



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

***The Fabulous Saga of Guðmundr inn ríki**

Representation of Sexuality in Ljósvetninga saga

Ritgerð til MA-prófs í 2014

Yoav Tirosh

Maí 2014

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Abstract

Medieval Icelandic gender and sexuality have been a constant source of scholarly debate since the late 20th century, with Preben Meulengracht Sørensen and Carol J. Clover elucidating the volatile nature of Old Norse masculinity. Medieval explanations for sex difference have also been a source of much debate in this period, Thomas W. Laqueur's controversial and popular one-sex model complemented by Joan Cadden's more heterogeneous treatment of the issue. This thesis provides an extensive interpretation of Guðmundr inn ríki's portrayal in *Ljósvetninga saga*. Guðmundr, a powerful goði living in the late 10th and early 11th century, was subjected to sexual insults by his rivals Þorkell hákr and Þórir goði Helgason. These sexual insults described him as effeminate and cowardly, and the thesis shows that the *Ljósvetninga saga* text follows suit with these slurs. Guðmundr's description is tied with medieval medical perceptions of sex difference, and with gender perceptions prevalent in medieval Iceland. It is argued that these are not so distant as sometimes suggested, supported by Lars Lönnroth's study of Latin scholarship's influence on *Íslendingasögur* character descriptions.

Keywords: *argr*, *níð*, homosexuality, sodomy, sex difference, gender, medieval sexuality, medieval medicine, medieval Iceland, *Ljósvetninga saga*, Guðmundr inn ríki

Ágrip

Kyn og kynhneigð á Íslandi á miðöldum hafa verið mjög til umræðu meðal fræðimanna á seinustu áratugum frá því að meðal annars Preben Meulengracht Sørensen og Carol J. Clover drógu fram hið óvissa eðli fornnorrænnar karlmennsku. Hugmyndir miðaldamanna um kyn hafa verið mjög til umfjöllunar á þessu tímabili, einkum hið umdeilda en vinsæla „eins–kyns-líkan“ eftir Thomas W. Laqueur og rækilegri og vandaðri umfjöllun Joan Caddens um málið. Þessi ritgerð felur í sér rækilega túlkun á ímynd Guðmundar ríka í *Ljósvetninga sögu*. Guðmundur var öflugur goði sem var uppi undir lok 10. aldar og snemma á 11. öld og var níddur af keppinautum sínum, þeim Þorkatli háka og Þóri goða Helgasyni. Í níðinu fólst að stimpla hann sem kvenlegan og ragan og í þessari ritgerð er sýnt fram á að texti *Ljósvetninga sögu* dregur fram þessa svívirðingu. Lýsingu Guðmundar má túlka út frá læknisfræðilegum miðaldahugmyndum um kynferðamun sem hafi verið ríkjandi á Íslandi á þessum tíma. Því er haldið fram að það sé ekki langsótt að gera ráð fyrir slíkum áhrifum, og rökfærslan styðst við rannsókn Lars Lönnroths á áhrifum latnesks lærdóms á mannlýsingum í *Íslendingasögum*.

Lykilorð: *argr*, *níð*, samkynhneigð, sódómska, kynferða munur, Kynhneigð á miðöldum, læknisfræði á miðöldum, Ísland á miðöldum, *Ljósvetninga saga*, Guðmundr inn ríki

„Ólíkr er Guðmundr flestum höfðingjum.“
ÍF 12, 306

[“There are few chieftains like Gudmund.”]
Cook 2001, 205

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Introduction

As the Knights Templar discovered at the beginning of the 14th century, being accused of sodomy was not the best prescription for a long and healthy life. While sodomy was by no means the only allegation directed against them, it was used to support other claims of corruption and heresy (Zeikowitz 2003, 112–3). Richard E. Zeikowitz shows that although the King of France’s motives for these accusations were mostly political and financial, they proved most expedient, and despite the contradictions found in the testimonies and allegations, and their unsubstantiated nature, “the prosecutors succeeded in bringing down the entire order” (2003, 113). The texts of the interrogations create a discourse that in itself contributed to the accusations and justified the persecution of the religious order (Zeikowitz 2003, 108; 129).

Throughout the *Íslendingasögur*, few characters shine as bright as Guðmundr inn ríki Eyjólfsson of Møðruvellir. With appearances in *Njáls saga*, *Grettis saga*, *Ólkofra þáttr*, and *Víga-Glúms saga*, to mention a few notable examples, this *goði* was a prominent member of 10th and 11th century Icelandic society. His being referenced in *Landnámabók* and *Íslendingabók* makes it clear that he was perceived as a ‘historical’ character, if one considers that these texts were written in a rather historical mode compared to the sagas (cf. Hermann 2007, 19–22). These appearances were examined by both Theodore M. Andersson and William Ian Miller in their 1989 translation of *Ljósvetninga saga* and Gísli Sigurðsson in his 2007 article “*The Immanent Saga of Guðmundr ríki”. Andersson and Miller attribute differences in the portrayal of the powerful *goði* to the different viewpoints of the oral traditions that would later become the sagas: for example, the positive portrayal of Guðmundr in *Njáls saga* due to his support of the Njálssynir, and the negative portrayal of Guðmundr in *Ljósvetninga saga* due to his opposition of the Ljósvetningar (1989, 88–9). Gísli, on the other hand, argues for a “coherence and consistency” in Guðmundr’s different portrayals in the sagas (2007, 215), differences in behavior explained by the different stages of his life in which the different sagas take place. Gísli says that Guðmundr “comes across as a multifaceted personality,” with certain distinguishing features that make him identifiable to the audience (2007, 218).

This thesis will examine Guðmundr’s literary portrayal in *Ljósvetninga saga*. This portrayal is full of subtle and not-so-subtle stabs at this powerful *goði*. In his

book on the connection between *Ljósvetninga saga* and 12th and 13th century politics, Barði Guðmundsson argued that “Þorvarður Þórarinnsson er níddur undir nafni Guðmundar ríka forföður hans” (1953, 114).¹ It is highly revealing that the description of Guðmundr’s character is so insulting that it could be seen as potent enough to injure through the centuries. The character that emerges from the *Íslendingasögur* is that of a powerful man, very involved in the politics of his region and Iceland as a whole. Not Unlike Snorri goði’s image being haunted by his not having avenged his father, Guðmundr is haunted by the rumors of his being *argr*.² As Gísli Sigurðsson suggests: “He is enormously powerful but short on justice and fair-mindedness, particularly in his own home region. He is ruled by greed and arrogance and suffers unremitting censure on account of his *ergi*” (2007, 218). Paul Schach sees the portrayals in *Ljósvetninga saga* and “Ólkofra þáttur” as exceptions to the rule, reading his description in *Njáls saga* as a redemption for the character’s honor (1978, 265–7).

Although this thesis limits itself to Guðmundr’s portrayal in *Ljósvetninga saga*, it will be argued that the boundless sense of self, weakness to flattery and overbearing personality that seem to accompany most of this character’s appearances in other sagas (including *Njáls saga*) do not contradict the medieval Icelanders’ understanding of an *argr* man, but actually complement it. This reading will also support Andersson and Miller’s argument that the saga is in its essence a discussion about moderation and immoderation (1989, 98–115), and Gísli Sigurðsson’s claim for a consistency in the character’s various portrayals.

In a 1963–4 *Lychnos* article, Lars Lönnroth examined various concepts in the Old Norse texts such as *gæfa* and *feigr* through the prism of Latin scholarship, rather than treating them as Germanic concepts. Lönnroth ties these and various descriptions in the sagas to concepts such as the four humors and physiognomy, arguing for evidence in *Fóstbræðra saga*, *Njáls saga*, *Bandamanna saga* and others. This thesis will follow suit, focusing on the concept of the four humors and its possible influence on Guðmundr’s character in *Ljósvetninga saga*.

¹ “Þorvarður Þórarinnsson is slurred using the name of his forefather Guðmundr ríki” (my translation).

² For a discussion on the definition of *argr*—indicating, roughly, sexual perversion or unmanliness—cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 1983, esp. 18–20.

Terminology

From the onset, discussing terminology cannot and should not be avoided. Ruth Mazo Karras supplies useful and short definitions for some important terms: “‘Sex’ refers to the physical fact of male and female bodies; genes, hormones, genitalia, and so forth. ‘Gender’ refers to masculinity and femininity, patterns of behavior and identity. ‘Sexuality’ refers to orientation or desire. Thus a person today might be of the male sex, but have a female gender identity and a bisexual orientation” (2005, 5). She furthermore points out that these academic and everyday distinctions we make were non-existent in the Middle-Ages: “For them, sexuality was not separate from sex and gender” (2005, 5; cf. Foucault 1978, 105–6).

In addition to the term ‘sexual’, “The term ‘homosexuality’ itself often seems an abusive construction when applied to medieval texts” (Jordan 1997, 24), since ‘homosexual’ implies an identity based on sexual attraction, something that we certainly do not have direct evidence for in Medieval time, Foucault arguing that ‘sexuality’ as a medical category was only introduced in the nineteenth century (1978, 117–9). The meaning of an act is determined differently according to the definitions (or lack of definitions) that preside in the society in which these are performed (Karras 2005, 7). The confusion regarding terminology can be a pitfall for the most cautious of scholars, as was made clear by the “Homosexuality” article written by Warren Johansson and William A. Percy for the 1996 *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, the terminology of which jumps between “sodomy” (e.g. 179), “homosex” (e.g. 165), and “homosexuals” (e.g. 176), maintaining that “‘Homosexuality’ then is an umbrella concept covering a multitude of constitutional and personality types” (159) and even unwittingly hinting that “homosexual offenses” include anal sex orchestrated between a man and a woman.³ All this, it should be noted, is contained in an article that dedicates more than three pages to matters of terminology (156–9). Thus, although caution should be employed when applying Modern categories to pre-Modern societies, too much caution might make us lose our way. In the present paper, when the term ‘sodomitic’ or its variations are used, this refers to the *act*, not an

³ “None of the penitentials even implies that the secular arm should prosecute or punish culprits, but most treated homosexual offenses more severely than heterosexual ones, prescribing greater severity for anal than for oral sex—whether with a partner of the opposite or of the same gender” (Johansson and Percy 1996, 166). Indeed, the reading I offer is not the only possible one to this sentence.

identity. The decision to use this term rather than others available is reinforced by the fact that an authority such as Albertus Magnus defined ‘sodomy’ as “a sin against nature, of a man with a man, or of a woman with a woman” (Jacquart and Thomasset 1988, 161; cf. Boswell 1981, 316–8). When the anachronistic term ‘homosexual’ is used, it is there to discuss a distinct identity, rather than simply a man who has sexual relations with other men.

The Material

Ljósvetninga saga tells of the feud between the Ljósvetningar and the people of Eyjafjörðr valley’s Mǫðruvellir, which seems to have started after Guðmundr inn ríki and Þorgeirr Þorkelsson Ljósvetningagoði enter a legal dispute with the latter’s sons. The bulk of the story describes the life of Guðmundr inn ríki of Mǫðruvellir and the various disputes he gets involved in, occasionally getting the better of his opponents, but often losing face in the process. The remainder of the story tells of the continuation of the feud, which leads to deaths on both sides and instability in the entire region.

It is complicated to claim a definitive version for any saga, since the various manuscripts do not always represent similar word choices and in some cases different events in the saga are described in varying lengths and emphasis. This is complicated further in the case of *Ljósvetninga saga*, where we possess two redactions of the saga that feature changes in the story’s structure and characters’ names, one version featuring three *þættir* that seem to be mostly unconnected to the main plot of the saga. Andersson and Miller give a good survey of the issues surrounding these redactions (1989, 64–74) and their approach will be adopted for the present discussion, with the C redaction being given priority, since it includes “Sǫrla þátttr”, “Ófeigs þátttr” and “Vǫðu-Brands þátttr”, and gives us a more complete image of Guðmundr inn ríki. However, redaction A will be addressed as well. In a way, this is an excellent opportunity to get a ‘reader’s response’ to the saga; if, as Andersson has argued (1964, 150–65), it is allowed that redaction A is an abridgement or response to redaction C, then it is possible to look for various instances where the editor changes the plot and see how that reflects upon Guðmundr’s character. This can help to verify certain readings and conclusions that may arise from the text.

While the action in *Ljósvetninga saga* takes place in the late 10th and early 11th century, the composition is commonly dated to the 13th century; Andersson and Miller point more specifically to c. 1220 (1989, 74–84). The two extant medieval manuscripts—AM 561 4to and AM 162C fol.—containing redactions A and C of the saga are both dated to the early 15th century (Andersson and Miller 1989, 64). The distance of the saga from the actual Viking Age is thus immense, and even considering the oral tradition that surrounded it (e.g. Ranković 2007, 297), these traditions survive precisely because they evolve (302), the physical manuscripts being “narratives arrested in their development” (303). An example from Ancient Greek literature may help to elucidate this: Chariots were prevalent at the time of the alleged Trojan War but not during the 8th century BCE when the *Iliad* may have taken on its stable form (Finley 1954, 23–4). This distance in time accounts for Homer’s awkwardness in describing the use of chariots, his characters riding with chariots to battle but then disembarking from them when they arrive (Finley 1954, 39–40). This, then, is an example of how oral transmission does not always preserve the world it is trying to recreate. Preben Meulengracht Sørensen (1983, 12) and William Ian Miller (1990, 50) suggest that the best approach towards the sagas would be to read them as reflecting the society in which they were written, Meulengracht Sørensen even pointing out that, with relation to sexual insults, the *Íslendingasögur* are more reliable than the *samtíðarsögur* since the former’s authors did not need to show respect towards—or fear reprisal from—their still-living characters or the latter’s family members (1983, 81). Sigurður Nordal was also hesitant about treating the *Íslendingasögur* as clear evidence for the ‘Saga Age’, but allowed for a certain continuity between the ‘Saga Age’ and the age of saga writing (1990, 89), while Jesse Byock (quoting Sigurður Nordal) is more firm in his stance regarding a connection between the two eras (2001, 155–6). Looking at the *Íslendingasögur* through the prism of cultural memory could be used to re-affirm their place as historical sources since their main role becomes one of constructing the perceptions of the past rather than representing the past itself (Hermann 2013, 351; cf. Burke 1997, 43–59). In other words, it might not be possible to discern a reliable picture of the Viking Age from these narratives, but we may learn much about the way the 13th and 14th century Icelanders understood that past, and how it reflected upon their present. The interests of this thesis lie firmly in the late medieval period rather than the Viking Age, and as such the saga texts can be used as the ideal piece of evidence.

Another issue that should be addressed is that of the authorship of *Ljósvetninga saga*. It is far from the scope of the present thesis to try and guess at possible candidates for the authorship of the saga. Andersson and Gade have suggested Munkaþverá in Eyjafjörður as *Ljósvetninga saga*'s place of composition (2000, 69), and Barði Guðmundsson has looked at the relationship of the saga to its time of writing (1953), attempting to root its composition in contemporary politics. For the purpose of the present thesis there is no need for a more specific author. Convincing arguments have been made in the past for an authorial intent behind *Egils saga* (Torfi Tulinius 2002) and *Morkinskinna* (Ármann Jakobsson 2002), and a similar argument could be made for *Ljósvetninga saga*. Accordingly, the term 'author' is used as a shorthand indicating a clear and consistent agency to the text.

The first part of this thesis is dedicated to the discussion of medieval, mostly medical, perceptions of sex difference. The second part, which is the bulk of the thesis, is a literary analysis of Guðmundr inn ríki's portrayal in *Ljósvetninga saga*. The final part is a discussion on perceptions of gender in Old Norse society. As will be argued in the final stages of the thesis, medieval perceptions of sex difference may have found their way into texts as unreligious and unscientific as the *Íslendingasögur*, and particularly *Ljósvetninga saga*. The distance between Iceland and continental European understandings of the body will thus shorten, and as a consequence the distance from Germanic, or 'Viking', mentalities will lengthen.

