Guðrún esteems the jewellery in the third dream by how she feels towards it rather than its monetary worth. In this dream she is wearing a golden arm ring, which seems to fit her well and there are no visible qualms about it. Yet Guðrún insists that she does not feel the same level of attachment towards it as she did towards the silver ring. Candid as always, she acknowledges that this is strange by saying "all the same it wasn't as if it suited me so very much better, not if compared with how

[48] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal* 65. "þótti mér illa sama." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 88.
[49] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal,* 65. "þóttumk ek eiga ok einkarvel sama; þótti mér þat vera allmikil gersemi, ok ætlaða ek lengi at eiga." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 88.

much more costly gold is than silver."[50] Such a particular woman would predictably be more satisfied with gold than silver, if only for the fact that it is more valuable and rare. But Guðrún again shows that what is most important is how the jewellery relates to her, and while the gold arm ring is sufficient, it does not elicit the same emotions as the silver had. All the same Guðrún admits that she hoped to keep this ring longer than she had the last, although it is obvious that given total control she would have kept the silver ring indefinitely.

Yet Guðrún faces sorrow again, this time in a more visceral way. She tells Gestr that this ring is lost to her because she falls, and as she is breaking her fall with her hand the ring comes between her and the rock and splits in half. None of the previous dreams had shown any sort of gore, the first adornment being simply cast aside, and the second disappearing without any trace. But the golden ring not only splits in half, it also appears to bleed. It is also partially Guðrún's fault that the ring meets this fate, since it broke her fall, in every sense of the word. While Guðrún was responsible for the first crown being tossed away, it was not a violent parting, but this dream is certainly violent. Guðrún does admit that she felt some amount of regret after the ring broke, but it is also interesting that she then tells Gestr that the ring had many flaws that had previously gone unnoticed. It is almost as if she is attempting to relieve herself of the guilt that the ring broke when it was under her, saying that it was because there had already been something wrong with the ring. She does not allow herself to be at fault in the splitting if her jewellery, claiming that she would still have preferred it whole, even with its flaws.

The final dream also shows Guðrún transferring some of the guilt to the dream object. In this account she is wearing another headdress, this one is a magnificent helmet with many decorations and "set with many gems," that she treasures.[51] Even though she appreciates the value of this adornment, it seemed to her to be too heavy for her head, yet she attempts to keep it on. Eventually the helmet fell from her head into the nearby Hvammsfjörð. Guðrún does not say it, and in fact she attempts to contradict it, but it is obvious that the helmet fell because of its own flaw of being too heavy for Guðrún, rather than anything that she could have prevented.

---

[50] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal,* 65. "en eigi þótti mér sjá gripr því betr sama, sem gull er dýrra en silfr." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 89.
[51] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal,* 66. "mjǫk gimsteinum settan." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 89.

There are many significant aspects about these dreams and the symbols used to represent Guðrún's future husbands, but there is one attribute that they all share which I would like to currently focus on. This is the shape and nature of each of the adornments, the two rings and the two headdresses. Each of these objects is circular in design, and encompasses their wearer, which makes them explicitly relatable to the Jungian dream symbol of the mandala. Jung theorizes that all dreams are part of a single purpose, which is the search for self through the Unconscious. Beyond this he says that "the self is not only the centre, but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious; it is the centre of this totality."[52] All of the symbols that can be found throughout dreaming, especially the mandala, are related to this search for the Self. Because the mandala is a circle, symbolically an uninterrupted whole, it is fitting that it should be the object that so often represents the search for the wholeness of the conscious and unconscious self. This can be seen in all four of Guðrún's dreams in *Laxdæla saga*, as she searches for her self and her meaning.

Each of Guðrún's dreams contains a piece of jewellery or adornment that takes a circular shape. Her focus is on these, and while some seem to fit better than others, they are all lost at some point. Guðrún is dreaming of her search, which will occupy her life, to find her true self. The image of the circle, seen in all four dream symbols, signifies the completeness that she is looking for and is unable to find through her husbands. Because all of the dreams are connected, in theme and content, the symbols can be assumed to be different manifestations of the same problem. If the dreams were to be overlaid, combined into one, the dream image would be that of a circular object which occupies Guðrún's whole mind, but which she never quite obtains permanently. I would argue that she only reaches the end of her search when she abandons the pursuit of matrimony and rather turns to religion.

Each dream also has a similar setting, with a nearby body of water. The presence of water in all of the dreams, except the one about the golden ring, can be seen as a representation of the subconscious.[53] It is interesting that three of the objects end up disappearing into the nearby water, as if their realization by the conscious mind was

[52] Jung. *Dreams*, 115.
[53] The water is also a liminal setting, which can represent many things but most pertinently it shows that she is removed from reality while having these dreams. They remind the audience that Guðrún is now part of an outside world, in which these pieces of jewelry and adornment could represent anything.

denied and the search was once more resigned to the Unconscious. In one dream related by Jung, the dreamer searches for an unknown treasure that lies at the bottom of the sea. He proposes that the treasure and the sea represent the Self, and the search for the Self.[54] This is similar to Guðrún's search for self, cantering upon the fine objects and their eventual disappearance into the water. There is also a further connection with Guðrún herself as it has been proposed that "straumurinn, vatnið, er kvenlegt frumefni og tákn."[55] If the water itself is a feminine symbol then it would make sense that it represents Guðrún's unconscious, effectually allowing her adornments to sink back to the Unconscious from her consciousness.

Only in the third dream does water not appear as a part of the scene, but this is not the only difference that makes the dream stand out from the others. The dream of the golden ring is the only one where we get the sense that Guðrún legitimately felt she was somewhat at fault for its demise. Where previously she had divorced her husband, and cast that crown into the sea, there was no damage done to the crown. When she lost the silver ring it happened when she was unaware of it, and it simply disappeared without any specific damage, although it is assumed that it represented drowning. The golden ring is broken because Guðrún fell upon it, making her more responsible for its damage than in any other case. Because of this it is impossible for her to successfully banish the symbol to her subconscious, instead she must rationalize why and how it came to be damaged, and so it does not disappear into the water nearby. In the other cases, that of the silver ring and the final headdress, she loses the objects despite her best attempt to keep them, thus relieving her of any responsibility in their demise and allowing them to leave her consciousness more readily.

Jung's theory for dream interpretation is applied quite easily to the dreams of Guðrún because of the presence of the mandala image in the four adornments. She has these four dreams as representations of her search for self, and the four objects represent not only her husbands but also the effort of her subconscious to assert itself in this search. Jung posits that when one dreams of a stranger doing something, putting on a hat for instance, it is not really a stranger in the dream but rather the dreamer's self in a

---

[54] Jung. *Dreams*, 192.
[55] Kress, Helga. "Haf og skegg: Flæði í Laxdælu." (Presented at *Milli himins og jarðar: maður, guð og menning í hnotskurn hugvísinda*. Reykjavík, Oct. 18-19, 1996), 84.

role that does not fit them, in which they feel strange.[56] Indeed this pertains to Guðrún and her experience with both headdresses in her dreams. In the first dream she feels uncomfortable in the crown, and believes that it fits her badly. What her dream is telling her is that her role as the wife of her first husband will be ill fitting, and she will not be herself. Her search for self continues and is shown through the discomfort she feels in the crown.

Similarly she feels that the helmet in her final dream is too heavy for her head. Here the dream is telling her that she will feel the weight and pressure of the role of wife to her final husband. While acting in this role she will not have connection with the Self that she has been searching for throughout the dream sequences. It is only in the second dream, where the silver ring fits her well, beyond even the more expensive golden ring of the third dream that she is in a role that allows her self to be realized. The four dreams when applied with the theory of Jung tell essentially of Guðrún's search for self, but there are other things that can be taken from her dreams if viewed from other perspectives.

To attempt a very different sort of dream analysis we can look towards Sigmund Freud's work in dream interpretation. Because of his technique, which requires the ability to free associate aspects of the dream with the dreamer's daily life and conscious associations, it is quite difficult to apply to literary dreams, which are inherently constructed. Therefore I will attempt to use Freudian analysis through an experiment of treating Guðrún as if she were a real person who had presented these dreams to her psychoanalyst. For the sake of the analysis regard will be given only to the saga material that has happened up to this point in the story, disregarding what will happen in the future.

It must first be stated that Freud does not agree with the existence of prophetic dreams in essence, which Guðrún's clearly are, believing instead that there can be more scientific explanations for such dreams.[57] Freud argues that "most of the artificial dreams constructed by imaginative writers are designed for a symbolic interpretation

---

[56] Jung. *Dreams*, 259.

[57] Freud. *Dreams*, 93. Freud also gives a simple explanation of why he thinks dreams sometimes seem to predict the future: "Nevertheless the ancient belief that dreams foretell the future is not wholly devoid of truth. By picturing our wishes as fulfilled, dreams are after all leading us into the future. But this future, which the dreamer pictures as the present, has been moulded by his indestructible wish into a perfect likeness of the past." Freud. *Dreams*, 615.

[...] they reproduce the writer's thoughts under a disguise which is regarded as harmonizing with the recognized characteristics of dreams."[58] Guðrún's dreams are quite obviously created by the saga compiler(s) to give some foreshadowing of events to come, and are given attributes which match with the previously described character of Guðrún. Therefore we must forget that they are interpreted as such, and indeed do point towards the future within the saga, and instead require that they portend to past events which Guðrún has experienced or heard of.

Freud begins his analysis of a person's dreams by "[putting] the dream before [the dreamer] cut up into pieces, he will give me a series of associations to each piece, which might be described as 'background thoughts' of that particular part of the dream."[59] This is what I will attempt to do with the dreams that Guðrún relates to Gestr. While the dreams are told fully and without as much elaboration as Freud would no doubt want for an analysis, this type of segmentation of the dream narrative is quite helpful when attempting to find the Freudian meaning behind the events.

The first dream begins with Guðrún placing herself near a stream, wearing a headdress that she claims fitted her badly. Through fairly obvious association we can posit that the water represented in the dream is that of the Sælingsdalsá springs by which she lived. This automatically associates the dream with the position of her family, which is one of good standing although not distinctly wealthy or prosperous. She sees herself wearing a headdress that does not fit her well. We have already been told that Guðrún takes great care in her appearance, to the point of making other women pale in comparison. So it seems strange that she would be wearing something that does not fit her well, physically or otherwise, and it can be assumed that this would bring her reputation into question. The associations for this part of the dream show her in relation to the standing of her family, but also wearing a headdress that threatens her individual reputation.[60]

---

[58] Freud. *Dreams*, 122.
[59] Ibid., 128.
[60] In fact we do see in kapituli 34 that Guðrún's father thinks her first husband may be too unevenly matched with her, since Þorvaldr is a much wealthier man. This would partially explain why he did not seem to be a great fit for Guðrún.

The dream continues to say that Guðrún wishes she could take off the head dress "but many people advised against it."[61] Despite these suggestions she takes the head dress and throws it into the stream. This desire to be rid of the head dress is the manifest dream content constructed from a motivation that must reside in the latent content. Once realized in the manifest content, Guðrún takes action by depositing the ill-fitting head dress in the stream. The stream, as a representation of Guðrún's family, then receives the consequences of her actions. So she chooses her individual reputation over that of her family. She also acts upon a wish, which follows Freud's theory that all dreams are wish-fulfilling. But the dream ends there, without any further information as to the effects of her disregard.

The second dream can be broken into three sections, the first setting the scene in a nearly identical way to that of the previous dream. Guðrún sees herself near a lake, and she is wearing a silver arm ring which she quite likes. The ring is different from the previous headdress in that Guðrún feels it fits her, and belongs to her. She is not weighted by its presence or distressed by it. It would seem that the ring meets with her approval as well as the station expected of her family. It is true that it is not as extravagant as the headdress, but it seems to be more fitting in relation to what Guðrún considers her taste, and very likely is also more consistent with her position in society.

Guðrún also says that she intends to keep the ring for a long time, and yet it surprisingly slipped off her arm and into the water, never to be seen again. Here I would like to include Freud's idea of dreams as wish-fulfilment, even in dreams that appear to have the opposite meaning. We must remember that dreams that appear to be contrary to the wish-fulfilment theory are simply showing distortion in the manifest content. Freud says that "it is only necessary to take notice of the fact that my theory is not based on a consideration of the manifest content of dreams but refers to the thoughts which are shown by the work of interpretation to lie behind dreams."[62] Guðrún's dream here seems to take exactly this path, while the manifest dream content insists that she does not want to lose the ring, the underlying force must be wishing for it to disappear. Perhaps the ring, although it suited Guðrún perfectly, actually was disappointing to the prospects that her family had for her, even though it seemed to be approved of at first

[61] *Kunz, trans. People of Laxardal*, 65. "margir tǫlðu um, at ek skylda þat eigi gera." Einar Ól. Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 88.
[62] Freud. *Dreams*, 160.

glance. Therefore losing the ring fulfils Guðrún's wish to please her family and be able to have what they believe is suitable for her, as well as to assert her own agency.

The only thing that seems to contradict this theory is that afterwards Guðrún says, "I was filled with a sense of loss much greater than I should have felt at losing a mere object."[63] This is a prime example of censorship that "forcibly brings about a distortion in the expression of the wish."[64] Guðrún addresses the problem with these words. She says she felt great loss over the ring, but that it was an irrational sense of loss. Here the dream misdirects the emotional response, in an effort to censor the true desire to be rid of the ring despite her apparent attachment to it.

Freud described dreams that happen in such a way as being subject to distortion. In these cases the dream will appear to be saying one thing when its true meaning is either quite the opposite, or hidden in an underlying layer that takes effort to discover. These dreams have two agencies, "and we can further say that distressing dreams do in fact contain something which is distressing to the *second* agency, but something which at the same time fulfils a wish on the part of the *first* agency."[65] He goes on to explain that the function of the "second" agency is that of defence against the wish of the "first" agency. Guðrún's dreams are a good example of this, in which the overlying theme of the dream is quite distressing, but underneath there is the possibility for an interpretation that shows a wish fulfilled.