Sua segia nátturu bókr: Medieval Medical Perceptions of Sex Difference and the Sodomite

Since its publication, Thomas W. Laqueur's argument in *Making sex: Body and gender from the Greeks to Freud* that "sometime in the eighteenth century, sex as we know it was invented" (Laqueur 1990, 149) has gained much popularity. Laqueur presents what he calls a 'one-sex model' in which the minds of pre-Enlightenment scholars operated (e.g. 8). The importance of examining these medical texts is evident, since these were not just written in order to make sense of the world in a religious context, but also for pragmatic needs of healing (Jacquart and Thomasset 1988, 2). Greek, Medieval and Renaissance scholars, Laqueur argues, thought that women were inverted men; "In this world the vagina is imagined as an interior penis, the labia as foreskin, the uterus as scrotum, and the ovaries as testicles" (1990, 4). Laqueur examines the work of philosophers, medical writers and encyclopedists as varied as Aristotle, Galen, Hippocrates and Isidore of Seville, and shows how their different theories all add to the perception of a woman as the inferior and weaker version of a man. The limits set between being a man and being a woman were much less strict (42). He dismisses the importance of the competing theories of whether or not women have seeds that contribute to the process of creating a new life (42). As for Hippocrates, or the Hippocratic writer discussing the two-seed theory, he says: "I think that, if pushed on the point, the Hippocratic writer would have to admit that there was something uniquely powerful about male seed," (40) otherwise he could not explain the fact that women do not simply create a solely female race of humans using their own seed.

Laqueur's book received considerable opposition. Katherine Park and Robert A. Nye's 1991 review in *The New Republic* politely congratulates this "well-meaning and occasionally brilliant book" (56), and then goes on to attack the actual evidence Laqueur provides for the shift between the one-sex to the two-sex models. Park and Nye argue that "the closer one looks at his chronology, and at the texts and the images that he adduces, the more his distinction between the two models blurs into a haze of contradictions" (54), explaining that "a more complete reading of the sources shows that there never was a one-sex model in Laqueur's sense" (54-5). They maintain that Laqueur "projects his own hopes into the past" (57) and is therefore guilty of misunderstanding the different mentality under which these texts were written; "he

insists on collapsing their rich world of analogies into notions of identity, in keeping with our modern outlook” (54). Others were even harsher, proclaiming that “amateurs like Michel Foucault . . . and Thomas Laqueur . . . skewed the medieval scene with their extreme reductionism discussing long periods of time from highly selected texts” (Baldwin 1994, 305). In a later re-evaluation of the topic, Katherine Park goes as far as to state that in her extensive examination of the source material, “before 1500 I could find no convincing expressions of the idea of genital homology at all, even as an alternative to be discarded, except for a few brief passages in the works of several late medieval surgeons, including Guy de Chauliac, who seems to have been one of the only medieval scholars to assimilate the full text of Galen’s *On the Use of Parts*” (Park 2010, 98).

Joan Cadden’s timely 1993 *The Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* seemed to provide “an excellent antidote for the totalizing discussion in Thomas Laqueur’s *Making Sex*” (Park 1995, 553).⁴ What Cadden’s study offers is an extensive analysis of the Greek scholarship and the Medieval Latin scholarship it inspired, and how those actually lack a consistent view into the matters of sex. Although seldom referencing Laqueur’s study throughout the book, she clearly states at the onset that “though there is much evidence in the present study that fits his ‘one sex’ model, medieval views on the status of the uterus and the opinions of medieval physiognomists about male and female traits suggest evidence of other models not reducible to Laqueur’s” (Cadden 1993, 3).

What, then, were the opinions of those Greeks who had inspired medieval thinking? Cadden argues that while Hippocratic medicinal writings recognize a system of polarities along the lines of hot/cold and dry/wet, none of these are attributed as positive/negative or as better than the other. These writings treat women as inherently different from men, their ailments treated differently than how a man’s ailments would have been treated (Cadden 1993, 15–21). Aristotle uses the polarities discussed by the Hippocratic writer, but gives these differences value; “warm and cold translate into superiority and inferiority, ability and inability, activity and passivity” (23). Her wetness turned the woman into something liquid, boundless, which needed to be bound (Carson 1999, 79). While Soranus stressed the similarities

⁴ Park and Nye have previously called Jacquart and Thomasset’s *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* “the best single antidote to Laqueur’s reading of the early period” (1991, 54).

rather than the differences between the sexes (a position that would presumably lend support to Laqueur's theory), the influence of his writings was slight and indirect (Cadden 1993, 30). Cadden's narrative establishes 2nd century AC Galen as a type of a prototype for medieval thinking on the matter of sex: "although Galen dismissed the beliefs of many of his predecessors and contemporaries, he borrowed selectively even from those whose general positions he rejected. Thus he served his medieval successors both as an example of creative eclecticism and as a repository of information and ideas from a variety of sources" (30–1). As stressed by Laqueur (1990, 25–6), Galen took pains to show the parallels and inversions of the male and female body. However, his studies into the matter were not consistent (or at least complex and offered readings that could be understood as contradictory), and he would at times abandon the parallels in the structure and functions of the male and female body, for example in his examination of the uterus or in the discussion of female menstruation and male semen (Cadden 1993, 30–7). What we understand from this is that the 'woman as inverted man' concept was far from widespread, and that it was not necessarily consistent with the warm/cold, dry/wet oppositions.

While the transmission of these Greek scholars' writings was far from perfect, their ideas seeped through to the 11th century in various ways, including copyists and Arabic translations. It seems that although there were many inconsistencies and ongoing debates, there was still a basic agreement on the matter of differences between the sexes, articulated by Jacopo of Forlì; men and women differed from each other in "complexion, disposition and shape. And among these complexion is the most fundamental" (Cadden 1993, 170). While there were disagreements among these medieval scholars on these matters, but a certain consistency could be found regarding the perception of how men and women were different.

'Complexion'—heat and coldness—was the main feature that explained so much of the differences between men and women. Men's excess heat allowed them to grow beards and more body hair, to grow faster in the womb (Cadden 1993, 171), to grow stronger bodies (172), and to produce semen instead of the inferior semen and the menses women suffer from (173). As for 'shape', we can see references to women being an inverted or an imperfect man (177), an empty vessel that needs to be filled up by the man's semen, which explains their insatiable sexual appetite (178), differences in the kidney structure and an underdeveloped brain (180). As mentioned above, hair was also an important mark of masculinity and sexual virility (181–3; cf.

Carl Phelpstead 2013). The issue of ‘disposition’ was directly associated with one’s constitution/complexion. “The four qualities – hot, cold, moist, and dry – lay at the foundation of a system of four elements, four humors, and four temperaments” (Cadden 1993, 184). These components were not metaphors but rather the things themselves, portraying a reality of balance that must be maintained in order to preserve one’s masculinity (Smith 1997, 5). One’s behavior would be defined by the amount each one of these qualities resides in his or her bodies. And these are defined by—amongst other issues, but most prominently—their sex (Cadden 1993, 183–8).

What we can see from Cadden’s study is that while there was no uncontested ‘one-sex model’ under which all operated and perceived the world, there was, in the Middle Ages, a very clear understanding of what it was to be a biologically sexed man and what it was to be a biologically sexed woman, and how these two differed from each other. This understanding was based on the philosophical and medicinal knowledge of the ancients but was independent of them, an attempt to create a unified perception of the world in general and specifically of sex.

But what of the borderline cases? What about the people who do not clearly fall into these male or female categories? As Cadden points out, people who did not fit into these paradigms fell into a generalizing crack (1993, 202). It is therefore interesting to see that language for hermaphrodites, transvestites and homoeroticism became confused in the Middle Ages (212). The subject of sodomite behavior was rarely addressed by medical writers to the point that some argue the existence of a general “silence” in the matter, especially due to its moral rather than medical origins (Jacquart and Thomasset 1988, 156). The likes of Peter Damian and William Peraldus avoid mentioning this ‘vice’ because of its perhaps contagious nature (Jordan 1997, 31). Mark D. Jordan attributes this silence to exactly that which differentiates us from our study subjects; for us, ‘sexuality’ is separated from ‘procreation’. For people such as Thomas of Aquinas any carnal act is meant for procreation, which is what makes the sin of sodomitic acts unnatural and thus serious and unmentionable (1997 33–4).

However, when these issues were addressed by late 13th and early 14th century scholar Peter of Abano, he described the men who enjoy passive sexual behavior as suffering from an innate ill-formation of pores and passages in their reproductive system, which disrupt the movement of spermatic moisture to the penis. Thus, they are only able to emit semen through their anus, and seek sexual behaviors which would allow this (Cadden 1997, 45–6; cf. Jacquart and Thomasset 1988, 157–8;

Karras 2005, 136). Alongside a naturalization of people who are innately attracted to sodomitic acts, there is a condemnation of people who choose—rather than being born into—this behavior, though there is vagueness on what is natural and what is habitual (Cadden 1997, 47–8). What is furthermore interesting in Peter of Abano’s medical account on the matter of ‘sodomites’ is that it gives the feeling that there is more than simply a medical condition or moral vice discussed here; “the persistence of locutions like ‘such men’ would suggest the subsistence of a general conception” (52). While Cadden refuses to claim that Peter of Abano’s text exposes ‘homosexuality’ as an identity that existed before Modern times, she makes it clear that there was something beyond simply engaging in the passive sexual role that characterized these men in the eyes of Peter of Abano, and perhaps his contemporaries.

While we have until now dealt with texts from and about continental Europe, we must ask what of this was known to the common Icelandic scholar, writing manuscripts and, potentially, writing and copying *Ljósvetninga saga*? It would appear that quite a lot. Lars Lönnroth notes that “even a layman in thirteenth-century Iceland may have had a “clerical mind” . . . a mind formed by the Christian culture of medieval Europe” (1976, 105). AM 194 8vo features an extensive medical treatise based on the work of Hippocrates (Alfræði Íslenzk 1, 61–77).⁵ This is the same Hippocrates (or Hippocratic corpus) that introduced the hot/cold, dry/moist polarities (Cadden 1993, 17), and showed “real ambivalence on the subject of sex difference” (19), not necessarily disproving but also not full-heartedly supporting a ‘one-sex model’ (cf. Cadden 1993, 15–21). In *Elucidarius* we come across the concept of man being both “af andlegu eðli og likamlegu” (Þrjár þýðingar lærðar frá miðöldum, 54).⁶ This *líkamligr* manifests itself in the four elements, which explain why man is called “minni heimur” (54):⁷ “hann hafði hold af jörðu, en blóð af vatni, blást af loft en hita af eldi.” (54–5).⁸

In the *Heimspeki ok helgifræði* segment in the 14th century *Hauksbók* (a manuscript that also features a translation of *Elucidarius*) we discover much more

⁵ Beginning with the quaint “Madr het Ypocras, hann var spakaztr allra lækna” (Alfræði Íslenzk 1, 61) [“There was a man called Hippocrates, he was the wisest of all physicians.” (my translation)].

⁶ “He was made of both a spiritual and a physical nature” (Firchow 1992, 15).

⁷ “The small world” (Firchow 1992, 15).

⁸ “He got his flesh from the earth and his blood from the water, his breathe from the air, and his warmth from the fire” (Firchow 1992, 15).

about the elements that compose man's blood (Lönnroth 1963–4, 33–4; Hauksbók 181–3). “efst er rauða bloð elldi likt. Ok at nátturu heítt ok þurt. Þar næst er rauðbrúnt bloð likt lóptinv at vokua ok verma. Neðst er melan  kolea suarta bloð i  r  u likt at l  t at nátturu þurri ok kalldri. Þa er flem  na vatni likt af v  tri n  tturv ok kalldri (Hauksb  k, 181).”⁹ Each element is thus given a corresponding humor, a method of thinking that harkens back to both Hippocrates and Isidore of Seville (Jacquart and Thomasset, 1988, 11), accompanied with the line “Sua segia n  tturu b  kr” (Hauksb  k, 181).¹⁰ The best kind of person is the one in which there is a balance of the four humors, an “iafnm  kla i s  nv blo  i” (181).¹¹ Where there is an imbalance, a majority of a certain humor leads to physical implications and accompanying character traits.

A majority of *rau  a blo  * or yellow bile causes a person to become “fimr ok flogall. lettr    s  r. Sl  gr. ok br   r. ok ma mikit eta” (181).¹² If a person's blood is composed primarily of *blo  *, then “hann bli  r ok h  feskr k  tr. ok litill  tr. vakr. ok varmr    natturu sinni” (181).¹³ Blood with a prominence of *suarta blo  * or black bile causes a person to be “  ungr ok   gull. s  nkr ok svefnvgr. styggr. ok prettugr.   fund || siukr ok af kalldri n  tturu ok þurri” (181).¹⁴ Finally, a person in which the prominent humor is *vari*, or *flem  na* (phlegm) will be “af kalldri natturu. ok v  tri. vst   ugr. vakr¹⁵ ok udiarfr” (181).¹⁶

Cadden notes that “the integration of scientific inquiry with biblical exegesis or religious precepts was appealing and fruitful” (1993, 190) for authors writing in 12th century continental Europe, that were influenced by Isidore of Seville and various bestiaries such as the *Physiologus*. And Iceland was no exception to this. That a

⁹ “First is the red blood that is like fire, and its nature is hot and dry. The next one is red-brown blood, like the sky in that it is wet and warm. Next is melancholia, black blood, seeming like earth in its dry and cold nature. Then the phlegm is like water due to its watery and colder nature” (my translation).

¹⁰ “According to the natural/scientific books” (my translation).

¹¹ “Even amount in his blood” (my translation).

¹² “Nimble and lively. Light-natured. Cunning, and hot tempered. And may eat much” (my translation).

¹³ “He is friendly and most moderate. Cheerful and humble. Alert and warm in his nature” (my translation). See nt. 15 on translation of *vakr*.

¹⁴ “Heavy and taciturn. Greedy and sleepy. Shy and deceitful. Sick with envy and of a cold nature and dry” (my translation).

¹⁵ Since *vakr* is used here to describe two types of people, ‘alert’ seems to be the best word choice, since it could be understood as both a positive characteristic (meaning attentiveness) and a negative (implying that the phlegmatic man is constantly ill-at-ease).   rmann Jakobsson has suggested that perhaps *vakr* can be read as ‘fickle’, someone who is always on the move and unstable (Personal communication). This reading of the word would work well with both the phlegmatic person and the *blo  * person-type, since both are *v  kvi*, humid.

¹⁶ “Of cold nature and wet. Unsteady, alert and a coward” (my translation).

biblical translation such as *Stjórn* references Isidore of Seville (Unger 1862, 135) is only one manifestation of this. As Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir points out, the *Physiologus* is found in two fragments dated to c. 1200 (2005, 339). This translated text—though it shows manipulation from its Latin original and from the Old English translation it is believed to have been derived from (Dolcetti Corazza 2005)—influenced contemporary sermons which featured “allegorical interpretations of natural phenomena and glosses on the Scriptures” (Svanhildur 2005, 339). That one of these manuscripts, AM 673 a II 4to, also features a *Læknisráð* segment following the *Physiologus* strengthens the connection to the present discussion.

To sum up, it seems highly probable to argue that medieval Icelanders were aware of the notions of sex difference that were prevalent at their time. Though they did not actively participate in the debate that was taking place in continental Europe, and although the primary texts were not at their disposal, they relied on the European and Christian world-view to explain the world around them, and in particular to explain how the body works.

What a Man, What a Mighty Good Man: Guðmundr's Representation in *Ljósvetninga saga*

The Yellow Wedding

The events leading up to Guðmundr's feud with Þórir goði Helgason and Þorkell hákr are key to understanding his character. They offer us insight into how the *goði* was perceived by his rivals, friends and family, as well as literary tools employed by the author in order to support the allegations thrown against him. After Guðmundr is reluctantly persuaded by his household member and friend from youth Þorsteinn to attend a wedding, it initially seems that he is getting all the honor and respect that he feels he deserves. He is placed in the high seat at the farm in Hørgárdalr, the local chieftain and head of household Þórir sitting opposite of him. The narrative goes on to create a false sense of security and merriment through an a-typically descriptive sentence “ljós brunnu björt, ok váru borð fram sett” (17).¹⁷ But at the women's end, things do not go as smoothly.