This concept can be seen again in the third dream. Here Guðrún seems to contradict herself, or talk around her true feelings towards the golden ring, without really saying what she means. She says "it was my own and seemed to make up for my loss. I expected to have the pleasure of owning this one longer than the previous one," yet even as she says this she admits that she did not feel any greater attachment to it than she had to the silver ring.[66] Just within this passage she gives three conflicting feelings towards the ring; first that it seems to make up for her previous loss, second that she does not feel an attachment that is proportionate to the value of the material of the gold ring versus that of the silver ring, and third that she thinks she will keep this

---

[63] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 65. "þótti mér sá skaði miklu meiri en ek mætta at glíkendum ráða, þótt ek hefða einum grip týnt." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 88.
[64] Freud. *Dreams*, 168.
[65] Ibid., 170.
[66] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 65. "ok þótti mér bœttr skaðinn; kom mér þat í hug, at ek mynda þessa hrings leng njóta en ins fyrra." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 89.

ring longer than the previous one. This dream can also be explained as wish-fulfilment, and these conflicting feelings within Guðrún allow a perspective into how she is attempting to combat, or deny, the wish, which is ultimately to be rid of this ring as well. Freud says, when talking of a case with one of his patients who also shows such contradictory behaviour, that "inadequate reasons like this usually conceal unconfessed motives."[67] Guðrún is doing just that while she is circumventing her true desire that the dream is going to fulfil.

Even with this apparent indecision the dream concedes to its function as a wish-fulfilling vision in the breaking of the ring. In this case the ring is broken as Guðrún puts her hand out to stop her fall. This action also is representative of what the ring subconsciously may have meant to Guðrún. It was while wearing it that she fell, an allusion to the falling of her self-perception, and so she puts her hand out, sacrificing that which perhaps caused the fall. In this way, she breaks the ring and is rid of the thing that she must admit she felt dissatisfied with.

The dream ends with more contradiction. Guðrún begins by saying she does not feel responsible for breaking the ring, and attempts to give some amount of justification for its fragility, yet she ends by saying that if she had taken more care with the ring, then it would likely not have broken.[68] This sort of censorship of the wish-fulfilling act in the dream can be explained by Freud's theory. The theory of combatting forces in which "one of these forces constructs the wish which is expressed by the dream, while the other exercises a censorship upon this dream-wish," shows how such a distorted dream can arise.[69] With this passage from Guðrún we can see these two forces attempting to overplay each other. On one side is her wish, that the ring be broken and no longer in her care, on the other side is the distortion which tells her she is to blame for its destruction and that she did not really desire it to break. It is this distortion that makes its way most readily to her conscious mind in the form of the dream events.[70]

---

[67] Freud. *Dreams*, 172.
[68] "I realized that there had been a flaw in the ring, and upon examining the pieces I could see other flaws. All the same I had the impression that if I'd looked after it better the ring might still have been in one piece." Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 65-66. "þat þótti mér líkara harmi en skaða, er ek þóttumk þá bera eptir, kom mér þá í hug, at brestr hafði verit á hringnum, ok þá er ek hugða at brotunum eptir, þá þóttumk ek sjá fleiri brestina á, ok þótti mér þó, sem heill myndi, ef ek hefða betr til gætt." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 89.
[69] Freud. *Dreams*, 168.
[70] This dream is the most ambiguous of the four, which is understandable if it relates to her marriage with Bolli, which began under false pretenses and never really seemed to please Guðrún. The marriage ends

The fourth dream also deals with some amount of wish-fulfilment, and in many ways mirrors the troubles from the first dream. Here Guðrún marvels over the magnificence of the helmet made out of gold and decorously ornamented and appears to be very pleased that it belongs to her.[71] And yet she says that the helmet is too heavy for her to hold up, and it falls from her head into Hvammsfjǫrðr. Just as in the first dream it is apparent that Guðrún finds this adornment to be too much for her, even if she recognizes its great beauty. She is aware of her standing within society, and she is unable to maintain possession of such an impressive helmet because of her limitations. And so this dream becomes a fairly straightforward wish-fulfilment, when the helmet falls from her head because of its weight. Guðrún does not elaborate on her emotional response to this dream as she does with the two previous.

Just as this dream is the least elaborated upon within the saga, so it is the least interesting to analyse. Guðrún obviously appreciates the helmet but it is clear that she also wishes to be rid of its weight. When the dream portrays the helmet slipping from her head it is in response to the desire for this very event to happen. There is no distortion in this dream, although Guðrún makes a mediocre attempt at denying her wish to lose the helmet, and so the analysis is quite simple. This dream reflects Freud's view on the dreams of children, which are so obviously wish-fulfilling that "they are of inestimable importance in proving that, in their essential nature, dreams represent fulfilments of wishes."[72] This dream helps to give conviction to the previous dreams as wish-fulfilment.

Through this experiment of interpreting Guðrún's dreams with Freudian theory, and attempting to ignore facts which are given further on in the saga, we can see that all of Guðrún's dreams function as wish-fulfilments. While this interpretation has been interesting, there remains the problem of legitimacy within the saga context. Because Guðrún is a constructed character, and therefore her dreams are created with a specific purpose within the frame of the saga narrative, it is not necessarily helpful to rely too heavily on these interpretations of her dreams. That being said the interpretations can possibly help to explain Guðrún's actions and her inability to maintain a husband.

---

equally questionably as Guðrún knowlingly avoids the scene of her husband's death, therefore baring some indirect guilt in its occurance.

[71] Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga*, 89.

[72] Freud. *Dreams*, 152.

The interpretative symbols that are ascribed by Jung appear to be more relevant to such a constricted type of dream analysis. Because the symbols are quite universal, it is not implausible to think that they could actually apply to the dreams that Guðrún relates in this section of the saga. We are able to look further into the saga and realize that the objects which she dreams of refer to her future husbands, and the symbolism still pertains to the dreams. When attempting to bring the entire context of the saga into analysis with Freudian technique, the legitimacy of the interpretations is more ambiguous. Even so I also believe it is important to retain the idea that these dreams are wish-fulfilling, even though they are heavily distorted and often appear to be quite contradictory, they do actually have some relevance in the saga as Guðrún's relationships develop.

In a similar experiment Hans-Jürgen Bachorski endeavours to treat the dreams of Herzeloyde, in *Parzival*, as if she were a real person. Bachorski attempts Freudian psychoanalysis on her dreams, as I have done here with Guðrún's, and comes to a similar conclusion. But he also posits that this is really an act of psychoanalysis on the author, rather than the characters. Quite aptly worded he ask "whose conscious mind and whose unconscious does this dream-text articulate, then?"[73] This question can definitely be asked in relation to the dreams of Guðrún, made even more complex by the ever disputed question of authorship within the sagas. It further raises the question of whether these interpretations are for Guðrún or for the saga author. It has even been posited that the saga implies that Guðrún has already interpreted the dreams by the time she tells Gestr about them, which would allow for added distortion and implied meaning that may not have been present if this were not the case.[74] And yet, despite these additional qualms, the dreams of Guðrún have obvious significance not only within the saga, but also about the character herself. The ability to interpret the dreams with new techniques allows for a different perspective on the events of the saga that follow the four dreams. While they may at first appear strange and somewhat unhelpful, a second reading of the saga, keeping in mind the interpretations given above, illuminates reasons for events which had henceforth been seen as coincidental.