Kona fór með vatn fyrir pallinn ok hafði dúk á ǫxl ok fór fyrir Geirlaugu, því at hon hafði verit með henni inn fyrra vetrinn. Geirlaug tók til orða: „Þú ferr með góðum vilja, en eigi með nógum álitum. Færðu Þórlaugu fyrr vatnit. Svá á at vera.“ Hon gerði nú svá. Þórlaug drap við hendi ǫfugri og mælti: „Bjóð eigi beinann, Geirlaug, því at sjá kona gerir rétt. Eigi býr þat í mínu skapi, at mér leiki á þessu ǫfund. Er sýnt, at ǫnnur sé kona ǫfugri en þú í héraðinu?“ sagði hon. Geirlaug mælti: „Greiddr er beininn, Þórlaug. En hefir þú metnað til at vera mest metin; hefi ek engan hlut til jafns við þik nema gjaforð.“ Þórlaug svarar: „Víst hygg ek þik vel gefna. En nú er þar komit, at ek veit eigi aðra frammar gifta en mik.“ Geirlaug svarar: „Þá værir þú vel gefin, ef þar væri einmælt um, at bóndi þinn væri vel hugaðr eða snjallr.“ Þórlaug svarar: „Þetta er illa mælt, ok muntu fyrst manna mæla.“ Hon svarar: „Satt mun þat, fyrir því at fleiri mæla it sama, en Þorkell hákr hefir haft þetta fyrst fyrir mér ok þeir Þórir bóndi minn, en hverr maðr mælir þat sama, er tungu hrærir.“ Þórlaug mælti: „Ber hingat vatnit, kona, ok hættem tali þessu.“ Síðan hneig hon upp at þilinu ok mataðisk ekki. (ÍF 10, 17–8)¹⁸

¹⁷ “The lights burned brightly and the tables were set up” (164). It is possible to offer a reading of “ljós brunnu björt” as a foreshadowing of the conflict that would ensue with Þorkell hákr of the *Ljósvetningar*.

¹⁸ “A woman brought water to the end bench and had a towel over her shoulder; she offered it to Geirlaug because she had stayed with her the previous winter. ‘You mean well,’ said Geirlaug, ‘but you are not acting thoughtfully enough. Offer the water to Thorlaug first—that’s how it should be.’ She did as she was told. Thorlaug made a dismissive gesture with the back of her hand: ‘Don’t put yourself out,

This dynamics of this dialogue reveal much about how female interaction was perceived in medieval Iceland, the honor system that reigned in the island, and the subtleties of hosting culture. Most importantly, though, is the moment when Geirlaug's insult reveals itself. Frustratingly typical to Icelandic manuscripts, we have a noticeable difficulty in understanding the most critical lines in the text; as Björn Sigfússon notes "*bjóð að nokkru leyti tilgáta*"¹⁹ (ÍF 10, 18 nt. 1, italicization in text) and regarding the line "Greiddr er beininn" states "*Orðið Greiddr verður ekki lesið með neinni vissu, kynni að vera greiðr eða jafnvel gerðr*" (ÍF 10, 18 nt. 2, italicization in text; cf. Andersson and Miller 1989, 165 nt. 75).²⁰ Even though it cannot be said for certain, it is possible to argue that Þórlaug's dismissive gesture, using the back of her hand, might be seen as a break of conduct, as if she is saying that these petty displays of respect do not interest her, for she knows her true—implying superior—worth. Perhaps also Þórlaug's use of the word *hérað* indicates that the honor she is allowing Geirlaug is minimal; after all, they are not from the same *hérað*. Whether or not Geirlaug had malice in her heart from the onset, it now ripens, perhaps after detecting in Þórlaug something of Guðmundr's pride.

Geirlaug states that there isn't much agreement about Guðmundr being "vel hugaðr eða snjallr". Andersson and Miller translate this as "manliness", but Geirlaug's word-choice functions to emphasize Guðmundr's lack of courage. By finishing the conversation and agreeing to receive the water, Þórlaug is in a way acceding to Geirlaug's superior honor; in other words, she is agreeing that Geirlaug is

Geirlaug, because this woman is doing the right thing. It didn't occur to me to resent this. Can it be said that there is a finer woman in the district than you?' 'The hospitality is your due, Thorlaug. It is appropriate to your standing to be most honored. I am in no way your equal except in my marriage.' 'I certainly think you're well married, but as things stand, I know of no other woman with a better marriage than mine,' responded Thorlaug. 'You would indeed be well married if there were general agreement about your husband's manliness,' said Geirlaug. 'Those are cruel words,' Thorlaug said, 'You are surely the first person ever to say anything like this.' 'It must be true,' she replied, 'because more than one person says so; Thorkel Hake mentioned it to me first, along with my husband Thorir, and everyone with a tongue in his head says the same thing.' 'Bring me the water, woman,' Thorlaug said, 'and let's drop the matter.' Then she leaned back against the wall and ate nothing.' (Andersson and Miller 1989, 164–6). The *Njáls saga* (ch. 35) comparison is obvious. Andersson and Miller also point out similarities between this scene and the exchange between Brynhild and Gudrun in *Völsunga saga* ch. 28 (1989, 165 nt. 75). Note that all quotes from *Ljósvetninga saga* are from Íslenzk fornrit X, and that all translations from Andersson and Miller 1989, unless otherwise mentioned, and both will henceforth be referred to using a page number.

¹⁹ "*bjóð* partly a guess" (my translation).

²⁰ "The word *Greiddr* cannot be read with any certainty, could be understood as *greiðr* or even *gerðr*" (my translation).

better married than her. Choosing a wedding as the background for this dialogue is an interesting choice. Cast against a ‘proper’ union between a worthy man and (based on Guðmundr’s own words) worthy woman, Þórlaus’s marriage appears even more open to mockery.²¹

Masterfully written, *Ljósvetninga saga* does not just tell us what people say about Guðmundr, it also displays this through action. Leading up to this wedding scene, we learn how Þorsteinn approaches Guðmundr and asks for his help in obtaining a marriage agreement with a woman called Guðrún from the household of Þórir goði Helgason, the chieftain from Hǫrgárdalr. Guðmundr says he is wary of going to Þórir’s district because he will have less manpower there, and instead waits for an upcoming horse-fight to discuss the matter with him. This decision could be questioned; horse-fights²² are an almost constant source of animosity in the *Íslendingasögur*, nearly every appearance causing immediate conflict, or being the first step in what will develop into a feud (cf. Martin 2003, 29–31, 42–3).²³ The fact that horse-fights had a “playful” nature to them (Martin 2003, 30) does not negate the fact that they were consistently used as a literary motif of inviting conflict. Guðmundr comes out of this encounter unscathed, thus resulting somewhat in an anti-climax and a delaying of the audience’s expectation of a conflict bound to come. This is an example of the ‘experimental’ structure of *Ljósvetninga saga* (Kellogg 2000, xxv). When Guðmundr raises the issue of arranging a marriage between Þorsteinn and Guðrún, Þórir replies: “Allvel er maðrinn til fenginn at flytja hans mál, ok munu vér mikils meta þín orð” (17).²⁴ A few lines earlier in the saga, Einarr of Þverá, Guðmundr’s brother, is introduced with mention of the two being on bad terms because “Guðmundr sat mjök yfir metorðum manna norðr þar” (16).²⁵ The narrative then points out that Einarr and Þórir Helgason were friends; that the latter uses the

²¹ Compare this with how Froissart “implicitly” contrasts Edward II’s “distinctly unproductive, ungenerative relationship with Despenser” with the betrothal of his son Edward III (Sponsler 2001, 149).

²² Remigiusz Gogosz has suggested *hestaping* would be better treated as a “meeting the central point of which was a horse-fight” (2014, 20).

²³ Cf. *Víga-Glúms saga* chapters 13 and 18, “Þorsteins þátrr stangarhoggss”, *Njáls saga* ch. 57–8, *Víglundar saga* ch. 9, *Svarfdæla saga* ch. 24, *Bjarnar saga Hítðelakappa* ch. 23 (where insulting poems are cited), *Flóamanna saga* ch. 19 (where an assassination contract is made). “Gunnars þátrr Þiðrandabana” being a notable exception since it introduces the character Þiðrandi through a horse-fight. However, this is in itself revealing, since he will be the main cause of friction throughout the *þátrr*.

²⁴ “He has chosen an outstanding man to plead his case, . . . I will attach great importance to your words” (164).

²⁵ “Gudmund lorded it over men there in the north” (163).

combination ‘meta þín orð’ could thus be more than an accidental choice of words, even if not conclusively so, considering that later on Þórir explicitly slurs Guðmundr. These words appearing just a few lines after describing the discordance between the two brothers could invoke Einarr’s complaint about his brother’s oppressive behavior, perhaps even as a subtle insult against Guðmundr. By using words associated with Einarr to mention Guðmundr’s honor, Þórir—who as Einarr’s friend would be aware of the issues between the brothers—may be hinting at a lack thereof. Notice that before insulting Þórlaus, Geirlaug uses the words “en hefir þú metnað til at vera mest metin”. *Metnaðr* and *meta* here again could be suggested as a callback to Einarr’s *metorð*. Geirlaug and Þórlaus may not be aware of the significance of that word choice, but presumably the audience of the saga was. This reading suggests that Guðmundr’s self-image blinds him to a possible insult by Þórir, hence causing the narrative to ‘hiccup’ and delay the dispute expected from the horse-fight, using narrative techniques as a commentary on Guðmundr’s character. The validity of this argument lies, of course, on the assumption that the use of ‘meta þín orð’ is indeed associated with Einarr. Another explanation could be provided for this scene’s presence in the text; perhaps its function is purely to create suspense through describing an uneventful horse-fight and delay the climax with no ‘fault’ to Guðmundr.

Guðmundr’s weakness to compliments is established further when he accedes to Þorsteinn’s request that he attend the wedding, following a compliment “meiri sæmð er at þér einum en at mörpum qðrum” (17).²⁶ The fact that Þorsteinn is Guðmundr’s childhood friend establishes his knowledge on how to pull the *goði*’s strings.

When the wedding is set to take place, Guðmundr is again reluctant to go to Þórir’s district, despite Þorsteinn’s request. Guðmundr’s answer is curious: “Þetta em ek ófúss at veita þér, ok þú ærna menn til þessa” (17).²⁷ Contradicting his earlier statement, Guðmundr now stresses the fact that *enough* people will be travelling with Þorsteinn. It could be argued that Guðmundr is looking for any excuse available not to go to the wedding, thus supporting with his actions Geirlaug’s words regarding his cowardice. Another explanation is possible: As has been shown, rumors regarding

²⁶ “There is more honor in you alone than in many others” (164).

²⁷ “I am reluctant to grant you this, . . . You will have plenty of other men for the trip” (164).

Guðmundr's manliness have surfaced through, allegedly, the words of Þórir and Þorkell hákr. It seems reasonable that Guðmundr should be aware of these rumors through his vast network of connections as a powerful *goði*. Guðmundr, perhaps due to his being *forspár*, perhaps due to common sense, may know that if he visits the district he must confront the rumors spread by these two, since now a prolonged interaction will be necessary, unlike the relatively fleeting meeting at the horse-fight.

After her conversation with Geirlaug, Þórlaug feigns illness and demands from Guðmundr that they return home at once. Here, as before with Þorsteinn, Guðmundr does not display resolve and allows himself to be pushed into leaving, a course he deems inadvisable. To his wife he replies: “En fúsari væra ek, at kyrrt væri, meðan boð þetta stæði” (19). Andersson and Miller translate this as “but I’d prefer that everything run its normal course for the rest of the feast” (1989, 167). The first part of the sentence could be translated as “but I would be more keen”. This phrasing reads as weak and unassertive, the use of the comparative form of *fúss* perhaps indicating lack of resolve. His wife insists and he gives in, and when he announces this, Þorsteinn implores him to stay with very assertive words, telling him “gerðu þat ekki, Guðmundr, at þú farir heim þegar” (19).²⁸ At this point Guðmundr takes a firmer stance: “Bið þú nú eigi framar en ek vil veita þér, því at þat mun eigi stoða” (19).²⁹ To the ears of those who have half-heartedly left a party, this sounds more like Guðmundr trying to draw the line for himself—as if he is pleading with Þorsteinn not to ask, because he might still say yes. But perhaps he is also voicing his frustrations: he should not have caved in and agreed to come in the first place.

As suggested above, Guðmundr may have already had his suspicions about the rumors spread by Þórir and Þorkell, but once he learns of his wife's true motives, his first reaction is to complain that they were wrong in leaving; they should have remained and thus avoided possible gossip. When Þórlaug tells him that “nú eru þau efni í, er ek má eigi leyna þik” (19),³⁰ the reason she cannot hide this information is also because she demands that he confront what was said about him. It is interesting that his mood changes quickly, and he immediately considers how to make the best of the situation, saying “en eigi þykki mér þat ráðit, hvárt oss verður þetta at engu” (19).³¹

²⁸ “Don’t leave for home so soon, Gudmund” (167).

²⁹ “Don’t ask for more than I wish to give; it will be to no purpose” (167).

³⁰ “A subject has come up that I cannot conceal from you” (167).

³¹ “I’m not at all sure this matter won’t turn out well for us” (167).

This quick mood shift could be read as a certain unsteadiness of character, and perhaps even as a hint of him having a greedy nature, if his making the best of the situation involves financial profit.

This episode carries within it most of the themes that are important for the portrayal of Guðmundr throughout *Ljósvetninga saga*. We are presented with the rumors against Guðmundr's masculinity, and with the fact that these were widespread. Even if he himself was truly not aware of the rumors, two prominent characters from non-neighboring valleys were discussing them, and allegedly spreading them as well. His handling of Þorsteinn's engagement gives credence to Geirlaug's accusations of cowardice on Guðmundr's part. Problematic family relations are also a theme addressed in this episode, as is apparent from his dispute with his brother Einarr, but also from his wife Þórlaug, who becomes distressed following the rumors voiced against her husband, and calls him into action, perhaps demanding that he prove his masculinity. The fact that Þorsteinn holds so much power over him relates to the various relationships Guðmundr develops with men throughout the saga—relationships that cause him to lose his better judgment. The ease with which Þorsteinn motivates him through flattery reveals to us another theme in the saga's depiction, which is Guðmundr's susceptibility to praise, and his inflated sense of self. Though not mentioned directly in this episode, Guðmundr's hesitancy to go to Þórir's district could be a display of his abilities as *forspár*, another recurring theme in the saga. These themes will lead up to the reading of Guðmundr's body in the saga as unstable, leaking and perhaps womanly.

Family

Family uniformity is something that occupies the *Ljósvetninga saga*'s narrative, as is apparent from the very beginning of the saga. Guðmundr is presented to us as the instigator of an inner-family dispute amongst the Ljósvetningar, between Þorgeirr and his sons. It is worth noting that Guðmundr does nothing to lessen the dispute between father and sons, and instead insists on continuing the proceedings that result in the two sides coming to blows, rather than seeking legal reconciliation.

Guðmundr's family does not display much harmony either. As mentioned above, Einarr had taken issue with the way that the powerful goði 'lorded it over' the men in the area. In a flashback scene into the childhood of Guðmundr and Einarr, we

are told that “Guðmundr átti sér fóstura skollóttan, ok unni hann honum mikit” (37, redaction C).³² One day a fly buzzes around this foster father’s bald spot while he is sleeping outside in the sun. Interestingly, in the A redaction of the saga, we are told that “en sveinninn sat undir hofðum honum” (29).³³ Einarr then suggests to Guðmundr that he get rid of the fly using the blunt side of his axe. When the foster father reproaches Guðmundr for this behavior, he realizes that he has been tricked by his brother. Einarr may be seen as reacting to what he deems too close a relationship between the foster-son and foster-father, emphasized by the A redactionist relating that the bald foster father was lying on Guðmundr’s lap. In other words, even though this case leads Guðmundr to state that Einarr does not always have his best interest in mind, it may be that the latter simply wants to control his brother’s behavior with which he feels unease. When Guðmundr denies his daughter’s suitor Sqrli from visiting her at Möðruvellir, Einarr keeps in check what he perhaps considers a rash decision by allowing these visits to occur under his own supervision at Þverá. Gísli Sigurðsson argues that the overall portrayal in the sagas of Einarr is as a check for Guðmundr’s wrath (2007, 216).³⁴ This fits with *Ljósvetninga saga*’s specific portrayal of Einarr, though clearly it is not only his brother’s wrath that he checks.