---

[73] Bachorski. "Dreams that Have Never Been Dreamt," 110.
[74] Ármann Jakobsson. "*Laxdæla* Dreaming," 36.

The Dream Anima Appears

One of Carl Jung's most discussed theories in dream interpretation is the anima, a mysterious woman who functions ambiguously in the dream. This woman can appear in many different ways, but is most often an ambiguous character that interacts with the dreamer in some way. As such she can sometimes play a direct role in the dream, whether good or evil, as well as have a passive role. Jung connects this figure with his ideas of cognitive functions, saying that "the anima also stands for the "inferior" function and for that reason frequently has a shady character."[75] The dream anima is believed to be a personification of the inferior function of a person's cognition. When Jung describes the dream anima as the "inferior" function, he does this because this function is usually underdeveloped in comparison with the three functions that rank above it. Because of this the inferior function often becomes synonymous with the Unconscious in dreams, acting as the motivations ignored in daily waking life.

Jung gives many examples of the dream anima in the demonstration of his interpretation techniques. He does not attempt to give a specific identity to this woman, rather believes that it is simply a part of the dreamer's consciousness. In fact he states that "a man's unconscious is likewise feminine and is personified by the anima."[76] In the dreams related in *Laxdæla saga* this idea can be argued to apply to the dreams which centre around a mysterious dream woman, although the argument that it is a woman because of the opposition in sex of one's unconscious cannot, obviously, apply to the dream dreamt by Herdís. In fact we will see that the case of Herdís' dream has additional elements that almost put it in another category. In his summary of the description of the anima Jung states "I have defined the anima as a personification of the unconscious in general," and he continues to posit that because of this relationship, or rather as part of it, "that consciousness (that is, the personal consciousness) comes from the anima."[77] As a result we can come to understand that the anima is seen as a bridge from the Unconscious to the conscious mind, and is indispensable as such. In our circumstance the anima can be seen taking the shape of a woman who brings into the

[75] Jung. *Dreams,* 224-225.
[76] Ibid., 224.
[77] Jung. *Alchemical Studies,* 42.

conscious mind something that otherwise would have stayed underneath in the subliminal unconscious.

The idea of a dream anima can be related to many existing figures in Icelandic tradition, as well as numerous other traditions including those of medieval Christian Europe. The dísir in Icelandic folklore can be compared to Jung's idea of a dream anima. The word dísir is often used to refer to a variety of figures which can appear to be quite different from each other, but in many cases the word "suggests that the *dísir* were tutelary goddesses attached to one neighbourhood, one family, perhaps even to one man."[78] These spirits often acted as a guardian to whomever they were attached, and are referred to in many different circumstances, including dreams and dream interpretations.

Textually it is common that the dísir take the shape of women when they visit people in dreams. Often it is through poetry that they are referred to and sometimes they are even seen as "dead female ancestors."[79] This idea helps to show their importance in the society. The spirits of ancestors who may have followed the immigrants to Iceland would no doubt have been revered and held in high import by a culture that was still establishing a past on a new land. Similarly the figures known as hamingja appear in dreams and seem to be essentially the same as the dísir in function and form. Kelchner describes them as "this tutelary genius is in the form of a woman . . . while an antithesis to these is represented by the evil genius."[80] The two similar figures, the hamingja and the dísir, tend to appear in the same circumstances, often dreams, and evolve similarly with the advent of Christianity.

All of these explanations show why these female figures were important to the Icelandic dreamers, and why their foretelling held so much weight in the narratives of the sagas. As dead relatives returning through dreams, the dísir would have only come to the dreamer under serious circumstances, and they are treated with such respect when they appear in the sagas as draumkonur. This proves true in *Laxdæla saga* when, after Án is visited by his dream woman and his companions are laughing at his dream, Auðr says, "that it was nothing to joke about," telling the men off for not taking such a dream

---

[78] Turville-Petre, G. "Guardian Spirits." In *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia*. 221-235. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, (1964): 221.
[79] Ibid., 225.
[80] Kelchner. *Dreams in Old Norse literature*, 30.

seriously.[81] While the actual scene of the dream may appear to be funny, Auðr realizes that a dream woman would only visit Án if there were some immediate purpose to her visit. Of course, it ends up that the dream somehow prophesied Án´s strange survival of the events later that day, in which he should have rightly died. Auðr thinks the dream is significant enough to warrant Kjartan taking more men with him on his short journey.

While the dísir appear to be part of an ancient and respected tradition, their appearances in the Icelandic sagas often show that "the dísir have assumed the characters of good and evil angels, the divine and Satanic guardians of medieval legend."[82] These female images have unmistakable similarities to the angels, and sometimes demons that are present in medieval Christianity. In *Laxdæla saga* alone there are examples of the dream women acting as guardian spirits as well as heralds of what is to come in the dreamer's life. They play many different roles within the sagas, mimicking the angels of European Christianity. Additionally they most often are referred to in relation to oneiric occurrences, as are angels.

The most suitable example of the angelic nature of draumkonur comes in *Gísla saga* and is discussed at length by P.S. Langeslag, Christopher Crocker, Lars Lönnroth and others.[83] The argument for the dream women in this saga centres around one representing a Christian angel and the other a pagan draumkonur. Each of the above scholars has a somewhat differing view on the relationship of the two dream women, and the relevance of that relationship within the saga. Kelchner similarly argued that there are good and evil dream women, but rather than calling them dísir, she names them hamingja and says "the *hamingja*, though often displaced by the Christian angel, still survives in heathen guise in a few instances, while of the *dísir*, as such, I have come upon no trace."[84] While she names the dream women differently, she is still strongly positing that they are eventually synonymous with the Christian angel, although her argument also does not concretely establish a difference between the dísir and hamingja. Langeslag ends his argument with a statement about saga dream visions and their relationship to those of Christianity, saying "their incidence in the Icelandic sagas

[81] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 112. "Eigi þarf at spotta þetta svá mjǫk." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 149.
[82] Turville-Petre. "Guardian Spirits." 223.
[83] See: Lönnroth, Lars. "Dreams in the Sagas.", Langeslag, P.S. "The Dream Women of *Gísla saga*.", Crocker, Christopher. "All I Do the Whole Night Through."
[84] Kelchner. *Dreams in Old Norse literature*, 37.

is so high that they are likely to have been a common device in Icelandic storytelling before the establishment of the Christian cultural hegemony."[85] Essentially saying that, while there can be the argument for a connection between the angel figure and the dísir, it is not necessarily productive, which I agree with in the context of the dream women in *Laxdæla saga*.