It is unclear whether or not Einarr always has his brother’s best interest in mind; that Einarr continues to meet with the outlawed Þórir Helgason during his illegal summer stays in Iceland is an example of how he displays disregard for his brother and his honor. Before this, when Þórir tells Einarr that he intends to challenge Guðmundr to a duel to settle their legal dispute, his response in redaction C is “þat er ørendi ógott, en eigi lítillmannligt” (38),³⁵ while in redaction A he simply responds “mikit ráð er þat” (39),³⁶ in any case doing nothing to dissuade him from the duel. Einarr thus continues to support a person who is openly challenging his brother. It could be suggested that Einarr, like many others, perceived Guðmundr as a coward and thought that he would never dare to fight. But he also knew that Guðmundr’s honor was important to him and that he might yet accept Þórir’s challenge; later in the

³² “Gudmund had a bald foster father whom he loved greatly” (180).

³³ “And the boy had his head in his lap” (249).

³⁴ Later on in the saga, after Guðmundr’s son Eyjólfir ignores Einarr’s warnings against confronting an enemy, the latter causes him to fall off a horse so that the fight is postponed (ÍF 10, 86; cf. Miller 1990, 67). Here he tries to function as a check for Guðmundr’s son as well.

³⁵ “That’s not good news, . . . but it is not a cowardly resolution” (181).

³⁶ “That’s a bold move” (252).

saga he *does* attack Þorkell hákr and exposes himself to a certain amount of danger. Einarr's friendship with a man who has spread insults about his brother and is in midst of a conflict with him shows a severe lack of family uniformity. Guðmundr is not innocent of this himself; his friendship with Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson, who has a lasting grudge towards Einarr and the way that he treated his family, is also noteworthy. Vigfúss would presumably not be a friend of someone he associates directly with the downfall of his family. When Vigfúss suggests challenging Einarr to a duel to force Þórir to withdraw his own challenge, stating explicitly that he either intends to shame Einarr by forcing him to back out of the duel or killing him if he does not, Guðmundr cannot ignore the danger this puts on his brother. But as Guðmundr could arguably be thinking, "*he started it*".

When Guðmundr approaches his own brother seeking to form an—admittedly false—alliance, he does not trust their relationship enough to approach him in a straightforward manner. Guðmundr goes alone to the relatively nearby Þverá, in a manner that is both self-humbling and also meant to catch Einarr off-guard. Andersson and Miller's reading of the scene is in favor of Einarr: "Here the author seems to be saying that Einar is susceptible to Gudmund's plea for family solidarity, whereas Gudmund himself is interested only in promoting his own ends" (1989, 89–90). However, it is important that Guðmundr cannot achieve this alliance without offering Einarr a gift; a *skikkja góða*. The fact that Guðmundr cannot simply rely on the strength of their relationship and must lull him with extravagant gifts attests to the problematic nature of this family connection. Einarr takes kindly to the gift and accepts it, but when he is forced to choose between his brother Guðmundr and his friend Þórir, he chooses the latter. When he hears that Guðmundr is about to bring his friend to court, Einarr declares "svá mæli ek um, at troll hafi þá skikkju. En komit hefir Guðmundr á vitsmuni við mik, ok hefir slíkt eigi fyrr orðit" (35, redaction C).³⁷ If we follow Andersson and Gade's reasoning and trace the composition of *Ljósvetninga saga* to Munkaþverá at c. 1220, it is also possible to suggest an intertextual connection with *Morkinskinna*, which Andersson and Gade also place at around the same time and place of composition (2000, 66–72; but cf. Andersson and Miller 1989, 80), and more specifically with "Hreiðars þátr" (ÍF 23, 152–64), a story

³⁷ "The trolls take that cloak! Gudmund outwitted me this time and that's never happened before" (178). Andersson and Miller's translation leaves out the 'svá mæli ek um' element, which can be translated as "so I declare!", or perhaps a sorrowful exclamation.

also concerned with problematic family relations. There, king Haraldr harðráði uses similar words to describe the protagonist's gilded-pig gift turned *sýr*.³⁸ Similar to the disgrace Haraldr felt, this cloak gift now may be seen as a *níð*, since it represents Einarr's shame.³⁹ Einarr then approaches his brother, asking that he allow an arbitration with Þórir, and when Guðmundr refuses, he revokes all the dealings between them by offering him back the cloak, saying "tak nú við skikkju þinni aptr, er þér hafa lengi áðr augu til staðit" (36, redaction C).⁴⁰ While Einarr gives up the cloak in order to legally release himself from the obligation represented by the gift, he is also trying to teach his brother a lesson, telling Guðmundr that his greed knows no bounds; he even has eyes for objects that he gave others in friendship.

Guðmundr's relationship with his wife is also problematic. As is apparent from the wedding scene described above, Þórlaug finds the rumors about her husband's masculinity disturbing. Guðmundr's death scene in the saga tells us much about the marital relations between the two. Before dying, Þórlaug presents Guðmundr with warm milk, and three times he rejects it claiming that it is not warm. As Gísli Sigurðsson points out regarding this scene, "his wife's gift of warm milk may be seen as her way of expressing her love, but Guðmundr fails to find the heat she has put into it and he dies soon after" (2007, 211). That after he dies his brother Einarr comes to treat the body and suggests that "ok kaldr hefir hann nú verit innan, er hann kenndi sín eigi" (61),⁴¹ supports this. It is interesting that with this Einarr hints that both he and Þórlaug felt deprived of Guðmundr's affection and love.

The distance between husband and wife reaches its peak when Guðmundr's self-proclaimed-cowardly spy and hot-pot companion Rindill is murdered. Guðmundr, after being duped by Hlenni inn gamli, follows Rindill's killer Eilífr to his home in Gnúpufell. This scene follows:

³⁸ "Hafi þik allan troll!" (ÍF XXIII 163) ["May all the trolls take you!" (my translation)]. The connection is not obvious since this is a common curse in Old Norse texts.

³⁹ In light of this it is tempting to make a connection with the famous *alþingi* scene where Flosi associates a *silkislaður* with effeminacy. The *skikkja góða* is described as "pell dregin yfir skinnin ok gullbqnd á tyglinum, ok var in mesta gorsemi" (22, redaction C) ["a costly fabric lined with fur and with gold braid on the straps, and it was a great treasure" (169)]. Björn Sigfússon says that "pell var breytilegt efni, en oftast þýddi orðið glitofið silki" (ÍF X 22 nt. 5) ["*Pell* was an inconclusive material, but the word often signified embroidered silk" (my translation)]. This allows for a reading that connects this scene with *Njáls saga*, but not definitively so.

⁴⁰ "Take your cloak back. You've had your eyes fixed on it for a long time" (179).

⁴¹ "He must have been cold inside already since he felt nothing" (201).

Síðan kómu þeir í Gnúpufell ok gengu at dyrum. En hurðir váru aptr, ok stóð Eilífr fyrir innan hurð með skeyti sín. Þá mælti Guðmundr: „Sel þú fram, Brúni, Eilífr ódádámanninn, ella munu vér leggja eld at bönum.“ Hann svarar: „Þá skal hart eptir ganga. Ok kynligt er, at þér sýnisk at hafa stórvirki á várum frændum ok leita eptir svá frekt um menn slíka, er einskis eru verðir.“ Guðmundr mælti, at eldinn skyldi at bera. Þá var svá gørt. Þá gekk kona til hurðarinnar ok mælti: „Má Guðmundr heyra mál mitt?“ Hann kvezk heyra, – „eða er Þórlaug þar? Ok er einsætt at ganga út.“ Hon svarar: „Eigi mun ek skilja við Álfdísi, frændkonu mína, en hon mun eigi skilja við Brúna.“ [Guðmundr mælti]: „Ef þú vill kjósa heldr at deyja við skömm hér en lifa með mér með sæmd ok virðingu, þá skal þó verkit eigi fyrir farask.“ Þá gekk maðr í dyrrnar ungr ok mælti: „Hvárt má Guðmundr heyra mál mitt?“ Hann kvazk heyra, – „eða er Halldórr þar, sonr minn?“ Hann kvað svá vera. Guðmundr mælti: „Gakk þú út, frændi.“ Hann svarar: „Eigi þarftu þess mik at eggja, því at þér skal engi verri en ek, ef móðir mín brennr hér inni.“ Síðan áttu menn hlut at við Guðmund, at hann gerði eigi svá mikla óhæfu. Ok svá varð, at hann lét teljask ok fór í brottu. Síðan varð aldri vel með þeim. (57; brackets in text)⁴²

Andersson and Miller comment that “the episode carries a good deal of shock value; it exemplifies not only Gudmund’s penchant for extreme behavior but a real lack of feeling. That he should consider even momentarily that Rindil is more important than his family shows an obsession with personal status to the exclusion of kin that is quite unexampled in the sagas” (1989, 111–2). This is reflected in Brúni’s reproach that Guðmundr has great designs against his kinsman (to whom Guðmundr himself is related by marriage) while putting too much store in worthless men such as Rindill. This arguable apathy towards familial connections may actually be what causes his death. In his older age he approaches Drauma-Finni for help with interpreting a

⁴² “They arrived at Gnúpufell and went up to the door. It was closed, and Eilif was standing inside with his weapons. Gudmund said, ‘Turn over that criminal Eilif, Bruni, or we will set fire to the house.’ ‘That is pressing the matter very hard,’ he said. ‘It’s strange that you have such great designs against our kinsmen and take the part of worthless men with such determination.’ Gudmund gave directions to kindle the fire and it was done. A woman went to the door and said, ‘Can Gudmund hear me?’ He said he could—‘is that Thorlaug? You, of course, have free exit.’ ‘I will not take leave of my kinswoman Alfdís,’ she replied, ‘and she will not take leave of Bruni.’ ‘If you would rather die in shame here than live with me in honor and good standing, we will not stand in your way.’ Then a young man went to the door and said, ‘Can Gudmund hear me?’ He said he could—‘is that my son Halldor?’ He said it was. ‘Come out, kinsman,’ said Gudmund. ‘It’s better not to urge men,’ he answered, ‘for you will have none to fear more greatly than me if my mother dies in these flames.’ Then people joined in to persuade Gudmund not to commit such an atrocity. It turned out that he allowed himself to be dissuaded and went away, but they never again had good relations” (197–8).

dream. Finni, who was the brother of Þorkell hákr whom Guðmundr had killed and a son of Þorgeirr, had many reasons to wish him harm. Yet when he tells him “Óþökk er mér á öllum kvámum þínum fyrir sakar harma várna” (58),⁴³ Guðmundr answers “engi kemr grimmð til þessa, ok þigg at mér fíngull” (58).⁴⁴ Later in the same chapter, Drauma-Finni is approached by a certain Þórhallr who wishes to relate his dream, but Finni quickly turns him away with threat of force, and demands that he tell the dream to Guðmundr instead. After Guðmundr hears the dream, he sits stiffly in his chair and dies as discussed below. If Drauma-Finni knew the possible effects of Þórhallr’s dream, sending him to Guðmundr could be read as an act of vengeance. After Guðmundr approaches him and gives him a gift to appease him, Finni can no longer ignore their feud and uses his powers to bring about the *goði*’s death.

His wife and son’s defiance gives the impression that Guðmundr does not even have his own household under control, as is also apparent from his daughter and brother’s behavior in “Sörla þátrr”—while acknowledging his prominent position in the kin-group, they don’t take him as seriously as he expects them to. When in “Vöðu-Brands þátrr” Einarr is approached by Ófeigr with a marriage proposal for his daughter, he first hesitates saying Guðmundr should have the greatest say in the matter, but is quickly persuaded to decide for himself (ÍF 10, 136).

The near-burning scene can be further illuminated if looked at through the prism of house-burning *type-scenes*. This term is a borrowing from Robert Alter, a biblical literary scholar, who suggests that instead of looking at certain key scenes in the Bible through their intertextual connections, it would be much more helpful to consider their relationship through literary convention (1978).⁴⁵ The variances in the structure of the scenes are what help the author to convey meaning. For instance, when Hvamm-Sturla’s house is burnt, the conciseness of the description of that burning and his sarcastic reply afterwards⁴⁶ emphasize his calm calculated nature and perhaps even his indestructibility; the farm is quickly rebuilt. In these house-burning scenes, the head of the household tends to display signs of passivity. When confronted with the burners, Njáll convinces his household to fight the attackers from inside

⁴³ “You are unwelcome here because of the injuries we have suffered” (198).

⁴⁴ “There is no malice intended, . . . accept this gold ring from me” (198).

⁴⁵ Lönnroth introduced the concept of ‘stock scenes’, but put more stock into word choice rather than meanings conveyed through the variances in the enfolding of events (1976, 42–103).

⁴⁶ “Einarr mundu elt hafa frýjulaust eina nótt” (Sturlunga saga I, 75) [“Einarr must have lit a fire flawlessly one night” (my translation)].

rather than outside, and himself opts out of fighting and goes to die in his bed. When Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson sees that there is no hope for his household, he sacrifices his life by giving himself up to his enemy Þorvaldr. When confronted with his attackers, Gissur Þorvaldsson hides in a barrel of skyr, thus managing to escape their spears and the fire. In *Ljósvetninga saga* the author creates a reversal of the roles in the convention—rather than having the head of the household die with his family members, or at least display passivity, Guðmundr here is the most active of them all. But this activeness is so misguided that he is willing to burn his family together with his target. His conviction to set the house on fire grows significantly *after* he discovers that his wife and son are in the house and defy him.

Guðmundr's family being in disarray is not necessarily a given. Miller argues that “neolocality⁴⁷ was hardly a rule in a prescriptive sense” (1990, 125), yet it is interesting that while the rebelling sons of Þorgeirr Þorkelsson Ljósvetningagoði live in separate farmsteads from their father, the sons of Guðmundr inn ríki stay united under his household until their father's death (Tirosh, forthcoming; cf. Miller 1990, 128, 131; Miller 1988, 339–40).⁴⁸ Indeed, it seems possible that the author might have actually chosen to portray Guðmundr's sons Eyjólfur and Koðrán as living under the same roof simply so he can split them up and recreate the relationship between the brothers Guðmundr and Einarr (cf. Andersson and Miller 1989, 112). But it would also appear that Guðmundr kept his sons in check, and despite Halldórr's show of insolence, the other two sons remained under control.

Relationships with Men

In the episode titled “Sqrta þátr”, Guðmundr's lavish lifestyle and household are introduced:

Þat er sagt, at Guðmundr inn ríki var mjök fyrir qðrum mǫnnum um rausn sína. Hann hafði hundrað hjóna ok hundrað kúa. Þat var ok siðr hans at láta lǫngum vera með sér gofugra manna sonu, ok setti þá svá ágætliga, at þeir skyldi engan hlut eiga at iðja annan

⁴⁷ Moving into a new home following marriage.

⁴⁸ Though Hlenni fostering Koðrán may account for this; the sons might may never have been under the same roof long enough to bicker.

en vera ávallt í samsæti með honum. En þat var þó sá siðr þeira, er þeir váru heima, at þeir unnu, þó at þeir væri af gøfgum ættum (109).⁴⁹

The opening of this *þáttr* establishes the extraordinary sense of grandeur that Guðmundr bestows on his household, and also invites us to look into his habits of entertaining the young sons of the rich. This kind of behavior invokes the realm of Greek love and pederasty discussed in Michel Foucault's *The Use of Pleasure*. While it is improbable that medieval Icelanders would have access to texts invoking anti-pederastic sentiments such as Aeschines's "Against Timarchus",⁵⁰ medieval readers of Latin would have encountered the concept from reading classical texts (Ashurst 2002, 71). What is important isn't whether or not the concept of pederasty was known to the medieval Icelanders; even if they had read about it, they would probably have understood it differently from how the Ancient Greeks practiced it. But even for the non-Latin readers or audience who were not familiar with pederasty, it would still seem that something out of the ordinary was at play here. It certainly seems that at least in some areas of medieval Europe (Florence and Venice being the best documented examples) the phenomenon of same-sex relations between old and young men—where the old was the active and the young was the passive—were prevalent and condemned (Karras 2005, 141), and that even though it was the young man who was being penetrated and thus 'used as a woman', it was the elder who was more often condemned for these actions, perhaps because the passive could claim "persuasion, seduction, or even rape" (Karras 2005, 141).

While Guðmundr playing host to the sons of distinguished farmers is not unheard of in the Old Norse aristocratic community, the fact that his only demand from them is that they keep him company is odd. So odd that the author does not let the subject rest and also points out that when these youths were at home they had to work like everybody else. This is as close as you can get to direct criticism in the sagas. Guðmundr shows excessiveness by holding no check over the behavior of the youngsters in his household; this could be understood as a literal manifestation of

⁴⁹ "It is told that Gudmund the Powerful far outstripped other men with his grand style of life. He had more than a hundred members of his household and the same number of cows. It was his custom to lodge the sons of distinguished men for long periods of time, and he treated them so splendidly that they had no work to do other than to be always in his company. When they were at home, however, it was their custom to work even though they were from eminent families" (135–136).

⁵⁰ Cf. Foucault 1990 (esp. 217–219); Halperin 1991; Hubbard 1998; and Sissa 1999 for a discussion on Greek approaches towards pederasty.

youth corrupting allegations. The introduction of the þáttir, according to Gunnar Karlsson, opens up the possibility that Guðmundr is reluctant to give his daughter to Sqrli because “hann hafi verið afbrýðisamur út í hana að fá að njóta þessa glæsilega pilts” (2013, 279).⁵¹ If read this way, it would seem clear that Guðmundr harbors desires towards this specific youth, or perhaps towards many other of the young men visiting his house. That he not only promoted idleness amongst the youth but could also be read as coveting them sexually makes his character seem even more negatively portrayed. This would also explain why Einarr is so supportive of Sqrli; this could be read as an attempt to subdue behaviors of which he disapproves.

As mentioned above, during their youth Einarr tried to drive a wedge between Guðmundr and his foster-father. It was noted that the A redaction of the saga has the foster-father’s head lying on Guðmundr’s lap; but even without this, there was something in the relationship between the two that the young Einarr saw fit to disrupt. Without reading too much into the use of the verb *unna*—since it is often used to describe the love that can exist between two men or more—the adding of the ‘mikit’, could suggest strong emotions that would bother Einarr, though this reading of the scene is by no means certain.

Guðmundr has various other male friendships and relationships worth taking note of. The “kynlig veizla” (8)⁵² between him and Þorgeirr against the latter’s sons is one example, though there is no textual evidence of this being anything other than a political relationship. Another strange alliance is between Guðmundr and Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson, his brother Einarr’s begrudging rival. That at one point at the *alþingi* the two sleep closely makes them quite literally ‘strange bedfellows’. Þorsteinn, his friend of youth who persuades him to expose himself to danger and slurs in Þórir’s district, obviously has much influence on Guðmundr’s decision-making, as discussed above. In addition, it seems that Einarr Konálsson, Guðmundr’s foster-brother plays the same function for him that Njáll plays for Gunnar in *Njáls saga*—a legal consultant whose advice is followed strictly, and a close friend. If Njáll and Gunnar’s relationship raises questions as to the nature of their relationship (see discussion in Ármann Jakobsson 2007, 204–5), would Guðmundr and Einarr’s relationship raise similar questions? If so, then certainly to a lesser degree, since this relationship (at

⁵¹ “He had been jealous of her that she would get to enjoy this splendid young man” (my translation).

⁵² “Strange alliance” (127).

least according to *Ljósvetninga saga*) seems less intense. At any rate, it is interesting that Guðmundr allows a friend of his to hold so much sway over his decisions; it certainly helps portray him as a man of weak personal resolve.

Ironically, the relationship that solidifies the rumors regarding Guðmundr is created as part of his efforts to put a stop to them. During the *alþingi*, Guðmundr spots someone whom he immediately points out to his friend Vigfúss and asks if he had ever seen such a worthless man (ÍF 10, 44, redaction C). He deems this man fit for being a *flugumaðr* (assassin), and approaches him with the target Þorkell hákr on his mind. Bandlien comments that after around the beginning of the twelfth century, “when masculinity became connected to the þing, men with social identities based on power outside the farms became highly suspicious” (2005, 351); vagrants included. This man introduces himself as Þorbjörn rindill (in redaction A he is called Þorsteinn rindill) and is offered employment; but this may only come after Rindill goes around the region rejecting other possible work offers, so that his appearance at Mqðruvellir will not seem planned. Thus, the beginning of their relationship is already shrouded with secrecy and deceit. When Rindill appears at the farm, Guðmundr initially does not give him any work, but then makes a show of asking him to mow and observing that he is not skilled for the job. He then offers him to spend his days in the hot springs, to which Rindill agrees. Once again, Guðmundr allows a person of his household to spend all day in idleness. Guðmundr then tells Rindill that he would like to use him for something, tempting him with the possibility of meeting with high society. Rindill responds by telling Guðmundr that his life is in his hands, “Ok treysta vil ek því, at ek mun vera þér trúr; en ef hætta er í sendiförum, ok vilir þú þær fyrir mik leggja, þá mun ek um njósna, en í áræði em ek eigi trúr” (46–7, redaction C).⁵³ Rindill is portrayed as a person who not only declares himself a coward but who is also not ashamed of it; something that would make him immediately despicable to the saga’s contemporary audience and to the people he interacts with. And indeed, we are told more than once that people in Guðmundr’s household dislike him and avoid his company. Meulengracht Sørensen has argued that in Old Norse society, cowardice and effeminacy go hand in hand (1983, 11). If Rindill’s company is unwanted it is

⁵³ “I count on being loyal to you; but if there is a risk in the job you want to give to me, I can’t be counted on for direct action, although I will spy and inform” (189).

because of him being out of place, because of people disapproving of his unabashed effeminacy.

It would be wise to bear Ruth Mazo Karras's words close to heart: "If we do not want to assume that a man who writes love poetry to another man is sexually involved with him, we should make the same demands for proof in the case of a man who writes love poetry to a woman" (2005, 147–8). When Guðrún and Kjartan meet at the hot springs in chapters 39 and 40 of *Laxdæla saga* there is no need to justify why this is understood as the unfolding of a love affair.⁵⁴ Why then should there be doubt on what goes on between Guðmundr and Rindill at the hot springs, or at least about what people are whispering about (see below)? Gísli Sigurðsson has suggested a reading of the two's relationship as "intimate", but unfortunately has not offered evidence for this (2007, 211). As Richard E. Zeikowitz points out in the context of medieval knights, the actual uncovering of same-sex genital sex is less crucial than finding evidence for same-sex desire (2003, 149–50).

In the A redaction of the saga, it is related that during the summer after the two plot Þorkell hákr's assassination, "ríðr Þorsteinn [Rindill – Y.T.] með Guðmundi opt til laugarinnar. Ok fannsk mǫnnum mjök orð um þat ok þóttusk vita, at nǫkkut myndi undir búa" (48).⁵⁵ These whisperings of people regarding Guðmundr and Rindill's hot spring encounters are obviously alluding to the plot against Þorkell hákr, since redaction A makes an effort to show a coherent structure in Guðmundr's attempts at avenging the insults he sustained. But it is possible that these are whisperings of a different kind; hinting at other acts that might transpire between the two in the hot springs besides talking. If we treat redaction A as a "reader's response" to redaction C, it is probable that the medieval audience of this saga understood this relationship similarly to the present reading, since this redaction sees fit to expand on the matter. This does not necessarily imply a sodomitic relationship between the two; but rather, just as Kjartan and Guðrún developed their romantic relationship in the hot springs without (presumably) sexual intercourse taking place, the same could certainly apply here. That Guðmundr pursues Rindill's killer and is willing to burn the house where he hides along with his own wife and son hints that perhaps something

⁵⁴ Kjartan's father Ólafr Páir discusses the matter with him in ch. 39, thus showing that the people around them treated the two as a potential couple.

⁵⁵ "Thorstein often rode with Gudmund to the hot springs. People took notice of it and suspected that something was afoot" (254).

more than his pride was hurt by this murder; perhaps his heart was hurt as well. As the saga author notes before Rindill is killed: “Guðmundr hafði virðing mikla á honum ok held hann vel” (55).⁵⁶

Forspár and Otherness

An *argr* or *ergi* man was associated with witchcraft and magic (Meulengracht Sørensen 1983, 19; cf. Ármann Jakobsson 2008, esp. 55–7); a man practicing magic would immediately be suspected of practicing sexual deviance as well. In “Ófeigs þáttur”, after Ófeigr chides him, Guðmundr responds “Þetta er harðla vel talat, sem ván er at þér. Er þat ok víst satt, at ek hafa þetta gort. En athuga er vert, hvárt þú munir vera í móti mér, er mín sœmð liggir við. Ok er þat víst” (120–1).⁵⁷ This would initially appear to simply be the words of an offended person—as they also probably are—and Ófeigr treats them accordingly. As Andersson and Miller comment, “the evenhandedness for which Ofeig stands is not a value that he grasps” (1989, 106). However, when Ófeigr meets with Guðmundr’s brother Einarr, the latter states that things usually follow Guðmundr’s *spár* (ÍF 10, 121; prophecies). Guðmundr’s words thus change from the petty reprisal of a man whose honor was offended into a prediction or prophecy of a *forspár* (a man with an ability to see the future).

Guðmundr is certainly not a false-prophet. In “Vöðu-Brands þáttur” Ófeigr joins the side of Þorkell Geitisson, who is in a legal dispute against Guðmundr, and helps facilitate matters in a manner that hurts Guðmundr. Ófeigr manipulates matters so that Einarr joins their side through a marriage contract involving his daughter Jórunn, in order to force Guðmundr into accepting mediation. Ironically, Einarr attributes his agreeing to play along with the arranged marriage to Guðmundr’s *forspár*: “enda hefir Guðmundr góðs spáð Jórunni dóttur minni, ok ganga jafnan eptir spár hans” (136).⁵⁸

When Guðmundr learns of the marriage pact, he reminds Ófeigr of his prophecy from “Ófeigs þáttur” (ÍF 10, 135–6). Guðmundr is thus established as a *forspár* whose predictions come true. Andersson and Miller argue that “Gudmund is

⁵⁶ “Gudmund attached great importance to him and took care of him” (195).

⁵⁷ “These words are well spoken . . . as was to be expected from you. It is indeed true that I have done as you say. But it is worth considering whether you will be against me when my honor is at stake; it certainly appears so” (143).

⁵⁸ “Gudmund has prophesied auspiciously about my daughter Jorun, and his prophesies are always fulfilled” (158).

somewhat *forspár*, . . . His talents in this regard, however, are not consistently presented and, in any event, are not sufficient to obviate his need to consult dream interpreters and sorceresses” (1989, 158 nt. 63). However, even a *forspár* as great as Njáll had his occasional failings (cf. Tirosh forthcoming), and the shortcomings of Guðmundr’s abilities does not equate to him having none.

The *forspár* status is important because of its implications for Guðmundr’s status as a gendered male. As William Sayers argues, Njáll’s lack of a beard and his abilities as *forspár* are connected, since it seems that in order to gain a spiritual ability one must sacrifice something in the same realm. According to this explanation, Njáll sacrifices something manly—his ability to grow a beard—so that he may better understand the workings of other men (Sayers 1995, 12; cf. Ármann Jakobsson 2007, 196, nt. 25). Thus, if a little literary tautology is allowed, if Guðmundr is able to understand the ways of man, he must have had something manly taken away from him. It is also helpful to cautiously consider that during the Viking Age, the practice of *seiðr*, which involved an element of telling the future “brought with it a strange kind of dishonour and social rejection, combining cowardice and general ‘unmanliness’ with suggestions of homosexuality” (Price 2008, 245). This sense of Guðmundr being associated with an occult practice is also supported by the saga author noting that he was a great friend of Þórhildr the pagan witch (ÍF 10, 59). Though Guðmundr’s prophetic acts cannot be compared directly to that of *seiðr*, it is worth considering the fact that in the society in which this saga was composed, a dichotomy between the manly ruler and the unmanly *seiðr* existed, at least in the work of Snorri Sturluson. According to Bandlien this dichotomy may have been exaggerated by Snorri (Bandlien 2005, 69), and the association between *seiðr* and transgressive masculinity may have been varied throughout the Iron Age (90), but this does not contradict the fact that some people writing (and consuming) sagas had this notion. The association with the heathen practice of *seiðr* is also interesting in light of Bandlien’s comment that “clerics had a long-standing missionary tradition to marginalize heathen men for their lack of rationality and moderation” (351). As we will see below, these two qualities were indeed something the author of *Ljósvetninga saga* attributes to Guðmundr.

When the apprehensive Guðmundr approaches his witch friend Þórhildr and asks her if there will be retribution for his killing Þorkell hákr, she replies: “Eigi ætla ek, at menn verði til at slá í mannhefndir við þik, ok muntu sitja mega í sœmd þinni”

(ÍF 10, 59).⁵⁹ And indeed, it is not a *man* that eventually brings about the death of Guðmundr, but Drauma-Finni Þorgeirsson, who is established as having connections with the supernatural, perhaps even being *forspár* himself. As Ármann Jakobsson has argued in regards to *Grettis saga*, frequently “monster fighters . . . are not and can never be normal” (2009, 313), they are always *outside* of society. Always an Other. The fact that Guðmundr can only be vanquished through the supernatural contributes to the sense of supernatural around him. This is strengthened by the ominous supernatural forebodings that lead up to his death (Þórhallr and Einarr’s dreams) and subsequently the way his body is treated: “Síðan kom Einarr þar ok veitti honum nábjargir ok umbúnað” (61).⁶⁰ As Andersson and Miller note, this treatment of a dead person’s body is something readers of the sagas usually encounter in the context of ghost hauntings (1989, 201 nt. 138), giving examples from *Egils saga* (Skalla-Grímr), *Eyrbyggja saga* (Þórólfr) and *Njáls saga* (Höskuldr Njálsson). Both the characters of Skalla-Grímr and Þórólfr are men who have an element of supernatural during their life (the former) or following their deaths (the latter).

In the childhood flashback scene the author chooses to point out that the foster-father whom Guðmundr strikes was *skollótr* (bald). This baldness, although it has an actual function in the narrative, may also convey something about the character. Baldness, especially at old age, could indicate one’s loss of virility and sexual potency (Phelpstead 2013, 6–8), and thus, his perhaps moving closer to the gender boundaries that separate the masculine from the feminine. Both loss of hair and loss of virility come with old age, both involve the loss of an ability to make something grow. Baldness of course is not always equal to femininity; consider Skalla-Grímr, Egill’s father, whose portrayal as masculine *Egils saga* does not question. But Skalla-Grímr is also descended of what appears to be a werewolf, and similar monstrous elements are observable in his character as well. These elements make him a liminal character, a shape-changer whose identity can be flexible.⁶¹ Guðmundr’s association with the foster-father, along with Einarr’s reaction to this connection (discussed above), may perhaps convey that there is something liminal about him.

⁵⁹ “I don’t think there will be men to take up vengeance against you. You will be able to maintain your honorable position” (200).

⁶⁰ “Einarr arrived and closed Gudmund’s eyes and nostrils and attended to his corpse” (201).

⁶¹ Compare with the sexuality of the shape-changing Loki; though in his case he changes genders as well so his sexual liminality is more apparent (cf. Bandlien 2005, 69–72).

Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir argues that the giantesses in the sagas “articulate sexual taboos and their aggressive sexuality” and is meant to invoke all kinds of promiscuous behavior, including “male sexual passivity” (2013, 77). In this she follows Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, who has said that the monster is the embodiment of sexual practices permitted only to *him* (1996, 14). Although Cohen stresses the uniqueness of the female monster of “Norse tradition”, he maintains that even though the giant’s body is usually male, it often shares much with the feminine and the maternal (1999, xii).