Of course there is the question of whether this relationship, between angels and dísir, is intentional or not. Because the extant manuscripts of the saga are dated to the second half of the 13th century, it is certain that the compiler would have known of the concept of angels.[86] Even so, it should not be assumed that the draumkonur in the saga are based off of the Christian concept of angels. It is evident that figures such as the dísir were present in the Scandinavian culture long before and throughout the saga period.[87] I would suggest that the connections between angels, draumkonur, and the dream anima result rather from the shared human consciousness that Jung often talks about that allowed cultures, developing far from each other, to have similar conscious and unconscious experiences. Such symbols cannot be confined to specific religions or times, although they may appear in those circumstances. They are apparent in every culture and every time period, and are simply given different names and roles in the societies. This could very easily be the case for the draumkonur. They are in essence the same as angels; they can be good or evil, guardians or heralds. They can reveal things to the dreamer, or simply be present in the dream. This figure is what Jung refers to as the dream anima, and which he believes to be a substantial part of dream consciousness.[88]

When Jung argues that the dream anima represents the inferior function of the four cognitive functions, he implies that it is specifically repressed within the consciousness. He says that, while the tertiary function can become present in the conscious mind more easily than the inferior, there will nonetheless be "contamination with the inferior function, thus acting as a kind of link with the darkness of the unconscious."[89] Because of this he seems to infer that the dream anima is representing something already present within the dreamer, which is unable to surface into the

---

[85] Langeslag, P.S. "The Dream Women of *Gísla saga*." *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 81, Spring 2009: 68.
[86] Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* lxxvi-lxxvii.
[87] Simek, Rudolph. "Rich and Powerful: The Image of the Female Deity in Migration Age Scandinavia." (Presented at the 11th International Saga Conference, University of Sydney, 2-7 July 2000.): 478-479.
[88] Jung. *Alchemical Studies*, 41-42.
[89] Jung. *Dreams*, 226.

conscious mind, and therefore arises in the Unconscious. This brings an interesting perspective to the presence of such figures in literary dreams. If we agree with Jung, then the dreamers within the story have in fact always known what is being revealed in their dream, but it was their unconscious mind that had the knowledge, and so it needed a conduit to bring itself into the waking mind.

In the case of Óláfr in *Laxdæla saga*, this seems to mean that the draumkona is an aspect of his guilty conscious that had been repressed. Óláfr's dream comes in a brief episode after he butchers his prized ox because it has lost its strange third horn that made it so formidable. He is visited afterwards in a dream by a woman who says "you have had my son killed and sent him to me disfigured, and for that I will make sure you see a son of yours covered with blood."[90] The woman, who apparently is the mother of the ox that Óláfr slaughtered, is admitting to her quest for vengeance. If the woman truly represents a repressed part of Óláfr's consciousness, then it would be the part that believes there must be vengeance for his killing. He unconsciously saw the ox as human, and even a part of his family, worthy of life payment. He feels as if one of his sons has died, and this translates into the need for one of his real sons to be killed brutally. He has been repressing a feeling of guilt in relation to the butchering of his prize beast, and it takes the form of a dream anima that comes and reveals to him what he is unable to realize in himself.

This example lends itself quite well to Jung's idea of the function of the dream anima, but that is not the case for some of the other dreams within the saga. If we look forward to the dreams had by Án, which are admittedly some of the most interesting and strange dreams in the saga, it is very difficult to prescribe the same straightforward method to understanding his draumkona. In these dreams we see something more akin to a guardian angel, although there is no doubt that she would not be referred to as an angel in the sense of many other medieval Christian dreams she is more similar to the terrible apparitions called angels in the Old Testament. She is neither gentle nor fair, and is in fact brutal and ugly. Yet what she does to Án allows him to survive a violent fight, to the point of surprising all his companions at his waking from supposed death.

---

[90] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 62. "son minn hefir þú drepa látit ok látit koma ógørviligan mér til handa, ok fyrir þá sǫk skaltu eiga at sjá þinn son alblóðgan af mínu tilstilli." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 84.

Án's first encounter with his draumkona comes before the companions leave for, what will become, the battle with the Ósvifssons. In his vivid recollection of the dream he says "a horrible-looking woman approached me and tugged me sharply out of bed. She had a cleaver in one hand and a wooden meat tray in the other. Placing the cleaver on my chest, she slit me open right down the front, took out my entrails and put in twigs instead."[91] How can this possibly be Án's inferior function presenting itself through a dream? In fact this draumkona seems to be simply acting as we would expect a hamingja or dísir to act in protection of its person. If we are to believe that all of these figures represent one and the same in the universal symbolism of dreams and consciousness, how does it apply here? Is there some supernatural guardianship at work for Án?

Nowhere in the saga does it say that Án actually had twigs in place of his innards, in fact, during the fight scene we are told that "after having fought for some time with his entrails exposed, An finally fell."[92] Clearly Án still possessed his real intestines; they had not been replaced by the dream woman. With that being said, it seems that the dream simply acts as a prophetic vision, predicting that Án will suffer a wound to his stomach, and it will nearly kill him, rather than expecting there to be any belief that he actually had undergone such a procedure.

As he is lying in the field unconscious he is visited again by the same draumkona. At this point he says that "I dreamed this same woman came to me as before, and now she removed the twigs from my stomach and replaced my entrails, after which I became whole again."[93] I interpret this as Án's unconscious self reminding him that he is not yet dead, and in fact his wounds are not as mortal as they appear. The draumkona acts as a personification of his own knowledge, and that is what it takes for him to regain the will to live and return to consciousness. Once he does so, his wounds are treated and he recovers fully.

---

[91] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 111. "kona kom at mér, óþekkilig, ok kippði mér á stokk fram. Hon hafði í hendi skálm ok trog í annarri; hon setti fyrir brjóst mér skálmina ok reist á mér kviðinn allan ok tók á brott innyflin ok lét koma í staðinn hrís." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 149.

[92] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 115. "Þá fell Án ok hafði hann þó barizk um hríð svá, at úti lágu iðrin." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 153.

[93] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 117. "þá dreymði mik in sama kona ok fyrr, ok þótti mér hon nú taka hrísit ór maganum, en lét koma innyflin í staðinn, ok varð mér gott við þat skipti." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 155.

With this interpretation it is clear that the two dreams must be seen together. The first one viewed by itself cannot be interpreted in any substantial way without the second vision being taken into consideration as well. Once we do this it is apparent that the dream woman does fit into Jung's idea of the universal symbolism of an unconscious knowledge that is attempting to come to the surface.

Án's dream woman also fits with Jung's idea that often this fourth function is personified in dreams as an apparently evil woman. While her actions were strange and obtrusive at first, they ultimately had good intentions, yet she was described quite vividly by Án as "óþekkilig" (un-handsome). In describing the dream anima's ugly appearance Jung says: "she is the dark and dreaded maternal womb which is of an essentially ambivalent nature."[94] While she is not actually evil, the draumkona is very obviously a "shady" and ghastly character in Án's dreams. It is not uncommon that the draumkonur in Icelandic sagas are very much hags, and this is also the case in Óláfr's dream where his draumkona is described as "a large, angry-looking woman," not an altogether pleasant image for a dream.[95] Similarly in Herdís' dream it is said of the draumkona that "her expression was far from kindly."[96] These women are obviously not the preferred type of draumkona, but their appearances seem much more in line with their purposes within the dreams, which are, in neither case, necessarily pleasant. Only in the case of Óláfr does the draumkona actually come close to representing "evil itself." These personifications of the inferior function are terrifying but essential to bring knowledge to the conscious mind.

If we look at the draumkonur that appear in *Laxdæla saga* as representations of this inferior function, attempting to bridge the gap between the Unconscious and the conscious functions, then we must ask how it is impacting the dreamer and his future choices. In the case of Óláfr, whose dream woman, as discussed above, represents his repressed guilt over killing his prize animal, the dream acts as prophecy. But the function is working to remind Óláfr of his guilt, and his reaction to this tells us how he continues to repress his inferior function. When he wakes from the dream he seeks interpretation from friends and yet "no one could interpret it for him to his satisfaction.

---

[94] Jung. *Dreams*, 225.
[95] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 62. "sú var mikil ok reiðulig." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 84.
[96] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 171. "ekki sýndisk henni konan sviplig." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 223.

He was most inclined to believe those who said that his dream was only a false indication of things to come."[97] This comment seems to say that, while he knows on some level the dream was likely prophetic, he does not want to believe it because he still does not see himself at fault for anything worthy of vengeance. Óláfr is given a vision that reveals his repressed function to him, and could possibly have been useful for him, yet he discards this revelation and refuses to allow for its significance. Ultimately he rejects his inferior function, and decides to continue suppressing it to his unconscious.

This is not the case for Án, who is similarly visited by his personified inferior function. As previously discussed it is a little more difficult to figure out what Án's draumkona is attempting to bring to his consciousness through her strange actions, but I would argue that it is a self-preserving instinct that is buried within his inferior function. This event of course has a taste of magic to it, but if thought of in terms of the Jungian theory, it is possible to see the dream woman instead portraying an instinct from the Unconscious about the coming events. In this case I would argue that Án's inferior function is intuition, and the draumkona is imparting an intuitive perception that Án will need to protect himself from bodily harm, and she gives him the means to do this.

While Án's friends may mock him for this dream, he seems to accept it; at least he does not obviously discount its importance. When he awakes from his fall in battle after having the second encounter with this dream woman it signifies that he has accepted her help, and therefore he has allowed his inferior function to work through his unconscious in a way that protects him and brings him back to his life. I would argue that Án fell in battle at the exact right moment, when he was severely injured but just before his wounds became mortal, and that he was advised of this by his oneiric function. It reminded him that his body had indeed listened to intuition and then he was able to come back from the edge of death. Contrary to Óláfr, Án accepts his inferior function and allows it to help him.

The final draumkona to be discussed visits Herdís Bolladóttir and speaks to her about Guðrún. This dream woman is explained as a spirit whose bones lie under the church floors where Guðrún has taken to praying. She tells Herdís something quite

[97] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 63. "ok varð ekki ráðinn, svá at honum líki. Þeir þóttu honum bezt um tala, er þat mæltu, at þat væri draumskrǫk, er fyrir hann hafði borit." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 85.

cryptic, talking of the discomfort that Guðrún causes her, and that she would prefer Herdís' presence over that of her grandmother.[98] This dream is much more complicated to look at through a similar theory, mainly because I believe the dream woman is actually a representation of Guðrún's unconscious rather than Herdís'. It seems to be telling Guðrún that her newfound piety and her tears of contrition are causing the woman, who represents an older belief buried deep beneath, discomfort. If this dream woman can be seen as Guðrún's inferior function, perhaps more repressed now than it had been in past days, its discomfort is explained easily. It also seems to be the clearest occurrence of the Unconscious, allegorically buried within the mind, attempting to make itself known to the above ground consciousness. Jung states that "the fourth function is contaminated with the unconscious and, on being made conscious, drags the whole of the unconscious with it."[99] So here the suppressed function is also bringing with it Guðrún's past which has become repressed due to her new religious piety. Of course the presence of this dream woman and its relationship to a religious motif that appears in many Icelandic sagas makes it more difficult to relate to Jung's idea of the dream anima.[100]

When Guðrún choses to unearth the bones of the spirit who has visited her granddaughter on her behalf, she also has them "moved to a remote place little frequented by men."[101] While this is an action of religiosity it also can be seen as a denunciation of this part of her unconscious, the part that still held onto her pagan beliefs that she actively continues to repress her unconscious. Her inferior function is pushed back into the Unconscious without having any lasting impact on Guðrún's conscious convictions. This specific regard for her past allows her to continue her new life, despite the discomfort it brings to her unconscious. In this case, as with Óláfr, the inferior function continues to be repressed despite its best effort at presenting itself to the conscious mind.

This instance of the draumkona that visits Herdís is also problematic simply because it is a woman. If this example were to fit completely with Jung's theory of the dream anima, the figure would have to be a male spectre, thus being a dream animus.

---

[98] Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 224.
[99] Jung. *Dreams*, 226-7.
[100] This idea is developed further by Torfi Tulinius, see further Torfi Tulinius. *The Enigma of Egill*, 5-7.
[101] Kunz, trans. *People of Laxardal*, 171. "fœrð langt í brott, þar sem sízt var manna vegr." Einar Sveinsson, ed. *Laxdæla saga,* 224.

Jung insists that this dream figure takes the opposite sex of the dreamer, because "this primordial pair of opposites symbolizes every conceivable pair of opposites that may occur: hot and cold, light and dark, [...], conscious and unconscious."[102] While this is definitely an inconsistency with the application of Jung's theory, I tend to think that it is possible to put aside this problem. Because the saga author was most likely male, and the Icelandic culture was primarily male dominated, it makes sense that the dream figure would have an unvarying sex for both men and women. Because the dream anima would be a female character in the dreams of the men, its subsequent amalgamation into a uniformly male dream character is plausible.

Even with this argument it remains difficult to attribute Jung's idea of the dream anima to this particular instance in the saga. While I have made every effort to do so, it is much less plausible than the previous two examples seen in Án and Óláfr. I think this is because the dream is serving a very different purpose initially within the saga, one of religious conversion. Because of this it makes less sense as a personification of Guðrún's inferior function, and perhaps fits better with the ideas of Freud presented in the previous chapter. If this dream can be seen as a wish-fulfilment, where Guðrún is, in a way, given confirmation of her religious conversion through the discomfort of a personified paganism, then the dream becomes more relevant to the character's progression. Perhaps then it is necessary to admit that this dream, while it can be made to fit Jung's theories with some effort, does not quite coincide with the other two examples of the dream anima.