Text also has the power to turn a man into a monster, as the example of the English king Richard III shows us: “culture gives birth to a monster before our eyes, painting over the normally proportioned Richard who once lived, raising his shoulder to deform simultaneously person, cultural response, and the possibility of objectivity” (Cohen 1996, 9). It could be suggested that a person whose body would be manipulated thus could become a symbol for sexual deviance as well. Bjørn Bandlien stresses the importance of the monstrosity discourse, and offers that the insult of the *níð* defamations “concern the transgressing of the border between the centre and the periphery, or the human and the monstrous, as much as that between male and female” (2005, 350). An *argr* man would thus be in danger of not only being considered a woman, but also of being considered a monster.

Character Traits

Geirlaug’s insult to Þórlaug is: “Þá værir þú vel gefin, ef þar væri einmælt um, at bóndi þinn væri vel hugaðr eða snjallr” (18). This is translated by Andersson and Miller as: “You would indeed be well married if there were general agreement about your husband’s manliness” (1989, 165). From Þórlaug’s reaction it is clear that Geirlaug is saying something unspeakable (Gunnar Karlsson 2013, 280–1), but this ‘manliness’ is an allusive term. Björn Sigfússon suggests that “*ósnjallr* gat þýtt ragur, og ragur gat þýtt kynvilltur” (ÍF 10, 18 nt. 4),⁶² but as Andersson and Miller point out, there is an “indirection” in the insult (1989, 165 nt. 76). Geirlaug isn’t explicitly saying that he is *argr*. Rather, she is saying that he is lacking courage and finesse. The fact that later Þórir addresses having spoken “ragliga” of Guðmundr (40)⁶³ just before

⁶² “*ósnjallr* can translate to *ragur* [unmanly], and *ragur* can translate to homosexual” (my translation).

⁶³ Or: spoke of Guðmundr’s *ragr*.

challenging him to a duel again connects manliness with courage. Gunnar Karlsson implies that Fritzner's glossing of *úsnjallr* (Fritzner 1973 III, 807) as “uforstandig” (unreasonable) or “uøvet” (unpracticed) is insufficient (Gunnar Karlsson 2013, 280). But these actually seem very accurate descriptions of Guðmundr's character, and they add up to his portrayal as someone who is inherently inefficient in being a *goði*, a father, a brother, a husband and most importantly: a man. As Bjørn Bandlien remarks regarding people accused of being *argr*, the legal perception was that “the accused should use his right as a free male to defend himself, or else he had nothing worth defending” (2005, 108). Guðmundr certainly exercises this right, but does so in such an excessive manner that it can be argued that he is proving his accusers' point.

Andersson and Miller note that the “lavish style of life” of Guðmundr and his family are indicative of their vanity and “hunger for status and distinction” (1989, 107). In “Sqrli þátrr”, besides the argued sexual implications of encouraging idleness among the sons of prominent men discussed above, we are also introduced to Guðmundr's lack of moderation and incompetence in maintaining his own household. Guðmundr's role as the head of his household is threatened by the ensuing relationship between his guest Sqrli Brodd-Helgason—one of the *göfugra manna sonu*—and his daughter Þórdís. When he tries to end the visits by moving his daughter to his brother Einarr's residence in Þverá, Sqrli visits her there, disregarding the obvious problem Guðmundr has with this, and finally asks for Þórdís's hand. The fact that he allows himself to act like this is revealing in itself; although Guðmundr is *inn ríki*, he cannot even control his own household. When the suitor asks to marry Þórdís, Guðmundr makes a stand and refuses to give Sqrli his daughter's hand. When the rejected suitor employs Þórarinn tóki, the latter convinces Guðmundr into accepting Sqrli's proposal through flattery, asking if Guðmundr is afraid that a child born through the union of his daughter and Sqrli would be too powerful a man. This also depicts him as a character obsessed with their own image (cf. Andersson and Miller 1989, 107). As noted by Bjørn Bandlien, “masculine power was constructed through the control over women in their own group and the acquirement of women and tools from those positioned in the periphery. . . . In the laws and sagas, the ideology of masculinity is . . . connected to the integrity of honour and household” (2005, 349–50). The fact that Guðmundr ends up allowing a man who has so blatantly ignored his position as the head of the household to marry his daughter is puzzling. This is a behavior we would not expect from a powerful *goði*.

This mismanaging of his affairs is also evident in the mishandling of Þórir's outlawry. The saga tells us that after his exile from Iceland Þórir continues to visit the island every summer, redaction C even noting that "kom hann aptr til Íslands í Eyjafirði" (43),⁶⁴ right at Guðmundr's doorstep, so to speak. That he continued to attend the Vøðlaþing and regularly meet with Guðmundr's brother Einarr enhances his dishonor. As Elizabeth Walgenbach's (March 14, 2014) analysis of *Arons saga* has shown, a *goði* was deeply connected with the fate of his outlaw; his failing to kill him was considered a source of shame. While Aron received full-outlawry and Þórir only lesser-outlawry, it is clear from Gunnar's fate in *Njáls saga* (ch. 77) how one should behave if his lesser-outlaw does not comply with his sentence.

In "Ófeigs þáttur", Guðmundr is depicted as having no sense of self restraint or awareness of proper limits. He develops the habit of visiting his Northern *þingmenn*'s farms during the Autumn, followed by a retinue of thirty men, each bringing along their own horse, thus overstressing the financial capacities of his hosts. Following a famine, this behavior becomes unbearable to the *þingmenn*, who then reach out to the prominent man of the Reykjadalr: Ófeigr Járngerðarson.⁶⁵ Ófeigr gives Guðmundr a taste of his own medicine by visiting his farm for a long period, taking with him a large retinue. Ófeigr then chides Guðmundr who accepts the criticism, but also feels threatened and perhaps offended by Ófeigr's audacity. This gives the impression that Guðmundr is being too apprehensive about his own honor, and Ófeigr voices that as well.

In "Vøðu-Brands þáttur", Þorkell Geitisson says he would like to orchestrate a forceful response against Guðmundr "ef hann skal þó eigi fébótum fyrir kona, ok reyna svá, hvárt ek sé eigi annarrar handar maðr hans, sem hann svaraði Bjarna

⁶⁴ "He came back out to Iceland, making land at Eyjafjörð" (187).

⁶⁵ Andersson and Miller 1989, 121 nt. 3 claim that "it is clear from elsewhere in the saga that Ófeigr is a thingman of Guðmund the Powerful", but they do not elaborate on this besides referring the reader to "Ófeigs þáttur", probably following Björn Sigfússon's lead ("Goðorðsmaður var hann ekki, heldur þingmaður Guðmundar ríka, samkvæmt Ófeigs þ." (ÍF X, 3 nt. 5) ["He was not a *goði*, rather a *þingmaður* of Guðmundr ríki, according to "Ófeigs þáttur" (my translation)]. I have not found evidence for Ófeigr being Guðmundr's *þingmaður*. Perhaps Þorbjörn calling Guðmundr "höfðingja várs" (117) when speaking to Ófeigr is what led scholars to assert this, but since Þorbjörn uses the plural rather than the dual, "várs" could just as easily refer to himself and Guðmundr's other *þingmenn* rather than to Ófeigr. In addition, perhaps Guðmundr visiting Ófeigr following the affair during his visit to his Northern *þingmenn* (ÍF X, 121) could be seen as an indication as well, though not unequivocally. This lack of clear evidence is unfortunate for the present study, since Ófeigr being Guðmundr's *þingmaður* would strengthen the insult of his behavior throughout the saga.

Brodd-Helgasyni, frænda mínum, um sumarit á alþingi” (132).⁶⁶ Towards the end of the *þáttur*, Bjarni Brodd-Helgason speaks with Guðmundr and tells him:

Svá sýnisk mér, Guðmundr, sem þú hafir þurft báðar hendr við Þorkel frænda minn, ok hafi þó ekki af veitt um. Ok man ek enn þat, Guðmundr, er ek bað þik, at þú skyldir sætta okkr Þorkel, ok svaraði engi ódrengiligar en þú ok sagðir hann eigi vera mundu meira en annarrar handar mann gilds manns ok kvazt hann hafa hálfþynnu eina í hendi, en mik hoggspjót gilt á hávu skapti. En ek em nú minni hofðingi en þú, ok sýnisk mér sem hann muni eigi þar lengi gengit hafa skaptamuninn. (138)⁶⁷

Bjarni is a kinsman of Þorkell Geitisson but is shown earlier to be undecided on whose side to take (ÍF 10, 135), thus making him, in a way, an objective observer. He shows Guðmundr to be outwitted and claims that Þorkell is the man with the most honor. This is expressed by using two metaphors; the hands (which were invoked in the earlier quote by Þorkell as well), and the length of symbolic weapons as expressing one’s abilities.

Arms or hands as an indicator of masculinity may seem obvious to the reader, since they are the main instrument of fighting and manual labor.⁶⁸ An example of this association can be found in a scene in *Grettis Saga* when the protagonist and his half-brother Þorsteinn drómundr compare hands, and Grettir states: “Eigi þarf at horfa á þetta lengr; krækt er saman rifjum í þér, ok eigi þykkjumk ek slíkar tengr sét hafa, sem þú berr eptir, ok varla ætla ek þik kvenstyrkan” (ÍF 7, 138).⁶⁹ Later in *Ljósvetninga saga*, during a visit to a farm very close to his death, Guðmundr sits himself on the high seat usually saved for Ófeigr Járngerðarson. Ófeigr confronts Guðmundr:

⁶⁶ “In the event he won’t accept compensation, and in testing whether I am to be disposed of with his left hand, as he remarked to my kinsman Bjarni Brodd-Helgason at the Allthing last summer” (153). This is also a reference to *Vápnfirðinga saga* and the role that Guðmundr plays in the dispute between Bjarni and Þorkell’s families there.

⁶⁷ “It seems to me, Gudmund, that you had to use both your right and left hands against my kinsman Thorkel, and you didn’t manage even so. And I still remember, Gudmund, when I asked you to reconcile me with Thorkel, that nobody gave a meaner answer than you; you said that he was only half a real man and had only an ordinary ax in hand while I had a stout pike on a long shaft. I am a lesser chieftain than you, but it seems to me that it didn’t take him long to make up the difference between ax and pike” (161).

⁶⁸ Although one might wonder how the labor done in the ‘women’s sphere’ would be done without hands?

⁶⁹ “I’ve seen quite enough. Your ribs look like hooks, and I don’t think I’ve ever seen another pair of tongs like those arms of yours. I can’t imagine you have the strength of a woman” (Scudder 1997, 115).

Þá setti Ófeigr hnefann á borðit ok mælti: „Hversu mikill þykki þér hnefi sjá, Guðmundr?“ Hann mælti: „Víst mikill.“ Ófeigr mælti: „Þat muntu ætla, at afl muni í vera?“ Guðmundr mælti: „Ek ætla þat víst.“ Ófeigr segir: „Mikit muntu ætla, at hogg verði af?“ Guðmundr segir: „Stórum mikit.“ Ófeigr segir: „Þat muntu ætla, at saka muni?“ Guðmundr mælti: „Beinbrot eða bani.“ Ófeigr svavar: „Hversu myndi þér sá dauðdagi þykkja?“ Guðmundr mælti: „Stórrillr, ok eigi mynda ek vilja þann fá.“ Ófeigr mælti: „Sittu þá eigi í rúmi mínu.“ Guðmundr segir: „Þat skal ok vera,“ — ok settisk qðrum megin. (58–9)⁷⁰

In this scene Ófeigr is equating his honor with his masculinity and hands. Because he has the stronger hands that could easily crush Guðmundr, he is the one who should sit at the high seat, rather than the *goði*. The fact that Guðmundr does not stand up for himself but rather yields without protest is equally telling about his character's depiction.

The phallic symbolism of weapons seems inviting; if we describe their action, we can say that the *hálfpynna* and the *hoggspjót* are shafted objects that upon entering a body cause it to emit a liquid.⁷¹ The association was clearly there, evident in medieval weapons such as the kidney dagger, which resembled a phallus in its design and the way it was placed on the belt (Nøttveit 2006). That both the *hálfpynna* and *hoggspjót* are chopping weapons⁷² makes the comparison between the two more

⁷⁰ “Ófeig put his fist on the table and said, ‘How big does that fist seem to you, Gudmund?’ ‘Big enough,’ he said. ‘Do you suppose there is any strength in it?’ asked Ófeig. ‘I certainly do,’ said Gudmund. ‘Do you think it would deliver much of a blow?’ asked Ófeig. ‘Quite a blow,’ Gudmund replied. ‘Do you think it might do any damage?’ continued Ófeig. ‘Broken bones or a deathblow,’ Gudmund answered. ‘How would such an end appeal to you?’ asked Ófeig. ‘Not much at all, and I wouldn’t choose it,’ said Gudmund. Ófeig said, ‘Then don’t sit in my place.’ ‘As you wish,’ said Gudmund—and he sat to one side” (199).

⁷¹ When looking at the famous murder in the marital bed scene in *Gísli saga*, David Clark argues that the narrator intentionally uses the verb *vekja* when referring to Gísli waking up Þorgrímr to imply that he arouses him, thus penetrating him when his penis is erect; “when he spears him, he is symbolically saying: ‘I am penetrating you, because I am a *real* man, and you are taking it from me like a woman, and indeed your erection shows that you are enjoying it’” (Clark 2012, 113–4). Though this reading is persuasive and interesting, the only point that is confusing about it remains the erection; if Þorgrímr is a woman, how could he achieve such a manly feat as an erection? Hrútr Herjólfsson of *Njáls saga* (de)fame, however, reminds us that sometimes an erection can diminish a man’s masculinity just as easily as enhance it (cf. Ármann Jakobsson 2007, 207–9; Carl Phelpstead 2007, 430–4).

⁷² Andersson and Miller’s translation of *hoggspjót* to “pike” perhaps not the best choice for this word. J. Fritzner glosses *hoggspjót* as “Spyd som bruges til at hugge med” (Fritzner 1973 II, 177) [“A spear that is used to cut/chop with” (my translation)], and *hálfpynna* as “liden Øxe med tyndt Blad” (Fritzner 1973 I, 707) [“A little ax with a thin blade” (my translation)]. Falk also defines *hoggspjót* as a generic term for hewing spears (1914, 66; cf. Petra Sjöström 2001, 102), so, function wise, the comparison

inviting. In addition, the fact that both these weapons could also be used as tools seems to be consistent with other medieval texts utilizing this kind of literary technique (cf. Schibanoff 2001, 29). Þorkell's ability to prolong his shaft and equal the difference in shaft sizes is here comparable to an erection, to his virility. In short, what Bjarni tells Guðmundr is that he had overextended himself, and fell flat. But the absurdity of his character is enhanced by the fact that he does not even show awareness to his own faults. Guðmundr believes his arms are strong enough to dismiss Þorkell with only one hand, when actually they are too weak to do so with both. He believes he has a long chopping spear when he actually has a short axe.

As discussed above, before his death, Þórhildr offers Guðmundr a prediction that “muntu sitja mega í sæmd þinni” (59), and indeed he immediately goes home and “sat í virðingu sinni” (60).⁷³ Before he dies, we are told that he sits in the *qndvegi* (high-seat). It can be argued that here is another connection to Einarr's complaint that his brother “sat mjök yfir metorðum manna”. This tying between sitting and honor is interesting, since sitting is, of course, symbolic of inaction. In *Njáls saga* ch. 44, Njáll's sitting is noted as symbolic of his idleness and is a source of mockery. The fact that this is said in the presence of Hallgerður, Njáll's chief defamer, might suggest a connection between the passive action of sitting and femininity. Guðmundr dying while in the *qndvegi* could also be the author's way of saying that he was so obsessed about his honor, that in the end it was all he had.