And so two of these three examples of draumkonur in the saga lend themselves quite well to the idea of dream anima representing the inferior function within the characters' consciousness. In each case the function is making an attempt to loose itself from the Unconscious and impart some information onto the conscious mind, and only in the case of Án is it accepted as legitimate. While these women may have been regarded as dísir or angels depending on the religious beliefs at the time, they represent the same attempt at cognition in each case. The inferior function is personified by the women that visit these characters in their dreams, and appear in numerous other instances in sagas and other medieval dream visions. It is always left to the dreamer to either disregard the information imparted to them through the dream anima or to respect

[102] Jung. *Dreams*, 226.

what is told to them and accept its importance and role in their lives. Jung's theory helps to explain the presence of such figures in numerous cultures, whether dísir or angels, and why they were seen as important, respected figures that must be listened to.

Conclusion

These readings of the dreams in *Laxdæla saga* through the techniques of psychoanalysis show interesting perspectives on the characters and the dreams they have. It is undeniably difficult to attempt psychoanalysis on literature that does not have an easily apparent Unconscious, especially when one takes into account that whatever Unconscious might show up in the saga would have to be that of the author(s). Because the characters in literature are constructed and all of their actions serve some purpose for the evolving story, it is difficult to look at them through a psychoanalytic lens that relies heavily on the ability to uncover aspects of the Unconscious. Add to this the fact that all dreams in literature are not real dreams, but events entirely composed by the author to serve a specific purpose, no matter how ambiguous they may appear to the reader. With this in mind it would make sense to approach the dreams in the sagas as a view into the Unconscious of the author rather than the character that is doing the dreaming. This would be conducive to a study of authorship and the mind of a 13th century learned man, but it would not add particularly to the literary study of the saga characters. Therefore it becomes necessary to allow for some discrepancies in the study, at some points ignoring that the characters are entirely constructed and treating them rather like real humans.

Keeping all of this in mind I have attempted to use the psychoanalytic techniques of Freud and Jung, not to look into the mind of the medieval saga author, but to study the motivations and significance of the individual characters in relation to the dreams that they dream throughout *Laxdæla saga*. Dreams had a significant role in medieval literature, including the Icelandic sagas, and served many different purposes throughout. In many cases the dreams were religious, directing a character to a God given purpose, or converting pagan kings to the word of Christianity. In other cases they acted as they do in literature today, to show the motivations of a character and their Unconscious in an often convoluted way. In the Icelandic sagas both of these uses of dreams make an appearance, but most of what I have focused on in *Laxdæla saga* has been the dreams that give insight into the character and their motivations for future actions. The dream of Herdís is the only one that I would argue has any religious significance; otherwise the dreams are, by medieval definition, mundane.

Freud's main theory of dreams as wish-fulfilments is illustrated perfectly through the dreams of Guðrún and her adornments. In each case she expresses some feeling towards the jewellery or ornament that she is dreaming of, ranging from loving attachment to hesitant adoration, and yet in each case the objects are lost or destroyed. Looking at the dreams with a Freudian lens shows us that there is distortion at work within the dreams, and even in the cases when she appears to be attached to her objects; she is unconsciously wishing to be rid of them. And the resulting dream shows these wishes to be true: each time her adornment is lost by the end of the dream, regardless of her professed feelings towards it.

Guðrún's dreams can also be understood in a different way by using Jung's theory about the symbolism that is present in the dreams of everybody in some form or another. One of his main symbols is that of the mandala, expressed through the circularity of movement or objects that in some way represent the dreamer's search for self throughout their dream. The mandala represents the Unconscious circumambulation around a realization or knowledge that the dream is attempting to bring towards the conscious sphere. This can be seen in each of Guðrún's dreams because all of the objects that she dreams of are circular, rings or head ornaments. They all cause her some sort of pause in her dream, and represent how she is searching for herself in the objects and what they may represent in her future.

It is also interesting to look at these interpretations in tandem, even though they are using the theories of very different psychoanalysts. The wish-fulfilment seen in Guðrún's dreams leads directly to the search for self that is represented through the mandala-like objects that she is focusing on. As she is casting away, or otherwise getting rid of, her adornments she is coming closer to what her Unconscious is searching for. As I mentioned briefly above, it seems to make sense that Guðrún finally reaches the end of her search when she abandons the thought of marriage and instead turns to piety. Each of her dreams leads towards this, manifesting in the wish-fulfilling loss of each of her symbolic husbands. In the final dream involving Guðrún she is finally satisfied, and perhaps this is the sign that through her search she has found the Self that all of the previous dreams alluded. If this dream is also seen as a wish-fulfilment, and that wish was to successfully convert to Christianity, then the painful tears of contrition that fell on the spirit of the pagan woman underneath the church

shows this aspiration accomplished. And so her dreams come full circle, fulfilling their purpose in bringing unconscious desires into her conscious mind to aid her in her search for self.

The idea that Guðrún found her purpose through her conversion also brings up another possible study. She becomes an example of women finding independence and agency through their change in religion. It would be very interesting to see how this concept appears in other sagas, and whether they are similarly accompanied by dreams that either lead to, or confirm the woman's conversion. This would show a stark contrast from the dreams that appear in other instances such as, to use the example of *Vǫlsunga saga* again, the dreams that Guðrún Gjúkadóttir has about her impending marriage to Sigurðr.[103] Rather than the desire of the dream being the successful marriage, perhaps there are more examples of dreams leading away from marriage and ending in an independence found in Christian piety.

The second of Jung's symbols that I have discussed is the dream anima, a representation of the Unconscious, or inferior, cognitive function of the dreamer. This figure appears in the dreams of three different characters, and is arguably a common dream figure in Icelandic sagas. It can be argued that the dream anima, as a universal dream symbol, is represented by the dísir and hamingja that are part of Old Icelandic/Norse folklore, as well as the angel seen in Christian dreams. In *Laxdæla saga* the dream anima impacts the dreamer in some fashion, whether through giving them information or threats, or from some physical action that has consequences in their future. As a personification of the dreamer's inferior function, the dream anima can either be accepted or rejected; both choices have an impact on the future of the dreamer. In the case of Án, who accepts the actions of his dream anima, his life is indirectly saved because of his choice. Contrarily the reaction of Óláfr to his dream anima is rejection, and it impacts his life accordingly.

Jung's theory of the dream anima is an interesting topic that could use more research in its relation to the dísir figures in Icelandic literature and the angel in medieval Christian literature. I think there are more connections that can be found than what I have been able to do in this thesis that would bring more certainty to the idea of symbols that appear universally in many cultures. It is my belief that the dream anima

[103] Finch, trans., *Saga of the Volsungs*, 44-46.

would show up in a variety of other medieval cultures through their literature (as well as classical), although I am not schooled enough to bring any conclusions of the sort. In fact, Jenny Jochens very briefly brings up this idea by saying "the similarity between the *dís* (the singular form) and the Indian *dhisanas* (goddess) suggests an ancient and widespread context for these female figures."[104] It would be very interesting to do a cross-cultural study of the dream woman and its significance in literary dreams.

Further analysis can also be done using Freudian theories if one looks at the author as the analysand. All of the dreams and characters are constructed for a purpose by the author, who also shows unconscious tendencies through their writing and the dreams they create. While we can never know whether the dreams in *Laxdæla saga* were ever dreamt, in part or in whole, they were written in a specific way and that itself can be analysed. This would be an interesting project in applying all of Freud's theories to one saga author, without limiting the analysis only to dreams. I believe this is the way that Freudian psychoanalysis would be most useful in literary studies, although I have shown that it can be very illuminating in the analysis of characters' dreams.

Throughout all of the analysis of *Laxdæla saga* it has become apparent that the oneiric symbolism of Jung can be quite easily applied to the dreams dreamt by the saga characters. This is an indication that these symbols can indeed be considered universally apparent. While they ultimately are called different things and perceived in a different way, they do appear and can help to explain the dreams that occur. As was said above, this could be further proven by a more inclusive cross-cultural study of literary dreams.

While I began this project thinking that Freudian dream theories would not work particularly well on the constructed dreams of the saga, I have since changed my mind. The idea that dreams are essentially wish-fulfilling is exemplified in Guðrún's dreams in *Laxdæla saga*, even more so with the idea of distortion within the dream thoughts. Looking at her dreams in a slightly disconnected way from the rest of the saga text proved to be very illuminating in explaining how she really felt about the foreshadowing dreams, and can even explain some of the future events of the saga. Her motivation to be an independent, unmarried woman may not be conscious, but it presents itself in the wish-fulfilling nature of her dreams which make the losses of her husbands appear to be the deep desires of her unconscious. When we realize that the

[104] Jochens, Jenny. *Old Norse Images of Women*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press 1996). 38.

dreams are explicitly telling us that this is her motivation, covered by layers of distortion, we suddenly can understand the character more fully.

This thesis presents many ideas for further research in the use of psychoanalysis on saga dreams, and I think gives many specific areas in which further analysis can be done. It is my hope that the study of dreams within the sagas can add more theoretical readings to the plethora of factual analyses and comparisons with Christian dream literature. Not only does it allow for more experience in applying theories but it also gives different views of what the dreams can possibly mean for the saga characters. The characters themselves also become more dynamic when their dreams are interpreted through the psychoanalytic theories I have used. There is much room for further study, both in the Freudian and Jungian theories as well as those of other psychoanalysts. There is also much possibility in looking at the saga author through a psychoanalytic lens. For now, I will have to leave all of these possibilities to dreams, of course knowing that they are my own wish-fulfilments.

Bibliography

Aers, David. "Interpreting Dreams: Reflections on Freud, Milton, and Chaucer." In *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, edited by Peter Brown, 84-98. New York: Oxford University Press, (1999).

Ármann Jakobsson. "*Laxdæla* Dreaming: A Saga Heroine Invents Her Own Life." In *Nine Saga Studies*, 173-189. Reykjavík: University of Iceland Press, 2013.

Bachorski, Hans-Jürgen. "Dreams that Have Never Been Dreamt at All: Interpreting Dreams in Medieval Literature." Translated by Pamela E. Selwyn. *History Workshop Journal*, No. 49 (Spring 2000): 95-127.

Björn K. Þórólfsson and Guðni Jónsson, editors. *Gísla saga Súrssonar*. In *Vestfirðinga sogur*. Íslenzk fornrit 6, 1-118. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1943.

Calcidius. *Platonis Timaeus interprete Chalcidio cum eiusdem commentario*. Edited by Ioh. Wrobel. Leipzeg: B.G. Teubner, 1876.

Crocker, Christopher. "All I Do the Whole Night Through: On the Dreams of Gísli Súrsson." *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 84, (Summer 2012): 143-162.

Einar Ól Sveinsson, editor. *Laxdæla saga.* In *Laxdæla saga*, Íslenzk fornrit, vol 5, 1-248. Reykjavík: Hið íslenzka fornritafélag, 1934.

Eusebius. *Historia Ecclesiastica.* 9.

Finch, R.G., translator and editor. *The Saga of the Volsungs*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons LTD., 1965.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Interpretation of Dreams.* Translated by James Strachey. New York: Basic Books, 2010.

Jochens, Jenny. *Old Norse Images of Women*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996.

Jung, Carl G. *Dreams: Collected Works from Volumes 4, 8, 12, and 16*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974.

Jung, C.G. *Jung Contra Freud*. Translated by R.F.C. Hull. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011.

Jung. C.G. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Volume 6: Psychological Types.* Edited by Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, William McGuire. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, LTD., 1967.

Jung. C.G. *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung. Volume 13: Alchemical Studies.* Edited by Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, William McGuire. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, LTD., 1967.

Kelchner, Georgia Dunham. *Dreams in Old Norse literature and their affinities in folklore.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935.

Kress, Helga. "Mjök mun þér samstaf þykkja." *Konur Skrifa*. Reykjavík: Sögufélag (1980): 97-109.

Kress, Helga. "Haf og skegg: Flæði í Laxdælu." Paper presented at *Milli himins og jarðar: maður, guð og menning í hnotskurn hugvísinda*, Reykjavík, October 18-19, 1996. 83-95.

Kruger, Steven. *Dreaming in the Middle Ages.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Kunz, Keneva trans. *The Saga of the People of Laxardal and Bolli Bollason's Tale*. London: Penguin Books, (2008).

Langeslag, P.S. "The Dream Women of *Gísla saga*." *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 81, (Spring 2009): 47-72.

Le Goff, Jacques. *The Medieval Imagination*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Lönnroth, Lars. "Dreams in the Sagas." *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 74, Winter 2002: 455-464.

Lönnroth, Lars. "Sverrir's Dreams." In *Scripta Islandica*, Isländska Sällskapets Årsbok 57/2006. Upsalla: Swedish Science Press, (2007): 97-110

Macrobius. *Opera quae supersunt*, 2 vol. Edited by Ludwig von Jan. Quedlinburg and Leipzig: Typis et Sumptibus Godofredi Bassii, 1848-52.

Macrobius. *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis*. Edited by Iacobus Willis. Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1963.

Miller, William Ian. "Dreams, Prophecy and Sorcery: Blaming the Secret Offender in Medieval Iceland." *Scandinavian Studies*, Vol. 58, (1986): 101-123

O'Connor, Ralph. "Astronomy and Dream Visions in Late Medieval Iceland: *Stjörny-Odda draumr* and the Emergence of Norse Legendary Fiction." *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, (October 2012): 474-512.

Peck, Russell A. “Public Dreams and Private Myths: Perspective in Middle English Literature.” *PMLA*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (May 1975): 461-468.

Simek, Rudolph. “Rich and Powerful: The Image of the Female Deity in Migration Age Scandinavia.” Presented at the 11th International Saga Conference, University of Sydney, 2-7 July, 2000. 468-479.

Spearing, A.C. *Medieval Dream-Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976.

Torfi Tulinius. *The Enigma of Egill: The Saga, the Viking Poet, and Snorri Sturluson*. Translated by Victoria Cribb. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Library, 2014.

Turville-Petre, G. “Dreams in Icelandic Tradition.” *Folklore*, Vol. 69, No. 2 (June 1958): 93-111.

Turville-Petre, G. “Guardian Spirits.” In *Myth and Religion of the North: the Religion of ancient Scandinavia*. 221-235. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964.