Guðmundr is also shamed through comparison with his rivals. When Þórir Helgason is introduced into the saga it is stated that he was “garpr mikill” (16).⁷⁴ Þórir's wife Geirlaug receives even more praise: “Hon var skörungr mikill ok vel mennt” (16).⁷⁵ The fact that the author chooses to give praise to Þórir's wife yet stays silent regarding the merits of Guðmundr's is a statement anticipating the argument that would later develop between the women, on whom deserves more honor; it seems pretty clear that from the author's perspective, it is Geirlaug rather than Þórlaug who is the more honorable. But this is also a way of comparing the men through their wives. After killing Þorkell hákr, Guðmundr and his men offer his wife help with the

between the two weapons makes sense. I wish to thank James McMullen for his insights into medieval Scandinavian weaponry.

⁷³ “Continued to live in good standing” (200).

⁷⁴ “A forceful man” (102).

⁷⁵ “She was an outstanding woman and of excellent character” (102).

burial. To this she replies that she would rather be with Þorkell dead than with Guðmundr alive, another moral judgment favoring Guðmundr's enemies.

When Guðmundr's foster-brother Einarr Konálsson advises him on how to deal with the rumors spread by Þórir Helgason and Þorkell hákr, Einarr advises him to control himself and to seek revenge by prosecuting every case that he can against Þórir's *þingmenn*, promising him that this will help him muster up money quickly. In the A redaction of the saga, after sharing his plan, Einarr tells Guðmundr to turn the money over to him: "ok ekki mun þat týnask" (20). Andersson and Miller translate this as "so that it will stay intact" (1989, 246). But Einarr's use of *týnask*, glossed by Cleasby & Vigfússon (1874, 647) and by Zoëga (1910, 446) as "to parish", is indicative of a limitless nature attributed to Guðmundr. Even his good friend is shown to believe that money leaks out of his hands.

During the court of confiscation,⁷⁶ Guðmundr discovers that Þórir had made a property transfer of "doubtful legality" (Andersson and Miller 1989, 177 nt. 101), and received the goats of his outlawed *þingmaðr* after the case had already been brought to court. Guðmundr openly accuses Þórir and declares that he will take this to court. To this Þórir replies "eigi kanntu nú hófi þínu um áganginn" (35, redaction C).⁷⁷ This lack of *hóf*, or moderation, is characteristic of the limitless nature of Guðmundr's portrayal in *Ljósvetninga saga*.

The fact that *Ljósvetninga saga* closes with the sentence "eigi þykki mér þú maðr sterkr, en drengr góðr ertu" (106)⁷⁸ strengthens the reading of this saga as one that deals with moderation and of Guðmundr being presented a case of a man lacking that trait. As Andersson and Miller maintain, Guðmundr is depicted "as a man whose immoderation is deeply ingrained in his nature" (1989, 103). Foucault argues that in the Ancient Greek perception it was the practice of immoderation that was objectionable rather than any specific kind of personal quality or sexual behavior (1990, 44), and that "immoderation derives from a passivity that relates it to femininity. To be immoderate was to be in a state of nonresistance with regard to the force of pleasures, and in a position of weakness and submission" (1985, 84). It is

⁷⁶ In redaction A it is specifically noted that during this event the *geldfé* were reserved for Guðmundr (ÍF 10, 25), a possible comment on his manhood, considering the emasculating function of castration (see discussion below).

⁷⁷ "You know no moderation in your aggressiveness" (178).

⁷⁸ "I don't think you are a strong man, but you are a sound one" (245).

hard to claim that Old Norse sexuality was somehow identical to the Ancient Greek,⁷⁹ especially if we consider that *Foucault's* Greeks did not perceive homosexuality as a sexual identity, while this thesis attempts to be a step towards arguing otherwise in the Old Norse world. But what is important is that the association between a lack of immoderation and perverse sexual behavior has been firmly established in the past.

Cold and Wet

Before Guðmundr dies, the following is described:

Eptir þat réttisk Guðmundr upp, ok var þá fram kominn matr. Mjólkk var heit, ok váru í steinar. Þá mælti Guðmundr: „Eigi er heitt.“ Þórlaug mælti: „Kynlega er þá,“ — ok heitti steinana aptr. Síðan drakk Guðmundr ok mælti: „Eigi er heitt.“ Þórlaug mælti: „Eigi veit ek nú, Guðmundr, hvar til kemr heitfengi þitt.“ Ok enn drakk hann og mælti: „Ekki er heitt.“ Þá hneig hann á bak aptr ok var þegar andaðr. (61)⁸⁰

As mentioned above, Einarr treats Guðmundr's body and suggests that “ok kaldr hefir hann nú verit innan, er hann kenndi sín eigi”.⁸¹ The implications of Guðmundr's lack of sensation in a scene where both his brother and wife are present have been discussed above. But another point can be argued; the coldness that is within Guðmundr may reflect the scholarly perception of a man as warm and dry and a woman as cold and wet. Guðmundr may be seen here as a having the body of a woman, or perhaps that of a phlegmatic man, his coldness within being literal rather than simply figurative.

When Guðmundr uses Rindill's spying in order to catch Þorkell hákr unaware, the latter confronts him with a rather odd dialogue:

⁷⁹ Or, for that matter, that Foucault's understanding of Ancient Greek perceptions of sexuality lacks flaws. Foucault himself acknowledges that Aristotle, for instance, did not simply discuss immoderation as a flaw but also addressed “disgraceful pleasures” (1990, 45 starred footnote) that were evidently shameful in and of themselves.

⁸⁰ “After that Gudmund sat erect in his seat while the food was served. The milk was kept hot with heated stones. Gudmund said, “It's not hot.” “That's strange,” said Thorlaug and she heated the stones again. Then Gudmund drank and said, “It's not hot.” Thorlaug said, “I don't know what's become of your sense of hot and cold, Gudmund.” He drank yet again and said, “It's not hot.” Then he leaned back and was instantly dead” (201).

⁸¹ “He must have been cold inside already since he felt nothing” (201).

Þá mælti Guðmundr: „Þat er nú ráð, Þorkell, at sýna sik Guðmundi ok skríða eigi í hreysi.“ Þorkell svaraði: „Nú skal ek víst sýna mik þér, Guðmundr. Ok eigi komtu fyrr en ek ætlaða. Eða hverja leið fóru þér hingat?“ Hann svarar: „Ek fór Grímubrekku ok Hellugnúpsskarð.“ Þorkell mælti: „Þú hafðir bratta leið ok erfiða, ok trautt kann ek at ætla, hversu rassinn myndi sveitask ok erfitt hafa orðit í þessi ferð.“ (52)⁸²

What Þorkell does here is first to remind Guðmundr that he took his time in avenging his honor. Then he clarifies the implication of this: His anus is excreting liquid, because of the effort for such a weak man.⁸³ But this could also harken back to the discussion of medieval sexuality above, where the man prone to sodomy was understood as someone who can only ejaculate from the anus.

After Guðmundr's men overcome Þorkell and his guts are hanging out, the following takes place: “Guðmundr hopaði undan ok hrataði í mjólkrketilinn. Þat sá Þorkell ok hló at ok mælti: „Nú kveð ek, [at] rassinn þinn hafi áðr leitat flestra lækjanna annarra, en mjólkina hygg ek hann eigi fyrr drukkit hafa. Enda rázk þú nú hingat, Guðmundr; úti liggja nú iðrin mín” (52).⁸⁴ About this Andersson and Miller note: “Thorkel sets up this line perfectly by having first made Gudmund's ass thirsty from the arduous journey. The image also inverts Gudmund in other ways, turning him upside down by making his anus his mouth” (Andersson and Miller 1989, 193 nt. 125). The inversion that Andersson and Miller detect could be understood in another way than a thirsty anus. When imagining the splash of white liquid caused by Guðmundr's fall into the milk vat, it is also possible to suggest that his anus excretes fluid as well as intakes it.

The description of Þorbjörn/Þorkell rindill is also meant to suggest that he engages in sodomitic behavior. As mentioned above, when Guðmundr first laid eyes

⁸² “Then Gudmund said, ‘Now you have the chance to face Gudmund, Thorkel, and not hide in a cave’. ‘I’ll face you all right, Gudmund,’ replied Thorkel. ‘You didn’t come any sooner than expected. By the way, what route did you take here?’ ‘I came by way of Brynjuridge and Hellugnuppass,’ he replied. ‘You had a steep and arduous trip,’ said Thorkel, ‘and I can imagine how sweaty your ass must be from such exertion on the way!’” (192). In this case *Íslenzk fornrit* quotes redaction A which has ‘Grímubrekku’ as the ridge Guðmundr passes, while Andersson and Miller choose redaction C’s ‘Brynjubrekka’. Cf. ÍF 10, 52 nt. 2.

⁸³ It can also be seen as echoing the insult thrown at Guðmundr in “Ólkofra þátr”, where he is accused that while he is able to protect the Ljósvatn pass, he is not being able to protect his own buttocks (ÍF XI 94, cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 1983, 37).

⁸⁴ “Gudmund danced away and tumbled into the milk vat. Thorkel saw what happened, laughed, and said, ‘I imagine your ass has slaked itself at many streams, but I doubt it has drunk milk before. Come at me, Gudmund, and fight if you dare, for my guts are hanging out. That is what you wanted when you were so eager to meet’” (193).

on him he stated to Vigfúss Víga-Glúmsson “Hefir þú nokkurn þann sét, at síðr sé nokkurs verður en þessi maðr?” (44, redaction C.)⁸⁵ This implies that someone’s qualities can be judged from their appearance, supporting Lönnroth’s arguments regarding the use of physiognomy in saga writing and character description (1963–4, 43–4). This is further supported by the fact that people tend to dislike Rindill and avoid his company; we are not told of anything peculiar about his behavior that would justify such a reaction. But what perhaps strengthens the feeling that it is Rindill’s appearance that deters people from interacting with him is when he goes as a spy to Þorkell hákr’s farm. There, he is meant to be under disguise, so people do not have any prejudices based on previous interaction with him. Yet we are told that the women of the house, Þorkell’s wife in particular, take an immediate, intuitive disliking to him. The fact that they know nothing about him gives us the impression that something about Rindill’s features make others dislike him. His negative character portrayal is thus tied together with his negative appearance.

Rindill’s death is a humiliating one by medieval *and* modern standards. After he loses his horse, he goes looking for it alone because only one person agreed to stay with him. When they find the horses, the two sit down to eat: “Rindill hafði skyr ok mataðisk skjótt, því at skyrit var þunnt; ok riðu síðan út frá garði ok svá í skoginn. Þá hleypðu menn í móti þeim. Ok var þar kominn Eilífr ok maðr með honum, — þar varð fátt af kveðjum —, ok setti þegar kesjuna á Rindil miðjan, en skyrit sprændi ór honum ok upp á Eilíf (55).”⁸⁶

As mentioned above, spearing someone could be a way of showing him to be *argr*; just as Þorgrímr is speared when his penis is erect (see nt. 71), Rindill is speared with the skyr still in his bowels, causing him to spurt out the white liquid on the face of his aggressor, thus hinting that he is sexually enjoying the penetration.⁸⁷ As Gísli Sigurðsson argues, the skyr is meant to invoke the milk vat scene, and also the semen Rindill may have received from Guðmundr (2007, 211).⁸⁸ Not every spearing in the

⁸⁵ “Have you ever seen a more worthless man than this?” (188)

⁸⁶ “Rindil had curdled milk and ate quickly because it was thin; then they rode away into the woods where men jumped out at them. It was Eilíf and another man with him. Not much time was taken to exchange greetings. He plunged a halberd into Rindil, and the curdled milk spurted out all over Eilíf” (195).

⁸⁷ That Eilífr is doing the spearing does not automatically make him shameful, as the concept of “phallic aggression” suggests (cf. Meulengracht Sørensen 1983, 27, 51–61).

⁸⁸ Or, perhaps, from his travelling companion with whom he is left alone.

sagas is sexual, of course. But unlike Atli, Grettir's brother, Rindill does not get the opportunity to say a catchy phrase such as “Þau tíðkast in breiðu spjótin” (ÍF 7, 146);⁸⁹ instead, he only has time to spurt out skyr and die.

The association between milk and dairy products and lack of masculinity is not unheard of in the Old Norse world. Three examples illustrate this. When Grettir fights his kinsman Auðunn; “Auðunn laut þá niðr ok þreif upp skyrkyllinn ok sletti framan í fang Gretti ok bað hann fyrst taka við því, er honum var sent. Grettir varð allr skyrugr; þótti honum þat meiri smán en þó Auðunn hefði veitt honum mikinn áverka” (ÍF 7, 96).⁹⁰ The insult could simply lie in the fact that Grettir is covered with filth, but why is that insult greater than a bloody wound from a superior fighter? The injury to his masculinity would most have certainly come from the liquid nature and white color of the material. When in *Egils saga* Ármóðr skegg serves the protagonist and his companions skyr rather than the meat that the rest of the household are served, the drunk Egill is so insulted that he goes over to his guest and spews all over him. His vomit would undoubtedly contain skyr and would therefore be comparable with an ejaculation, but here Egill is asserting his dominance rather than showing himself to be passive; being the one ejaculating could thus also mean taking the active role, and not necessarily the passive one. Similar to Rindill who is described as eating the skyr hastily, so does Egill; the latter spews his white liquid on Ármóðr in order to re-establish his dominance, temporarily taken from him when he was forced to eat skyr quickly and in a large quantity. This reading of the scene is strengthened when in the following morning Egill enters Ármóðr's bedroom and in the presence of his wife and daughter cuts off his beard and plucks out his eye, two signs of symbolic emasculation. During the *Flugumýrabrenna* in *Íslendingasaga*, Gissur Þorvaldsson hides in a barrel of whey while his sons fight and are killed by the burners, and thus avoids the fire and the spears of his enemies. Sturla Þórðarson, the alleged author of the saga, had an ambivalent relationship with Gissur,⁹¹ and it would make sense that he would wish to make a mockery of him or portray him in a partially negative light.

⁸⁹ “Broad spears are the fashion these days” (Scudder 1997, 119).

⁹⁰ “Audun bent down to pick up the curd pouch, slung it into Grettir's arms and told him to take what he was given. Grettir was covered with curds, which he considered a greater insult than if Audun had given him a bloody wound” (Scudder 1997, 94).

⁹¹ On the one hand Gissur was one of the killers of Sturla Þórðarson's uncle Sighvatr and cousins Sturla and Kolbeinn, on the other he was his political ally whose son he married to his daughter Ingibjörg.

Indeed, after the fire, Gissur, who is freezing from the cold whey is warmed between the thighs of a woman, thus reasserting his masculinity.

The association between milk and femininity is not exclusively medieval European, it is also intuitive: it is the women who produce the nurturing milk, as is evident in Guðmundr's death scene. The color of milk and color of semen are similar as well, and even the texture may sometimes fit. That both are excreted from human organs after stimulation makes the conflation more inviting. One need not be aware of medieval medical perceptions to put two and two together, but the knowledge helps for a more complete understanding of the descriptions' implications.

Guðmundr's Portrayal: A Tentative Conclusion

Throughout this chapter it has been established that *Ljósvetninga saga* features countless manifestations of hostility towards the character of Guðmundr inn ríki. It would sometimes seem that every word a character utters, every action described and every narrative technique work together to defame Guðmundr. When considering that the *Ljósvetninga saga* we currently possess is the result of a narrative constantly developing by its transmission, it is difficult to claim for clear, consistent authorial intent. However, since the narrative and the characters' words are consistent in their criticism towards Guðmundr, it seems that a negativity towards the *goði* shaped the extant text. A good illustration of this is Einarr's complaint that his brother "sat mjök yfir metorðum manna". Is this the narrator speaking, or is it Einarr? In a sense, it does not matter, since throughout the saga both the description of Einarr's behavior *and* Einarr's words show displeasure with Guðmundr.

Guðmundr is undoubtedly a man: his children Halldórr, Eyjólf, Koðrán and Þórdís attest to that. But throughout the saga, it seems like the author makes a conscious attempt to portray him otherwise. Guðmundr's unstable relationship with his family makes him an unsuccessful head of household, as well as makes it unclear where his loyalties lie. Guðmundr associates with men in a manner that is too close for comfort; Rindill, his foster-father, foster-brother, childhood friend and sons of wealthy men with whom he may or may not have developed a pederastic-like relationship. Guðmundr is described as prone to excess, exerting no self control, having a boundless sense of self and not being able to resist flattery. These characteristics can be summed up as 'immoderation', and as discussed tied to

‘unnatural’ sexual behavior. Guðmundr is described as a man with *forspár*, which perhaps harks back to perceptions of *seiðr*. And, finally, Guðmundr’s body itself is described as boundless, as leaking and as receiving milk, Rindill—his alleged sexual partner—following suit. It is now necessary to move on and ask: how does this description of a person engaging in sodomitic acts—or perhaps of a homosexual—enlighten our understanding of medieval Icelandic sexuality?

Old Norse Gender

As Back Danielsson notes in regards to the Laqueur-Cadden debate, “a definition of sex is always discursive” (2007, 53). This rings even more true when discussing a topic such as gender, which is not necessarily tied to biological sex. *Ljósvetninga saga* was written in a very specific background, though this is a background that we do not fully comprehend; thus, matters of discourse and definition become more necessary to discern. What is most important to understand is that the perception of gender reflected in the saga represents 13th century mentalities rather than Viking Age ones. This is not to say that the two relatively similar eras did not have sometimes corresponding perceptions and attitudes towards gender, but simply that a text composed in the 13th century should be treated as reflecting the 13th century.⁹²

Perhaps the most important study of how homosexuality and sodomy were understood in medieval Iceland can be found in Preben Meulengracht Sørensen’s *Unmanly Man*. There he followed the footsteps of Ström and others, giving a detailed analysis of the Old Norse *níð* insult which made a “no-man of a man” (Meulengracht Sørensen 1983, 84). Meulengracht Sørensen’s study is important because it emphasizes how widespread these insults were, places them firmly in the context of 13th and 14th century Iceland, and most importantly: makes it clear how heavy a toll these took on the perception of one’s masculinity. He also pointed out the triumvirate of *argr* ‘vices’: Sodomy, witchcraft and effeminacy/cowardice (1983, 19–20; cf. Clover 1993, 9). All three of these are qualities that Guðmundr had been associated with to one degree or another in *Ljósvetninga saga*.

The status of Thomas Laqueur’s *Making Sex* study is comparable to that of Carol Clover’s 1993 “Regardless of Sex: Men, Women, and Power in Early Northern Europe”, though of course in a smaller scope. Widely cited in scholarship, this article suggests that “early northern Europe “lived” a one-sex logic, a one-gender model, to a degree unparalleled elsewhere in the west” (Clover 1993, 18). Bjørn Bandlien attributes Clover’s popularity in international scholarship and in the field of gender studies to the fact that it tackles “the alleged heterosexism of Western popular (and academic) notions on sex and gender” (2005, 10). Clover presents Old Norse society

⁹² The fact that the earliest extant manuscripts are dated to the early 15th century only enhances the distance of this text from the Viking Age.

as one in which the difference between a man and a woman was not in the field of sex but rather in the field of power; “the fault line runs not between males and females per se, but between able-bodied men (and the exceptional woman) on one hand and, on the other, a kind of rainbow coalition of everyone else (most women, children, slaves, and old, disabled, or otherwise disenfranchised men)” (1993, 13). A woman by sex could become—at least temporarily—a gendered man, and a man by sex could become a gendered woman. When Egill is lamenting his penis not working properly, he is lamenting his becoming a de-facto woman (16–7). When Eyjólfur orders his men to attack Auðr, Gísli the outlaw’s wife, he is turning her—albeit temporarily—into a man (1–2).

If Laqueur offered a one-sex model to explain sex in medieval Europe, Clover takes this one step further and cancels out *gender* distinction as well, replacing it with something else, a differentiation based on power. Her point of departure is indeed Laqueur’s model:

I presume that the Scandinavians in the early period had some one-sex account of bodily difference—the conflation of anus and vagina and the charges of male pregnancy point clearly in that direction—but no treatise spells out the terms. I also presume that in the same way that the thirteenth-century authors were cognizant of the other medical learning (the theory of humors, for example), they were cognizant of the learned hot/cool model of sexual difference—but they did not insinuate that model into the “historical” texts. (Clover 1993, 12)

As discussed above, Laqueur’s one-sex model is one which should be taken with a grain of salt.⁹³ Although his argument is fascinating and well-made, it is certainly not a model on which one should uncritically base his understanding of medieval sex difference. Laqueur’s entire argument seems to fall apart if gender is taken away from it. As he himself says, “there existed many genders, but only one adaptable sex” (Laqueur 1990, 35). He does not point out what these ‘many genders’ are, but certainly subscribes to a two-gender model, as evident in his discussion regarding the one-seed/two-seed theory: “Like reproductive organs, reproductive fluids turn out to be versions of each other; they are the biological articulation, in the language of a

⁹³ Also, Bandlien notes that more than one Scandinavian historian has taken issue with the applicability of Laqueur’s model on the region’s history (2005, 10, nt. 31).

one-sex body, of the politics of two genders and ultimately of engendering” (38–9). Without a *two-gender* model, his *one-sex* model would make no sense. If there was only one sex, how could the difference between man and woman be explained, *unless* there existed a gender distinction between them?

Clover deconstructs “the very dichotomy between masculine and feminine by arguing that Old Norse society had only one gender” (Bandlien 2005, 10). Cancelling out gender distinctions is important in the context of Clover’s general work towards understanding women’s role in Old Norse society. As exemplified in the case of the *fonaldarsögur*’s maiden warriors, a feuding society would put patrilineal concerns above all, even if, in order to continue the father’s lineage, a daughter needed to temporarily become a functional son (Clover 1986, 39). Clover’s 1993 article thus extends an argument already made in her 1986 article: everything in these stories was judged according to masculine standards, because masculine standards were, in a way, all that mattered (1986, 48–9).

Clover stresses that “the conflation of anus and vagina and the charges of male pregnancy” are indicative of a one-sex model (Clover 1993, 12). This use of Laqueur’s one-sex model weakens her point rather than strengthening it, since now a confusion is created regarding how she envisions this sexless, genderless society. It also gives the sense that Clover reads as realistic what was meant as symbolic. In their review of Laqueur’s *Making Sex*, Park and Nye state that “any reading that emphasizes only the similarities in this cosmos, let alone reduces them to identities, misrepresents the entire structure” (1991, 55). A similar argument can be made regarding Clover’s reading of the anus as equal, in the sources, to the vagina. Clover maintains that being on the receiving end of a sodomitic act, as well as being subjugated to a *níð* insult, could easily make one feminine, especially if one does nothing to clear his name; the fact that insults were directed at a man’s passive participation in a sodomitic act, or inability to maintain his own household, shows that if you cannot function as a man, you might as well not be one (Clover 1993, 9–11). Thus, when a man such as Egill laments about losing his penis’s—or tongue’s—potency, Clover argues that this “sounds like a female lament, in short, because in some deep cultural sense it *is* one” (17; italicized in text). However, regardless of Egill’s gender, his complaint regarding his potency would mean nothing were he a woman by sex. As Bandlien points out, “the sources she cites indicate that the agent’s biological sex *did* matter” (2005, 11; italicized in text). Thus an anus of a man can

never be a vagina. It can only be used *like* a vagina. While the question of whether or not this would make a man by sex turn into a woman by gender will not be engaged at present, the fact that such a question exists is telling in itself.

The importance of Clover's study is that it emphasizes what Meulengracht Sørensen has shown: the social cost of losing one's status as masculine in the Old Norse world. This was not relevant only to the sphere of sex and sexuality, as these studies make clear. It was relevant to your everyday function in society, to your interaction with people. This fear of defamation was not just an echo from a faraway overly-masculine past. It was relevant to the contemporary 13th and 14th century Icelanders who were writing these stories. This is evident from laws (Ström 1974, 6–7), *samtíðarsögur* (Guðrún Nordal 1998, 171–2) and *konungasögur* (e.g. This threat is prevalent throughout “Sneglu-Halla þátr” in *Morkinskinna*, ÍF 23, 270–85). Ármann Jakobsson (2007) argues that the author of *Njáls saga* was highly preoccupied with issues of over-demanding masculinity and misogyny,⁹⁴ another interesting case for how perceptions of gender and sex worried the men and women of that time.

Meulengracht Sørensen argues that castration is comparable to *níð* insults, because of the analogous function of negating a man's masculinity (1983, 82–4). Castration could indeed be seen as a symbolic act—mutilating the most obvious sign of one's masculinity—but it is also a very real attack on one's progeny, on one's future. Similarly a *níð* is an attack on one's future as well as one's present. When Sneglu-Halli threatens to spread an insulting poem on the *ójafnaðarmaðr* (a man unwilling to pay compensation) Einarr flugu, king Haraldr harðráði warns the latter: “Hann svífisk enkis, ok er þér verri einn kviðlingr ef eptir verðr munaðr, sem hætt er ef upp kemr at eigi falli níðr, slíkr maðr sem þú ert” (ÍF 23, 281).⁹⁵ This was not an empty threat; the present reading of *Ljósvetninga saga* is living proof of that. The fact that in the 21st century, eight centuries after his death, a Master's thesis is being written about Guðmundr's sexual representation means that this defamatory text was effective. Since the linguistic turn has suggested that all that remains of our understanding of the past are textual representations (cf. Spiegel 1997, 44–56; also cf. Stein 2005, 80–2 and Hermann 2007, 21), all that is essentially left of the historical

⁹⁴ Although Ármann does not explicitly state to what time he attributes this criticism (194–5; but cf. 195 ft. 24), it would seem improbable that such an investment in these issues as reflected in the saga would result from an antiquarian interest alone.

⁹⁵ “He will shrink from nothing, and a single ditty that is circulated and remembered is worse for you, considering your rank, than paying compensation” (Andersson and Gade 2000, 250).

Guðmundr Eyjólfsson, is the literary Guðmundr inn ríki. The present reading in this thesis suggests that Guðmundr's representation in *Ljósvetninga saga* is the realization of the fears and apprehensions of the defamed man; to be remembered forever as his rivals depicted him, with no possibility of defending himself.

How beneficial is using general medieval European perceptions when looking at Old Norse gender and sex? As has been argued above, the people writing the sagas were aware of these perceptions to a certain degree, and the reading of *Ljósvetninga saga* strengthens that notion. It would be possible to try and fit Guðmundr into the schema of the man in whose blood phlegm is the most prominent. As noted earlier, this person's characteristics are "af kalldri nattu. ok vátri. vstóðugr. vakr ok udiarfr" (Hauksbók, 181). Guðmundr's cold nature has been established in the hasty eulogy his brother gives him. The watery characteristic could be connected to the 'sweaty buttocks' comment made by Þorkell hákr. This goes well with him being unsteady⁹⁶ and excessively alert. This unsteadiness also manifests itself in his non-firm relations to his kin-group; his loyalties are misplaced, his honor—and perhaps his lover—proceeds his familial obligations. It has been argued that his cowardice is present throughout the saga, being the main point of the rumors directed against him, and being a possible reading of his actions when approaching Þórir Helgason, before the duel at the *alþingi*, and even when he attacks Þorkell hákr. That other characteristics are manifest in Guðmundr's depiction, like greed, deceitfulness and enviousness, which are a characteristic of a person with a prominence of black bile (characterized as cold yet dry), does not necessarily contradict the influence of the phlegmatic man; after all Lars Lönnroth has tied the descriptions of both kinds of men together (e.g. 1963–4, 43), and as Joan Cadden has shown, medieval medicine had its fair share of contradictions.

If Meulengracht Sørensen emphasized the importance of looking at Old Norse sexual concepts such as *níð* through a framework contemporary to the time of writing (1983, 79–80), then it is also necessary to recognize influences of contemporary ideas that originate from outside of Iceland and Scandinavia. Even a classic example of a 'Germanic' proverb such as "svá ergisk hverr sem eldisk" (cited in Clover 1993, 17) could also be understood as corresponding with medieval European perceptions:

⁹⁶ His fall into the milk vat shows him as literally unsteady, or unable to keep his footing.

“Síþan er vari mestr með órvosvm. ok fellr þui slefa oruósum sem bronum” (Hauksbók 182).⁹⁷ In other words, the proverb can now be ‘he who is older is more *phlegmatic*’, rather than ‘more *ergi*’. We should not look at medieval medicine as a guideline that saga authors had to follow word by word; obviously they had many other influences when writing. But much can be gained through awareness to the possible influence of medieval medicine on the description of a man practicing sodomy.

⁹⁷ “Later [in life] phlegm is the most [prominent] with the decrepit [old]. And for this reason saliva falls from the decrepit like children” (my translation).

Conclusion

During his lifetime, King Edward II had lost two good friends who had died because their friendship with him was perceived as a danger to the governing of England. Both Piers Gaveston and Hugh Despenser the Young were seen as holding too much sway over the decision making of the English king, and paid for this with their lives. In the historical representations of Gaveston's relationship with the king, Edward II was perceived as favoring his friend's presence over his wife's, to the extent of sending him the wedding gifts he had received from her father, among these a luxurious bed (Zeikowitz 2003, 115). Gaveston was portrayed as the active seducer while Edward the king, the passive one being seduced (Zeikowitz 2003, 117). Despenser—especially in the historical account of Jean Froissart—was framed as a person whose relationship with the king was too intimate. As Claire Sponsler points out in her appropriately titled article, “The King's Boyfriend”, the two are punished by the other members of the court for having too close a friendship; one that didn't allow others access to governmental power (2001, 146), rather than for any actual sodomite acts that may or may not have occurred between them (158).

Interesting is the fact that a chronicle depicting the royal retinue's anger towards Edward II's male-friend/boyfriend Piers Gaveston uses these words: “*Inuidebant enim ei magnates terre, quia ipse solus haberet gratiam in oculis regis et quasi secundus rex dominaretur, cui subessent omnes et par nullus*”. This translates as: “For the magnates of the land hated him, because he alone found favour in the king's eyes and lorded it over them like a second king, to whom all were subject and none equal” (original quote and translation in Denholm-Young 1957, 1; taken from Zeikowitz 2003, 114–5). The similarities between “*sat mjök yfir metorðum manna*” and “*quasi secundus rex dominaretur*” are only due to the choices made by the translator, yet it is revealing that both men who are accused of sodomitic actions are also men who had extremely powerful positions in their respective societies, and were seen as abusing that power against their fellow man and taking more than they rightfully deserve. In other words: not showing moderation.

The similarities that can be found between these descriptions to the case of Guðmundr inn ríki are fascinating. As mentioned, both Gaveston and Despenser form in these texts a relationship that takes precedent over Edward's familial ones, in the latter case this drives the son and mother away from the father. The treatment of the

bodies of Despenser and Edward II are revealing as well; After Despenser is caught his penis is publicly removed and burnt, and then the same is done with his heart. One historian's version has Edward II executed by a hot-rod being stuck up his buttocks; "the bodies of Despenser and Edward are forced to identify and atone for their transgressions" (Sponsler 2001, 156). That the main issue in this story was about power is revealing as well. "Froissart shows not just how effectively scapegoating could work as a forum of public spectacle, but also how vilification of same-sex desire and homosocial relations could be enlisted in the cause of political power" (Sponsler 2001, 161). The fact that Guðmundr is a father and surely did not avoid his wife's bed is as irrelevant as the fact that Edward II fathered five children (Sponsler 2001, 149).

That Guðmundr's portrayal may fit similar depictions in contemporary European texts should not surprise us. It would seem that medieval Icelandic understanding of sex had much more to do with other contemporary ones than is usually considered. In response to Foucault's statement that homosexuality became a separate category for a person only in the 19th century (1987, 43) Gunnar Karlsson suggests that the slurs against Guðmundr being *ekki snjallr* were understood as a characteristic, as a part of his nature (2013, 297). This argument goes well with the overall claim of the present thesis: *Ljósvetninga saga* understands Guðmundr indulging in acts of sodomy and his immoderate behavior as one and the same, because he is a boundless man, a phlegmatic man. The audacity of the slurs directed against Guðmundr by his attackers and by the author of *Ljósvetninga saga* may be unprecedented, but they are firmly set in medieval perceptions of sexuality, both Icelandic and medieval European.

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